

Easing The Return



Easing back-to-school worries together.
Supporting your child's return to school with confidence.



CAMHS
Child & Adolescent Mental
Health Services



Emotional Wellbeing Team in Schools
(EWTs)
A programme of Support for Post Primary Schools



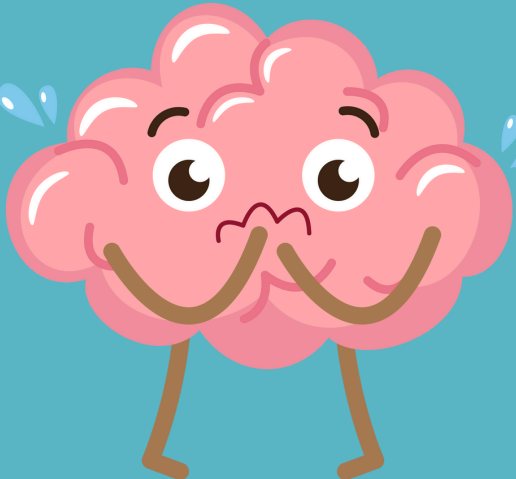
CYPSP
Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership

SCAN ME



Youth Wellness Web

Easing the Return to school



Listen Without Judgement

Encourage your child to talk about what's bothering them. Avoid immediately jumping to solutions - Listening & validating their feelings can be powerful.

Normalise Anxious Feelings

Explain that anxiety is a normal response to stress or new experiences. Let them know that many students feel this way, especially during transitions.

Avoid Avoidance

It's tempting to let your child stay at home to avoid anxiety triggers, but this reinforces fear. Encourage small, manageable steps toward facing the anxiety-provoking situation.

Model Calm Behaviour

Children often mirror their parents / caregivers. Stay calm when they are anxious, and show them how you manage your own stress.

Limit Reassurance-Seeking

Anxious children often ask for repeated reassurance. Instead, help them learn to answer their own worries or tolerate uncertainty, building resilience.

Establish Predictable Routines

Children with anxiety feel more secure with structure. Set consistent routines for mornings, homework, meals, and bedtime to create a sense of stability.

Practice Separation Gradually

If your child struggles with school drop-offs, practice short separations and slowly increase the duration. Tell them that'll you'll return and keep goodbyes calm and brief.

Teach Coping Strategies

Help your child learn tools like deep breathing, mindfulness and positive self-talk. Practice these regularly, even when they are not anxious



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10 Things to Say When School Anxiety Shows Up:



“You’re feeling really worried about school. I hear you.”

“It’s okay to be nervous. Lots of people feel this way sometimes.”

“We can handle this together.”

“What’s the hardest part for you right now?”

“Even though this is hard, I believe in you.”

“Do you want to write or draw your worry for me?”

“What’s something that’s helped you before when you felt anxious?”

“We’ll get through the morning together – one step at a time.”

“School feels scary today, but your feelings won’t last forever.”

“Let’s make a small step plan together.”

Helping a young person break the cycle of anxiety

Here's a few supportive, confidence-building sentences you can use with a young person. These are designed to help validate feelings without reinforcing avoidance, encourage bravery & support gradual exposure.

1

Validate the Feeling (but not the fear)

- "It's ok to feel nervous - That's a normal feeling"
- "I can see this feels really scary for you right now"
- "Your brain is sending an alarm, even though you are actually safe"



2

Encourage Brave Action

- "Feeling worried doesn't mean you can't do it"
- "Let's be brave together and see what happens"
- "You don't have to feel 100% ready - you have to take one small step"



3

Teaching Coping & Reframing Thinking

- "This is your worry talking, not the truth"
- "You've done hard things before, your brain just forgot"
- "Feelings aren't facts, they're signals that we can learn to understand"



4

Reinforce Progress & Effort

- "Every time you face this, it gets a little easier"
- "I'm proud of you for trying, even if it felt hard"
- "You're training your brain to be braver, like a muscle getting stronger"



5

Avoid Reassurance Traps - Replace With Confidence

- Instead of saying "I promise nothing bad will happen"
- Say "What ever happens, i know you can handle it & I'll help you through it"

These phrases can be used before, during or after a challenging moment. Over time, consistent calm messages like these can help young people break the anxiety-avoidance loop

Parent confidence-building checklist for supporting an anxious child



UNDERSTAND ANXIETY

- Normalise anxiety as a common, manageable emotion
- Learn how anxiety presents in children of different ages
- Identify the difference between supporting and rescuing



STRENGTHEN YOUR RESPONSE SKILLS

- Praise effort and bravery, not just outcomes
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage problem solving
- Use validating language such as “it’s ok to feel nervous sometimes”
- Practice staying calm and regulated during your child’s anxious moments



BUILD EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

- Pause and breathe before reacting
- Reflect on your own emotional reactions to your child’s anxiety
- Notice if your fears or expectations are shaping your responses



SEEK KNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT

- Join a parenting support group (online or in-person)
- Connect with a counsellor, coach or paediatric professional
- Discuss common scenarios with a trusted friend or professional



PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION & SELF-CARE

- Remind yourself that mistakes are part of learning
- Take breaks and set boundaries when overwhelmed
- Make time for personal activities that bring joy and rest



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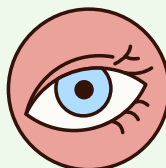
Youth Wellbeing Web

Rainbow Hunt



Look for objects that match
each colour of the rainbow...
Red, Yellow, Green, Blue,
Orange, Purple

5-4-3-2-1 Senses Grounding



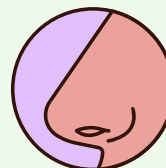
5



4



3



2



1

Butterfly Breath

Let's fly slow like butterflies
for 3 breaths...



Inhale slowly and lift your
arms like butterfly wings.
Exhale slowly and lower your
wings.

I spy Emotions



I spy something that looks
or sounds...
Calm, Happy, Sad, Joyful,
Lonely

Thought Catch & Release

Our thoughts are like bubbles
or clouds in the sky



Notice your thoughts...
Let's imagine we catch it like a
firefly then we gently let it go

Energy Check

Is your energy like popcorn,
like a snail or just right?



If it's like popcorn try slow walking,
tiptoe steps or deep lunges
If it's like a snail try animal moves like
10 frog jumps, 5 bird flaps or buzzing
about like a busy bee

MY PLAN TO EASE SCHOOL WORRIES

Discussion Points

My worries

- What feels hard about going back to school?
- Are there parts of your day that make you feel nervous?
- What thoughts or 'What-ifs' pop into your head?

When anxiety comes to visit

I notice these thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours showing up

What helps me

Strategies to do...

Before school – deep breaths, calming playlist, journal,

During School – stress ball, grounding techniques, asking for a break

After school – quiet time, hobbies, talking to a loved one

Coping Toolkit

Create a physical or mental toolkit...

- Breathing techniques
- Fidget toys / stress balls
- Art / colouring
- Journaling
- Comfort item
- Playlists
- Puzzles / Games
- Favourite picture
- Grounding Techniques

Positive Self-Talk

Challenge anxious thoughts with positive phrases...

- "This is hard, but I can handle this – it won't last forever"
- "It's ok to feel nervous, – my thoughts are not facts"
- "I am safe, I am grounded, I am ok"
- "I am stronger than I think"

People at school

Who at school feels safe to talk to when you feel worried?

Things I like about school

List the things you enjoy at school



STEADY STEPS



MY PLAN TO EASE SCHOOL WORRIES

Name: _____

My worries

Things about school that
make me worry...

When anxiety comes to visit

My Thoughts:

My Feelings:

My Body:

My Behaviour:

What helps me

Strategies I will use...

Coping Toolkit

In my calming toolkit I
have...

Positive Self-Talk

I will challenge
anxious thoughts with
positive phrases...

People at school

When I feel worried at school I
can talk to...

Things I like about school

I like school because...