

## “Thinking” Strategies

**Keeping a thought journal:** If your child is experiencing anxious or depressive thoughts it may be helpful to have them keep a thought journal for a couple of weeks. This involves taking time to reflect upon and journal specific feelings and thoughts as different situations or activities are experienced. The content of a thought journal can provide opportunities for identifying specific negative thoughts, and reframing the way they perceive or think about potentially stressful situations or circumstances.

**Cognitive restructuring:** Cognitive restructuring helps children identify and replace negative thoughts with more adaptive and positive beliefs. Basic cognitive strategies include identifying and reducing negative self-talk, generating positive self-statements, thought stopping, thought challenging (weighing evidence for and against), and creating a coping plan for stressful or feared situations.

**Structured Problem Solving:** A structured problem solving approach provides a positive alternative to continued worry about situations.

1. *Define the problem:* It is important to be specific about the area of concern.
2. *Brainstorm options:* Think about possible solutions and take time to gain feedback from others (e.g. friends and family).
3. *Focus on the best solutions:* Choose two or three options and list their advantages and disadvantages.
4. *Make a plan:* Set a plan for carrying out the best option.
5. *Review:* Congratulate yourself for giving it a go and reflect on how things are going now as a result of your plan.
6. *Continue or change the plan:* At this point, you may continue using the plan or refine it.

**Chunking:** Chunking is breaking up a big task or piece of information into smaller chunks. Chunking may be beneficial for reducing immediate pressure or anxiety. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by a large project or assignment with multiple parts, a given task is broken down into smaller and more manageable units that are completed one step at a time. As steps are completed, your child will experience success, a sense of accomplishment, and personal confidence.

## Calming Strategies

**Make a Comfort Box:** A comfort box is a box that children or youth can fill with things that relax them or calm them. Bags and backpacks can also make great portable alternatives to an actual box. Possible content for a comfort box might include: a favourite picture, specific books or poems, colouring or drawing materials, or a journal. Comfort boxes can be personalized by including items that foster positive and peaceful emotions. When emotions intensify, allow time for your child to de-stress by taking some time with the contents or activities in their comfort box.



## Calming Strategies

**Mindfulness Activities:** Being mindful involves paying attention to the present moment, exactly as it is. It is really hard to be anxious if our senses are alive and fully focused on the present moment. Example mindfulness activities may include:

### ***Come Back***

When you catch yourself being caught up in worries about the future or guilt and regret about the past, just notice that it is happening and simply and kindly say to yourself, “Come back.” Then take a calming breath and focus on what you are doing right now.

### ***Three Senses***

Notice what you are experiencing right now through three senses – sound, sight, touch. Take a few slow breaths and ask yourself:

- What are three things I can hear? (clock on the wall, car going by, music in the next room, my breath)
- What are three things I can see? (this table, that sign, that person walking by)
- What are three things I can feel? (the chair under me, the floor under my feet, my phone in my pocket)

Think of these things slowly, one sense at a time. It’s impossible to do this exercise and not be present and mindful!

**Cool Down Passes:** When stress or anxiety builds within young people, being able to leave the situation briefly to get a drink of water or wash their face can allow them to clear their heads and return to a task with less anxiety. Since anxious children or youth may be hesitant to ask for this, teach them to use a signal when they need a short break to regroup and return to the given task with decreased stress or pressure. Share this strategy with your child’s teachers so that they can use it both at home and at school.



## Proactive Strategies

**Assigning a Positive Adult Connection at School:** Having one person at school who understands your child's worries and anxieties may make the difference between them attending school or staying home. A guidance counsellor, resource teacher or classroom teacher may serve as a helpful point of connection for children and youth with anxiety. Daily check-ins or dropping by to see how things are going can serve as a reminder of positive supports in the school. This may be a person for the child to check in with briefly (5-10 minutes) during the day to help dispel worrisome thoughts, or to serve as a point of connection for relieving anxious thoughts or emotions.

**Plan for Changes in Routines:** Changes in schedules or routines may be stressful for young people with anxiety concerns. When such changes are expected, it is helpful to be proactive in identifying specific strategies for adapting and coping with new circumstances. Parents or caregivers should alert the school to such changes to ensure sensitivity and support for young people during times of change or transition.

**Regular Exercise:** Encouraging engagement in daily physical activity is an important part of managing anxiety. Exercise can boost mood, enhance sleep, reduce tension, and calm stress. It often provides a "mind-break" away from worries and anxieties. Regular exercise contributes to more energy, and the capacity for problem solving and addressing anxiety in constructive and effective ways.