



@mentalhealthchats

**ACTIVITIES TO
HELP CHILDREN
MANAGE
ANXIETY**

FOR PARENTS/CARERS

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Anxiety is a **normal emotion** that everyone feels at some point in their life.
- Anxiety is like feeling afraid and has helped us survive as a species.
- Anxiety triggers a response in our brain called the **Fight or Flight response**, which enables us to respond to danger, so we have a better chance of surviving and staying safe. This emotion allowed cavemen to survive because it allowed them to run away, fight or hide from dangerous threats in their environment, including tigers or dinosaurs!
- A little bit of anxiety is a good thing because it prepares our body for danger and helps us get things done, for example, revising for a big exam. If we weren't worried then we wouldn't have any motivation to revise!
- However, anxiety becomes a problem when it stops us from doing day to day things or stops us from concentrating as we're too busy worrying.



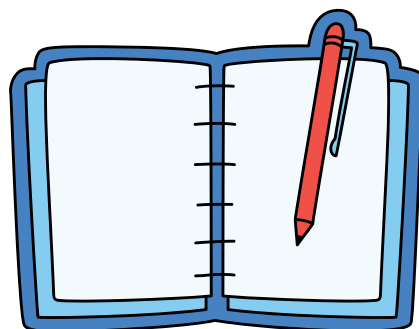
A good way to think of anxiety is like a **faulty smoke alarm**. Imagine you have a smoke alarm that is oversensitive and goes off all of the time, even when there isn't a real fire. When you have a problem with anxiety, your Fight or Flight response is just like this – it goes off and causes the symptoms of anxiety, even when there isn't any real danger.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O_5M

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD?

- Talk to your child about how they are feeling and how the feeling feels in their bodies. It is normal for our hearts to beat faster or to have butterflies in our tummies when we feel worried. Children sometimes don't know why they have these feelings, which makes it more scary.
- Normalise anxiety so your child does not feel scared by it. It might be helpful to talk about times when you have felt anxious before and how it feels for you. This will teach your child that anxiety is normal and everyone experiences it (even adults!).
- Some parents find it helpful to describe anxiety as waves. Sometimes it is big, sometimes it is small and it passes through us like waves.
- Keep a worry diary with your child and encourage them to write their worries down when they feel anxious. This will help you identify any triggers, for instance, are they all on a Sunday night before school?
- Listen to your child and validate their feelings. Sometimes, all they want to hear is 'I can see you're feeling worried, that is rubbish, but it will pass soon'.
- Ask questions rather than problem solve for them. Our gut instinct is to solve all of our children's problems for them, but it can be more helpful to ask questions and prompt them to solve their own worries.



ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Understanding your child's thoughts from their point of view can be helpful as it tells us what they need to learn to overcome their problems with anxiety. To do this, it is important you ask questions, rather than give answers.

It's helpful because asking questions can:

- Help your child think for themselves.
- Make them feel in control
- Stop them from feeling silly or wrong
- Help them get used to there being some uncertainty.

**WHY ARE YOU
FEELING
WORRIED?**



**WHAT IS THE
WORST THAT CAN
HAPPEN?**

**WHAT DO YOU
THINK WILL
HAPPEN?**



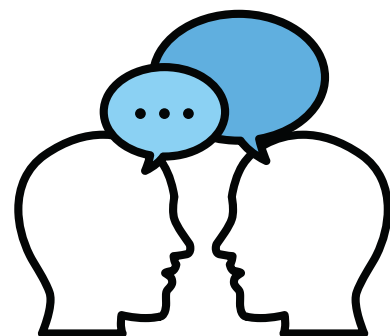
**WHAT IS IT ABOUT
X THAT IS
MAKING YOU
WORRIED?**

**WHAT IS
FRIGHTENING
YOU?**

**WHY IS THAT SO
BAD?**

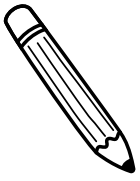
KNOWING WHAT TO SAY

How you ask your child about their worries and when you ask your child can be as important as what you ask them. It always works best when you ask your child about their worries whilst they're distracted, like around the table at teatime or when they're playing or drawing. It is less intimidating when they don't have to look you in the eye!

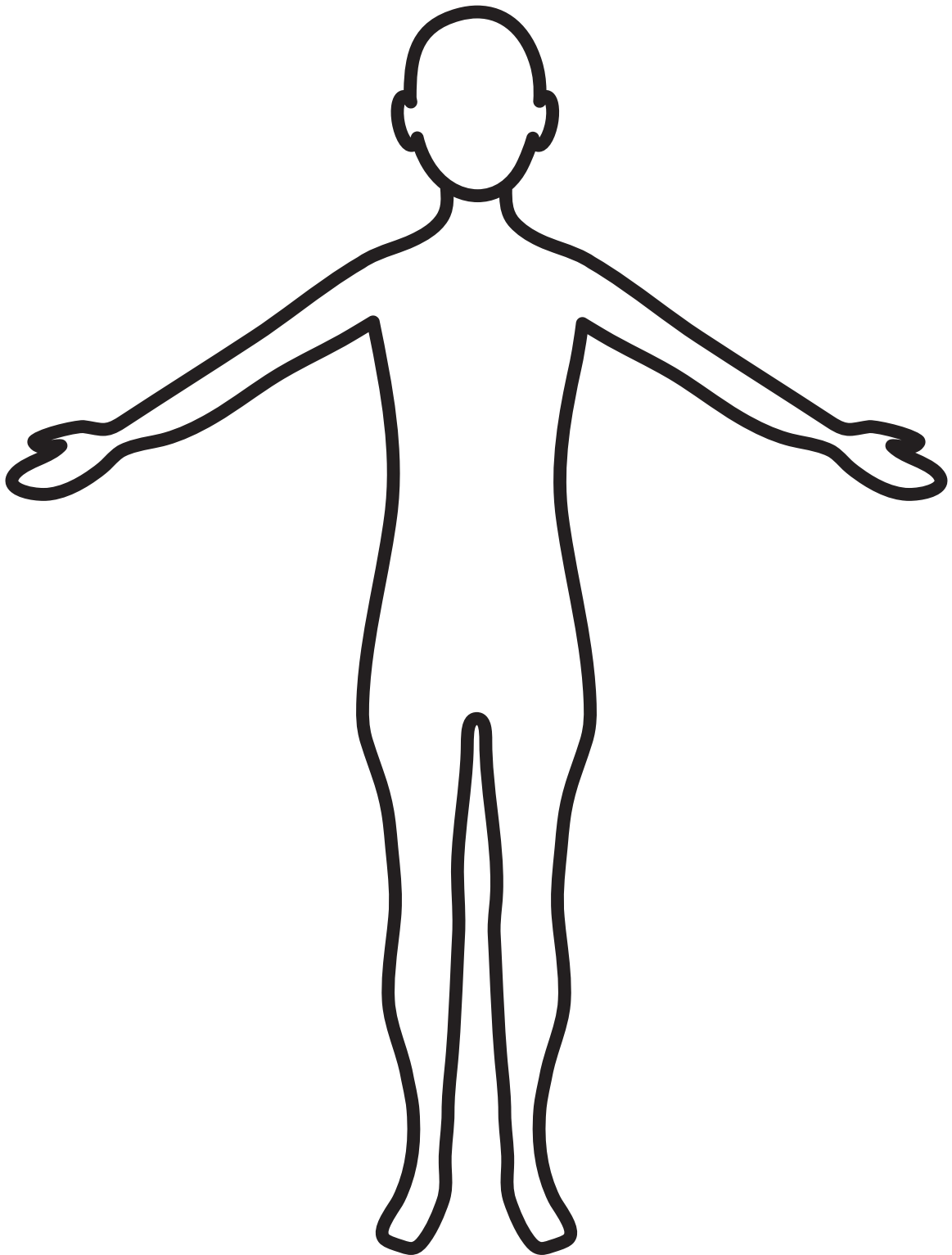


Questions	Validation	Normalising
How do you feel about that?	I think I might feel like that too if it happened to me	Being worried is really normal you know
What worries you about this?	It does sound worrying	Lots of children in your class would be worried about this.
What would happen if you asked/cried/go?	I can see why you might think that would happen.	This happened to me when I...
Do you notice anything different in your tummy/heart?	It feels scary when your breathing gets faster doesn't it?	I get scared when my worries grow too

HOW WORRYING MAKES US FEEL IN OUR BODIES (COMPLETE WITH CHILD)



This is a great activity to complete with your child. Draw and label the stick man below with what happens in your body when you feel worried.



WORRY MONSTER



Worry monsters are a great, fun way to help children forget about their worries. The idea is that children write down their worries on paper and then zip them up into the monster's mouth, so that the monster can eat and get rid of their worries. You can buy Worry Monster teddies or you can create your own.



Design your own worry monster - <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/design-a-worry-monster/>



Make your own worry monster for free - <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Worry-Monster-Craftivity.pdf>



How to make a worry monster from a tissue box - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbMbVMMqdDI>



BRAVERY LADDER

This activity can be completed with your child. Think of a few activities they could do where there is some degree of uncertainty. This could be, going upstairs by themselves, making a snack by themselves or joining a new club. Start at the bottom of the ladder with the easiest activity and slowly work your way to the top which is the hardest, most anxiety-provoking step. The idea is that you expose your child to some uncertainty and they learn that they can cope, which will help them face their other anxieties.

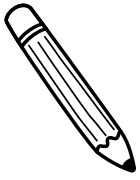
Join a new club

Stay over night at a friends
house

Make a snack by myself

Get dressed by myself





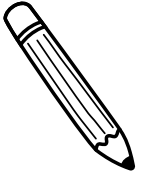
BRAVERY LADDER

Have a go at coming up with activities for your child to complete in the table below. Start at the bottom with the easiest activity then work your way up through harder activities.

ACTIVITY



	HARD
	EASY



WORRY JAR

This activity is similar to the worry monster in that it helps children recognise and then forget about their worries.

The idea is that children write their worries down on paper and put it into a jar. Children can then screw the lid onto the jar to stop their worries getting out again. Using a real jar works best, but try this activity by writing your child's worries in the jar below.



WORRY TIME

Children who feel anxious can sometimes want to talk about their worries for a long time, which can be hard for parents to manage. Often parents give reassurance, but find that their child carries on worrying about lots of 'what if' worries. Worry time is a helpful strategy to reduce how long your child spends dwelling on worries. The idea is that you have a set, limited time with your child for worrying. You might start with 30 minutes and over time reduce this to 10 minutes.

- Worry time is your child's time to talk to you about their worries.
- To do this they might write worries down and you could help problem solve the worries with your child.
- It can be helpful to pick a time of day where you have time to do something fun with your child after worry time, like going for a walk or playing lego, to help distract them from their worries before bedtime.
- It is important that you stick to the agreed length of time for worry time in order for it to be effective.



Worry Time Explained

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Uoef3M_hzE

OUR WORRY TIME PLAN:

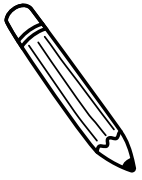
WHEN:

WHERE:

WHO WITH:

WHAT WE WILL DO AFTER WORRY TIME:





STRESS BUCKET

This activity is helpful for both adults and children in identifying things that increase and lower stress. The rain drops, which are filling the bucket, represent things that cause us stress and worries. For children, this might include homework, tests and friendship difficulties. The taps, which are lowering the water level, represent things that help lower our stress. This could be exercise, spending time with family or breathing techniques.



BREATHING TECHNIQUES

When we feel anxious, upset or distressed, it can be difficult to know what to do to feel better. By using these breathing techniques, your child can reduce their anxiety and lower their blood pressure and heart rate. This will help them feel calmer and better able to face their fears. Encourage your child to practice these next time they feel anxious as well as when they feel calm.

FINGER BREATHING



- Use your index finger to trace around the edges of the finger on your opposite hand.
- Count 1,2,3,4 and breathe in as you go up the first finger.
- Count 1,2,3,4 and breathe out as you go down the finger.
- Repeat until you have done all 5 fingers.

BOX BREATHING



- Imagine you are drawing a square with your finger in the air.
- Breathe in whilst counting to 4 as you draw the top line then pause.
- Breathe out whilst counting to 4 as you draw the line down the side then pause.
- Repeat

OTHER THINGS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S WELL BEING

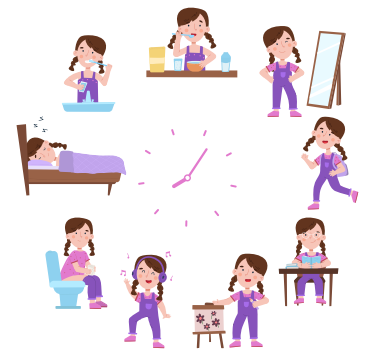
SLEEP



We know that, even as adults, when we don't get enough sleep, it impacts our wellbeing and we feel grumpy. It is the same for children too. Children should be getting around 8-10 hours sleep every night.

ROUTINE

Having a regular home routine can help children feel safe as they can easily predict what will happen both before and after school and at bedtime. It is important that you stick to the same routine each night for this to be effective in improving your child's wellbeing.



EXERCISE



Exercising can have a powerful and positive impact on our wellbeing. Not only does it help children's development, but it can help increase their sense of connection and improve their mood through releasing 'feel-good' hormones.

OTHER SERVICES

KOOTH

kooth.com download the app

THE MIX LGBTQ+

themix.org.uk 0808 808 4994

CALM HARM

calmharm.co.uk download the app

SAMARITANS

samaritans.org.uk 116 123

PAPYRUS UK

papyrus-uk.org 08000684141

YOUNG MINDS

Parent webchat at
youngminds.org.uk Parent
helpline 0808 802 5544

CHARLIE WALLER TRUST

charliewaller.org

SHOUT CRISIS TEXT LINE

giveusashout.org.uk text for
free 85258



SCAN TO ACCESS LINKS AND RESOURCES



