



WORRIES AND ANXIETY:

WHAT TO EXPECT AND HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

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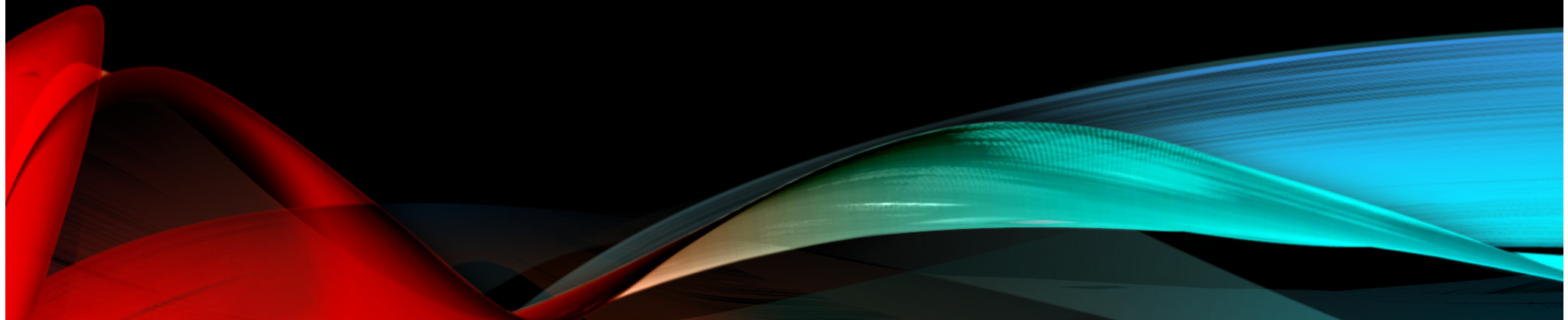


AGENDA

- What are worries?
- Common worries across child development
- When typical worry turns into anxiety
- When anxiety turns into an anxiety disorder
- Anxiety and the brain
- Identifying anxiety in your child
- Ways to support a child who is worried/anxious
- Parental mental health and anxiety
- Resources and services
 - CYMH

WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

Other cultural or spiritual groups might have a different way of understanding and responding to worries and anxiety...





WHAT IS A WORRY?

- Worry is a type of a thought, a cognitive process
- Worry is future-oriented, “feeds” on the unknown/uncertainty
 - Can be related to a consequence of past event
- Expectation of unwanted, unpleasant outcome
 - “what-if...?”
- Often is *unrealistic* and *automatic*
 - Focused on the least likely event
- Can be realistic but *unhelpful*
 - stops people from doing the things they want
 - Avoiding failure
- Worries are common, part of being human
 - Normative, adaptive, and healthy
 - Not something we can eliminate
 - Evolve over development and life span

TYPICAL CHILDHOOD WORRIES

- Young children (2-7yrs) can have many fears
 - Dark, being alone, parent leaving, loud sounds,
 - Separation, being away from parents, falling asleep alone
 - Strangers/bad guys, doctors and injections
 - Change and transition, starting school
- Worries are linked to unknown... everything is new to young children AND very few tools to manage emotions
- Around age 8-9yrs, worries start to revolve around performance at school or in sports, peer rejection, getting sick and dying, future (Transition into middle or high school)
 - some of the earlier worries may persist

TYPICAL TEEN WORRIES

(AGE 12 AND UP)

- More aware of health and safety concerns
 - Worrying about their mental health
 - Awareness of global and environmental issues
- Confusion about identity and self-image, body changes
- Increased expectations/demands, both at school and at home
 - Requires more skills and provide opportunity to fail...
- The future, many options to choose from, overwhelming
- Peer and romantic relationships, wanting to fit in
 - misinterpretation social cues and emotions
 - Peer influence becomes more dominant than family influence
- Financial worries
- Family Worries
- **Still developing brains (up to age 24)...**
 - Lacking emotional regulation and executive functioning skills to manage their worries

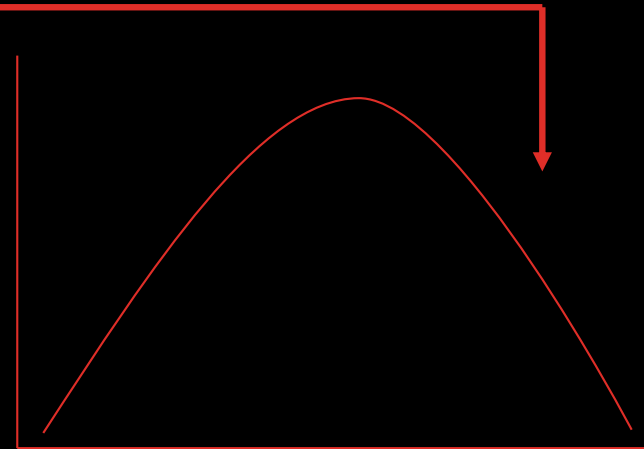
WORRY CAN BE HELPFUL

- Increases planning
- Can be motivating
- Leads to caution, increase alertness, reduces risk-taking
- Optimizes performance (tests/sports/presentations)

But when worries are excessive...

Performance

Worry/Stress



WHEN WORRIES ARE EXCESSIVE..



- Period of Anxiety
- A *frequent* feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease/feeling on edge
- A Negative lens
- Impact functioning
- Can be expected in times of change
 - More unknown
 - Reduced sense of control and autonomy

ANXIETY AS A DISORDER

- To meet criteria for an Anxiety Disorder in children, the anxiety needs to be
 - Developmentally *inappropriate*, cannot be explained by *situations/changes*
 - Over a long duration (6 months) and exists most of the time
 - Significant suffering/distress; inability to control
 - Significant interference with functioning
- The most common mental health concern in childhood/adolescence
 - In BC, an estimated 42,000 children aged 4 to 18 likely meet criteria for an anxiety disorder at any given time (Barican, et al., 2022).

THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



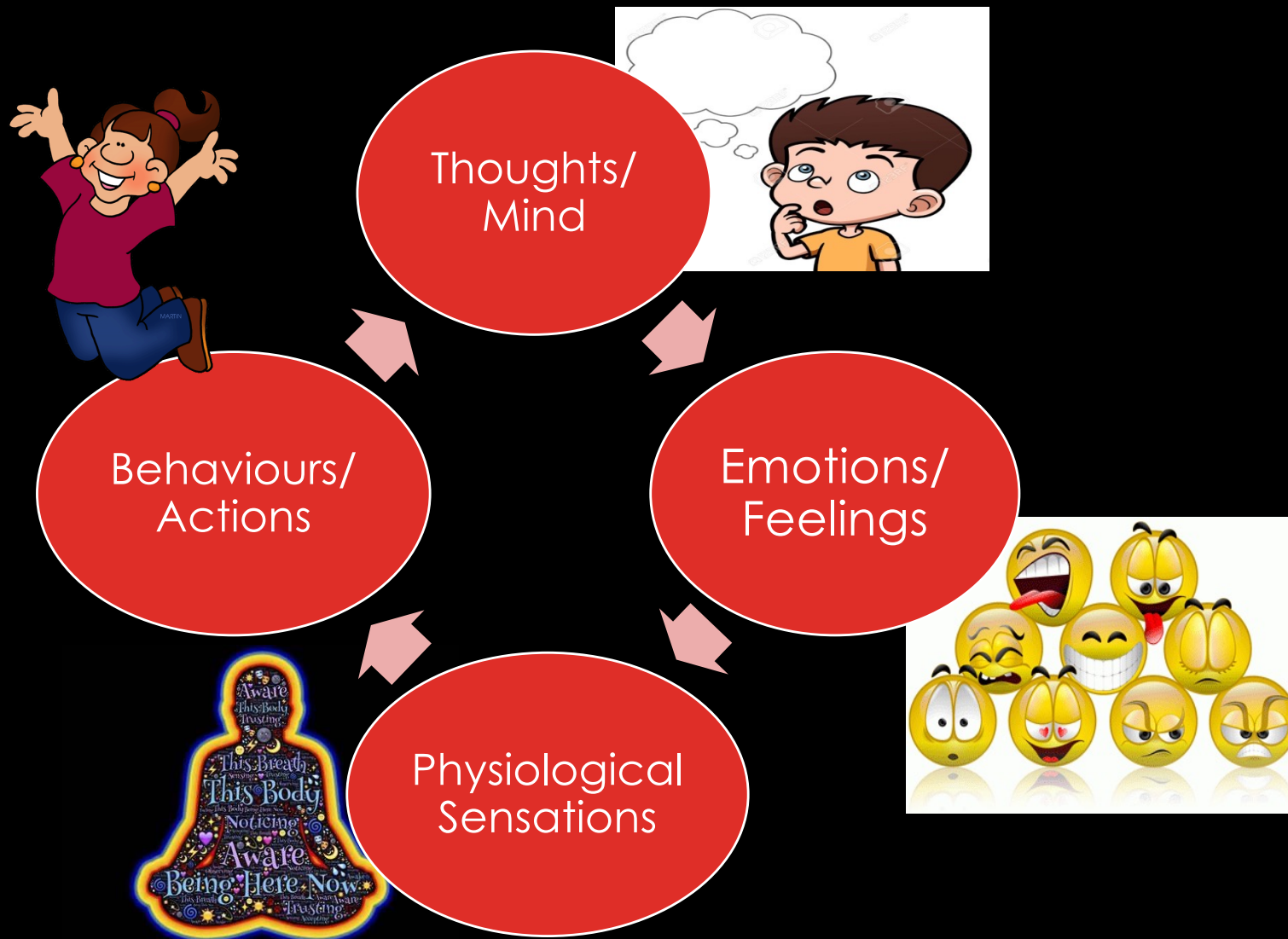
Controls the automatic functions of your body that you need to survive

The “Stress-Response” system; An ALARM system

- **Sympathetic:** activated when there's threat/stress
 - “Fight or flight”
 - Can be uncomfortable when activated, triggers a physiological response
- **Para-Sympathetic:** brings the body back to regulated, calm, non-threatened state
 - “Rest and Digest”
 - Feeling comfortable and calm



THE BODY-MIND CONNECTION





PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- Digestive issues: Stomachache, constipation
- Muscle tension and bodily pain
- Sleep issues: difficulty falling or staying asleep, waking up tired in the morning
- Feeling panicky, difficulty breathing, or shallow/fast breathing, shaky
- Feeling hot or sweaty

BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- Avoidance/refusing activities or settings
- Resistance to change
- Distraction/Difficulty focusing
- Reassurance Seeking
- Underachieving/Refusal to try
- Perfectionism/correcting over and over
- Temper/anger/irritability
- Low mood/sadness
- Avoidance of social/group activities, social withdrawal





COGNITIVE SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- Difficulty focusing, easily distracted
- Assuming the worst in situations
- Jumping to negative conclusions/assumptions
 - What if's...?
- Engaging in negative self talk (e.g., “I’m so stupid”, “this is silly”, etc.)



NOW WHAT?

BUILDING YOUR TOOLBOX...

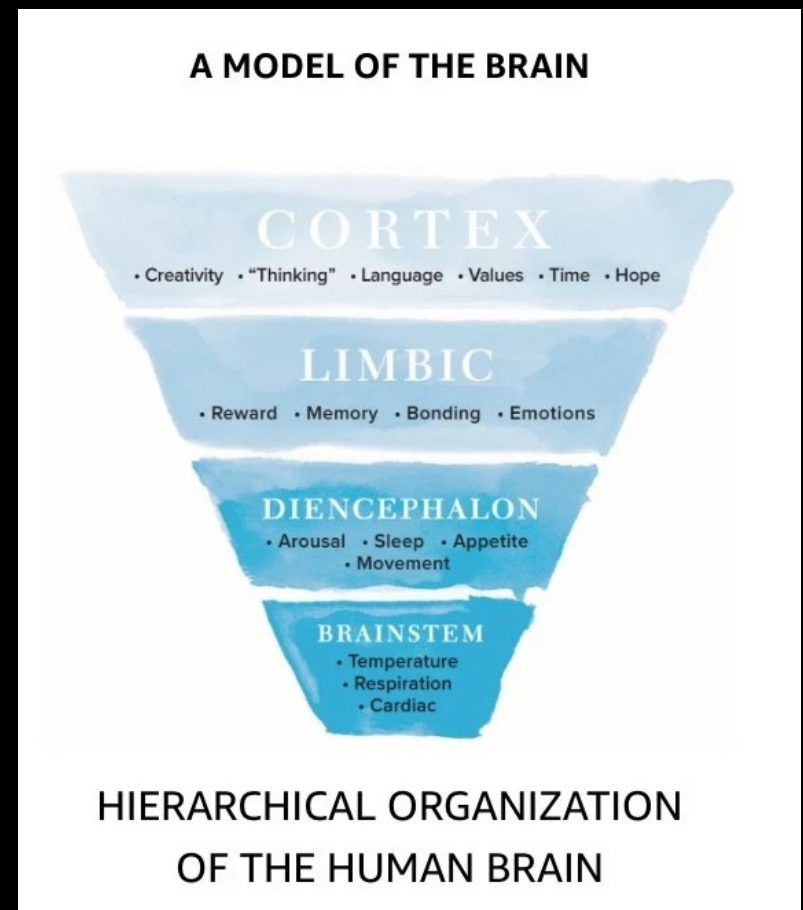


GENERAL REMINDERS

- Encourage healthy habits, exercise, healthy eating and sleeping, limit screentime when possible, spend time together doing enjoyable activities.
- Check in with yourself (am I stressed? dysregulated?)
- How can I show up for my kids right now?

BACK TO THE BRAIN

- Consider where the child's brain is at when supporting them
 - When dysregulated, sensory calming tools
 - When regulated, cognitive/thinking tools
- Dan Siegal's “flip the lid”
- 3 R's: Regulate, Relate, Reason



TO SUPPORT AN ANXIOUS CHILD,

Try to...

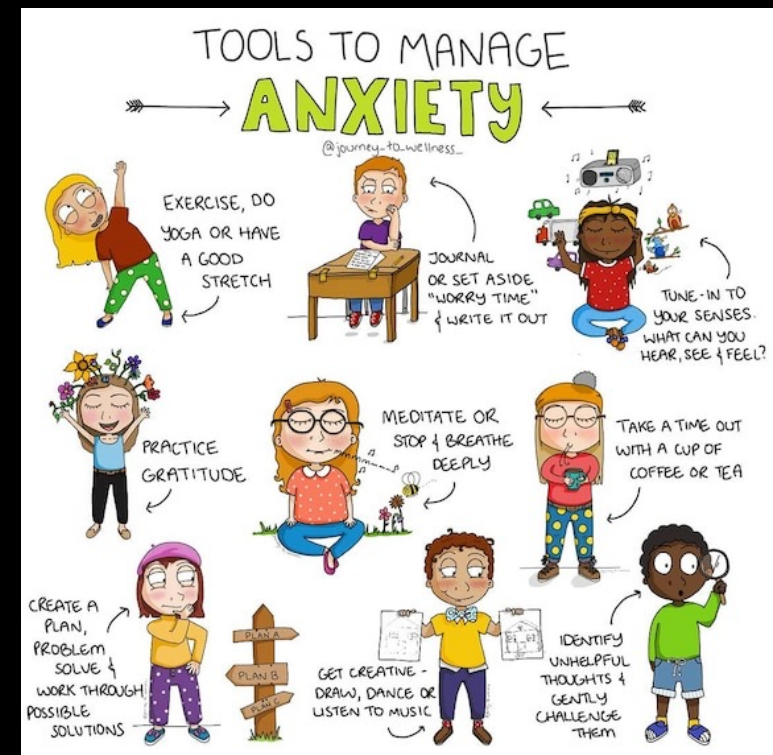
- **Listen** with curiosity... Ask them to describe the feelings, and LISTEN actively
 - How often...?
 - What do you feel in your body?
 - What's on your mind?
- **Normalize:** Let your child know that it's okay to feel anxious; many kids feel that way, and adults too!
 - Help them identify these are worries and everyone has them
 - Objectify the worry
"you are brave/courageous/strong; your worries don't mean you are weak, it is normal to have these"
- **Reassure:** Remind them they are safe and that you are there with them

Try to AVOID...

- minimizing their concerns; The bodily sensations are real and can be very uncomfortable
- telling them to stop worrying or that they have no reason to worry
- using "But..."
- solving the problem before you take enough time to hear them
- over-protecting, avoiding anxiety triggers/settings
- pressuring them to overcome their fears/worries too quickly

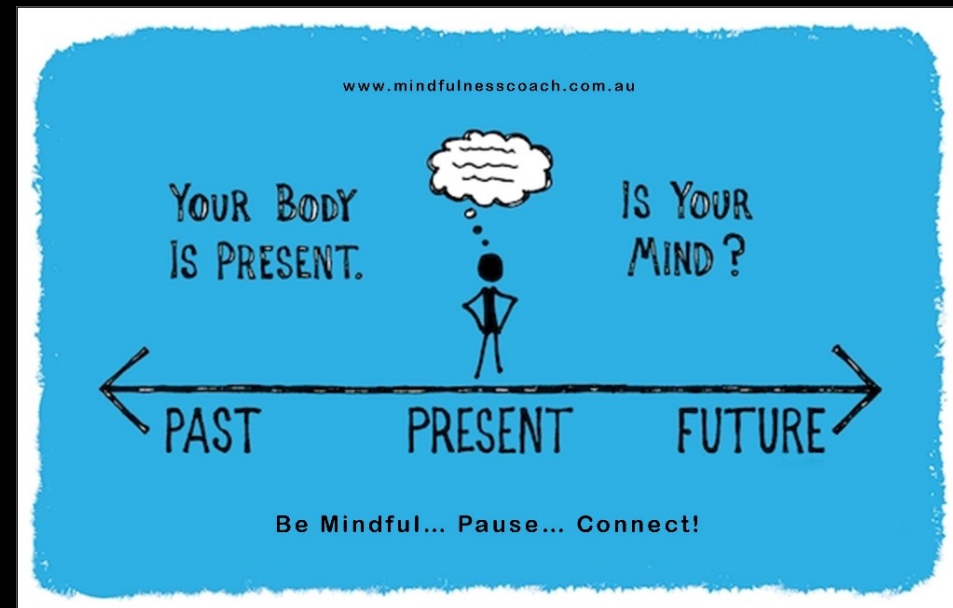
ANXIETY MANAGEMENT TOOLS

- **Breathing**
 - Finger breathing
 - Box/Star/Lazy 8 breathing
- **Visualization**
 - Calm/safe place, as many details as possible
 - Use existing visualization scripts
- **Mindfulness**
 - addresses both the mind and the body
- **Exposure**
 - Dr Becky: "I know this is hard, AND I also know you can do hard thing, *and* you are not alone, *and* you have tools"
 - This may not be comfortable for the parent



MINDFULNESS IN A NUTSHELL

- Helps to keep mind in the present, where worries cannot exist
- *Acceptance* of our worries
- Invitation to use our senses to “ground” ourselves
 - activate the para-sympathetic (“Rest and Digest”) system
 - 5-4-3-2-1
- MindshiftCBT App
 - See Anxiety Canada website



PARENTAL ANXIETY

- Inevitably, parents have worries
- Many children/youth who are anxious have parents who are anxious
- Remember to practice the tools too
 - *“Parents can support their children by addressing their own anxiety, so they are better able to model coping well in situations they find fearful”* (Children’s Mental Health Research journal, Fall 2024, p.4)
- Be mindful of what is shared with the children and what can be kept among adults only
 - Remember: Anxiety feeds on the unknown and when we sense a lack of control



IN SUMMARY...

- Worries/fears are completely appropriate across the life span
- Worry content will change throughout development
 - NOT a sign for concern



AT THE SAME TIME...

- Worries may seem small, but the feelings are very REAL for the child
- Can negatively impact mood, if not addressed
- Parents can be a protective factor in the development of more severe anxiety
- *Early identification, normalization, validation, and developing healthy and effective coping skills* can reduce the likelihood of developing a mental health disorder

CYMH SERVICES

- Some children and youth will develop an anxiety disorder, *regardless of what their parents do*, and require professional help
 - *comorbidities: ASD, Trauma History, ADHD*
- CYMH provide mental health services to children and youth, 0-19yrs, with moderate to severe mental health needs.
- **Walk-In Clinic: Tuesdays 9am – 12pm, no appointment needed**
 - Youth 12yrs and up need to consent
 - Intake, 90min, screening for mental health
 - recommendation for services and supports
 - CMHA “Confident Parent – Thriving Kids”, Anxiety Program (ages 3-12)
 - If meeting criteria for CYMH, individual counselling and parent support and skills building
 - Access to psychiatry as needed, at the clinician’s discretion
 - **Call 250-837-7612 for questions; located at MCFD, 210 Garden Ave.**

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Indigenous health services through Interior Health: [Indigenous Health & Wellness | IH \(interiorhealth.ca\)](#)
- Anxiety Canada: [Anxiety Canada | Self-help Resources, Programs & Services](#)
- Canadian Mental Health Association [Home - CMHA British Columbia](#)
 - Bounceback program – referral required
- [We're here to help | Here to Help](#)
- Kelty Mental Health by BC Children's Hospital [Home | Kelty Mental Health](#)
- Foundry BC: [Foundry - Where Wellness Takes Shape - \(foundrybc.ca\)](#)
- Family Smart: [FamilySmart - Together-Centred™ for Child & Youth Mental Health](#)
- [The Struggle Switch video by Dr Russ Harris](#)- YouTube video about Anxiety
- Ted Talk by Kelly McGonigal, "[How to Make Stress Your Friend](#)"
- Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Early Years (EASEY) at Home is now live on the [HealthyMindsBC website](#) (ages 0-5 yrs)
- Dr Becky's [Good Inside](#) website, including podcast and many resources



REFERENCES

- Barican JL, Yung D, Schwartz C, et al. (2022). Prevalence of childhood mental disorders in high-income countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis to inform policymaking. *Evidence-Based Mental Health*, 25, 36–44.
- Schwartz C, White O, Barican J, Tang J, Waddell C, & Thomson K. (2024). Preventing problematic childhood anxiety. *Children's Mental Health Research Quarterly*, 18(4), 1–14. Vancouver, BC: Children's Health Policy Centre, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University.