

**Childhood Anxiety Disorders;
Visual Activity Kit & Therapy Tool**

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation
with research distinction in Visual Communication Design in the undergraduate
colleges of The Ohio State University

by

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CHILDHOOD ANXIETY DISORDERS

Research Questions:

How might I understand Childhood Anxiety Disorders?

What is the current situation surrounding treatment for anxiety disorders?

What is missing from this situation, is it a sustainable system?

Can I provide a more accessible resource?

Overview + Problem Space

The difference between a **phase** and an **anxiety disorder** is that a phase is temporary and usually harmless. Children who suffer from an anxiety disorder experience fear, nervousness, shyness, and avoidance of places and activities that persist despite the helpful efforts of parents, caretakers, and teachers.

The term "**anxiety disorder**" refers to a group of mental illnesses that includes generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social anxiety disorder (also called social phobia), and specific phobias.

Anxiety disorders are the **most** common of all child and adolescent mental health disorders, both in the United States and around the world.

Anxiety disorders affect **1 in 8** children.

80% of children with a diagnosable anxiety disorder are not getting treatment.

Half of all mental health conditions start by the age of 14 and most are undetected/untreated.

Proposed Design Solution

The goal of this design thesis project is to understand the needs of children, ages 11-14, who experience anxiety and provide them with a workbook that will allow them to **distract themselves** when they are **feeling overwhelmed**, engage them in an **expressive, creative personal way**, as well as provide them with an **accessible comfortable therapy tool**. It will help to **normalize taking care of childhood anxiety** and give caretakers, like parents or teachers, **a readily available inexpensive resource**.

SENIOR THESIS FIRST SEMESTER

The methods I used to conduct my research:

Online Surveys

Buzz Reports

Popular Media Scan

Expert Interviews

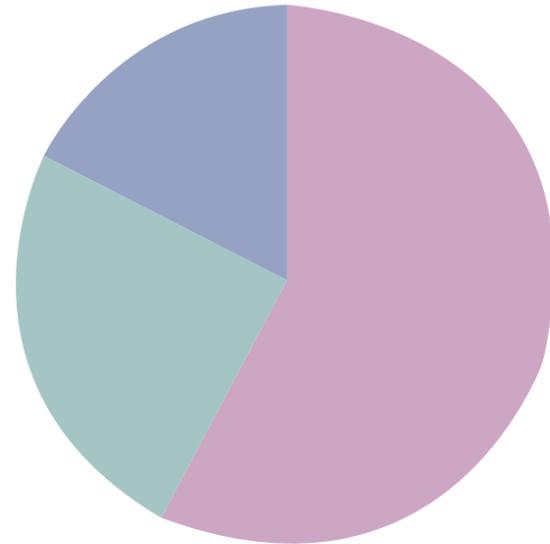
Literature Scan

Mindfulness Books

Anxiety Workbook

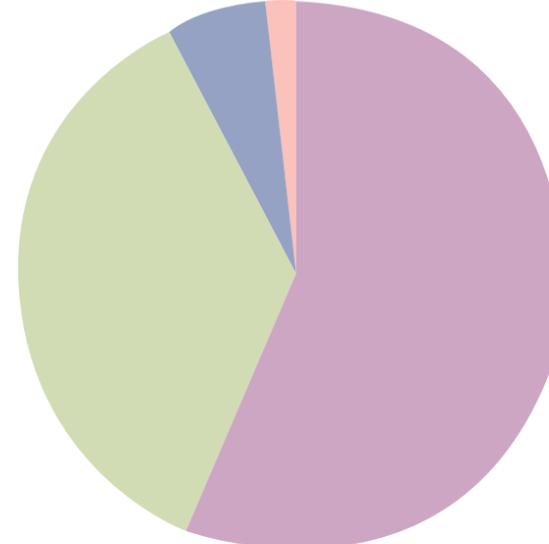
Individuals Who Experienced Childhood Anxiety Survey Responses (85 responses)

When did you start recognizing your symptoms as anxiety?



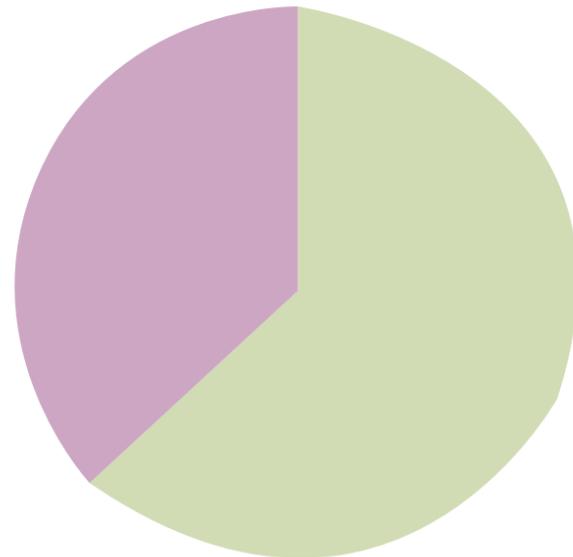
57.6% – Under 12
24.7% – Over 15
17.6% – 12-15

Where did you have the most trouble with your anxiety?



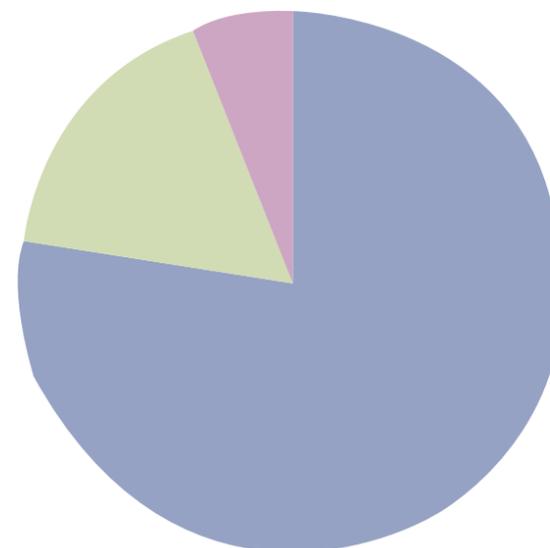
56.5% – School
35.9% – Home
5.9% – Don't Know
1.7% – Both

Did your anxiety go untreated as a child?



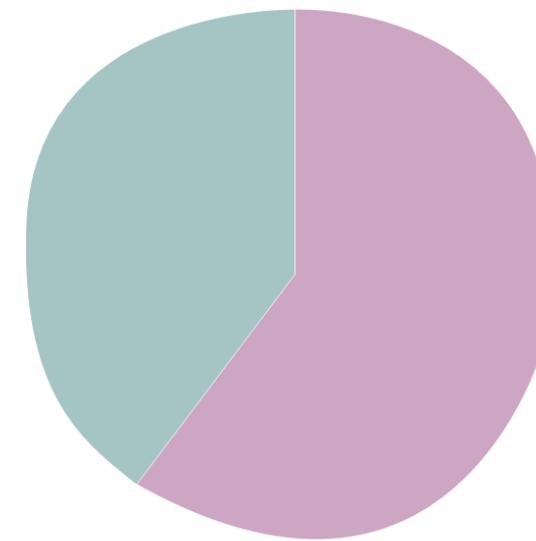
63.1% – Yes
36.9% – No

Did your elementary school have resources for students with anxiety?



77.4% – No
16.7% – Yes
5.9% – Unsure

Do you feel you had effective care as a child with the available resources and treatment options?



60.2% – No
39.8% – Yes

Individuals Who Experienced Childhood Anxiety Survey Responses (85 responses)

What resources do you wish you had to help you as a child? (even if you feel the ones you had were effective) 49 responses

"I just wish I knew what was going on sooner than I did. Up until around the age of 18 I just thought everyone felt this way and had no idea what I was experiencing was general anxiety"

"Detecting anxiety and depression and coming up with treatment plans and making sure individuals are succeeding in the best way for them"

"I just wish that more adults would've been understanding of it and seeing it as the same thing as a cold, or the flu, something bad for my health and that could be addressed. If I had adults who could've spotted it and led me to resources it would've been very helpful."

"I wish the adults around me would have been able to recognize that my symptoms were not caused by a phase, but rather made up a persistent pattern of thoughts and behaviors recognized as clinical anxiety"

"I wish the adults in my life had shared what anxiety feels like with me - we learned about emotions like happiness, anger, sadness, etc. but without the explicit understanding of the symptoms and feelings of anxiety I never knew how to cope in a consistent way"

"I didn't even know what anxiety was. I thought I was going crazy. And in high school when I realized what it was, my guidance counselor had NO idea what to do with me during an anxiety attack. I wish we got taught about it from an earlier age and we're given a safe space to go to in these cases"

"Education on what anxiety was because I didn't know what it was I just thought something was wrong with me and I would often feel embarrassed when classmates knew I didn't do the hw or when I was disorganized"

Is there anything else you'd like to add? 16 responses

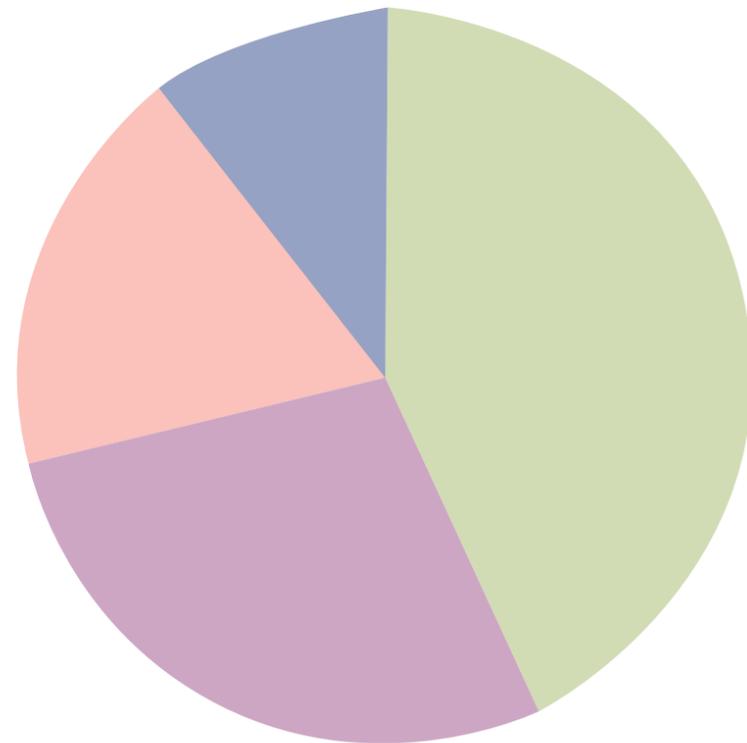
"I think I was lucky with how I experienced help with my anxiety. There weren't any obvious/not stigmatized resources that I could seek through school, but my parents could see that I was struggling and they were open about and familiar with mental health and what can be done (therapy and medication). Without their similar experiences and knowledge, I know that my anxiety would have plagued me for the rest of my life without acknowledgement that something proactive could be done."

"I feel that the best resource to any child going through anxiety disorders is just to be understanding. Whether it's teachers, parents, friends etc. by far the most valuable thing is just to feel as though there's no stigma around it. Also just knowing that the people close to you simply understand what's going on with you and that they support you is the best medicine. I didn't develop an anxiety disorder until later in high school and this really helped me"

"The best thing my therapist told me about my anxiety about my future (I'm a senior): You can't let the anxiety control you. Cognitive and Behavior therapy was the best thing for me; We talk about tangible ways to mitigate, reframe, relieve, and channel my anxiety and anxious thoughts."

"It took being on my own at college to see a therapist and seek treatment for my anxiety disorder. I regret [regret] not receiving treatment sooner. I think my childhood and adolescence would have greatly benefited from interventions."

Individuals Who Have Cared For a Child with an Anxiety Survey Responses (60 responses)



43.3% – Parent
28% – Camp Counselor/Director
18.3% – Teacher/Educator/Guidance Counselor
10.4% – Other

What resources do you find helpful?

"Honestly, common sense. We've all been there. As adults we can learn to control our own anxieties at most times but these kids deal with so much more developmentally in adolescents it's hard."

"Break space, calming objects, visuals, books that are relative (above activities)"

"I often go to the school counselor, intervention specialist, and/or school psych. for assistance."

"As an educator, I find it very helpful when parents are willing to engage in honest conversation about their child, strategies that help deescalate behavior, etc."

"I did not have so many resources, I just used a lot of breathing exercises I knew and yoga techniques"

"His therapist and homework from his therapist"

"Haven't found many"

What resources do you wish you had to help you?

"More on how to handle stopping the anxiety - as a parent you want to help your child (no matter what age) to be able to say - I feel you are spiraling what can we both do to help you and have your child be willing"

"We have resources... I just wish we had more of them and they were more readily available."

"More information on how to help children dealing with anxiety"

"More insight/recommendations from the child's primary caregiver or therapist"

"other parents going through the similar thing with their child"

Survey Key Takeaway Points

There **aren't enough** mental health professionals per child in need.

Getting help can be **expensive**.

Children's anxiety is often **minimized or ignored**.

Anxiety is **stigmatized** in our culture as being a phase or not a serious disorder.

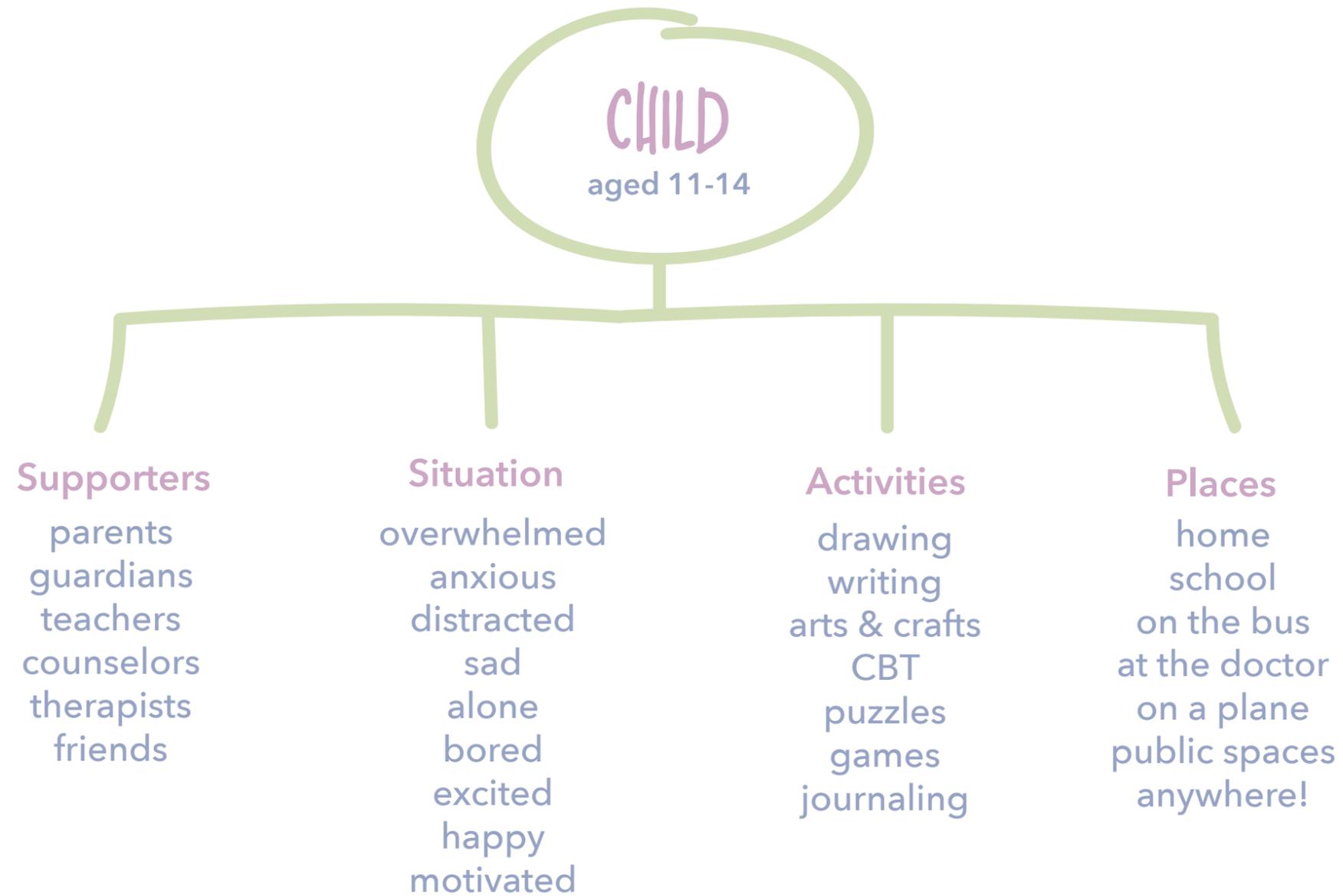
People with anxiety are seen as **weak** or fragile.

This issue is only getting worse but we are seeing a rise in discussion and normalization of anxiety and self-care.

THE SYSTEM
HOW IT ALL WORKS

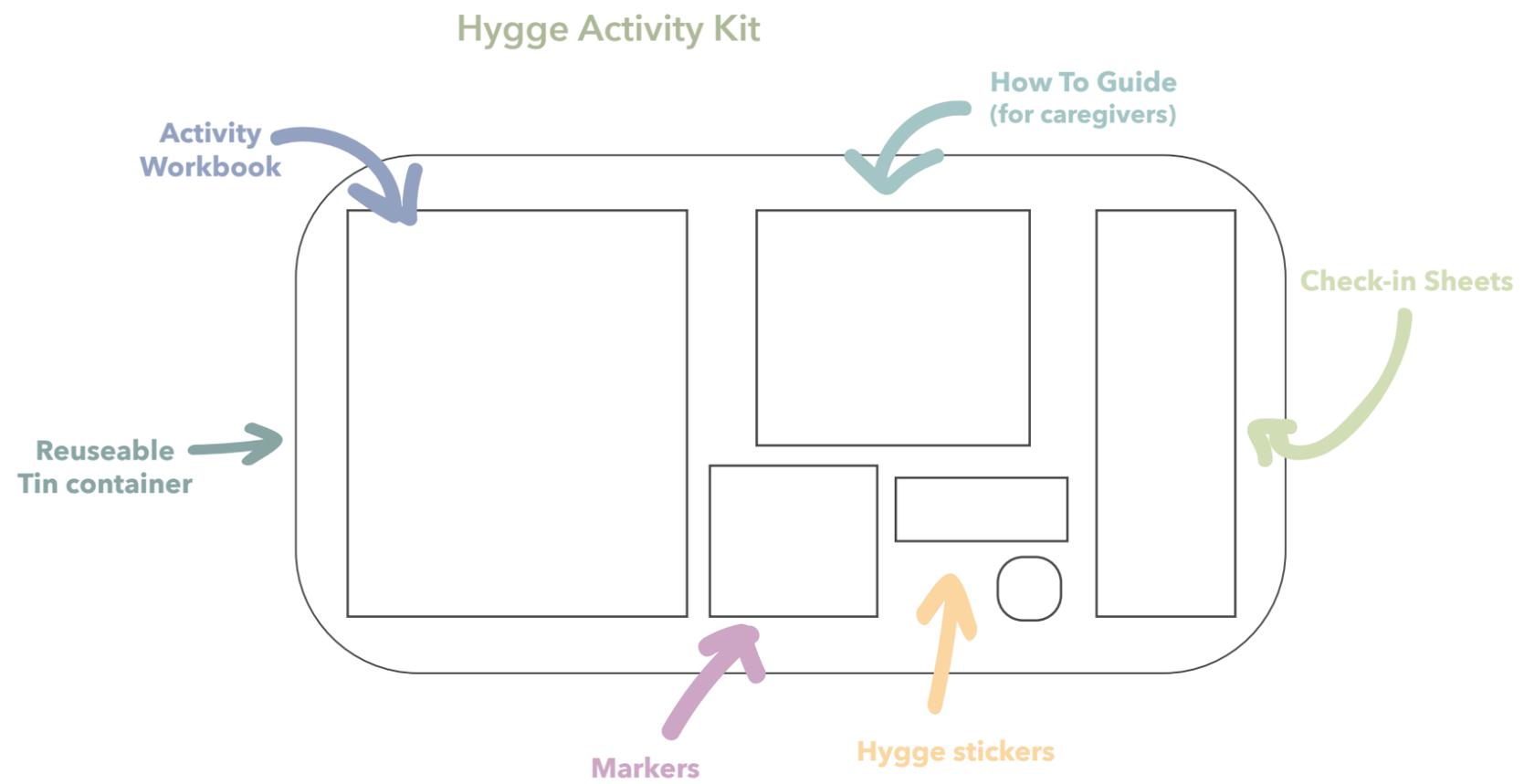
Ecosystem

The ecosystem of the brand is everything that interacts with it. Our system is centered around the child because we want to ensure they are the focus of our brand!



Touchpoints

Each piece of the kit outlined to see how they look at all together!





The main touch point of the Hygge kit is the activity workbook. This workbook is composed of customized activity pages that focus on drawing, creativity, cognitive behavioral therapy and fun games! The intention is that this book can be used on the go or in the privacy of the child's home.



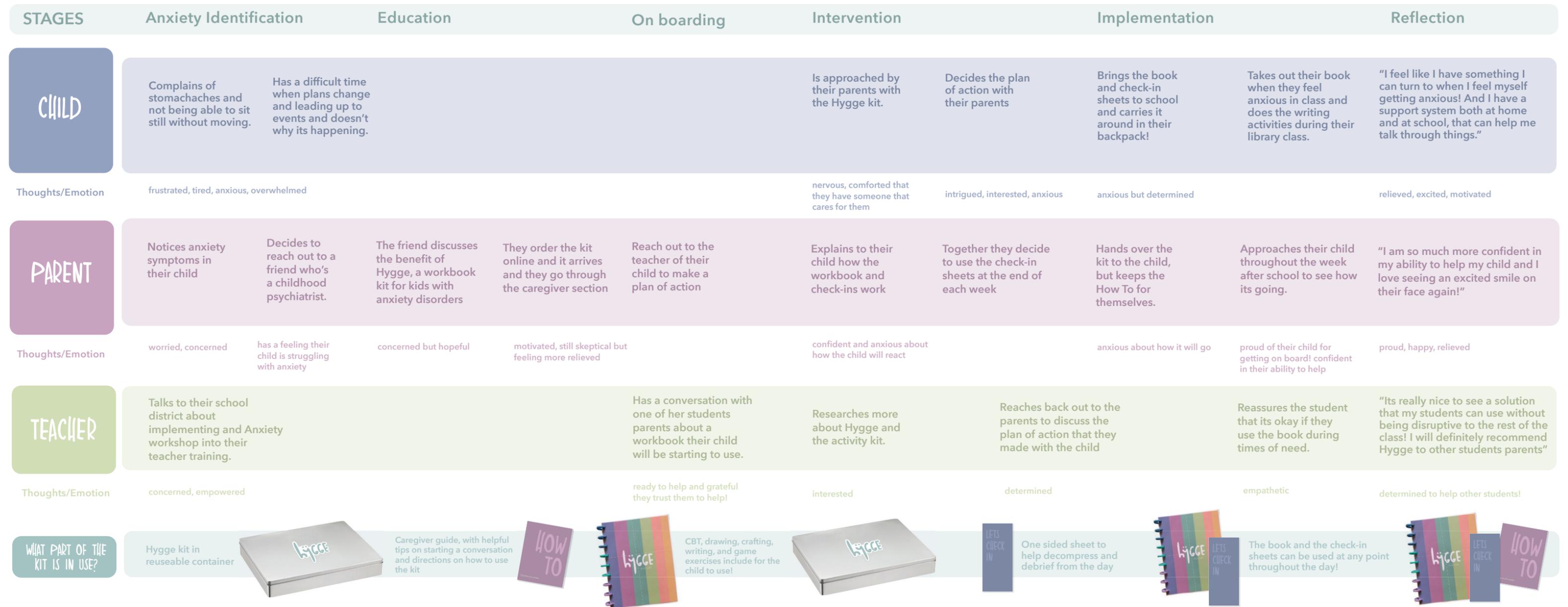
Check-in sheets offer the child with a weekly, daily, or even monthly check in experience; these can be done whenever the child pleases. This is to encourage the child track their anxiety and express their feelings on a normal basis.



Every kit comes with a How To guide which is for the caregiver to help them in the process of working with their child. It is compiled with a message about the brand and who we are, some information on anxiety disorders, a note from the author, and helpful tips to start conversation.

User Experience Map

How each user interacts with the kit from each stage of the process.



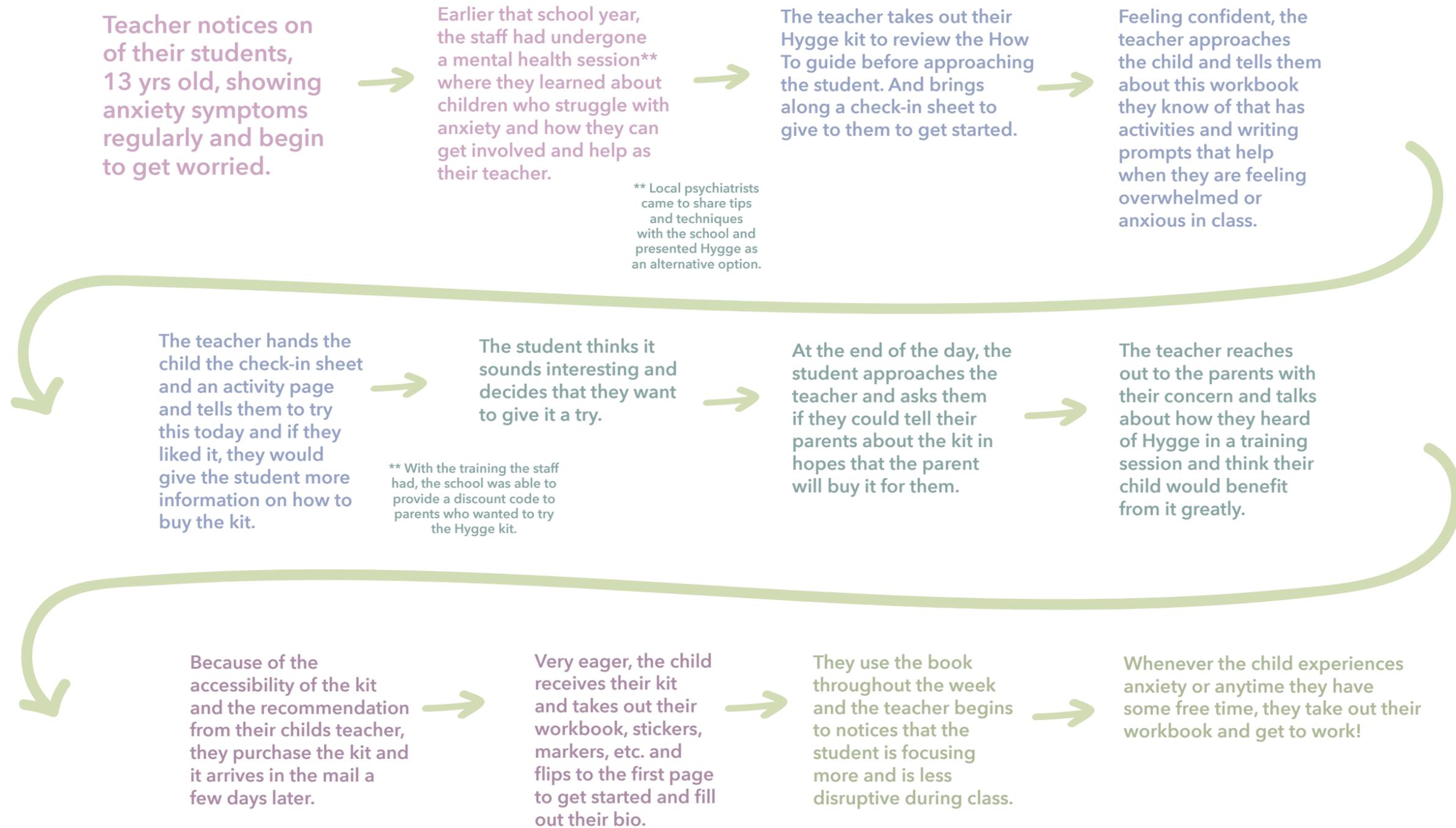
User Journeys

Home - Parent scenario



User Journeys

School - Teacher scenario



Design Principles

ACCESSIBLE

Make an easily available and affordable resource.

ENGAGING

Ensure they want to use the workbook without being prompted.

INDIVIDUALIZED

Make the child feel like the items in the kit are theirs and that it is designed for them specifically.

EXPRESSIVE

Provide an emotional outlet for the child both creatively and visually.

COMFORTING

Create a safe space for the child they can turn to and open whenever they please.

#95A2C3

C: 43
M: 31
Y: 10
K: 0

#D1DCB4

C: 19
M: 5
Y: 34
K: 0

#CDA6C3

C: 18
M: 37
Y: 6
K: 0

#A5C5C5

C: 36
M: 11
Y: 21
K: 0

#FBC1BB

C: 0
M: 29
Y: 18
K: 0

#FCD8A3

C: 1
M: 16
Y: 40
K: 0

Branding

NAME + LOGO



Pronounced {HUE-gah}, a Danish concept that:

1. Encompasses a feeling of cozy contentment and well-being through enjoying the simple things in life
2. A quality of coziness that makes a person feel content and comfortable

This name was chosen to inspire the child and others around them to embrace Hygge and to strive to live in a space of contentment.

TYPOGRAPHY

Aa
Anak Anak

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz

Aa
Avenir Next

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz

SYMBOLS



RESEARCH DISTINCTION
SECOND SEMESTER

Intent

The intention for my research distinction and focus for second semester was to continue primary and secondary research as well as overall brand testing. As a result of the timing of our first semester senior thesis requirements, I felt I was not able to conduct as much in person research and explore therapy types as I had hoped, therefore that was a HUGE focus of mine during second semester distinction. In addition, I began user testing on the current workbook design.

As I detail further on; I focused on adding additional pages to the workbook, added styles to broaden the brand and expand the brand itself. During this semester, I preformed user testing with kids ages 11-14, (additional testing will continue in the next steps as well), conducted interviews with medical professionals and dove deeper into the psychology aspect of my project.

Research



Michael Pollak, PCC-S, LICDC
A Professional Clinical Counselor and Licensed Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor, Michael Pollak provides Intensive programming individual and family therapy to chemically dependent adolescents and adults. Additionally, he provides mental health therapy for young adults. Prior to forming The Behavioral Wellness Group, he worked with Psychological & Behavioral Consultants and Laurelwood Counseling Center for 17 years.

He earned his Master of Education degree from Cleveland State University, where he specialized in community agency counseling, and his Bachelor's degree in Psychology from The Ohio State University. He pioneered a Dual Diagnosis Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) for both Laurelwood Counseling Center and Psychological & Behavioral Consultants.



"I think this is really great. I definitely think you're onto something. I do think you gotta figure out how to explain why this type of thing has been so difficult and why it's so important to deal with."

Intent: The main reason I consulted with Michael is because I wanted the knowledge and perspective from a psychology professional. Since he specializes in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), I was extremely interested in seeing how I can incorporate that aspect of therapy into my project.

Interview Insight:

- Why don't people want to work with kids?
 - The parents, its often hard to get them on board and understanding the process!!!
- Something often misunderstood by the older generation is present day anxieties
 - Education on the anxiety of the time / social anxiety - phone anxiety is real for our generation!
- Caring for someone with anxiety is not an intuitive skill
 - They may not have experienced the same or they have never gotten over their own personal anxieties

Things to add:

- Explaining why activities are used for certain reasons – what's the benefit of each?
- DBT – add in the Mindfulness
- Language – how are you speaking to the children
- Explain why this is so difficult and why it's so important
- Expand greatly on the parents guide

Research



Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders, Ph.D.

Liz joined the Design Department at The Ohio State University as an Associate Professor in 2011 after having worked as a design research consultant in industry since 1981. She introduced many of the tools, techniques and methods being used today to drive and/or inspire design from a human-centered perspective and has practiced co-designing across all the design disciplines. She speaks and conducts workshops about participatory design research, collective creativity and interdisciplinary all over the world.

Liz serves as an Associate Editor for Codesign: International Journal of CoCreation in Design and the Arts, and is on the Advisory Board for the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University.

Liz is also the founder of MakeTools, a company that explores new spaces in the emerging design landscapes. Some of her clients have included Apple, AT&T, Coca Cola, Compaq, GE, IBM, Intel, Kodak, Microsoft, Motorola, Procter & Gamble, Roche Diagnostics, Steelcase, Thermos, 3M, and Xerox.



Intent: The main reason I consulted with Liz is because I wanted to gain her insight into how I can dive deeper into my research and gain her expert knowledge with Co-Design techniques and psychology.

Interview Insight:

- Consider a darker colors to add into your palette
- Develop a system for the therapist for working in junction with the kit – Very important!

Questions to consider:

- Are there aspects of awareness that I can push further with the given time frame?
- How are some ways I can get psychologists involved? Even therapists as a way to track behavior?
- Have you considered broadening the age range, maybe 8-14?

Workshop Insight:

- Preform a series of Mini workshop with kids
- Try recording one of the kids
- Some might be out of town – how are you going to conduct that?
- What are some ways to get them involved without just having them fill out a page
 - Make there own pages up
 - Sort pages - good bad maybe
- Have Hygge photos ready so you can explain to them what exactly Hygge is

- Remember to make consent forms for picture and quote
- BOYS + GIRLS !!! more important for diversity then race or nationality in this case
- Workbook only with them
 - Positive vs negative to sort how they feel
 - Mad angry sad happy etc
 - We are focusing on these and would these pages help with you feel this way
- Same card sort with parents (feelings) - how does your child fit in after reading the how to guide and the guide
 - How anxious is this child in general
 - Talk about check in sheets
- Make sure they read the pamphlet and how to guide!! There is a lot of good information here.

Workshop Outlines

Therapist

1. Homework

Read through the how to guide and pamphlet provided by the ADAA guide
-Sign Consent Form

2. Check In Sheets

How can you use these in practice?
Is this beneficial?

3. Overall Feedback on Book

Recommendations
Where to go from here

4. Do you have book/research recommendations that I could benefit from?

Parent/Caregiver

1. Homework

Read through the how to guide and pamphlet provided by the ADAA guide
-Sign Consent Form

How does your child fit in after reading the how to guide and the guide?
Do you feel you are prepared based on these readings alone?

2. Card Sort

Emotions -Do you notice these emotions in your child?
happy sad anxious mad angry (etc)

3. Check In Sheets

How can you use these in practice?
Is this beneficial?

Kid Workshop Outline One-on-One

1. Verbal Consent

Can I use quotes from you?

Can I use your picture and/or pictures of your work?

Are you okay if I record this conversation so I don't have to take notes and pay attention to you!

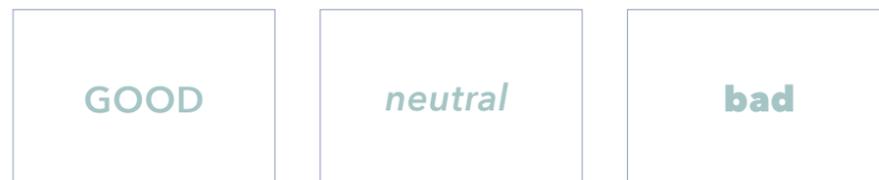
2. Card Sort

Ask the child to go through each card and pick out the ones they identify with feeling - Do you sometimes feel this?



3. Mini Discussion – Ask the kids if they have strategies to help with anxiety after card sort of emotion.

4. Page Sort – We are focusing on these emotions and based on how you feel during those times sort the pages into 3 categories:



5. Cover Help – Have a few and let them pick – or design their own!

Secondary Research

Dialectical behavioral therapy, emphasizes taking responsibility for one's problems and helps children examine how they deal with conflict and intense negative emotions.

DBT is a type of cognitive-behavioral therapy that focuses on the psychosocial aspects of therapy, emphasizing the importance of a collaborative relationship, support for the client, and the development of skills for dealing with highly emotional situations.

DBT is simply a modified form of CBT that uses traditional cognitive-behavioral techniques, but also implements other skills like mindfulness, acceptance, and tolerating distress.

DBT is composed of four elements that the individual and therapist usually work on over a year or more:

1. Individual DBT therapy, which uses techniques like cognitive restructure and exposure to change behavior and improve quality of life.
2. Group therapy, which uses skills training to teach patients how to respond well to difficult problems or situations.

3. Phone calls, which focus on applying learned skills to life outside of therapy.

4. Weekly consultation meetings among the DBT therapists, which offer a means of support for the therapists and to ensure they are following the DBT treatment model.

One of the main uses of DBT within Hygge will be with its use of Mindfulness. One description of the benefit of mindfulness in Dialectical Behavior Therapy is that it provides the individual with the ability to take control of the mind instead of having the mind control the individual. Practicing mindfulness helps the individual in DBT to direct their attention to observing, describing, and participating in a nonjudgmental way, which enhances the individual's skills and leads to improved ability to focus on the positive, let go of the negative, and regulate emotions.

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

While mindfulness is something we all naturally possess, it's more readily available to us when we practice on a daily basis. Whenever you bring awareness to what you're directly experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you're being mindful.

There is growing research showing that when you train your brain to be mindful, you're actually remodeling the physical structure of your brain.

Secondary Research

How Mindfulness Calms Anxious Feelings

Mindfulness helps you learn to stay with difficult feelings without analyzing, suppressing, or encouraging them. When you allow yourself to feel and acknowledge your worries, irritations, painful memories, and other difficult thoughts and emotions, this often helps them dissipate.

Mindfulness allows you to safely explore the underlying causes of your stress and worry. By going with what's happening rather than expending energy fighting or turning away from it, you create the opportunity to gain insight into what's driving your concerns.

Mindfulness helps you create space around your worries so they don't consume you. When you begin to understand the underlying causes of your apprehension, freedom and a sense of spaciousness naturally emerge.

"In essence, practicing mindfulness is a process of learning to trust and stay with feelings of discomfort rather than trying to escape from or analyze them," says Bob Stahl, Ph.D., Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) teacher, founder of multiple MBSR programs, and co-author of multiple books on MBSR. "This often leads to a remarkable shift; time and again your feelings will show you everything you need to know about them—and something you need to know for your own well-being."

How Mindfulness Helps Anxiety

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

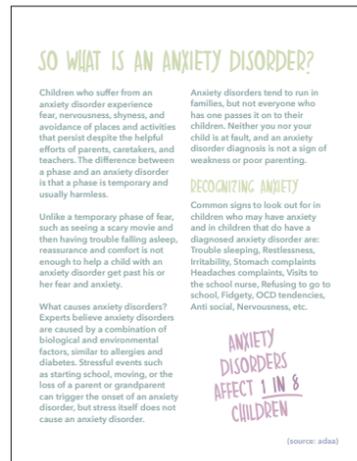
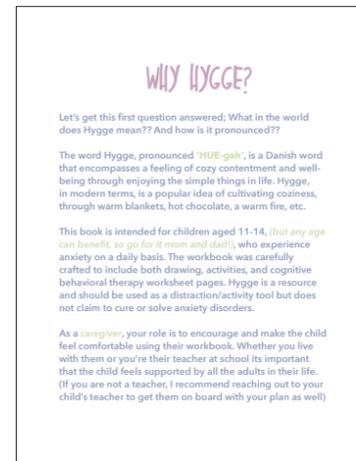
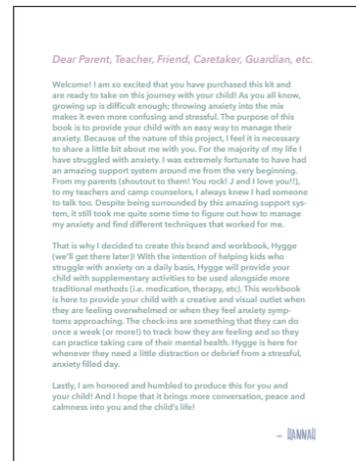
Leading expert Jon Kabat-Zinn describes it as "awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally," adding: "in the service of self-understanding and wisdom."

When you become aware of the present moment, you gain access to resources you may not have realized were with you all along—A stillness at your core. An awareness of what you need and don't need in your life that's with you all the time. You may not be able to change your situation through mindfulness, but you can change your response to your situation.

How To Guide

Based on continuing research and speaking with professionals, I have found that the caregiver guide needs to be expanded greatly and go significantly more in-depth.

Current Version:



Proposed Version:

Mini bound booklet that comes with every kit, still includes what it had before but now is more developed. Proposed Chapter outline:

Message From Author

How to Use the Kit

What is Mental Health?

What is Anxiety?

What is CBT?

What is DBT?

What is my role as the caregiver?

Why is my role so important for the child's success?

Helpful tips when approaching the child

More resources

- Other books

- Websites

- Contact local therapists! Heres a good website to find them...

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The end-goal of this project is to eventually publish the kit and put it into production to help kids with anxiety! That being said, here are my next steps for Hygge and, as of now, what I project to be the future steps.

THINGS TO CONTINUE

Expert interviews

Conduct interviews with medical professionals and caregivers

Workshops with Kids, Caregivers, Therapists

3 additional workshops with each contingency

Caregiver Guide

Finish compiling information and organizing book.

NEXT STEPS BASED ON DISTINCTION RESEARCH

Mindfulness Card Deck

This deck will include different types of breathing / mindfulness / grounding exercises and will be labeled based on different types of situations.

Workbook Redesign

Based on feedback from the workshops with the kids, I want to take a look at the design and see if it still makes sense for what my brand is. There are also sections that I would like to add on to that includes more of the DBT research.

User Testing

Go through a variation of the kids workshop again (circle back with the same kids as well as new ones). Additionally I would like to preform user testing with parents/caregivers and teachers and therapists now that they will be a much larger participant in the kit.

IN CONCLUSION,

Through my research I have found that Hygge, this anxiety workbook kit, is an extremely important and vital project for our children today. Children all over the world regardless of background or gender are experiencing anxiety, yet the large majority of them don't know where to turn to and are not getting the care they need. As a child, one's anxieties might get misdiagnosed or brushed off by their parents and/or doctors. Which just results in them growing up and instilling the same habits/behaviors in their children, which then ends up taking us down a crazy unhealthy mental cycle. Our culture stigmatizes anxiety as a problem or as a weakness because of the unknown that surrounds it and the quietness around the topic in the past. For my thesis, my intent was to join in the ever growing conversation surrounding mental health, but specifically amongst children. While working throughout the year, it was made pretty obvious to me that this is a project I must continue until it's ready to be made available to the general public. I am determined to see this through to fruition and I am thankful that Ohio State, specifically The Department of Design, has provided me with the platform to begin this project and helped me to become confident enough to tackle it.

Personally, working on this project has allowed me to face my own anxiety head on. It's given me the opportunity to look deeper within myself and has taught me how I can take my experiences battling anxiety and my empathic nature to help others as they grow up and go through similar situations. It seems very fitting that my senior year is coming to a close with a project I care so deeply about and I am excited and motivated for the future to come for myself as a designer and for Hygge!

- Hannah Frayman

*I acknowledge and want to make it very clear that I am not a medical professional and do not intend to be one; these are just my observations based on research, interviews conducted and personal experiences.

Thank you for your time and guidance.



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- Cards Against Anxiety Book
100 Mindfulness Meditations for Anxiety Book
Creative Spaces Journal
Choose Calm
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