

## Anxiety - 5 Simple Coping Strategies

On a recent training course run by Pooky Knightsmith of Creative Education, the following top tips were shared; I thought I would pass them onto you.

Try all these techniques in a time of calm and work out which one (s) work best for your child - it's all about cherry picking.

- a. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 - a grounding technique which keeps a child in the here and now, distracting them from their thoughts.

Ask your child to tell you 5 things they can see; 4 things they can hear; 3 things they can touch; 2 things they can smell; and then take 1 long breath.

- b. 5 Finger Breathing - this exercise can be done anywhere and by anyone of any age, not just a child.

Ask your child to spread their hand out like a starfish. Using a finger on the other hand, trace round the starfish hand, breathing in on the upward motion on each finger, pausing at the top and breathing out on the way down. Then pause.

Ask your child to shake their hands out and ask themselves - Do I feel better or do I want to do it again?

- c. Belly Breathing - this can be done anywhere and helps to slow breathing down when anxiety can make breathing quicker.

Ask your child to sit up straight with their hands on their belly. Tell them to breathe in deeply through their nose, through their belly which will push their belly out.

Ask your child to breathe out as far as they can and feel their hands move back again. This will encourage your child to tune into their breathing.

- d. Safe Space Visualisation - a therapeutic technique. This needs to be done when your child is calm and happy.

Tell your child to think of a time when they are calm and happy - this could be a memory or a regular activity.

Explore this as much as possible and create as rich a picture as you can: draw it, write about it; explore going to this place via all the senses. Practise going to this place at times of calm.

This can be used when your child is feeling anxious. When difficult feelings start to invade their head, encourage them to try and return to this space of safety.

This can also be used as a proactive calming measure as well as an emotional regulation technique.

It can sometimes help your child to use a prompt like a picture of this calm and happy place.

The more you practise going to this calm and happy place with your child, the better your child will become at escaping to their safe space.

- e. Progressive Muscle Relaxation - this is another technique that can be done anywhere by anyone. When we get anxious, our muscles tighten and this technique will help your child to relax, causing a change in physiology and therefore, a change in mindset. It can also help distract your child away from what's on their mind.

Encourage your child to work through their whole body, tightening their muscles, holding each one for 10 / 20 / 30 seconds and then relax. Start at their toes and work upwards. Again, the more this is practised, the greater the impact long term.

The 3 Ls - although this is not a technique, it is worth remembering the 3Ls when trying to support young people:

Laughter - the best medicine for us all and it helps to build a feeling of safety.

Listen - make time to give your child some undivided attention.

Love - let your child know how much you care about them; a smile, a wink and wave.

Finally, remember this:

"You don't have to be a hero; sometimes being a human is the best thing you can be."

*Pooky Knightsmith*

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