



# Supporting Your Child to High School

Let's talk  
it out ✨



# High School Transition



# Introduction

We have created this booklet to support you and your child in preparing for starting secondary school. The booklet explains techniques you can use to support your child in reducing anxieties they may be experiencing along with positive things you can do.



This booklet has been created by the Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing Service. We are part of Childrens Early Help Services for East Riding of Yorkshire Council. Please visit for more information about our services  
<https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/living/children-and-families/early-help-and-prevention/>

# Anxiety



# Fight, Flight or Freeze

Most children and parents will experience some levels of anxiety prior to starting secondary school. For some people their levels of anxiety will be high and will result in the body starting its automatic defence system, **Fight, Flight or Freeze!**

Our bodies use this amazing defence mechanism when it believes there is a physical threat to safety such as a growling dog, or a mental threat such as the idea of walking into a room full of strangers.

## Fight

When your body feels that it is in danger and believes you can overpower the threat, you'll respond in fight mode. Your brain releases signals to your body, preparing it for the physical demands of fighting.

- Tight jaw
- Grinding your teeth
- Urge to punch something or someone
- A feeling of intense anger
- Need to stomp or kick
- Crying in anger
- A burning or knotted sensation in your stomach
- Attacking the source of danger

## Flight

If your body believes you cannot overcome the danger but can avoid it by running away, you'll respond in flight mode. A surge of hormones, like adrenaline, give your body the stamina to run from danger longer than you typically could.

- Excessive exercising
- Feeling fidgety, tense, or trapped
- Constantly moving your legs, feet, and arms
- Restless body
- Feeling of numbness in your arms and legs
- Dilated, darting eyes

## Freeze

This stress response causes you to feel stuck in place. This response happens when your body doesn't think you can fight or flight.

- Sense of dread
- Pale skin
- Feeling stiff, heavy, cold, and numb
- Loud, pounding heart
- Decreasing heart rate

# Anxiety



# Fight, Flight or Freeze

Talk through these with your child, it may help to share your own experiences of when you have experienced these feelings and you managed to overcome them. This will encourage your child to talk about their feelings and help to realise they are not alone.

## Fight

When you react with a fight response, it means you are ready to face the situation. You are able to handle this situation yourself. This response shows you are strong enough to handle the situation. It is your body's way of dealing with perceived threats

Think about  
time you  
responded with a  
fight response?

## Flight

When you react with a flight response, it means you ignore the situation and escape like nothing has happened. You do not know how to react so you get yourself away from the situation. Your body is urging you to run away from the perceived threat

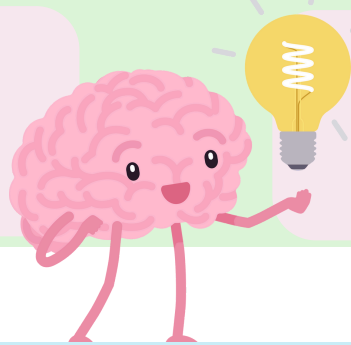
Think about  
time you  
responded with a  
flight response?

## Freeze

When you react with a freeze response, it means you go totally blank when faced with a difficult situation. You do not know what to do, where to go or how to react. Your body has an inability to move or act against a perceived threat

Think about  
time you  
responded with a  
freeze response?

# Anxiety



# Thoughts on trial

## Anxious thoughts

Anxious thoughts trick your mind into believing things that are unlikely or unrealistic. Your anxious alter ego uses your thinking errors to keep you stuck in emotional quicksand!

## Thoughts on trial!

To see if your thoughts are worth worrying about or if they are an alter ego trick, we can put your thoughts on trial! Just like in court, lawyers present evidence for and against a claim to determine the most likely reality. The judge/ jury then decide if the claim is believable or not.

### For example

Anxious thought: I'm going to get lost in my high school and get told off for being late

#### Evidence for (Thought is realistic)

It is so much bigger than my primary school.

Everyone else will know where to go and I will be lost on my own.

No one will be around to help me.

I will never remember where my lesson rooms are.

#### Evidence against (Thought is not realistic)

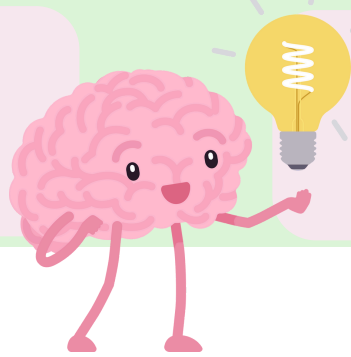
I will have a map in my school diary of where my lessons are.

As a year 7, most of your classes will be the same group as your form group, so you can all walk to lessons together.

Staff members will be walking round the school and other students who can point you in the right direction. (Especially in the first few weeks).

You learnt your way round your primary school and overtime you will learn how the school is set out.

# Anxiety



# Thoughts on trial

Thoughts on trial- your turn!

Try practising with a thought of your own.  
What is the evidence for and against it?  
What is the most likely verdict based on all your evidence?

Anxious thought:

Evidence for  
(Thought is realistic)

Evidence against  
(Thought is not realistic)

What is a more realistic thought using your evidence?

# Anxiety

WHAT  
DO YOU  
THINK?

# Challenging anxious thoughts

## Anxious thoughts

Anxiety can be a healthy emotion- it forces us to focus on our problems and work hard to resolve them!  
When anxiety grows out of control, it cripples our ability to solve problems. Irrational thoughts then creep up in our brains!

We are going to practise catching our irrational thoughts and make them rational

Describe a common situation that triggers your anxiety:

How does it make you feel?

Anxiety distorts our thinking by causing us to overestimate the likelihood of something going wrong, and imagine the potential consequences as worse than what they really are.

We need to take a moment to think about the facts and recognise when a thought is irrational!

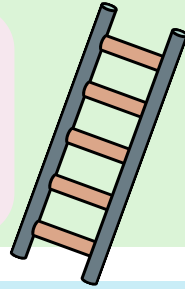
Imagine you are faced with the anxiety- producing situation from above. Describe the...

Worst outcome:

Best outcome:

Likely outcome:

# Anxiety



# Exposure ladder

Children's worries often need to be faced gradually to give them confidence and motivation. Using an exposure ladder will help them to break down and challenge their worries in simple steps.

- 1: Decide on the realistic goal they would like to achieve.
- 2: Break the goal down into small manageable steps.
- 3: Repeat each step until the anxious feelings reduce
- 4: Move up to the next step on the ladder.

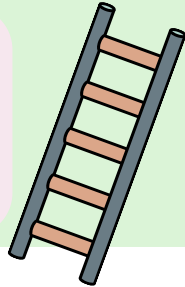
*Celebrate every achievement along the way!*

**Goal: Answering a question in class**

My Steps are..	Step number
Putting your hand up to answer a question in class.	7
Asking a teacher a question at the end of a lesson.	6
Emailing a teacher a question.	5
Ask school reception a question- e.g. "Where can I find...?"	4
Asking shop staff where an item is in the shop.	3
Paying for an item in a shop on your own.	2
Asking for help with a task from a family member.	1



Anxiety



Exposure  
ladder

Goal:

My Steps are..	Step number
	7
	6
	5
	4
	3
	2
	1

# Anxiety Coping

# Grounding techniques



# 1

## 5,4,3,2,1 METHOD

Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.



What are 5 things you can see? Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed



What are 4 things you can feel? Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities



What are 3 things you can hear? Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.



What are 2 things you can smell? Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.



What is 1 thing you can taste? Carry gum, mints, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors.

## CATEGORIES

# 2

Choose at least three of the categories below and name as many items as you can in each one. Spend a few minutes on each category to come up with as many items as possible.

Movies

Animals

Sports teams

Countries

Colours

Cities

Books

Cars

TV shows

Cereals

Fruit & Veg

Famous people

For a variation on this activity, try naming items in a category alphabetically. For example, for the fruits & vegetables category, say "apple, banana, carrot," and so on.

# Anxiety Coping

# Grounding techniques



## 3 MENTAL EXERCISES

Use mental exercises to take your mind off uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. They are discreet and easy to use at nearly any time or place. Experiment to see which work best for you.

**Name all the objects you see.**

Pick up an object and describe it in detail. Describe its color, texture, size, weight, scent, and any other qualities you notice.

**Count backwards from 100 by 7.**

Describe the steps in performing an activity you know how to do well. For example, how to shoot a basketball, prepare your favorite meal, or tie a knot.

**Spell your full name, and the names of three other people, backwards.**

Name all your family members, their ages, and one of their favorite activities.

Read something backwards, letter-by-letter. Practice for at least a few minutes.

Think of an object and “draw” it in your mind, or in the air with your finger. Try drawing your home, a vehicle, or an animal.

Deep breathing is an effective simple technique that’s excellent for managing emotions that is easy to use at any time or place!

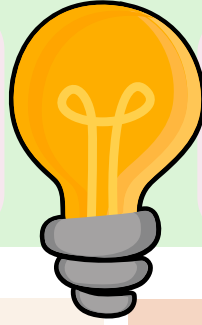
## DEEP BREATHING

# 4

Sit comfortably and place one hand/ both hands on your abdomen. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises. Hold the air in your lungs, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips puckered as if you are blowing through a straw. The secret is to go slow: Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s). Practice for 3 to 5 minutes



# High school Transition



# Top tips

## Sleep



Sleep routines tend to relax over the holidays and can take a while to get back. Start a week before they go back to school by gradually reducing the time they go to bed and getting them up earlier each day.

## Uniform

Do a uniform check towards the end of the holidays – children grow quickly and if things have been bought in advance they may no longer fit – don't forget the shoes!



## Uniform

Check your child's uniform against the school uniform policy to avoid your child experiencing any consequences from the school if their uniform is incorrect.



## Getting to school

- If going by bus, do they know where to get on and off, do they have the right bus pass or safe place to keep their bus fare?



- If they are walking, practise the route with them so they know where they are going and how long it takes. Have they arranged to walk with friends, check these arrangements.



## School equipment



Go through the check list of equipment they will need with your child – get them to tick things off the list and to pack their bag in preparation, resist the temptation to do this for them to encourage their independence. Make sure all items including their school bag meet school requirements and they have the right equipment for the lessons that day.

## Lunchtime

What are lunchtime arrangements? If they are buying lunch in school is their lunch card topped up?



## Communication

Finally, allow space for acknowledging and talking about any worries but ensure you remain positive and enthusiastic to your child regarding school. Encourage them to talk about the things they are looking forward to and feeling excited about. This is a big transition in your child's life so by being positive and encouraging they are less likely to feel anxious. Have conversations around who the different people are both inside and outside of school who can support them.



High school  
Transition



Looking at  
the positives

Encourage your child to discuss what they are looking forward to- fill in the rest with your own examples!

Making new friends

Learning new subjects

What am I  
looking forward  
to at high  
school?

Lunchtime