



Lincolnshire Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust

Transition Back to School

A Guide for Parents and Carers

It starts with you

It's natural for your child or young person to feel anxious or worried about returning to school; it's going to be a change to their routine. It may also be a change to your own routine, so it is important to acknowledge that there could be a variety of emotions you are feeling as their parent/carer.

You may be feeling apprehensive about them returning to school and be concerned about how they will cope or what emotions and behaviours this may bring. It's best to begin by spending time prior to returning to school exploring how your child or young person feels, and what worries they may have. Be sure to spend time looking at positive feelings and thoughts as well, such as the excitement of seeing friends again.

Your child or young person will be looking to you for reassurance so role model confidence to them, especially the night before they return and in the morning. Your child will be feeling hyper-sensitive and is more likely to notice your body language and vocabulary during these times.

Provide your child or young person with a safe space to explore how they are feeling but equally, allow yourself to have protected time to acknowledge your own anxieties or worries. You might find it useful to discuss these with another adult which will allow you to explore and normalise these feelings.

In order for you to provide this emotional support and guidance to your child or young person it is crucial that you look after your own wellbeing. You might do this by building in some time everyday where you can have some time to yourself. This might include doing hobbies, physical exercise, connecting with friends and family or even spending time on your self-care.

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This guide will talk you through the following topics to provide you with information and strategies to help your child or young person transition back into school.

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What causes worries and anxieties?

Worries usually occur as a result of experiencing a **challenging life event** such as changing school, moving house, making new friends, taking exams or even just trying something new.

Worries will often manifest as behaviours, for example they may feel so anxious that they avoid school if they are worried.

Anxiety is the body's **natural response** to a perceived threat. When we are faced with danger our bodies release adrenaline into the bloodstream, increasing our heart rate and breathing. This then leads to blood and oxygen being pumped around the body to our muscles which enables us to 'fight or flight'. As well as being useful to escape danger, this reaction is also really beneficial, for example when competing in sporting events, completing exams or performing in front of others. It enables us to perform in a way that can far exceed what we can normally do.

The Fight or Flight Response



Fight

Try to make yourself look scary or shout

Flight

Run away as fast as possible

Freeze

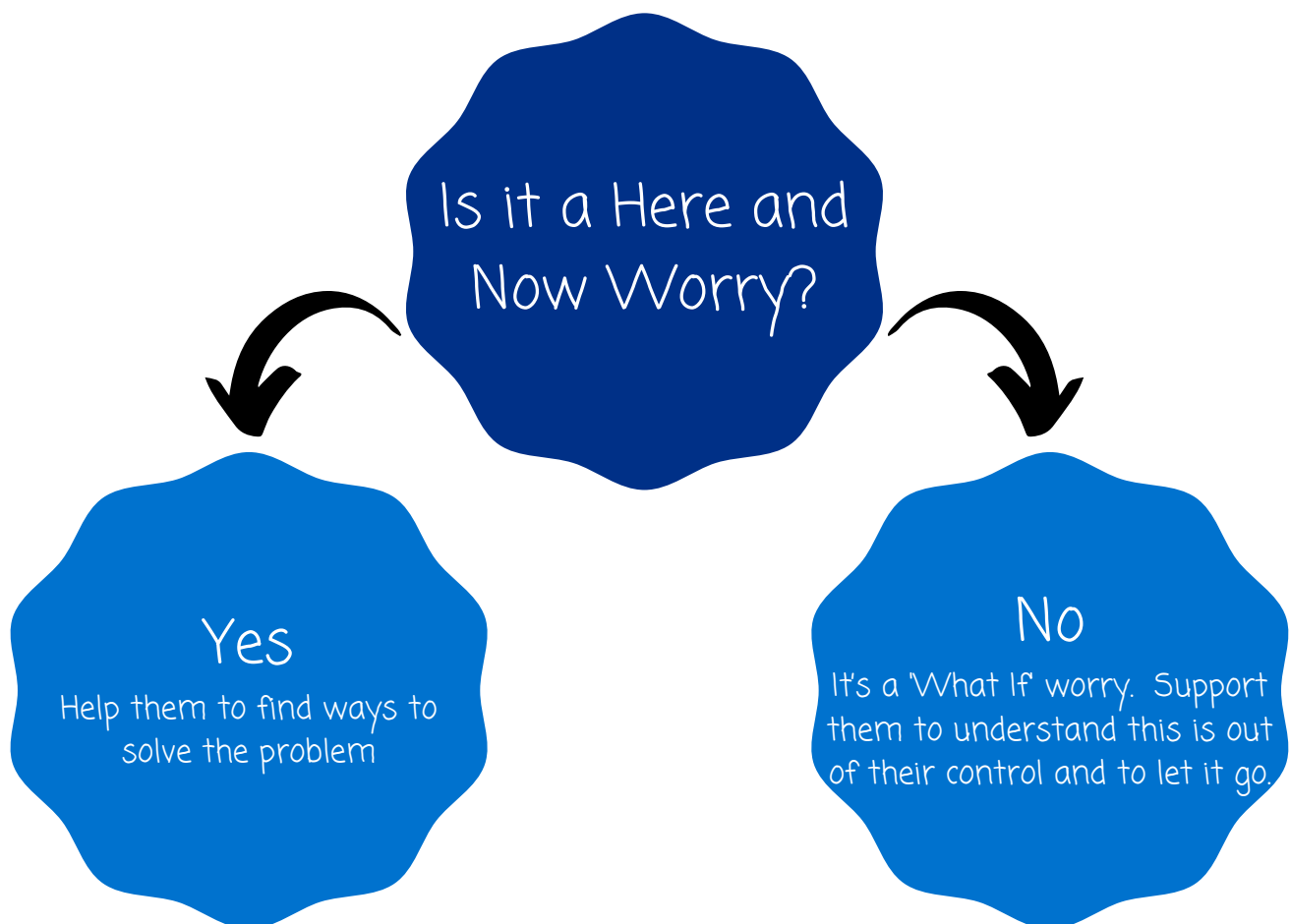
Stay as still as possible so as not to be noticed

Worry Management

Two Types of Worries

There are two types of worries that your child or young person may experience. 'Here and Now' worries are worries that we can do something about and can be solved. **Hypothetical** worries are worries that we cannot control and tend to be 'What if' worries (What if it rains? What if I get sick? What if Mum and Dad are late picking me up?).

You can support your child or young person in identifying their worry, and whether they are 'Here and Now' worries or 'What If' worries.



Managing Worries

The [Worry Tree](#) guides your child or young person through the process of identifying what kind of worry they have and what to do about it.

They will learn that 'Here and Now' worries can be solved by using problem solving and making a plan of action, and 'What if' worries can be managed by using distraction techniques and worry time.



Worry Time

Worry time involves your child or young person 'catching' their worries throughout the day and writing them down to deal with later. Once they have written down the worry ready for worry time later in the day, they should be using distraction techniques to help take their mind off it.

They then have a specific time set aside for worrying.

For example, between 6pm and 6:20pm they will get out their daily worries and worry about them for 20 minutes.

They may need support whilst completing the worry time, whether that be emotional support or practical support for how to manage the worries further.

Problem Solving

Here and Now worries are best resolved by using problem solving to create a practical plan that can be used to implement a solution. This can be done by using 7 simple steps.

Step 1

What is the problem?

Help them to identify what **problem** they are struggling with

Step 2

Find solutions

Support them to identify all the possible ways to solve the problem. At this point, encourage them to **think outside the box**

Step 3

Pros and Cons

Speak to them about what is **good and bad** about each possible solution. Try to allow them to identify these

Step 4

Pick the best idea

Based on the pros and cons list, pick the **best solution** that is most likely to solve the problem

Step 5

Make a plan

When can it be completed? What will be done? Will they need any help from other people? Try to make this plan **thorough and practical**

Step 6

Do it

Put the plan into action following it as **closely as possible**

Step 7 Review

How did it go? Is there anything else that needs to be tried? Would they do **anything differently** next time?

Understanding Anger

Childhood can be challenging for many young people as they face many new or unfamiliar situations. Feeling **uncertain** about these things is **normal**. Anger is a perfectly natural emotion experienced by children, teens and adults. Anger helps us cope with threats, hurt and frustration and can be formed around many things including relationships, school pressure, stress at home and illness. We all get angry sometimes, but it is important to ensure we are able to stay in control and ensure you are able to help them achieve this too.



What causes anger?

Anger is a reaction to emotions and thoughts within us. It is based on how we perceive events and the conclusions we draw about them; these perceptions can be both realistic and unrealistic.

Anger can be an immediate response to feeling threatened. However, we can often become angry as a reaction to feeling another strong emotion such as sadness, worry or embarrassment. Anger is the body's natural response to a perceived threat. When we are faced with danger our bodies release adrenaline into the bloodstream, increasing our heart rate and breathing. This then leads to blood and oxygen being pumped around the body to our muscles which enables us to 'fight or flight'.



Fight or Flight is explained further on page 5

Managing Emotions

Below are some techniques that you can support your child or young person to try

Talk to yourself

The next time you feel angry ask yourself 'what would happen if?' For example, what would happen if I throw my iPad? You may consider outcomes such as feeling bad once calmed down, the possibility of getting into trouble and hurting yourself or others.

Count Backwards

This is a great way to distract your brain and improve maths.

Have a Drink of Water

Take 10 slow mouthfuls, counting each time you swallow.

Refocus Your Mind

Focus on your 5 senses. Have a look at the 'Relaxation' section of this booklet for ideas.

Exercise

Run as fast as possible on the spot or outside. (see page 18 for other exercise ideas)

Be a Turtle

Curl up very small on the floor, imagine you have a hard turtle shell. Nothing can get through. Breathe in slowly.

Support your child or young person to engage in [relaxation, mindfulness or distracting activities](#) (see page 26) when they are trying to manage strong emotions or negative thoughts. Support them to practise these strategies when they are calm. By rehearsing relaxation techniques, it will make it easier for them to control their reactions when they become angry or anxious.

You can support your child or young person to make their own [self-soothe box](#). We recommend that each child or young person has a self-soothe box to keep the things that make them feel better when times get tough. The box and what is in it do not have to be expensive. It can be a shoe box that can be decorated and have small items or prompts to remind them what they should try to help themselves feel better.

Challenging Negative Thoughts

Your child or young person might be anxious about returning to school and worrying about friendships, bullying, and catching up with schoolwork, especially if they're changing school, moving up a year or changing class/teacher. They may not always share these worries with you, and instead complain of tummy aches or feeling sick. One of the signs is crying or seeming tired in the morning. Here are some ideas for what you can do to help.

Talk

Tell them that you have noticed they seem to be feeling worried or anxious recently. Ask them if they would like to talk about it and ask them how you can help. They may already know what will help but haven't felt able to ask.

Listening and validation

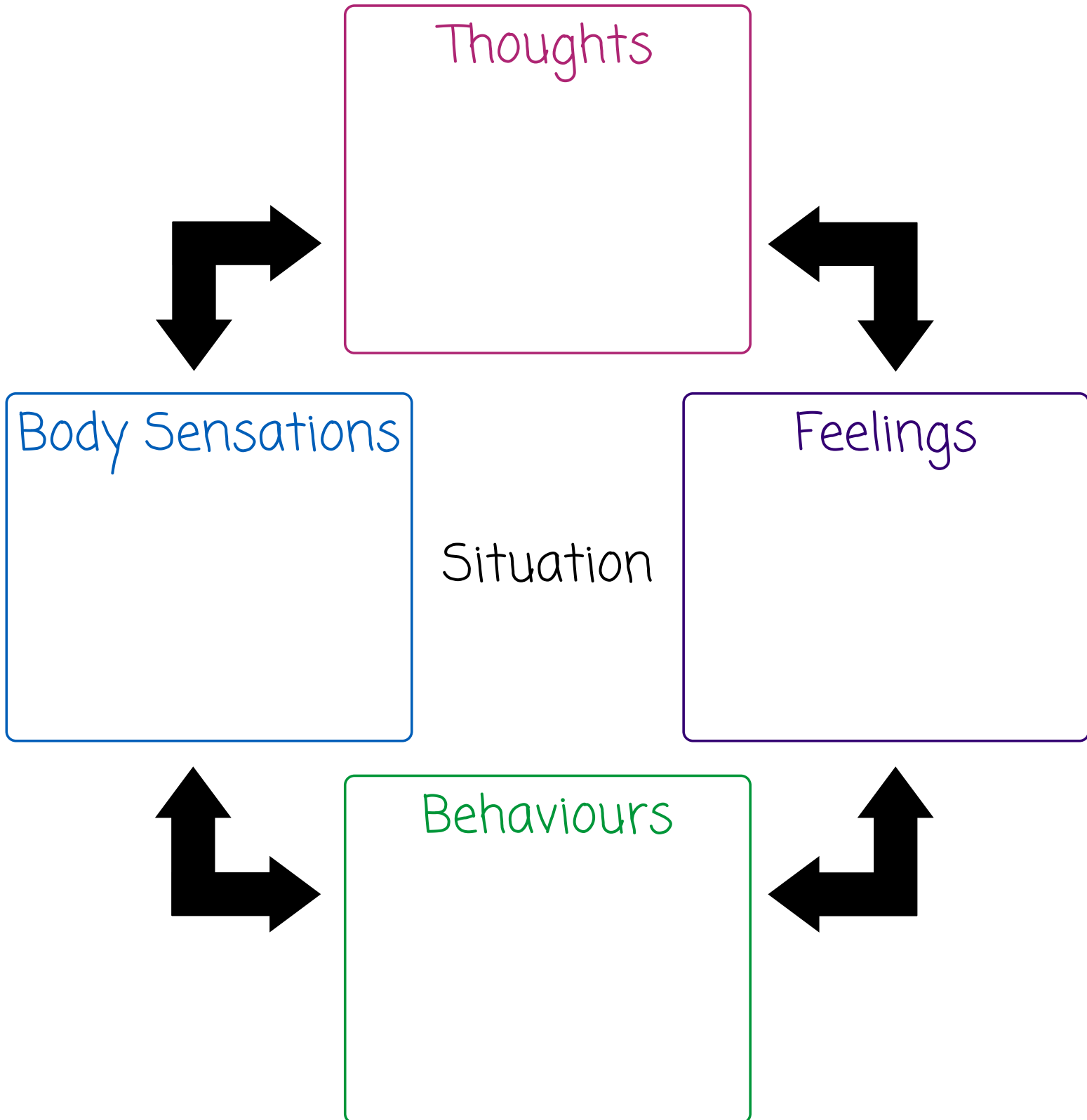
When talking, try not to jump in and solve everything for them immediately. Just listen at first and validate how they are feeling. Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviours as understandable. Try to understand what is going on for your child or young person in a non-judgemental way. Show that you understand by reflecting back what they are saying or guessing at how they may be feeling. E.g. 'you must be feeling nervous about going back to school. I think I would feel that way too'.

A great example of validation can be found in a video clip of the film 'Inside Out', which you can watch by typing 'Inside Out Validation Clip' into Google and the YouTube video will appear in the search results.

Help your child or young person to understand what is going on

Healthy Minds Lincolnshire recommends using the 5 areas cognitive behavioural model to understand and explain to young people why they are feeling anxious or worried and what they need to do to break the cycle. It might be useful for your child or young person to keep a diary to jot down negative thoughts and how they make them feel. They can then use the 5 area model below to see how their thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviour are all linked.

The 5 Areas



Use the 5 area model above to explore thoughts, feelings, behaviours and body sensations. Help your child or young person to pick any thoughts and behaviours that are unhelpful and help them come up with some different, more positive thoughts or look at changing some behaviours that might be keeping the problem going.

Different Ways of Thinking about a Worry

You could help your child or young person to explore different and more positive ways of thinking about a worry by using a table like the one below.

My Worry/Thought

A More Positive Thought

Example: 'When I go back to school I will have so much work to catch up on that I won't be able to cope.'

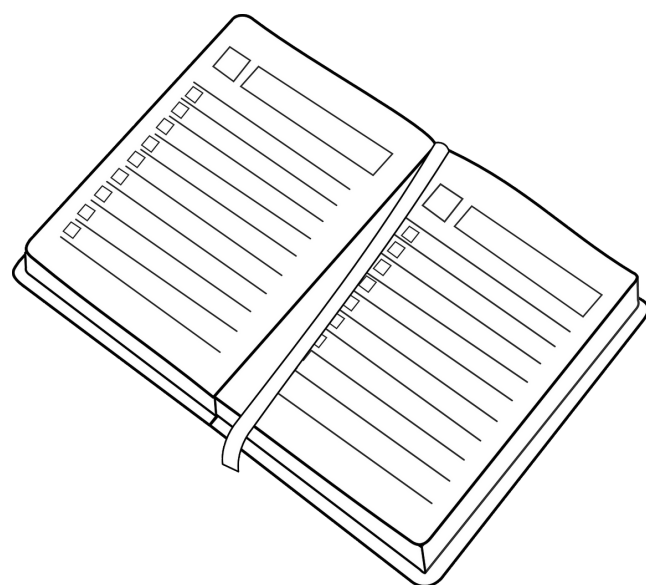
Example: 'Everyone needs to catch up, it won't just be me and the teachers will be there to help. I know that I can ask for support if I am struggling.'

Routine

Everyone's routines will have changed a lot since being at home, but as life starts to go back to a **new normal** it is important to encourage your child or young person to get back into a good routine.

It can be helpful to use a **routine diary** to set small achievable goals each day.

A big part of routine is what time we go to bed and wake up, so if you know your child or young person has been going to bed really late then together you could set a goal of moving that sleep time forward by half an hour to start with. Then when that has been achieved, support them to move it forward again in small amounts, and continue until you get to the desired times. Allow plenty of time to get routines back on track.



Make sure there are some **emotional energy boosting** activities (things that make them feel good) into the new routine as well, such as exercise, social interaction and self-care. The main aim is to get a good balance of things we have to do, and things that make us feel more positive.



Sleep, Diet & Exercise

Sleep, diet and exercise are all very important things to consider when your child or young person is transitioning back into school. Whilst the three areas link together, it is easier to consider them all separately.

Sleep

Sleep hygiene is used to describe **good sleep habits**. Your child or young person may not be aware of their sleeping habits but they are essential for maintaining good physical and emotional wellbeing.

Good sleep is important for health and happiness. A good night's sleep:

- Helps improve concentration, performance and memory
- Helps improve the immune system so you are less likely to catch infections
- Improves physical health
- Helps to put you in a better mood



During a transitional period, it is extremely important for children and young people to have a good night's sleep to ensure they feel prepared to deal with any changes that are occurring around them.

What is the right amount of sleep?

3-5 years: 10-13 hours
(including naps)

6-12 years: 9-12 hours

13-18 years: 8-10 hours

There are some ways that you can help your child or young person to sleep with greater ease:

Try

- Developing a relaxing bedtime routine (listening to music, reading, having a bath etc.)
- Having a light snack or a warm drink (without caffeine) before bed
- Darken the bedroom, and ensure it is quiet, cool and comfortable.
- Exercising during the day
- Keeping the bedroom for sleeping only, rather than as a playroom or homework space

Avoid

- Having screen time within a hour of bedtime
- Caffeine consumption within 4 hours of bedtime (including chocolate and soft drinks)
- Exercising right before bed. Exercise within 2 hours of bedtime may interfere with sleep
- Napping during the day
- Staying up really late

Diet

Eating a well-balanced diet that contains vegetables and different nutrients is important to maintain both physical health and emotional wellbeing. A diet that contains food and drink high in sugar and saturated fat may feel comforting, but it can have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of your child or young person. During a transitional period, it is important to ensure that your child or young person receives a varied diet to ensure they maintain positive emotional wellbeing which can help them successfully adapt to any changes.

Did You Know?

Bananas, cashews and **leafy vegetables** are full of potassium and magnesium which naturally relax muscles. This makes them perfect for improving sleep and reducing anxiety.

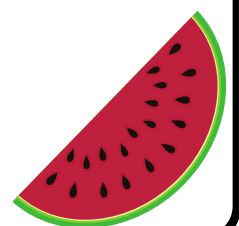
Energy drinks contain extra-large doses of caffeine, which are not recommended for children and young people. If these are consumed, it can lead to sleep difficulties and ultimately, mental health problems.

Drinking **water** improves concentration by flushing out toxins in the blood.

Eating **breakfast** has been linked to better performance at school, college and work as it helps to prevent mid-morning energy dips. This is very important for children and young people who are experiencing a transition.

Chocolate contains caffeine and sugar which keeps your brain 'buzzing' and awake for a short period of time. Afterwards, however, it will leave you feeling more tired.

Eating regularly prevents feelings of tiredness, irritability and sadness. Slow energy release foods such as pasta, rice and nuts can help with this.



Exercise

Like both sleep and diet, the exercise that children and young people take part in can impact upon their emotional wellbeing. Exercise is beneficial in many ways, including **relieving stress, improving mood and improving memory**. Taking part in regular exercise also helps to improve sleep quality and can improve self-esteem, as it releases 'feel good hormones' into the body that give a natural boost. Exercise doesn't mean long-distance running or weight lifting; it can be anything that is completed to help them become more active.

Children and young people aged 5-18 should aim to complete 'an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day across the week' (NHS Live Well), which varies in type and intensity to help develop movement skills and strengthen muscles and bones.

There are 4 main categories of exercise:

1. **Daily Physical Activity** – this includes normal everyday activities planned or unplanned including transportation (walking, cycling etc.) as well as household chores and games.
2. **Exercise** – planned physical activity with the intention of improving health and fitness.
3. **Play** - unstructured, unplanned activity that is completed purely for enjoyment.
4. **Sport** – activity that is done in a structured and competitive environment, either as a team or alone.

Ideas!

Walking to School
Playground Activities
Riding a Scooter
Netball
Rollerblading
Cycling
Basketball
Tennis
Skipping
Swimming
Household Chores
Badminton
Bodyweight Strength Training

Guide to Energy Banking

A useful way to support children or young people who may be experiencing heightened emotions at this time can be to complete [emotional energy charts](#). Completing an energy account helps them to understand what drains them emotionally and how monitoring this and adapting this can help [reduce meltdowns](#). It is really important to help your child or young person work out what is being taken out of their energy bank and how they can add things back in so they never end the day in a negative. This particular technique can be useful for children or young people with autism but can also be used with any child or young person who may be becoming overwhelmed emotionally.

For example:

Withdrawal

- Not Sleeping (90)
- School (90)
- Crowds (70)
- Noise (80)
- Brightness (50)
- Shopping Centres (50)
- Swimming Pools (50)
- Hot Days (50)
- Rushing (70)
- Pain (90)
- Change (90)
- Screens (50)
- Sport (70)
- Social Events (80)
- Busyness (60)
- Appointments (70)

Deposit

- Walking (20)
- Reading (90)
- Painting (30)
- Origami (50)
- Solitude (80)
- Cat Cuddles (20)
- Cross-Stitch (20)
- Chosen Noise (50)
- Rug Rolling (10)
- Teacher (20)
- Accomplishment (90)
- Lego Alone (50)
- Noise-Cancelling Headphones (50)
- Tactile Play (50)
- Chats with Mum (40)
- Breakfast in Bed (50)

My Energy Bank

Putting Energy
In

Taking Energy
Out

Energy Boosting Ideas

Tips for Being Apart

Separation anxiety is a **normal**, expected part of returning to education. It can feel hard to manage the intensity of this during the morning before school. Here are some handy tips to manage these feelings; it might take a bit of time to work out what is most suited to you and your child or young person.

We have included a variety of activities aimed at all different ages:

Charging Your Heart

This activity involves drawing a small heart on the palm of your hand, and drawing a matching one on your child or young person's hand. Holding hands prior to them going into the school building is 'charging the heart' ready for the day at school. During the day if they feel worried about being away from you they can look at the heart and know you are there and love them.



Something Personal

Wearing something personal such as a spray of perfume or aftershave or a bracelet to feel connected during the school day. (Please discuss this with school first)



Books

There are many books available to buy online that are about separation anxiety which may be useful to read with your child or young person.

What to do when you don't want to be apart

Kristen Lavalley & Silvia Schneider

Parent-Led CBT for Child Anxiety

Cathy Creswell, Monica Parkinson,

Kerstin Thirwall & Lucy Willetts

The Invisible String

Patrice Karst



Small Mementos

Decide with your child or young person on a small object they can take to school or wear that is either yours or reminds them of you to help with feelings of being alone whilst at school. This could be an item such as a small family photo or a small teddy.

(Please ensure school are aware of the item prior to trying this activity)



It is also important to consider your own feelings when it comes to being away from your child or young person. Try to follow your pre-COVID routine and [limit contact](#) during the school day. It can be difficult as it's natural that you will want to check in and ensure they are managing; however, this can encourage feelings of anxiety in your child or young person as it suggests that there is something to be worried about. The activities listed on the previous page are also useful to manage your emotions as well, as it will be an adjustment for you also.

Managing Change

Your child or young person may begin to become anxious upon returning to school after such an extended period of time off. This may be particularly hard for children or young people who struggle with change as they will be returning to a new class or even moving to a different school. [Lincolnshire BOSS](#) have created some great booklets which you and the school can complete together to help your child or young person begin to think about managing change.

Within the booklets there are a variety of tasks which will provide the opportunity for your child or young person to explore hopes, expectations or concerns they have around the transition process, whilst working towards a solution focused plan.

Infant

www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/05/BOSS-Transition-Booklet-Infant-Junior.pdf

www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/05/BOSS-Transition-Key-Adult-Guide-Infant-Junior.pdf

Secondary

www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/05/BOSS-Transition-Booklet-Primary-Secondary.pdf

www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/05/BOSS-Transition-Key-Adult-Guide-Primary-Secondary.pdf

Post-16

www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/05/BOSS-Transition-Booklet-Post-16.pdf

www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/05/BOSS-Transition-Key-Adult-Guide-Post-16.pdf

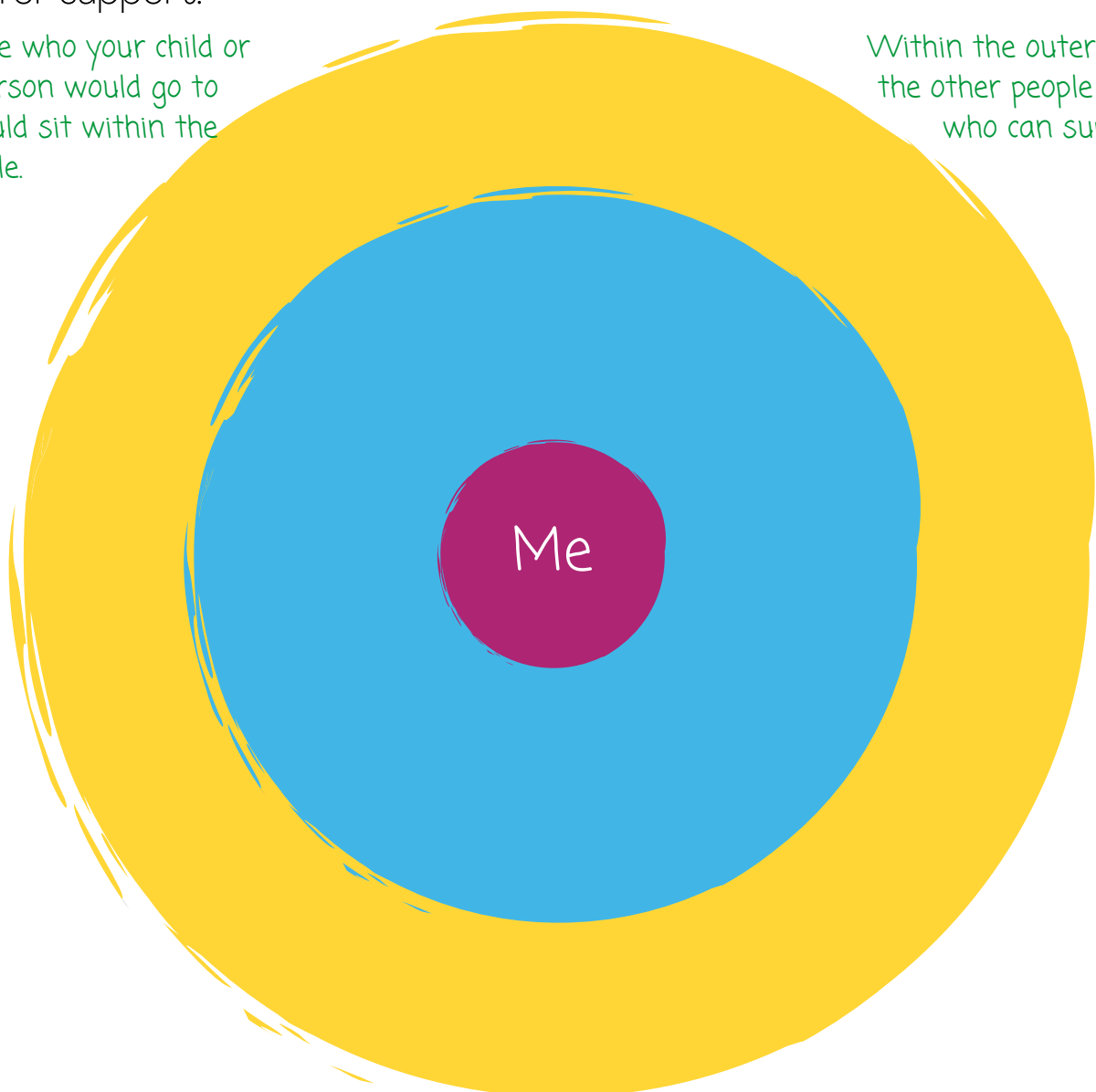
Other Strategies for Managing Change

There are some other useful strategies you can support your child or young person to develop to help them manage their anxiety surrounding change. One of these is **Problem Solving** where they can identify a current problem or a potential problem and work through the **7 Step Problem Solving** worksheet to find a solution (included on page 8). By allowing your child or young person to work through this they will begin to develop their own problem solving skills which in turn will build their confidence to manage and navigate difficulties independently.

Another useful strategy they can use is **Circles of Support** which will enable them to begin identifying people who can support them during challenging times. This will help remind them that they are not alone and that it is ok to ask others for support.

The people who your child or young person would go to first should sit within the inner circle.


Within the outer circle, place the other people in their life who can support them.



'Dos and Don'ts'

It's easy to feel that doing anything is better than doing nothing. But sometimes the things we do as adults to try and help children and young people may not always achieve that goal. Here's a quick guide to some 'dos and don'ts' to support you in feeling more helpful.


Dos




Listen to your child or young person and let them speak without interrupting them. When they have finished speaking, try to [validate and normalise](#) how they are feeling. Reflect back to them what they have said or what they are feeling e.g. "It sounds like this is very scary for you." "So I understand from what you've said that you're worrying about having new teacher."



[Convey love and acceptance](#) towards your child or young person by giving them a hug or holding their hand if they are ok with this.



Be mindful of your [facial expressions](#) and body language. Try to face them and make eye contact to show that you are listening and are interested in what they have to say.




Help your child or young person to get back into a [routine](#). Encourage them to stick to bedtimes, times to get up, mealtimes etc.



Help your child or young person to [prepare everything](#) they need for going back to school. Let them write lists, help with shopping and getting things together.



Encourage your child or young person to [make contact with friends](#) so that the first day is a little less daunting for them.



[Ask questions](#) and be reasonably inquisitive. Check if there's anything that might help. However, be prepared that they may not know and reassure them that it's ok if they don't know what they need.

Don'ts



Dismissing any emotions shared or saying that you don't think that they should feel that way won't be helpful. All emotions are welcome and it's ok to feel scared, angry, upset or happy at different times.



Try to not overreact to emotions or thoughts shared. This can be hard if they are behaving in a challenging way but try to stay calm and listen to what they are telling you.



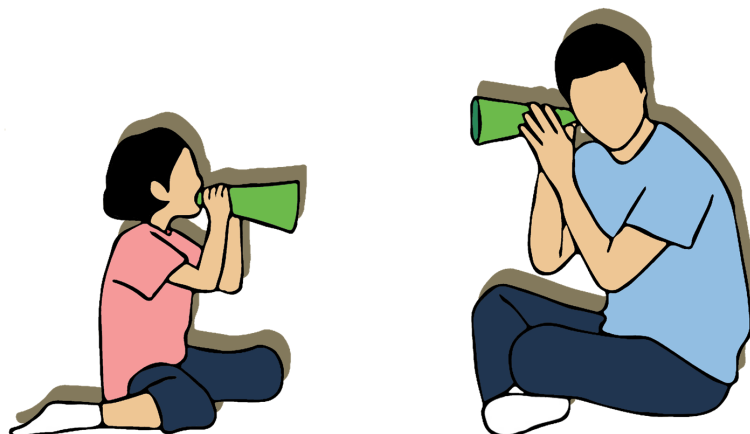
Don't try and predict how they feel. It's ok to feedback and repeat what they've told you, but don't try to guess at what they may be feeling.



Don't interrupt them, let them speak freely. This can be tricky if you hear something you think you can help with and want to dive in to offer advice or support. Listen to everything they have to say and ask further questions if you need to clarify anything, before considering your response.



Try to not avoid the conversation. Sometimes children or young people will start a discussion with you at an unexpected time, like when you're driving in the car or about to start dinner. They have chosen that place and time to speak with you because they feel comfortable, so try to avoid putting the conversation off to speak later or somewhere else. If you have to delay the conversation though, explain to them that you can see this is important to them and that you want to be able to listen to what they have to say. Arrange a time when you are both free and able to talk.



Relaxation

There are several different types of **relaxation and mindfulness** techniques, including breathing, grounding and self-soothe that you can practise with your child or young person. Asking them about their senses whilst they are doing the activity can help if they are struggling to focus on something else. The following activities work well for grounding and relaxation.

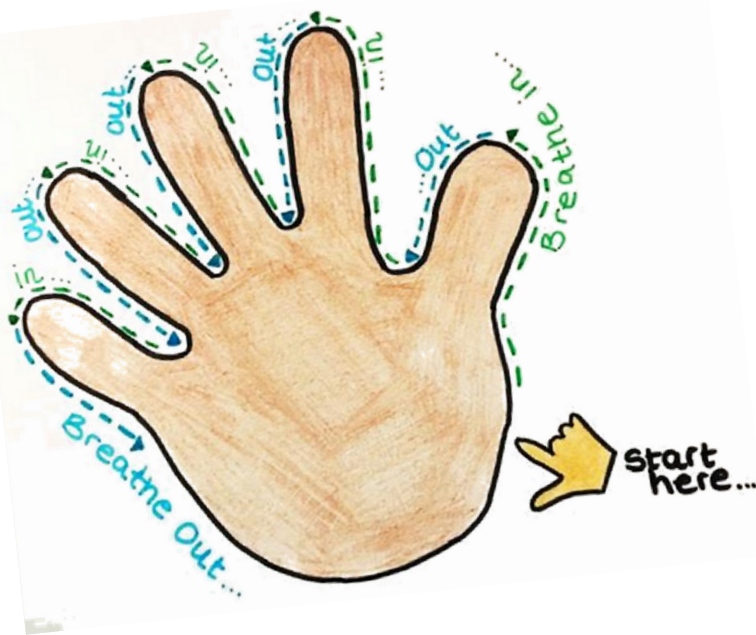
Finger Breathing

Step 1: Sit comfortably, resting one hand in front of you with fingers outstretched like a star. Have the index finger of your other hand ready to trace your hand.

Step 2: Starting at the base of your thumb on the outside of your hand, breathe in slowly through your nose as you slide your index finger up to the top of your thumb.

Step 3: Breathe out slowly and slide your index finger down the inside of your thumb. Breathe in as you slide your finger up the next finger and out as you slide down.

Step 4: Continue breathing in and out as you trace your whole hand.



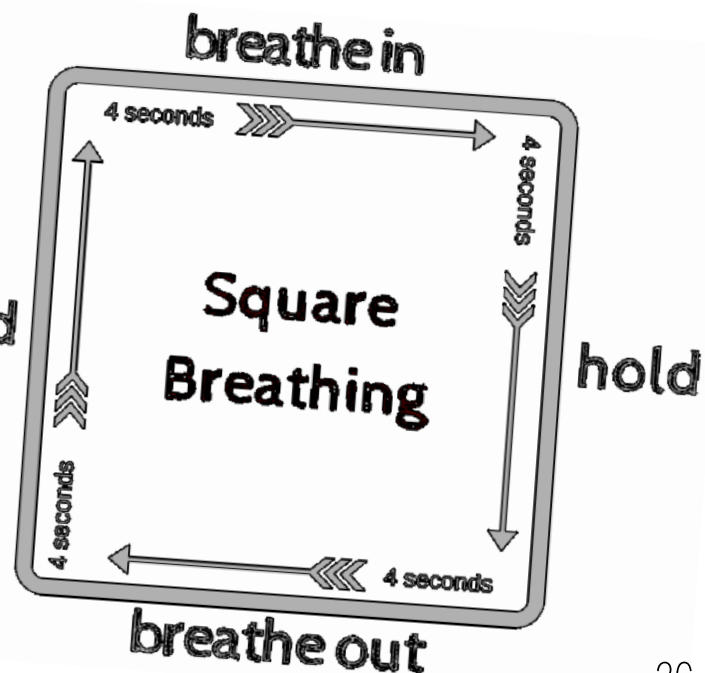
Square Breathing

Step 1: Starting at the top left hand corner of the square, sit upright and slowly inhale through your nose for a slow count of four. Pay attention to the feeling of air filling your lungs.

Step 2: Hold your breath for another slow **hold** count of four.

Step 3: Exhale slowly and deeply through your mouth to the count of four. Feel the air leave your lungs.

Step 4: Hold your breath for the same slow count of four before repeating this process.



Refocusing

See if you can name:

- Five things you can see,**
- Four things you can hear,**
- Three things you can feel,**
- Two things you can smell,**
- One thing you can taste**

You may even wish to focus on one specific colour and finding objects that match. Get creative and find different things you've not noticed before.



STOPP

Step 1: Stop.

Step 2: Take a breath. Use square breathing or finger breathing at this time, whichever is most helpful.

Step 3: Observe. What am I thinking? What am I reacting to? What can I feel in my body? Is there anything else I notice?

Step 4: Pull Back. Try to see the bigger picture. Is what I am thinking a fact or an opinion? How would someone else see the situation, like my parents or my friends? What would other people say?

Step 5: Practise what works. What is the best thing to do for myself and others in this situation? What have I done before that has worked? Are there any ways of calming down that have been recommended?



Mindfulness Stories

The Clever Fox - New Horizon Meditation and Sleep Stories

Blue Gold - Calm (read by Stephen Fry)

The Cozy Attic - Michelle's Sanctuary

Walk in the Woods - New Horizon Meditation and Sleep Stories



Positive Reinforcement

Celebrating success is crucial when children or young people are making positive changes in their lives. Discuss how they would like to be rewarded for their success when they make progress or for their 'brave behaviour' (such as when they try something new). Rewards don't have to be very big. For example, they could have their favourite food for tea. Rewards can also be agreed with school so that success is celebrated in all areas of life.

Safety Behaviours

As a parent, it is very difficult to see your child or young person in distress and want to do things to help them. However, when you try and help your child or young person with worries and anxious feelings, it is easy to feed into the worry and anxiety without realising you are doing it.

For example, a child or young person might be scared of monsters at night time so the parent gives them 'monster spray' to make the monsters disappear. This is a **safety behaviour** because, although it may work in the short term, the child or young person becomes reliant on this rather than building confidence and learning that they can manage the anxiety. Another example may be to make a call for your child or young person because they get anxious about talking on the phone.

So, we challenge you to recognise the safety behaviours that you are unintentionally feeding and instead encourage brave behaviour. Encourage your child or young person to 'have a go' and celebrate the effort regardless of success or failure.



Be
brave

Other Places to get Support

Sometimes children and young people are not able to cope with change by themselves and this is okay. But it's important to remember that there are lots of great **services** out there should you, or they, need someone to talk to.

Websites

Healthy Minds and CAMHS Website - www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people

Get Self-Help - www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Young Minds - www.youngminds.org.uk

KOOTH (11+) - www.kooth.com

Mood Juice - <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/>

LCC Emotional Wellbeing Pathway - www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/emotionalwellbeing

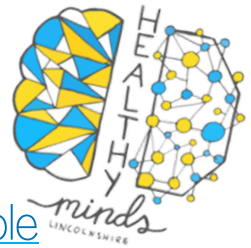
Numbers

Here4You Advice Line: 01522 309120 (Healthy Minds & CAMHS)

ChildLine: 0800 1111

Samaritans: 116 123

Young Minds 24/7 Crisis Messenger (Shout):
SHOUT to 85258



The Healthy Minds and CAMHS website contains lots of other useful information for you to have a look at such as **relaxation videos**, **online workshops** and our **useful apps booklet**!

