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YOU'VE  
BEEN  
MISSED

## Understanding 'Health-based Anxiety' – Guidance for parents and carers

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Anxiety is a common emotion experienced by everyone at some time in their lives and can be for a number of reasons. Although it is normal on occasion to worry about becoming unwell, for some adults and children they can become fixated on being unwell or on a specific set of symptoms. For example, a child may spend a lot of time worrying that if they go to school they may become ill and end up in hospital or that a child's friend has been unwell with vomiting and they feel nauseous.

### Common signs of 'health-based anxiety':

- Frequently checking for any signs of illness
- Obsessive concern if they notice any new lumps/bumps etc
- Constant questioning about seemingly trivial concerns (such as a tickly cough or sore throat)
- Non-specific aches and pains occurring regularly

Children and young people who experience these symptoms may be convinced that there is something seriously wrong with them. They might frequently seek reassurance from others or search the internet for information on different health conditions. They may also believe that physical changes in their bodies such as an increased heart rate, feeling shaky, and breathlessness are signs of illness, rather than being caused by anxiety.

### Some ideas that could help your child or young person to manage their 'health-based anxiety' include:

- Talking to your child or young person about the physical sensations that anxiety can cause, such as a raised heart rate, dry mouth and sweaty or tingly palms. This may reassure them
- Encouraging your child or young person to keep a diary. Your child or young person can then identify their own triggers and techniques that have helped them to work through any real or perceived health issues in the past
- Taking part in physical activity. Exercising causes endorphins to be released which helps to improve mood
- Trying distraction. Distraction can be anything from things they enjoy (such as colouring, mindfulness, games and puzzles, or listening to music), to things that keep their mind and body distracted (such as helping you with the shopping or cooking)
- Being clear and reassuring in responses to questions from your child / young people about 'health-based anxiety'
- Using a worry box \*\*
- Working through their thought processes with exercises such as ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts), Take

*\*\*For more information or resources please go to <https://bwc.nhs.uk/youve-been-missed>*

**Please note:** complaints of physical illness should always be taken seriously and medical advice sought. If a medical examination reveals no abnormalities, the problems persist and you suspect anxiety, please discuss this with your child's GP.