

Be Present

Coping with Stress and Anxiety : Strategies for Parents

During times of high stress it can be difficult to be present and connect to your child or teen. It might be harder for you (or your child/teen) to manage reactions or emotions when experiencing anxiety. Mindfulness, Guided Imagery, and Grounding are three relaxation and regulating strategies that can help.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a relaxation strategy that can help calm the mind. The aim is to focus on your current experience. This includes noticing emotions, thoughts, and sensations without judgment.

Anxiety often involves what if? thoughts about the future.

Focusing on the present moment reduces stress and stops this type of anxious thinking. It slows the mind and helps to relax.



INCREASE AWARENESS & TAKE DELIBERATE MOMENTS

- **Sit straight.** Take a few deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth. Do a simple check-in of your emotional state, any physical discomfort, and your thoughts. Focus on the feeling of your breath. Notice the sensations as you take a breath in and out.
- **Five Senses.** Take a few moments to explore the morning through your senses with your child. Take turns naming things you see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. Try to notice things you normally tune out.
- **Mindful Eating.** Eat slowly. Notice how the food looks. How is smells. Ask your child to describe the experience: What does it taste like? What does the food feel like on your tongue? Take turns sharing different things you notice about the food.
- **Mindfulness Box.** Decorate a box with your child. Fill it with interesting items found around your home and yard (e.g. rocks, Cotton balls, flowers). Notice and talk about color, texture, weight, smell of each.
- **Practice gratitude.** Start a habit with your family to end the day (bedtime or dinner) on a good note. Have each person say something (or more) that he or she is grateful for right now.

Start with slow breathing

Use Five Senses for grounding, mindfulness & guided imagery

Practice strategies when you (& your child) are calm so that you are able to use them effectively when upset.

Make practice fun and a time to connect to your child.

Practice Daily.

Most important...

Find relaxation strategies that work for you!

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is another relaxation tool. This strategy helps by encouraging use of imagination to change negative or anxious thoughts by focusing on the five senses (sound, vision, smell, taste, touch, movement) while thinking about a real or imagined peaceful place.

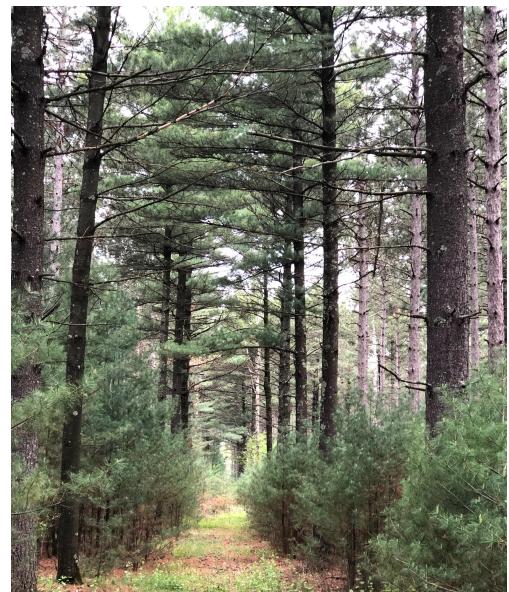
- Close your eyes.
- Take 3-5 deep belly breaths.
- Imagine you are going to a favorite place.. [If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be? Where would you like to go? Where do you feel most calm and relaxed? What is a happy memory or one that makes you feel good?]
- Imagine feeling calm and happy and that you are in a pleasant mood.
- What are your 5 senses? Use these to tell me what you see, hear, feel, smell, taste. Describe this picture or place in detail. (Paint this picture for me, tell me how you feel).

When you finish, take a few minutes to sit in silence. Ask yourself what you noticed experiencing (sensations in the body, thoughts and his/her emotions).

Follow the general steps above or read a written script. See links below or find apps to listen to with your child. You can also make up any scene the child might like (e.g., the beach at sunset, a comfortable bed, picking flowers, walking through the woods).



BEACH: Think about the feeling you get in your body when you are at the beach. Imagine your favorite time of the day to be there. Morning? Sunset? Imagine the refreshing, salty wind. Breathe it in. Feel the warm sun on the top of your head and your shoulders, on your feet. Look up and down the beach. Notice the the color and texture of the sand, the way it looks in the sunlight. Now imagine that you are standing in the dry, soft, sand. Feel it under your feet and between your toes. Imagine taking a few steps. Feel the warm, soft sand under your feet. Hear the deep, calming, rhythmic sound of the waves crashing on the beach. Look out at the ocean, see the deep blue water shimmering. Notice the waves as far back as you can see, rolling toward you breaking, sparkling in the sunlight.



Anxiety Canada uses the term “mental vacations”.
(The site has scripts and the visualization below).

FOREST: “Close your eyes and imagine being in a beautiful forest. Imagine looking around, up through the branches, and at the sun streaming through the leaves. Look down beside you and see a small stream bubbling. Any leaves floating down the stream? Any smooth rocks shining in the sunlight? Are you alone or with other people who love you? Now listen – what do you hear? Birds? Rushing water? Do you feel the coolness of forest shade on your skin? Do you smell the fresh earth?”

Grounding Techniques

Grounding is different than other relaxation strategies. It is a more active strategy to detach from emotional discomfort or pain (anger, anxiety, sadness), and focuses on distraction. It is helpful when distress or negative feelings are more extreme or feel overwhelming. It can also help when you or your child are feeling distressed, triggered, or you feel “numb”. It can help become centered again and calm down and reorient to be in the “here and now”.



Grounding does not solve the problem causing negative emotions, but it can help you regain control and prevent you from feeling worse or reacting in a way you might regret. It allows you to calm down and get through a difficult moment. It can be done anywhere and anytime. Some examples you can try with your child are below:

Physical grounding

Touch objects around you. Notice how each feels.

Place both feet firmly on the ground, push and feel the ground below you.

Run cool water over your hands. Stretch.

Stress Press: flatten your palms and press them together, raising your arms so that your forearms are straight and parallel to the floor. Push them together. Release. Repeat.

Mental Grounding / Soothing

Play a “categories” game. For example, name animals alphabetically (alligator, bear, cat...) name types of cars, songs with “love” in title, name all the red things you can see, then blue.

Ground with 5 Senses: Name 5 things you can see. 4 Things you can feel. Name 3 things you can hear. Name 2 things you can smell. And 1 thing you can taste.

Come up with a **coping statement** that you (or your child) can repeat such as, “I can handle this”, “this feeling will pass”, “I am safe right now”.

This is an unprecedented time causing higher stress and anxiety for many parents and children. The uncertainty can make you feel more on edge or easily angered. **When you feel yourself getting angry or anxious acknowledge it.** Take time to try to calm before interacting with your child. Notice if you feel numb or “checked out” and engage in a soothing activity or mindfulness. Use a grounding technique. Pray. Meditate. Exercise. Help your child learn different tools. Focus on what is in your control. Practice self-care. Practice relaxation skills and find what works for you.

Websites & Resources

- ▶ **Grounding Techniques:** <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/grounding-techniques.pdf>
- ▶ **Family Mindfulness Aid:** <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/family-mindfulness-schedule.pdf>
- ▶ **Guided Imagery:** http://www.traumacenter.org/resources/pdf_files/relaxation_exercises.pdf
- ▶ **Visualizations, Anxiety Canada:** <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/visualizations/>
- ▶ **How mindfulness can help:** <https://childmind.org/article/how-mindfulness-can-help-during-covid-19/>