

6 TIPS TO COPE WITH ANXIETY

Anxiety is a feeling of unease. Everyone has feeling of anxiety at some point in his or her life. Often this anxiety is perfectly normal and keeps us safe (helps us jump out of the way of a car coming towards us) or helps us be prepared (before tests/exams). This feeling of fear and worry can be severe or mild. Some people find it hard to control their worries and this can affect their day to day lives.

Here are some ideas that can help manage and cope better with anxiety: **(Please note, the websites mentioned in this pack have been checked, but we cannot guarantee the suitability of sites visited and they are only a suggestion, not an endorsement of that provider of information).**

1 Exercise

The Mayo Clinic, a medical research group <http://www.mayoclinic.org> gives the following explanation as to how exercise can help anxiety and depression:

- **feel-good brain chemicals** that may ease depression (neurotransmitters, endorphins and endocannabinoids)
- **Reducing immune system chemicals** that can worsen depression
- **Increasing body temperature**, which may have calming effects. Regular exercise has many psychological and emotional benefits, too. It can help you:
- **Gain confidence.** Meeting exercise goals or challenges, even small ones, can boost your self-confidence. Getting in shape can also make you feel better about your appearance.
- **Take your mind off worries.** Exercise is a distraction that can get you away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed anxiety and depression.
- **Get more social interaction.** Exercise and physical activity may give you the chance to meet or socialize with others. Just exchanging a friendly smile or greeting as you walk around your neighborhood can help your mood.
- **Cope in a healthy way.** Doing something positive to manage anxiety or depression is a healthy coping strategy. Trying to feel better by drinking alcohol, dwelling on how badly you feel, or hoping anxiety or depression will go away on its own can lead to worsening symptoms.

2 Be a Thought Detective

We control our thoughts, not the other way around. If we can start to notice when a thought does not make us feel calm or good we can challenge it or stop it by consciously changing our thoughts. Often, the worry or stressful thought will emerge again but again, consciously think of something else positive to replace the negative thought. Worry is the brain's way of keeping us safe, and to make sure we pay attention the brain allows these thoughts to return and sometimes exaggerate the

cause of the worry. Some people find have a wrist band or picture of a favourite place or pet etc. can help to distract from the negative thinking and remind them to redirect their thoughts.

Use NOW:

Notice your thoughts: As you start to worry about something, try to notice it. You may be able to picture it like in a comic strip or visualize a word related to the worry. You may want to write it down or draw it.

Observe the thoughts and think about why you are thinking them, what caused them and consider is this a fact or a thought/feeling getting carried away. Feelings and thoughts are not facts.

Win. Challenge your thoughts and don't let them win. Draw a funny picture of beating your worries, list lots of positives, distract yourself, talk it through, remind yourself- these are just thoughts and I am not giving them any more attention!

3 Breathe

Counting the breath if very anxious can help. It distracts you from negative thinking. In addition, if you make the outer breath longer than the in breath, this tricks the body into thinking you are calm even if you are not as it slows the heart rate down. If your physical stress response is reduced then your mind will feel calmer and vice-versa.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rozgJyJomyg>

4 Mindfulness and Relaxation

We mentally spend a lot of time in the worrying about the past or fearing the future. Thoughts such as 'I can't believe I did that, what will they think?' or 'What if they don't like me?' Research shows that focusing on the present can help. One effective method of doing focusing on the now/present moment, is through mindfulness exercises.

Mindfulness could be completely focusing on a task or going for a walk and noticing everything around you, so you are noticing what is, at that moment not what maybe or worrying about the 'What ifs'. Guided-meditation CDs can help. Not all people like them, but those that do, find them extremely beneficial. As you are following a voice/what someone is saying, you cannot then, dwell on negative thoughts. This enables your mind to calm and racing thoughts to slow down. This, in turn, enables you to have a clearer perspective of things. You are more likely to see solutions to problems rather than worrying and getting upset. Yoga and guided relaxation (where you relax one part of your body at a time, from forehead to toes) can also be helpful. There are lots of Apps and audio tracks on YouTube available.

5 Distraction

Doing activities which we enjoy or occupy our minds to distract thoughts from getting out of control This could be craft, watching a TV programme, tidying up etc. Avoid over use of screens/video games however as these can be over stimulating. At times the anxiety may return or require attention but at times these distracting techniques can stop the anxiety from spiralling out of control. Affirmations may help as they distract the mind

(you can't simultaneously think two thoughts at once) but also, they are positive in nature and this can help foster a more positive perspective. Mentally repeating a phrase such as: 'I am ok' 'This feeling will pass', 'Every day and every way I am getting better and better' are examples of affirmations.

6 Routine and Organise

If the anxiety is around workload then some people find making lists and clear timetables useful. Writing things down can be useful to help plan but also feel in control of what needs to be done. Also, if you feel overwhelmed and anxious it can feel impossible to know what to do and fear about what may happen can take over. Setting small goals and targets and planning them or putting them in the diary can help. It may help to go with someone you feel comfortable with or try something you are familiar with first and build up to trying different environments or meeting new people.

Get Creative: Find what works for you!


You could start by investigating what helps to calm **you** down. We are all different. Just as the causes of our anxieties may be different, so will the way in which we calm ourselves down differ. Use the grid below or note down things you try to help you calm in different situations.

Perhaps try this for 6 weeks or so, until you have a list of tried and tested strategies- what helps a bit, a lot or not at all. Then, make a checklist so you have your own way to calm down. What do you need to do when you first feel anxiety coming on? If breathing helps them, then the first step is to pause and breathe. Step 2 may be to get moving to shift the feeling of unease, then a shower and a relaxing show on TV may help. Create your own personal check list, print it off, add colour, and happy images, and stick it on the wall. Use it when the anxiety appears!

Example Record

Score Anxiety Before the strategy (1 awful, 10 great)	Strategy Tried and details	Time spent on activity/strategy	Score after the strategy was used (1 =awful, 10 great)	Rating Red Amber or Green (Red =not effective, Amber=a little helpful, Green helped a lot)
3	Breathing	3 minutes	6	*
2	Exercise(what type?) run	15 minutes	8	*
	Distraction (what type?)			
	Affirmations (write it here)			
	Mindfulness CD			
	Breathing App			

When you have your 3 greens or, most effective strategies make a reminder notice! An example is below.

My 3 steps to feeling calmer	
1	Breathe for 3 minutes (in for 5 out for 8 seconds)
2	Go for a run 15 minutes -to the shops and back
3	Shower and read my comic in the lounge
EVERY DAY AND EVERY WAY I AM GETTING BETTER AND BETTER!	
	

This is a 3-point scale example. You can use this to identify how you feel when you are calm, a little unsettled or very anxious. Learn to notice how this feels physically and in your mind. Write how this feels-any words that describe it in the second column. In the final column write ways you can calm yourself down. This could be used in a similar way to the chart above. Use the strategies that work for you and put them in the last column. Use them to help you get from a red / 3 down to a 2 or a 1 or an Amber 2 down to a 1.

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; color: red;">3</p>	<p style="color: red;">Throat feels tight, hot, panic, sick, stressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathing- longer out • breath • Run, 20 minutes or until I feel calmer and • less panic • Breathe again • Shower • TV and a treat for • calming
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; color: orange;">2</p>	<p style="color: orange;">Stomach churning, nervous, scared</p>	<p style="color: orange;">-Breathing long out breaths -Distract, read comic -Mindfulness CD</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; color: green;">1</p>	<p style="color: green;">Happy, chilled, still, calm</p>	<p style="color: green;">I am fine. Just keep doing what I am doing 😊</p>

Feeling Cards

The below can be cut up and used as cards. If you feel very anxious but cannot communicate or tell others how you feel, you can use these cards to help. Then your teacher or family will know you need some calm time or to use the strategies on your scale or chart.



**Feeling very anxious
I need help to calm down**



**Something is bothering me
and I am not feeling good**



**I am calm and happy.
Everything is ok**

Scripts

Scripts like the one below can help to calm you. Read it through when you need. You can alter it, fill in the blanks to suit you!

Sometimes I feel worried.

It's okay to feel worried.

Everyone feels worried sometimes.

I can tell that I am worried when

When I feel worried I can _____ (e.g. take 4 deep breaths)

When I have _____ (taken the breaths) _____ I can go to talk to my teacher or my mum or dad and tell them I feel worried.

I can use my strategies to feel calm again.

This moment will pass.

I will feel calm again

If despite trying some of the suggestions in this pack no improvement seems apparent or you feel worse, talk to the school nurse/family doctor for further advice.