

# What is Anxiety?

# How can we help?



Wokingham  
School Nurses  
Berkshire Healthcare

# Aims and Objectives

- To understand and recognise Anxiety
  - Have an awareness of how to build a child's resilience
  - To walk away with practical techniques to help you support your children when anxious and after.
-

# Role of School Nurse

- Our team is a multi-skill team of Specialist Community Health Nurses, School Staff Nurses, a Nursery Nurse & School Health Assistants
- Provide health advice, support and guidance to children, young people & their families
- Deliver Health Promotion sessions to schools
- Offer 1:1 appointments face-to-face in schools and drop-in clinics for Secondary schools
- Hold an Enuresis Clinic once a week



We help children, young people and their families in Bracknell, Wokingham, West Berkshire and Reading with issues such as:

- Enuresis (bedwetting) clinics
- Emotional health (anxiety, depression, self harm)
- Behaviour concerns
- Weight management
- Sleep
- Bullying
- Relationships
- Sexual health
- Body changes
- Alcohol/drugs/smoking

We run the **National Child Measurement Programme** (which measures the height & weight of children in reception & year 6) and **train school staff** in managing conditions such as asthma, epilepsy and severe allergic reactions in school. We also work closely with social care settings with regards to **safeguarding**.

#### How to access support

Referrals often come from schools but can be made by the young person or their parent or carer and there are links to the referral forms for each location on our website.

Parents and carers and young people can also text a school nurse in total confidence using **ChatHealth**, if they live in one of the areas that we cover.

- For young people 11-19: 07312 263266
- For parents of 5-19 year olds: 07312 263194

[cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/  
school-nursing](https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/school-nursing)



# True or False

If you feel anxious all the time for no reason, you should talk to your healthcare provider?

**TRUE**

Anxiety only affects your emotions

**FALSE**

Everyone will experience anxiety

**TRUE**

If you have a mental illness, you have it for life

**FALSE**

---

# What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a **normal emotion** – it's one of our body's natural reactions to stress.

For young people, **some level of anxiety is normal** as they grow up and learn to navigate the world.

However, it's important that they have the **tools to manage feelings of anxiety** and are able to tell the difference between normal emotions and more severe anxiety which is interfering with their everyday life.

---

# Anxiety versus Low Mood

There are some similarities between anxiety and low mood. However, there are also clear differences.

These are:

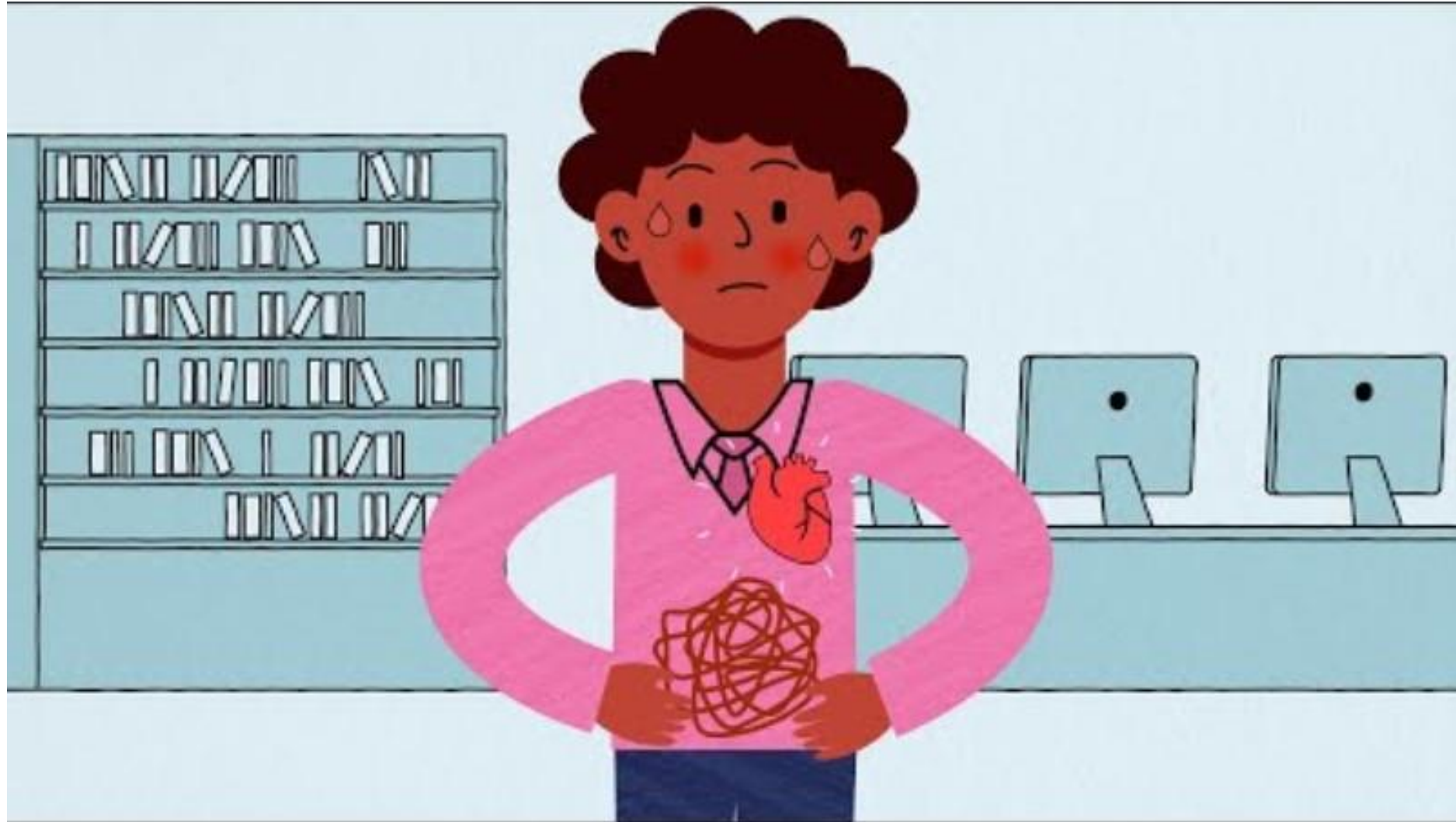
## Anxiety

- Sweaty or shaky feeling
- Racing heart
- Feelings of dread

## Low Mood

- Feelings of consistent sadness
  - Feelings of hopelessness
  - Fatigue/tired all or most of the time
-

# What is Anxiety?



# Anxiety Triggers

Some potential triggers for anxiety:

- Crowds/lots of people
- New environments
- Loud noises
- Heights
- Small spaces
- Exams
- Being asked to read/answer a question in class/public speaking
- Not understanding the work set
- The unknown



# When is anxiety a concern?

- When it is constant and intense and becomes too overwhelming.
- When anxiety occurs where there is no 'real' threat or when a threat becomes exaggerated.
- When anxiety starts to interfere with a young person's daily lifestyle and stops them from enjoying the things they used to do then this also is a concern.



# Brain Development

A human brain does not fully develop until **the age of 25**.

When a child develops into an adult, they will go through changes that will affect the way they make decisions.

**The amygdala** is part of the brain that is linked to **survival responses**.

- Cannot tell the difference between real or perceived threats.
- Triggers uncontrollable response to alleged threat.
- Linked with memories made.

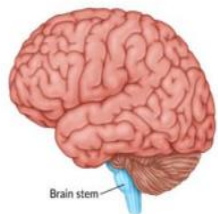


High levels of stress hormone that is not managed will affect brain development.

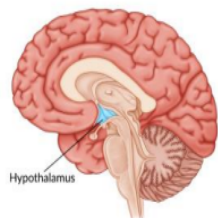
---

# Hand Brain Model – Dan SIGEL

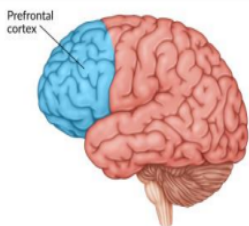
*Explaining how the brain works?*



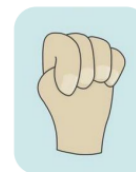
Think of your wrist as the **brain stem**. This is responsible for basic bodily functions, like breathing and keeping your heart pumping.



Your thumb, tucked in, sits in the middle. Think of this as the **amygdala**, which is in the centre of the brain. This is responsible for sensing danger and communicating this to the rest of the brain and body.



Think of your fingers as your **prefrontal cortex**. This is responsible for managing emotions and making complex decisions, also known as your executive functioning.



When the amygdala sounds the alarm that there is a threat, the pre-frontal cortex goes offline. This is known as **"flipping your lid"**. This is why it is hard to make thoughtful decisions when upset, angry or scared. In these moments, the brain needs to take a break to reflect and reconnect.



When the **pre-frontal cortex is engaged**, this allows calm, rational thought and mental flexibility. This means you are able to make good decisions.

When the **lid is flipped** and the **amygdala is engaged**, big emotions will arise. This includes anger, fear, anxiety and sadness. This means you are not able to make good decisions or calm down.



# How can I tell if my child is anxious?

There are **different reasons** for a child to become anxious and this can include the following:

- Friendship issues
- Worrying about doing well in school
- Traumatic events that may have occurred
- Body image worries
- Social media

There are **some signs** that can help you indicate if your child is experiencing anxiety such as:

- Avoiding social activities
- Seeking reassurance constantly
- Difficulty leaving the house
- Difficulty concentrating, relaxing or sleeping



# Thoughts and Feelings

Whilst the young person's brain is developing, they will experience different emotions, and this may include anxiety.

Anxiety can present as physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms.

**Physical** – Tight chest, hyperventilating, excessive sweating etc.

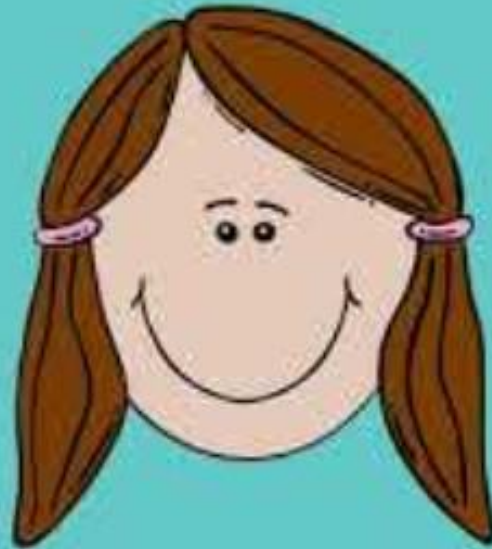
**Emotional** – Worry, panic, feeling of impending doom etc.

**Behavioural** – Biting nail, picking at skin, pulling hair out etc.



Anxiety can feel overwhelming for someone, and it is important to recognise these symptoms, to provide reassurance and support.

---



# FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE!

**FIGHT, FLIGHT or FREEZE** – This is the physical reactions a person might feel when experiencing anxiety.

**Fight** – Fighting the source of anxiety

**Flight** – Avoiding the source of anxiety

**Freeze** - Stopped by the source of anxiety



To be able to fight the source of anxiety will help your child to face their fears and manage their anxiety.

---

# What does it look like?

## Fight

- Acting out
- Behaving aggressively
- Exhibiting defiance
- Being hyperactive
- Arguing
- Screaming or yelling

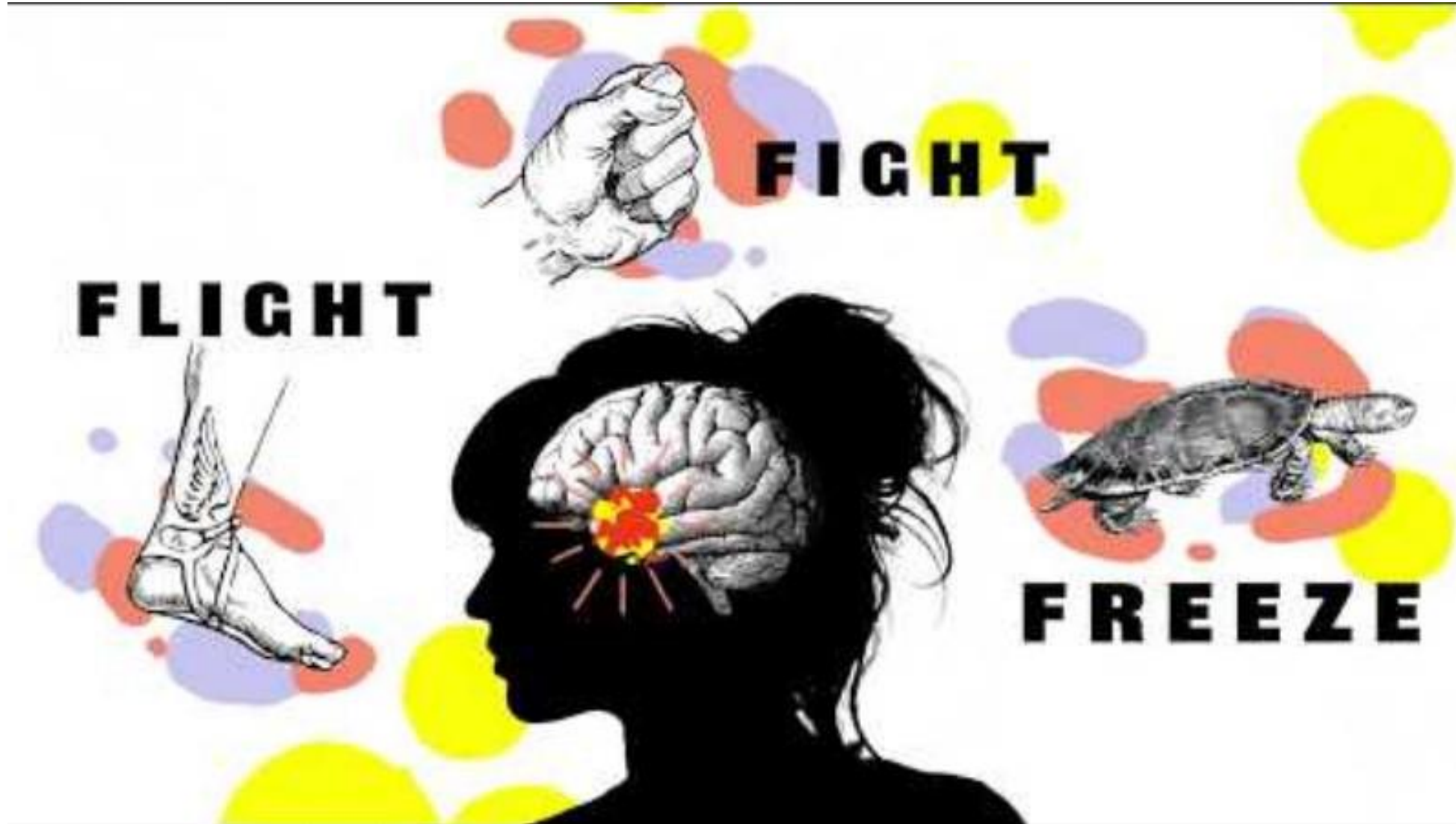
## Flight

- Withdrawing
- Becoming disengaged
- Fleeing the classroom or room at home
- Skipping class
- Day dreaming
- Avoiding others

## Freeze

- Exhibiting numbness
- Refusing to answer
- Feeling unable to move
- Giving a blank look
- Sense of stiffness





# What is resilience?

**Resilience** is the **capacity to recover quickly** from difficulties or tough situations.

We build resilience through:

- Experiences
- Strong support/guidance from family and friends
- Building and learning from tough experiences
- Creating coping strategies





# What can you do 'in the moment'?

- Stay Calm and focus on your child's needs
- Keep your emotions in check
- Avoid asking 'why' instead look to acknowledge their feelings
- Listen
- Let them know what they are feeling will pass, a bit like a wave. Explore what might help distract them.
- A quiet place can also be the best thing you can do – some children might not want to talk whilst they feel anxious so sitting in a quiet area can give them a safe space.



*Do not take it personally as a parent your child might be reacting from one of the 3 natural responses.*

# What do I say to my child?

**Give reassurance carefully** – reassure your child that you are there for them but also ensure they know you believe they can manage their emotions independently e.g. “I believe you can do it”

**Notice and validate when they overcome a fear themselves** e.g. “It was great that you were able to calm your anxiety using that breathing technique” or “going for a walk with a friend really seems to help when you are getting anxious”

**Validate their emotions** – even when we do not understand a child’s behaviour or emotional response, it is important to acknowledge how they feel e.g. “I can understand why you might be feeling worried. When I feel like that, I try to...”

---

# Pace Approach

## Playfulness:

Using a light-hearted, reassuring tone - similar to parent-infant interactions - to creating an atmosphere of safety and reassurance where no one feels judged and your child feels able to cope with positive feelings

## Acceptance:

Acceptance is about actively communicating that you accept the feelings, thoughts and internal struggles that are underneath the child's outward behaviour. It is not about accepting the behaviour itself but helping to teach the child to not feel ashamed by their inner turmoil.

## Curiosity:

Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children become aware of their inner life. It's about wondering out loud without necessarily expecting an answer in return. Phrases like "I wonder if..." will help the child to put a name to their emotions and thoughts.

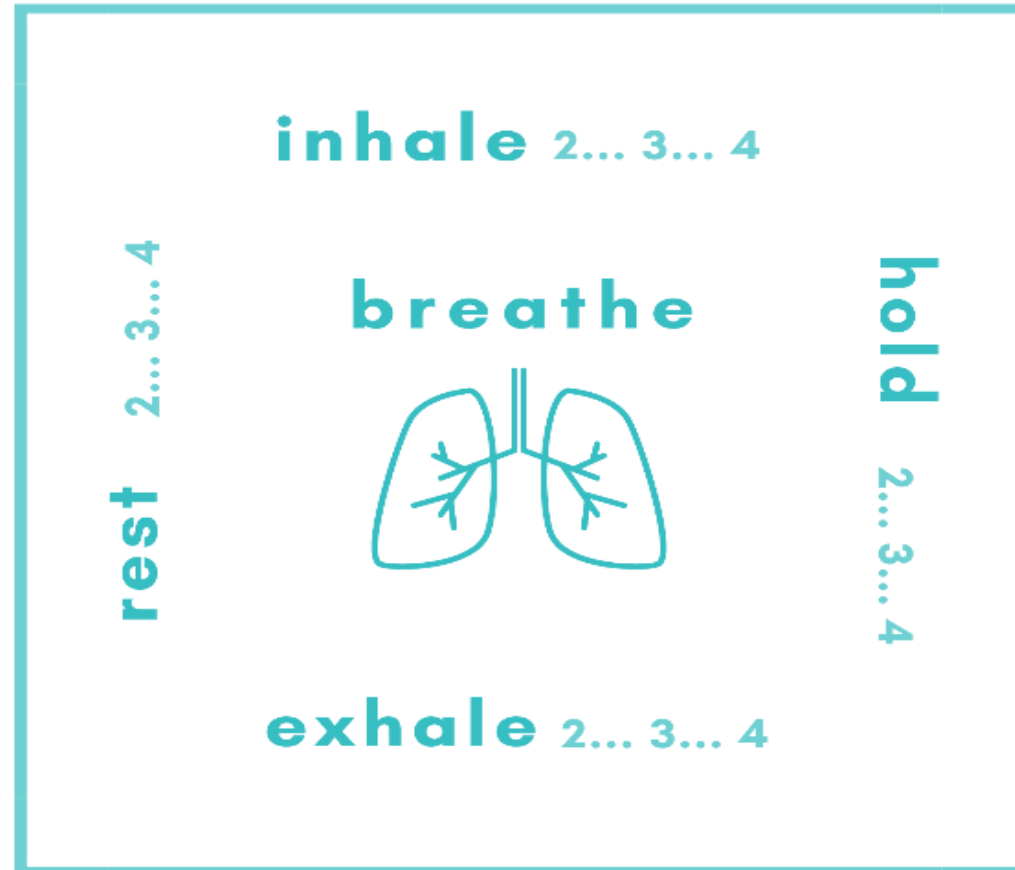
## Empathy:

Feeling a child's sadness or distress with them, being emotionally available to them during times of difficulty shows the child that they are not alone, and that the adults are strong enough to support them both through it.

---

# Box Breathing

## SQUARE BREATHING



# Grounding technique

## 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 GROUNDING EXERCISE

 **5** Things you can  
**SEE**

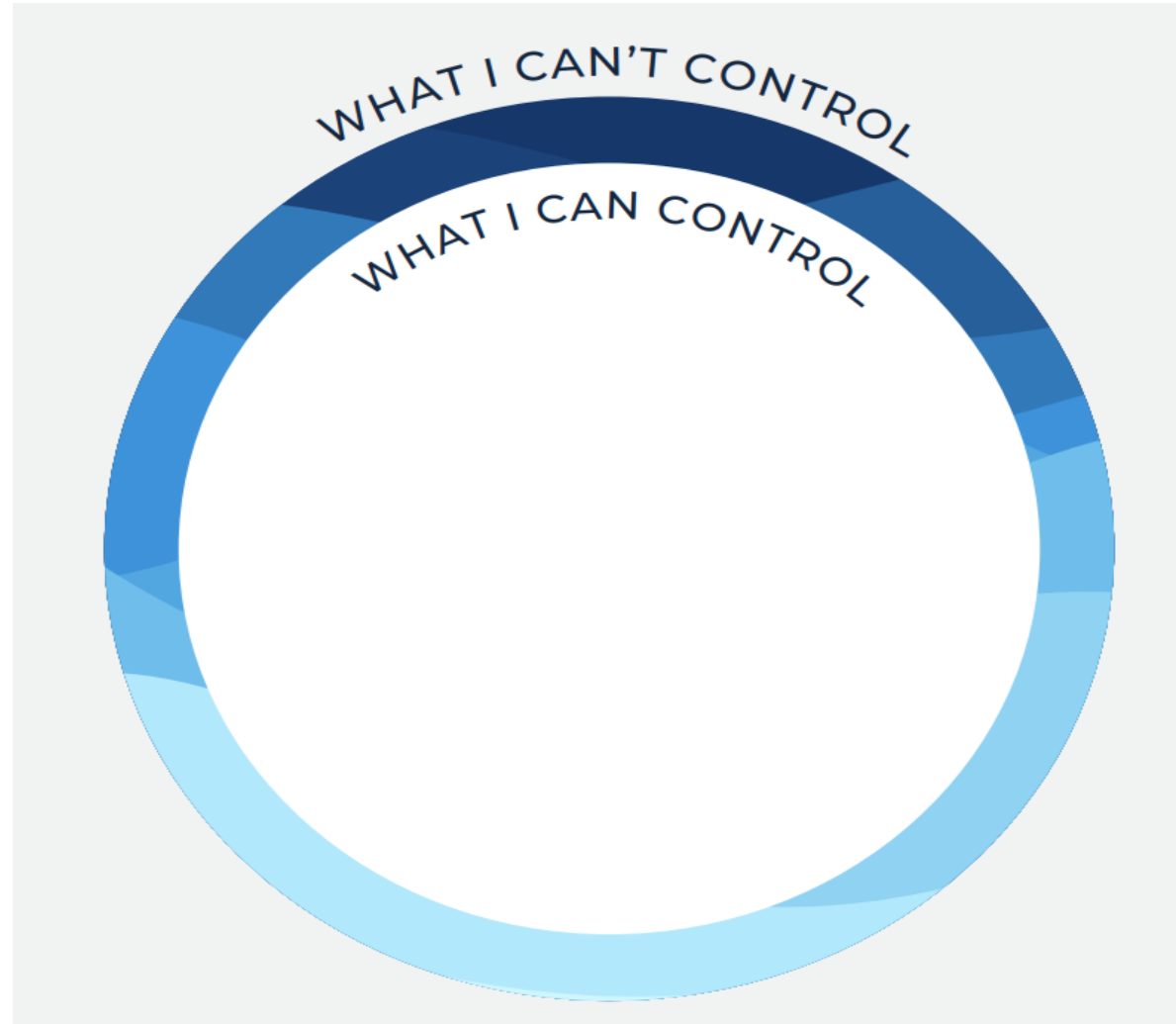
 **4** Things you can  
**FEEL**

 **3** Things you can  
**HEAR**

 **2** Things you can  
**SMELL**

 **1** Things you can  
**TASTE**

# Control circle



# Feel good box

Make a box of physical things which remind them of happy times and positive feelings e.g. pictures, toys or small objects which have a good memory attached to them, tickets from events, photos.



# Positive self-talk

Helping your child with **positive affirmations** can allow your child to build a better relationships with themselves.

## Ideas:

- Put up posters that have positive motivational words e.g. “You can do this” or “You are special”
  - Acknowledging their thoughts and feelings and helping them see a positive e.g. “I understand that you are feeling this way, let’s look at this another way”
  - Placing words of affirmation in the bathroom, where they might be getting ready for the day e.g. “You are great” or “I can do it; I have done it before”
-

# The worry balloon or Worry Box

This exercise allows your child to write everything that worries them onto a balloon or into a box, once they have done this, they can let it all go.

This exercise helps your child to understand that their worries won't last forever.

---

# Anxiety Support and Information

- **School Nurse** – Face to face help and support
- **TellMi** – Mental Health Support App – [Tellmi](#) (Teenagers)
- **Young Minds** – Online Support and information – [YoungMinds | Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People | YoungMinds](#)
- **The Mix** – Online support and information – [Get Support - The Mix](#)
- **ARC Counselling** – face to face counselling - [Home - ARC \(arcweb.org.uk\)](#)
- **No5. Counselling** – face to face counselling - [No5 - Free Counselling Services - Reading | No5 - Free Counselling Services - Reading](#)



# Thank you

# ANY QUESTIONS?





Confidential, anonymous health support & advice by text for

**Parents of Children & Young People aged 5 - 19**



**07312 263194**



**Please complete a feedback  
form.**