

# ADVICE FOR PARENTS

## RETURNING TO SCHOOL - HELPING YOUR CHILD TO MANAGE WORRIES AND ANXIETIES

Anxiety is the body's normal reaction to stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar situations, either real or perceived. COVID-19 has affected or raised concerns for us all. It is important we share the following messages with children to ease worries they may have as they return to school.

- Anxieties are normal and they do pass – it can help to share experiences with young people of a personal worry that you have overcome in the past.
- Anxiety and worry are unpleasant and distort our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In anxiety provoking situations we can think and act irrationally – you could use an example of the recent hoarding of food items during lockdown and how on reflection this was unnecessary. This could be explained by our desire to make sense of and control situations - recently we have had very little control over our day to day lives and looked to ease our anxiety by regaining control in unfamiliar situations.
- We can make worries bigger and all-consuming by thinking about them without taking steps to address them.
- We can also pass on worries to the people around us without realising - we have mirror neurones in our brain which subconsciously pick up signals from others and give us the capacity to copy these responses
- When we are worried we stop 'socially engaging', for example (our talk is shorter, our tone changes and it takes more effort to think of others) This is all normal as our bodies flood with stress hormones, but young children have the capacity to pick up on these non-verbal signals: the tone of your voice; your body language. You may be trying to protect them from hearing how worried you are but chances are they can see and feel the tension around them.
- The attention principle can be applied to young people's worry. As we know with behaviour, what we pay attention to we get more of! Telling our young people not to worry will not help. Acknowledging their worry as an expected emotion in this situation and emphasising it will pass as we return to our daily routines will help normalise and reduce their worries.

# HELPFUL TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

1. Regulate yourself - learn to read your own body and calm it down. Engage in controlled breathing exercises and mindfulness activities with your children - The Healthy Minds Team have shared resources with schools - ask your child if they can teach you some they have learned or access via the links on this page.
2. When your child is worried, learn to recognise the signs (it can come in any form: rejection, withdrawal, anger, over-excitement or tears). Rather than tell them to calm down, show them how to: model relaxation activities (yoga, singing, stretching); give them a hug; spend time with them.
3. Check your responses - would you talk to a friend the way you talked to your child or partner? We tend to be less guarded with people we love and live with.
4. Acknowledging their feelings – ‘I can see you are upset. I can see this is really frustrating for you’ is more helpful and easier to respond to for a young person than ‘what’s wrong?’ - it also makes it easier to see the worry as separate to their personality and therefore easier to deal with.
5. Identify irrational or unlikely worries and have a plan to deal with real or likely worries. Having plans reduces fear of the unknown and eases worry.
6. Teach your child that we can tell our brains to worry and they will; or we can focus our attention on more helpful or positive thoughts.
7. Our bodies like to feel balanced and produce hormones to help with this. When the stress hormones go up our oxytocin (feel good hormone) goes down. However, if oxytocin goes up our stress hormones come down.
8. We can increase our oxytocin easily – physical connection such as a cuddle, sharing positive experiences, playing a favourite game together or a favourite food can ease worries and stress.

9. Ask school for help or search resources on The Healthy Minds Team Padlet. We have produced a child friendly introduction to why our bodies can feel worried and tips to help manage this worry.
10. If you need additional support or the worries increase, The Healthy Minds Team are currently supporting young people and their families remotely. We can offer individual therapy or parent led sessions to identify possible triggers or unhelpful thinking patterns that may be causing high levels of worry.

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

There are lots of helpful links that you may find useful, The Healthy Minds Team has collated this information on our Padlet site which can be accessed at: <https://padlet.com/joannecomerford/yfgynw4bu28wxl36>

Kooth provides a safe and secure means of accessing mental health and wellbeing support designed specifically for young people. To find out more visit: [www.Kooth.com](http://www.Kooth.com). Where young people can register and others can find out more about the service.

You may find that you are struggling with your own mental health or emotional wellbeing, you can access support for yourself by visiting: [www.southtynesidelifecyclementalhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.southtynesidelifecyclementalhealth.nhs.uk)

If you feel that your child requires a personal intervention or access to internet therapy, please call South Tyneside Lifecycle Talking Therapies on 0191 2832937 to discuss this further. If your child is experiencing mental health crisis requiring immediate response from the Crisis Team, please telephone 0191 5665500.

Recovery College has online courses to develop learning and understanding around resilience.

There are two courses **Exploring Psychological Resilience** is for young people aged 13-18 and **Developing Resilience** (under 12's) which helps children learn more about what resilience is and how they can be more resilient. You can access these courses at [www.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk](http://www.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk)