



## Parenting during pandemic

### Day 4: Managing worries children may have about coronavirus and schools being closed

Hopefully both you and your children are beginning to get into some routines around staying at home and we hope that our blogs have been helpful with some of this. Today's blog focuses on worries and anxieties children may have either about coronavirus, schools being closed or both. You may already have seen our guide to talking to children about coronavirus without making them anxious but if not, you can [access it here](#). You may also have seen our guide to managing stress and anxiety during coronavirus but if not, you can [access it here](#). This explains what anxiety is, how it presents and advice on what to do about it for adults but this blog is about children.

#### Reducing physical symptoms of anxiety in children

**Breathing techniques** – as with adults, children are known to change how they breathe when they are anxious so one way to help them is to encourage a change in breathing when they are anxious. This slows down everything that is happening in the body, therefore reducing the physical symptoms of anxiety and the added benefit is that by focusing on breathing for a few minutes, they are also distracting from the worries that tend to go along with anxiety.

For children, it's difficult to think about breathing because we take it so much for granted and don't usually have to think about it. It can be helpful, then, to make it fun. For example, pretend to have a flower in front of you. Smell the flower (taking a long, slow, deep breath) then pretend to blow the petals off the flower (with a long, slow breath). Another way is to pretend to have a toy boat on the water, take a deep breath then blow the boat out into the water.

**Relaxation techniques** – these are helpful for releasing any tension children are holding in their muscles when they are anxious. There are lots of relaxation techniques for children and you can have a look together and try a few to see what's helpful. One quick one is to pretend to stand up straight and tall holding tension in the muscles like a soldier or guard. Then, pretend to flop on a chair like a floppy teddy or favourite soft toy. This teaches children the

difference between holding tension in their muscles and adopting a more relaxed or chilled out posture.

### **Reducing cognitive symptoms of anxiety in children**

**Distraction** – when we worry, it can be difficult to distract ourselves because the thing that is worrying us is quite important to us so our attention system prioritises it. Young children can look to you to tell them what is important to pay attention to so if you distract them with something, they may go with it. As they get older, they will need a bit more encouragement around this so you may have to distract with something really fun or something you think they would really enjoy doing. Distraction will not take away the worry though, it will literally distract from it.

**Positive self talk** – in our adult guide to managing anxiety, we suggest using positive self talk to manage anxiety. For children, you can ask them to think about (and write down or draw) the different things that different people tell them when they are anxious. It may be that someone says “You’re ok” and someone else says “it’ll be fine” and someone else says “you can do it”. Children are often comforted by those they are close to so if they think about this and write it down or draw it out then they can refer to this in times of anxiety. Asking them to try positive self talk, where they think what they want to say to themselves rather than what others might say to them, can be helpful but they may find it difficult depending on age and stage. It’s helpful to try so that they learn about self care techniques as they grow up.

**Challenging worries** – this is where children are allowed to think about what’s bothering them but with the idea that they have to be a detective and find any clues or evidence that what they are thinking may not be totally true. If they are worried about not seeing friends from school, you could arrange a call with them and use this as evidence that their friends haven’t forgotten about them. If they are worried about school work, similarly look at some and point out that they are doing well and still have their academic skills.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing the fourth day off school and we hope you will join us again tomorrow.

### **Tomorrow’s topic: Self care for parents during the coronavirus pandemic**

Please [contact us with questions, comments or topics](#) you’d like to see covered. We’d love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.