

ANXIETY- COPING TOOLS, STRATEGIES & RESOURCES

Building Your Child's Toolbox:

You can help your child by giving him/her some tools to manage their anxiety. These tools will help your child to accomplish the most important step – facing his or her fears.

DEEP, SLOW- BELLY BREATHING: Breathe in through the nose and fill the belly <hold for 1 second> then breathe out slowly. Repeat 5-10 times.

- *For young children: smell hot chocolate or soup in through your nose filling your belly with air <hold> blow out through your mouth slowly- to cool it down- repeat.*

FINGERTIP PRESSES: slowly press on each fingertip and pay attention to the sensation, may pair it with counting or slow breathing (young children and teens)

BUTTERFLY TAPS: cross your arms and place your hands on your upper arms and tap your hands on your arms like a butterfly (younger children)

MUSCLE RELAXATION: Tense fists or certain body parts when breathing in (slowly), then relax your muscles when breathing out (slowly).

METAPHOR IMAGERY:

- Put worry on a cloud (balloons or waves) and watch them float away...

HELPFUL THOUGHTS, COPING STATEMENTS:

Choose an affirmation and keep saying it until you don't need it anymore. This replaces the negative (unrealistic, fearful) thought(s). The child should use and choose their own statements, in their own language in order to be meaningful to the individual child.

- 1). "I can handle this"
- 2). "I am confident (brave, kind, a good friend)"
- 3). "I am safe at school"
- 4). "It's okay not to know everything"
- 5). "My mistakes help me learn and grow"
- 6). "I prepared for this test and will do the best I can"
- 7). "This is uncomfortable, but I can handle it if I take slow and deep breaths"
- 8). "I can talk to classmates at lunch"
 - These coping statements can be paired with belly breathing
 - *make coping cards- write positive coping statements on index cards*

Stop, Name Your Feeling, Calm Down: (used in Second Step Program)

- a). **Stop:** *imagine a stop sign in your mind:* when you are upset, worried, or stressed (with any strong emotion).
- b). **Name your feeling** (in your mind or out loud) i.e. I am feeling... worried, scared, mad, upset, embarrassed, frustrated, etc.
- c). **Use your calming technique:** Count to 10 OR do belly breathing OR Positive self-talk (i.e. "I'm going to be okay," or "I am brave," or "I can handle this")

MY CALM PLACE: Create a calm place, like a mini vacation you can imagine (using all your senses) anytime you need to feel calm. First use it when in a calm state in order to access it when anxious, stressed or upset.

COPING SKILL: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE (USE FOR PANIC ATTACKS, adults help child with this)

Many students benefit from being taught some *grounding techniques* such as simply observing their immediate surroundings with all their senses. Helps settle a person when in a **highly anxious state**.

HOW TO DO IT:

This technique will take you through your five senses to help remind you of the present. This is a calming technique that can help you get through tough or stressful situations. Take a deep belly breath to begin. You can also do a simpler/modified version.

5 - LOOK: Look around for 5 things that you can see, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I see the computer, I see the cup, I see the picture frame.

4 - FEEL: Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things that you can feel, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I feel my feet warm in my socks, I feel the hair on the back of my neck, or I feel the pillow I am sitting on.

3 - LISTEN: Listen for 3 sounds. It could be the sound of traffic outside, the sound of typing or the sound of your tummy rumbling. Say the three things out loud.

2 - SMELL: Say two things you can smell. If you're allowed to, it's okay to move to another spot and sniff something. If you can't smell anything at the moment or you can't move, then name your 2 favorite smells.

1 - TASTE: Say one thing you can taste. It may be the toothpaste from brushing your teeth, or a mint from after lunch. If you can't taste anything, then say your favorite thing to taste. Take another deep belly breath to end.

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

- Establish daily routines and predictability
- Acknowledge their feelings (do not minimize)
- Break down challenges into chunks
- Use good time management (*being late or rushing to your child's events, or school can elevate anxiety*)
- Get a good night sleep
- Help child develop strengths and talents to promote confidence & competence
- **Practice** coping skills such as deep breathing and helpful thoughts (positive self-talk, not only when anxious.
- Focus on & talk about what is going well
- Re-direct attention to what they have to look forward to during the school day (seeing friends, recess, fun projects, etc.)
- Encourage physical activity
- *Avoidance feeds anxiety*, learn to *cope (manage)* whatever makes them anxious instead of avoiding it
- **Praise bravery, even small steps!**

PARENT(S)- STAY CALM! Children look to their parents to determine how to react in situations. We've all seen a young child trip and fall and then look to their parents to see how to react. If the parent seems concerned, the child cries. This is because the child is looking to their parents for a signal of how to react to the situation. Children of all ages pick up on their parent's emotions and resonate with them. If you are anxious, your child will pick up on that anxiety and experience an increase in his/her own anxiety. *So when you want to reduce your child's anxiety, you must manage your own anxiety.* This may mean deliberately slowing down your own speech, taking a few deep breaths to relax, and working to ensure that your facial expression conveys that you are calm. The more confidence and comfort you can model, the more your child will understand there is no reason to be afraid.

Goal is to calm the anxiety but don't let the child dictate/avoid the citation that makes them anxious (i.e. missing school)

- Coach child to use their coping/calming strategies
- **Create drop off ritual:** (special handshake, a certain number of kisses) be consistent, make it quick, give full attention to your child, stay calm.
- Parents- do not linger when dropping off your child- be calm, supportive but firm when saying goodbye.
- Soothe but **limit reassurance** (repeated reassurance feeds the anxiety)
- Limit number of times you answer the same questions: let them know if there is a change you will let them know
- **Distraction** can be useful tool to interrupt the anxiety
- Reset the system when very anxious or panicking: go outside, do something physical, drink water, belly-breathe (deep breathing), choose a special memory to think about, progressive muscle relaxation.

NOT HELPFUL:

- "There's nothing to worry about, don't be worried, etc." (what they are experiencing is real and makes them feel worse and more anxious when you minimize). Instead acknowledge the feeling AND encourage them to manage the feeling (to get through it)
- Repeatedly reassuring (feeds the anxiety)
- Repeatedly answering the same questions (feeds the anxiety)
- Sneaking away (with children experiencing separation anxiety)
- Allowing your child to miss school due to anxiety (feeds the anxiety)

Building on Bravery Learning to manage anxiety takes *hard work* and practice. If your child is doing better, that is **progress**. Learning to manage anxiety is like exercise – your child needs to "keep in shape" and practice his/her skills regularly. Make them a habit! This is true even after your child is feeling better and has reached his or her goals. Don't be discouraged if your child starts reverting to old behaviors. This can happen during stressful times or during transitions (ex- going back to school after a long break or moving). This is normal, it just means that your child needs to start practicing using their tools. **Remember, coping with anxiety is a lifelong process.**

RESOURCES

ANXIETY WORKBOOK & BOOKS for KIDS:

What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by Dawn Huebner (K- 5th Gr.)

What to Do When Mistakes Quake: A Kid's Guide to Accepting Imperfection by Claire Freeland & Jacqueline Toner (K- 5th Gr.)

The Anti-Test Anxiety Society by Julia Cook (K-5 Gr.)

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn (K-2nd) *helpful for separation anxiety*

ANXIETY BOOKS FOR PARENTS:

Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children by Lynn Lyons& Reid Wilson

Freeing Your Child from Anxiety: Practical Strategies to Overcome Fears, Worries, and Phobias and Be Prepared for Life--from Toddlers to Teens by Tamar Chansky

The Opposite of Worry: The Playful Parenting Approach to Childhood Anxieties and Fears

by Lawrence J. Cohen

WEBSITES:

Child Mind Institute (has a wealth of resources)

[Anxiety in Children and Teenagers - Child Mind Institute](#)

[What to Do \(and Not Do\) When Children Are Anxious](#)

[What Is Separation Anxiety? - Child Mind Institute](#)

Tips for Beating Test Anxiety

[Tips for Beating Test Anxiety](#)

How to Talk to Your Child About Anxiety (excellent website with loads resources)

[Talking to Your Child about Anxiety | Blog](#)

ADDitude Magazine:

[What If You Are Enabling Your Child's Anxiety?](#)

PODCAST (HIGHLY RECCOMEND)

[Start Here, Parents of Anxious Kids - playlist by Flusterclux Podcast: Lynn Lyons | Spotify](#)

APPS:

[Calm](#)

[Headspace](#)

[MindShift@ CBT](#)