

Supporting a child who is experiencing anxiety



Because of Covid-19 we are all experiencing things in our worlds which are scary, new and anxiety provoking. This time can be especially difficult for children, as it is hard for them to truly understand the magnitude of the situation and the boundaries which have now been put in place for them.

Below, are some activities which the child can do with an adult to **prepare for anxious times**, there are also links to **online resources** and also activities to support a child who is experiencing an **episode of acute anxiety**.

Preparing for anxious times (1)

Practising the below activities with a child when they are calm and scheduling them into the day, will make it much easier to access them in times of high stress or anxiety.

- **Hand breathing* (Appendix A)**
- **Yoga flow (Appendix B)**
- **What I can and can't control (Appendix C)**
- **Belly breathing with toy* (Appendix D)**
- **Grounding activities* (Appendix E)**
- **Rainbow Visualisation* and art activities (Appendix F)**

Online resources (2)

- Audio books can help bring the world closer to a child when things are feeling big and out of control.
<https://stories.audible.com/>
- Mindfulness colouring, can also help to bring more perspective to a child who is experiencing anxiety, by making their world smaller.
<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/search>



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- Regular exercise can support mental health and doing it live through a video can support in feeling connected to others. <https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1>
- Creating a structure or timetable, for your child can help to manage anxieties – as they know what is coming next. <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/home-learning-hub>

Coping with an episode of acute anxiety (3)

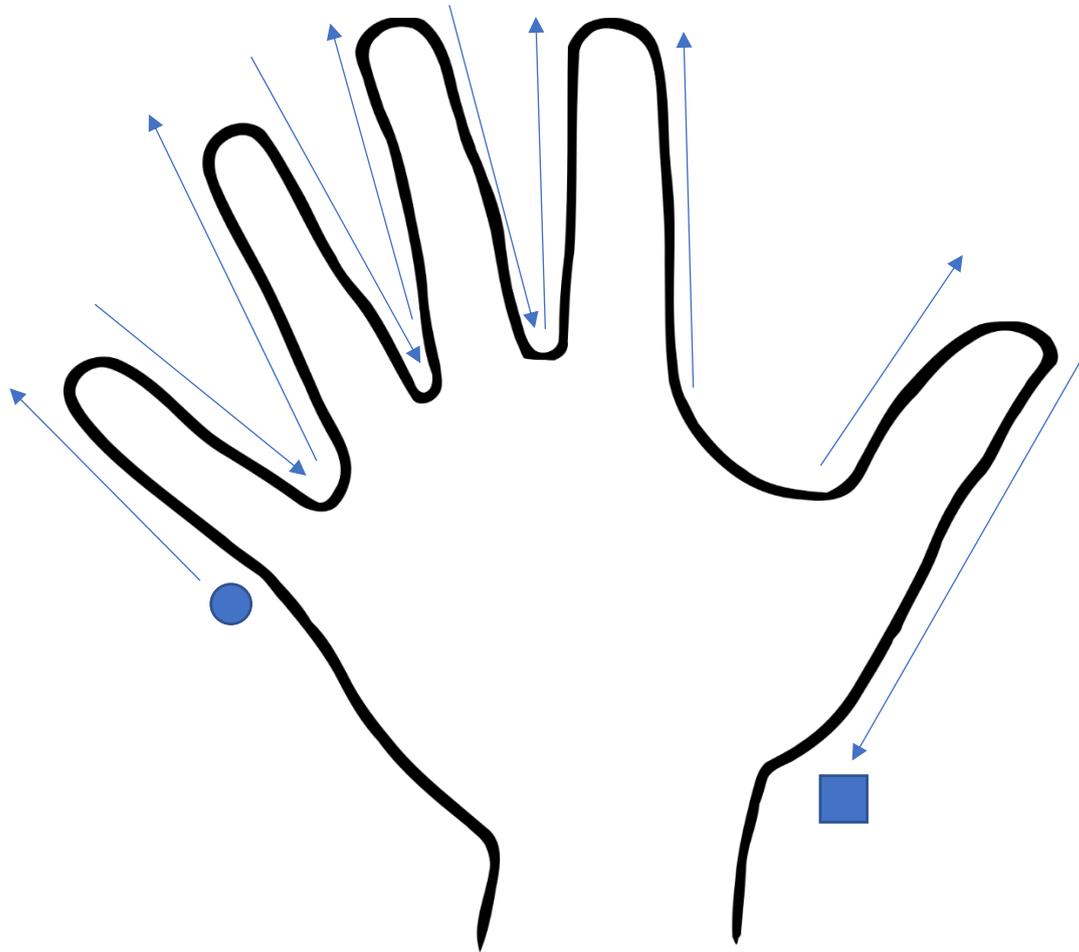
- The activities marked with a * in (1), can be done with a child who is experiencing an acute episode of anxiety, just concentrate on one at a time, get down to their level and do it with them. You may need to repeat it a number of times to support them to feel less anxious.
- When a child is experiencing an acute anxiety episode, it is as if they have ‘flipped their lid.’ Dr Daniel Siegel offers a simple explanation of this, using the ‘Brain in my Hand’ model. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>
- When a child has ‘flipped their lid,’ they are unable to process any new information or respond in the usual way. Sticking to one of these * activities, staying at their level and being calm, will support them in bringing their lid back down.



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Appendix A – Hand breathing



- Using the image above or your hand, start at the circle with a finger from the opposite hand.
- Run your finger towards the fingertip and **breath in**.
- **Pause for 3 seconds** when you reach the fingertip.
- **Breath out** as your finger travels back towards your palm.
- **Pause for 3 seconds** when you reach the base of your finger.
- **Continue**, as above with the other fingers, until you reach the square and then **stop**.
- **Repeat as necessary**.



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Appendix B – Yoga

The focus of yoga is all about breath, when we are anxious, being able to control our breath can help us to feel more in control generally. Our friend Chloe, at Yoga revolution, has put together some resources below to support you and your child through anxious times, using yoga.

Create yourselves a space, where you can both see and hear the screen. Use a blanket or cushion to sit on and make sure you are comfortable. The first video is a guided meditation, aimed to quieten the mind and the second video is a breathing exercise.

Meditation: <https://youtu.be/iluFiLREA28>

Ujjayi breath how-to: <https://youtu.be/E8pvy427OI>



www.theyogarevolution.co.uk/



Contact the OWLS team on
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Appendix C – What can I control?

Support your child to think about the things they can and can't control in their own world and in the wider world and fill in the boxes below.



What can I control?

What can I control – examples

- Turn off the tv/news
- Put on relaxing music
- Do exercise
- Talk to someone



What can't I control?

What can't I control – examples

- Whether someone gets unwell
- Whether other people stay in or go out



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Appendix D – Belly breathing



- The child lies on the floor and places a teddy on their lower belly.
- They are to try and make their teddy move as slowly and as much as possible, without it falling off.
- **Breathing in** deeply, expand their lower belly, watching the teddy rise.
- **Pause** for 3 seconds when the teddy is at the highest point.
- **Breathe out** slowly, making sure the teddy doesn't fall.
- **Pause** for 3 seconds when the teddy is at the lowest point.
- **Repeat** for 1 minute.



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Appendix E- Grounding activities

Grounding activities are generally short exercises which include our different senses, the aim is to make us feel more connected to our bodies and the ground beneath us. This stops us being so much 'in our heads' and getting caught up in a web of worries or anxieties. Below are some examples;

- Heads, shoulders, knees and toes.
- I can see..., I can hear..., I can smell..., I can feel..., I can taste...
- Stamp feet 5 times, clap hands 5 times, bang table 5 times.
- Touching the tips of each finger (both hands at the same time), to your thumb.
- Pick up a nearby object and describe it (texture, colour, weight, uses, etc.)
- Who is in my family? Start with immediate and work outwards.
- Audible books and mindfulness colouring in can also support grounding as they both focus on stimulating the senses.
- Sorting objects into groups i.e. colour, uses, size etc.
- Feeling your heart or finding your heartbeat – on yourself or someone else.
- ABC senses, around the room – I see an apple, I hear a bee etc.
- Touching something cold (ice) and then something warm (hot water bottle).



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Appendix F - Rainbow visualisation

(based on Rainbow visualisation in Creative Interventions for Bereaved Children by Liana Lowenstein, 2006)

Ensure your child is in a calm space and sitting/lying comfortably, with their eyes closed, if possible. You will need to be able to provide them with paper and pencil/colouring pencils at the end of the visualisation.

(Child's name) is sitting and waiting patiently for the storm to pass. She/he is sitting in her/his bedroom, looking out of the window. The storm is enormous, thunder crashing very loud and lightening flashing across the sky. Rain is running down the window panes in a steady stream.

Gradually, (name of child) can hear that the thunder is fading away and the lightening has stopped. The stream of water is changing into the pitter patter of raindrops on the glass and sky looks dull and grey now. (The child) is about to turn away from the window when they see the sky change – and yes – there is the most beautiful rainbow they have ever seen. It looks as if one end is in their garden. It is a big rainbow arching right over the other houses into the mists beyond. They cannot see where it ends but it looks a long way away.

(Name) gives a big sigh and wonders what is at the end of the rainbow. They decide they will go and find out. Is there really treasure? Or does the rainbow lead to a whole new place? This time they will know for certain. Although they have been feeling a bit down and lonely, the thought of following the rainbow cheers them up immediately. They put on their coat and steps out into the garden. There is the rainbow! Maybe it is waiting for them?

As they move towards the rainbow, their feet take over. It is wonderful! Amazing! They can actually climb the rainbow. It feels soft and easy and not too steep. Her/his legs take her/him up and up – one step after another – and soon she/he is at the very top of the rainbow. She/he pauses and looks down to the earth, but it is very misty. She/he realises that she/he is up above the clouds and down below looks like billowing cotton wool. It looks like a snow field.

She/he turns to go on and, just as she/he is about to move, she/he sees another figure coming towards her/him it is their friend! (Name) looks closely at their friend, notices what they look like and what they are wearing, their friend holds out their hand and passes over an object. (Name) takes the object and looks at it, she/he places it carefully in her/his pocket. Their friend hugs them, hard, 'It is time to go,' they whisper, 'I will come back again.' As she/he slowly goes back down the other side of the rainbow, she/he turns towards (name) and says, 'remember, I am always here,' and, with a wave, she/he disappears.

(Name) turns to leave and starts to walk down her/his side of the rainbow. She/he is feeling very warm inside and knows she/he can visit her/his friend again. But when will there be another rainbow? She/he walks slowly back to the house, takes off her/his coat and goes up to her/his room. When back in the bedroom, she/he puts her/his hand in her/his pocket and feels that the object given by the friend is still there, she/he squeezes it very tight. She/he places it in a very safe place in her room and silently tells her friend that they will meet again soon.

This is the end of the story, so That is the end of the story, feel your body as it lies/sits in this room. Begin to wiggle your toes and fingers and have a stretch. In front of you there is paper and some pens/pencils, take some time to draw what you saw; the rainbow, your friend and the object. This is going to be the beginning of your own rainbow story.



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