

Understanding and Coping with Feelings

Sometimes, it can be very difficult for us to make sense of big feelings like worry, anxiety, and stress. This is especially true for children. The exercises below will support you and your child to understand their feelings better, and to find ways to support them with those feelings

Worry Box

Support your child to create a colourful worry box out of a shoebox – make sure there is a lid, so the worries can be kept safe. Talk to your child about writing their worries down and put it in a box. Talk to your child about when and how regularly they would like to go through the worries with you. Have a conversation about how your child would like you to respond to their worries and support them to write these in the “Do’s and Don’ts” sheet below.



You could also make or buy a ‘Worry Monster’.

Worry Box



Sometimes, it can be very difficult for us to make sense of big feelings like worry, anxiety, and stress. This is especially true for children, and even more true for children with a learning disability and/or autism.

The worry box is a great way of helping children to learn to verbalise and manage some of the worries they are experiencing. It can also be a great way of physically containing worries, so that children don't have to think about them all at once or all the time. It can help children put the worries somewhere safe and out of their heads before bed to help them sleep.



Explaining the Worry Box:

Whilst making the worry box, explain to your child that it is a special box for them to put their worries. Let them know that no worry is too big or too small for the box, they can put anything they are worried in the box at any time. There is no time limit for how long the worry can stay in the box, either.



Let your child know that they can either come to you with their worries, and you can help them write this down to go in the box OR they can write the worries down and put them in the box themselves. The worry can stay in the box until they want to talk about it more.

Sometimes, it can be helpful for children if you take the worry box from them and look after it until they want to use it again. It helps the young person to feel like someone is taking control of their worries and can help them feel more contained. You can ask your child where they would like the box to be kept when they are not using it.



Using the Worry Box:

- When your child brings you their worries to talk about, sort them out together into:
 - Things we can't change – e.g. being worried about grandma being ill
 - Things we can change – e.g. being worried about getting in trouble for not doing homework
- Manage the worries:
 - Things we can't change: acknowledge the worry and how your child is feeling. Your child may need more information about why nothing can be done to change the worry. Give your child ideas of how they can help themselves feel better when they begin to worry about this (e.g. social tools like seeing friends, physical tools like going for a walk, distraction tools like watching a movie, relaxation tools like having a bath). Ask your child if they'd like to put the worry in the bin, or if they'd like to put it back in the box so you can keep talking about it.
 - Things we can change – acknowledge the worry and how your child is feeling. Discuss who the best person to take action on this worry is (e.g. them, you, teacher). Help your child come up with a plan for how to change the worry (e.g. you can talk to their teacher about why their homework wasn't finished). Once the worry is sorted, encourage your child to put the worry in the bin.

Anxiety Toolkit

Practice some of these strategies with your child when they are calm. Try them together when they are finding things difficult, perhaps when talking through their worries, and see what helps.

Flower and Candle



- Breathe in slowly through your nose as you smell the flower
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth as you blow out the candle
- Repeat 4 more times

Leticia Lemon



- Reach up to the tree and pick a lemon with each hand.
- Squeeze the lemon as hard as you can to get all the juice out.
- Throw the lemon on the floor and relax your hands.
- Repeat until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade!
- After your last squeeze and throw, shake out your hands to relax!

Star Breathing




- Trace the star with your finger.
- Keep going until you've traced the whole star.

Cole Turtle



- Pretend you're a turtle.
- Oh no, it's started to rain. Curl up tight under your shell for 10 seconds.
- Phew, the sun's out again. Come out of your shell for a relaxing walk.
- Repeat 4 more times.

Take 5



How do you feel now?
Are you calm or would you like to take another 5 breaths?

- Stretch out your hand like a star
- Slide the pointer finger of you other hand up each finger slowly
- Breathe in as you slide up your finger.
- Breathe out when you slide down your finger.
- Keep going until you've traced your whole hand

Jack the Lazy Cat



- Pretend you're a cat!
- Have a big yawn
- And a meow
- Now stretch out your arms, legs, and back – slowly, like a cat – and relax!

Create a First Aid Kit

Chat with your child about what makes them feel worried, angry, or sad. Ask them next what helps them to feel better. Support them to design a 'first aid kit' of ideas for what to do when they're struggling. This could be a physical box with things that help (chewy sweets, bubbles to help with breathing, a soft blanket etc.) or a drawing that reminds them to do the things that help.