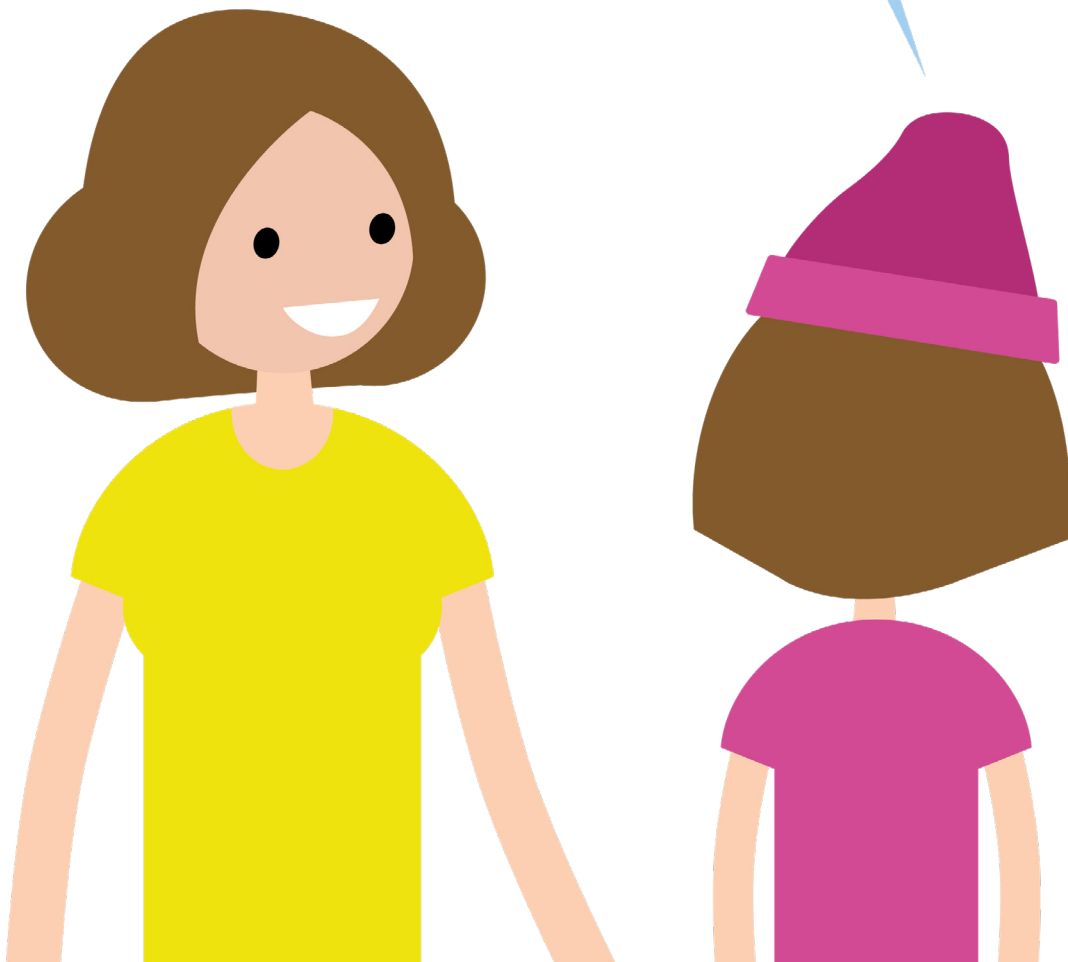


‘Let’s Talk About
Mental Health’



A Parent's Toolkit for Wellbeing.

2simple

Written by Nina Jackson and Kelly Hannaghan.

Hello

We are delighted to welcome you on this journey in supporting important conversations around mental health and wellbeing with your child.

We understand the challenges you may face in navigating the ever changing landscape of life and parenting, but knowing that you have arrived at this point, we are here to support you with some of the difficulties in exploring the mental health and wellbeing of your children.

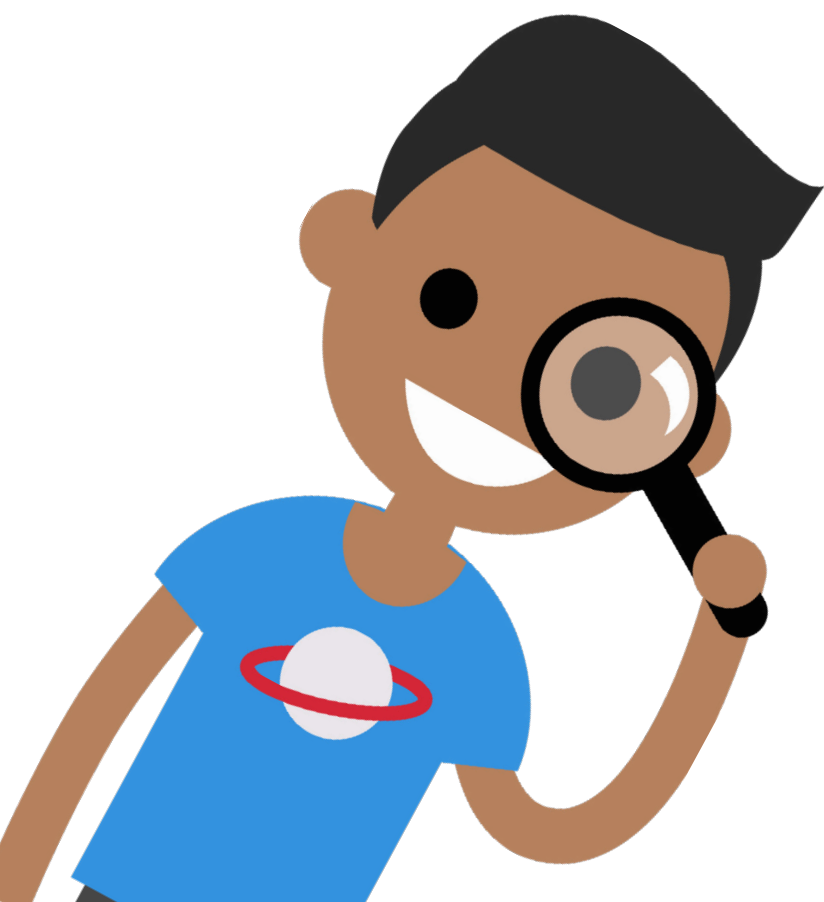
Firstly, we'd like to thank you for being there for your child in times of uncertainty. This booklet has been created to provide you with the tools to identify and respond to your child's unique emotional health needs.

This booklet has been written by Nina Jackson and Kelly Hannaghan. [Nina Jackson](#) is an award-winning motivational speaker, a published author and an International Mental Health Advisor & Consultant. [Kelly Hannaghan](#) is a Mental Health & Wellbeing Consultant with 15 years' experience of working in education as well as being an award-winning motivational speaker, school improvement advisor and published Author.



Contents

Why Mental Health and Wellbeing is important	4
Being your child's role model	5
Five steps to physical and emotional growth	6
Supporting your child and spotting the signs of emotional distress (5-7)	7
Steps towards helping your children with anxiety, resilience and self-esteem. (5-7)	9
Steps towards helping your children with anxiety, resilience and self-esteem. (7-11)	12
Your positive mental health toolkit for your children (5-11)	15
Positive steps to help with transition and social media (7-11)	17



Why Mental Health and Wellbeing is important.

Wellbeing is important. It's about feeling good both physically and emotionally. It marries the head and the heart together to create a sense of fulfilment. However, the world of mental health and wellbeing does not have to be considered a place of worry for parents; in fact, it can be embraced as a tool for building a better future for us all with healthy conversations that nurture emotional growth and positive relationships.

2Simple have put together this informative guide to help support you with healthy conversations about mental health and wellbeing with your child. This will enable them to flourish in an ever-changing world, armed with the tools for emotional understanding and the resilience to regulate their thoughts and feelings.

The world of mental health and wellbeing is vast and ever changing, evolving at such a pace that parents often find it hard to keep up with the emotional needs of their children. Our children are now experiencing levels of stress, anxiety and emotional uncertainty like they have never known before.

In this toolkit, you will find tips and advice for parents of children aged 5 to 7 and for those of children aged 7 to 11, providing you with everything you need to start and build on conversations about mental health and wellbeing.

SEMH Guidance

The tips and advice have been created with the rationale that they are flexible and can be adapted to suit the needs of your child including those with **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**. There are many brilliant resources readily available online that support children with a range of Special Educational Needs. The [Anna Freud Centre](#) is an excellent starting place for resources and links to other highly reputable providers of free advice and resources.



Being your child's role model

When children are very young, adults are key people in nurturing their physical and emotional development with regards to stability, safety and security. Parents and carers are role models from an early age which set the positive pathways of child development and emotional wellbeing.

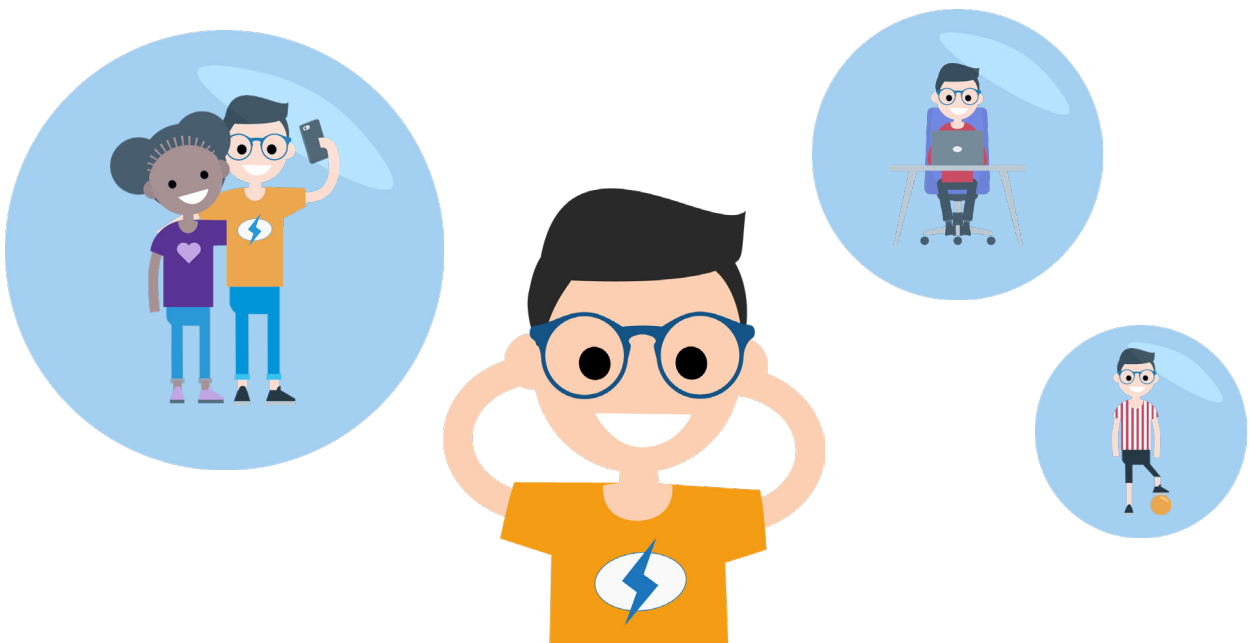
Advice and modelled behaviour at an early age will help to protect your child when faced with emotional challenges and difficulties. After this, parents at certain points in their child's development will need to instigate conversations along with modelled behaviour about mental health and wellbeing to ensure that the child is confident, creating a sense of openness and compassion for themselves, embracing the beginning of self-care needs at an early age and maximise their chances of growing into safe and responsible citizens. When being your child's positive role model consider some of the following approaches:

Be mindful

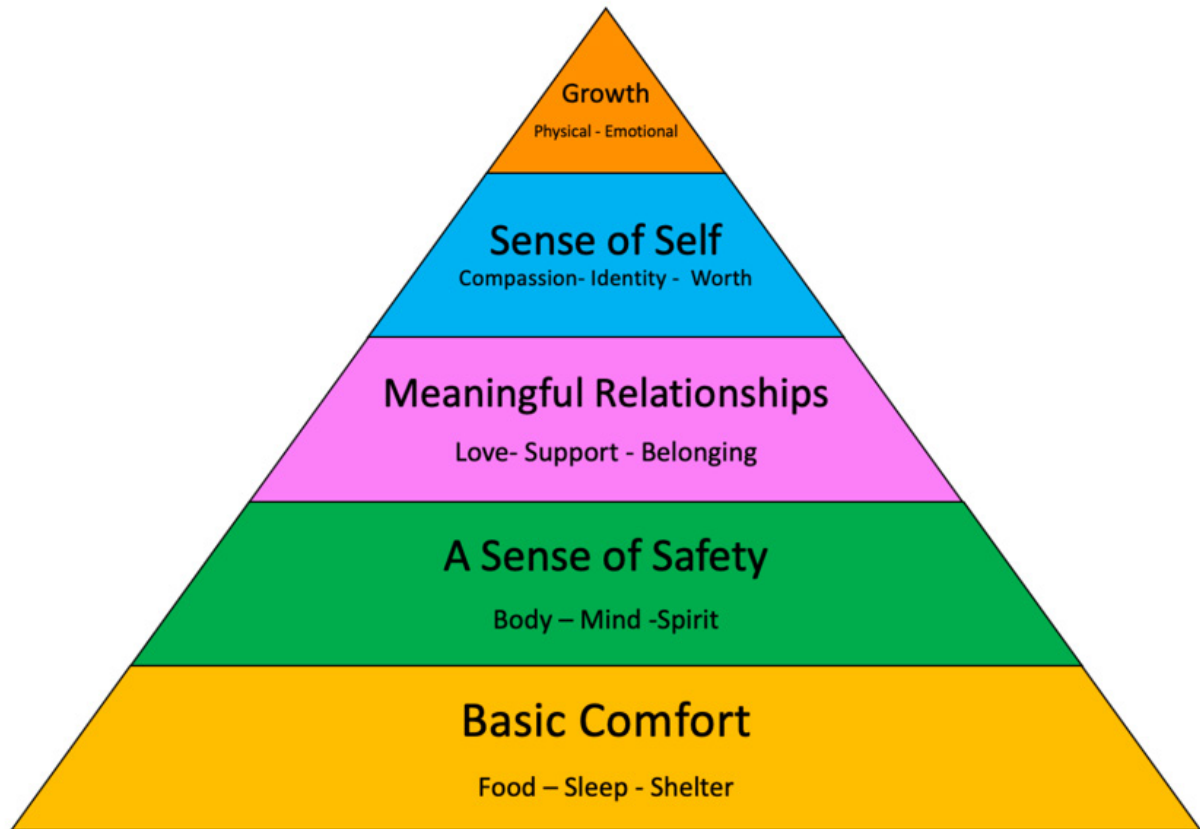
If your child sees you overcoming challenging emotions, this is positive, however, be mindful where and when they see this happening. If you are sharing your emotions with other adults and your child is an onlooker, your use of words and body language will be very different. If your child does see this when you are with other adults make sure you explain your feelings in a child-friendly manner which makes it more understandable for their world.

Child Development – understanding their needs.

Knowing your child and their unique personality is key in identifying any changes in their emotional behaviours and presentations as they move from the safety of the home into a new world of experiences such as nursery, school, clubs and social circles.



The Five steps to physical and emotional growth



This pyramid supports positive physical and emotional growth

This sense of purpose enables children to have the emotional and cognitive skills to embrace life through the building blocks of experience, relationships, and self-belief and independence through schooling, Home-life experiences, socialising, physical and emotional growth.

For children to feel safe and secure and grow the ability to take risks and learn from these, it's vital that each element of this pyramid is fulfilled to grow a sense of purpose in life.

These are the needs of every child through these experiences:

- School Life
- Home Life
- Friendships
- Social Circles (real life and online)

Supporting your child and spotting the signs of emotional distress (5-7)

Watching your child grow both physically and emotionally is a wonderful experience as a parent and carer. There will many occasions when they will flourish, showing and experiencing happiness and joy. However, there will be other times when both your child and you will be faced with challenges that can often be uncomfortable and feel emotionally overwhelming. These are some things you can do to support your child during difficult times.

Spotting the signs

- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in behaviours
- Withdrawal from the family unit
- Under or over-eating
- Irritable mood swings
- Spending more time alone
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Change in learning patterns



Starting a Conversation

When the need arises to start a conversation with your child about their wellbeing, think about some of the following ideas to help you manage these situations.

Have a conversation about feelings e.g.

“Shall we play a game of Emoji Faces?”

Then try and think of all the different Emoji faces and play a pick one, show one.

E.g.

Parent: “Show me a happy face, show me a sad face, now you pick one and ask me”

Child: “This is my happy face, this is my sad face, show me your angry face?”

When playing this game, you can then move the conversation into asking your child what these emotions feel like.

Allow enough time for a structured conversation

You may want to set a time aside in your mind when you are going to speak with your child about their wellbeing where you will not be disturbed **Note:** Turn your phone off at this point!

Be prepared for unscheduled conversations as thoughts and feelings arise

There will be times when your child will happen to mention in passing an experience or an observation which will need you to have a conversation there and then, at random times.

e.g. Your child runs out from school and says that their friend was unkind and angry with them today and they didn't understand why!

This is your child seeking support and safety from you, by instigating the need for a chat or conversation to help them to understand why this may have happened. Exploring this can help your child understand the reason why this may have occurred. Reassure your child that often we take our worries out on others, sometimes to make ourselves feel better.

Don't push your child to speak

Take the lead from your child in setting the pace for the conversation and remind your child that you are there to listen when they are ready to communicate with you.

Eye contact is not always important, just being together

Often children prefer to have a conversation side-by-side. Try walking and talking, or using games, stories and role play to facilitate conversations.

Bite size conversations

Small, bite-sized conversations support your child in breaking down big feelings and allow them time to process.

Listen to understand, not to repair

As parents you may feel the urge to rescue your child. Allowing your child to express their feeling without you resolving them, will empower your child to connect with the resources they have within them to overcome challenge.

Ask the child what could make them feel better

Try not to give your child all the strategies and offer the opportunity to explore what they may need to make them feel better. P.S Ice Cream is not the correct answer!!

Steps towards helping your children with anxiety, resilience and self-esteem. (5-7)

It's quite normal for children to show signs of anxiety, worries and fears sometimes. In most cases, anxiety in children and fears in childhood come and go and don't last long. This is due to children being uncertain of new experiences and emotions. The best thing you can do for your child is to help them find coping mechanisms, identify triggers and then put some preventative strategies in place so that when you are not with them, they will be able to help themselves before seeking adult guidance. This will allow your child to regulate their emotions and build in skills to self soothe. As they grow, they will be able to use these coping strategies to help them in the future.

You may want to start helping them by:

Slow, slow, slow with the breathing

Encourage your child to take some slow, deep breaths to calm the physical effects of anxiety. Practice together by breathing in for three seconds, holding for three seconds, then out for three. Once they're feeling a bit calmer, you can talk through what's worrying them. This will help with counting skills too.

Sensory Safe

During the first initial stages where you spot anxiety, try and make your child 'feel' safe by giving them a cuddle or wrapping a blanket around them so they feel protected. You can then have the conversation about what they are feeling and why they are anxious. For some, the first experiences of anxiety can be the most daunting as they have never encountered these feelings before. Many parents also use 'calming blankets' which have weights in them to make the child feel even calmer when sleeping. Lava lamps or warming lights on the wall can also help those who have sleep anxiety.

Make time to worry

Setting aside some designated time to deal with worries can stop anxious thoughts from taking over. Try creating a daily ritual called 'worry time' and encourage children to draw or write down whatever's bothering them. You can make the activity a bit more fun by decorating a 'worry box' or building a 'worry wall' out of post-its. When the time is up – after 10 to 15 minutes – shut the worries up in the box or tear them off the wall and say goodbye to them for the day. Even better if you use a 'Worry Eater'.

Climb that ladder

Why not try a technique called 'laddering'? Breaking down worries into manageable chunks and gradually working towards a goal. Let's say your child is afraid of water and swimming. Instead of avoiding the pool, create some mini goals to build their confidence. Start out by just sitting and watching other kids swimming. As they feel more comfortable get them to try dangling their legs in the water, then standing in the shallow end, and so on. This can be used for any form of anxiety or situation.

Positive Panther not Anxiety Ant

Children with anxiety often get stuck on the worst-case scenario or 'what ifs' in any situation. You can help them shift these thinking patterns by:

- Reminding them of times they've dealt with similar issues in the past and how things worked out OK
- Helping them to challenge the scary thought with facts and evidence. For example, we know that crocodiles can't survive under our bed
- Make a plan for how they'll respond if things don't go as they'd like
- You can create a 'Positive Character' to help your child feel better and when they feel more positive you can say that you have now blown the worry away

Give it a go!

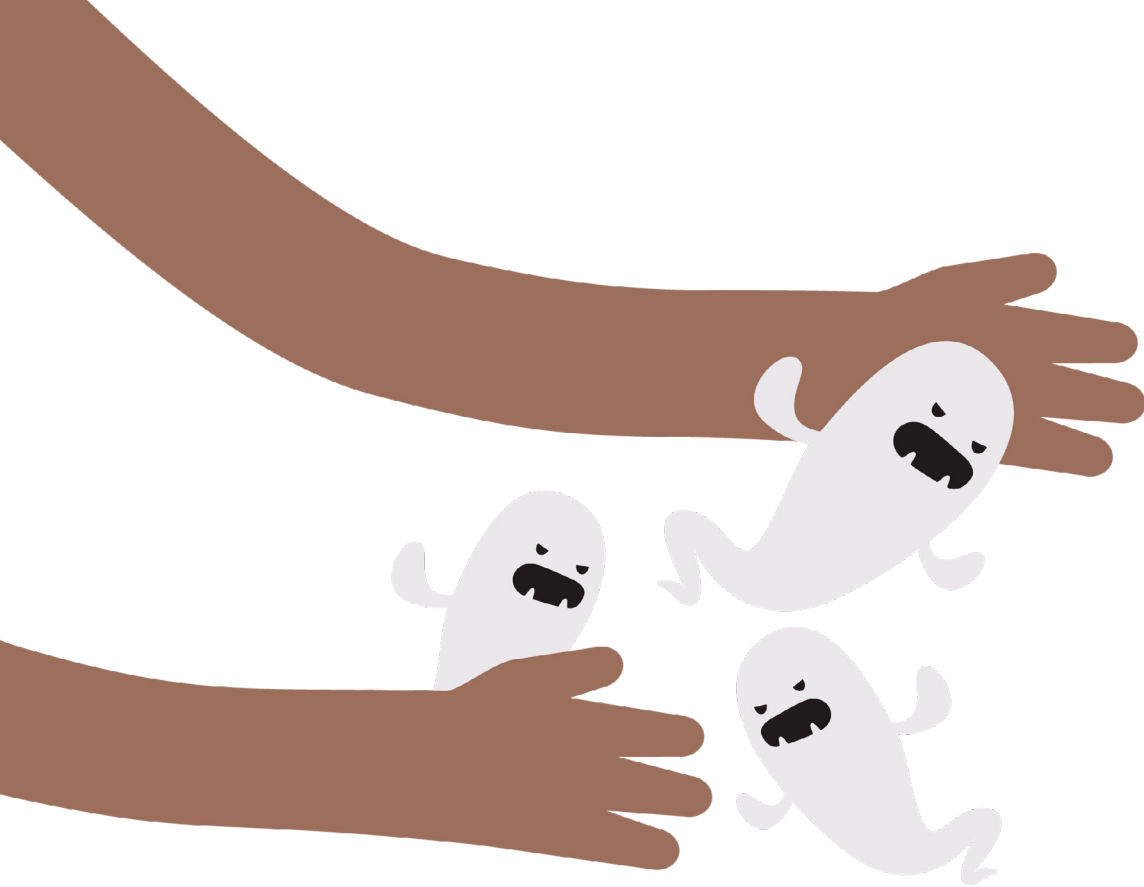
Anxious children often worry about making mistakes or not having things perfect. This can lead to them avoiding situations or activities – they'd rather sit out than get it wrong. Emphasise giving new things a try and having fun over whether something's a success or a failure. Just like learning to ride a bike. You have to fall off to know you have not quite got it right, but you get back on and try again.

Be a model

Don't just tell your child how to overcome emotions – show them. When you get anxious or stressed, verbalise how you're coping with the situation: "This looks a bit scary, but I'll give it a go." And hey, you might even knock off one of your own fears. When we do things with or for children, we often find new strategies to help ourselves as parents too.

Take Charge

Think about what you can do to make your child feel like they have some control over the scary situation. For example, if your child gets anxious about intruders, make shutting and locking their bedroom window part of their night-time responsibilities. The same as a scary monster under the bed. Grab it (as if you can see it too) and squish it in your hand and throw or blow it away.



Keep it real

Lots of children have worries about death, war, terrorism or things they see on the news. This is all really normal. Talk through their fears and answer any questions truthfully. Don't sugar-coat the facts – try and explain what's happening in a way that puts their fears into perspective.

Check your own behaviour

Children pick up all sorts of signals from the adults in their lives, so have a think about the messages that you are sending. Over-protective family members can inadvertently reinforce children's fears that the world is a dangerous place where everything can hurt you. Similarly, parents who 'over-help' are subconsciously telling their child that they can't do anything without adult support. Try taking a step back and waiting next time before you jump in. It can be hard seeing your child distressed but figuring things out for themselves is an important step in building resilience. The more resilient they are the more likely they are to be able to manage their anxieties when you are not with them.

Steps towards helping your children with anxiety, resilience and self-esteem. (7-11)

Stop Reassuring Your Child

All children worry and parents may feel that these are unnecessary worries. However, it's important to recognise and respect your child's big feelings. A simple way of responding could be "I can see you're really worried, let's try and work through this worry together, so what do you need to feel better?" This helps the child to be seen, heard and valued and will highlight the resources they have within them.

During periods of anxiety, there is a rapid dump of chemicals and mental transitions executed in your body for survival. One by-product is that the prefrontal cortex — or more logical part of the brain — gets put on hold while the more automated emotional brain takes over. In other words, it is really hard for your child to think clearly, use logic or even remember how to complete basic tasks. What should you do instead of trying to rationalise the worry away? Try the *FEEL* method:

- **Freeze:** pause and take some deep breaths with your child. Deep breathing can help reverse the nervous system response.
- **Empathise:** anxiety is scary. Your child wants to know that you get it.
- **Evaluate:** once your child is calm, it's time to figure out possible solutions.
- **Let Go:** Let go of your guilt; you are an amazing parent giving your child the tools to manage their worry.

Worrying can be a good thing

Remember, anxiety is tough enough without a child believing that something is wrong with them. Many children will be anxious about being anxious. Teach your child that worrying does, in fact, have a purpose. When our ancestors were hunting and gathering food there was danger in the environment and being worried helped them avoid attacks from the sabre-toothed cat lurking in the bush. In modern times, we don't have a need to run from predators, but we are left with an evolutionary imprint that protects us: worry.

Worry is a protection mechanism. Worry rings an alarm in our system and helps us survive danger. Teach your child that worry is perfectly normal, it can help protect us, and everyone experiences it from time to time. Sometimes our system sets off false alarms, but this type of worry (anxiety) can be put in check with some simple techniques. Knowing that you are worried helps the child to work out how they can make the worry go away.

Teach Your Child to Be a Thought Detective

Remember, worry is the brain's way of protecting us from danger. To make sure we're really paying attention, the mind often exaggerates the object of the worry (e.g. mistaking a stick for a snake). You may have heard that teaching your children to think more positively could calm their worries. But the best remedy for distorted thinking is not positive thinking; it's accurate thinking. Try a method we call the 3Cs:

- **Catch your thoughts:** Imagine every thought you have floats above your head in a bubble (like what you see in comic strips). Now, catch one of the worried thoughts like "No one at school likes me."
- **Collect evidence:** Next, collect evidence to support or negate this thought. Teach your child not to make judgments about what to worry about based only on feelings. Feelings are not facts. (Supporting evidence: "I had a hard time finding someone to sit with at lunch yesterday." Negating evidence: "Sherry and I do homework together—she's a friend of mine.")
- **Challenge your thoughts:** The best (and most entertaining) way to do this is to teach your children to have a debate within themselves.



Allow Them to Worry

As you know, telling your children not to worry won't prevent them from doing so. If your children could simply shove their feelings away, they would. But allowing your children to worry openly, in limited doses, can be helpful. Create a daily ritual called "Worry Time" that lasts 10 to 15 minutes. During this ritual encourage your children to release all their worries in writing. You can make the activity fun by decorating a worry box. During worry time there are no rules on what constitutes a valid worry; anything goes. When the time is up, close the box and say good-bye to the worries for the day.

Help Them Go from 'What If' to 'What Is'

You may not know this, but humans are capable of time travel. In fact, mentally we spend a lot of time in the future. For someone experiencing anxiety, this type of mental time travel can exacerbate the worry. A typical time traveller asks what-if questions: "What if my teacher is not in school today?" "What if my friend doesn't sit with me at lunch time?"

Research shows that coming back to the present can help alleviate this tendency. One effective method of doing this is to practice mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness brings a child from what if to what is. To do this, help your child simply focus on their breath for a few minutes.

Avoid Avoiding Everything that Causes Anxiety

Do your children want to avoid social events, dogs, school, planes or basically any situation that causes anxiety? As a parent, do you help them do so? Of course! This is natural. The flight part of the flight-fight-freeze response urges your children to escape the threatening situation. Unfortunately, in the long run, avoidance makes anxiety worse.

So, what's the alternative? Try a method we call laddering. Kids who are able to manage their worry break it down into manageable chunks. Laddering uses this chunking concept and gradual exposure to reach a goal.

Let's say your child is afraid of sitting on the swings in the park. Instead of avoiding this activity, create 'mini goals' to get closer to the bigger goal (e.g. go to the edge of the park, then walk into the park, go to the swings, and, finally, get on a swing). You can use each step until the exposure becomes too easy; that's when you know it's time to move to the next rung on the ladder.

Help Them Work Through a Checklist

What do trained pilots do when they face an emergency? They don't wing it (no pun intended!); they refer to their emergency checklists. Even with years of training, every pilot works through a checklist because, when in danger, sometimes it's hard to think clearly.

When children face anxiety, they feel the same way. Why not create a checklist so they have a step-by-step method to calm down? What do you want them to do when they first feel anxiety coming on? If breathing helps them, then the first step is to pause and breathe. Next, they can evaluate the situation. In the end, you can create a hard copy checklist for your child to refer to when they feel anxious.

Practice Self-Compassion

Watching your child suffer from anxiety can be painful, frustrating, and confusing. There is not one parent that hasn't wondered at one time or another if they are the cause of their child's anxiety. Here's the thing, research shows that anxiety is often the result of multiple factors (i.e., genes, brain physiology, temperament, environmental factors, past traumatic events, etc.). Please keep in mind, you did not cause your child's anxiety, but you can help them overcome it.

Working towards the goal of a healthier life for the whole family, practice self-compassion. Remember, you're not alone, and you're not to blame. It's time to let go of debilitating self-criticism and forgive yourself. Love yourself. You are your child's champion.

Your positive mental health toolkit for your children (5–11)

When building a toolkit to help you have conversations with your child here are some ideas for you. However, you may already have a wealth of approaches and strategies that you use on a daily basis that you have not considered as effective tools for wellbeing. For example, routines, schedules, systems and approaches. So, be ready to add your own tools into the ones we suggest.

- **Emotional Literacy Books**

In your toolkit you may want to think about using some of these emotional literacy books that will help with having conversations.



- **Puppets**

Using puppets can be a great way to model conversations and can build in skills of active listening and empathy.

- **Music**

Using music to create the right environment for conversations can be really helpful. From calming, soothing music to up-beat tracks for energy and positivity. You may even want to dance and talk at the same time.

- **Small World Play & Lego**

Small world play and Lego allows children to use their creativity and imagination in guiding their own play and can take the attention away from them when talking about thoughts and feelings.

- **Drawing**

Drawing is a great way to explore a child's internal world. An example of this is to ask a child to show you how they are feeling on paper, in sand, clay, using shaving foam, craft materials and so forth.

- **Games**

Board games are a helpful strategy when building in quality time together and starting difficult conversations. It helps some children as there is no need for eye contact just focussed listening.

- **Apps**

There are a range of apps that can be used to help with expressing emotions and challenges and dealing with anxiety.



Positive steps to help with transition and social media (7-11)

Transition

There are many milestones of momentous transitions in our lives. Some of these are during our childhood years and can have an overwhelming impact on our emotional wellbeing and mental health if we don't help and support our children. Moving from one year group to another, taking transition from primary to secondary school as well as moving home, community or safe environments that our children have become accustomed to can be really difficult to manage. These big changes can feel intimidating, frightening, cause anxiety and stress and often sleepless nights because of moving into the unknown.

Once your child has settled and familiar with new systems, places, people and surroundings it becomes less daunting and generally anxieties and feelings of emotional distress will eventually, over time, feel less scary and more comfortable. Even as adults we can find uncertainty and change in routine and surroundings difficult. Children of course, need that little extra support as the change can seem hugely overbearing. You as the parent and carers can ease all these emotional burdens felt by your children through some of the following steps:

Walk, Talk and Plan Together

Familiarity is key with any form of transition. Most children are often concerned about one of the biggest educational transitions which is moving from Primary to Secondary School, or Middle to High School.

Talk to your child about what they may expect. Visit the site of the new school as the enormity of the building can be worrying for some. If your child is travelling to school on public transport, practise the route beforehand. Share your own experiences about how you adapted to such change as a child. Reassurance is key.

Drawing maps of the route from home to school can help many. If they are moving to pay for lunch instead of taking prepared food from home practise choosing food and paying for it or pretend they are swiping their lunch credit card at home. Getting used to these types of systems can alleviate so many worries. Think about management of the following the night before:

- Getting uniform ready and laid out
- Packing the bag with books, stationery, PE Kit, musical instruments and snacks
- Checking the school diary/timetable for lessons and how to move from one class to another
- Water
- Bus Pass (if needed)

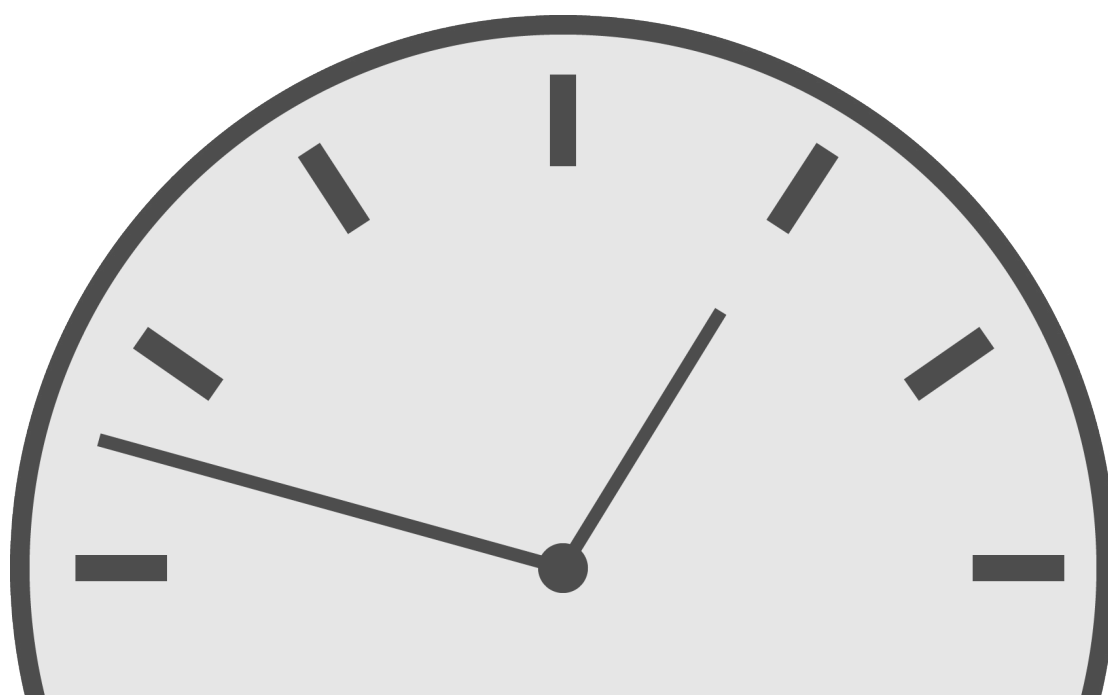
Whatever the type of transition, even if it's moving home or geographical location, getting to know the areas with you is key in supporting a smooth experience.

Routines, Routines and did we mention Routines?

Routines are so important. We feel comfortable with routines because they help us to navigate our thoughts and feelings. They give us a purpose. No matter what the transition is maintaining a daily routine helps to ease them into the process. Routines let children know what they can expect to happen each day, from the time they wake up until they go to bed.

Make sure that the routine you set for your child promotes positive health, both physically and emotionally. This will include establishing a bedtime that allows for a healthy amount of sleep, regular mealtimes that include healthy options, and designated homework schedules during the week and school year. Don't forget fun time each day, too!

Weekends and holidays may be a bit more relaxed when it comes to keeping the routine, and that is fine. Be sure that your child understands why weekend routines get to be a little looser so that making the transition back to the weekday routine is less painful. Think of it as a connecting bridge from one week to another. Using the term 'bridging time' is a good way of allowing your child to relax and connect with wellbeing activities and self-care.



If it's possible to keep their routine similar to what it was before, that can help curb confusion and stress in your child. However, if it must change dramatically due to an entirely new set of circumstances, know that your child can adapt. Children are extremely resilient and can acclimate to a new schedule, but still make sure you are there to offer your support and motivate them to keep moving forward with confidence.

Part of transition is allowing your child to become more independent. This can be hard on you as parents as you will always see them as your 'child' even if they are growing up quickly and changing physically. Be mindful to give your child space and privacy whilst ensuring they know you are there for them. You were a child once and I'm sure you remember the changes you wanted and the changes you didn't want. Unconditional love is all you can give them.

Finding Time for Fun and Laughter

To help make a transition more comfortable for your child, plan and seek out some fun activities that they could get involved in. If your child is transitioning to a new school, they may not know many people around them. Talk to your child about getting involved in one or more school programmes or extra-curricular activities. A great way to develop resilience and self-worth as well as confidence and self-esteem. This will be a way for your child to meet new people who have similar interests.

If you're moving to a new house, keep your eyes open for parks nearby that you see children playing in. You can take your child there, and perhaps they'll get to know some of the other children there. Or make the new school experience a treasure hunt of gathering clues about the area and the school.

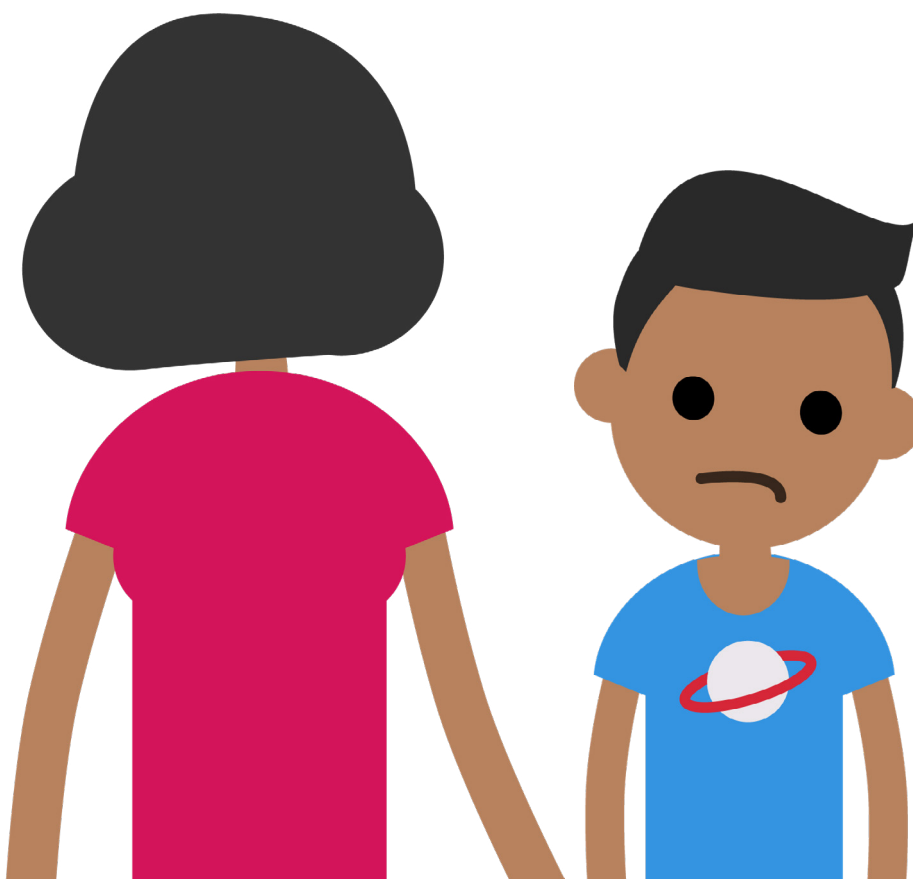
Think about using as much outdoor space in your area as you can. Either in your garden, if you have one or safe local spaces. Children love to explore and play fantasy games with their friends; it helps with social bonding and independence which is all good for emotional growth.

It's Good to Chat!

In some instances, it might not be a total surprise to you that your child isn't happy about making a transition. The unfamiliar is often scarier than it is exciting, so they might not be taking to the transition very well. Talk to your child about how they are feeling with regards to the upcoming change and allow them to share their feelings with you. Make a game of 'worry words' and 'wonder words'. The wonder words being small moments of celebration and feelings which they can store on a digital device or make a Word Wall or Word Salad. There are many applications and online tools that they can use.

Maybe your child is anxious about the separation from you and their old friends as well as friends from their previous school. Or maybe it could be that they are angry that they have to leave their old room for a different one in a new house or similar transition experience. Keep a positive attitude about yourself as you have these conversations with your child. As a parent, if you are confident and enthusiastic about the transition at hand, this will likely rub off on your child.

There will be ups and downs throughout the transitions like into a new home or a new school but work to maintain your positive outlook as a way to help encourage your child to do the same. Starting the conversation might not always be easy, especially if your child is reluctant to talk about what's bothering them. To help spark a conversation, try reading stories about other children who are dealing with changes might help your children to realise that others feel the same way and that it's okay. You can use books on positivity and self-growth.



Some great books we can recommend are:

['Tween You and Me'](#)

['Your Mood Journal'](#)

['Happy Self Journal'](#)

['Happy, Confident Me'](#)

['How to Hug a Porcupine'](#)

Coping with change can be tough. Tough for people of any age, but unlike many adults, children don't always understand why transitions take place and how to handle it. As a parent, patiently work with your child and offer the support they need to move ahead into whatever it is they are about to face.

Walk together through what is about to change and get a routine in place as soon as the transition takes place. Don't forget to look for new ways to have fun to lighten the stress of a scary move. Finally, remember to encourage your child to talk about what they're feeling in order to let out their emotions. Even if it seems scary today, with healthy support, your child can overcome and succeed in the new circumstances with which they are presented.

Managing emotional change and uncertainty is difficult of course it is, but when you have a trusted friend, adult or parent this can make the stress and anxiousness of new challenges become less overwhelming and more embracing.



Social Media (7-11)

Social media can be a real cause for concern for both yourselves as parents and children who may not fully understand some of the hidden dangers that can cause serious anxiety, depression, and for many young people it can make them mentally unwell. Social media is not going away, we have to accept that it is part of our lives, the lives of our children and grandchildren.

There are many different ways that children begin to use social media:

- **Online profiles:** Most social media sites require users to set up a profile, which usually includes a name, e-mail address, birth date, interests and a photo. Make sure your child is age appropriate for these sites. Did you know that your child needs to be 13 to use Facebook as an example.
- **Friends:** Depending on the tool, users “follow” or “request” to be friends with people they know, such as classmates or family members. They may also use it to find new friends.
- **Messaging/Chats:** Using instant messaging over the Internet or between smartphones to send messages (e.g. Facebook Messenger, iMessage, WhatsApp, Hangouts, Instagram and so forth).
- **Walls and boards:** Social media sites allow people to post or send messages in many different ways. On Facebook, for example, information is posted to a “wall”. Depending on a user’s privacy settings, some messages are visible to the public, while others can only be seen by friends or followers. Your child may have already set up a Facebook account under a pseudonym and you may not know that they have. Talk e-safety as much as you can.
- **Photo and video sharing:** Many social networking sites or apps allow users to upload photos and videos, or to share live videos. These can also be public or private depending on privacy settings. Be honest about what ‘trolls’ and ‘bots’ are. Trolls are real users who will make your life uncomfortable and bots are automated. They do not post from a human. Trolls use bots to attack accounts and cause emotional distress.
- **Vlogs:** Short for “video blogs”, vlogs are posted regularly to a video sharing platform (like YouTube) by individuals called “vloggers”. Vloggers can develop very big followings online and many children are aware of the money they can make from such online presence. Money does not help mental and emotional health needs.

- **Joining groups:** Many apps allow users to create groups. People “join”, “like” or “follow” groups to access information and have conversations with other members.
- **Playing games:** Children will often visit online sites to play games, alone or with their friends. Some apps include free online gambling, and many feature product promotion or advertising, so make sure you explain the effects of such sites to your children.

What you can do as parents is to help them navigate a world that can be wonderful but also worrying. Using social media in a productive manner is what we all want children to do. However, through no fault of their own there are unsuspecting trolls and internet intruders that can make life very difficult.

From cyberbullying to FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) and other acronyms used, social media can be a land mine for some children. From Tik-Tok to Instagram, WhatsApp to Facebook and many more, helping your child to understand what is good online etiquette as well as spotting the signs of unwanted attention and possible grooming, you will need to help them to understand the positive aspect of the online world as well as the dangers. Our children are now being described as ‘Digital Natives’ because it is part of their world growing up and has always been there, unlike the generation we grew up in.

Make Digital Wellbeing a priority for your whole family, not just your child. Talk about the great points of social media and online learning as well as the dangers that EVERYONE faces, but more so where your child could be placed in a vulnerable position

For some children social media can or may act as a trigger – though not always the root causes – for their anxiety levels or emotional unwellness. Remember that for ‘some’ children for a variety of reasons and learning needs, they may be more prone to anxiety-producing effects of social media and online learning. Those children who are diagnosed with social anxiety disorder may prefer to have online interactions and workspaces over face-to-face interactions. You as parent may not be aware of the impact of social media on your child until potential issues arise. However, be mindful of screen time for the ‘whole’ family. Maybe think about having a family ‘Digital Wellness Check’ on a weekly basis such as you would have on a mobile digital device when it gives you the screen time usage.



When your child is starting to show changes in behaviour, both physically and emotionally, be aware.

As parents look out for:

- Tech addiction – gaming, online chat groups, social media channels
- Loss or lack of real-life social skills
- Sudden obsession with body image
- Eating habits are changing dramatically

Things to help/support your child:

1. Encourage Self-Care
2. Put Social Media into perspective
3. Offline and Online Activities
4. Let's talk about – feelings
5. Never give up on them – always here
6. Help – get it if you need it.

How to help your child with being safe using social media?

- Learn about the online platforms and apps your child is using. Take an interest in what they are using so you can become familiar with these sites yourself so that you can offer unconditional support. Some social media platforms have age restrictions to join, but it's easy for children to get around these.
- Show interest and be comfortable in your child's online life and ask questions. Not probing ones as they could cause alarm and may come across that you are not trustworthy of their online usage.
- Where and when possible, keep tablets and computers in common areas where you can watch while your child uses them. Encourage your child to use the internet in a safe space in the house where you can periodically glance at their screens without becoming intrusive.
- Get online family protection. Programmes that provide parental controls can block websites, enforce time limits, monitor the websites your child visits, and their online conversations. This is a good way of filtering unwanted sites.
- Do not be afraid to follow your child's online accounts and tell them that you are monitoring their online activity to help keep them safe. Some children or teens may create a fake second account for their parents to follow.

- Ask them about the people they “meet” online. Showing genuine interest will help them feel comfortable talking about it. Explain that it’s easy for someone on the Internet to pretend to be someone they’re not. We have all heard the horror stories no doubt.
- Talking about the importance of keeping online friendships in the online world is crucial. Make it clear that if your child wants to meet an online friend in person, it must be in a public place and with a trusted adult. Keep a note of date, time and where they may choose to meet. This is always a difficult moment for a parent.
- Discuss what’s appropriate and safe to post online, and what is not. Online posts stay online forever. As a general rule, your child shouldn’t post anything they wouldn’t want a parent or teacher to see or read. It’s difficult to retract posts and information you share online.
- People can’t always control what others post about them. Explain that information and photos found online can turn up again years later. This can help them to understand that they are less likely to suffer worry and anxiety in future years if they protect themselves now.
- Explain that autocorrect can sometimes lead to miscommunication and hurt feelings. I’m sure as a parent you have seen this happen yourself?

All of these emotional and mental health approaches you will use with your child will have a lasting positive impact for future generations.

Further links, support and guidance:

[Anna Freud](#)

[Young Minds UK](#)

[Mental Health Foundation](#)

[NSPCC](#)

[Mind](#)

