

## **How to use the cycle diagram**

You can complete this with your child. We encourage you to be open and honest with your child about what you are doing and why. For the strategies to work, your child also must be onboard.

This diagram is for you to fill out to see what is going on for you child and for you with regards to their anxieties.

It is recommended that you complete a few of these over the space of a couple of weeks.

Think of a recent situation in which your child was anxious – the more recent the better.

Complete the boxes to show thoughts, feelings and behaviours of both you and your child.

Can you identify how some of the thoughts and anxieties you have, may feed into your child's worries?

**Have a look at the example on the next page.**

# Situation: parent is going out with friends

## Figure of 8 Handout

### Child

#### Thoughts (what are the worries)

- Something bad might happen to my Dad when he is out
- Something bad might happen to me when he is out

#### Behaviour (what did they do?)

Crying  
Shouts at parent  
Texts and calls whilst they are out to check on them and asking them to come home

#### Feelings (emotional and physical)

Anxious  
Sad  
Nervous  
Angry  
Tummy ache  
Shakey

### Parent

#### Thoughts (what were you thinking)

- It is going to be a nightmare trying to go out
- My child is going to be hysterical
- I feel bad as it upsets them when I am out

#### Behaviour (what did you do?)

- Answer texts and calls to reassure them
- Text them to check how they are doing
- Come home early to stop them feeling upset

#### Feelings (emotional and physical)

- Stressed
- Tense muscles
- Anxious
- Exhausted
- Guilty

First thing to notice is how our thoughts, feelings and behaviours interact. Example – my child will be hysterical, and I shouldn't be going out if they feel bad. This leads to emotions of anxiety and guilt. These feelings strengthen the thoughts and lead to the physical symptoms such as muscle tenseness. These physical feelings strengthen the emotions and the thoughts!

Now let's think on the behaviours – in the case of the child they are sending texts for reassurance, and they are crying as a coping mechanism.

The parent responds to the messages and provides the reassurance.

This gives both parent and child temporary relief from their thoughts and feelings. The parent feels better as they have provided the reassurance and the child feels better because they have received the reassurance.

However, does this fix the problem?

Probably not – the child has learnt that the only way the parent is safe is if they text them all the time and ask them to come home. The parent has learnt that the only way to stop the anxiety is to provide reassurance through messages and by coming home early.

Next time the parent goes out, the cycle will repeat!

The child and parent needs to adapt their behaviours so that the child learns they can cope with the problem! The later resources will support with how to change the way we react when a child is anxious.

# Figure of 8 Handout

Child

Thoughts (what are the worries)

Behaviour (what did they do?)

Feelings (emotional and physical)

Parent

Thoughts (what were you thinking)

Behaviour (what did you do?)

Feelings (emotional and physical)