

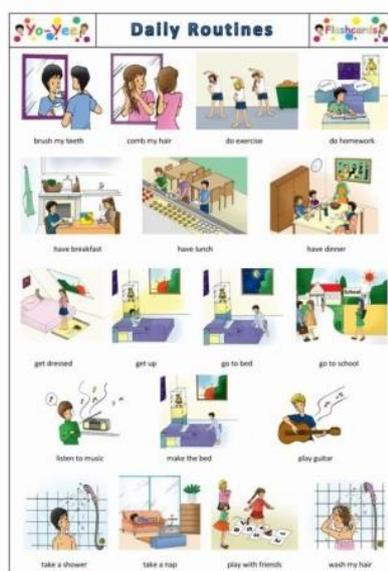
Anxiety Management Guidelines and Resources

- **Model calmness.** It's important to keep in mind that children and teens often react to what they see from the adults around them. Therefore when parents and caregivers deal with this outbreak calmly and confidently, they are providing the best support for their children.
- Teach your child to **recognise signs of anxiety in themselves**, and encourage them to manage their anxiety and **ask for help** when they need it.
- **Maintain a routine / structure.** Your child's routine has already been affected by the outbreak in many different ways. But during times like this, it is best to keep structure in the day - it may be helpful to use visual schedules. A typical routine may involve some academic time, exercise, creative time, jobs/chores, quiet time, family time etc.
- **Maintain a regular sleep routine.** Changes to your child's sleep cycle could impact their mood in the weeks or months ahead. If the uncertainty of the current situation is causing them to lose sleep, talk to them about their worries, rather than allowing them to think about it alone.
- For older children / teens: **stay informed, but set limits for the news.** The constant stream of news reports could cause them to feel

worried. Sometimes it can be difficult to separate facts from rumours. Read up-to-date, factual information on coronavirus from well-informed sources such as the HSE or the World Health Organisation.

- For older children / teens: **set limits for social media.** On social media, people may talk about their own worries or beliefs. Your child does not need to make these worries their own. Too much time on social media may increase their worry and levels of anxiety. Consider limiting how much time they spend on social media, or limit them to set times during the day to check for updates, to help protect them from being overwhelmed and confused.

- **Stay connected to others.** During times of stress, friends and families can be a good source of support. It is important to keep in touch with them and other people in your life. As we have been advised to limit social contact, try to stay connected to others in different ways. For example; e-mail, social media, video calls or phone calls can help you all stay social and feel connected to others in this time.



Relaxation & Distraction Techniques

These relaxation techniques may help reduce stress during these unprecedented times. Not all these techniques will work for everybody, so it's best to try what you think will work best for you and your child.

- Deep breathing – see below
- Mindfulness
- Deep muscle relaxation – see below
- Yoga – see Fun Activities section on the St. Joseph's Foundation website for yoga activities
- Squeezing a stress ball / using theraputty
- Taking a bath / shower
- Sleep



It may also be helpful to be distracted or complete an activity that helps them forget about their worries. Some examples:

- Doing something they enjoy
- Listening to music
- Reading
- Drawing / Colouring
- Playing with a pet
- Watching TV
- Playing computer games / jigsaw puzzles
- Physical exercise e.g. walking, running, cycling, trampoline, dancing, swinging
- Sensory activities (for example: deep pressure, water play, popping bubble wrap, theraputty, looking at a lava lamp)—see Occupational Therapy guidelines
- Fidget toys
- Sitting on a bean bag



Online Resources

Managing Anxiety: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-anxiety/>

Meditations: <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids>

<https://www.shambhala.com/sittingstilllikeafrog/>

Deep Breathing

Try **one** of the following breathing exercises and see which one works best for you and your child:

- 1) **Deep, slow breaths:** Inhale through the nose fully right down into the bottom of your lungs and exhale through the mouth (repeat 2-3 times and return to our normal breath)
- 2) **'Tension Down' exercise:**
 - a. Stand or sit with feet firmly on the floor.
 - b. Inhale through the nose and as you do notice any tension you have in your body. Imagine that you are 'picking up this tension' as you breathe in.
 - c. Exhale through your nose and slowly breathe out saying 'Tension Down'. Imagine the tension flowing down through your body, through your feet and out of the room and far away.
 - d. You can repeat the Tension Down exercise once or twice at a time. Then any time you notice yourself becoming tense repeat the sequence.
- 3) **Breathing out for longer**
 - a. Inhale through the nose to a count of 1,2,3,4
 - b. Exhale through the mouth for a count of 1,2,3,4,5 or 6
 - c. Repeat above steps for a minute or two, working at whatever pace is comfortable for you. When you are used to the practice you can stop the counting, so long as the out-breath is a little longer than the in-breath.
 - d. Return to your own natural breath

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

This exercise may be help to reduce anxiety in anxiety provoking situations. It is important to first teach your child how to perform the exercises so that he/she can subsequently use them independently.

Instructions

- Set aside two 5-10 minute sessions to complete these relaxation exercises with your child.
- Choose times when you will not be interrupted.
- Choose somewhere warm and quiet.
- Encourage him/her to sit in a comfortable chair or lie on his bed.
- Consider using background calming music (e.g. "Weightless" by Marconi Union).
- Tense each muscle group for 3-5 seconds.
- Repeat each exercise twice.
- Before and after each exercise, ask him/her to breathe in deeply and exhale slowly three times while saying the word "relax" to him/her.
- When all exercises are completed, praise him/her for completion of exercises.

Relaxation Exercises

Area	Exercise
Hands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clench your fists. Now open them slowly.
Arms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bend your arms at the elbow and touch your shoulders with your hands.
Shoulders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise your shoulders up to your ears and now, relax your shoulders.
Legs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Point your toes downwards. Now return them to the resting position.• Point your toes downwards. Now return them to the resting position.
Stomach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take a deep breath. Hold for 3 seconds while tensing the muscles in your stomach. Now, breathe out slowly.
Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clench your teeth tightly together and relax.• Scrunch you face and relax.• Close your eyes tightly and relax.
All Over	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Now that you've done all your muscle exercises, check that all of your muscles are relaxed. Relax your hands Relax your arms Relax your legs Relax your tummy Relax your face
Breathing	Breath IN .. two, three, four and OUT , two, three, four X 4