Building a Supportive Community of Care (Home, School, Community) for Children with Anxiety
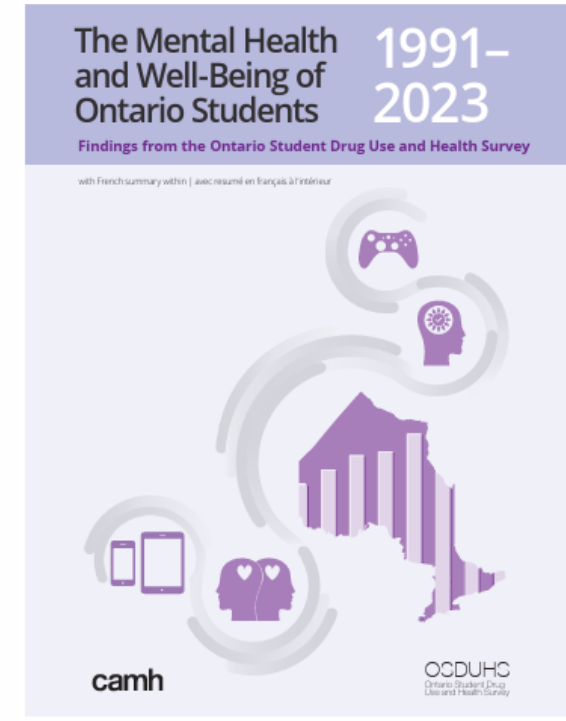
Colin King, Ph.D., C.Psych

An Introduction

- Anxiety disorders are one of most common forms of mental health problems (~ 6%)

- Anxiety symptoms can also be effectively managed (Hudson et al., 2021)

OSDUHS (2023)

- 51% indicated moderate to severe psychological distress

- Over one-third (37%) report elevated levels of stress
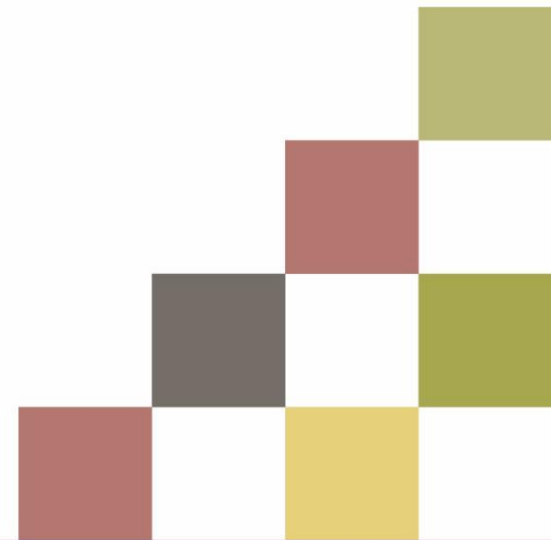
Treatment for Anxiety

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT):
- Active, experiential form; focus on skill acquisition
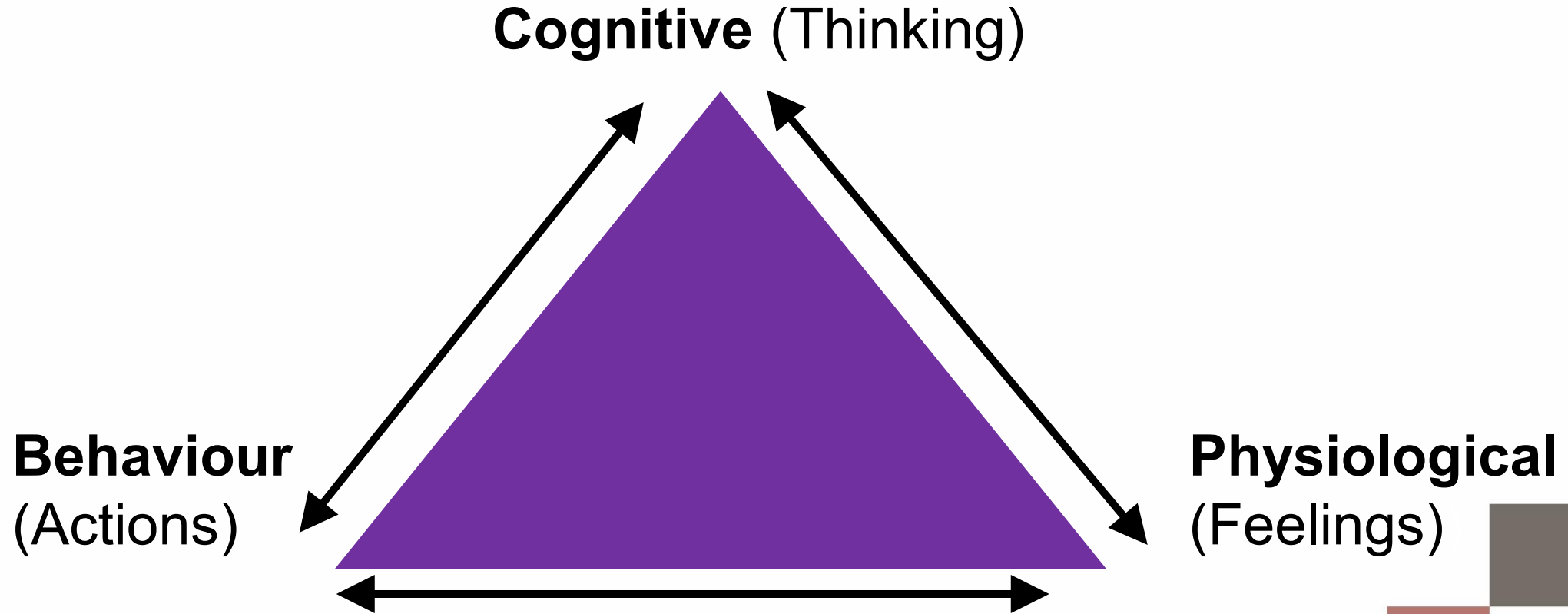- Strongly supported evidence-based intervention

1) **Cognitive** (Thinking)

2) **Behaviour** (Actions)

3) **Physiological** (Feelings)
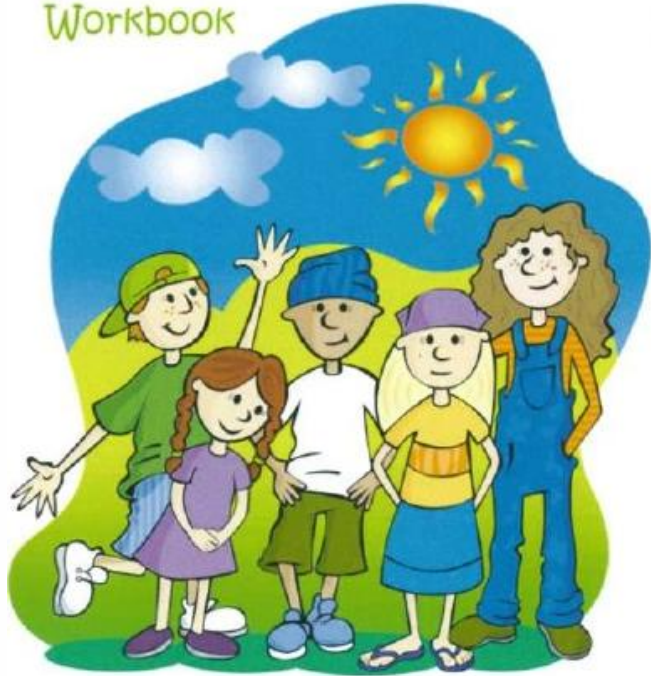
Components of Anxiety

Cognitive (Thinking)

Behaviour (Actions)

Physiological (Feelings)

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(Scaini et al., 2022)

(Kendall et al., 2006)

(Khanna & Kendall, 2010)

(Kozina, 2019)

Challenges with Effective Treatment

- Major challenges with access to MH services (CMHO, 2020)
- Pharmacological treatment most common (Collins et al., 2014)
- Insufficient use of evidence-based MH (Roberge et al. 2011; Flett, 2018)
- Lack of collaboration across settings and professionals (Alonso et al. 2018)

Anxiety
(Chorpita et al., 2014)

Treatment for Anxiety

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT):

1) **Cognitive** (Thinking) ⟶ Changing Thoughts

2) **Behaviour** (Actions) ⟶ Exposure (facing fears)

3) **Physiological** (Feelings) ⟶ Relaxation

(Wagner & Jutton, 2004)

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Experience of Anxiety
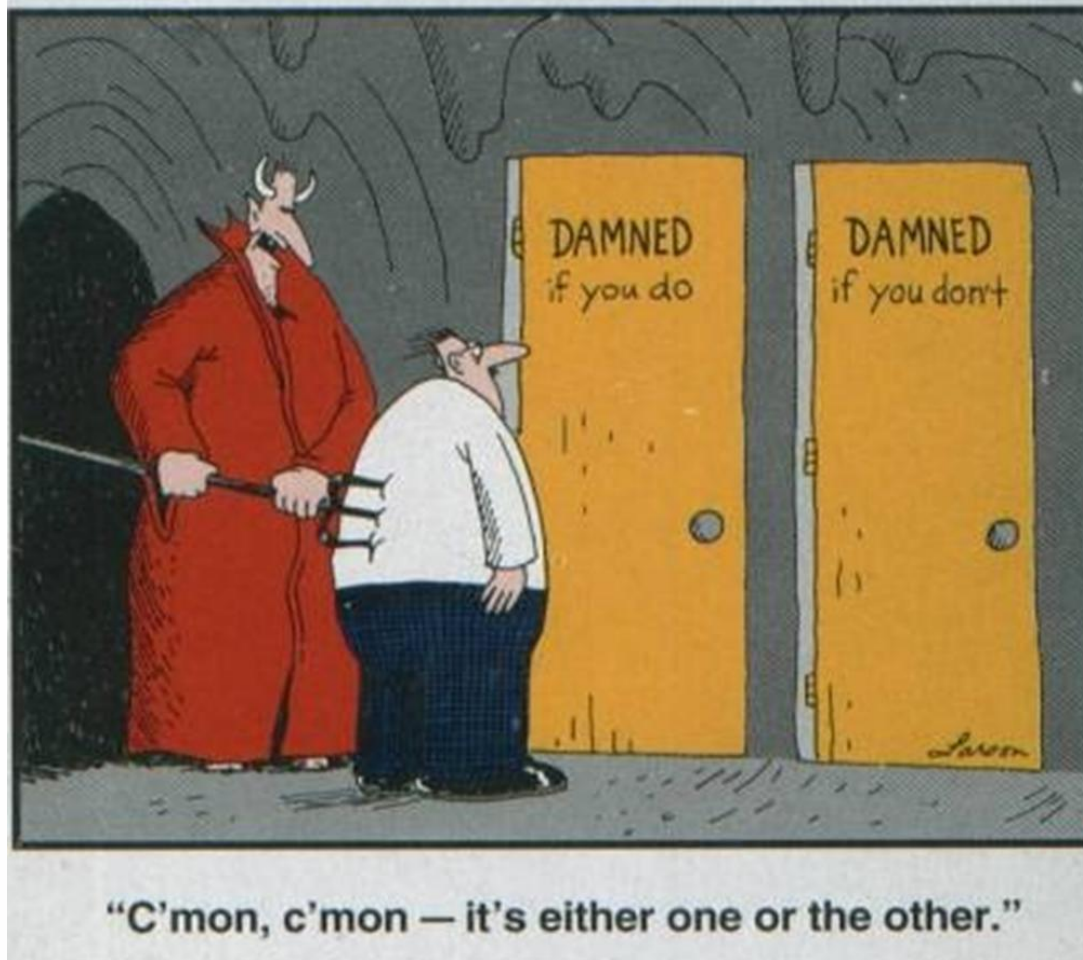
The Fearmometer
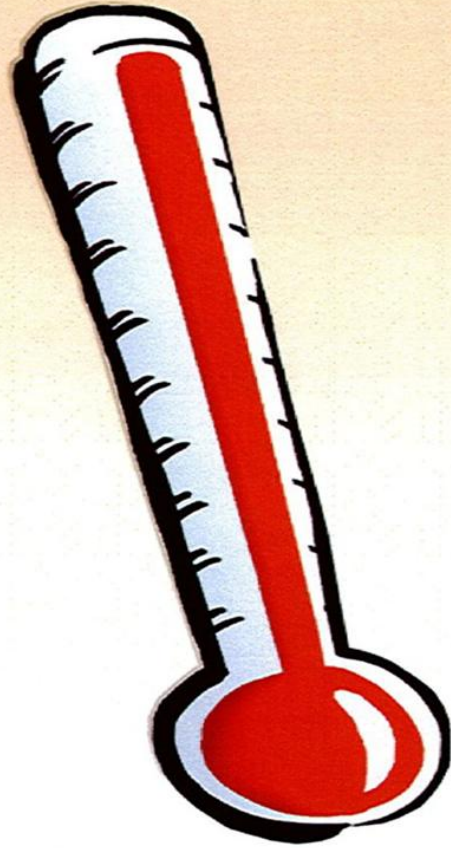
10. Out of control! Ballistic!
9. Can't handle it.
8. Really tough.
7. Pretty tough.
6. Getting tough.
5. Not too good.
4. Starting to bother.
3. Just a little uneasy.
2. A little twinge.
1. Piece of cake!

The Science (and Art) of Exposure

- A great example of exposure "in action"

- Often incorporates multiple strategies (exposure + changes in thinking)

- Offers new learning, confidence, and perspective

Anxiety Canada: Video Resource

The Science (and Art) of Exposure

(1) **Personalized** to Millie (*setting; time*)

(2) "It was hard, **especially at first** – but I kept walking …" (*habituation; knowledge of anxiety*)

(3) "Anxiety is **not dangerous**"

"These feelings **won't last forever**"

"**I didn't think** I could come here today" (*promotion of new learning*)

Anxiety Canada: Video Resource

(Wagner & Jutton, 2004)

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Building a Community of Anxiety Care and Shared Understanding

- How do we share this evidence-based knowledge across settings?

- How can we incorporate these strategies into early intervention opportunities?
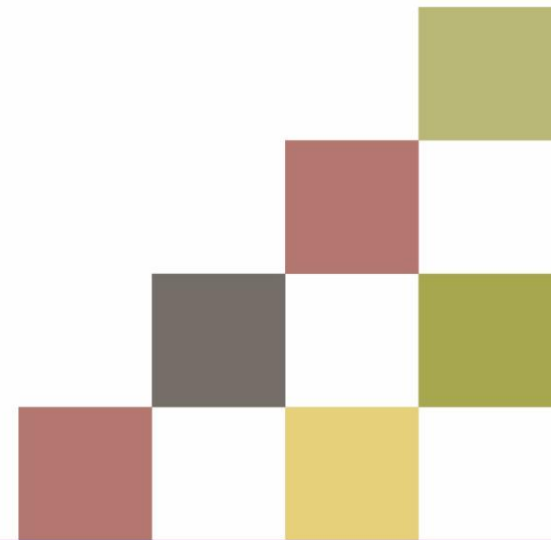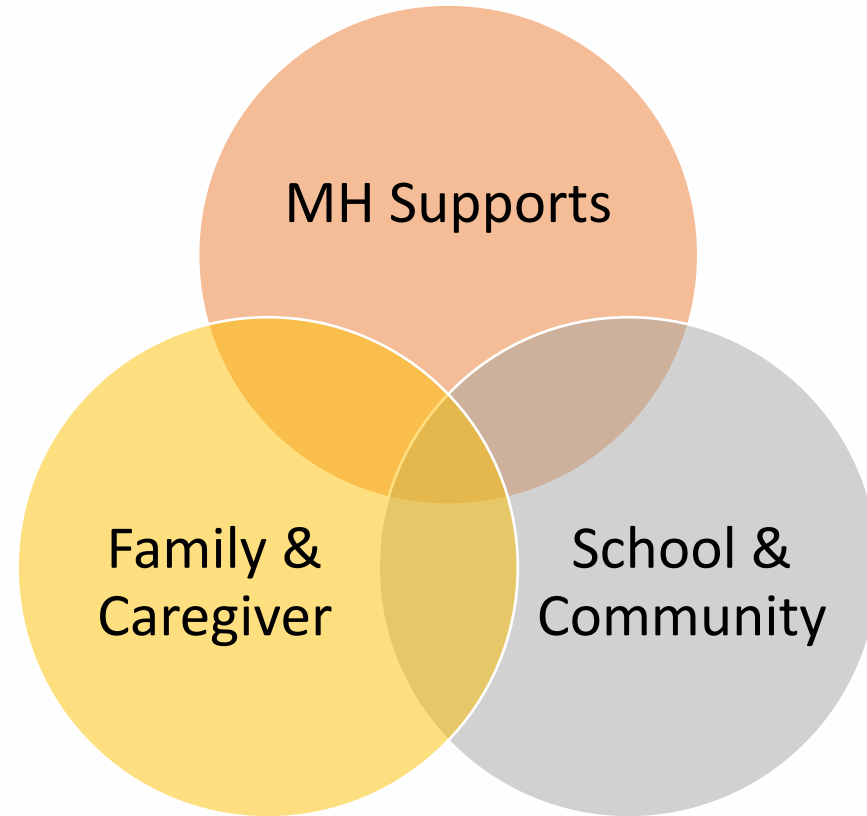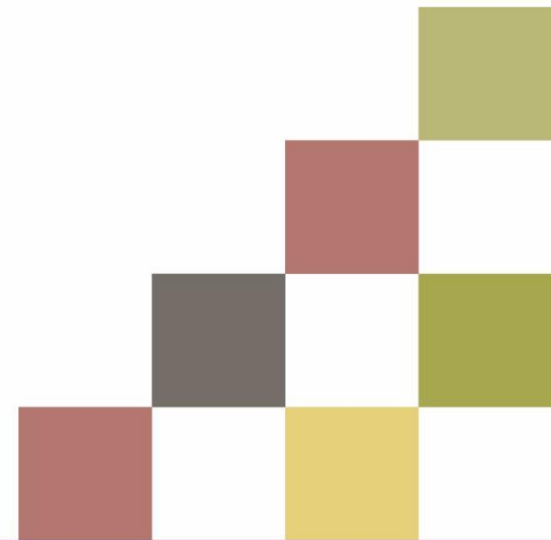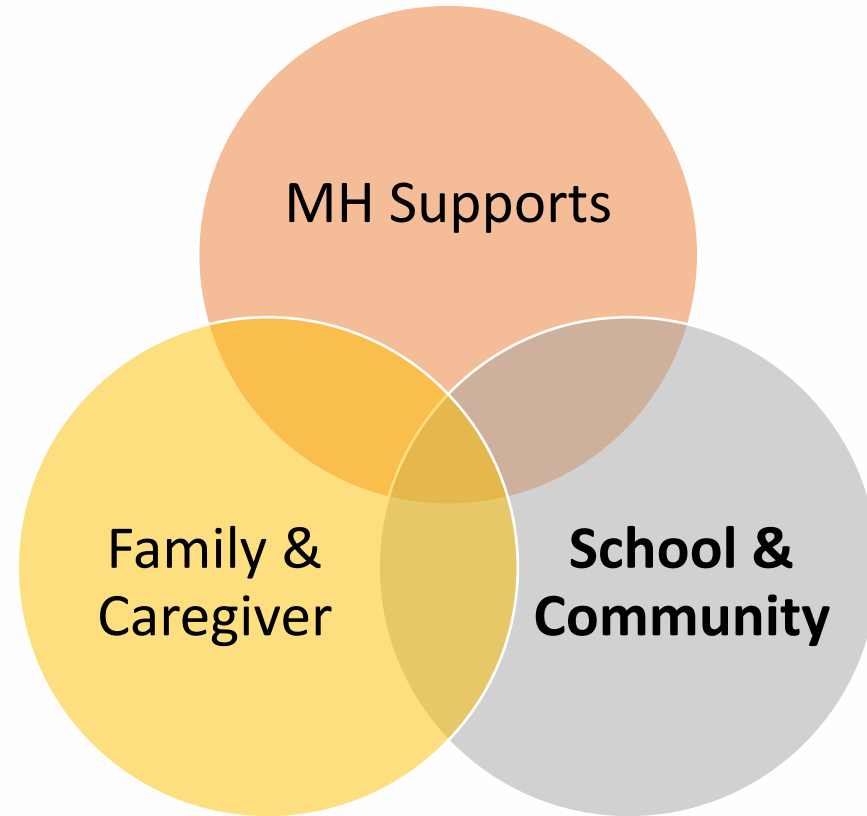
Exploring Teachers' Perspectives on Child Anxiety: Opportunities to Promote Anxiety Management Skills in the Classroom

Sydney Coleman
Dr. Colin King and Dr. Shannon Stewart

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Role of Schools in Managing Anxiety

- Anxiety often interferes with academic performance (Tong & McLeod Macey, 2017)

- Anxiety management skills increase when practiced across settings (Creswell et al., 2016)

- Teachers are well positioned to support strategies that are anxiety reducing
  - Problem-solving, focus on mastery/engagement (Allen, 2017)

- Rise of everyday mental health strategies to promote positive coping (CMHO, 2021)

Role of Schools in Managing Anxiety

What are the opportunities for educators in using cognitive-behavioural informed strategies in the classroom?

- Presentation on CBT core strategies
- Educator focus groups (4) to look at opportunities and challenges for using these types of strategies in the classroom ($n = 11$)
- Varied experience of educators (2 to 25 years (M = 14.8))

Themes from Educators

Connection to the Curriculum

Aligns with Existing Practices

Opportunities for CBT-Informed Strategies in the Classroom

Scaffolding Exposure

Class-Wide Implementation

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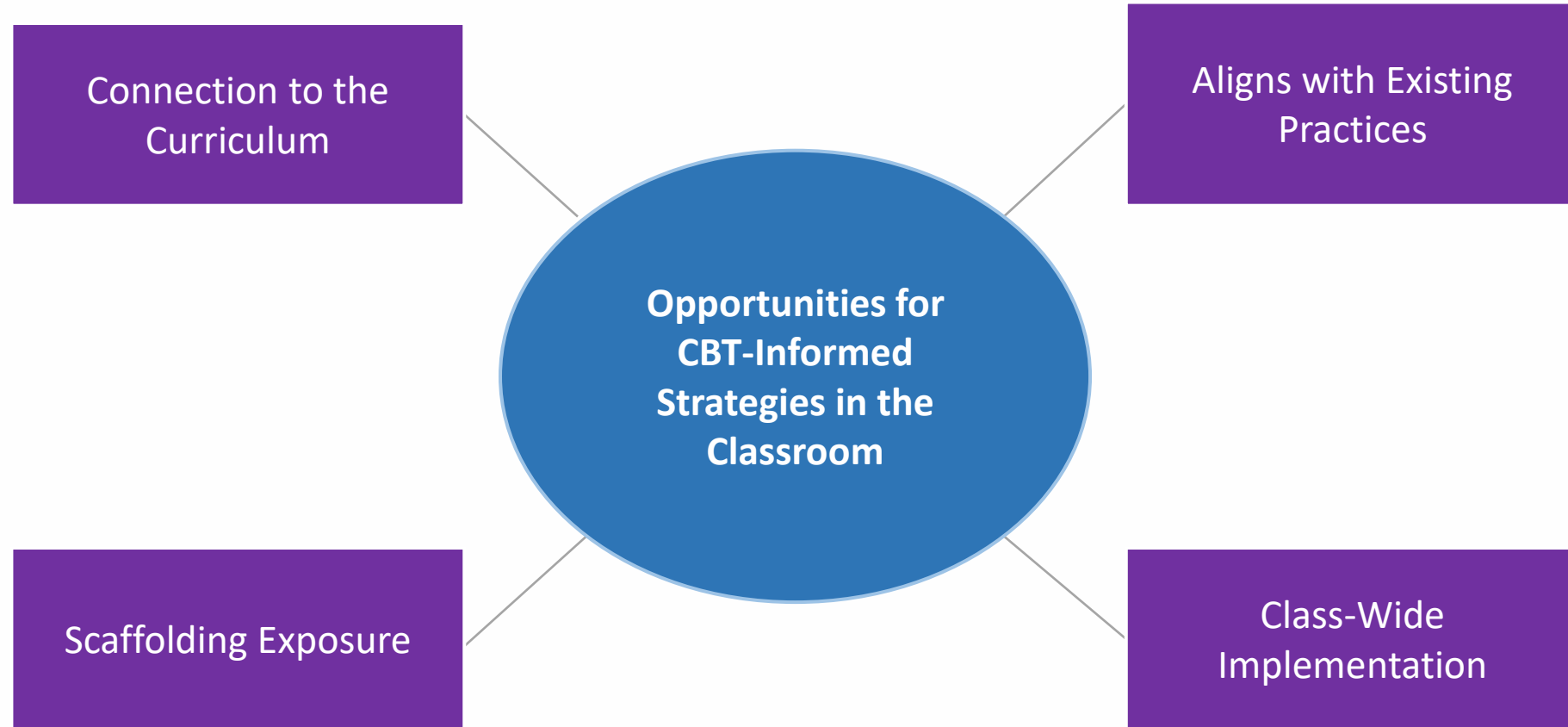
Themes from Educators
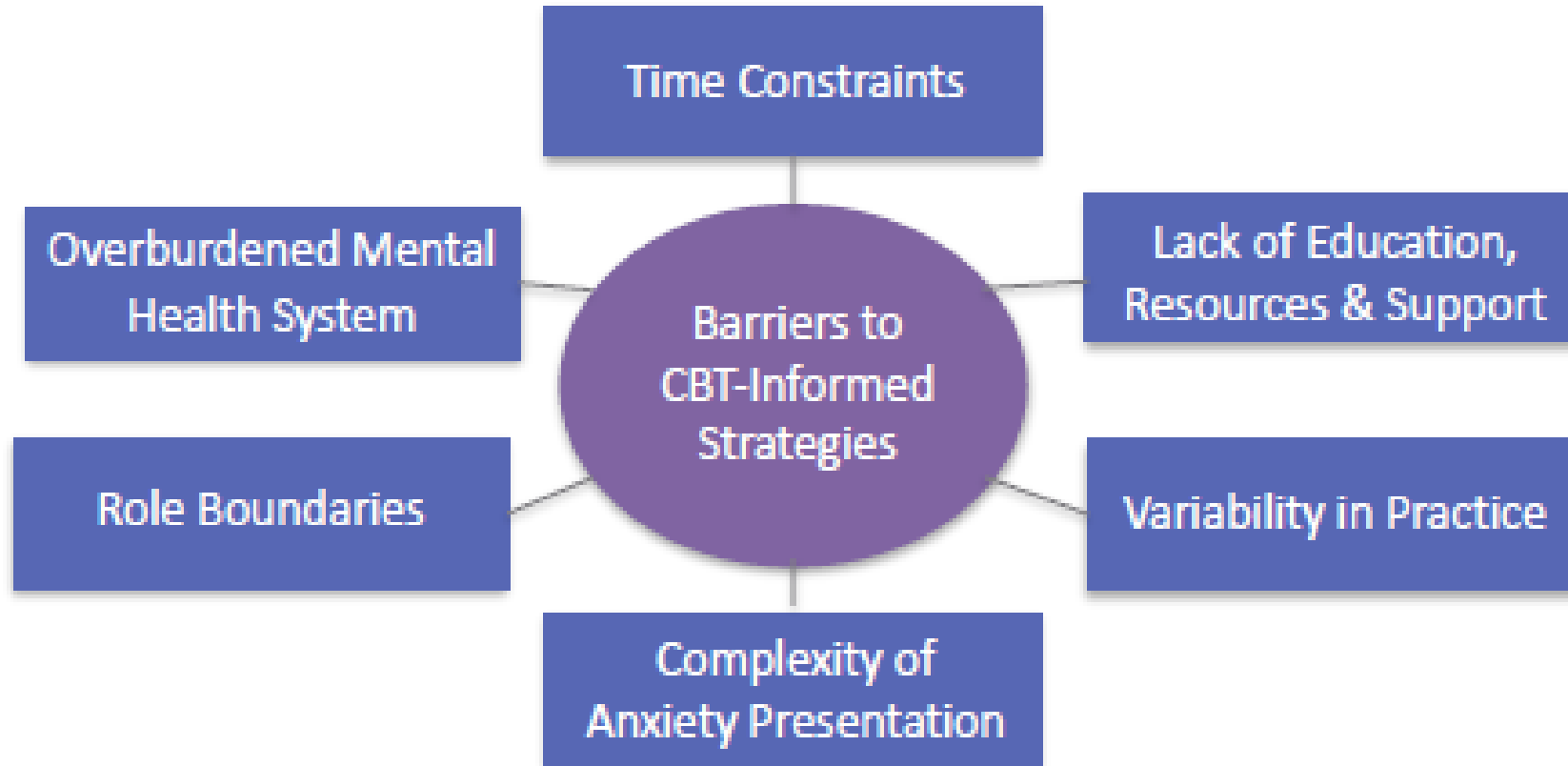
Learning Expectation:
Sharing knowledge/presenting to others

Possible learning activities and expectations over the course of a year (low to high demands):

-Sharing knowledge with a preferred peer

-Sharing knowledge with a non-preferred classmate

-Sharing a preferred topic to a small group of students

-Presenting a topic to a small group of students on a related topic (e.g., favourite book)

-Sharing a brief (1 minute) presentation summary to the whole class from their desk seat

-As part of a small group, sharing knowledge with the whole class

-Individually presenting a brief (2 minute) presentation to the whole class

-Individually presenting a longer (7-10 minute) presentation to the whole class

Teachers' Responses to Anxiety in Children (TRAC)

Anxiety-Promoting	Autonomy-Promoting
Overprotection	Encouragement
Sanction	Problem-Solving
Avoidance	Reward

(Allen and Lerman, 2018)

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Teachers' Responses to Anxiety in Children (TRAC)

Anxiety-Promoting

- Overprotection
- Sanction
- Avoidance

Autonomy-Promoting

- Encouragement
- Problem-Solving
- Reward

(Allen and Lerman, 2018)

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Bridging the Gap: The Role of Psychoeducation in Shaping Preservice Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Responses to Student Anxiety

Sydney Coleman
Dr. Colin King and Dr. Shannon Stewart

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Impact of Professional Development

- Teacher candidates from Western (N = 378)

- Can a brief (1 hour) anxiety workshop promote changes in teachers' self-reported use of strategies and confidence in helping students with anxiety?

- Use of open-ended responses, knowledge and confidence measures, and the Teachers' Responses to Anxiety in Children (TRAC) questionnaire

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Impact of Professional Development

- Increases in knowledge and confidence
  - To identify and support anxious students

- What was helpful? Content about anxiety; specific to school setting; strategies

- Decreases in anxiety-promoting responses; increases in autonomy-promoting

Variable	Pre-Test		Post-Test					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*	*d*
TRAC-ANX	61.16	17.34	54.8	20.21	292	7.64	<.001	.47
TRAC-AUT	124.78	19.14	133.08	34.50	292	-7.68	<.001	-.45

Building a Community of Anxiety Care and Shared Understanding

MH Supports

Family & Caregiver

School & Community
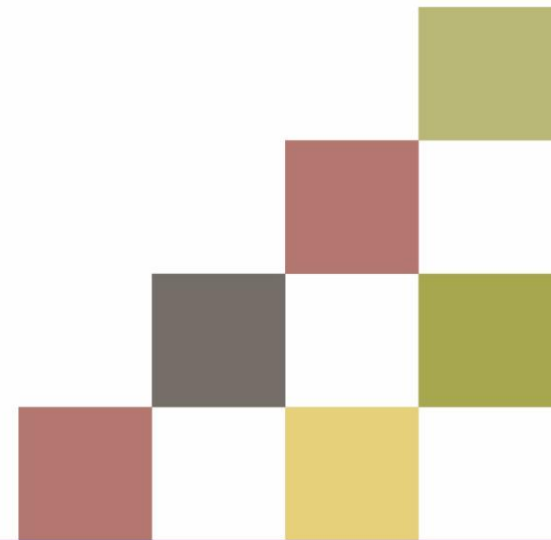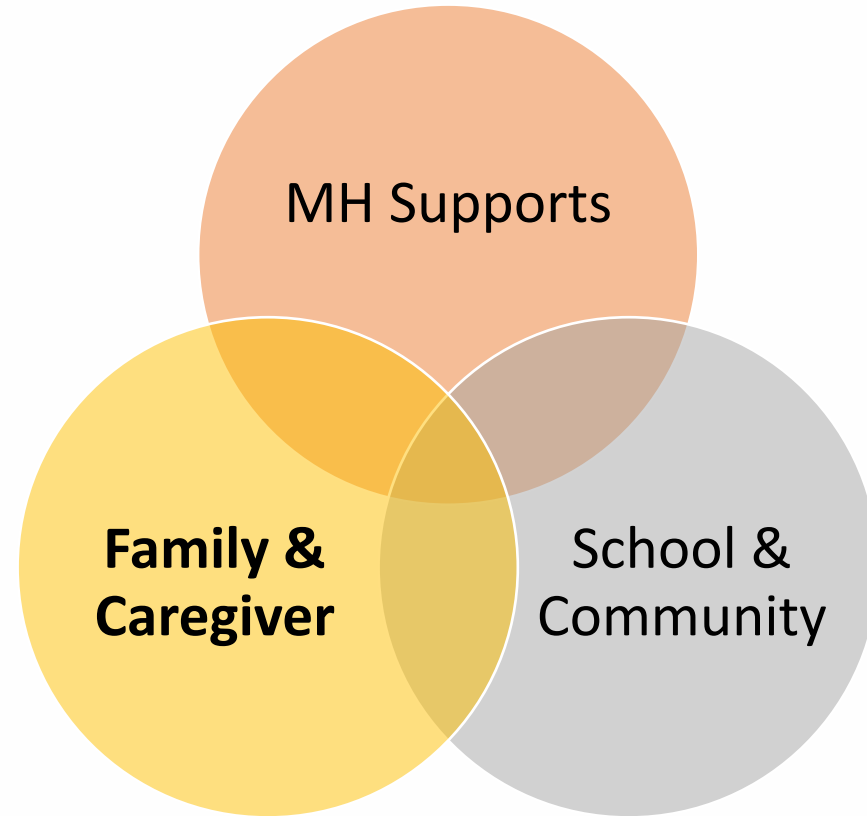
Children's Storybooks on Anxiety: A Content Analysis of Knowledge and Skills Promoted to Children

Dr. Colin King, Alex Riggin, & Maryum Khan

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Potential for Bibliotherapy

- May be helpful as part of a stepped care model for MH support
- Has been examined to support knowledge/process in several content areas:
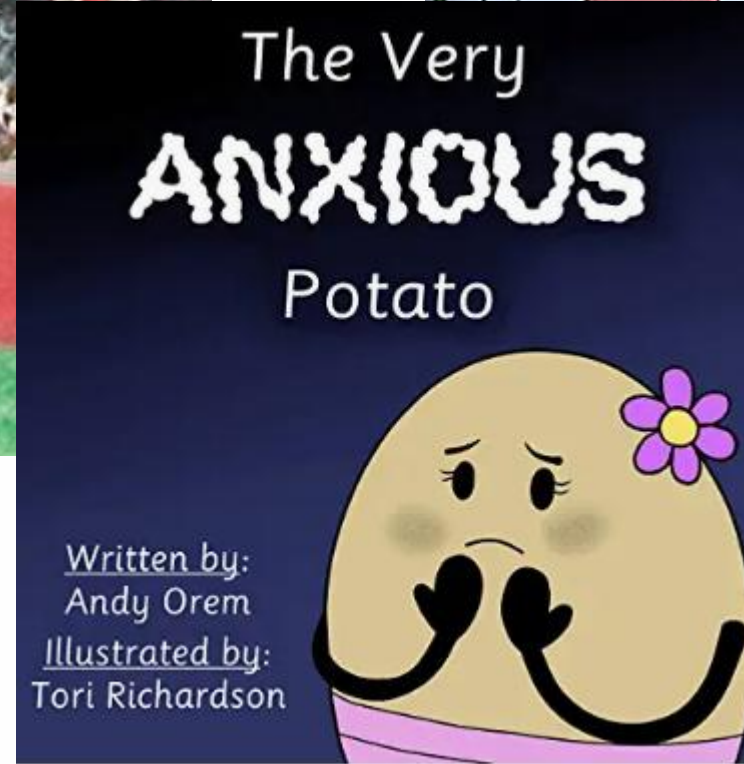 - Anxiety, Grief, Autism, Bullying
- Easily accessed, inexpensive resource
- Little knowledge about skills and content promoted to children about anxiety (Dalzell, 2017)
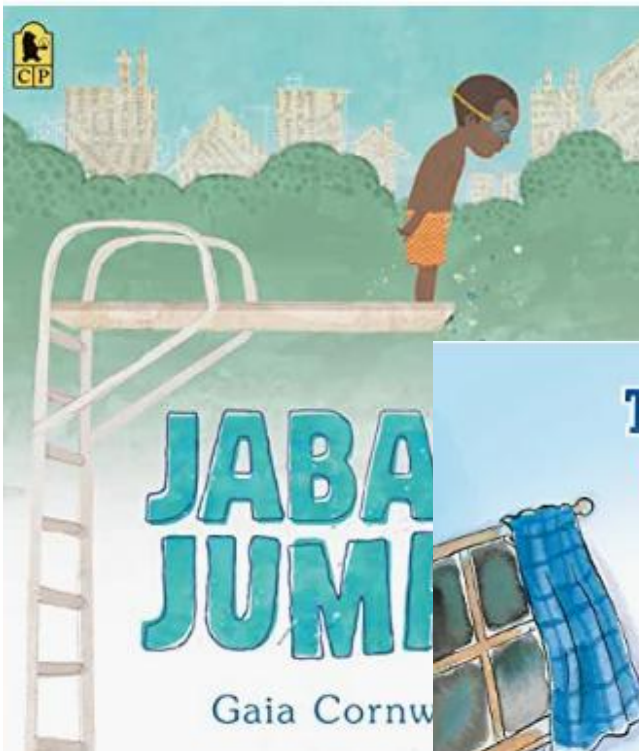
Database & Book Selection

- Use of NoveList Plus Database (Wiseman, 2018)
- Key words (anxiety, worry, stress, fear) (1131 books)
- Limited to "picture books"; review of abstract/summary
- Random selection of 100 anxiety picture books from 230 eligible books
- Pilot coding of 20 selected anxiety picture books to establish adequate inter-rater reliability
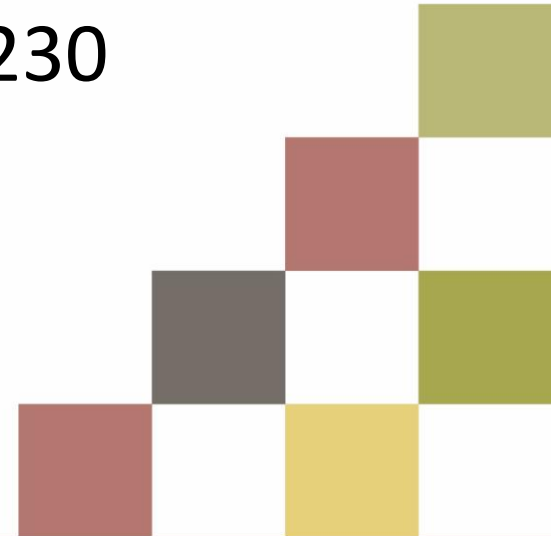
CBT Module Coding

Psychoeducation	Info. about the symptoms and support options in a concrete, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate manner that is easy to understand.
Self-Monitoring	Attends to their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It provides insight and feedback regarding what requires change.
Behavioural Tech.	Strategies that decrease frequency and severity of undesirable behavior while promoting desirable behavior. Focuses on learning direct and concrete skills.
Cognitive Restructuring	Cognitive procedures that challenges inaccurate thoughts, all-or-nothing thinking, and misattributions through testing the evidence and problem-solving.
Exposure	Focus on experiential learning and emotional arousal. Anxious beliefs are directly challenged and disconfirmed through exposure.
Cultural Elements	Depiction of diversity by accurately and sensitively representing the lifestyle, customs, traditions, and/or values of a cultural group.

CBT Module Coding

Psychoeducation	3	-Excellent representation of anxiety
Self-Monitoring	2	-Identifies select feelings, triggering situations
Behavioural Techniques	3	-Introduction of multiple behavioural tools
Cognitive Restructuring	0	-No depiction of cognitive strategies
Exposure	2	-Strong illustration of practice/exposure and consequences
Cultural Elements	0	-No depiction of any elements of diversity

None	A little, fair quality	Somewhat, reasonable quality	A lot, good quality
0	1	2	3

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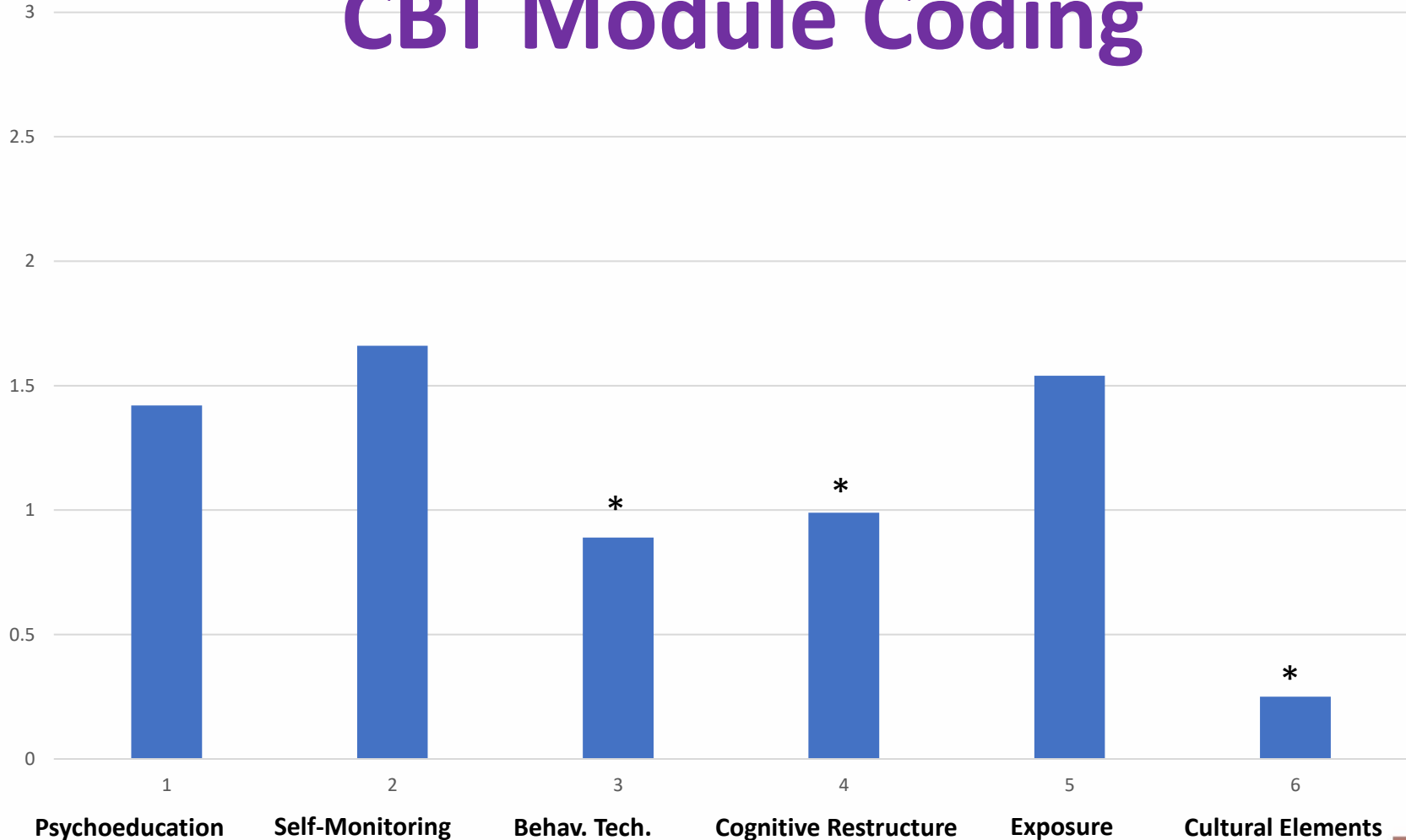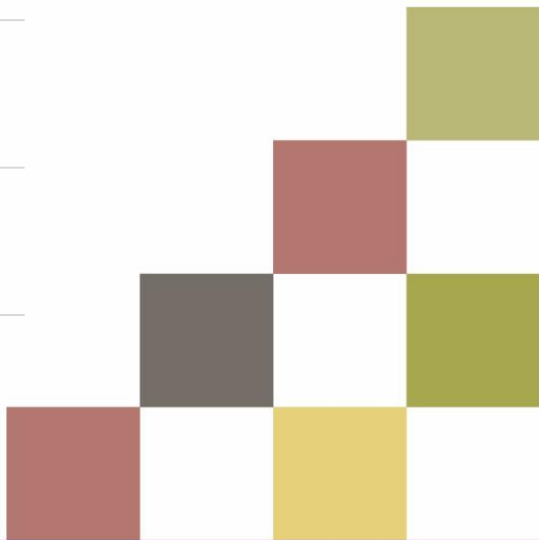
Results

- High degree of variability across anxiety picture books for children

- Most common areas covered included: psychoeducation, self-monitoring, exposure

- Few books had strong endorsement (2+) across multiple modules (3+)

- Very limited depiction of cultural diversity
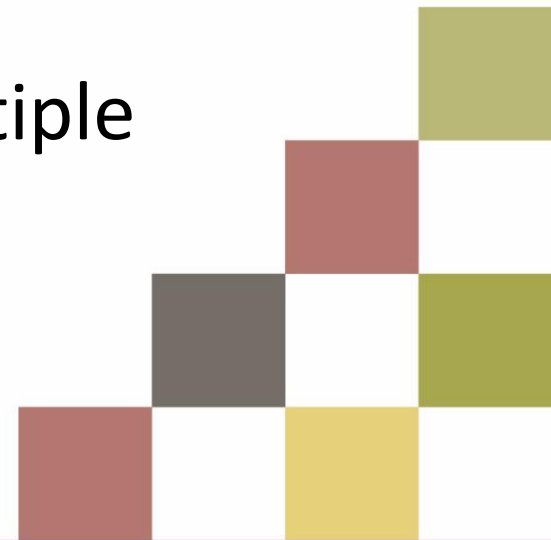
Implications & Conclusions

- Careful consideration of bibliotherapy resources as part of treatment or support process
- One resource unlikely to cover all key skills
- Potential for key books to cover select skills in therapy
- Opportunity to use key books as a supplement to evidence-based therapy or early intervention resource
  - Parent-led therapy approaches

Supporting Young Children with Anxiety Using Storybooks:

Guidance and evidence-informed strategies for caregivers

Dr. Colin King, Amy Rzezniczek, and Rachel Krahn

Parent Resource Guide: Supporting Knowledge & Skills in Managing Anxiety Using Storybooks

Western | Mary J. Wright Child and Youth Development Clinic

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Structure and Components of the Guide

The guide is organized into four sections that build from foundational knowledge to practical strategies:

1. **Understanding Anxiety**: Key concepts, definitions, the impact of anxiety
2. **Strategies for Supporting Children**: Covers bravery behaviours, cognitive strategies, and body-based regulation
3. **Overview of Anxiety Types:** Includes brief descriptions and signs of common anxiety presentations
4. **Storybook Finder and Guiding Questions:** Offers book recommendations aligned with anxiety types and guiding questions
   - Supplementary Finder: Features 100+ additional storybooks

Using the Guide at Home

- **Book selection:** Caregivers and children choose storybooks based on the child's current needs, interests, or anxiety-related concerns
  - o **Shared reading:** Books are read together to open conversations about thoughts, feelings, and experiences
- **Guiding questions:** Storybooks include prompts for caregivers to use in facilitating reflection and discussion with their child
- **Strategy exposure:** The guide and storybooks introduce a range of supportive strategies, such as facing fears, rethinking worries, and calming the body

Selected Books by Anxiety Themes

Five Little Ducklings Go to School

Author: Roth, Carol   **Illustrator:** Julian, Sean

Book Summary:

It's time for the five little ducklings to go to school.

Four of the little duckling's shout, "YIPPEE! HOORAY! OH BOY! THAT'S COOL!" The fifth little duckling sobs, "BOO-HOO! I won't go to school! I'm going to miss you!" But when Mama reminds them, "Even though we'll be apart, we'll still be in each other's heart," the little ducklings go forth and soon discover "School is great!"

Guiding Questions:

- Five little ducks are getting ready for school while the fifth little duck wakes up crying, indicating to his mother that "I won't go to school", and "I am going to miss you". How might we help children manage these fearful feelings?

- The five little ducks had a blast at school, engaging in many activities and making lots of friends. Do you believe opening up a discussion about concerns and worries could have been more beneficial in the long run? Was this avoiding the feelings?

- When the fifth little duckling started to cry, his brothers and sisters began crying as well! Can you think of a situation where you empathized with someone else's emotions?

- Have you experienced feelings of worry before going to school and where might these feelings stem from?

- It is okay to feel these worries before school, what can we do together to help relieve some of these unsettling feelings?

YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/5BDkqqNjqVg?si=Xs6spT_X4m9BBkQN

YouTube Title: Five little ducklings go to school read aloud

By: Crystals Storybooks

First Day Critter Jitters

Author: John, Jory   **Illustrator:** Climo, Liz

Book Summary:

It's almost the first day of school, and the animals are nervous. Sloth worries about getting there on time, snake can't seem to get his backpack fastened onto his body, and bunny is afraid she'll want to hop around instead of sitting still. When they all arrive at their classroom, though, they're in for a surprise: Somebody else is nervous too. It's their teacher, the armadillo! He has rolled in as a ball, and it takes him a while to relax and unfurl. But by the next day, the animals have all figured out how to help one another through their jitters. School isn't so scary after all.

Guiding Questions:

- Mouse is worried because all the other kids are bigger than him, Kangaroo is worried about being away from his mom's pouch, Parrot talks a lot when he's nervous, and Rabbit has a hard time sitting still in class. Do you relate to any of these critters' feelings?

- The animals were worried about going to school for the first time because they did not know what to expect. Are there any situations you are unsure about?

- Their teacher, Armadillo, felt nervous about the first day of school too! The worried animals reassured him, and ended up feeling better themselves. Does helping others calm down ever make you feel better?

- Armadillo was anxious about forgetting things. Do you ever forget things when you're worried, or do you know someone forgetful? What sort of strategies can help you to remember?

YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqSOEnl8vOg

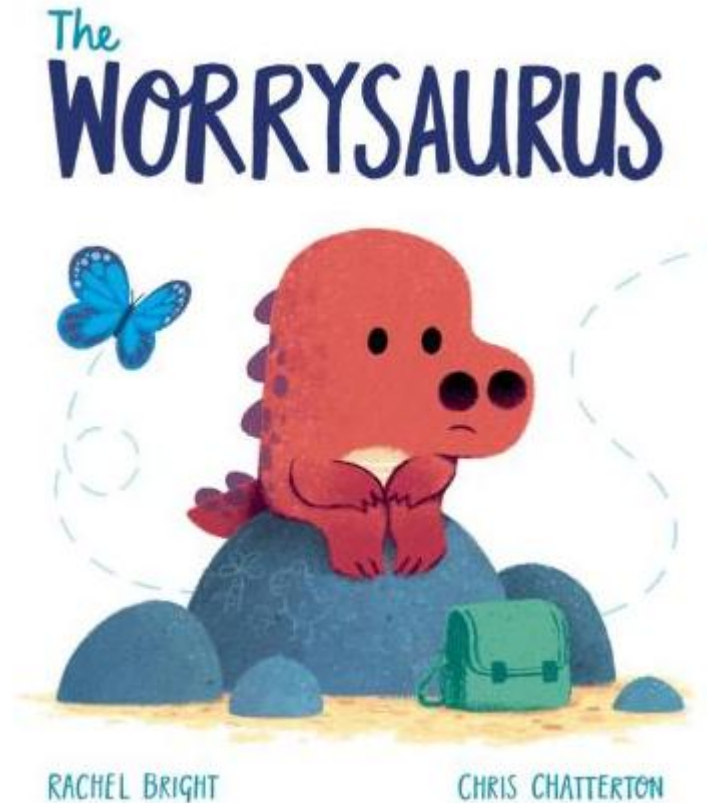**YouTube Title:** FIRST DAY CRITTER JITTERS / Stories for Kids / Read Aloud / First Day of School

By: STORIES AT HOME with Ms. Turner

Western Mary J. Wright Child and Youth Development Clinic

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Example Storybook: *The Worrysaurus*

The
WORRYSAURUS

RACHEL BRIGHT   CHRIS CHATTERTON

It's a beautiful day and Worrysaurus has planned a special picnic. But it isn't long before a small butterfly of worry starts fluttering in his tummy...

Potential for Evidence-Informed Resources

Understanding Use and Impact:

- How can conversations shape children's and parents' understandings of anxiety?
- Does the use of storybooks/conversations shape how families respond to anxiety?

Continued Development of Storybook Tools:

- Emotion regulation; grief and death
- Using storybooks alongside formal CBT and professional treatment

Please check our free resources! **https://iaasp.ca/storybook**

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Western University Open Repository

Parent and Caregiver Resource Guide: Supporting Knowledge & Skills in Managing Anxiety Using Storybooks

(Mary J. Wright Child and Youth Development Clinic, Faculty of Education, Western University, 2025-08) Kin

This guide is intended primarily for parents or caregivers to assist their child who may be struggling with early symptoms of anxiety. This guide provides an overview of anxiety, different types of anxiety, cognitive-behavioural informed skills and approaches, as well as guiding questions on how to use storybooks to guide conversatio
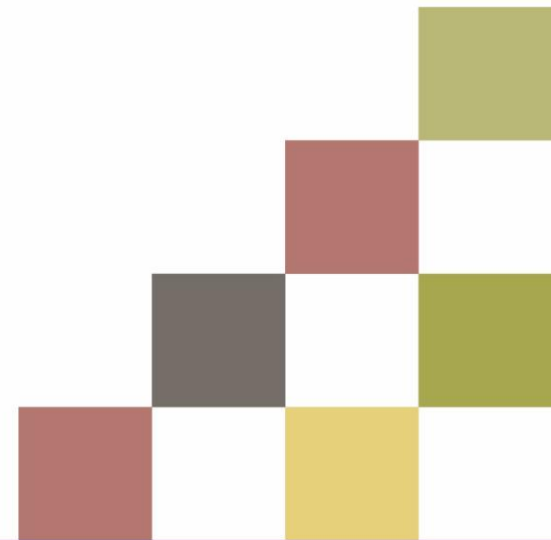
∨ Show more

Storybook Finder: A Companion to the Parent and Caregiver Resource Guide on Supporting Knowledge & Skills in Managing Anxiety Using Storybooks

(Mary J. Wright Child and Youth Development Clinic, Faculty of Education, Western University, 2025-05)

This Storybook Finder Guide was created to accompany the Parent and Caregiver Resource Guide: Supporting Knowledge and Skills in Managing Anxiety Using Storybooks. It includes additional storybooks organized by anxiety-related concerns. To help support discussion with your child after reading, a set of general guiding quest

∨ Show more

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A Big Thank You

- **Sydney Coleman**
- **Laura Herbert**
- **Chelsey Urquhart**
- **Lindsay Pittman**
- **Alex Riggin**

- **Shelby Federman**
- **Amy Rzezniczek**
- **Carly Zylak**
- **Rachel Krahn**
- **Abigail Fisher**

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Anxiety Resources

Parent and Caregiver Resource Guide: Supporting Knowledge and Skills in Managing Anxiety Using Storybooks

https://iaasp.ca/storybook

"Freeing Your Child from Anxiety" – Tamar Chansky, Ph.D.

www.worrywisekids.org

Anxiety Canada - www.anxietycanada.com

"Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents" – Reid Wilson, Ph.D. & Lynn Lyons

M.I. friends Program

www.miunderstanding.ca/m-i-friends

Anxiety Resources

Vanier Children's Services – Talk-In Clinics (London & Middlesex)
www.vanier.com

Wellkin Child & Youth Mental Wellness – Elgin/Oxford
https://wellkin.ca

London Health Sciences Centre – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Care
www.lhsc.on.ca/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-care-program