

## Overview

**SNAP-B suggests anxiety may be affecting Azim's learning.**

## Interventions selected to help Azim

The aim should be to *increase desired behaviours through teaching and encouragement*, rather than trying to decrease behaviours through punishments and disapproval. *It is easier to teach and encourage new skills than to remove existing ones.*

It is essential that the following interventions are incorporated into a caring and accepting relationship and that any intervention is modified depending on Azim's individual needs and his level of social, cognitive and emotional understanding.

## Modelling

Ask Azim to sit and work with a peer, interacting adaptively in a situation that would normally make him become anxious. For example, a pupil who has worries about taking tests could sit and work with a peer who has a relaxed and positive attitude combined with good test-preparation skills.

## Relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques are intended to give pupils an understanding of how the physiological and muscular responses to anxiety affect them, while providing them with specific skills to enable them to control these reactions.

Sometimes it is useful to think of anxiety like a 'burglar alarm'. Like anxiety, the job of a burglar alarm is to spot danger and to warn us about it so that we can take action to prevent us being harmed. However, if a burglar alarm is too sensitive and it goes off when there isn't any real danger, this can cause problems. It can lead to us feeling distressed when we don't need to, and confused about what is a 'real alarm' and what is a 'false alarm'. In our body, the alarm can trigger changes such as fast shallow breathing and muscle tension.

Problems can also arise if we don't take appropriate action when a burglar alarm goes off. Anxiety can lead to fear and, when these two join, then panic is the likely response. Anxiety is a very useful warning system for telling us that things are not right and that we should take action to prevent something undesirable happening to us. However, problems can arise when:

- we are 'too sensitive' and feel anxious when there isn't any significant threat
- we either take no action when we need to, take action which does not work or take action that causes problems.

### Visualisation and guided imagery

This involves Azim actively visualising a scene that he finds quiet and relaxing – a time and place where he felt calm, safe, confident and in control. The scene itself is less important than the feelings associated with it. The more detail that can be included, the better: the sights, sounds and smells are all important. This is then used to help him control situations in which he feels anxious.

- Ask Azim to list four situations in school that make him feel nervous and anxious. Ask: *"Which of these make you feel most anxious? Rank them in order from 1 for the worst to 4 for the least anxiety-provoking."*
- Now, using what is called 'guided imagery', ask Azim to think of a really pleasant, peaceful, situation, place or activity and to take time to describe it in as much detail as he can. Prompt, for example: *"Where are you? Are you inside or out? Are you on your own or with friends? What can you see, smell or touch? What are you wearing? What are you feeling like inside?"*
- Work to get Azim to commit this scene to memory: he could record it in a soft voice on a suitable device to play back whenever he wants.
- Now ask Azim to choose one of the situations that he ranked 3 or 4 in terms of anxiety-provoking. It is best to start on these because he is learning a new skill. (As Azim gets better at the skill, then he can move towards the more anxiety-provoking ones.)

Now say to Azim: *"Every time you start to become anxious in this situation, take three deep breaths and practise remembering the situation where you were relaxed and happy. You cannot be both relaxed and tense at the same time. The more you use this technique, the easier it will become for you to be in control. Each time you use it, remember to rate how anxious you felt."* A rating can be made like this: *"After using guided imagery I felt the same / a little less anxious / much less anxious."*

## How else can I help Azim in the classroom?

- Is there a teacher or support staff that Azim gets on well with? Can he meet regularly with this person to review his day?
- Explore with Azim 'hot spots' around the school where he feels most anxious. Are there specific triggers such as too many people, too much noise? Can these areas be avoided?
- Is there a bolthole where Azim can go if he feels over-anxious and unable to cope with a situation – a place where he can feel safe and practise calming down?
- Specific arrangements may need to be made for the use of toilets, which are often avoided by anxious children. Can Azim visit when they are quiet or empty?
- Where would Azim like to sit in the class – at the front with his back to the class or near a door? Which would allow him to leave the class quietly if he became over-anxious?
- Modelling more appropriate responses. Get Azim to sit and work with a peer, interacting adaptively in a situation that would normally make him become anxious. For example, a learner who has worries about sitting tests could sit and work with a peer who has a relaxed and positive attitude combined with good test-preparation skills.

### Additional points

- Consider referring on to either the family GP or CAMHS.

## Useful websites

<http://www.annafreud.org/media/4612/mwb-toolki-final-draft-4.pdf> – *Measuring and Monitoring Children and Young People's Mental Wellbeing: A Toolkit for Schools and Colleges* is designed to raise awareness on mental health issues with a range of mental health and wellbeing assessment instruments.

<http://www.healthcentral.com/anxiety/school-258065-5.html> – Provides 20 classroom interventions for children with anxiety disorders.

<http://www.youngminds.org.uk> – Provides information and practical advice on anxiety for children and young people, parents/carers and professionals.

## Further reading

Young people who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have the right to be supported by informed professionals. The suggested readings are written by highly experienced academics and practitioners and are intended to further an in-depth understanding rather than a 'quick fix'.

Plummer, D. & Harper, A. (2010) *Helping Children to Cope with Change, Stress and Anxiety: A Photocopiable Activities Book* (Jessica Kingsley). Offers over 100 activities and games specifically aimed at helping children to build emotional resilience.

Reilly, N. (2015) *Anxiety and Depression in the Classroom: A Teacher's Guide to Fostering Self-Regulation in Young Students* (WW Norton). Practical ideas to increase a young person's control over anxiety and develop well being.

Schab, L. (2008) *The Anxiety Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Deal With Anxiety & Worry* (New Harbinger). Packed with tips and strategies to enable teenagers between 11–16 years to take control.

Stallard, P. (2002) *Think Good – Feel Good: A Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Workbook for Children and Young People* (John Wiley). How to control what we think through an understanding of the links between, thoughts, feelings and actions.