

EASE at Home (Grades 4-7)

Strategies to help children cope with anxiety

Sometimes it's hard for adults to know what to say or do to ease a child's worries, especially during times of change and uncertainty. As the most important big people in their world, parents and caregivers can help children feel safer and soften the sharp edges of whatever is happening to make their worries grow.

Body Awareness

What is it?

Worried feelings can show up in many ways in our bodies. For example, children may experience a racing heart, hot face or tense muscles when they feel scared or worried. Being aware of the different ways our bodies respond to worry can make the feelings less frightening and help us understand what we are experiencing.

How?

Watch videos or listen to recordings about the different ways our bodies react when we experience anxiety. Ask if your child has ever felt some of the same sensations. Some examples include:

Fight Flight Freeze

Anxiety Explained For Teens

Video by Anxiety Canada

Body Scan

Recording by Kelty Mental Health

Anxiety Explained

Video by SEL Sketches

love

joy

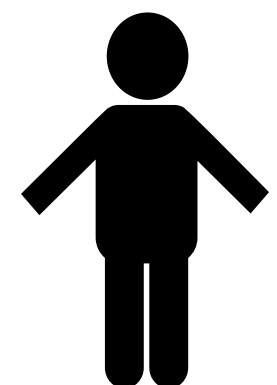
fear

Create a list of emotions with your child and write them on separate pieces of paper.

Take turns picking one piece of paper and act out the emotion without talking. Use body and facial expressions only, while the other guesses.

Encourage your child to pay attention to the way their body responds to worry by completing a “body awareness check” at different times of the day. To help them practise this awareness, have them focus on how different parts of their body can feel at different times of the day, such as after an unexpected event, after getting home from school or before bedtime.

Point out that sometimes the changes in our body may not feel great, but they don't last long and are not dangerous.



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Coping Cards

What is it?

It can be hard for children to remember helpful tools and phrases when they are feeling stressed or worried. Creating personalized cards, called Coping Cards, can be used to help support them through anxious feelings or challenging situations. Writing down these ideas can remind children “in the moment” that they can manage these feelings and they will pass.

How?

Children can use personally meaningful phrases, drawings or objects to help calm and focus their mind by reminding themselves of the skills they have learned when they feel overwhelmed or when they need support to manage worried feelings or challenging situations.

Recommend books your child can read that address coping tools, such as:

I Can Handle It

by Laurie Wright

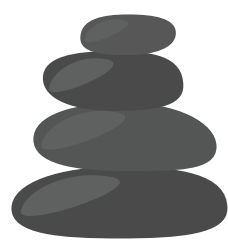
Outsmarting Worry: An Older Kids Guide To Managing Anxiety

by Dawn Huebner

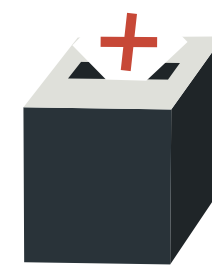
Everyone Needs a Rock

by Byrd Baylor

Encourage your child to write or paint personally meaningful words on rocks or pieces of wood.



Place rocks throughout the house or your child can put them in a pocket or backpack for times when they are feeling worried.



Together with your child come up with encouraging phrases or inspirational words. Write these on small pieces of paper and put in a jar or box for your child to read when they are feeling upset or to build a positive mindset.



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Creating a Helpful Mindset

What is it?

It's natural to have more worries than usual during times of uncertainty, but some worries can be unhelpful and persistent, fueling greater anxiety and stress. Parents and caregivers can help children express and cope with worries and shift unrealistic or overly pessimistic thoughts into more helpful and balanced thoughts. To learn more about helpful thinking, visit [Kelty Mental Health Resource Center](#).

How?

Talking to your child about their worries lets them know that they're not alone – we all have frightening thoughts or images that pop into our heads from time to time. Many worries are about the future or things that could happen, so prompting your child by asking “What if?” may help them talk about what's on their mind. Some children may prefer to write about or draw their worries than talk about them.

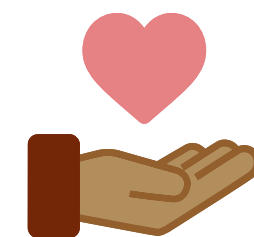
Write down worries and put them in a “worry box” for safe-keeping – re-visit worries later if desired.



Focus on what they CAN do – they can't control when school will open, but they can visit with friends online.



Together, think of three things you are grateful for each day and picture holding these things in your open hands.



When unrealistic or unhelpful worries crop up, help your child come up with more helpful ways of thinking:

Unhelpful Thought

I'm stuck at home.
I'm going to get sick.
I'm missing out on everything!



More Helpful Thought

I'm safe at home.
I'm doing everything I can to stay healthy.
I'm grateful for all the things I CAN do.

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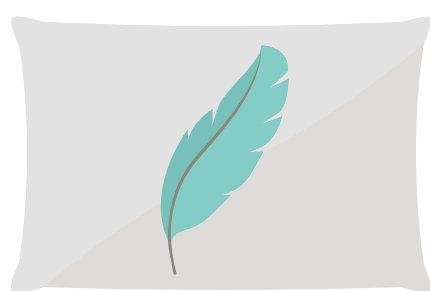
Creating Rhythms and Routines

What is it?

When the world feels upside down, the repetition of routines and a regular schedule help create a sense of order. Routines don't have to be elaborate and can include small acts that create moments of connection and comfort for your child.

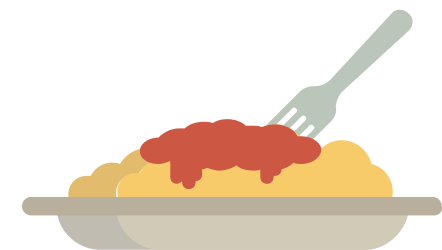
How?

Involve your child in creating a daily schedule that works for your family. Make sure to include time for fun, creativity and quiet time. Print and post a [schedule](#) or try out a [scheduling app](#). Establish some new routines or revisit old favourites. Examples include:



Have a special one-on-one connection time in the morning and before bed.

At dinner, ask everyone to share one thing they learned or one thing that surprised them that day.



Have a certain meal on a certain night, like Taco Tuesdays or Spaghetti Sundays – invite your child to help or even take over the cooking on these nights.



Schedule time for bubble baths with a candle or make time for cultural practices you enjoy doing together.

Older children still find comfort from the routine of bedtime rituals and may want to be read or sung to again even if this hasn't happened in a while.



Hint: Having regular reminders of what's coming next will help smooth transitions from one thing to the next.



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Helping Children Find Their Feelings

What is it?

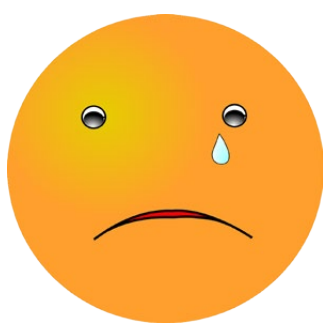
Children may have a hard time identifying the intense and confusing feelings that come with all the changes in their world. They might be feeling frustrated, worried, restless, hopeful, angry and overwhelmed all at the same time. So many swirling emotions could result in disrupted sleep, irritability, increased fights with siblings and physical complaints like stomach aches. Learning to recognize emotions and find acceptable ways to express them can keep their feelings from staying bottled up inside or acted out in unsafe ways.

How?

Talk about feelings with your child. Read books, share stories or watch videos about different emotions and ask if your child is having any of the same feelings. Some examples include:

My Heart

by Corrina Luyken



Share some of the feelings you have been having lately. Let your child know that you accept that these feelings are normal and temporary and that you are coping with them in healthy ways.

The Red Tree

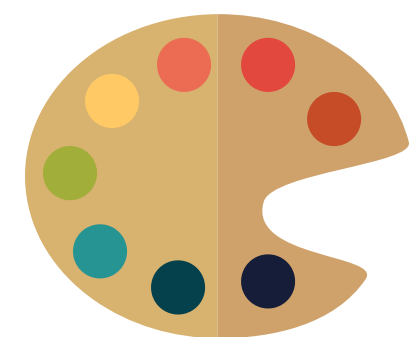
by Shaun Tan

Acknowledge all the feelings your child experiences. Be present and supportive without trying to fix or change how they feel. For example, "It's okay to be feeling a little nervous now - it's a sign your emotions are working as they should."



How is She Feeling?

by Disney Enterprises



Invite your child to express feelings through drawing and painting, a cultural practice, dancing, music or even having a good cry.

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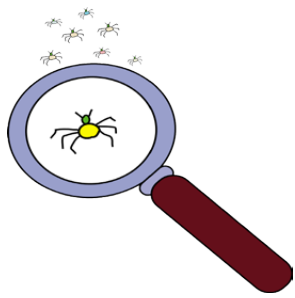
Helping Children Move Their Bodies

What is it?

Moving our bodies has many benefits for our physical, mental and emotional health. Build in big or small movement breaks throughout the day to decrease stress and increase fun!

How?

When possible, get outside to enjoy the fresh air. There are lots of ways to get active that don't require a lot of equipment or time. Use your imagination and interests to come up with your own activities or try some of these examples:

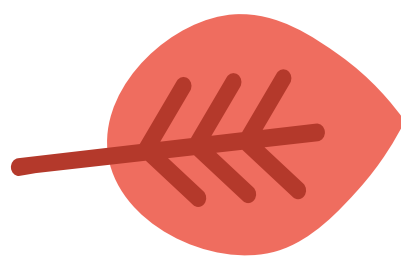


Observe nature and track observations in a notebook; or try [Geocaching](#).

Jump rope, kick a ball, toss a frisbee, or play hopscotch, tag or Red-Light Green-Light. Check out some [classic outdoor games](#).



Pump up the music, and dance or follow along with videos like [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#) and [GoNoodle](#).



Go on a scavenger hunt to find things like a feather, a y-shaped stick, a flat stone, a rock with a spot on it, five different leaves or something natural and red – see these [scavenger hunt printables](#) for more ideas.



Build an obstacle course with stations to move through. For example:

1. do 10 jumping jacks
2. jump over a row of canned goods
3. spin around 5 times
4. balance a cushion on your head for 10 seconds
5. pretend to hula hoop (or really hula hoop!)

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Learning About Worries

What is it?

There are many ways our bodies and minds react to feeling worried and uncertain. It can be reassuring to know that feeling worried and anxious is normal, temporary and even helpful in some situations. Although anxiety is uncomfortable, it is not dangerous, and there are many things we can do to calm ourselves.

How?

Watch videos about feeling worried and anxious and ask your child if they are having any of the same feelings. Some examples include:

Why Do I Feel Anxious Sometimes?

by Karen Young

Encourage your child to take notice and write down the situations, events or activities when they experience anxious feelings.



As they begin to understand what their feelings are linked to, they can be more prepared to better manage these feelings with coping skills they have learned.

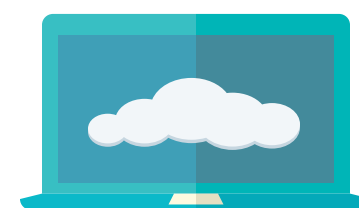
Fight Flight Freeze A Guide To Anxiety For Kids

by Anxiety Canada

What Is A Worry Warrior?

by Counselor Keri

Provide an opportunity for your child to create a word cloud using [WordArt](#) or their own worry character using a computer program like [Silk](#). Talk with your child about what their worry character looks like.



Hint: Share some examples of your own feelings of worry and anxiety as well as those of family members. This allows your child to see anxiety as a normal feeling that is manageable. Emphasize that worries come and go like clouds in the sky.



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Relaxation Skills: Being Mindful

What is it?

Paying attention to the present moment with an open, curious mind, also known as mindfulness, can help children understand the different ways our bodies can react when we experience feelings of anxiety. To learn more about mindfulness, visit [Kelty Mental Health Resource Center](#) and [Mindful.org](#).

How?

Parents and caregivers can help children be mindful by focusing on the present moment. Learning mindfulness can take some practice. It can be done by taking time to be still for periods of time throughout the day. Encourage your child to relax in a chair or lie down on their back and close their eyes, if comfortable doing so.

Share these videos and/or the guided listening activity with your child:

Mindfulness Exercises for Kids: Still Quiet Place

Video by GoZen!



Suggest an app to help your child learn mindfulness and ways to relax, such as [MindShift™ CBT](#). Offer to practise mindfulness with them.

Mindfulness: Youth Voices

Video by Kelty Mental Health

Everything Changes In The Rain

Recording by Inner Kids

Make “stillness” part of your family’s daily routine by adding it to another regular activity, such as before or after a meal, or before bed.

During a rushed time of the day, such as getting out the door or at mealtimes, get into the habit of doing a “speed check”. Take a minute to stop what you and your child are doing and ask yourselves, “Could we slow down? Are we feeling too rushed?” If the answer is yes, then take a few deep breaths and then return to what you were doing, but at a slower pace.



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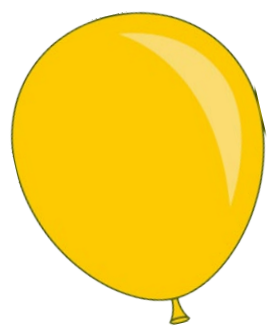
Relaxation Skills: Calm Breathing

What is it?

Children are usually not aware that worries and other difficult emotions can “show up” in their bodies as physical discomfort, such as headaches and muscle tension. Regularly practising fun relaxation exercises can help bodies and minds feel loose and calm and dial down stress and worries when they do arise.

How?

Practising slow, deep breathing is one of the most effective ways to feel relaxed, centred, and focused. Encourage children to breathe in slowly through the nose, allowing the belly rise, hold for a few seconds, then slowly exhale through the mouth, causing the belly to fall. Repeat the cycle 5-10 times to start and build up to a few minutes for a more powerful calming effect. Add some fun by trying the following:



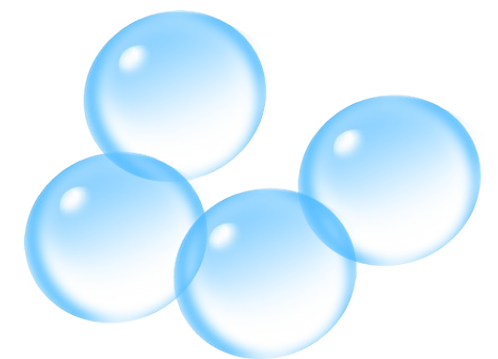
Imagine blowing up a balloon in your belly on the in-breath, then slowly letting it deflate on the out-breath.

Pretend to smell a flower while breathing in, then blow gently to cool down a hot drink while breathing out.



Use an app with guided breathing instructions, like the [Breathr App](#) from Kelty Mental Health or [MindShift™ CBT](#).

Follow along with a video like this [Calm Breathe Bubble](#).



Hint: Calm breathing is best practised regularly and when your child is already calm so they can remember how to do it when they feel upset. Learn to identify your child's triggers so that you can do some calm breathing together before things get out of hand. It's always easier to deal with strong emotions before they get too overwhelming.

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Relaxation Skills: Tense & Relax

What is it?

When kids and adults feel worried, they tense up physically. This muscle tension can feel uncomfortable and contribute to general feelings of unease. Tense and Relax involves children learning to tense up, hold and completely relax each muscle group, one at a time. The longer and more fully a child can work through the whole body, the more powerful the relaxing effect will be.

How?

Help your child understand the difference between feeling tense and feeling relaxed by asking them to imagine themselves as:



A body builder flexing their muscles one by one

A runner shaking to loosen up all their muscles before a race



Stiff, uncooked spaghetti, then soft, cooked spaghetti

Read a tense and relax script out loud – use a calming tone and pick a quiet time like after lunch or before bed when you won't feel rushed.

Follow along with a guided **tense and relax exercise**.

Hint: Just like Calm Breathing, Tense and Relax is best practised regularly so it will be more effective when needed for calming down the body.



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Spot the Thought

What is it?

Our thoughts can impact how we feel and act. Parents and caregivers can help children understand what a thought is and how some thoughts may be helpful while others unhelpful.

How?

Children can learn to become aware of their thoughts through regular practice.

Watch videos about how we can become more aware of our thoughts. Some examples include:

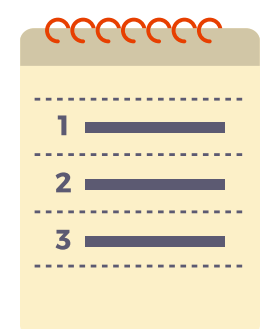
Mindfulness For Kids – Learning About Our Thoughts

by Fablefy – The Whole Child

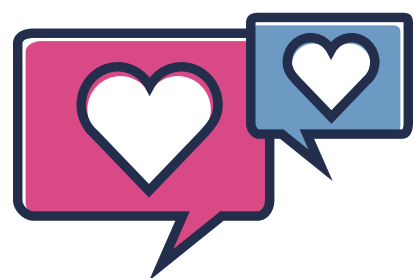
How To Manage Your Worries – Circles of Control

by British Red Cross

Divide a piece of paper into 3 sections. Title each section *Feelings*, *Thoughts* and *Action*. Brainstorm with your child a recent situation where they reacted strongly and write it in the *Action* section. Then move to the *Feelings* section and have them write down their feelings that were associated with the action. Then move to the *Thoughts* column and brainstorm with your child what thoughts they might have been thinking.



Discuss with your child the connection between their thoughts, feelings and actions.



Have conversations with your child throughout the day about situations and describe some of the thoughts you might be having. Invite your child to share some thoughts they might have in the same situations.

Talking about thoughts can help your child develop an awareness of their thoughts.

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Taking Brave Steps

What is it?

Parents and caregivers can help children understand that being brave involves taking small steps to slowly face their fears, one step at a time. Taking small steps is one of the most valuable tools to use when facing fears or overcoming a challenge.

How?

While it is common to avoid situations that cause fear and worry, when children learn about bravery and how to take small manageable steps to face their fears, they learn that they can move through their fears.

Explore with your child what it means to be brave. Watch a video that relates to someone conquering a fear. Ask questions like "How did the person in the video feel?" Some examples include:

Anita: Learning to Manage Fears (Exposure)

by Anxiety Canada

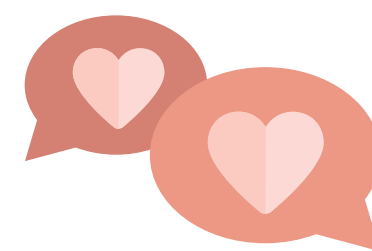
Brainstorm with your child a realistic goal they would like to reach and the first step they can take to meet it, such as learning a new skill. Help your child to think of all the steps needed to achieve this goal.

Invite your child to create a comic strip of themselves walking through each of these steps to overcome their fear.



Flight of the Hummingbird – Haida Manga

by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas



Take time to share with your child situations when you have been brave and had to face a fear.

Talk about the steps you took to overcome the fear.

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Worry Scale

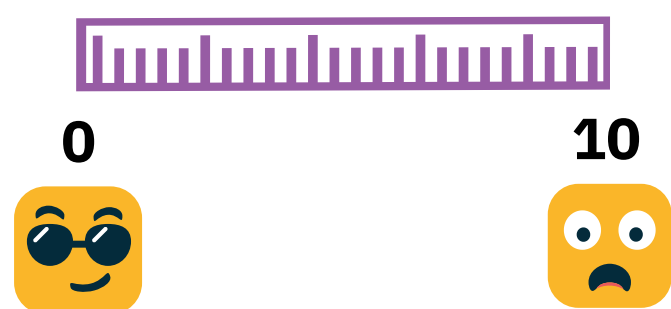
What is it?

The *Worry Scale* is a way to measure the strength of our feelings and understand that anxious feelings can vary from mild to strong. The scale can help children check in with themselves and recognize the amount of anxiety they are feeling, and when they may need support from a parent or caregiver to help them feel better.

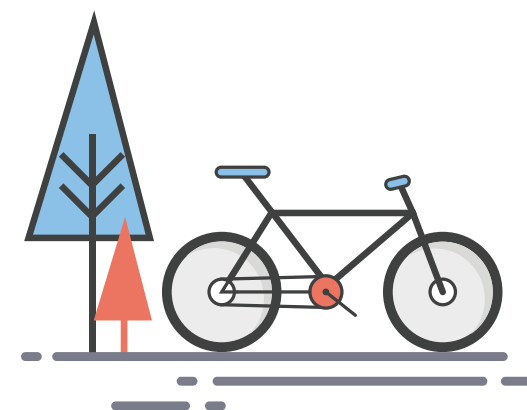
How?

Help your child visualize the “size” of their worries. Ask them to rate their worry in different situations such as the first day of school, going to the dentist, riding a bike on a busy street or giving a speech, using the activities below.

Create a worry scale with your child so they are able to rate their different worries. Draw a scale of 0-10, where 0 is happy and calm, moving up to 10 being the most anxious they have felt.



Use this scale when you notice your child might be feeling worried as a way to check in and see the strength of their worry.



Brainstorm with your child things they can do to help them shift their big worries to medium or small.

Ideas might include taking some deep breaths, going for a bike ride, listening to music, talking to a trusted adult or having time alone.