

# WHAT PARENTS CAN SAY IN ANXIOUS MOMENTS

## PARENT GUIDE



ANXIETY IS OFTEN A PROBLEM THAT GROWS WHEN WELL INTENDED PARENTS ARE TRYING TO HELP THEIR CHILD FIND FAST RELIEF TO BIG FEELINGS. UNDERSTANDING HOW ANXIETY WORKS AND WHAT YOUR ROLE IS IN HELPING YOUR CHILD IS CRITICAL. YOU MAY BE SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT HELPING YOUR CHILD MEANS FINDING WAYS TO ALLOW THEM TO FEEL THEIR FEELINGS AND NOT HELPING THEM FIND WAYS TO GET RID OF THEM. FAST RELIEF OFTEN HAS THE UNFORTUNATE SIDE-EFFECT OF TEACHING KIDS THAT FEELINGS ARE BAD AND WILL MAKE IT MORE LIKELY THEY RESPOND TO FEELINGS IN UNHEALTHY WAYS. ONCE A CHILD LEARNS HOW TO FEEL THESE FEELINGS, THE BONUS OUTCOME IS THAT THE FEELINGS USUALLY REDUCE. HERE IS A GUIDE TO HELPFUL RESPONSES YOU CAN GIVE TO CHILDREN THAT DO NOT REINFORCE WORRY.

### REFLECT

YOU REALLY WANT ME TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION.  
YOU REALLY WANT ME TO SAY YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL TODAY.  
YOU'RE FEELING SO WORRIED RIGHT NOW.  
I NOTICE THAT THIS WORRY KEEPS POPPING IN YOUR HEAD.

### EMPATHIZE

I CAN TELL HOW HARD THIS IS FOR YOU.  
IT MUST BE SO STRESSFUL TO FEEL THIS BAD.  
I AM GOING TO SIT WITH YOU FOR A BIT.  
CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW BAD THIS FEELS?  
THESE FEELINGS ARE NOT EASY.

Don't underestimate  
the POWER  
of your TONE OF VOICE!

### BE CLEAR

I CAN'T ANSWER WORRY QUESTIONS BECAUSE I KNOW THAT MAKES WORRY GROW.  
YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT, I THINK ANSWERING IT AGAIN WILL MAKE WORRY GROW.  
I KNOW IT'S HARD BUT I CAN'T LET YOU AVOID THAT, I DON'T WANT WORRY TO GROW.

### ENCOURAGE

THESE FEELINGS ARE HARD AND I ALSO KNOW THAT YOU CAN DO THIS!  
YOU CAN DO HARD THINGS.  
LAST TIME THIS HAPPENED, THE FEELINGS DIDN'T LAST FOREVER, REMEMBER?  
I BELIEVE IN YOU!  
YOU ARE STRONGER THAN YOUR WORRY!

### MODEL

SHOW YOUR CHILD THAT YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU ARE SAYING TO THEM BY:  
NOT CONTINUING TO TALK ABOUT IT (OF COURSE YOU CAN SIT WITH THEM AND BE LOVING)  
HELPING THEM TO GET GOING WITH THE DAY EVEN IF THEY HAVE THESE FEELINGS

#### Instead of:

You have nothing to worry about.  
Stop it.  
Everything will be fine.  
I'll do it for you.  
You don't have to go.  
Toughen up.  
Nothing bad will happen.

THESE STRATEGIES MAY PROVIDE YOUR CHILD WITH SOME QUICK, TEMPORARY RELIEF BUT IT WILL NEVER GIVE THEM LONG-TERM RELIEF BY TEACHING THEM HOW TO FEEL THEIR FEELINGS IN A HEALTHY WAY.

# Worry Sorting Activity


Try and sort the worries on the next page into 'Here and Now' and 'What If' worries in the table below.



What if  
worries

Here and  
Now worries



Did you get them all right? 

I have an exam, what if I fail?



I have forgotten my lunch

I've fallen out with my friend and I want to sort it out



I promised my parents that I would tidy my room, but I don't have time

What if people laugh when I walk past them at the school gates?



What if I get really ill?



I have been invited to a party and I don't know many people. What if no one likes me?

I am stuck on my homework and don't know where to start



What if my friends fall out with me?



My earphones have stopped working, so I can't listen to my music

# Problem Solving

If you're struggling with a practical worry, use this step by step guide which helps to break the problem down and solve it in a more manageable way. Practical worries can feel overwhelming and it's easy to put them off. However, it's much better in the long run to solve the problem today rather than put it off until later.

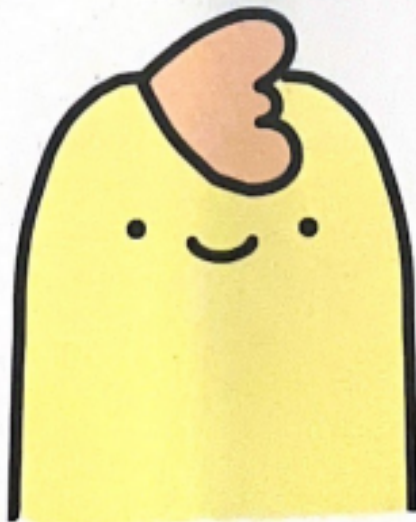
(You'll need some paper and pens/pencils)

- Step 1** Write down your problem in 1 or 2 sentences.
- Step 2** Write down all the ideas you can think of to solve the problem (no matter what they are!).
- Step 3** Make a table and write down ALL of the good things and ALL of the not so good things you can think of for each of your ideas.

	Good things	Not so good things
Idea 1		
Idea 2		

- Step 4** Choose one idea that looks like it could work (if you struggle, see which one has the most good things). Ask yourself, is my idea realistic? If it isn't, choose a different idea.
- Step 5** Make a plan! Write down the answers to these questions to create your plan of action!
- 1) What will you do?
  - 2) When will you do it?
  - 3) How will you do it?
  - 4) Who will you do it with?
  - 5) Could there be any difficulties? If so, what could you do to overcome these?

**Step 6 DO IT!**



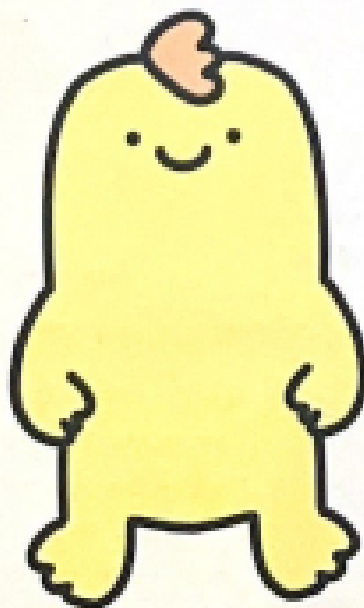
# After you've done it...

Well done for giving your idea a go and for trying to solve your problem! Now, think about how it went.

## Review it

Answer the following questions to help you reflect on how it went.

- 1) Was it helpful?
- 2) Did you achieve what you wanted to?
- 3) If not, could you do something differently/change something next time?
- 4) Did you achieve anything (no matter how small) towards solving your problem?  
Even tiny steps forward are big achievements.
- 5) What did you learn?



## Remember...

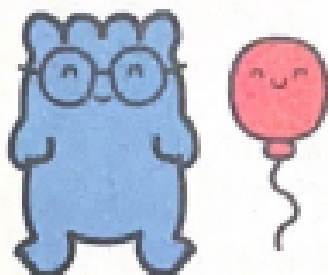
Whether your solution worked really well or whether it didn't quite go as you'd hoped, you should be very proud of yourself for giving it a go! Well done!



# Breathing Techniques

When we feel anxious, upset or distressed, it can be difficult to know what to do to feel better. By using these breathing techniques, we can reduce our anxiety and lower our blood pressure/heart rate. This helps us feel calmer and more focused and helps us to face our fears.

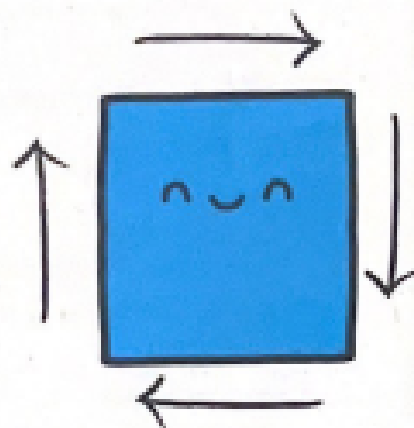
## Belly Breathing



- Take a deep breath in and fill your belly like you're inflating a balloon.
- As you do this, count 1, 2, 3, 4 to breath in and fill the balloon in your belly.
- Pause and then let all of the air out of your belly like you're letting a balloon deflate.
- As you do this, count 1, 2, 3, 4 to breath out and let the balloon go down from your belly.

## Square Breathing

- Imagine you're drawing a square with your finger in the air.
- Breath in while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the top line and then pause.
- Breath out while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the line down the side and then pause.
- Breath in while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the bottom line and then pause.
- Breath out while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the line up the side to make the square.

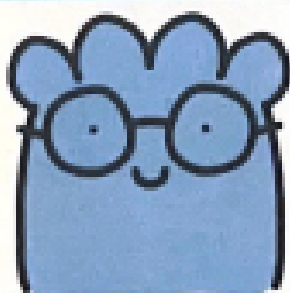


## Finger Breathing



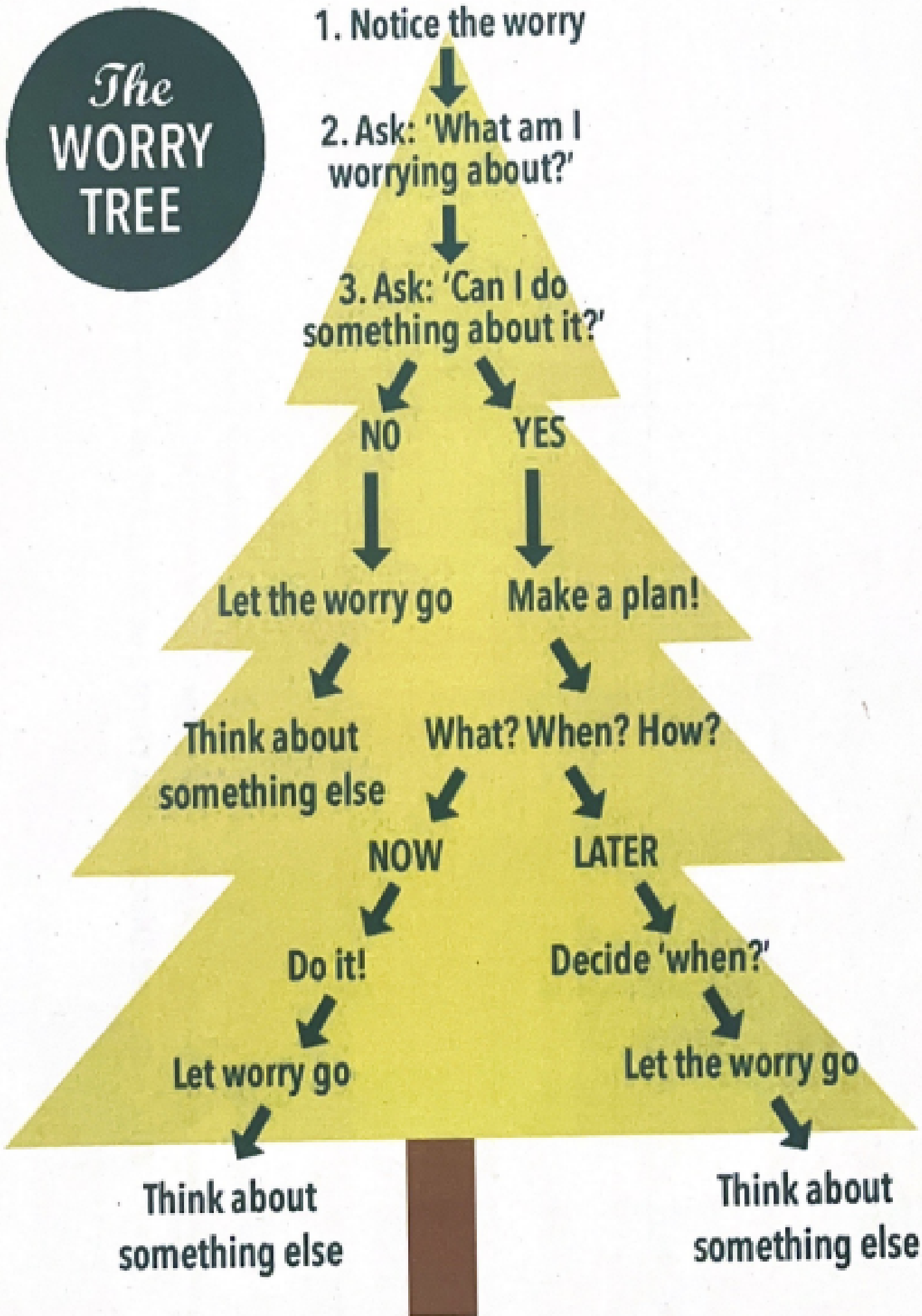
- Use your index finger to trace around the edges of the fingers on your opposite hand.
- Count 1, 2, 3, 4 and breath in as you go up the first finger.
- Count 1, 2, 3, 4 and breath out as you go down the finger.
- Repeat until you have traced up and down all five fingers, breathing 1, 2, 3, 4 in and 1, 2, 3, 4 out each time.

**Top Tip!** Practise these breathing techniques when you're calm so that you're better prepared to use them when you need to.



Count **slowly** when breathing in and out and **repeat** the technique as many times as you need to until you feel calmer.

*The*  
**WORRY  
TREE**



# Worry Time

Worry time gives you time each day to address all of your worries. The more you use worry time, the less your worries will impact you throughout the day.

## 1 Plan your worry time

It's important to plan in your worry time for the same time each day. This should be a time where you can focus on the worries and not be distracted. Start with a maximum of half an hour each day. As you use worry time more and more, you may notice that you eventually need less than half an hour each day because you get better at dealing with your worries.



## 2 Catch the worries

As you notice worries during the day, catch them so that you can come back to them later at worry time. You can do this by writing them down, drawing a picture or making a sound recording. You could use a diary, sticky notes, your phone or any other way you can think of to catch the worries as they happen.



## 3 Refocus your attention

Once you have caught the worry, it's important to focus on something different. Pay attention to whatever it is you're doing at that moment OR do something totally different. You can also refocus by using calming/grounding techniques.

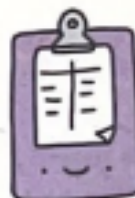


## 4 Worry time

Use worry time to go back and address all of the worries you have caught that day. For each worry decide whether it is a practical worry or hypothetical worry.

- For **practical worries**, use **problem solving**.
- For **hypothetical worries**, **let the worries go**. You can do this by ripping up, scribbling out, deleting or scrumpling up and throwing away the worry.

Some worries might not even be worries anymore! For these, you will learn that a lot of worries may seem big at the time but later they will seem much smaller and manageable.



## Let's Do It

My worry time will be at (time):

It will last for (number of minutes):

I will do it with (will anyone help?):

I will catch my worries by (what will you use?):

## Top Tip

To refocus your attention, try to take deep breaths and think: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. This gives you chance to calm down before focusing on a current or new task.