

Psychological relationship between Asthma and Anxiety

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Aim

- My role and link to respiratory team at Royal London Hospital (RLH)
- Links between Anxiety and Astma
- Anxiety/ Panic cycle
- How I work
- What can you do?
- How to access support?
- Questions

Paediatric Liaison Team

- Team of clinicians- Psychologist, Psychiatrists and social worker, bilingual co worker.
- Work at the Royal London Hospital
- Work directly with medical teams

Links between Asthma and Anxiety

- Psychological emotional difficulties can impact treatment adherence.
- Presence of chronic and potentially life threatening illness may cause enough stress that anxiety or depression emerges.
- Anxiety as a trigger to an attack (Sandberg et al, 2000 from Ryal et al, 2008 paper)

What is Asthma and its symptoms

Asthma is a condition that affects your airways – the small tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs (Asthma UK, 2018)

- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness or pain
- Rapid breathing

What is Anxiety and Panic and their symptoms

Anxiety is the reaction to situations perceived as stressful or dangerous.

A panic attack is a episode of acute and disabling anxiety associated with sudden physical symptoms.

- Chest pain / discomfort
- Difficulties breathing
- Sweating
- Choking feeling
- Fear of dying
- Shortness of breath

What does this mean?

- For our children and YP sometimes an asthma attack might feel like an anxiety attack
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1. Bodily Sensations

An unusual bodily sensation (e.g. pounding heart) makes you react with fear that something bad is about to happen.

2. Panic Attack

Your continued over-reaction to the bodily sensation triggers more fear and eventually leads to a full panic attack.

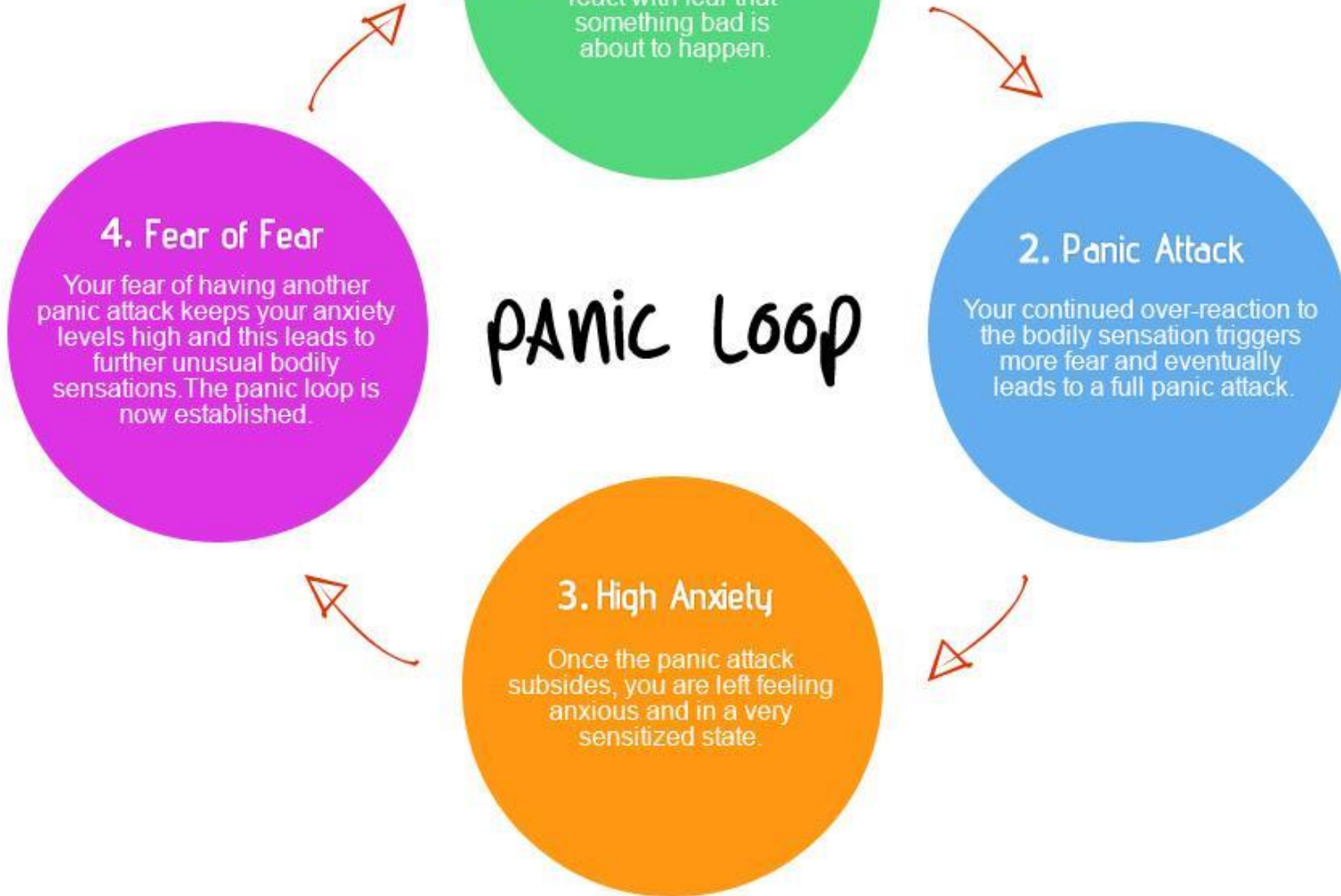
3. High Anxiety

Once the panic attack subsides, you are left feeling anxious and in a very sensitized state.

4. Fear of Fear

Your fear of having another panic attack keeps your anxiety levels high and this leads to further unusual bodily sensations. The panic loop is now established.

panic loop



How I work

- Systemic approach - Working with the whole system – Family, school, medical team. Ensure every responds in the same way.
- Psychoeducation – Giving children and young people a good understanding about the health condition they have, about anxiety and asthma attacks
- Managing as a MDT
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Grounding techniques
- Relaxation techniques

What can you do ?

- Screen for mental health difficulties in all children specifically with chronic health difficulties.
- Understand about [the link between anxiety and asthma](#)
- Always hold in mind that anxiety could be impacting on symptoms
- Help families to identify any triggers in the system that could be causing anxiety i.e. recent bereavement, bullying at school, exam pressure etc.
- Help a child to identify when it is anxiety rather than a asthma attack.
- Get them to keep a diary of their asthma and panic attacks

Challenge

- Its not just about teaching breathing techniques to calm down. This can help but also need to address the cognitions that are impacting on the child
- Whole system needs to buy into this. The message has to be consistent. i.e. schools and parents cannot medicalise the symptoms by calling ambulances or bringing to A&E or it reinforce to the child that they are having a asthma attack.
- People can be very worried that they are missing an asthma attack

Referral for support

- If you believe the child has anxiety linked with underlying psychological difficulties refer to local CAMHS for therapy for anxiety/ panic.
- If the anxiety is more closely linked with the asthma and the child is under the respiratory team at the Royal London hospital then the Paediatric Liaison Team may be able to see them.
- We cannot receive referrals from Gp's but you could discuss the case with the Respiratory team at RLH and with PLT and we would be happy to advise and become involved if the RLH consultant refers.
- My contact number: 0203 594 0407

Questions

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