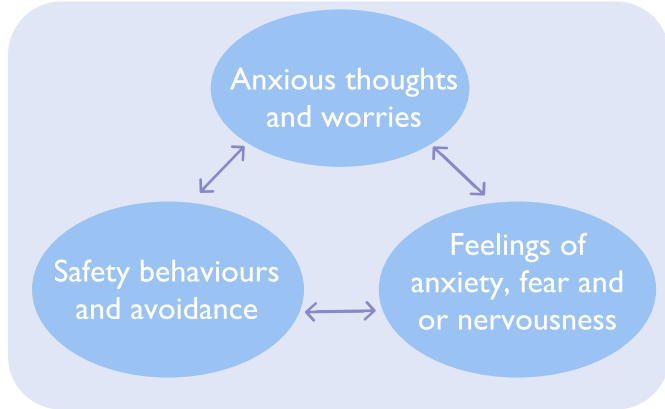# Anxiety and Worry in Children

**Anxiety** is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness or a rapid heartbeat.

**Worry** is the cognitive component of anxiety. It is the thoughts that go round and round your head without resolving. Although worry in adults and older adolescents feels less intense and not as bad as a fear response, in primary aged children, especially the younger ones, this isn't true. Worries feel as bad as fear and anxiety.

Anxious thoughts and worries

Safety behaviours and avoidance

Feelings of anxiety, fear and or nervousness

## Relevant models

**Attachment:** secure base and support for exploration

**General model of anxiety:**

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{Likelihood of threat} \times \text{Severity of threat}}{\text{Coping skills} + \text{Support offered}}$$

## Anxiety in the classroom

**Avoidance of work, friendships, challenges**

- Withdrawal from activities

- Acting out

**Problems with transitions**

- Absences

- Late attendence

**Reassurance seeking**

- Panic attacks

- Worry
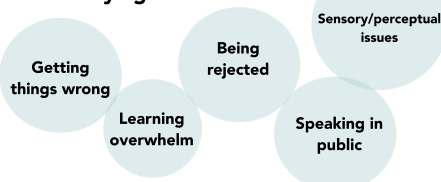
### What stops a classroom from becoming a secure base?

- Bullying
- Being excluded or made to feel different
- Feeling pressured to be the same as others
- Failing (expectations or competition)
- Belittling, singling out, or humiliation
- Stressed teachers

# What can you do?...

## Reduce threat

1. Identifying threat....

Sensory/perceptual issues

Being rejected

Getting things wrong

Learning overwhelm

Speaking in public

2. Identify the behaviour you want to support, offer praise and rewards for small steps towards that goal

READY OR NOT...

## Support children's coping skills

Set limits round anxious behaviours including avoidance or withdrawal

Manage your own reassurance seeking

Reinforce efforts at coping

If needed, identify someone (within the school or externally) that can teach coping skills directly

Encourage children to take the next (small) step

## Supporting parents

Believe them and validate their experience of their child

Identify and reduce the threat for the parent

Maintain communication

Work with parents to create strategies at home and at school

Develop parental coping skills (same as for children)