

Crumpled Paper Throw

From: *Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety* by Liana Lowenstein. Copyright 2016.

Ages: 8–12

Objective: Explain anxiety, physiological responses to anxiety, CBT, benefits of therapy

Supplies: Paper, masking tape, bag filled with small prizes

Description:

Crumpled Paper Throw helps children learn and process information on anxiety in a playful and developmentally appropriate manner. Review and modify the questions as needed to suit the needs of the client. Remove questions that are inappropriate to the child's situation. Prior to playing, place masking tape on the floor to create a "throw" line. The practitioner should stand at a distance from the line and form a hoop with his/her arms. It is important to stand far enough from the line to make the game challenging, but close enough to ensure the client can have some success in throwing the crumpled paper through the hoop. Parents should play the game along with the child so they can learn together.

Presumably, clients will not know the answers to many of the questions. However, they have the opportunity to learn the answers when the practitioner reads them aloud and can then earn points for providing the correct response. This approach encourages children to listen attentively when correct answers are read aloud, and facilitates learning and integration of the material. Children and parents can earn points that they can trade in at the end for a small prize.

Movement exercises are incorporated into the game to add to the appeal of the activity and to teach relaxation skills. The practitioner can participate in these movement exercises to model and to set a playful tone.

Optional questions on specific anxiety disorders can be added to the game, if appropriate. Providing specific information about a child's diagnosis can be helpful, as it normalizes the child's symptoms and behaviors.

During the game, the child might ask if the practitioner has an anxiety disorder. There are benefits and risks to sharing this kind of personal information with clients. If the decision is made to disclose, it should be done for the purpose of conveying an increased sense of understanding and empathy to the client's situation, and in a manner that serves the needs of the client.

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Crumpled Paper Throw will help you learn and talk about anxiety. To play, crumple a piece of paper into a ball, stand behind the tape line, and throw the paper ball toward the hoop I will make with my arms. If you get the crumpled paper through the hoop, you earn 1 point. If you miss, I will ask you a question. (The questions are about anxiety.) You get 2 points for each question you answer correctly. If your answer is incorrect, I will read the answer to the question, and then you will have the chance to answer again and earn 2 points. (Don't worry if you get the answer wrong the first time—the whole point of the game is to learn about anxiety, so that's why I'll read the answer and give you a second chance to answer.) At the end of the game, trade in points for prizes: 1-10 points = 1 prize; 11 or more points = 2 prizes.

Question: What is therapy?

Answer: Therapy is a place where people get help for their problems and worries.

Question: What is a therapist?

Answer: A therapist is a person to talk to about problems and worries. It may take some time to feel comfortable talking to a therapist about problems and worries.

Question: What is anxiety?

Answer: Anxiety is a feeling of worry or nervousness. Everyone gets anxious or worried sometimes. When kids worry a lot, it can be hard for them to feel happy and enjoy certain activities. Kids need help for anxiety when they worry much of the time, and when their fears or worries stop them from having fun or from doing normal.

Take a break to move your body: Do the shoulder scrunch by scrunching your shoulders up to your ears, then relaxing them and moving them around five times.

Question: True or Not True: Many kids feel scared or embarrassed to admit that they feel afraid, anxious, or worried a lot.

Answer: True. Many kids find it hard to admit that they're scared and worried. Some kids may think they should act tougher or that they're too old to be scared. It's important for kids to know that it's okay to have worries and fears. Admitting that you have a lot of worries and fears is the first step to getting help and to feeling better!

Question: What are some common things that kids with anxiety worry about?

Answer: Kids with anxiety often worry that bad things will happen to them or to their family. They might feel afraid to be away from their parent(s). They might feel really afraid of things like bugs, dogs, or thunderstorms. They might be afraid going to parties or being around people they don't know.

Question: What does anxiety feel like in the body?

Answer: When you feel anxious or worried, you might get a sore tummy or have diarrhea. Your body might get hot and sweaty. You might feel dizzy or shaky, or even feel like you're going to throw up or faint. Your heart might pound really fast and you might have a hard time breathing. Therapy can help you learn ways to handle anxiety so your body doesn't feel so bad.

Take a break to move your body: Stretch your body by lacing your fingers together and raising your hands above your head, palms facing upward. Hold this pose for five seconds.

Question: What is the fight, flight, freeze response?

Answer: When a person thinks that something dangerous is about to happen, their body makes chemicals that get them to **fight** off the danger OR run away from the danger (**flight**) OR get very still (**freeze**). The fight, flight, freeze response can protect you when there is real danger, but it can be a problem when there is no real danger. For example, let's say you are afraid of dogs. You are at the park and you see a dog. The dog is not doing anything dangerous. But because you are afraid of dogs, you think this dog is dangerous. You might react in one of three ways: (1) You hit the dog with a stick (fight); (2) You run away from the dog (flight); (3) You are unable to move (freeze). Therapy can help you learn ways to tell your brain and body to react differently so you can cope better with scary situations.

Question: True or Not True: Some anxiety can be helpful.

Answer: True. Anxiety can actually be helpful because it can protect people from real danger. For example, if you're crossing the street and a car comes fast toward you, anxiety would alert you to this danger so you can get out of the car's way.

Take a break to move your body: Do neck circles by placing your hands on your hips, and circling your head in one direction three times, then in the opposite direction three times.

Question: What is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)?

Answer: Cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT for short, is a type of therapy to help people with anxiety. In CBT, kids learn special skills to help them cope with worries and fears. CBT has proven to be the best way to help kids deal with anxiety.

Question: What is gradual exposure?

Answer: Gradual exposure is part of CBT. Gradual exposure involves facing a fear a little at a time until the fear is not so scary anymore. Don't worry: We will only start this part of therapy when you are ready. We will make a plan together so you feel okay with it. After a while, your anxiety will lessen and you will feel calmer and better.

Question: True or Not True: The goal of therapy is to make anxiety go away.

Answer: Not True. Remember, some anxiety is normal and helpful, so we need a certain amount of anxiety. The goal of therapy is to help kids handle fears and worries so anxiety does not stop them from having fun or from doing normal activities.

Take a break to move your body: You did a great job learning about anxiety. Give yourself a pat on the back!

Optional Questions (only include if appropriate for the client)

Question: What is separation anxiety?

Answer: Separation anxiety is when children feel really scared to be away from their parent(s). They may get scared when their parents leave them with a babysitter or when they're dropped off at a friend's home. Therapy will help you learn ways to handle being away from your parent(s) so you don't miss out on fun, and so you can feel calmer and happier.

Question: What is social anxiety?

Answer: Kids who have social anxiety feel really scared when they are around people they don't know well. This makes it hard for them to meet new people, go to parties or camp, or join a team. Therapy will help you learn ways to feel safe around people you don't know well.

Question: What is selective mutism?

Answer: Selective mutism is when a child does not speak in some situations but speaks comfortably in other situations. Kids with selective mutism might not speak at school or around people they don't know well, but they're usually comfortable speaking at home.

Question: What is a phobia?

Answer: A phobia is an extreme fear to a thing or a situation. The thing or situation is not actually as dangerous as the person thinks it is. But to the person with the phobia, the danger feels real because the fear feels so huge. Phobias cause people to worry about and avoid the things or situations they fear. Having a phobia can stop you from enjoying normal activities. Therapy will help you learn ways to deal with your phobia.

Question: What is obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)?

Answer: OCD causes someone to have thoughts and/or behaviors that they don't want but cannot stop, no matter how hard they try. Therapy will help you learn ways to get control over OCD.

Question: What is a panic attack?

Answer: A panic attack is when the anxiety gets so strong that it seems to take over your whole body. For example, you can have a hard time breathing. You might also notice that your heart beats faster and you feel dizzy or sweaty. Therapy can help you learn to handle or prevent panic attacks.