Comfort, Stretch, Panic

Here is a simple model that can help us recognise and manage anxiety in ourselves and our children.

The comfort zone

We all have a comfort zone: places and situations where we feel relaxed, safe, and in control. It looks different for everyone.

The stretch zone

This is where we grow and learn. Children are in their stretch zone every day at school, learning new ideas. It can feel uncomfortable: stepping out of our comfort zone releases chemicals like adrenaline and cortisol, which can cause physical discomfort. Our instinct might be to retreat, but if we always retreat, we never grow.

Building resilience

Learning to recognise when we are in the stretch zone, and knowing that the discomfort is okay, helps us grow. The more we experience the stretch zone, the more our comfort zone expands, and things that used to feel scary become easier. It is the same for children: gentle, repeated stretching builds confidence and resilience over time.

Avoiding the panic zone

We want to avoid the panic zone altogether. The trick is to stretch gradually, a bit at a time, not to leap straight from comfort into panic. This week, notice when you or your child are stretching, acknowledge that it is okay, and have a go.