

Supporting Social and Emotional Wellbeing

There is much that each one of us can do to support the wellbeing of those in our lives, including children and young people who may already be vulnerable or suffering from mental health difficulties.



Anxious children?

During a health scare, particularly one of these proportions, it's natural to be worried. Children are generally very resilient and, in a loving and nurturing environment, will often work through problems and difficult times without needing too much additional help. These exercises will help your child explore, express and explain their worries and open up the conversation with you.

Relaxation exercises

Ask your child (or children) to lie down on a rug or carpet with plenty of room around them and ask them to close their eyes. Slowly read these instructions to them in a calm, quiet voice.

1. Breathe in through your nose. Hold your breath for a few seconds, then breathe out. Take another deep breath in through your nose. Imagine your tummy is a balloon filling with air. Breathe out slowly and let the air escape quietly like a leaky balloon.
2. Stretch out your legs in front of you, and point your toes. Stretch out your arms either side of you, stretching all the way to your fingertips. Concentrate on feeling the ends of your fingertips.
3. Now you are going to tense all the muscles in your body. Begin with your toes. Curl them over so they are clenched. Then think about tensing the muscles all the way up your legs. Then the muscles in your tummy. Make it as hard as a wall.
4. Now tense your arms as well, so your arms are by your sides and even your fists are clenched. Bring your shoulders up around your ears.
5. Now scrunch up your face. Push your lips together and frown down into your face so your forehead is all crinkled.
6. Make your body go limp again. Think about each part of your body in turn going limp and relaxed: your face, your shoulders, your arms, your tummy, your legs and your toes. Imagine yourself as a floppy rag doll.
7. Take a deep breath in through your nose and breathe out again, Notice how relaxed and calm you feel. When you are ready open your eyes.

It might take children a few times to take it seriously if they are not used to doing this, but you will be surprised because many teachers use these kind of exercises in class. To help your child get used to the order of the instructions swap places with them and allow them to read the instructions. Let them be teacher. You might find it helps you too!

One important point is not to wait until you see your child being anxious and stressed to try this exercise. It might be a little late. Build it in your day as a regular event, perhaps to prepare them for a few minutes of quality learning.

The Worry Jar

Make a worry jar to help contain your child's worries.

It can be a drawing or an actual jar. It is better for younger children in particular if it is a real jar as this involves a physical, real action.

Ask members of your family what they are worrying about. Get them to write it down to help younger children to write it down, perhaps on a small piece of paper like a post-it note. Together fill up the jar with your worries.

When you have finished, put the lid on to stop the worries getting out again.

Or leave the jar in a communal place with pieces of paper and a pencil nearby like a suggestion box. This might work for older children who might feel hesitant to talk. If you notice new worries going in the jar you might get chance to read them and address them.

A brilliant way into opening a conversation is beginning with "I am wondering if you..." Sometimes all that is needed, though, is to acknowledge the worry.

For younger children many schools use cuddly toys that "eats" the worries, called Worry Monsters. See this YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3c8J2cO_gE

Your child may already have a cuddly toy or a pyjama holder that could do this job rather than buying a new one.



(Some ideas from No Worries! By Dr Sharrie Coombes, Studio Press)