

Partnering with parents to reduce anxiety in elementary age students - Cool Kids program

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Cool Kids Background - “Treatment of Anxiety and Phobic Disorders in Children”

- 2 day training for all LCPS school psychologists, professional development for review and with new psych interns
- Permission to use materials
- The Cool Kids authors state the program was successful with 80% of the kids who complete it, particularly with strong parent involvement.

ETIOLOGY/RISK FACTORS for ANXIETY DISORDERS

- GENETIC
- TEMPERAMENT
- PARENTAL INFLUENCES
- PEER RELATIONS
- EVENTS/LEARNED EXPERIENCES

Anxiety Disorders in children are associated with:

- Later anxiety disorders as adults
- Mood disorders
- Substance abuse
- Reduced educational achievement

Why use Cool Kids?

- Cognitive instruction and exposure-based interventions show the strongest reduction in symptoms
- “implementing prevention programs at an early age when behavior is more amenable to change is likely to produce better outcomes than treatment delivered when rigid patterns of cognition and behavior have already been established and are engrained.” (Gladstone, Beardslee, and O’Connor, 2011)
- Treatments that just focus on supportive listening may inadvertently work to “accommodate” anxiety. (Higa-McMillan 2016)
- The Cool Kids workbook lends itself easily to discussion

Some **positive aspects** of Anxiety:

- Reduces aggression
- Increased preparation
- Increased focus
- Protective / survival instinct

Parents and Teachers are good at identifying external behaviors while children are better at identifying internal disorders

- Behavioral Observations of Anxiety:

- Somatic complaints
- Expression of fear – worried, scared, afraid
- Nail biting
- Lip-licking
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Fearful facial expression
- Restlessness/fidgeting
- Withdrawal

Getting started

- Parents and psychologist meet (preferably in person) to review Cool Kids materials, show them how it progresses, and discuss the specific anxiety provoking situations that the child is experiencing.
- “safety” is emphasized as you discuss how the child will be “facing their anxieties”
- Parents will need to do “appropriate pushing” which can be stressful for parents at first, until the child’s anxiety decreases.
- Cognitive restructuring by itself is not as productive
- Cool Kids without behavioral intervention may not work
- Goal is to reduce anxiety and make it more manageable, not completely get rid of anxiety

Cool Kids program

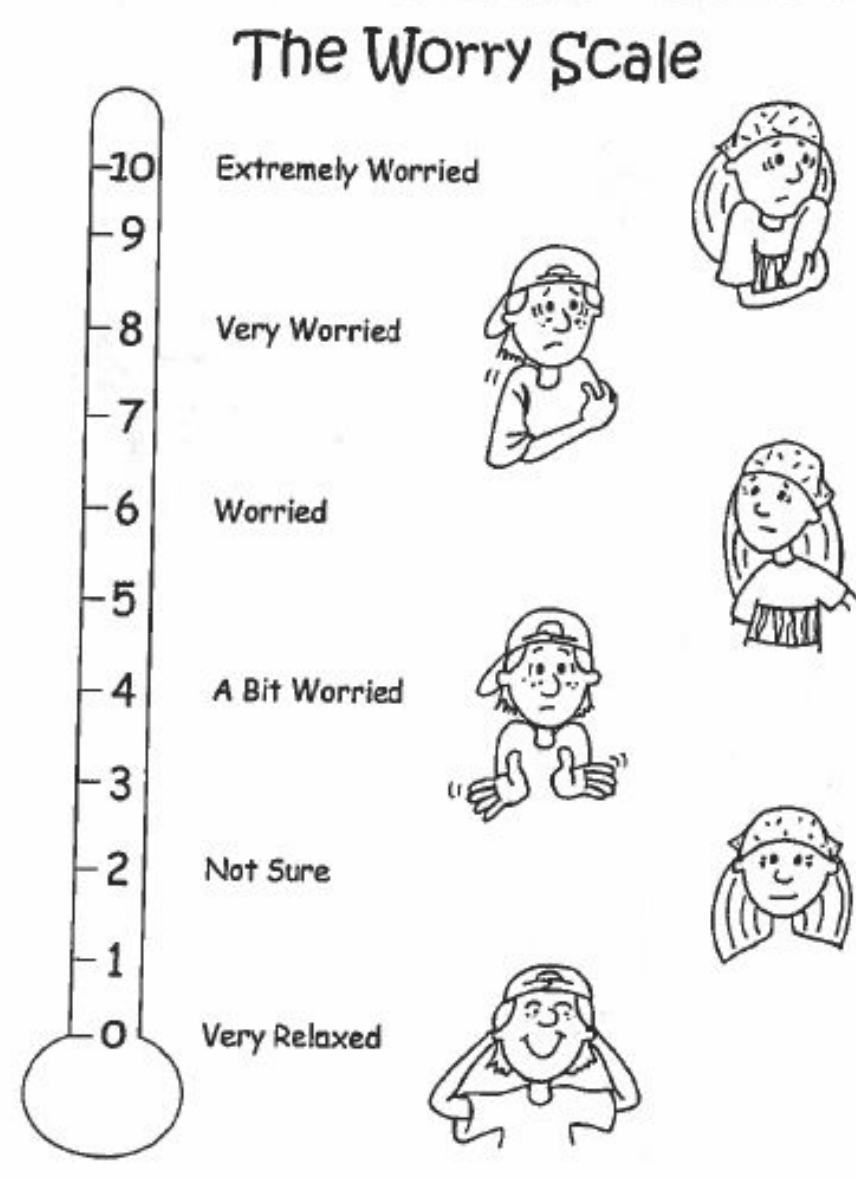
- Intent is for 10 one hour sessions (although I had more like 12-15 sessions at 30-40 minutes)
- Rapport building for the first few sessions
- Child needs to feel comfortable, fun games used as ice breakers

Section 1

Define and discuss anxiety
(events leads to thoughts
leads to feelings to behaviors)

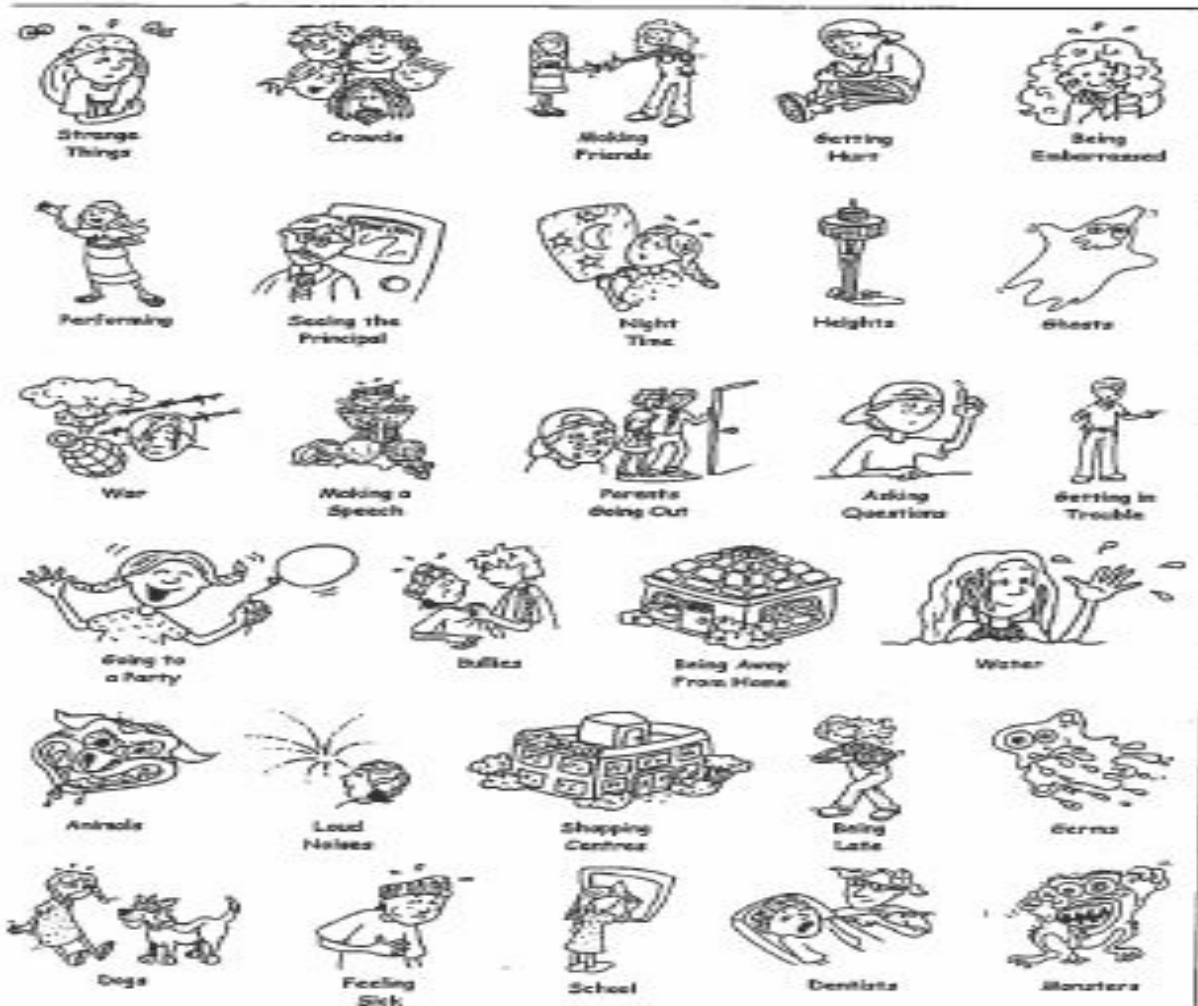
Activity 2 along with a ranking

Worry Scale

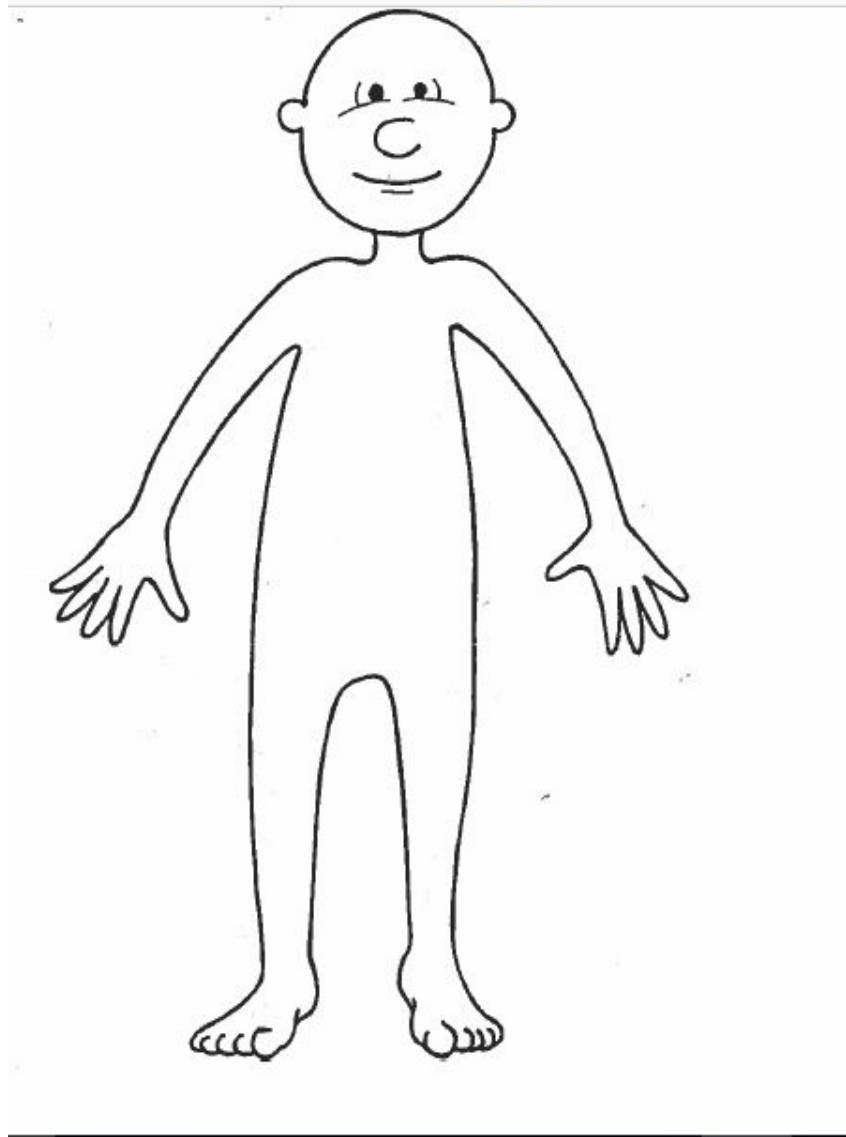


Activity 2: Me and My Anxiety

Here are some pictures of the types of things that some children are afraid of or worry about - circle the ones that can be a problem for you.

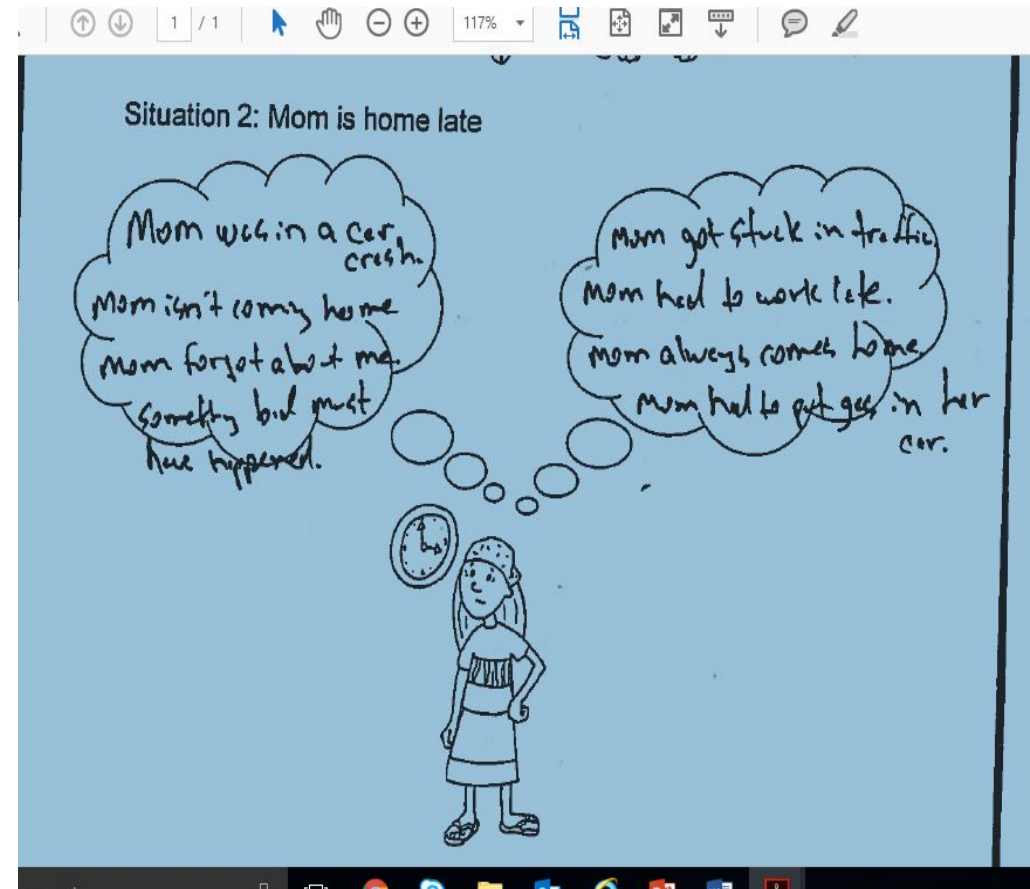


How anxiety feels

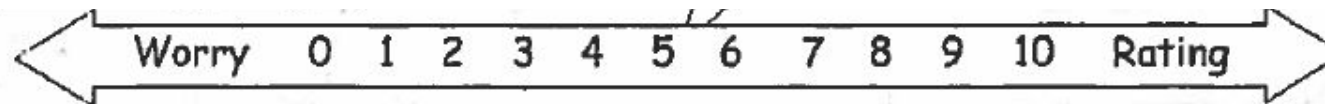


Section 2

- Linking thoughts to feelings
- Distinguish between “calm” and “worried” thoughts (activity 12)
- Self-talk bubbles (activity 11)
- Detective Thinking (4 steps)
 1. What is the event
 2. Worry thought (worry rating)
 3. Look at the evidence
 4. Realistic thought (worry rating)



Linking Thoughts and Feelings

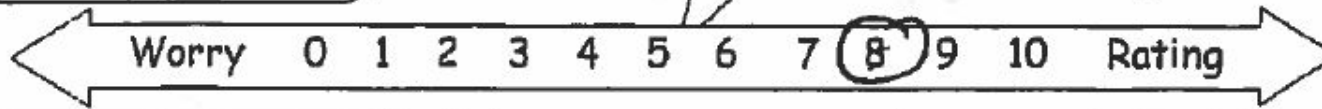


Now think of a time when you were really, really worried. In the shapes below write down what was happening, what was running through your mind and finally what you were feeling. Circle what your worry rating would have been in that situation.

What happened?
There is a birthday sleep over coming up.

What was I thinking?
I don't know if I can do it. What if I get too scared.

What was I feeling?
I was worried & stressed.



Detective Thinking

- Go through workbook examples together
- At first, complete one Detective Sheet for child to take home as an example
- Email/Call parent to make sure they see and work on the Practice Task 2 Detective Thinking homework
- Don't forget to list a "worry rating" at beginning and end

Activity 14: How to Do Detective Thinking

- To help your detective we have four steps for you to follow and a form for you to write down all the evidence that is discovered about a particular worry.

Steps for detectives to follow

1. Write the event and then the thought behind the feeling. Use the worry scale to rate how worried you are when you think this thought
2. Look for the evidence. Ask what are the facts? What is likely to happen? What has happened to me and to others before?
3. List all the alternative things that might happen.
4. Write down a realistic thought to replace the worried thought. Give a new worry rating.



The Detective's Evidence Sheet

- On the next page is an example of how a finished



Detective's Evidence Sheet

Event What is happening?	I have to give a presentation at school
Thoughts What am I thinking?	People will notice how embarrassed I am and they will talk about me behind my back. Worry Rating: 8
What is the evidence? What are the facts? What else could happen? What happened when I worried before? What is likely to happen? What has happened to other people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I've given talks before and once I got really embarrassed.○ I have seen some other kids get embarrassed a couple of times, so I'm not the only one who feels like this.○ I've heard other people say that they gave really bad talks or felt really embarrassed about doing the talk, but I didn't notice that they did anything wrong, or looked embarrassed.○ Even when I did notice that other kids were embarrassed, I really didn't bother to talk about it much and I didn't hold it against them.○ I might feel embarrassed, but people won't necessarily notice.○ Most people look a bit nervous or embarrassed when they are speaking in front of a crowd - so I won't look different to most other people.○ Even if people DO notice that I look uncomfortable, that doesn't mean that they'll talk about me in a horrible way.○ I've given talks before and been embarrassed - but no-one said anything much about it.○ I've seen other people give talks and looking really embarrassed, but people actually said kind things to them.
What is my realistic thought?	


Behavioral section -Rewards for facing fears

- The focus now shifts more to parents' direct involvement to slowly shape the behaviors.
- Parents work with child to develop a list of appropriate rewards (later bedtime, ice cream shop, rent video game, trip to 7-11, go to movies, dinner out, candy)
- Rewards should be immediate, consistent. Ollendick suggested they not be financial.
- Psychologist and parent may discuss which rewards are most practical for daily use and to develop a range of rewards from smaller to bigger.

Section 4 (Stepladders)

- Teach concept of stepladders, emphasizing how they are taking small steps of facing their fear, paired with rewards
- Stepladder keys:
 1. Patience, stay on the step until the anxiety drops to at least a 3
 2. Steps need to be gradual and not too steep
 3. Parent should try not to come to their child's rescue
 4. There will be setbacks, 2 steps forward and 1 step back
 5. Use detective thinking at each step
 6. Progress is slow so rewards are important

Separation anxiety



A black and white line drawing of a young boy with a worried expression, wearing a cap and shorts, climbing a wooden ladder. The ladder is positioned on the left side of the page, with the boy's hands and feet on the rungs.

Step by Step Plan

Goal: Stay at home by myself.

Step 1: _____
Reward: _____

Step 2: _____
Reward: _____

Step 3: Mom goes to grocery store while I
Reward: Stay home alone. (go to pet store - dog treat)

Step 4: Mom picks up sister from preschool while
Reward: I stay home. (pizza)

Step 5: Mom takes the car to gas station with me
Reward: home alone. (movie rental)

Step 6: Mom walks in neighborhood for 20 minutes
Reward: with me home alone. (movie rental)

Step 7: Mom goes to neighbor's house across the
Reward: street for 10 minutes with me home alone. (later bedtime)

Step 8: Stay home with dad while mom runs errands
Reward: extended. (mom makes cookies with me)

Step 9: walk the dog to end of street by myself
Reward: (cookies)

Step 10: Play with dog in my yard by myself
Reward: with mom inside house. (candy - 1 piece)

Parent/Psychologist/Child meet in person for stepladder plan

- This meeting is generally longer – a full hour
- Psychologist and parent meet first and then the child is brought into the meeting. (I usually go get them from class and bring them down.)
- Parent, psychologist, and child then create the stepladder, pairing rewards and steps from low anxiety to higher anxiety
- Parent contact will now increase, but mostly by phone or email as you help them work their way up their stepladders
- Avoid use of a “lucky charm” (lucky bracelet, shirt, toy, picture of parent, etc.)

Getting off the bus without mom

Step by Step Plan

Goal: I want to get off the bus without needing mom here.

Step 1: _____
Reward: _____

Step 2: Mom inside house but on 2nd floor.
Reward: (dinner out)

Step 3: Mom inside house but not in the
Reward: front entrance (pizza)

Step 4: Mom inside front entrance with door
Reward: open but I can't see her. (pizza)

Step 5: Mom stands in house on front of
Reward: window where I can see her. (hardcore with mom)

Step 6: Mom stands in house doorway but I
Reward: can still see her. (later bedtime)

Step 7: Mom stands in doorway.
Reward: (candy)

Step 8: Mom stands in front of doorway.
Reward: (candy)

Step 9: Mom stands close to house.
Reward: (candy)

Step 10: Mom stands between bus stop & house.
Reward: (candy)

A cartoon illustration of a boy with a determined expression, wearing a cap and sneakers, climbing a wooden ladder. The ladder is positioned between two vertical wooden posts. The boy is currently on the fourth rung from the bottom, with his hands on the rungs above him.



Step by Step Plan

Goal: Not to be bothered
by making mistakes at school.

Step 1: Don't do the correct homework.

Reward: _____

Step 2: Deliberately give the wrong answer

Reward: to a question in class.

Step 3: Intentionally return library books

Reward: 5 days late.

Step 4: Answer a question in class when

Reward: not 100% sure of the answer.

Step 5: Intentionally hand in an essay

Reward: with several spelling mistakes

Step 6: Make a deliberate mistake in a

Reward: science project.

Step 7: Don't check an essay for mistakes

Reward: before handing it in

Step 8: Draw a wobbly line on a page and

Reward: leave it there.

Step 9: Don't brush hair before school.

Reward: _____

Step 10: Intentionally call Mark (a friend)

Reward: by the wrong name.

The Importance of Exercise for reducing anxiety

- Exercise can make us feel better (releases endorphins)
- Improved sleep and healthy eating (people who exercise often eat better)
- Health benefits, decreased illness
- May improve motivation and sense of accomplishment
- Often provides social opportunities for children

Sleep recommendations for children/teens

How Much Sleep Do You Really Need?	
Age	Sleep Needs
Newborns (0-2 months)	12-18 hours
Infants (3 to 11 months)	14 to 15 hours
Toddlers (1-3 years)	12 to 14 hours
Preschoolers (3-5 years)	11 to 13 hours
School-age children (5-10 years)	10 to 11 hours
Teens (10-17)	8.5-9.25 hours
Adults	7-9 hours

Source: National Sleep Foundation

Practical strategies for reducing anxiety

- Social connections
- Setting aside time to relax
- Family activities
- Prioritizing your responsibilities
- Improved organization
- Having an event to look forward to
- Limit media exposure
- Help your child challenge their thoughts
- Show your child that you're calm, model calmness for them

Negative coping techniques

- Denial
- Excessive eating
- Avoidance**** (avoidance often leads to increased anxiety)
- Excessive worrying
- Isolation
- Over-talking about the negatives

“You are the boss of your brain.”