



Jake manages OK at school but only when the routine is predictable. He seeks reassurance constantly and asks a lot of 'What if?' questions. An excursion is coming up and Jake's anxiety is building. He is biting his nails and feels pain in his chest.

Small Steps for Jake

1. Jake's teacher communicated excursion plan to class.
2. Jake's parents helped with preparation using the plan.
3. Both encouraged Jake to use the information he has to answer some of his own questions to reduce the 'What If?' questions he asks his parents and teacher.
4. His parents gently challenged his anxious thoughts – is that likely – what else could happen?
5. Jake's teacher organised a mini excursion and his parents included after-school out of routine activities to help him build confidence in managing unscheduled events more confidently.

Alternate thinking

The aim of alternate thinking is for Jake to trust his own ability to find/think of an answer and not outsource all the answers to alleviate his feeling of anxiety.

The problem of avoidance and short term symptom relief

If Jake's teacher and parents constantly reassure him by continually answering questions on the same theme, Jake's anxiety is reinforced (remember the anxiety cycle). The short term relief doesn't last, and the questions continue.

Dismissing Jake's worries by saying, 'Don't worry, that won't happen. It will be fine' is counterproductive. We have to accept his fears are real for him and then assist him to overcome them in small steps.

When he asks a question, his teacher can gently turn his attention to the sheet to locate the

information. Teachers and parents can also work with him to challenge his anxious thoughts.

Questions Jake's teacher and parents could ask, include:

- *What else could happen?*
- *Are you jumping to the conclusion that this will happen?*
- *What are the chances of this happening?*
- *What has happened in the past?*
- *If your friend had this worry what would you tell them?*

Out of routine activities

Parents and teachers can also add out of routine and spontaneous activities into their week which is especially useful for children experiencing anxiety.

Managing small amounts of anxiety in small steps safely builds children's belief in their own ability to control their own emotional responses.