

Staying
calm
when your
kids are
stressed
out!

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Staying calm when your kids are stressed out!

This booklet is designed as a guide to what children worry about and explains what parents can do to support their children through the inevitable difficulties that come their way as they grow up.



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1. Introduction

As parents we like to protect our children from harm and feel it's our responsibility to prevent them from being upset, worried or anxious.

It is inevitable that they will have to go through experiences, both at home and in school, which will cause them to become worried and upset. However, many of these 'life-events' are necessary growing-up experiences which will help them to become adults.

Advice to parents often focuses on 'what not to do' and can make us feel inadequate. In contrast, this booklet is designed to help you to 'be there and support your child' through these difficult times, and tries to answer some of the most commonly asked questions.

2. What are 'life events'?

We all have to experience and cope with events in our lives which cause us stress and upset. These include 'life events', such as moving house, the death of people close to us, and starting or leaving a new job. All of these changes can produce discomfort and stress. However, changes which are IMPOSED upon us and over which we have NO CONTROL are likely to affect us most.

What happens is that we get worried, lose sleep, have bad dreams, and get very upset. This makes us feel ill. Eventually, we come to terms with the change and these unpleasant reactions go away as we move forward with our lives.

3. How do children show that they are worried?

You know your child better than anyone, so you'll be able to see when they are worried by the changes in their behaviour or their attitudes - ie changes from their 'normal' self.

Here are some ways in which children can react when they are worried or anxious:

- Sleep problems (difficulty getting to sleep, waking up or having bad dreams)
- Becoming fearful, clingy and anxious
- Bedwetting or thumb sucking (or other 'babyish' behaviour)
- Inability to concentrate on school work
- Naughty and attention-seeking behaviour
- Irritability and disobedience
- Physical symptoms like head aches and stomach aches
- Not wanting to go to school
- Panic attacks

There is growing concern about children suffering from depression. If your child persists with some of the symptoms mentioned above for a long period of time (six months or more), you should seek professional guidance from a psychologist or child psychiatrist.



4. What upsets children most?

There are regular items in the press and on TV and radio about all the things which are supposed to be worrying children including, most recently, bullying and SATS tests.

But what do children themselves think?

Asked what really upset them, 100 ordinary Year 6 children in five different primary schools identified the following:

- Someone close to them dying (32%)
- A member of the family going into hospital (23%)
- Having to go into hospital myself (10%)
- One of my parents leaving home (10%)
- Starting school or nursery (6%)
- Changing teachers in the middle of a year (6%)

The children were also worried about:

- The arrival of a brother or sister
- Changing school
- Going to live with a different family
- A new mum or dad coming into the family
- Going into care

5. Why do children get upset?

Like us, children can react badly to changes which are imposed upon them, because:

- They don't like losing control of things as they are now
- They are fearful of the 'new situation'
- They usually would not have chosen to make the change

But, unlike us, children are also very strongly affected by the fears and anxieties that they see in adults and many children say that they are 'only worried because mum/dad seemed to be in a state about something.'



6. Will they get over the upset?

Some serious life events, like the death of someone close, will stay with the child for ever. However, children are surprisingly tough emotionally and the evidence shows that, with good support from their families, most can deal with even the most upsetting life events.

With most life changes, the anxiety will not last long. Many of the child's worries will be about what 'might happen'. In most cases, the children soon put these worries behind them. There is some evidence to show that the children who are most affected by a major trauma, such as an accident or a death of someone close, are often:

- those with personal problems before the event
- those unable to get the best sort of parental support afterwards



7. Some problems need specialist help

Childline, the organisation which children can phone when they are worried, points out that children call up more about bullying than any other problem. However, some research shows that bereavement and loss is of greatest concern to children. Other areas of concern can include:

- Changes in their family make-up (ie new parent, step siblings etc)
- Relationship difficulties between family members
- Relationship difficulties with teachers
- Family breakdowns
- Hospitalisation (themselves or family members)
- Problems controlling their temper
- Moving house
- Relationship difficulties with other children
- Feeling depressed
- Behaviour problems
- Moods/out of control emotions
- Moving school
- Health problems
- Problems with self-esteem
- Problems with their own body-image
- Learning difficulties
- Having to look after younger siblings

8. Staying calm and helping them through

SOME GENERAL RULES FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH ALL LIFE EVENTS

- **Tell them what they need to know**
 - Give them the facts, at a level they'll understand
 - Be honest - not just your feelings or what you believe to be the case
 - Tell them if you don't know the answer (don't make it up)
 - Be prepared to challenge unfounded rumours, gossip or lies
- **Re-assure them that things will be alright**
 - Assure them that they will 'get through'
 - Tell them that things will get better eventually
 - Give them personal examples of how you have coped with problems
 - Remind them of all the things which won't be changing
- **Keep the routines and family life constant**
 - Don't change the 'ordinary things' they and you do
 - Treats are fine, but not all the time
 - The child's own space and time is really important
- **Calm down and don't panic about your own fears**
 - If you are worried, share this with the adults in your family (not the children)
 - Focus on practical advice for your children
 - Notice how your being calm helps calm the child down
 - Don't escalate the child's worries by over-reacting yourself
 - Practise a relaxation technique yourself
- **Don't project your own fears/anger onto your children**
 - Be aware that children react much more to feelings than what you actually say
 - Find out if they are reacting more to your behaviour than the particular life event
 - If you can't separate your feelings from the event, get your partner or a relative to talk to your child
- **Find enjoyable things for you all to do**
 - However upsetting the event, you still deserve some enjoyable things to do
 - Don't put off planned treats, because 'It's not the right thing to do'
 - Little things, like reading a story at bedtime, will still be very important
- **Listen to and talk to your child**
 - Find a time to have a chat without others interrupting
 - It's better to be doing something together (shopping, washing up, going for a walk) rather than 'having a face-to-face talk'
 - Try to develop an attitude of 'I'm interested, but not really bothered if you don't want to talk!'
- **Just be there**
 - Plenty of hugs and cuddles
 - Keep on doing 'the ordinary things'
 - Tell them how much you love them, and how special they are to you
 - Keep up the old 'stupid family jokes'

9. Dealing with children's problems

The general rules on page 6 are a useful starting point for finding out the reason behind a child's reaction to stress. They can help with dealing with any of the following:

• Sleeping problems

Children who are worried may experience a range of sleep-related problems. These include being afraid of going to sleep, waking up with bad dreams or 'in a state', or waking up very early in the morning.

If the child has settled into a regular sleeping pattern, then suddenly changes, this may indicate that something is worrying them.

Practical tips

- Reassure the child that 'bad dreams' happen to us all. Although they are scary, they are not real, just our mind making things up.
- Re-establish a new pattern to 'wind down to bedtime'. Doing too much or eating late makes our minds race and stops us from getting to sleep.
- Use a relaxing activity like storytelling or story tapes (not TV) as a means of relaxing before bedtime.
- Spend time yourself with the child before they go to sleep.
- If they wake up in the night, cuddle them and reassure them, then take them back to their own bed. Although it may be tempting to take them into your bed, it's better to take the trouble to make their own bed and bedroom a 'safe haven'.
- If they wake up very early, try to get them to stay in bed by allowing them special toys or activities.

• The child who starts to wet the bed.

About 75 per cent of children are dry at night by the time they are eight. Some children are relatively later in developing bladder control, and continue to wet the bed when they are older. Most children will have occasional 'accidents' as they are beginning to establish control.

Emotional or 'secondary' bedwetting occurs when a child who has been dry for a long time (about 6 months) starts to wet the bed again regularly and is often a result of a trauma or the child beginning to worry.

When older children wet the bed, they get really upset by what has happened, and the bed wetting itself can add to the child's stress. Getting upset or angry will only make things worse.

Practical tips

- Try to be 'matter of fact', get them to strip the bed and put bedclothes and nightie/pyjamas in the washing machine.
- Don't get angry, laugh at them, or allow other family members (particularly other children) to make fun of them.
- Start with a LOW KEY PROGRAMME
 - have a star chart where you reward the child for a dry bed
 - wake them up as late at night as you can for a wee
 - wake them up very early in the morning for a wee, then put them back for an hour or so
 - give special treats for improvements over time (ie three dry beds per week – then four and so on)

- If this is not working try this very effective **INTENSIVE PROGRAMME**, which teaches them strong bladder control.
 - Get them to practice stopping weeing mid-flow (ie sitting or standing at the loo-wee-stop-wee-stop-wee-stop). This increases their awareness of a full bladder.
 - Get the child (during the day) to tell you when they need to go for a wee. Distract them for about five minutes before letting them go for a wee.
 - Explain what you are doing and gradually (step by step) increase the time between them telling you that they want a wee, and actually going to wee. Work up over about three weeks to about 30 minutes. Use distracting strategies, talking to them, send them on errands etc – to help them 'hold it' for as long as they can.
 - In my experience, children who can 'hold their wee' for 30 minutes will no longer wet the bed.

• 'Babyish' behaviour

Some children react to stress and worry by behaving like a younger child. This is called regression and can mean they become fearful or anxious (afraid to go to places they had happily gone before), become more clingy and demanding towards you and possibly start thumb-sucking or some other behaviour that they had 'left behind'.

Practical tips

- Do not get angry or make a joke of the issue.
- Be reassuring and encourage 'grown up' behaviours.
- Give more attention to 'expected' behaviour for the child's age.
- Give little attention to 'babyish' behaviour.
- Think of this as a 'phase' which is likely to pass relatively quickly.



- **The child who suddenly becomes naughty**

It is quite common for children who are worried to suddenly appear to change their personality and start to do all sorts of naughty things that they would never have done before. This 'attention-seeking behaviour' is not deliberate. Subconsciously, the child has learned that you will get angry and react more strongly to 'naughty' rather than 'good' behaviour – so being naughty means they get more attention.

Practical tips

- Be reassuring and give lots more attention for good behaviour (eg a spontaneous hug, kiss, pat on the head, a compliment or a treat).
- Ignore as much of the 'low level' naughty behaviour as you possibly can. By doing this you are choosing 'not to react' to attention-seeking behaviour.
- Think of this as a phase – rather than your previously 'well behaved' child starting on a downward spiral to becoming a 'delinquent'.



- **The child who suddenly loses interest in everything**

When worried or stressed, many otherwise keen and enthusiastic children lose interest in the activities they used to like and may listlessly flit from one to another, lie about and complain of 'being bored!'. They may also lose their ability to concentrate on things they previously spent hours of concentrated time on.

If they are not a teenager or 'in love' this may indicate that they are worried about something.

Practical tips

- Spend some time helping to re-awaken the interest, but 'being there' while the child engages in the activity.
- Set little targets for the child to achieve (eg go and do 'it' for 10 minutes, then come and talk to me, then you can go back for another 10 minutes etc).
- Discuss with the child a possible 'new activity' which will 'be more interesting for the moment', and set this up with them.
- Explain that their lack of interest is because of the worry, and that the child may choose to not do these things for a while (but they can go back to them at any time).
- Understand that this is a phase, and that the child's enthusiasm and concentration will come back soon.

• Physical symptoms

Whenever they are worried or stressed, some children react by developing physical symptoms like headaches or pains in their tummy. Doctors call these psychosomatic, which means that they 'do not have a physical cause' and are caused by the worry.

It does not mean that the 'pain is not real' or that they are 'making it up'.

With some children, the headaches can develop into migraines (where they have to lie down in a darkened room and possibly be given some anti-migraine tablets). In others, the tummy pains can result in the child vomiting and developing what is called 'stomach migraine'.

The onset of such physical symptoms is always worrying, particularly as we always think that it might be something more serious.

NB. Whenever your child starts to suffer from severe or continuous headaches or pain in other parts of the body, ALWAYS seek medical attention.

Practical tips

- If your GP has investigated and has assured you that there are no physical reasons why your child has these symptoms, then you can follow these tips.
- Re-assure your child (following the doctor's advice) that these pains are not life threatening.
- Give the right levels of medication/care to reduce the symptoms.
- Don't let the pain stop the child from doing any activity (ie it may have started in order to avoid going to school, going out etc).
- Play down low-level problems (slight headache or tummy pain etc).
- You might develop a 'magic pill' (eg a vitamin tablet or some other harmless item) or 'magic cream' which you can use to convince your child has magical curative properties and is guaranteed to 'make them feel better'.
- Work out with your doctor the best ways of dealing/treating the most severe migraines etc.



- **The child who stops wanting to go to school**

Some children's anxiety shows through suddenly becoming anxious about leaving home and going to school. This is sometimes called 'school phobia' or 'separation anxiety' and is more related to their worry and stress rather than any particular problem in school.

It is different from the anxiety they face when they first go into school and happens with an older child who apparently has 'settled' in the school/nursery setting they are in.

Practical tips

- First speak to your school/nursery to find out if there are any difficulties there (with other children or adults).
- Don't assume that it is a school-based problem - children often give this answer to keep from being sent out of the house.
- Work with the school co-operatively to reward them for going in and get 'special attention' from the staff.
- See if you can negotiate little jobs or responsibilities in school so that they start to look forward to going.
- Set up an 'ET phone home' arrangement with the school (ie the child is allowed one short phone call a week home to speak to you). Acting as a 'safety net', anxious children may only use it on rare occasions.
- See next section if they 'get in a state' or start having a panic attack.
- Keep at it and things will get better.



- **The child who starts to have panic attacks**

A small number of children who are stressed or worried suddenly develop panic attacks. These can take different forms, such as completely freezing up (rooted to the spot, not saying anything), over-breathing and obviously in a panic, screaming hysterically or having an asthma attack without any provocation.

When they first occur, they are frightening for both you and your child and you may want to seek professional advice from your doctor, health visitor or school nurse, just to reassure yourself.

Panic attacks are not usually deliberate. They usually result in the child being comforted and not made to carry out a particular action. The child then learns that panic attacks are a way of avoiding things they don't want to do.

Practical tips

- Refer to a medical specialist to find out if there are any physical reasons for the problem.
- Check with school (and relatives if your child stays with them) whether or not it happens away from you.
- Teach the child relaxation techniques (see page 21-23).

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH STRESS

DON'T FORGET THAT THE GENERAL RULES ON PAGE 6 ARE A GOOD STARTING POINT FOR DEALING WITH ANY OF THE SITUATIONS RELATING TO A CHILD CHANGING SCHOOL OR STRESS AND WORRY RELATING TO ANY LIFE EVENT

• Going to school/nursery for the first time

This is the first major life event for many children.

- Most of the stress in children comes from your anxieties, fears and sense of loss about leaving your child in someone else's care.
- Nearly all children get a little upset at being left, but grow out of it very quickly.
- A few children have a prolonged reaction (called separation anxiety) and you may need help for this.

Practical tips

- Get your child used to your being away, by going out and leaving them with babysitters.
- Try to arrange sleepovers with relatives, so they know you can leave but will still come back for them.
- Think positively about leaving the child (and don't convey your own upset and feelings).
- When you collect your child don't talk about 'all the things you've done in their absence'.
- Focus on all the positive things they've done at school.
- Try to link up with other parents so your children can continue friendships out of school.

• A new child in the family

The birth of a new child is always a disruptive time, and all children react in some way.

- They are no longer 'the baby' in the family.
- You will be 'exhausted' – going through birth and then coping with the demands of a new baby.
- There will be far less time available for the older child/children.

Practical tips

- Talk about what will happen when new baby arrives.
- Prepare the child for their change of role – from being 'mum's baby' to 'mum's little helper'.
- Always find time to give them some 'special time'.



- **Someone close to the child dying**

This is what children find most upsetting, but is inevitable at some time for all of us.

- It is the first time that they are confronted with the fact that all of us will die someday (including you and themselves).
- Younger children don't understand the finality of death but react to the grief of surviving adults.
- Many families keep pets partly so that the child can get used to something close to them dying.
- The experience of losing a favourite pet may prepare the child for when they lose a close relative.



Practical tips

- Try to maintain the child's feelings of security, of being cared for, of being loved.
- Try to maintain all necessary practical care for the child.(e.g. ensuring that they are eating, caring for themselves, sleeping etc).
- Keep up the routines so that 'life goes on', but be prepared to accommodate some outbursts or extreme reactions by providing 'time-out'.
- Be honest with yourself and the child (at the child's own level of understanding).
- Continue to listen (even if the same questions reappear), to talk and communicate.
- Do not pretend to believe what you don't believe about what has happened.

- Try to understand the child's feelings (as a child of their particular age) and reassure where possible that their reactions are perfectly normal.
- Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know!' You can't be expected to have all the answers.
- Don't be afraid to share your own feelings, even if you get a bit upset. It will help to explain that adults also have these deep and confusing feelings (which we normally keep private).
- Remember, there are others who can help. Find another adult to 'offload' to on regular basis (a person who can listen, understand and comment) Supporting a child can be upsetting and emotionally very demanding. It is very important to get this personal support.
- Don't be afraid to admit to family, friends and managers that you can't cope at any particular time.
- Support can come from:
 - friends and family
 - colleagues at work (peers and managers)
 - religious and community leaders
 - specialist bereavement support groups
 - psychologists or counsellors
 - medical practitioners

● Moving house

Many parents are surprised, but this is one of the more upsetting things in a child's life. Many children in care report that they miss their own family homes more than the people in them.

- Their own space, bedroom, house, neighbourhood is extremely important for all children.
- It takes time to adjust to a new place (even if there is more space, bedroom on their own, better neighbours etc).
- Changing the place we live is often associated with other changes like friends, schools, neighbours etc.
- What is seen to be important to us as adults can't really be appreciated by our children.

Practical tips

- Don't move unless you really have to.
- Move at the end of a key stage for your child if possible (nursery/reception, end Year 2/Year 6).
- If you move nearby, try to keep your child at the same school
- If there is a family break-up, try to keep the child in the same family home.
- Remember that it will take longer for children to accept the change than adults.
- Keep emphasising the positive aspects of the change.
- Re-create some of the reassuring things of the old house (initially have similar bedroom designs)
- Keep up with old neighbours and friends.

● Going into hospital

- Many children associate going into hospital with dying (having seen elderly relatives doing this).
- Hospital dramas tend to highlight severe incidents and blood and gore.
- They are frightening places with different equipment, sights and smells.

Practical tips

- Tell the child as much as you can about the process (there is lots of evidence that, even when the child has a terminal condition, knowing the facts can really help them to cope).
- Get advice and guidance from specialist nursing teams (particularly when the child involved is going into hospital).
- Take the child to visit and give them practical tasks to do (even if it is to tell a specific story to the patient).



- **A serious illness in the family**

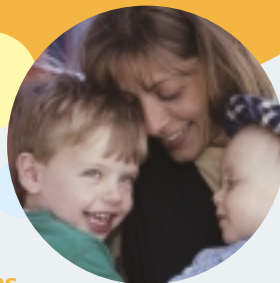
- Children get very angry at not being told how ill someone is or what might be wrong with them.
- They react to the behaviour and secrecy of the family without knowing why.
- Many children will imagine that things are much worse than they are, or that their relative is in far greater pain and discomfort than they really are.

Practical tips

- Answer the child's questions as honestly as you can, at their level of understanding.
- Ask them what they might be worried about and see if you can allay some of their fears.
- If you don't know something, admit to it.

- **Family break-up**

- This is extremely difficult, as the adults cannot manage their own feelings and continue to be objective when trying to deal with the children.
- Children will ask so many 'Why?' questions that you will not be able to answer.
- However 'reasonable' the break-up is for everyone's sake, it will still be seen as unreasonable by the children.
- There is the emotion and turmoil of the break up, followed by the difficulties of living and maintaining contact from separate homes.



Practical tips

- Try to plan the final separation (if you can) so that it doesn't coincide with any major life events for the children (such as changing school).
- Try to keep the adult conflicts/arguments separate from your joint responsibilities to the children.
- Make predictable, planned arrangements for joint care and contact (and stick to these).
- Try to keep the child's life the same as it was before the split (same material things, same routines, same activities, same toys etc). When the child is visiting the separated parent, it might be better to leave toys, equipment etc in the same place that the child left them (as if everything stopped and waited for the child to return).
- Understand that however 'bad or unacceptable' it was for you in the past, the children will keep on hoping for a reconciliation.
- Try to agree between the adults a common version of 'why you had to separate' and present this consistently to the children when they ask 'Why?'.
- However your new relationship changes the childcare arrangements, realise that your relationship with your children as 'Mum and Dad' will always be special.
- Be sensitive to the step parent role, and develop this as an 'extra-parent' not a 'replacement'.

• Having to change school

Children have to change schools for a variety of reasons but, in most cases, they would not choose to do so, e.g.

- The normal change they have to make because of their age such as that from primary to secondary.
- A change of school, decided by their parents, because of other reasons such as moving house, a decision to move them to a different school or the child needing to go to a special school or unit.
- School closing down

Making changes at the 'normal' times

All children, reluctantly, expect to make such changes (e.g. from playgroup to nursery to reception, and from class to class and teacher to teacher). Many of these changes can be upsetting on a temporary basis as the child may be very attached to a particular teacher or classroom base, and have heard 'bad stories and rumours' about a particular teacher they are about to go to.

Most of these worries will turn out to be unfounded and most children get over them after a very short period of time. This is helped by the fact that, in most cases, schools try to keep the same group of children together as they move up to the school. They do occasionally have to re-organise the social group, usually because of particular problems with learning, behaviour or teaching groups.

Choosing a secondary school for your child is always difficult. In most cases, parents choose the school that the majority of children from their child's primary school will go to.

Some problems

- Your own experiences of 'going to the high school' (particularly if these were bad).
- Rumours and stories spread by older brothers/sisters and those in the neighbourhood.
- Local gossip about the 'goings on' in the high school.
- Your own experiences with some of the older "tearaways" who might still be attending the school.

Practical tips

- Talk to other parents whose children made the transition successfully.
- Make sure to visit the new high School and have a list of questions with you before you go.
- Go to all the open days (with your child) and get them to find out as much as possible.
- Make sure that your child takes part in the transition programme that the high school organises and follow all the tips in the information booklet that they send you.
- If your child continues to be worried, speak to the first year tutor and tell them about these worries (They should 'look out' for particular problems and, if necessary, arrange for extra support for your child).
- Try to be concerned for but not overanxious for your child.

• Changing your child's school

This may be beyond your control, such as when you move house and it is too far for the child to travel to the old school. It may be because of a particular problem in the old school (with other pupils or a member of staff) or that you decide that your child would be better off in a new school.

Whatever the reasons, such changes are disturbing to most children as they will be leaving a place they know and established sets of friends and will have to make new friends and fit into a new teaching group.

Children who have changed schools several times often have particular adjustment problems and often underachieve in school. These problems include such things as:

- being able to make friends quickly, but being unable to keep them
- having gaps in their abilities from having missed out on key areas of learning
- being a 'class clown' in order to get attention by being laughed at
- seeking attention by being naughty
- getting 'blamed' for behaviour that others seem to get away with

Practical tips

- Only change your child's school as a last resort.
- Talk to them about the 'ups and downs' of friendships (i.e. relationships are not always 'perfect').
- Find out as much as possible about the new school.
- Tell them as much as possible about your child (particularly what their strengths are, but also any problems they might have).
- Although a 'fresh start' might be a way of leaving some difficulties behind, schools can be really helpful in helping your child to 'turn over a new leaf', if they know what is going on.
- Get in to see you new head and class teacher and keep in regular contact for the first few months.
- Share any worries as soon as you know so that school can help.
- Consider getting your child involved in new activities so that they can make friends in this way.
- Try and make new friends yourself with parents of children in the new school.



• School closures

Having to change your school because it is closing is particularly upsetting for many children, because it is like a combination of the previous two changes, i.e.:

- all the children have to move at the same time (like a secondary transition)
- the decisions to close are made by adults, and children's wishes are not taken notice of (like the school change you decide upon)

In addition there are other pressures such as:

- all the emotional discussion by adults before the school finally closes
- the long-term effects of any campaign to 'Save our School' as the battle may be lost
- the upsetting effects upon all the adults in the school
- the time it takes and the gradual loss of friends (whose parents move them to new schools) and adults (who get new jobs and move)

Practical tips

- Try and find out the reason for any worries. Once you have identified these worries – reassure them.
- Talk to your child and listen to their concerns.
- Keep a balance between remembering the 'good things' about the old school and the 'advantages' of the new one.
- Accept the fact that your child will continue to miss things about their old school, long after the change to a new school.
- Refer to the practical tips for changing a child's school (on pages 16/17) as many of these will also apply.

• Sitting exams/SATS tests

As all children now have to take these formal exams at a young age, many become worried and stressed out by the experience. Many worry about 'doing well' and getting 'a good result'. Other worries can include:

- not feeling well or at their best during the day
- fears that the tests will be so hard that they will make an idiot of themselves

Some even worry about needing to go to the toilet and not being able to sit for such a long day.

See overleaf for practical tips



Practical tips

- Try and find out the reason for any worries.
- Do not over-pressurise them by telling them how well you expect them to do.
- Talk through any concerns with the teacher so that they can reassure your child.
- Remember that the results are made up from a combination of teacher assessment and test results.
- Get your child to use a structured preparation system:
 - KNOWING what is expected in the exam
 - REDUCING the subject to manageable chunks
 - ORGANISING yourself and the work
 - OVERLEARNING to avoid forgetting
 - PRACTISE doing the work before the exam
 - RELAXING enough so that you don't panic
 - ANSWERING the questions being asked
 - WORK TOGETHER with your friends to support each other
 - ASK FOR HELP from your parents and teachers
- If your child has Special Educational Needs, it is possible to get help to complete the SATs (discuss this with your child's teacher).

• Changing teachers in the middle of the year

The relationship between children and their teacher is very important. Primary schools are organised so that children spend a year at a time with the same class-teacher (although they may spend some time with other teachers or have two part-time teachers working together).

Unfortunately due to staff moving jobs, becoming ill or leaving for personal reasons, it is sometimes a reality that some classes end up with a series of temporary teachers in a year.

Children can become very upset by losing their teacher in the middle of the year and there is some evidence that this can result in poor behaviour and affect their school work .

When children transfer to the high school, the constant change of teachers from lesson to lesson (i.e. they need to get used to 10-12 teachers each year) and the lack of time to form a special relationship with a particular teacher is difficult for some children.

Practical tips

- Share concerns with the headteacher and/or year tutor and see if there are ways of dealing with the child's worries
- Attempt to identify a constant adult figure for your child to relate to (e.g. the class support assistant may have always been there)
- If this only happens once, it may just be unlucky. However, if it happens to your child's class more than once, this is unfair and you need to speak to the headteacher and the parent governors as it may have a serious effect on your child's education.

• Bullying

This has always been a source of worry and stress for children in school. Research has shown that three out of every five children have suffered from bullying at some time and that one in five have suffered severe bullying which has upset their lives. Many of the calls to Childline are from children who are victims of bullying.

Although some bullying takes the form of physical attacks, children say that emotional and psychological bullying (eg where other children say things about them or their families, start-up rumours about them, or influence other children against them) are far more hurtful and upsetting.

At its extreme, children have run away from home, hurt themselves or attempted suicide as a way of getting away from the pressure.

As well as using 'fear' to control their victims, bullies also use the reluctance to 'tell tales' (or 'grass') to teachers and adults as a way of keeping the victims quiet.

Other children (who are not bullies), often know who is being bullied, but choose to 'mind their own business' because they are afraid that the bully might turn on to them.



Practical tips

- Try to decide whether the problem is a typical disagreement between children (the usual sort of falling out of friendships that all kids go through) – or whether it is more serious and needs you to intervene to prevent things getting worse.
- Talk to your child and point out that:
 - no-one should have to suffer being bullied
 - telling your teachers in school is not 'grassing' because if you do not tell, then the bullies will still be getting their own way.
 - the bullying will not stop until you get help from school.
- Approach a teacher who can do something about the problem, and work with them to make things better.
- All schools have a Bullying Policy, which shows how they recognise and deal with the problem. Ask them for a copy and discuss how it can help your child.
- Any plan you develop with the school should be designed to:
 - stop the bullying
 - protect your child
 - restrict the influence of the bullies
 - protect any other child from becoming a victim.
- Keep the conversations going with your child to make sure that 'things have really got better'.

HOW TO RELAX AND CONTROL STRESS

Teaching your child (and you) to relax

- Help your child become aware of the physical and mental changes which take place when they become tense. This will help them to control themselves.
- Help them to practise this technique when they're not 'in a state', but assure them that they will be able to use it to stop getting into any more trouble.

They should then use the relaxation sequence whenever they feel that they are getting into a 'state' and starting to feel tense.

Understanding what 'being stressed' feels like

- Demonstrate tension in muscles by getting the child to tense their fist really tightly, hold it for five minutes, then relax it.
- Talk to the child about what it feels like to be tense, and what triggers the tension.
- Ask them to recall the last time they were very angry and to 'replay' what happened.



A typical memory of being stressed might be an argument or 'being told off'

Typical reactions are:

- Feeling very hot or cold
- Shaking or being incredibly tense
- Being aware of tension in certain parts of the body eg shoulders, arms, hands, legs
- Having a heavy or hot or cold weight in the centre of the body – sometimes in the tummy, sometimes in the chest or throat

Afterwards many people suffer from:

- Headaches
- Pain in the neck and back of head
- Shaking and/or breathlessness
- Pains in the stomach
- Bad taste in the mouth

Questions you might ask:

- "What happened, who said what to who?"
- "What did you feel like (hot/cold/shaky etc)?"
- "Where in your body did you feel hot/cold(tummy/chest/throat/head etc)?"
- Did these feelings change during the incident?
- "What did the tension feel like in your arms/neck/head/tummy etc?"
- "What did you feel like afterwards(headache/upset/shaky etc)?"

Positive self-talk

Go through all the reasons why the child should not 'get in a state or lose it' and get them to give you a list of reasons why it doesn't help. Put these reasons together into a SCRIPT for the child to learn

Sample SCRIPT

Say to yourself:

"I'm not going to get into a state...."

I'm not going to let (X) upset me....

I don't have to lose control

It's being silly

I'm going to practise my relaxation"



It is a practised word or phrase designed to:

- STOP the behaviour
- make the child THINK
- START the calming-down sequence

Example

"Billy - Stop-it, you're getting in a state!! "

"Take deep breaths and count slowly 1 - 2 - 3 up to 20....."

START THE RELAXATION SEQUENCE

RELAXATION SEQUENCE

This should be taught over several sessions, when the child is quite relaxed and not tense.

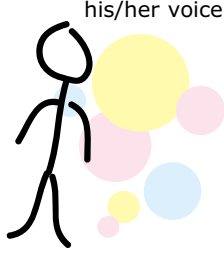
The approach consists of firstly standing or sitting still and of making your whole body very tense, so tight and tense that it hurts, holding this for five seconds, then relaxing by letting all the tension go.

- Close your eyes and concentrate complete on yourself and how your body is feeling.
- Practise, using really deep breathing, filling all your chest, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- Counting very slowly with each breath from 1 - 10.

Calm-Call Strategy SIGNAL

Where the child can't do this without help, the adult can use a pre-arranged SIGNAL as a stimulus for the child to stop the behaviour and to start the relaxation-sequence.

This is used when the adult can sense or see that the child is getting tense or beginning to react to the situation. (body tensing, becoming agitated, starting to speak frantically, raise his/her voice etc)



At the same time

- start tensing your hands and arms alongside your body (so tight and tense that they hurt).

Count 1

- then your feet and legs

Count 2

- then your thighs and bottom

Count 3

- then your tummy and chest

Count 4

- then your back and shoulders

Count 5

- then your neck and face

Count 6

- make sure your eyes and mouth are really tight right up to the top of your head

Count 7-9

- HOLD IT

Count 10 - 20

Then relax slowly as you continue to count up to 20, breathing each time you count.

face and head

Count 21

shoulders and neck

Count 22

chest and back

Count 23

arms and hands

Count 24

tummy and bottom

Count 25

thighs, legs and feet

Count 26

(feel the warm blood coming back into your body as your muscles relax)

Count 27-28-29

KEEP ON RELAXING FURTHER AS YOU BREATHE IN AND OUT AND COUNT

30!

- Now you feel calm and controlled and much better. You don't want to run away or hurt yourself or anyone else. You can now think more clearly about what is right to do.

- Say to yourself :

"I've really done well....

I have managed to control myself...

I've not got myself into a state....

I've not run away, hurt anyone or upset my teachers or my parents...

This is much better than before!!!!"

- End signal

"Now I don't need to lose it.....

I'm in control.....

I can think straight now....

I feel fine!"





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