

# *All about Anxiety*



Hi, my name is Timmy! We are going to learn about anxiety in more detail together! To learn about it, we need to know about our caveman ancestors...

A very long time ago, there were cavemen people living on Earth, just like these people below! As you can see, they didn't live like how we do now, it was a very different place back then.

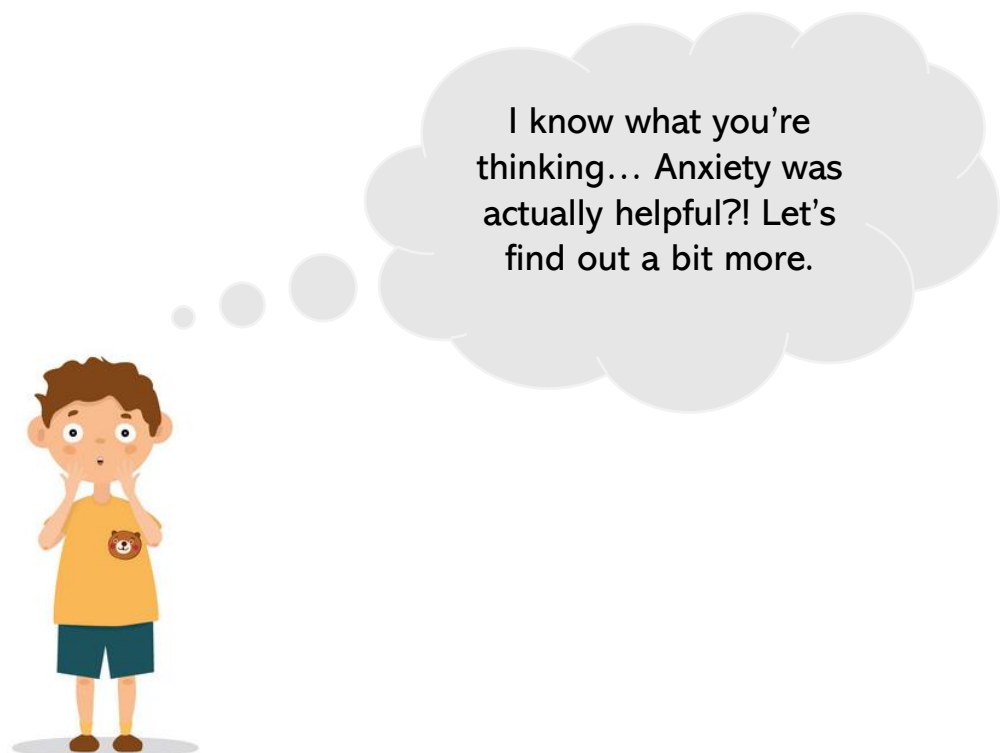


They faced different threats that could harm them and their survival. For example, there were predators who hunted for food (and maybe cavemen were a tasty meal for them!), cavemen had to hunt for food (there was no Lidl!), and there may have been other cavemen who wanted to fight for a new home.

Because of the different dangers, cavemen people had to always concentrate to keep them and their families safe. This can be quite tiring.

Instead, cavemen people had a system in their bodies that helped them survive, which made them act quickly, without even having to think about the danger (it was an automatic system).

The system that made sure they survived was actually Anxiety! And because Anxiety helped them survive, Anxiety has been passed down to us, to help us survive too. So, we all have an Anxiety system in our bodies.



The Anxiety system in your body and your brain are connected. There is a small part of the brain (called the Amygdala) which uses information from your surroundings to decide whether anything is dangerous to you or not.

If there is a danger, the brain sends a message to the Anxiety system.

But what does that mean? Let's think back to the cavemen people.

When the Amygdala thinks that there is a danger, it sends a message to the Anxiety system which gets the body ready to do 1 of 4 things:



**FIGHT**



**FREEZE**



**FLIGHT**



**FLOCK**

**FIGHT:** A cavewoman fighting a lion who is trying to attack.

- SO, this means staying in the situation that is dangerous and using aggression to help the situation.

**FLIGHT:** A cavewoman running away from a lion who is chasing him.

- SO, this means running away or avoiding the threat.

**FREEZE:** A cavewoman hiding behind a big rock and being very still as there is a lion near her home.

- SO, this means you don't move or do anything.

**FLOCK:** A cavewoman getting help from his cavewoman friends and family to help against the lion.

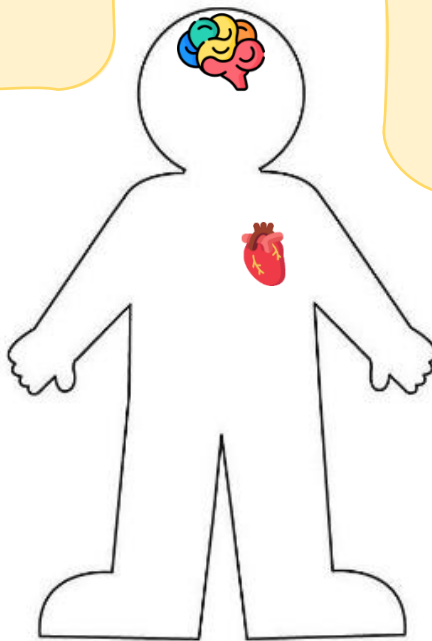
- SO, this means you find other people that you trust to help you.

The body goes through a lot of changes to prepare for Fight, Flight, Freeze, Flock. Here are examples of some of those changes, have a think to see if any of the changes are things you experience too (in the blue).

Our thoughts focus on the danger – **you may struggle to think of anything else but the thing you're anxious about.**

Your heart makes sure blood and oxygen is pumped to important muscles, to help give you energy and power against the danger – **this is why your heartbeat may feel faster.**

Blood from your fingers start to move towards the bigger muscles, as they need energy to help with fighting or fighting – **your fingers may feel numb or tingly.**



The energy to digest food is given to other areas of the body that need help to deal with the danger – **you may experience butterflies or an upset tummy.**

Your body works hard to get ready for the danger – it takes a lot of energy which causes your body to heat up – **you may feel yourself sweat more, this is to help your body cool down.**



Let's quickly have  
a recap of what we  
have learnt  
together so far.

- We are born with an Anxiety system in our bodies, which works with the Amygdala to help see if there are any dangers around us.
- When the Amygdala thinks that there is a danger, it sends a message to the Anxiety system to get our body ready to do one of four things: FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, FLOCK.
- Our body goes through some changes to help prepare it for FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, FLOCK.
- This helped our cavemen ancestors to survive, which is why we have this system to help us survive today.

*You can draw yourself as a cavemen person and write around what you feel in your body when you feel anxious:*



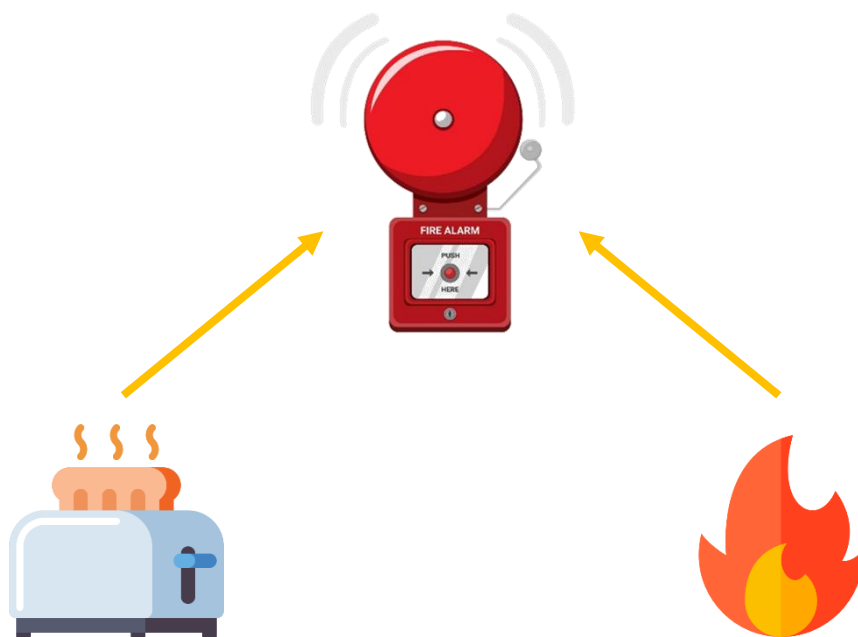
But what about Anxiety  
in the present day, where  
there are no predators  
chasing us?

Our brain and body still believes we are cavemen people! Also, **how we think or what we believe to be true** can trigger (start) the Anxiety system.

We use our brain to think, which is very close to the Amygdala!

So, if we feel worried, feel scared, or something makes us feel anxious,  
Fight, Flight, Freeze, Flock can happen.

If we think our Anxiety system is like a fire alarm.... a fire alarm can go off  
if there is a fire, or if you burn bread in the toaster. The fire alarm doesn't  
know which one is dangerous, and which one is annoying, but the fire  
alarm goes off anyway.



Like a fire alarm, anxiety is helpful when it works correctly. But, if it goes off when there is no real danger, it is not only scary, but also tiring.

We don't want to get rid of the alarm! It works well to protect us from danger, but we need to make sure it's working properly.



We have learnt about what we do because we feel anxiety (FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, FLOCK). We're now going to see what makes us feel anxious.

*You can draw yourself and write around yourself what makes you feel anxious.*

It's helpful to understand how our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are linked together. When something happens that causes Anxiety, we have:

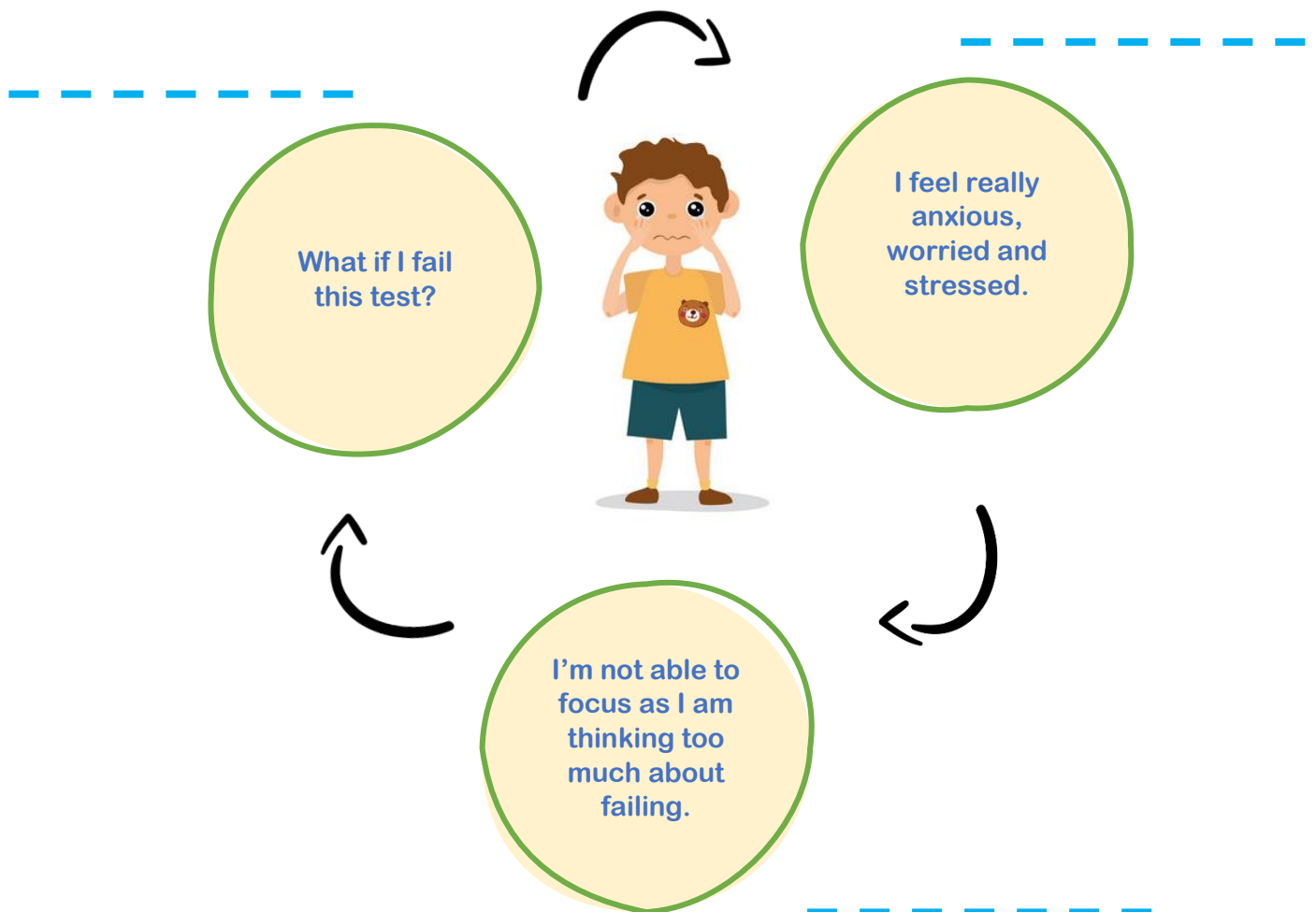
**THOUGHTS:** what we think about the thing that is making us feel Anxiety

**FEELINGS:** how we feel about the thing that is making us feel Anxiety

**BEHAVIOURS:** how we act because of how we're thinking and feeling



Here is an example: write on the line whether the circle contains thoughts, feelings or behaviours.



## Thoughts

Did you know we have about 6000 thoughts PER DAY?! We may not be able to remember every single thought, but we seem to remember the negative ones the most (the not so nice ones).

This could be because our Anxiety system is paying more attention to the negative thoughts to keep us safe. It helped cavemen ancestors be aware of any dangers, which is why it still does it now. However, as we are safer now, it's not as helpful all the time.

When feeling anxious about something, it makes sense why you may have negative thoughts. For example, you may have thoughts like “everyone hates me”, “I can’t do the work”, “I can never get it right”.

You may believe these thoughts to be 100% true, because they have popped into your mind. Now it is a good time to become a **detective!**

*You can draw yourself as a detective in the box! What is your detective name?*



For example:



Whenever I have a test coming up, I always think I'm going to get it all wrong, I'll have to redo it during my break time, I'm going to get into trouble for not getting it right.

Being a detective will involve asking yourself some questions to see how true those thoughts are:

How much do you believe that thought to be true?  
If it's not 100%, why isn't it?

Have I been in this situation before? What happened then?

Have there been times where you had this thought before and it didn't come true?

What would you say to a friend if they had this thought?

Is this thought a fact or is it what I think might happen?





Whenever I have a test coming up, I always think I'm going to get it all wrong, I'll have to redo it during my break time, I'm going to get into trouble for not getting it right.

I had a spelling test last week, and I didn't get it all wrong – I got maybe two spellings wrong but that's it!

I remember I did a Maths test on the times tables, I got some of it wrong – I struggle with my 8 times tables, but I didn't get into trouble for it.

Have there been times where you had this thought before and it didn't come true?

I can't think of a time where I had to stay in for breaktime to redo a test, I haven't gotten into trouble because I do try my best, and I do always get some answers right!

Another spelling test, I got half of the spellings wrong, my teacher said it's okay and went through the spellings with me before I went out for breaktime.

*What has Timmy found out?*

*Write in this box what thoughts you have when you're anxious:*

If you want to, pick a thought that comes up the most in your mind and then pick a detective question and write down the answer below:

*What question do you want to answer?*



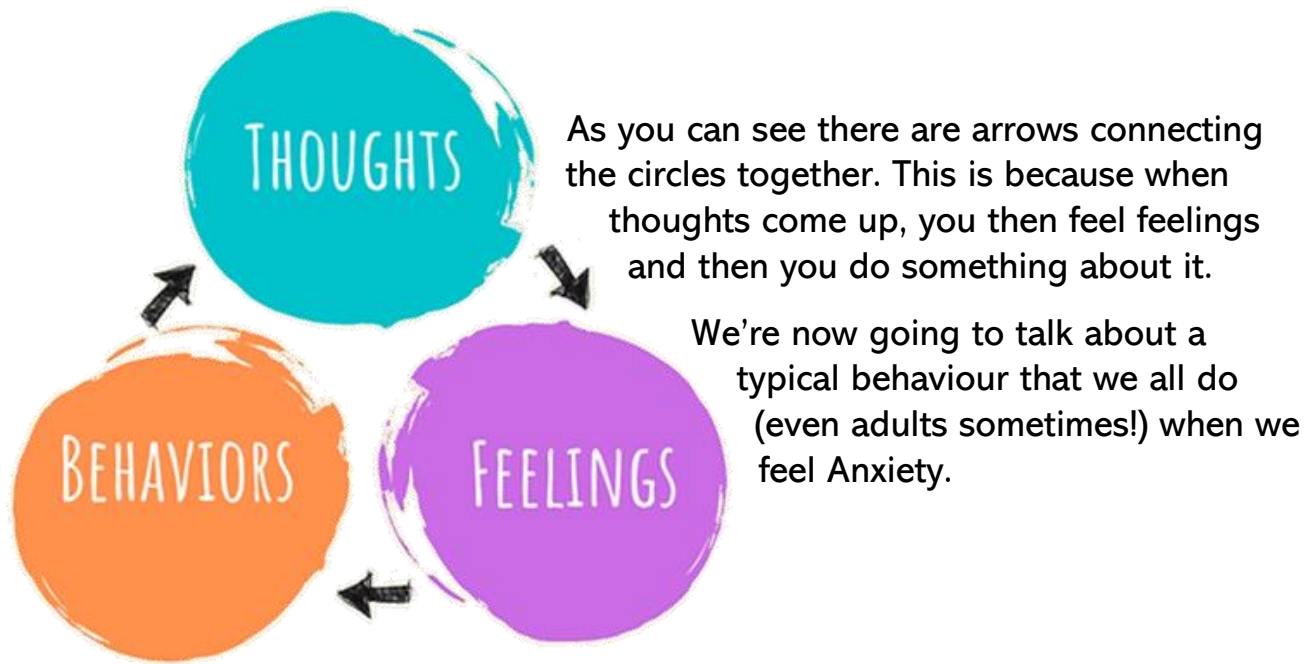
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## Behaviour

When we talk about behaviour, we mean it as something we do, or don't do, because of our negative feelings and negative thoughts.

When we have negative thoughts, and we feel negative feelings, we want to do something to help us feel better. Let's remind ourselves of this diagram:



Do you remember what this caveman was doing?  
Circle the correct one!

FLIGHT

FIGHT

FREEZE

FLOCK

The correct answer is FLIGHT! An easier way to understand this is when you avoid, escape or not do something because of your Anxiety, which you may feel in your feelings and thoughts.

For example:



I was invited to go to the park but I felt scared and worried because of the dogs that run around there. What if they do something? I decided not to go, which I did feel better about but I also felt sad that I missed out.

When faced with something that can cause Anxiety, or bring up negative feelings and thoughts, it seems easier to avoid, because that means you no longer feel those feelings or have those thoughts in your mind.

However, what else did Timmy feel when staying at home and why?

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When Timmy stayed at home, Timmy not only felt sad, but he also didn't find out whether what he thought might happen would come true or not.

*Is there anything you have avoided because you had negative thoughts and feelings about it? Remember, it is understandable to want to avoid!*

If you have found out that you have avoided things because of your negative thoughts and feelings, it's okay! We all have either avoided or have wanted to.



The most important thing to remember is that avoiding something means you don't find out that it's not as bad as you may think!

If you want to prove your Anxiety system wrong and don't want to avoid, have a read through these key things:



This is a big thing to do! Be proud that you want to do this.



If you have always avoided, don't expect that you can stay in the situation for a long time – break it down into small steps!



It might take a couple of goes to stay in the situation for same amount of time each time – that's ok!



After you have stayed in the situation, ask yourself if anything happened to support your Anxiety system thinking it would be dangerous.



It's okay to ask for help!



This is what I did to help me feel better about going to the park when there are dogs there!



I want to go to the park with my friends. I need to get over my fear of dogs. These are the steps that helped me with this.

I had to do each step a few times before moving onto the next one.

1. Look at a picture of a puppy
2. Look at a picture of a small dog
3. Look at a picture of a large dog
4. Talk about dogs
5. Talk about dogs while looking at a picture
6. Go to the park where dogs are on leads
7. Go to the park where dogs are off leads
8. Go to a friend's house with a dog and look at the dog when in the same room
9. Pet the friend's dog
10. Pet a stranger's dog

*Why do you think it's important for Timmy to do all these steps to help him with his fear of dogs?*

If we start to change the way we think or change how we behave when we are in a situation that makes us feel anxious, what will happen to our feelings?



If you wrote that our feelings could change, well done!



*What are some things you have learnt that you want to write down here?*



If you feel as though you would like some support for Anxiety, please speak to your parent and school!