

Anxiety resources

Activities to try at home

- Develop a routine of practising together relaxation techniques: how to unwind and reduce stress. These can include deep breathing, music, exercise, colouring in, etc. Help the pupil to find activities that help them unwind. You are modelling and teaching healthy ways of dealing with stress and anxiety.
- Practise problem-solving. Use different everyday worries, like a new school or meeting new people, to talk through ideas that could help manage the anxiety.

Focused distraction

This technique aims to alter the thoughts that tend to fuel anxiety. When we become anxious, we may over-focus on our breathing and our racing heart. We think thoughts like: *'I'm not going to cope with this.'*

Focused distraction involves focusing on the smallest detail of something in the immediate situation: perhaps the clouds in the sky or the grain on the desk. Encourage them to look closely at the colours and shapes of these things – perhaps they look like faces? This distraction technique can starve the anxiety of the negative thoughts it feeds on.

Positive self-talk

These are positive-thinking scripts that the pupil can say to themselves when they are beginning to feel anxious. For example:

- *"I know I can cope with this ..."*
- *"I've mastered this situation before ..."*
- *"I am going to be strong and brave and see this situation through ..."*

Get them to copy these statements onto a small card which they can keep with them.

Ask the pupil to think of three situations where they are:

- Mildly anxious
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

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- Extremely anxious

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

- Free from anxiety

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

Next, ask them to choose one of the situations that they ranked as making them mildly anxious. It is best to start on these because they are learning a new skill. As the pupil gets better at the skill, then move towards the more anxiety-provoking ones.

Now say to them: *"Every time you start to become anxious in this situation, take three deep breaths and practise using positive self-talk. Each time you use it, remember to rate how anxious you felt."* A rating can be made like this: *"After using positive self-talk I felt the same / a little less anxious / much less anxious."*

Positive thinking

It may seem difficult to control what we think, but it can be done. Little by little, pupils can learn to think positive thoughts.

Learning to remember and recall the positive 1

Encourage the pupil to complete sentences, either spoken or written, which focus on his positive skills and qualities:

- *"Three things I am good at are ..."*
- *"A new skill that I recently learned is ..."*
- *"My friends like me because ..."*
- *"Two things I like about myself are ..."*
- *"A very special and happy memory I have is ..."*

Do this with the pupil initially, and then encourage them to do it independently when they are feeling anxious.

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Learning to remember and recall the positive 2

Ask them to think of any three of the following and repeat them to themselves when needed:

- *"I look forward to ..."*
- *"I feel good about ..."*
- *"Something I do very well is ..."*
- *"I know I can ..."*
- *"One of my best qualities is ..."*
- *"People like it when I..."*
- *"A recent success was when I..."*
- *"One thing I like about myself is ..."*
- *"My favourite holiday was ..."*
- *"People can rely on me to ..."*
- *"A recent difficulty I overcame was ..."*
- *"A favourite memory I have is ..."*
- *"I feel good when I..."*
- *"I am at my best when I..."*
- *"A skill I have recently learned is ..."*

Relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques are intended to give pupils an understanding of how the physiological and muscular responses to anxiety affect them, while providing them with specific skills to enable them to control these reactions.

Sometimes it is useful to think of anxiety like a 'burglar alarm'. Like anxiety, the job of a burglar alarm is to spot danger and to warn us about it so that we can take action to prevent us being harmed. However, if a burglar alarm is too sensitive and it goes off when there isn't any real danger, this can cause problems. It can lead to us feeling distressed when we don't need to, and confused about what is a 'real alarm' and what is a 'false alarm'. In our body, the alarm can trigger changes such as fast shallow breathing and muscle tension.

Problems can also arise if we don't take appropriate action when a burglar alarm goes off. Anxiety can lead to fear and, when these two join, then panic is the likely response. Anxiety

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is a very useful warning system for telling us that things are not right and that we should take action to prevent something undesirable happening to us. However, problems can arise when:

- we are 'too sensitive' and feel anxious when there isn't any significant threat
- we either take no action when we need to, take action which does not work or take action that causes problems.

Visualisation and guided imagery

This involves the pupil actively visualising a scene that they find quiet and relaxing – a time and place where they felt calm, safe, confident and in control. The scene itself is less important than the feelings associated with it. The more detail that can be included, the better: the sights, sounds and smells are all important. This is then used to help them control situations in which they feel anxious.

- Ask them to list four situations in school that make them feel nervous and anxious. Ask: *"Which of these make you feel most anxious? Rank them in order from 1 for the worst to 4 for the least anxiety-provoking."*
- Now, using what is called 'guided imagery', ask the pupil to think of a really pleasant, peaceful, situation, place or activity and to take time to describe it in as much detail as they can. Prompt, for example: *"Where are you? Are you inside or out? Are you on your own or with friends? What can you see, smell or touch? What are you wearing? What are you feeling like inside?"*
- Work to get the pupil to commit this scene to memory: he could record it in a soft voice on a suitable device to play back whenever they want.
- Now ask the pupil to choose one of the situations that he ranked 3 or 4 in terms of anxiety-provoking. It is best to start on these because they are learning a new skill. (As they get better at the skill, then they can move towards the more anxiety-provoking ones.)

Now say to the pupil: *"Every time you start to become anxious in this situation, take three deep breaths and practise remembering the situation where you were relaxed and happy. You cannot be both relaxed and tense at the same time. The more you use this technique, the easier it will become for you to be in control. Each time you use it, remember to rate how anxious you felt." A rating can be made like this: "After using guided imagery I felt the same / a little less anxious / much less anxious."*

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Useful websites for teachers

<http://www.annafreud.org/media/4612/mwb-toolki-final-draft-4.pdf> – *Measuring and Monitoring Children and Young People's Mental Wellbeing: A Toolkit for Schools and Colleges* is designed to raise awareness on mental health issues with a range of mental health and wellbeing assessment instruments.

<http://www.healthcentral.com/anxiety/school-258065-5.html> – Provides 20 classroom interventions for children with anxiety disorders.

<http://www.youngminds.org.uk> – Provides information and practical advice on anxiety for children and young people, parents/carers and professionals.

Useful websites and resources for parents

<http://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/anxiety-101> – *Anxiety 101: What You and Your Child Need to Know about Anxiety* gives useful practical ideas about understanding anxiety and managing it.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/renee-jain/9-things-every-parent-with-an-anxious-child-should-try_b_5651006.html – *9 Things Every Parent with an Anxious Child Should Try*: a user friendly problem-solving approach to managing anxiety.

<http://www.youngminds.org.uk> – Information and practical advice on anxiety for children and young people, parents and professionals.

http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/19579/cyp_parents_1_2_web.pdf – *Children and Young People with Anxiety: A Guide for Parents and Carers* looks at common anxiety disorders with tips for parents and school management.

Manassis, K. (2015) *Keys to Parenting Your Anxious Child* (Barrons Educational Series). Explains anxiety in children and teenagers with strategies to manage common problem areas.

Plummer, D. & Harper, A. (2010) *Helping Children to Cope with Change, Stress and Anxiety: A Photocopiable Activities Book* (Jessica Kingsley). Offers over 100 activities and games specifically aimed at helping children to build emotional resilience.

Sunderland, M. & Armstrong, N. (2001) *Willy and the Wobbly House: A Story for Children Who are Anxious or Obsessional* (Speechmark). A picture book written for 4–11-year-olds that promotes understanding and normality.

Wilson, R. et al. (2013) *Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children* (Health Communications). Clear explanation of anxiety and user-friendly steps to manage it.

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Further reading for teachers

Young people who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have the right to be supported by informed professionals. The suggested readings are written by highly experienced academics and practitioners and are intended to further an in-depth understanding rather than a 'quick fix'.

Plummer, D. & Harper, A. (2010) *Helping Children to Cope with Change, Stress and Anxiety: A Photocopiable Activities Book* (Jessica Kingsley). Offers over 100 activities and games specifically aimed at helping children to build emotional resilience.

Reilly, N. (2015) *Anxiety and Depression in the Classroom: A Teacher's Guide to Fostering Self-Regulation in Young Students* (WW Norton). Practical ideas to increase a young person's control over anxiety and develop well being.

Schab, L. (2008) *The Anxiety Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Deal With Anxiety & Worry* (New Harbinger). Packed with tips and strategies to enable teenagers between 11–16 years to take control.

Stallard, P. (2002) *Think Good – Feel Good: A Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Workbook for Children and Young People* (John Wiley). How to control what we think through an understanding of the links between, thoughts, feelings and actions.