



# Feeling worried about going to school

## A help pack for young people

Created by Bolton Educational Psychology Service



Lots of young people feel worried about going to school and there are lots of reasons for this too. Circle or colour in if you think any of these reasons too:

I don't feel good when I'm at school.

I'm worried that I will have no one to sit with at lunch.

I worry about the work being too hard.

School is stressful.

I'm worried about my mum/ dad/ carer/ brother/ sister/ gran/ grandpa / dog.

I prefer to be at home with \_\_\_\_\_.

People are not nice to me.

I don't have any friends.

It's better at home because I can go on my video games.

I don't feel safe at school.

I don't like where I sit.

I'm worried about getting into trouble.

I worry about being asked to read out loud in front of my class.

The school bus is scary.

School is too noisy.

Add in your own



## What is in this pack?

This pack includes lots of ideas to help you feel better about going to school. Your school and parents/ carers are creating a plan too and should involve you in this. You can read the sections in order or go to the section that you think might be the most useful.

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## Find out what works for you?

You may find that you really like some of the strategies in the next few section and feel they work really well for you and you may find that some don't. Find out what works for you and try to do them often.

Top tips when using this pack:

- Use the action plan table to plan for your week (page 24).
- Cut out the coping cards of the strategies that you find the most helpful and carry them with you or put them somewhere that you can see them everyday (page 26).
- Ask the adults you trust to help you.

## Why don't other people feel this way?

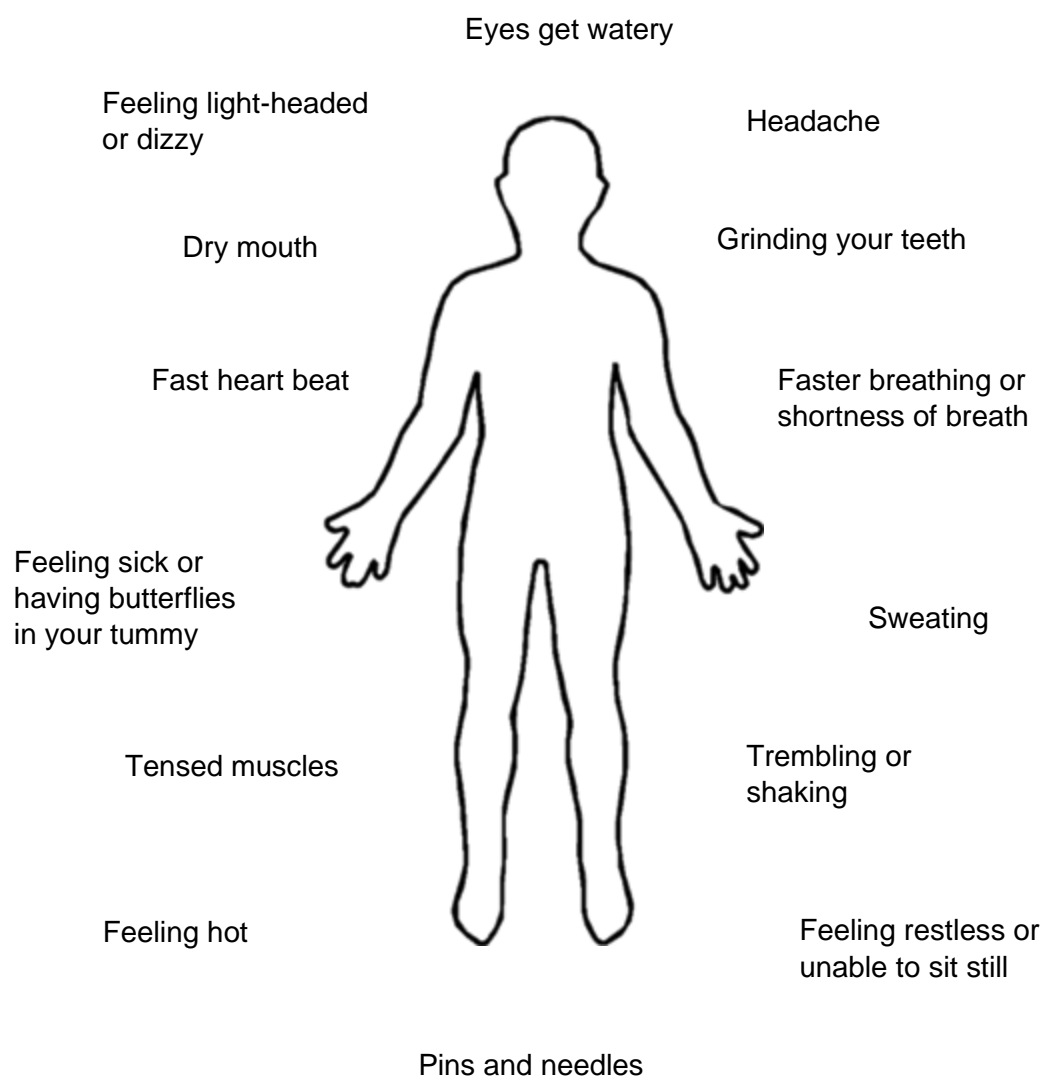
Lots of other young people will feel the same as you and feel worried about going to school or leaving home. They just won't necessarily talk about it. We are all different. Sometimes our experiences and how we think affect what we feel. Sometimes what we do affects how we feel.

# Worrying and how it can make us feel

It is normal to have worries and everyone experiences them now and again. Worry only becomes a problem when your worries get in the way of other things that you do, or if they make you feel sad or unhappy for most of the time.

## **When you worry your body goes through a number of changes...**

- Circle each of the worry signs that you've experienced.
- Choose a coloured pen or pencil and draw where you've experienced any of the worry signs on to the body.





## Why does this happen to my body

This is your body's normal response when you think that you are in danger.

Your body is designed so that it gets ready to run, hide or fight when you think that danger is coming (the “fight, flight, freeze” response) and this causes the changes to your body (see the last page).

When we are in fight, flight or freeze mode we might:

- Find it difficult to think.
- Find it difficult to concentrate.
- Breathe really quickly (as your body tries to get oxygen to your muscles).
- Think more negatively.
- Feel scared.

The following sections will suggest some different ways that we can help calm ourselves in general and when we are feeling worried. This resource will also explore helpful things to do when we are feeling worried about going to school.

# Breathing exercises

## Why does it work?

When we are feeling worried, we tend to take short, quick, shallow breaths; this is to get the body ready to run, fight or hide. Doing deep breathing has the opposite effect and tells the brain and body to relax and that we are safe.

You need to breathe into your tummy

or

The out breath must be longer than  
the in breath.

## How do I know if I'm deep breathing?

Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach and breathe normally. If your hand on your chest moves it is likely that you are doing shallow breathing. If both hands are moving it is likely that you are breathing more deeply (relaxed breathing).

## Top tips:

- Try to do a few deep breaths a day.
- Try to make deep breathing part of your routine, e.g. you could do it everyday when you wake up.
- The breathing exercises will work best when you are feeling worried if you do lots of practice when you are feeling a bit calmer.
- Remember that you can do some of these breathing activities (e.g. 4,7,8 breathing) anywhere and anytime that you feel worried.

## Breathing ideas:



Blow mini windmills. Go on Youtube to find tutorials on making your own.



'Milkshake' breathing – using a cup, straw and water blow bubbles.



Imagine blowing out candles on a cake.



Blow bubbles.

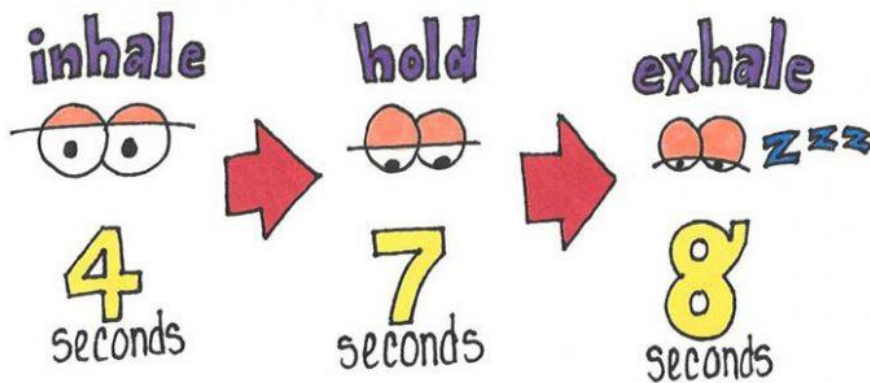




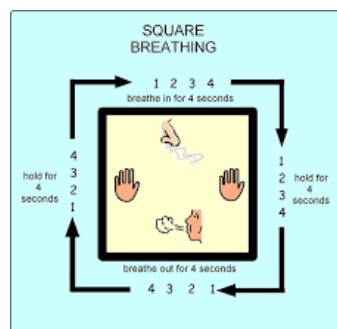
Recognise your breath by first blowing on the back of your hand.



Belly breathing – place an object on your stomach, try to get it to move up as you breath in and down as you breath out.

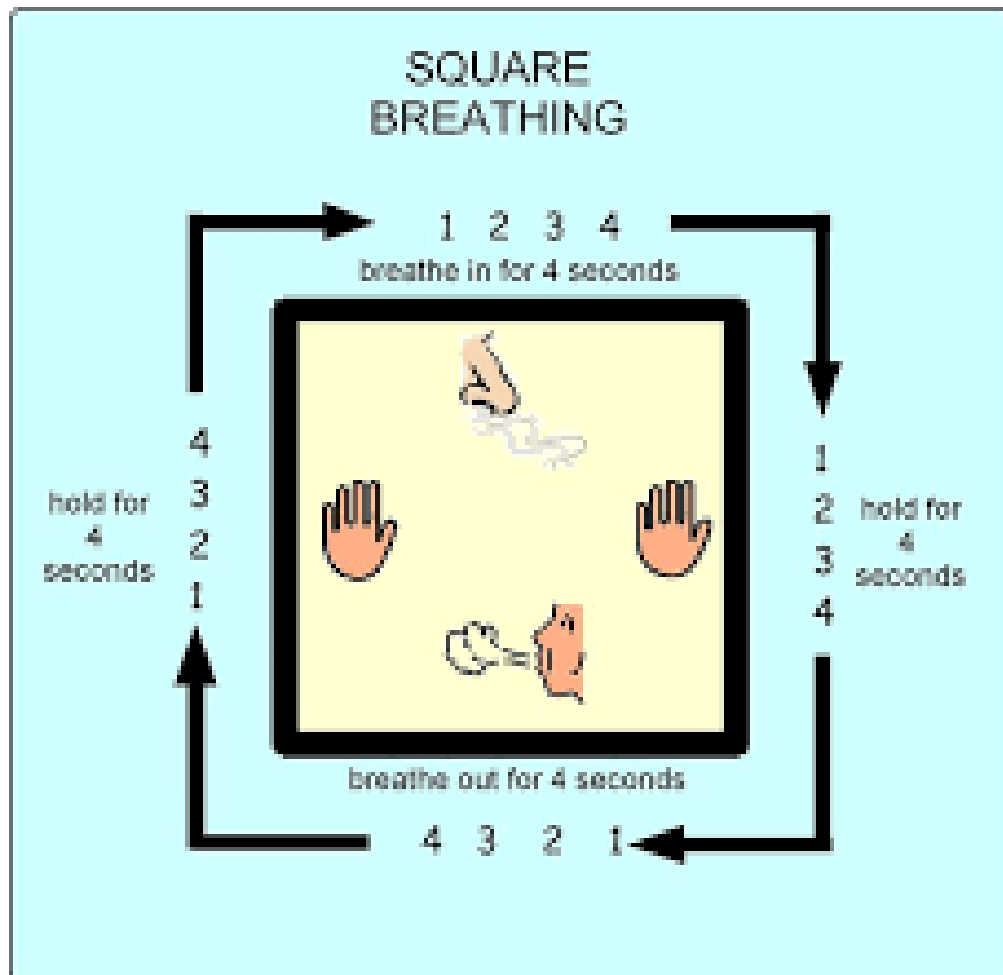


Breathe in for 4, hold for 7 and out for 8.



Square breathing (there is a big version of this, you can run your finger around the square as you do it).

## Square breathing



## Helpful apps/websites:



Headspace app: has a free area and some of the clips are available on YouTube.



Calm app: has a free meditation section.

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/relax-breathing.html>

Website with free audio activities.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

Yoga and mindfulness for children.

### Controlled Breathing Assistant



A free app with a simple visual to help coherent breathing.

## Reading

A big study found that reading a book that you enjoy was the most relaxing thing that a person can do!



## Time in nature

A big study found that spending at least two hours in nature a week (in one go or in little bits) can improve how we feel a lot.



Fun fact: In Japan people take 'forest baths' where they find a really green area to sit in and enjoy nature. There are small green areas in the cities so that people can have their forest baths!



# Helping yourself to feel calm

## Rhythmic movements

Rhythmic movements can be very soothing. You could try to...



Jog on the spot



Swing your arms



Stamp your feet



Dance



Rock back and forth



Hum

.... or whatever works for you. These things can be done wherever you feel comfortable.

## Change your posture

When you look down and wrap your hands around your stomach it can make you feel in danger (these are hiding behaviours). Try some of these poses and see how you feel:

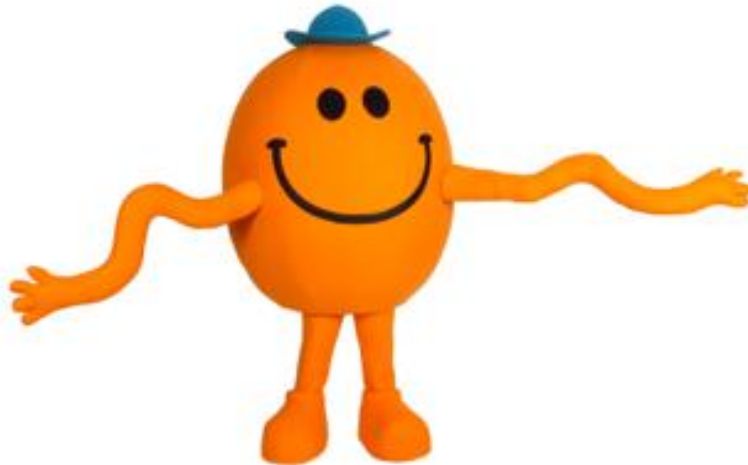
### **The Superman or Superwoman pose**



### **The winners pose**



**The Mr Tickle pose (stretch your arms out)**



[Think of lemons or something you love to eat](#)



Studies have found that thinking of lemons makes your mouth water. This has the opposite effect on our body when we feel anxious (when our mouth becomes dry) and tells our body that it is ok to feel calm.

## Grounding techniques

When we worry, often we think about a place or time when we have felt anxious. This can happen without you realising. Grounding techniques are often calming as they help us focus on the here and now.

- Play the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 game.



Say 5 things that you can *see*, 4 things that you can *hear*, 3 things that you can *touch*, 2 things that you can *smell* or like the smell of, and 1 thing you can *taste*.

- Put a cool cloth on your face.



- Count your breaths.
- Carry a grounding object with you – something that reminds you of a time you felt calm or a calm place (e.g. a pebble that reminds you of a nice day at the beach).





- Count how many steps you can take with a beanbag on your head.



- Look around you. If you're inside, how many things can you see that begin with the letter b? If you're outside, how many different shades of green can you see?
- Feel the weight of your body pressing into the chair.



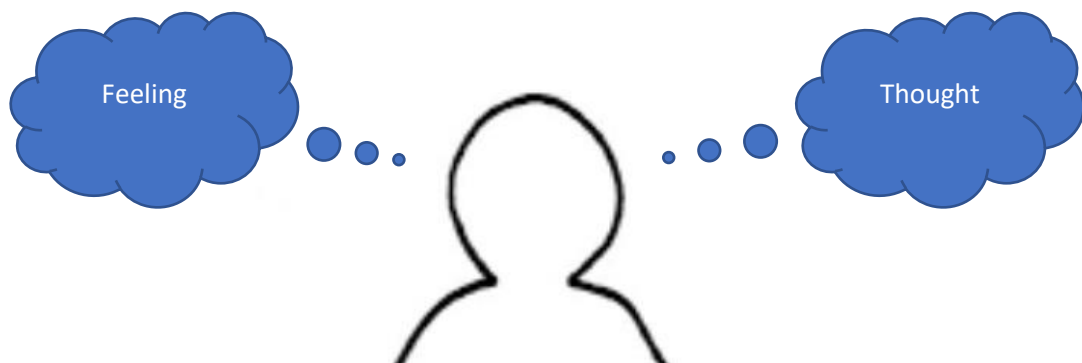
- Feel the weight of your feet on the ground.



## Mindfulness

### What is mindfulness?

- Mindfulness tries to help people concentrate on being in the 'now'.
  - It helps people to be aware of their thoughts and feelings.
  - It can help us to see the moment clearly and to manage how we feel and what we think.
- 
- Try a strategy called 'noting'. Sometimes, it is very hard to stop thoughts or feelings.
    - Instead of trying to stop a thought or a feeling we just 'note' it and label it by saying "thought" or "feeling".
    - Try not to think too deeply about the thought or feeling.
    - Then try to concentrate on what we are doing and let the thought go, it's only a thought. This can help us feel calmer and have greater control of how we think and feel.



- Imagine your thoughts floating past you like boats on a river.



- Close your eyes and concentrate on how your body is moving as you breathe.



- Lie on the floor with your eyes closed and feel all of the parts of your body as it meets the floor.



- Notice the movement and shapes of clouds in the sky.



- Taking time to notice beauty and greatness in small things, like a flower or a tree.



- Taking time to listen to different sounds, like birds singing, water running, people laughing.



- Smile often at others, and notice if they smile back.

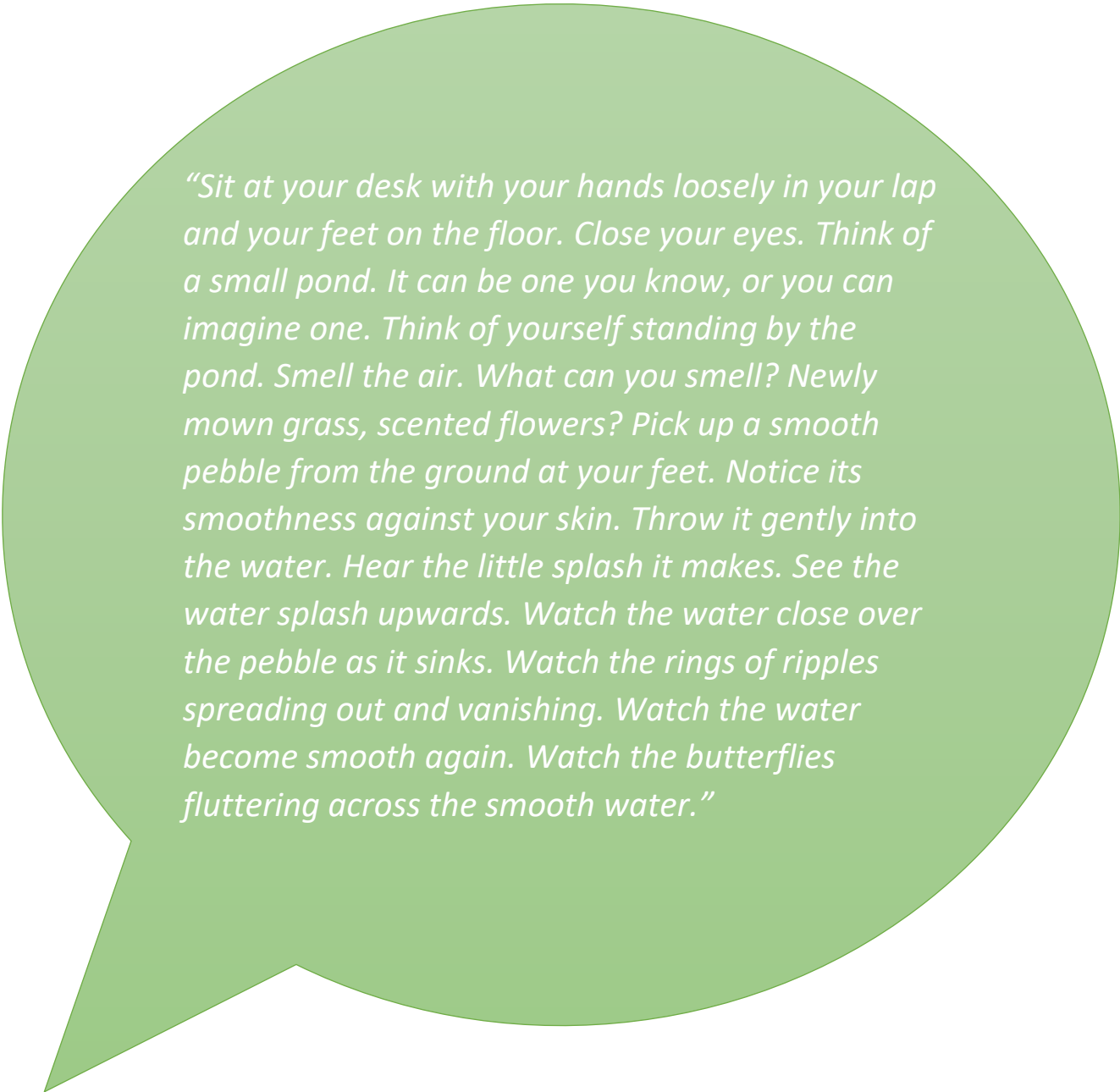




## Visualisation

Visualisation is when you imagine yourself in a place that is safe and peaceful, where you feel relaxed and happy. This can be very calming.

Here is an example Visualisation:



*“Sit at your desk with your hands loosely in your lap and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes. Think of a small pond. It can be one you know, or you can imagine one. Think of yourself standing by the pond. Smell the air. What can you smell? Newly mown grass, scented flowers? Pick up a smooth pebble from the ground at your feet. Notice its smoothness against your skin. Throw it gently into the water. Hear the little splash it makes. See the water splash upwards. Watch the water close over the pebble as it sinks. Watch the rings of ripples spreading out and vanishing. Watch the water become smooth again. Watch the butterflies fluttering across the smooth water.”*

# 5 Ways to Wellbeing

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are simple things to do everyday that can help you to feel happier and more positive.

## Get Active



Exercise can make you feel good. Try doing an activity that you enjoy.

- Go for a walk or ride your bike.
- Hula hoop.
- Walk your dog.
- Dance to your favourite song.
- Join a sports team.

## Connect



Spend time with those around you. This could be at home, school or in the community.

- Talk to your friends and family.
- Eat a meal with your family.
- Help a friend or neighbour.
- Bake some cakes and share them.

## Keep Learning



Learning isn't just for in the classroom. Learn a new skill, about a new topic or try something different.

- Learn a new word or do a wordsearch.
- Try a new food or cooking a new recipe.
- Learn to play a musical instrument.
- Learn a different language.
- Study an animal.

## Give



Doing something for others can make us feel good. Help other people by doing a kind act, smiling or saying 'thank you'.

- Hold a door open for someone.
- Help out at home e.g. do the dishes.
- Listen to a friend and how they are feeling.
- Give someone you love a hug.

## Take Notice



Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling.

- Draw or paint a picture of what you've seen today.
- Play a game of I spy.
- Notice how you are feeling today.
- Listen to the sounds of nature e.g. the wind or the rain.

# Improve your sleep



Lots of people who worry find it hard to get to sleep, wake up lots in the night or wake up early and struggle to get back to sleep.

When we don't have a good night's sleep it makes it much harder for us to manage our emotions and our thoughts.

Here are some top tips on how you can improve your sleep:

- Breathing and grounding techniques have been shown to help people fall asleep and get back to sleep when they have woken up.
- Try mindfulness (or use a mindfulness app) and try the noting technique.
- Try to do the same routine every night before you go to bed.
- Try to make your routine as relaxing as possible (maybe include some time to read or a bath).
- Go to bed and get up at the same time everyday.
- Avoid technology for the few hours before you go to bed.
- Try to make your bedroom a calm space.
- Try to make your bedroom as dark as possible.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Avoid sugary drinks or food before bed.
- Avoid eating before you go to bed.



# 'Share it, Shelf it, Shout it'

A strategy developed by Dr Pooky Knightsmith

## My school worries

Arriving at school can be hard. Your school might arrange for you to meet an adult you trust or you could agree to do this with your parent or carer. If you are worrying about something you can agree with them that you will share it or shout it or shelf it.

### Share it

Lots of people find it hard to share how they are feeling. It can be really helpful for you to share how you are feeling with an adult that you trust as they can use what you say to try to improve things. You could share how you are feeling by...

Talking to a trusted adult

Sharing a little bit at a time

Drawing your worries



Through play

Writing in a journal



Writing them  
a note

### Shelf it – 'make a time to worry'

Sometimes it is hard to share your worries if you know that you are going to have to do something or see other people after. You can 'shelf' your worry – this means that you are going to pretend to put your worry on a shelf and agree a time when you and your trusted adult will come back together to share it.





## Shout it

Doing some of these things might make your worry feel better or might make it easier for you to share your worry with a trusted adult...

Star Jumps



**Screaming or shouting  
into a pillow**

**Stamping your feet**

Going for a walk



Tensing and relaxing muscles

**Drawing anger**

**Running around the playground**

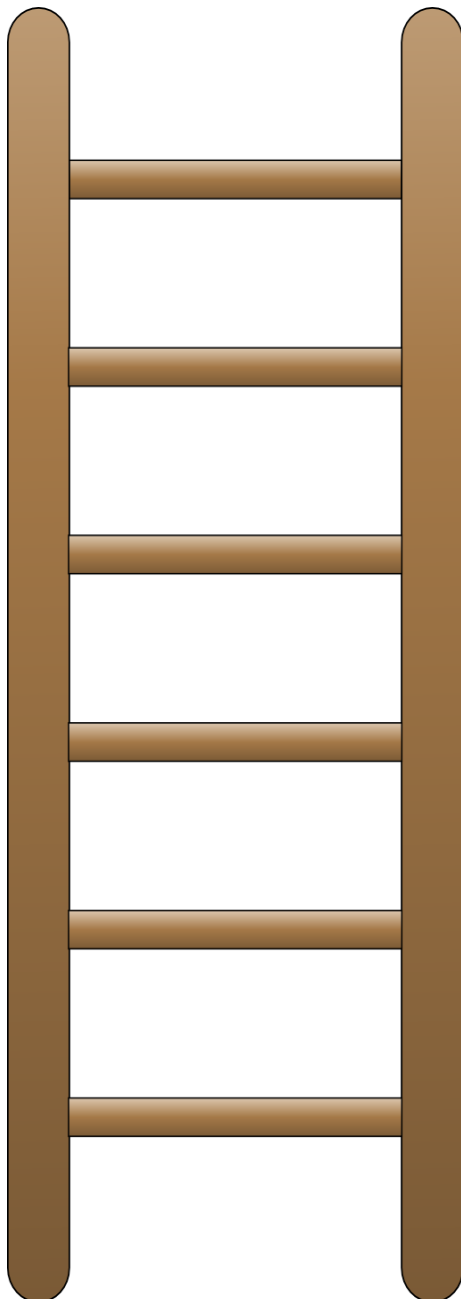


**Writing it down and  
then ripping it up**

# Anxiety ladder

An anxiety or exposure ladder can help you to think about what your worries are and how strong or important they are. Here is an example:

Most worried about



Sitting in a busy dining room.

Sitting in an empty dining room.

Going into a lesson (English).

Seeing peers around school.

Working in a small group with peers.

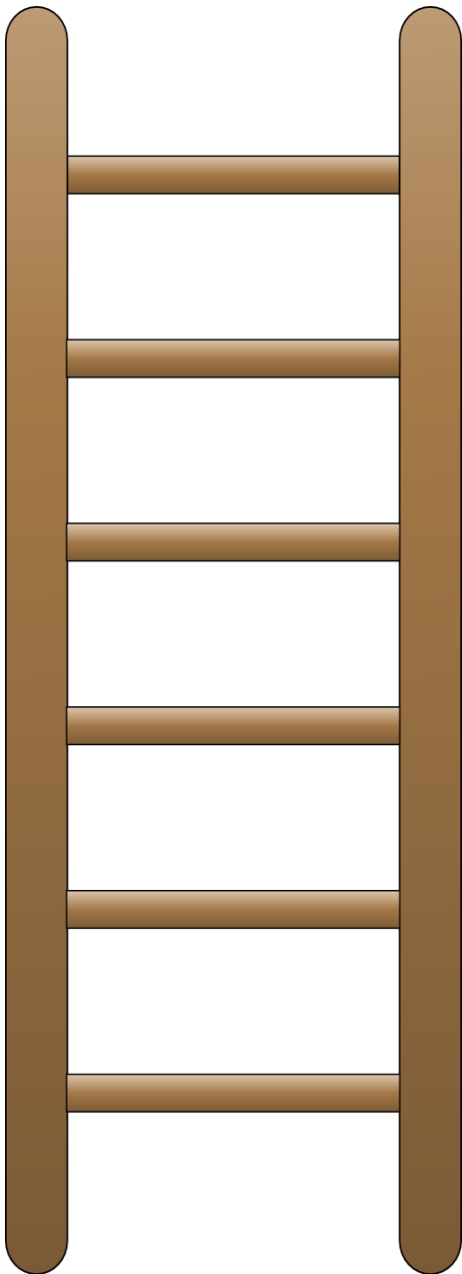
Meeting a member of staff in the carpark.

Not so worried about



Now try to list your own worries in order of importance from the things you are ‘most worried about’ facing when returning to school to the things you are ‘not so worried about’.

Most worried about




Not so worried about

# Planning my week

Try to do one or two activities a day under these four headings:

- Something you enjoy/ relaxation, e.g. a hobby, something creative.
- Something small that makes you feel like you've achieved something.
- Some exercise, e.g. a walk, an exercise class, a run, dancing in your bedroom, a online exercise class, a many squats as you can do.
- Something social, e.g. chat to a family member, text someone, ask someone how they are, meet a friend or family member.

Here is an example:

	Something you enjoy/ relaxation	A small achievement	Some exercise	Social
Monday	Read a magazine		Walk in the park with family	
Tuesday	Breathing exercises			Send a text
Wednesday		Made my bed	Dancing YouTube video	
Thursday	Grounding techniques			Say hi to someone you know and ask how they are
Friday	Mindfulness app	Help someone do something		
Saturday	Something fun			
Sunday	Breathing exercises	Try and do more squats than you could last time you tried		Meet a friend



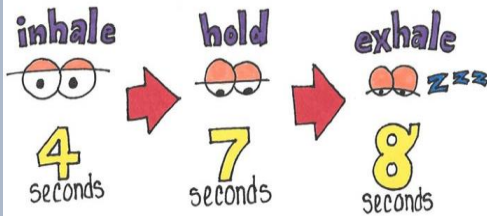
### My week

	Something you enjoy/ relaxation	A small achievement	Some exercise	Social
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

### My week

	Something you enjoy/ relaxation	A small achievement	Some exercise	Social
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

## Coping cards



5 - things you can see  
4 - things you can feel  
3 - things you can hear  
2 - things you can smell  
1 - thing you can taste

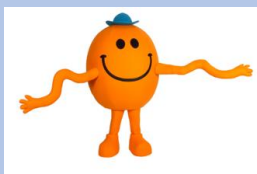


**Stamp your feet**



Imagine a lemon

- Share it
- Shelf it
- Shout it



Stretch your arms out



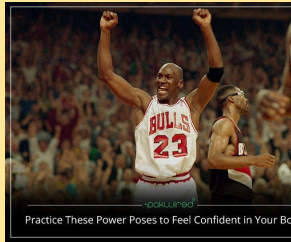
Swing your arms

Pay attention to what is around  
you



Breathe in through your nose  
and  
slowly out of your mouth

Do the winners  
pose



**Use a mindfulness app**

These have been left blank so you  
can add in your own.