



WORRYING ABOUT SCHOOL?

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS, PARENTS & CARERS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH RETURNING TO SCHOOL.



WHY USE THIS GUIDE?

This guide has been created to support teachers, parents, and carers with supporting their child/children who are worrying about going back to school. It is a guide that covers all aspects of what worrying is and how to support young people in coping with this feeling that can be overwhelming at times through practical strategies.

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Disclaimer: This guide has been put together as a supportive tool that can be used to inspire further ideas and thinking. It is NOT a therapeutic guide. Please use it at your own discretion. Exciting Teacher is not responsible for how this resource is used. Personal use only! :)

1. UNDERSTANDING

The first step in supporting your child is understanding that worrying, or feeling anxious, is normal. However, it can sometimes get in the way of the things we want to do and cause a barrier! This is when as adults we need to step in to support young people to feel better.

FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE



The 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response first developed in humans during the caveman times. This is a response to dangers or threats. Some people experience wanting to fight back, yell, shout, become aggressive or move towards the danger, known as the fight response. Others run away, avoiding situations or hiding, known as the flight response. Whilst finally, some feel stuck, frozen, and unable to move, known as the freeze response. It is also possible to react differently in different scenarios. For example, when seeing a spider you may respond with the flight response but when asked to talk in front of people, it may be the freeze response that is triggered.

However, sometimes our body perceives levels of danger or threat wrong. This can cause our 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response by accident. We do not have any control over how our bodies choose to react in situations as it is an automatic response to danger, real or not.



We can describe this response as a bit like a smoke alarm. A smoke alarm goes off when there is a real danger, such as a fire BUT it can also go off like a false alarm when you burn some toast. When people are anxious, sometimes their inner body smoke alarm can be really sensitive. This can be exhausting, scary and upsetting. It is important to remember that feeling anxious, or worried, and our body responding in this way is just its way of keeping us safe!

2. VALIDATION

The second step is to validate how your child is feeling. Let them know that this is normal and it is okay to feel worried, upset, angry, frustrated, etc. It is important to acknowledge those BIG feelings by saying things like:

"I can see that this is worrying you, it is okay to feel worried about it... here is what we can do together to help it to feel better!"

What we do not want to do is over emphasise those BIG feelings. It is about acknowledging them, validating them, and moving on to using a practical solution to help to lessen those BIG feelings.

Some helpful phrases for validating emotions include:

"I understand why you are feeling..."

"I understand that you are feeling... let's now think about some of the things that we have control over and some of the things that we have no control over."

"It can be really [worrying, tricky, scary, etc] trying new things!"

"I can see that you are feeling... Would you like some space to sit with that feeling or would you like me to help you to make a plan?"

"It can be really disappointing when things do not go the way you wanted, but what can we learn from this?"

The aim is not to encourage your child to run away or avoid how they are feeling nor by validating their emotions are you trying to 'fix' the problem.

You are simply guiding them towards noticing that it is okay to feel a certain way and then allowing them the space to act on that emotion by themselves. You are there to provide them the tools to cope with those BIG feelings. We shall explore these coping strategies in Step 3: Distractions!

3. DISTRACTION

Distraction techniques can help us to manage our worrying. These strategies are not just useful for children but adults too! It helps your child to direct their attention elsewhere and prevents worrying from becoming overwhelming. Here are some techniques that your child might find helpful:

DO

SOMETHING ENJOYABLE

This could be colouring, gaming, baking, reading, etc!

STAY ACTIVE

Get outside, breathe in some fresh air and move! Exercise helps to release positive chemicals to our brains that boost our mood and expand our ability to cope in situations that are difficult, like those that cause a feeling of anxiety.

PRACTISE SELF-CARE


This includes taking time alone and having a warm bath, listening to calming music, reading, mindful doodling, catch-up with a friend, etc.

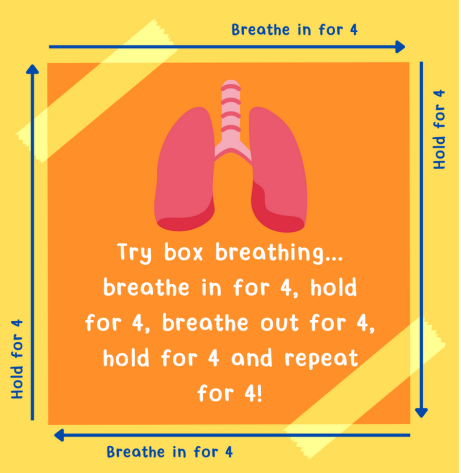
GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

We can turn down our sensitivity to danger dial by using grounding techniques like deep breathing or 5-4-3-2-1.






Cut me out for your child to keep!

 **GROUNDING TECHNIQUE: BOX BREATHING**



Try box breathing... breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, hold for 4 and repeat for 4!

What are grounding techniques?
Ground techniques are strategies that are helpful for dealing with big emotions and feeling calm again. 😊★

 **GROUNDING TECHNIQUE: 5-4-3-2-1**



5 things you can see...
4 things you can feel...
3 things you can hear...
2 things you can smell...
1 thing you want to taste...

What are grounding techniques?
Ground techniques are strategies that are helpful for dealing with big emotions and feeling calm again. 😊★

4. THOUGHTS

When we are feeling worried then negative thoughts tend to creep into our minds. These are often 'what if' type worries that will probably not come true but are nevertheless hard to budge. This is the same for children. They can have those helpless thoughts that leave them trapped in a negative thinking cycle. These anxious thoughts try to make us believe that we cannot do things or that bad things might happen.

We can use 'positive self-talk' to help us to feel better and think more positively. Encourage your child to consider what they'd say to their friend if they were worried or finding things tricky. These are the type of things that we can also say to ourselves in those situations! You might want to consider modeling this 'positive self-talk' out loud for your child to hear. For example, saying aloud: *"I am feeling worried about... but I know I can do this as I have done it before and it was okay!"*.

"I can do this."

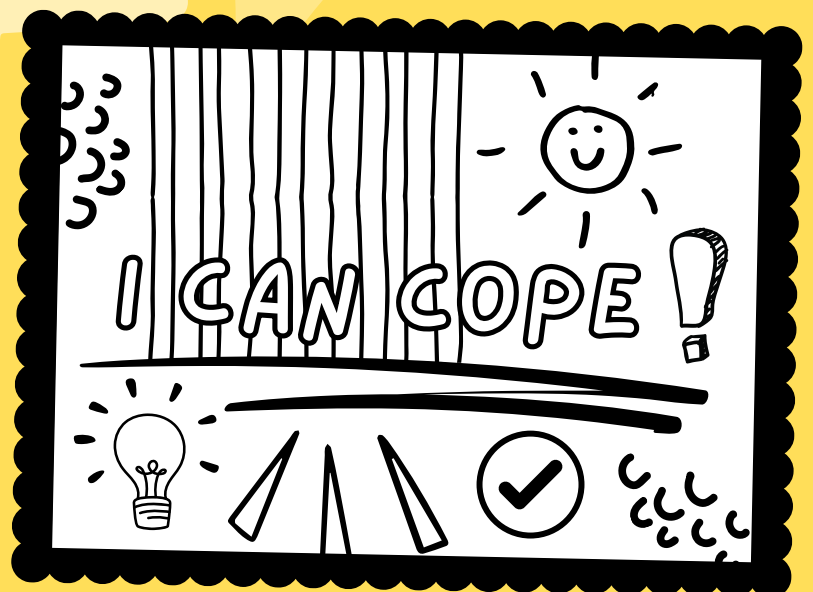
"I know I am feeling worried but I can cope."

"I have overcome tough challenges in the past."

"I haven't figured this out... yet!"

"What can I learn from this?"

"It is okay to feel... and I know what I can do to make the situation better!"



Why not make some positive affirmation cards with your child? All you need is a piece of A4 paper cut into rectangles and some colours to decorate!

5. EXPERIMENTS

It can be helpful to face our fears and carry out experiments to see what happens when we do the things that our worrying us. Avoiding things, such as joining an afterschool club or not going to crowded places, can lead to the feeling of anxiety only getting worse. The more we avoid situations, the higher that level of anxiety gets.



Break down the task that your child is worried about into small chunks. You could consider completing the step alongside them if it is appropriate. If your child is finding the small chunk too difficult, then consider ways to break it down into even smaller steps.

Think about what they were worried about before doing the activity and if their worry came true as a result of doing that thing.

Cut me out for your child to keep!



Reward them for making an effort to give things a try, even if the end result isn't perfect or completely what your child hoped for. It is important that you acknowledge they gave it a go! If it didn't go to plan, encourage them to give it another a go as things do go wrong sometimes but this is not always the case.

Bonus Grounding Technique:
Spot the colours around you, what colours can you see? How many of each colour can you see?

WELL DONE

When things get tricky, encourage them to use the distraction and coping techniques outlined in Step 3.

6. ROUTINE

Consistent routines allow for our bodies to know what to expect rather than always responding to the unknown. Without our basic needs being met, such as eating, sleep, and hygiene, then it is hard for our brains to have enough space to think about anything else. Our bodies when deprived of those basic things are not ready or able to cope well with BIG feelings when they arise. Ever woken up after not much sleep and felt grouchy? Yup, that's your brain feeling sleep deprived and struggling to navigate the world around it!

Routines help us to feel grounded, safe and secure. This is particularly important for children as by having a consistent routine, your child knows what to expect and when, allowing for more brain space for all the other bits and bobs, such as feeling ready to go to school or using their coping strategies discussed in this booklet.

A child between 6-13 requires between 9-11 hours of sleep each night. Getting good quality sleep requires a consistent bedtime routine to be in place. Top Sleep Tip: A warm bath or shower is highly recommended for helping our bodies to realise it is time to go to sleep!



Eating healthily, including your 5-a-day is highly recommended as it helps our brains to feel nourished and reduces those feelings of anxiety. Children could be drinking 6-8 cups of water per day! Our brains are happiest when hydrated!

For more resources on sleep, healthy eating and hydration, check out: members.excitingteacher.com

7. SELF-CARE

Self-care helps us to remain both physically and mentally healthy. This can take many forms as it includes a variety of activities from being active, taking time out for yourself, yoga, reading, sleeping, mindfulness and so much more!

TAKE
TIME for
your
SELF

We can work to promote self-care practise amongst young people by encouraging your child to do the things that they enjoy as a means to look after their physical and mental health. Create a list or poster alongside your child with all their ideas for practising positive self-care. Some ideas:

- Start a journal.
- Reach out to a friend.
- Go for a walk.
- Doodle.
- Meditation or yoga.
- Take a bath.
- Water the garden.
- Deep breathing.
- Notice your body.
- Note 3 things you are proud of today.

**DON'T
FORGET
ABOUT
YOU!**

Don't forget about yourself and your mental health. It can be challenging to see our children feeling upset or worried. This is distressing and can lead to having a negative impact on you. Therefore, ensure that you are promoting and modelling positive mental health and wellbeing practise and importantly, ensuring that you are okay. Children rely on having role models who demonstrate how to go about things when they happen, both good and not-so-good.



8. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

There are lots of services available for supporting both adults and young people should they need extra support for their mental health and wellbeing. Here are just a few that we recommend in the UK:

For Children and Young People:

- Childline
- YoungMinds
- MeeToo App
- Local Mental Health Support Team in Schools (depending on area), including CAMHS and EMHPs.

For All:

- Your GP
- Samaritans
- Mind
- The Sleep Charity
- NHS 111 (24/7 FREE Physical and Mental Health Support)
- For emergencies go to A&E or phone 999.

BE KIND
TO
YOURSELF

YOU ARE STRUGGLING OR YOU ARE
WORRIED ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE,
TALK TO SOMEONE.