

EASE at Home (Grades K-3)

Strategies to help young children cope with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

Sometimes it's hard for adults to know what to say or do to ease a child's worries, especially during times of change and uncertainty. As the most important big people in their world, parents and caregivers can help children feel safer and soften the sharp edges of whatever is happening to make their worries grow.

Creating Rhythms and Routines

What is it?

When the world feels upside down, following a schedule that includes some calming routines can help create a sense of order. Routines don't have to be elaborate and can include small acts that create moments of connection and comfort for your child.

How?

Involve your child in creating a [daily schedule](#) that works for your family. Make sure to include time for fun, creativity, and quiet time. With younger children, map out the day using pictures or drawings. Establish some new routines or revisit old favourites. Examples include:



Have a five-minute morning snuggle to discuss dreams from the night before

Before eating dinner, ask everyone to share one thing they're grateful for or one thing they learned that day



Have a certain meal on a certain night, like Taco Tuesdays or Spaghetti Sundays



Light a candle and play some soothing music during bath time

Sing the same song every night at bedtime



Hint: Having regular reminders of what's coming next will help minimize upsets when it's time to transition from one thing to the next.

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Helping Children Find Their Feelings

What is it?

Younger children may have a hard time identifying the intense and confusing feelings that come with all the changes in their world. They may be frustrated about having to stay home all the time, disappointed that activities are cancelled, and worried about the news. Parents and caregivers can help them learn to recognize their emotions and find ways to express them, so they don't stay bottled up inside or get acted out in unsafe ways.

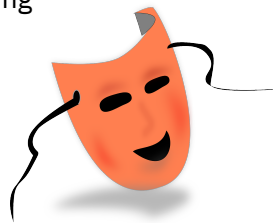
How?

Read picture books or watch videos about different emotions and ask if your child is having any of the same feelings. Examples include:

In My Heart

by Jo Witek

Play a feelings charade game by taking turns acting out different feelings and guessing what they are. Afterwards, invite your child to talk about the feelings they've been having lately.



The Feelings Book

by Tod Parr

Invite your child to find ways to express their feelings through drawing and painting, imaginative play, dancing, ripping up paper, banging on drums or pots, and even having a good cry.



The Feelings Song

by Miss Molly

Hint: Acknowledge all the feelings your child experiences. Be present and supportive without trying to fix or change how they feel. For example, 'I'm guessing you're feeling so frustrated that you can't play with Alex. It's so hard not being able to see your friends. I bet you really miss him.' or 'Feeling a little nervous now is a sign your emotions are working as they should.'

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Relaxation Skills: Calm Breathing

What is it?

Children are usually not aware that worries and other difficult emotions can 'show up' in their bodies as physical discomfort, like tummy aches, headaches, and muscle tension. Regularly practising fun relaxation exercises can help bodies and minds feel loose and calm and dial down stress and worries when they do arise.

How?

Practicing slow, deep breathing is one of the most effective ways to feel relaxed, centred, and focused. Encourage children to breathe slowly in through the nose, allowing the belly rise, hold for a few seconds, then slowly exhale through the mouth, causing the belly to fall. Repeat the cycle 3-5 times to start and build up to 10 times for a more powerful calming effect. Add some fun by trying the following:



Imagine smelling a flower while breathing in slowly, then pretend to blow out birthday candles while gently breathing out

Blow real or imaginary bubbles, breathing in deeply and gently breathing out to make the biggest bubble possible



Follow along with a short video like this [bubble breathing fish](#) or try [Belly Breathing with Elmo](#)

Hint: Calm breathing is best practiced regularly and when your child is already calm so they can remember how to do it when they feel upset. Learn to identify your child's triggers so you can do some calm breathing together before things get out of hand. It's always easier to deal with strong emotions before they get too overwhelming.

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Relaxation Skills: Tense & Relax

What is it?

When kids and adults feel worried, they tense up physically. This muscle tension can feel uncomfortable and contribute to general feelings of unease. Tense & Relax involves children learning to tense up, hold, and completely relax each muscle group, one at a time. This [Flopometer](#) video describes this concept in a child-friendly way.

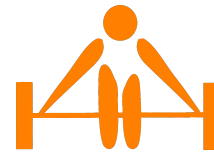
How?

Help your child understand the difference between feeling tense and feeling relaxed by asking them to imagine themselves as:



Stiff, uncooked spaghetti, then soft, cooked spaghetti

A rigid robot, then a floppy jellyfish floating in water



A body-builder flexing each muscle group one by one

Alternatively, read a tense and relax [script](#) out loud. Use a calming tone and pick a quiet time like after lunch or before bed when you won't feel rushed

Follow along with a guided tense and relax exercise like the one in [this video](#) by GoZen

Hint: Just like Calm Breathing, Tense and Relax exercises are best practiced regularly so they will be more effective when your child needs to calm their body down.



Everyday
Anxiety
Strategies for
Educators

EASE (Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators) is a collection of classroom lessons that have been adapted for parents and caregivers to help children manage anxiety and worries at home.



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Helping Children Move Their Bodies

What is it?

Moving our bodies has many benefits for our physical, mental, and emotional health. Build in big or small movement breaks throughout the day to decrease stress and increase fun!

How?

When possible, get outside to enjoy the fresh air, remembering to follow [physical distancing guidelines](#) to keep you and others safe. There are lots of ways to get active that don't require a lot of equipment or time. Use your imagination and interests to come up with your own activities or try some of these examples:



Jump rope, kick a ball, toss a frisbee, play hopscotch, tag, or Red-Light Green-Light. Check out these [classic outdoor games](#).

Have a family dance party, pump up the music, dress up and let loose!



Combine screen time and active time with videos like [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#) and [GoNoodle](#)



Go on a scavenger hunt. Look for things like a feather, a y-shaped stick, a flat stone, a rock with a spot on it, five different leaves, something natural and red. See these [Scavenger Hunt printables](#) for more ideas.



Build an obstacle course with stations to cycle through. For example:

1. do 10 jumping jacks
2. jump over a row of canned goods
3. spin around 5 times
4. balance a cushion on your head for 10 seconds
5. pretend to hula hoop (or really hula hoop!)



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