



# Anxiety (Parents Guide)

Produced by Educational Psychology Service & CAMHS

This fact sheet has been produced to support parents and carers in helping their children when they are feeling anxious, nervous or worried. There are a number of suggested exercises and strategies that you can try with your child to help manage their anxiety and it might be beneficial to also discuss the times that these strategies could be most useful for them to use.

## What is anxiety?

The brain has evolved to try to keep us safe by causing us to experience a sense of anxiety in situations it judges to be threatening. When we are very anxious, the 'rational' part of our brain (called the pre-frontal cortex) is temporarily overridden by a more primitive, instinctual part of the brain called the 'amygdala', often prompting what can be described as a 'fight, flight or freeze' response: this makes us feel more alert, stops us thinking about other things, and even causes the range of physical effects in the picture, all designed to get us out of the stressful situation as quickly as possible.



A person who is highly anxious will find it very difficult to focus on anything but the source of their anxiety and is likely to find it almost impossible to learn.

## When is anxiety a problem?

It is important to remember that a degree of anxiety is both normal and appropriate in stressful situations. Helpful levels of anxiety help us to take sensible steps to keep safe from a dangerous or threatening situation.

It is when a person's anxiety stops being useful and 'adaptive' and gets out of proportion with the level of actual threat, that extra support may be needed.

## What might problematic anxiety look like?

Problematic or unhelpful anxiety may look different depending on the age of the person and what they are anxious about. In primary age children you may see the following:

Excessive reassurance seeking

Increased temper tantrums

Complaints of tummy ache or feeling unwell

Clingy with caregivers

Difficulties getting off to and staying asleep

Repeated nightmares (more than 1x per week)

## Things to try when you feel anxious



**Draw a picture:** Draw a picture of your worry or draw/make a bag to put all of your worries inside. You could also draw yourself doing something that helps you feel calmer.



**Get active:** Exercise has been shown to make us feel less anxious. You could try going for a walk, doing press ups, star jumps, dancing to music or riding your bike.



# Breathing and Mindfulness

When we are anxious, our breathing can become shallow and fast. This is to get the body ready to run or fight, but the effects (dizziness) can make us feel more anxious. Taking slow, deep breaths can have a calming effect. You could try:



## Hot chocolate breathing



Pretend you have a cup of hot chocolate in your hands. Hold it for 1 second, smell it for 3 seconds, blow on it to cool it for 3 seconds and then hold again for 1 second.

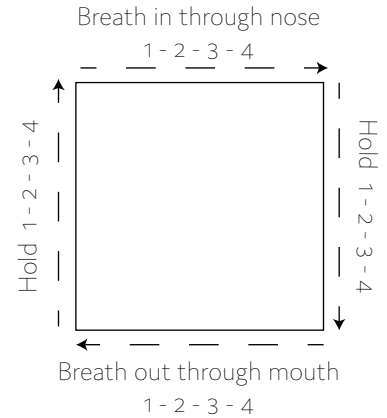


## Back to back breathing

Sit with an adult back to back. Try to keep your back long and notice your partner's breath moving their back. See if you can match the pace of their breathing or breathe slowly together.

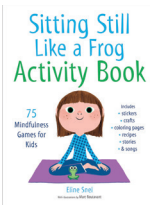


## Square breathing



## Teddy breathing

Place a teddy/beanbag on your tummy and watch it move up and down as you breathe in and out.



**Tune into the 'now':** Anxiety can make us dwell on 'what ifs' and future possibilities. Deliberately tuning in to the present moment can help break this habit. There are lots of ways of doing this. You could try mindfulness activities, such as those in the book 'Sitting Still like a Frog' by Eline Snel or at: <https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-children-kids-activities/>



**Grounding:** Paying attention to the place you are in right now, think of 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

# Visualisation



## Visualise your favourite place

*An adult might need to guide this activity*

Lie down with your legs straight or knees bent and cover yourself with a light blanket. Take a deep breath in and let your eyes close.

In your mind's eye, imagine your favourite place. Look around your favourite place. What can you see? Listen out for any sounds. What can you hear? Take a deep breath. Can you smell anything familiar? Think about touch. What can you feel? When you are ready, take one more look at your favourite place.

Notice how you feel being there and remember you can go there any time you like.

Wiggle your fingers and toes and when you are ready and slowly open your eyes.

# Who can help?

*If you or your child is experiencing unhelpful anxiety which is persistently interfering with daily life, you may wish to seek further support – for example, from your GP or from the following organisations:*

### 1Point counselling service

[www.1pointbolton.org.uk](http://www.1pointbolton.org.uk) 01204 917745

**Anna Freud** advice and resources on supporting children and young people experiencing anxiety:  
<https://www.annafreud.org/>

**NHS-approved mental health apps**, many of which are tailored to supporting individuals with anxiety, can be found at <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health>

### Be Kind to My Mind

<https://www.bekindtomymind.co.uk>

### Quell

Mental health and wellbeing service for parents and carers  
[www.qwell.io](http://www.qwell.io)

### Kooth

Ages 11+ anonymous 1:1 text-based counselling, self-help support and moderated peer support forums  
[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)