

Home Learning – Managing Anxiety

RESILIENCE



Your School's Family Support team are aware that during this time of ongoing isolation at home and with us having limited contact with others or access to other activities that we might have done regularly this can increase stress and anxiety for children, young people and parents.

This newsletter has been put together to help families with some tips and techniques on reducing anxieties at this time

On the following pages you will see a range of activity ideas that you can do at home safely and at little cost.

Remember to contact your family worker if you feel you need additional support.

There are also a range of web sites that you can access which will also provide useful ideas:

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.healthforkids.co.uk

www.healthforteens.co.uk

www.healthyyoungmindsinherts.org.uk

Visit www.gadeschoolsfamilysupport for more information.



EXPERIENCING ANXIETY?

When we get anxious we can suffer from all sorts of things from crazy thoughts to an upset stomach to a panic attack with a quickening heart beat and shortness of breath.

If you are feeling worried, you may also have noticed all sorts of other behaviours going on. Are you arguing more, talking faster, struggling to sleep, restless, desperate for information? Or are you teary and overwhelmed, perhaps feeling a bit sick? Struggling to make decisions? Just want to stay in bed? Tummy upsets? Having palpitations, butterflies, headaches? Ranting, picking fights or getting into arguments? Laughing unexpectedly or saying random, inappropriate things? Or have you just completely gone to ground?

If you are feeling any of these things: good news! You are not going mad. And you are 100% not alone. You are, in fact completely normal: a fully emotionally functional human being.

THE SCIENCE BIT

When we are exposed to threats and need to deal with them, our brain springs into action. The amygdala, the bit in charge when we are frightened and right now, if you are feeling anxious, it's in full flow working at its most active.

So this is what the body gets you ready to do. It's called the Fight or Flight response (there's also freeze, meaning you just get paralysed and feel you can't move). It does this by flooding your body with chemicals like cortisol, and adrenaline. Your heart rate goes up, you feel super alert, your breathing goes shallow and your muscles get ready for action. These chemicals are also largely responsible for the huge range of other cognitive/physical/emotional reactions - anxiety is even more infectious than the virus!

SO WHAT TO DO

BREATHE - It's so basic, but breathing exercises are basically magic. They work in minutes and you can do them anywhere. They work because of all the physical reactions the amygdala triggers, rapid breathing is the only one over which we have conscious control. Control your breathing and you are basically telling your body: it's OK. Try these simple exercises:

- Breathe in through the nose, out through the mouth. SLOWLY
- Make the outbreath longer than the inbreath – imagine there's a candle in front of you and it mustn't go out. Try breathing **IN** for a count of **5** and **OUT** for a count of **7**. Do this for a number of times.
- Breathe from the tummy not chest – really make your tummy go out when breathing in.
- Do it for two minutes - time yourself - and see how you feel

Seriously, try it – this technique is used by everyone from top athletes to the US military to help stay in control while under stress. There are all sorts of versions – from yogic breathing to box breathing to 4-7-8. Google them, mess around, figure out what works for you.

CALL A FRIEND - Don't suffer alone- someone who'll listen while you have a bit of a rant, or a cry, or a general 'wobble'. Someone you can trust not to judge you and who'll just sympathise and show you some empathy and understanding. And if you get one of those calls, just be nice to them. You only need to be kind. You can't fix what's going on so just give them a bit of space to tell you how they feel and tell them they're normal and doing great. And if you're OK, call your friends and check in on them. Especially if they've gone silent.

LAUGH - It doesn't matter what is funny – laughter is a huge releaser of endorphins. Silly memes, silly jokes, stand-up, rolling around with youtube. The sillier the better. It is also very good for bonding with friends, which will also help you feel less alone.

DO SOMETHING WITH YOUR HANDS - Yes you can meditate if that is what you like or know how to do, it's amazing. But if it's not your thing, do something instead with your hands, that you have to focus on to get right. Cook. Tidy. Knit. Draw. Bake. Garden. Mend things. This is what therapists call Mindfulness.

TREAT YOUR BODY - We hold stress in our bodies at least as much as our minds. Take a bath or a shower. Put on things that feel good on your skin. Use nice smelling body creams.

SUNSHINE - It's SPRINGTIME! If you can't go outside, open the windows and feel it on your face and breath it in. If it's safe for you to go outside, while of course observing social distance, go for a walk. Being outdoors, even in your garden, connecting to nature, is hugely calming.

STEP AWAY FROM SOCIAL MEDIA/THE NEWS - All it will do will potentially scare you and feed into your anxiety and make you feel worse. Watch some feel good TV, comedy films, you tube – watch things that will make you laugh and make you feel good.

BE KIND - To yourself and others. Think comfort books, comfort telly, comfort drawing, comfort everything! Make yourself a nice drink, sit by a window and drink it in the lovely morning sunshine. Controlling your breathing can be magical, you can do it anytime, anywhere.

Take care of yourself and others. This situation will lessen and it will get better. It might take a little while but we can all be patient and keep safe.

This information is courtesy of Mandy Berman Lead Counsellor, Sandringham School, St. Albans