



School Counsellor Newsletter

Edition 38

Anxiety

Anxiety: practical tools to help your son to cope with anxious feelings

"I really believe we need to be empowering young people with the belief that they can manage and they can cope".

Jacqui Maguire, Child psychologist and author

As parents we do not want our son to be upset so we may have a tendency to try and fix things for him or discount valid emotions such as sadness or disappointment. Whilst this is done with good intentions this can suggest to your son that he can only cope with anxious feelings by asking an adult to intervene. What is most powerful is supporting your son's agency and ability to cope with anxious feelings and powerful emotions. In this final newsletter in the series on anxiety, a range of tools and strategies to manage anxious feelings are shared so that you can role model these strategies and support your son to grow his tool kit.

In previous newsletters I have talked about these tools as wellbeing superpowers. Clinical psychologist, Jacqui Maguire, also talks about wellbeing superpowers and I highly recommend her book 'When the Wind Blew: A book for little people with big feelings'. This books help young people to regulate their emotions, recognise them and cope with them everyday - and to feel proud of themselves when they do this and celebrate this every day. Emotional regulation is something we need to do throughout our whole life and helps us to lead a successful life, and this book adds to what is being taught in the Aristotle programme. Most of the tools explained below are mentioned in Maguire's book and you may wish to read this article and listen to her interview from Radio New

Zealand: [Teaching children \(and adults\) wellbeing and coping skills.](#)

Practical tools for emotional regulation and coping with anxious feelings

- **Acknowledge his feelings:** this decreases the intensity of his feelings and shows that you are listening to your son. You can role model this, for example, "I'm feeling really disappointed and I can tell because my tummy feels funny." You could ask your son to draw how he is feeling if that is a useful way for him to express it.
- **Exercise:** from running or walking outside to star jumps or dancing inside, when we exercise we release endorphins and serotonin and this helps to calm our body.
- **Breathing from the belly:** deep breaths from the belly also help to calm our mind and body. You can try five finger breathing, square breathing, hot chocolate breathing, 3-4-5 breathing and many similar styles of breathing. Ask your son to show you the ones he knows or look these up together.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** moving through the body part by part, tensing and releasing as you go, can be helpful in releasing tension, especially before bed.
- **Cuddling a pet or a family member:** this releases oxytocin - the calming 'hug drug'.
- **Running your wrists under cold water:** this releases the vagus nerve which in turn releases oxytocin and helps to calm the body and mind.
- **Laughter:** laughing together can also help to ease tension and calm the mind.
- **Focus on the positives:** by focusing on positives, whilst not ignoring negatives, the power of positives can make a significant impact on your son's wellbeing. At the dinner table you can share three positive things that have happened that day as well as one negative, building the habit of giving more time and focus to positive emotions. Talk about the impact the positives have made to your son's day and how he coped with the negative emotions.
- **Mindfulness exercises:** are always a good way to manage wellbeing and to regulate one's emotions. Ask your son to share the ones he knows or look some up together.
- **Practice, practice, practice:** Once you and your son have identified the strategies that work best for him, build them into a regular routine as the more frequently these strategies are used the more effective they will be for your son.

I hope this list gives you some ideas to add to what you are already doing to support your son's wellbeing and ability to cope with anxious feelings.



Jenelle Hooson

Jenelle is a Registered Provisional Member with NZAC (New Zealand Association of Counsellors).

If you wish to discuss the services the School Counsellor can provide, please see your son's homeroom teacher or Amos Pilgrim:

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