



Education Directorate / Cyfarwyddiaeth Addysg

Educational Psychology Service / Gwasanaeth Seicoleg Addysg

Support Pack 1: Managing our worries

At times like these, when our way of life has been changed and it seems that the corona virus is the only thing everyone is talking about, there's no wonder that we all have some worries.

This booklet can't make the corona virus go away, but it can help us all to find some ways to help ourselves and the people around us to deal with our worries. We hope you find it helpful.

Managing our worries

Managing worries: advice for children and adults supporting them

These links are specifically about worries children and teenagers may have about corona virus.

Tips for teens and children who are worried about corona virus

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

Advice from BBC Newsround for teens and children who may be upset by the news

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/13865002>

A good, basic and illustrated explanation for under 7s – downloadable in 22 languages including English, Welsh, Polish and Turkish

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

Advice from the World Health Organisation for adults on talking to their children about corona virus worries

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2

A social story for children and young people who may need things explained in simple terms

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

A guide about what to expect age by age around anxiety, plus strategies and tips on when to get help.

<https://www.heysigmund.com/age-by-age-guide-to-fears/>

Managing worries: some practical ways to help

Although the following ideas are *not* specific to worries about corona virus, but to worries in general, they can be used by people worried about the present situation.

Worry or anxiety is a normal reaction to something that is frightening. It has helped humans survive for hundreds of thousands of years because it tells us “Look out!” “This could be dangerous!” “You need to be careful here!” Sometimes, though, our worry can take hold of us and prevent us doing the things we want, need and love to do. This is when some help is needed, and the rest of this short document describes three ways that we can help people – including ourselves – to deal with their worries. They may not *always* make the worries go away completely but they *will* help.

1. Scaling – score your worry level out of 10

Sometimes it can help you to know how worried you’re actually feeling. A quick test is to scale your present worry level out of 10.

0 is utterly chilled, totally calm.

10 is as bad as it can get!

If you are a 9 or 10 out of 10 it is pretty high, if it is 5 you are worried but not over the top, and 3 or lower is approaching calm.

2. Riding the wave

This is a term we use to help people see that:

- worries hit us in a wave and, if we ‘ride the wave’, it won’t go on for ever; and,
- you can’t stop the wave, so you just need to go with it.

So, what will help us ride the waves of worry when they come along? The answer is: relaxation techniques. They should be taught and practised, when the individual is quite calm, and will help them to ride the wave. Nobody needs all of these; it's better to try them out, see what works best, and stick with it. Here are some ideas:

Muscle relaxation

Tensing and relaxing different muscle groups helps us to learn to recognise signals that we are becoming tense, and to release the tension.

Relaxing muscle groups can be linked to a little phrase that we say quietly to ourself in our head, like 'stay calm'. If you teach this to someone, that phrase (it's called a 'cue') reminds them to start muscle relaxation when in an anxiety-provoking situation.

Teach the child to tense and relax specific muscle groups in turn – toes, hands, shoulders, etc. They should 'scrunch' as tight as they can for a count of 5, and then relax while you encourage them to focus on the lovely sense of relief as the muscles are allowed to relax. This can be practised anywhere.

Controlled breathing

There are many ways to control breathing which all prevents us breathing too fast, shallow or irregularly when worried. It is suggested that you use controlled breathing for a minimum of four minutes to restore a normal balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Try them all and see which one works best!

- You could try **7:11 breathing** which means that you breathe in through the mouth slowly to the count of 7, then breathe out through the mouth slowly to the count of 11.
- There's also **square breathing** where you breathe in while counting 4; hold while counting 4; breathe out while counting 4; hold while counting 4 and repeat the square. Some people paint a square in the air with a finger while they do this.
- You could **smell the flower** in which you hold up a hand with the fingers raised and spread. The hand represents a flower with the fingers as the petals. You slowly breathe in the scent of the flower, and then blow the petals away gently. Repeat.

Positive Thinking

Encourage the child to complete sentences – spoken or written – which focus on positive skills and qualities:

- Three things I am good at are...
- A new skill that I recently learned is...
- My friends like me because...
- Two things I like about myself are...
- A very special and happy memory I have is...

Do this *with* the worried person at first, and then encourage them to do it independently when they are aware of feeling anxious.

Visualisation

This involves picturing in the mind a scene that is quiet and relaxing to the child; a time and place where they feel calm, safe, confident and in control. The scene itself is less important than the feelings linked with it. The more detail that can be included, the better: sights, sounds, smells and other sensations are all important.

Focused distraction

This aims to alter the thoughts that can feed our worries. When we become anxious, we over-focus on our breathing and our racing heart, for example, and this just makes us worry more. We think thoughts like 'I'm not going to cope with this.' Distraction involves focusing very closely on the smallest detail of something close by: perhaps the clouds in the sky; patterns in the wall, carpet or ceiling; lines on the palm of the hand or fingerprint patterns.

An alternative is “5-4-3-2-1” which is a ‘grounding’ technique and has various versions, all based on the senses. When the child is feeling worried they can:

Name **5** things they can see, **4** things they can feel, **3** things they can hear, **2** things they can smell, **1** thing they can taste (or maybe their favourite taste).

It works by pulling the worried person back to the ‘here and now’, away from their worries, starving the anxiety of the negative thoughts it feeds on.

3. Biopsychosocial interventions

We need **biological**, **psychological** and **social** support to deal with worries successfully – hence “bio-psycho-social”. Two people who can be very supportive are FRED who is great in the short term and FRED who’s in it for the longer haul!

Friend – when worried, contact a well-chosen friend for support, advice or help

Relaxation, using muscle relaxation, breathing, positive thinking, visualisation, distraction

Exercise regularly in a way that works for you: run, walk the dog, kick-box, dance...

Drugs – avoid them! Go easy on caffeine, alcohol and energy drinks.

Action – do something positive, e.g., practice, help out, find out...

Friend – learn to talk to yourself like a true friend would (positive thinking as described on page 3)

Routine – develop a good one to stabilise your sleep pattern

Exercise – commit to doing this regularly over time

Diet - eat and drink regularly and reasonably