

# *Understanding and Supporting Worries*

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# Understanding and Supporting Worries

*Why are we here today?*

- *Validation and Reassurance*
- *Empowerment*
- *Practical Strategies*



GIG  
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*“Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs”*

**I’m depressed.**

**I’m a bit OCD about it.**

**My anxiety is playing up.**

**I’m an insomniac.**

*“Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs”*

**I’m feeling a bit low.**

**I have strong feelings about this.**

**I have lots of worries.**

**I’m not sure how I feel today.**

**I’m a bit overwhelmed by some big emotions.**

# Mental Health

## Mental Disorder

A syndrome characterised by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation or behaviour that reflects significant dysfunction in the psychological process underlying mental functioning.



Most diagnosable mental health disorders in children begin after the age of 14.

# Emotional Well-being

At primary school age, it is likely that a child's thoughts and emotions relating to worries are much better explained by:

- Reasonable and expected responses to the environment.
- Their neurodevelopmental stage.
- Emotional regulation.
- In certain cases, a neurodevelopmental disorder e.g. ASD/ADHD.



## Emotional Regulation

**Emotional regulation is the ability to exert control over one's own emotional state.**

This may involve processes such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, focusing on reasons to remain calm or be happy and containing our emotions until a more appropriate time.



# Emotional Regulation

The greatest impact on psychological well-being Shenfield (2016)

Children will develop the ability to emotionally regulate at different stages. This ability continues developing well into adulthood.

A child cannot usually emotionally regulate to any great effect until **at least** the age of 8.

Without this ability being fully developed, children often display greater conflict, higher levels of stress and have difficulty in truly expressing how they are feeling.

We need to model and support emotional regulation.





# Common Worries

*What are your child's top 3 worries?*

Separation from  
parent/s

Harm coming to loved ones

School

Death

Friendships

Feeling unsafe

Sleep/own bed

Health

Any change



N.B. If your child's worries aren't noted here, it does not mean they are a cause for concern.

# Common Physical Symptoms

*How does your child report physical symptoms?*

Sickness

Headaches

Feeling hot

Crying/outbursts



Faster heartbeat

Sleep disturbance

Needing the toilet

Racing thoughts

N.B. If your child's symptoms aren't noted here, it does not mean they are a cause for concern.

# Recognising Worry

Sometimes we **forget to look after our minds**, so we need to notice when we need to stop and **take care of ourselves**.



Not being able to sleep

Feeling stressed

Thinking things are 'too much'

Feeling sick in our tummy

Finding it hard to focus

Not feeling hungry

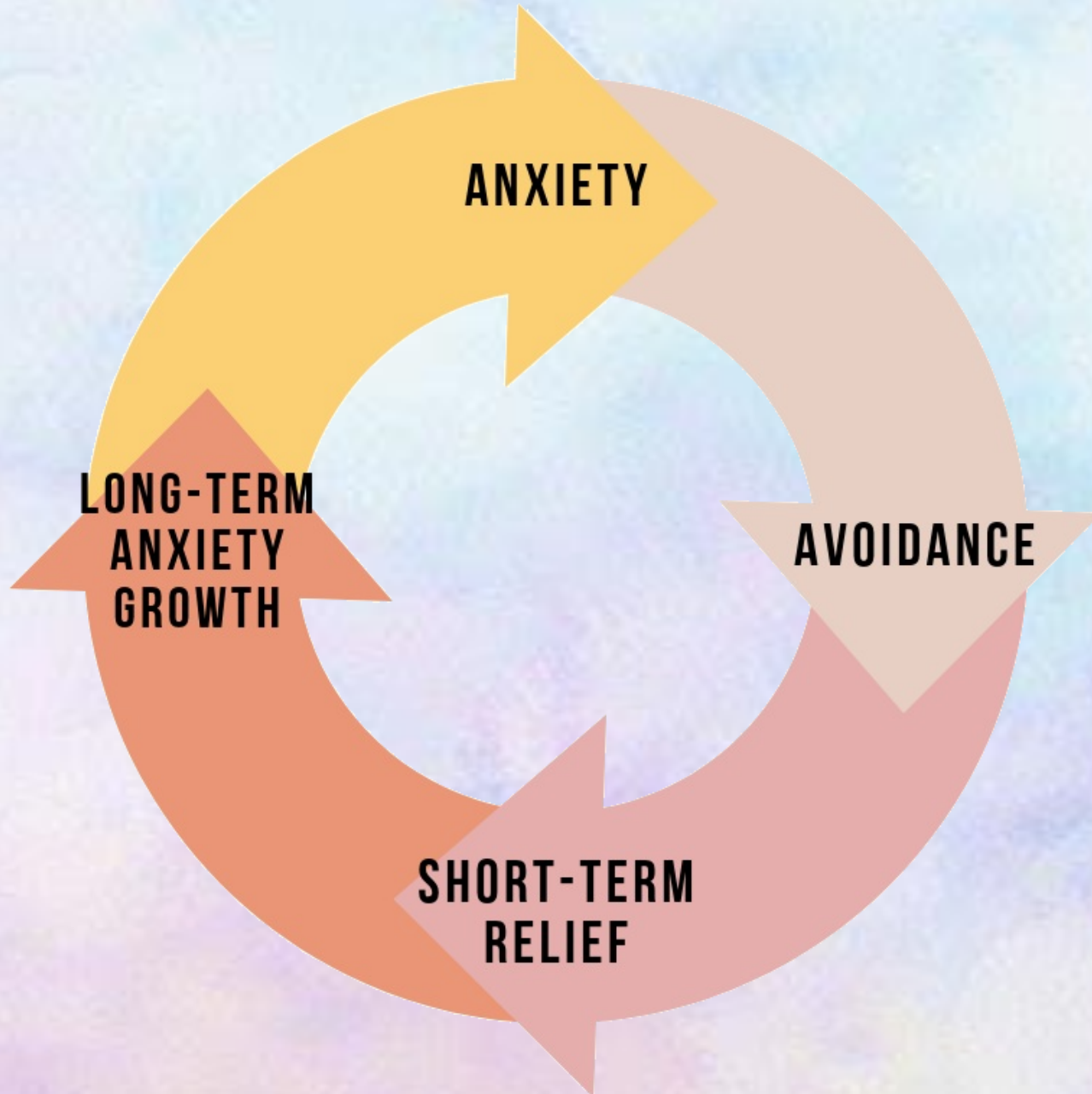
Feeling sad

Wanting to stay home

# The Anxiety Cycle

Anxiety is created and maintained through the anxiety cycle.

Without realising it, we often reinforce a child's anxiety which ultimately **makes the anxiety grow and often spreads** to other circumstances/scenarios.





# The Anxiety Cycle

**Child is worried about going to crowded places.**

**Child learns that avoiding crowded places and being in control makes them calm.**

**Child is allowed to avoid crowded places and chose where to go.**

**Child feels relief from worries and calms down.**

Providing a way to relieve the anxiety here has reinforced it and allowed it to embed.



# The Anxiety Cycle

**Child is worried about monsters/burglars.**

**Child learns that they only feel 'safe' after checking behaviours and seeking reassurance.**

**Parent gives verbal reassurance then checks under bed and in cupboard.**

**Child feels relief from worries and calms down.**

Providing a way to relieve the anxiety here has reinforced it and allowed it to embed.

# Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance and reassurance feed worries.



## Validate Without Agreeing

I can see that you're really nervous for your test today, I understand. But you're going to go in and try your best.

I know you really worry about me, that's okay. I will see you after work.

I understand you don't like sleeping in your own bed. It's important that you stay in your own bed tonight.

# Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance and reassurance feed worries.

## Gradual Exposure

Setting small, achievable goals that aim to exposure your child to their worry will build up evidence that there is no need to worry!

Your child needs to experience success in order to reduce anxiety in a way that does not reinforce it, but instead challenges it.





# Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance and reassurance feed worries.

## Exposure – Separation Anxiety

Parent(s) goes for a 20 minute walk without child while child is supervised.

Parent(s) goes out for 40 minutes ...

Parent(s) goes out but does not say what time they will come back...

Child tries a sleep over at grandparents' house.



# Stress is a natural and inevitable part of childhood.

**POSITIVE**

Brief increases in heart rate,  
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

**TOLERABLE**

Serious, temporary stress responses,  
buffered by supportive relationships.

***TOXIC***

Prolonged activation of stress  
response systems in the absence  
of protective relationships.

**Positive relationships  
and resilience act as  
protective factors for  
all types of stress.**

# Stress is a natural and inevitable part of childhood.

Thinking, talking, trying and figuring things out is a huge part of resilience.

## Rescuing

Because we care about our children, it is a natural instinct to want to solve their problems, remove unwanted feelings or to 'rescue' them from a situation that they are finding challenging.

Where appropriate, we need to encourage children to try to figure out themselves how 'big' a problem is and if there are any solutions that they can find themselves.

This doesn't mean abandoning them! Rather facilitating the problem-solving process.



# Reassurance Seeking

We all want to tell our children that everything will be 'okay'.

For some children, a quick word of reassurance is absolutely fine. However, for some children they become **dependent on this**.

This means that they will not take risks, join in with things they find challenging or resolve conflict without the input of an adult.

## Try saying:

What do you think you could do?

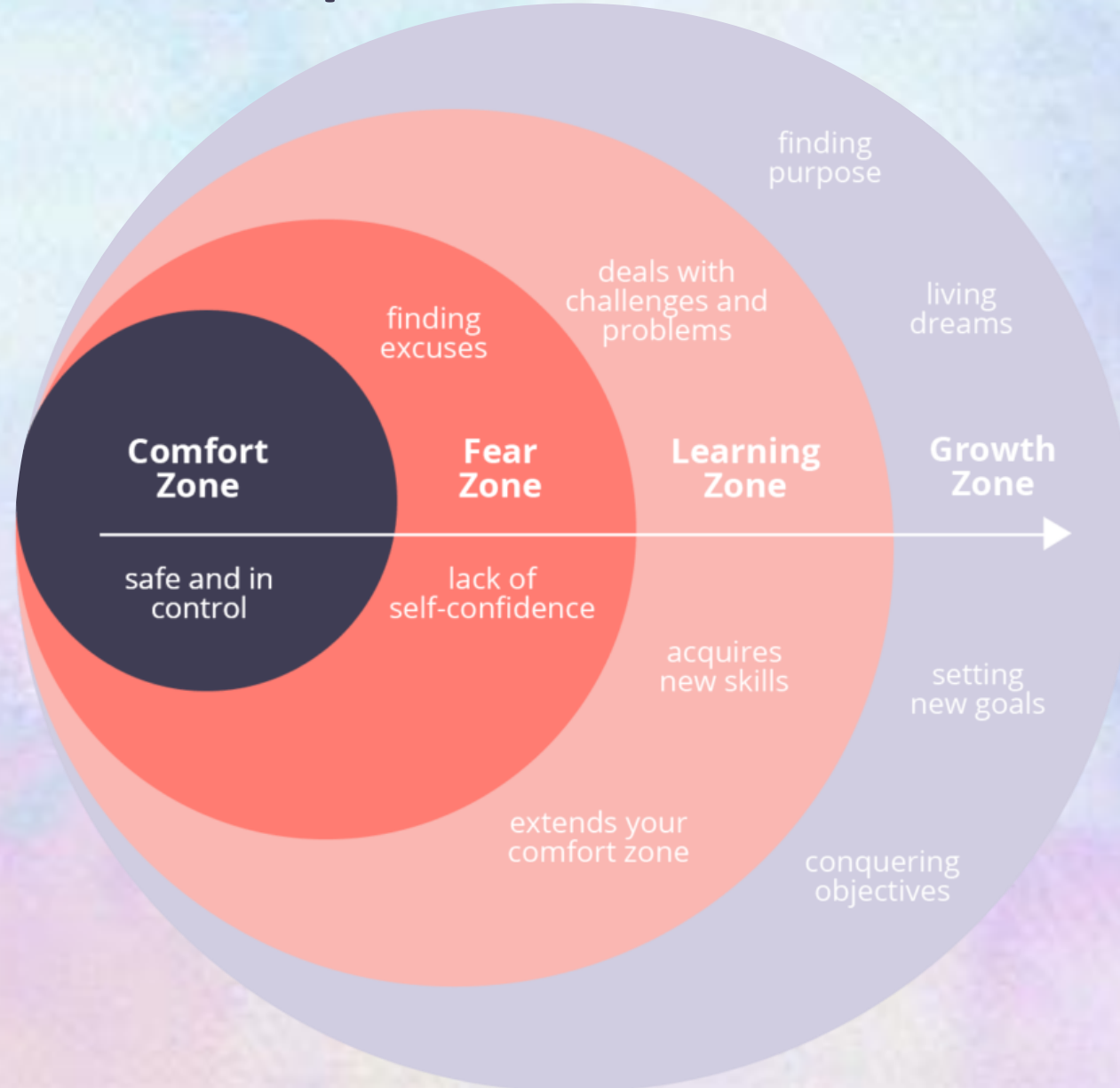
Okay, what if that does happen, what could you do?

What choice could you make?

Maybe that will happen!



**We have to set aside our own worries and allow children to explore, take risks and experience both success and failure.**



# Managing Worries not Eliminating Them

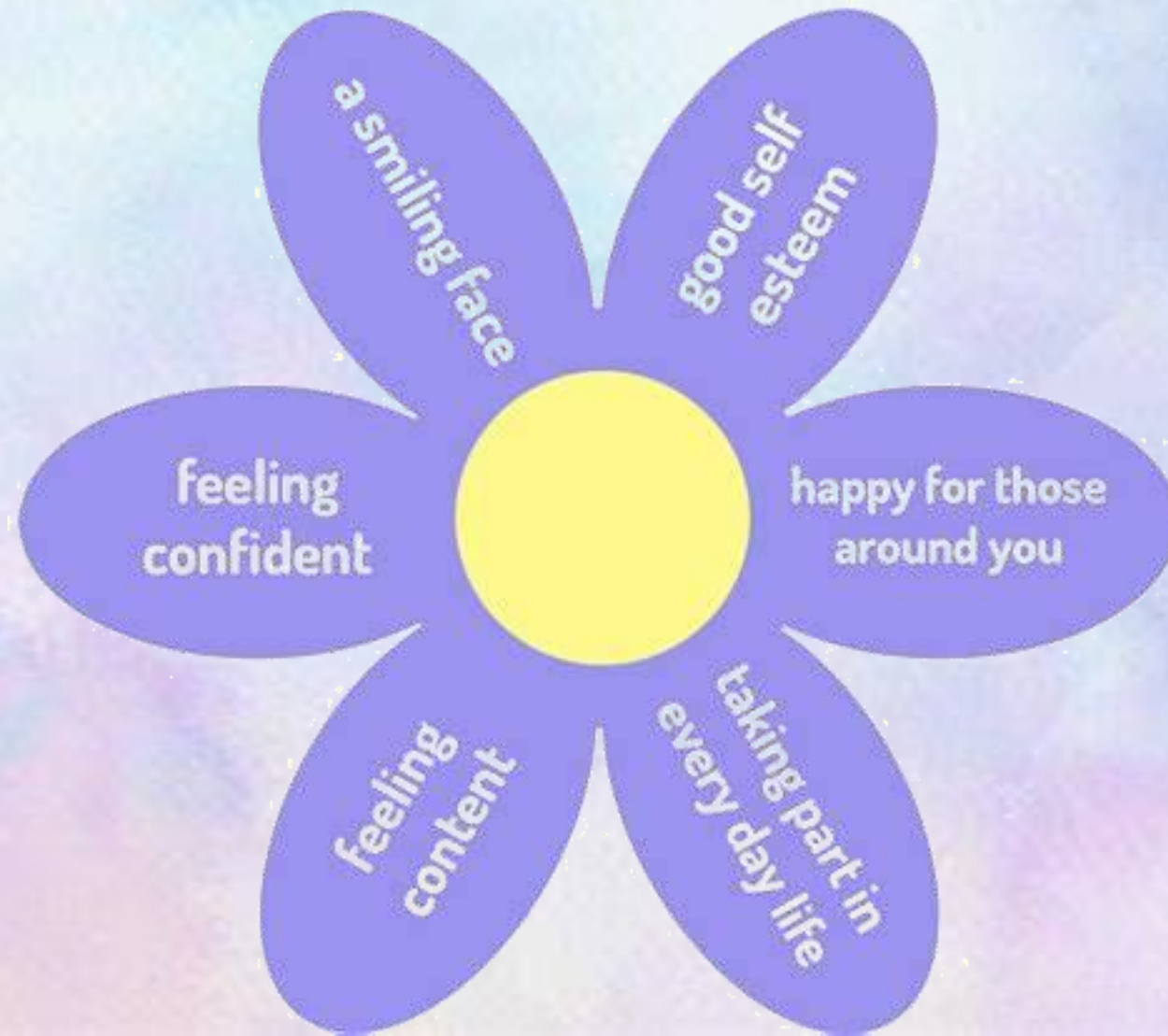


Resilience is a skill that we all need in life.

It is very likely that your child will face many challenges throughout their childhood and, of course, as an adult too.

We need to equip children with the **tools that they need** to face worries and know how to **manage them** rather than thinking they will never have worries again.

# Empower Children to Take Ownership of their Emotional Wellbeing



# Negative Thinking Patterns

When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



If you wear glasses with a purple lens, everything you see becomes tainted with purple. This can make it hard to see things and colours as they really are.

The same thing happens with worrying. You begin to see all situations in life through a '**worried lens**' which can prevent you from thinking positively.



# Negative Thinking Patterns

When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



## Predicting

Thinking that you already know what is going to happen or what something will be like.



## Catastrophising

Thinking the absolute worst.

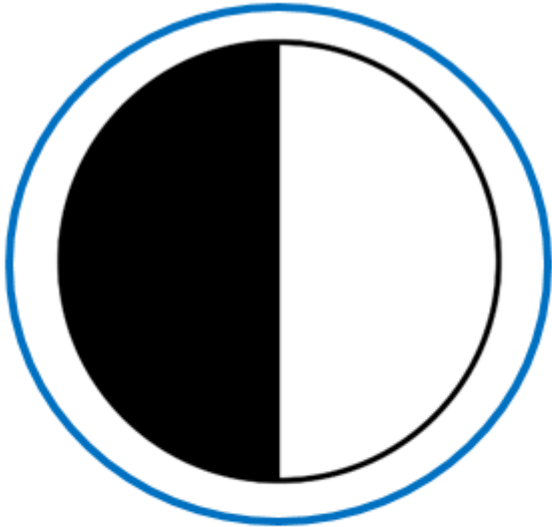


## Blaming

Blaming other people or circumstances.

# Negative Thinking Patterns

When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



## All or nothing

Seeing only one point of view.



## Over Generalising

Thinking that something is always a certain way.



## Mistaking

Thinking that thoughts are facts.

# Negative Thinking Patterns

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## Mind Reading

Believing that you know what someone thinks about you or a situation.



## Spiralling

Allowing one negative thought to 'suck you in' and bring more negative thoughts.

# Negative Thinking Habits

When you thinking a certain way over-and-over again this can become a habit. This changes the way you see certain situations and can make you biased. It takes 21 days to break a habit, so try challenging some of these thinking habits.



**Blaming**

Blaming other people or circumstances.



**All or nothing**

Seeing only one point of view.



**Catastrophising**

Thinking the absolute worst.



**Mistaking**

Thinking that thoughts are facts.



**Predicting**

Thinking that you already know what is going to happen or what something will be like.



**Over Generalising**

Thinking that something is always a certain way.

Allow your child to become familiar with these thinking habits.

Point out to them which thinking habit they are doing and help them to realise it is simply exacerbating their worry.

Sometimes, the simple realisation that they are doing this is enough to destabilise their thought.

**POW!**

Is there another way to see this?

What evidence is there?

How would someone else see this?

**BAM!**

Is this helpful?

What advice would you give someone else?



Is this fact or opinion?

First **identify the thought** – you need to know your challenger!



Defeat the negative thought by coming up with a new, more positive one!

# 'What If?' Land



Many children express their worries through using 'what if?' questions.

This can exacerbate their worries as they often get no answers and only find themselves with more questions that they started with.

I find that balancing these questions works well to change their outlook.

# 'What If?' Land – Balancing their questions

Having a new class teacher

What if they're really strict?

What if the work is too hard?



What if they let you do your favourite things?

What if I enjoy the work?

Having a neutral 'what if' question is often more realistic and believable for a child.

# Acceptance

Thoughts are like bubbles; they float around us and often distract us. Just like bubbles, thoughts often swirl around inside our head but then float away. Thoughts are not facts, let them float away and not bother you anymore.



**You Are Not Your  
Thoughts**



# Understanding and Supporting Worries

## Key Points

- **Avoid medicalising emotions.**
- **Strive to break the anxiety cycle.**
- **Challenge negative thinking patterns.**
- **Manage anxiety with practical steps.**

**Thank You**

[camhs-resources.co.uk](http://camhs-resources.co.uk)