

back to school anxiety

a guide for young people

making a

difference

together

If you have been away from school or college for a long time due to the covid-19 lockdown, you might be feeling more anxious than usual about returning. Like many other young people, you might have become used to being at home a lot of the time and therefore feel nervous about getting “back to normal” again. The important thing to remember is that this is NORMAL.

get prepared

Try your best to spend the days or weeks leading up to going back to school to get back into a routine. Make sure your bed time gets back to normal and that you set an alarm to get up at the time you would usually get up for school. This might be difficult at first but it will help you get a good night's sleep and make it much easier to get up for school again when you need to.



talk & ask questions

If you're feeling worried/anxious, chances are that someone you know is feeling the same way. Talk to your friends and family about how you're feeling as this can help you feel better just by getting it off your mind.



listen to the facts

There's a huge amount of news out there about Covid-19 and some of it can be pretty scary and daunting. Try to limit the amount of time you spend hearing about Covid-19 and only listen to the facts. Remember, you would not be going back to school if it wasn't safe to do so and your school will be putting lots of things in place to make it safe, too. If you're worried, talk to your school about what they have put in place so you know what to expect.



get help with your anxiety

You can use this booklet to help better understand your anxiety and learn some strategies for how to better manage it and feel better. But, if you continue to struggle, you can always make a referral to the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) for mental health support by contacting your local team, by visiting your GP or by speaking to your SENCo or head of year at school. You never have to struggle alone.



other helpful services

kooth

Kooth is an online community for young people aged 11-18 which offers mental health support and online counselling. www.kooth.com

mind

Mental health support for young people. Some localities are offering a dedicated phoneline who are struggling to cope with the current situation. www.mind.org.uk

recovery college online

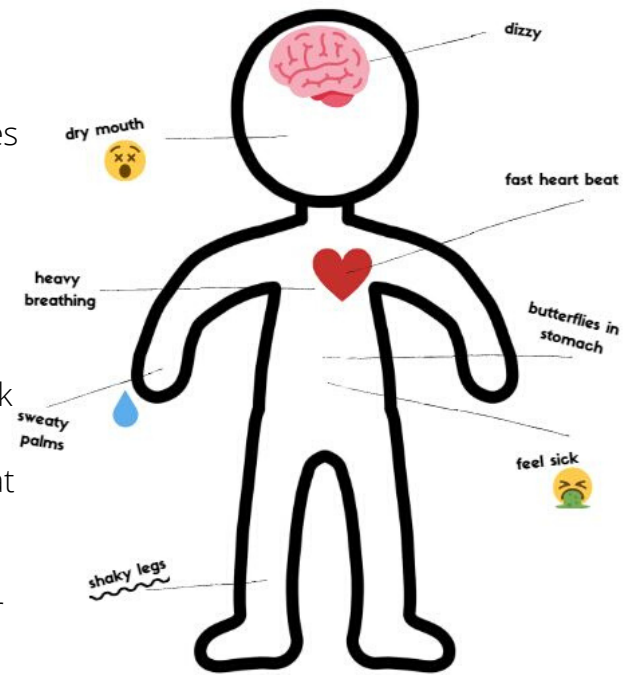
Free resources to help support people struggling with mental health difficulties. www.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk

symptoms of anxiety

When feeling anxious, we all experience some physical symptoms which can be unpleasant and upsetting. It's important to remember that these are NORMAL body reactions to a feared situation that everyone experiences at some time or another. What symptoms do you recognise when you're feeling anxious?

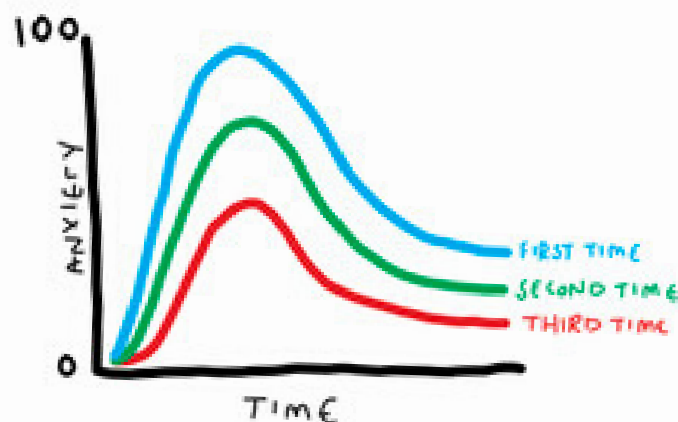
the fight or flight response

Humans developed this response as cave men because it was a much more dangerous time to live back then (think running away from saber tooth tigers and hunting for food). The Fight or Flight response meant that cave men's bodies went into survival mode whenever their brains sensed danger. This meant their heart rate and blood pressure would increase so they had a better chance of running away (flight) or fighting the danger (fight). We all react in different ways when we feel anxious and our Fight or Flight response kicks in, but it's important to remember that it is normal!



habituation (the more you do it, the easier it will get)

Evidence shows that the more we avoid feared or uncomfortable situations, the more anxious we will become. This is because our body and brain are learning to fear that situation. For many young people, the longer you have spent away from school and the more you have become used to being at home, the worse your fear/anxiety around school has become. This is because you haven't had any opportunities to test out that fear and teach your brain that there is nothing to be worried or scared about. You will therefore need to HABITUATE back to school. This means that, the first time you go back to school, you will most likely experience the symptoms of anxiety because your fight or flight response has reacted to the feared situation. However, what we know is that, the longer you stay in that situation, the less anxious you will feel. This means the more times you go back to school, the easier it will become. The good thing is that this is NORMAL and that you can re-teach your brain over time that there is nothing to be scared of.



It's a little bit like jumping in a cold swimming pool. At first, all you want to do is get out of the pool. But, the longer you stay in the pool, the more you get used to it and you no longer want to get out.

managing worries

You might notice that lots of worries make you feel more anxious and this might be even worse at the moment as you get ready to return to school. This guide can help you to deal with those worries in a structured way and help you to feel better.

There are two different types of worry and it's important to know the difference because we can deal with them in different ways. The first are **Hypothetical Worries** which are worries we don't currently have control over and can't do anything about. The second are **Practical Worries** which are worries we can do something about.

hypothetical Worries

- What if we all get ill?
- What if I have a different teacher?
- What if I'm in a different class?
- What if I infect my family?

practical Worries

- I might not be with a friend.
- What if I can't remember what we did in maths?
- Someone might not follow the social distancing guidelines.

catch the worries

As you notice worries during the day, write them down so that you can come back to them later at **Worry Time**. You could also write them on a note on your phone or make a voice recording. Once you've caught the worry, it's important to **refocus your attention**. Pay attention to whatever it is you're doing at that moment OR do something totally different. You can also refocus by using one of the calming techniques below.



worry time

Use **Worry Time** to go back and address all of the worries you have caught that day. Worry time should be at the same time everyday and should last for a maximum of 30 minutes. Make sure it's not too close to bed time and that you're not distracted when doing it.

For each worry, decide whether it is a **Practical Worry** or **Hypothetical Worry**.



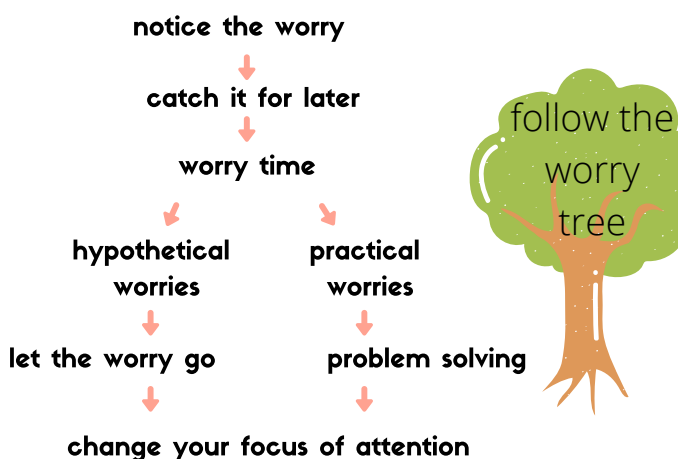
for the hypothetical worries:

For hypothetical worries, **let the worries go**. You can do this by ripping up, scribbling out or scrumpling up and throwing away the worry. Once you've done this, use a calming technique to refocus your attention from the worries which you have let go.

for the practical worries:

For practical worries, use **problem solving** to find a solution:

- 1) write the problem in 1 or 2 sentences.
- 2) think of all of the solutions you can.
- 3) for each idea you came up with, write down all the good things and bad things for each solution.
- 4) choose the solution that looks the most likely to help.
- 5) make a plan to put your solution in place and DO IT.
- 6) review how it went - did it solve the problem or do you need to change and/or try a different solution?



calming techniques to change your 5,4,3,2,1 focus of attention

Notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

Fact name

Think about and name facts about what is going on right now. For example, think:

My age is...

My name is...

I am wearing...

The weather is...

breathing techniques

When we feel anxious, upset or distressed, it can be difficult to know what to do to feel better. By using these breathing techniques, we can reduce our anxiety and lower our blood pressure/heart rate. This helps us feel calmer and more focused can help with back to school anxiety.

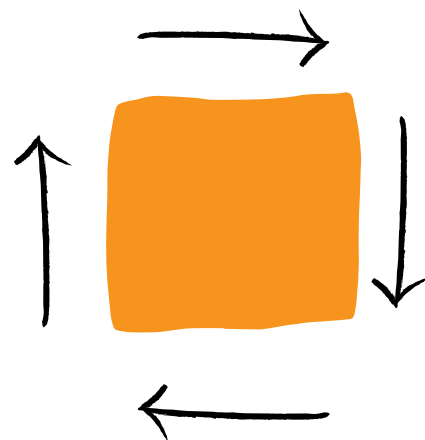
Belly Breathing



- Take a deep breath in and fill your belly like you're inflating a balloon.
- As you do this, count 1, 2, 3, 4 to breath in and fill the balloon in your belly.
- Pause and then let all of the air out of your belly like you're letting a balloon deflate.
- As you do this, count 1, 2, 3, 4 to breath out and let the balloon go down from your belly.

Square Breathing

- Imagine you're drawing a square with your finger in the air.
- Breath in while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the top line and then pause.
- Breath out while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the line down the side and then pause.
- Breath in while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the bottom line and then pause.
- Breath out while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 as you draw the line up the side to make the square.



Finger Breathing



- Use your index finger to trace around the edges of the fingers on your opposite hand.
- Count 1, 2, 3, 4 and breath in as you go up the first finger.
- Count 1, 2, 3, 4 and breath out as you go down the finger.
- Repeat until you have traced up and down all five fingers, breathing 1, 2, 3, 4 in and 1, 2, 3, 4 out each time.

Top Tip! Practise these breathing techniques when you're calm so that you're better prepared to use them when you need to.



Count **slowly** when breathing in and out and **repeat** the technique as many times as you need to until you feel calmer.