

## Practical Support in Moments of Anxiety

Here are some phrases you can use to calm and support children during times of anxiety:

- I'm here. I've got you (if appropriate use physical contact to reassure)
- It's okay you're safe
- You're going to be ok.
- This will pass.
- You've got through this before, you can get through it again.
- I can see you're feeling anxious/panicked/scared.
- That sounds hard, do you want to talk about it/how can I help you?

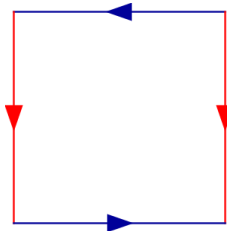
In the same way that the Anxiety Phrases can help to calm the child's nervous system when it has gone into 'survival' or 'fight/flight' mode, there are various physical tools that you may be able to use with the child (and for yourself too!).

**These could again be practiced ahead with the child in calm and happy moments, playfully, so they are already familiar and comfortable to the child if you are going to suggest them when anxiety comes up. This way, the child can also choose which specific ones work best for them.**

These could be used as follow up support after, or alongside the phrases, especially as they can be linked to the physiological/normalising/body sensation phrases. Also, you can do them together. You could explain to the child that doing some simple things with your body and breath, lets your brain know that it is safe and can start to relax.

The following are just a few examples and ideas, and there will be many more you can find online or create for yourselves:

### Breathing



#### **Square breathing:**

Take a big sigh out to empty your lungs first. Then breathe deeply **in** (to fill your **lower belly**) for 4 steady counts, **out** for 4, **in** for 4, and **out** for 4. You can use your finger to trace the lines of a square (in the air, or on a drawing) while you do this, perhaps starting along the top for the first breath in and down the side for the first breath out. Slow breathing is one of the quickest and clearest messages to the brain that it is safe to relax.



#### **Blowing breath:**

Younger children might like to imagine taking a deep breath in and then blowing out candles, or to cool a hot chocolate, or like blowing up balloon. (Just up to 3 times, so as to not hyperventilate). You might enjoy being playful with ideas for this.

## Grounding

Coming out of the busy mind and opening the senses can be very calming by bringing your child back into the present moment and can be done in many, simple ways, for example:

- Noticing feet on the ground; they can even; take shoes/socks off and feel different textures on the ground
- Counting how many objects of a particular colour or shape you can see around you
- Smelling favourite scents
- Listening to what you can hear inside, and outside; what's the closest sound? The furthest?
- Organising coloured pens or pencils into colours
- Drinking a long drink, especially out of a straw
- Finding different textures with your hands; what's the smoothest, or the roughest, or heaviest
- Humming a favourite song or tune (humming is very soothing to the nervous system)
- Rubbing hands together fast to get warm then place them onto cheeks/over eyes

Yoga poses can also be very beneficial for mental and physical health.

- Child's pose:



For this appropriately named pose, sit back on the heels and slowly bring the forehead down in front of the knees. Rest the arms alongside the body. This peaceful pose gently stretches the hips and thighs and helps calm your child's mind.

- Downward dog



(If you have pets, you can ask your child if they've ever noticed their cat or dog doing something similar to these poses when they need to relax or feel calmer).

This is one of the easiest poses for your child to mimic and probably one they've already done naturally. They can either enter this pose by rising up from their hands and knees or by bending forward and placing their palms on the ground, then stepping back to create an upside-down V shape with their bottoms in the air. In addition to stretching, this pose also energizes them. Plus, they'll get a kick out of the upside-down view.

These two poses are very grounding and can help your child to feel stronger and more in control

- Mountain pose



- Warrior pose



From a standing position (that's mountain pose for you yogis), step one foot back and turn it so the toes are facing slightly outwards. Then raise the arms up, parallel to the floor (one arm in front, the other toward the back). Bend the front knee and look forward over the fingers. Reverse the feet and do it again on the other side. This pose helps strengthen and stretch your children's legs and ankles, as well as help increase their stamina.

- Resting pose



Lie on your back with arms and legs stretched out and breathe. Try to remain in this pose with your child for five minutes (if you can). This helps your child relax and calm themselves. It could be very calming to do this pose after some of the others, maybe with a blanket on, and some gentle music.

