

## Parent Guide: Top Tips for Helping your Child Cope with Anxiety and Worry

### Identify your child's worries

Support them to identify whether their worry is a '*real problem worry*' or a '*crystal ball worry*'. A *real problem worry* is something that is happening right now and that we can do something about. There are often practical solutions to these. E.g. If a child is missing their grandparents- think of ways that they can still stay connected using Skype or sending letters in the post.

A *crystal ball (or hypothetical) worry* is often phrased as 'what if?' and is something that is not happening now, but it is something that might happen in the future. *Crystal ball worries* are not things that we can immediately do something about and so it is important that we support young people to find ways to let the worry go. Try the following strategies to see what works for your child.

### Postpone their worries

Help your child to practice postponing their worry. Worry is persistent - it can take over a child's thoughts and they might want to talk about it all the time. Helping children to postpone their crystal ball worries can help them to take control of them. This means deliberately setting aside time each day to let them worry (e.g. 30 minutes at the end of each day). It can feel like an odd thing to do at first! It also means that for the rest of the day, they need to try to let go of the worry until you get to your 'worry time'.

For younger children, worry monsters can be a great way of supporting this strategy. 'Feeding' the worry monster throughout the day and setting a time each day to talk about this can help. Twinkl has some instructions to make your own worry monster: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-l-54049-the-making-of-milton-worry-monster-activity-sheet>

For children of all ages, distract them with fun activities! This could include: reading their favourite book, watching a funny film, drawing, playing with pets, listening to music, cooking their favourite meal with them, writing a wellbeing journal about what has happened that day and what has helped them cope.

## Relaxation and breathing techniques

### Breathing

#### Brain Break Breathing

##### Bubble Breaths

Breathe in deeply and form a bubble in your mouth. Your cheeks should be puffed out. Blow your bubble out of your mouth and push it away from you by blowing out hard and strong. Do this slowly and picture your bubble floating away. Keep breathing in and out deeply. Close your eyes and think about where else your bubble could go. Can you blow it far away? Can you blow it to a friend? Imagine your bubble is returning to you. Open your mouth and catch it for next time. Repeat.



#### Brain Break Breathing

##### Bumble Bee Breaths

Open your hands out with the palms facing towards your face. Place your thumbs over your ears and your fingers over your eyes. Close your lips with your teeth slightly apart. Inhale deeply through the nose and breathe in. Count silently 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Exhale slowly through your mouth and make a humming sound like a bee. Count silently 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Repeat.



#### Brain Break Breathing

##### Balloon Breaths

Sit comfortably on the floor with your legs crossed in front of you. Imagine that there is a big balloon in your belly. Place your hands over your belly. Take a big deep breath in, sitting up straight and make your belly puff out as if it was a balloon filling with air. Then exhale slowly like you are letting the air out of a balloon a little at a time. As you let the air out, slowly roll your shoulders and bend forward. Repeat.



#### Brain Break Breathing

##### Starfish Breaths

Sit on the floor with your legs comfortably crossed in front of you. Open your left hand and extend it slightly in front of you so it looks like an open starfish. Take your right hand and extend your pointer finger. Beginning with your left thumb, take your right pointer finger and go up the outside thumb while taking a deep breath in. Go down the inside of the thumb and breathe out deeply. Continue the deep breathing in while going up each finger and exhaling when going down each finger. Once you are finished, switch hands and repeat.



### Self-soothing

Try to model self-soothing techniques to help your child to relax. When they are relaxed, they will be better at thinking of different solutions to help them cope. It is helpful to think about using the different senses. You could try some of the following:

- Smell- burn a scented candle or bake something to make the house smell nice
- Taste- eat their favourite food, but do it slowly to help them enjoy the taste
- Sight- Go through magazines and cut out pictures they like to make a collage, look at old photos of fun times and loved ones
- Hearing- Listen to soothing music or an audio book
- Touch- Have a hot bath or stroke a pet.

You might want to support your child to create their own 'coping box' which includes items relating to the self-soothing techniques they have identified. Papyrus provide instructions about how to create one of these which they call a 'hope box': [www.papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Hope-box.pdf](http://www.papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Hope-box.pdf)

### **Safe Place**

Help your child to visualise a 'safe place'. If your child is feeling scared or worried, you can help them imagine that they are in a safe, calm place- by doing this, their body will also feel calm and relaxed. Turn off the TV and mobile phones and be quiet. The safe place might be somewhere they have been on holiday or somewhere made up. Encourage them to imagine they are in that place and prompt them to think about their senses in relation to that place- e.g. What can you see? What do you hear? Get Self Help provide guidance about how people can do this, younger children may need more support to think of ideas:

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/SafePlace.pdf>

### **Positive Self Talk**

Encourage your child to use positive self talk. Instead of focusing on the worry, get them to use coping statements to help soothe their emotions when they are feeling anxious. These are statements that remind them of their strengths and the people or things they have around them that can help them- e.g. "This is difficult, but I am strong and know I can cope." "I can do this!" "I know that this feeling will pass."

### **Useful websites and resources**

The Partners in Salford website has recently added a list of helplines that are available for children, young people and their parents in relation to their mental health:

<https://www.partnersinsalford.org/media/1385/ehwb-helplines-april-2020.pdf>

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) have collated helpful resources from across the internet for young, people, carers and professionals:

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

The NSPCC has advice for parents whose children may be worried about Coronavirus and may be struggling with their mental health. They have tips for how you can support your child and keep them safe: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxietymental-health/>

Young Minds provides helpful guidance for young people who may be experiencing anxiety relating to Coronavirus: <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

Mind provides a comprehensive list of contacts that young people can use if they are looking for advice or support relating to a range of issues relating to their mental health:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/useful-contacts/>

For young people who have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) who have worries relating to contamination fears, OCD UK has some helpful tips to help them cope at this difficult time:

<https://www.ocduk.org/ocd-and-coronavirus-survival-tips/>

## Grounding technique to support someone during an anxiety attack

Look around you...

5. Look for 5 things you can see. Say their names out loud. Which one is nearest to you?
4. Find 4 things you can touch. Touch them. How do they feel under your fingertips?
3. Listen for 3 things you can hear. Can you identify what is making the noise?
2. Sniff 2 things that you can smell. Do the smells remind you of anything?
1. Taste 1 thing in your mouth. What did you last eat or drink?

This is called grounding. It can help you to feel calm when you feel like you have lost control of your surroundings. It is a simple technique within mindfulness, to help you notice what is in front of you. One of the senses might be more heightened than another during an anxiety attack. If you notice that you struggled to focus on one of the examples, go back to it and repeat it again.

When you have settled and feel calmer, and your heart rate has come back down, focus on your breathing. Sit in a comfortable sitting position. Breathe in deeply and exhale completely, for 3 breaths.

