

# Parent Guide



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We are excited to share this content with you. If you are interested in finding more resources made especially for Parents, then check out these links to different areas of the **Twinkl Parents** hub.

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## What is this resource and how do I use it?

Parenting is a wonderful experience but it can also make you very anxious. This resource is written to give you some tools to help manage any anxiety you may have as a parent. If these tips don't help or if your anxiety is affecting your everyday activities, speak to a healthcare professional.

## What is the focus of this resource?

Resilience

Self-Confidence

Understanding Mental Health

Managing Anxiety

## Further Ideas and Suggestions

Our [Starting School for Children](#) section has lots of resources written for your child to do in the lead up to the big day. Our [Starting School for Parents](#) section has information for adults to help them prepare too.

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# Anxiety Resources for Parents

Everybody feels some type of anxiety throughout their life - this is the way our body warns us of impending danger. During periods of heightened anxiety, the body is primed to respond to threats instinctively without us having to think about what we are doing, like jumping out of the way of a speeding car or jumping back from a large spider. These types of responses help to keep us safe. Sometimes, however, our brains can create anxiety when there is nothing to fear. This can make us feel scared and stressed and may lead to mental health disorders.

Parenthood is a time when many people feel overly anxious and the world seems full of dangers. Our fight, flight or freeze response may be triggered. The following tips can help reduce fearful thoughts and keep anxiety at a helpful level.

## *What is the Fight, Flight or Freeze Response?*

This is your body's subconscious response to danger - you don't have to think about it, your body just does it. It is an automatic response that our ancestors developed to keep them safe from physical danger by either fighting, fleeing or remaining perfectly still. The fight, flight or freeze response begins when a part of the brain called the amygdala senses danger and begins a chain of events that leads to increased heart rate, breathing and sensory awareness. These physiological changes allow the body to respond to danger quickly and subconsciously.

## Controlled Breathing

**How:** Close your eyes and place one hand gently on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose for four seconds and out through your mouth for six seconds. As you breathe in, feel your stomach rise and fill, then feel it fall as you breathe out. Repeat this four to six times.

**Why:** Controlled breathing has many beneficial wellbeing effects, including boosting respiratory performance. It also helps to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps regulate the body and conserve energy. It also deactivates the sympathetic nervous system which is responsible for the fight, flight or freeze response.



## Calming Imagery

**How:** Lie or sit somewhere comfortably and close your eyes. Starting with your toes and working your way up to the face, clench and unclench each muscle group - toes, feet, legs, buttocks, shoulders, arms, hands, face. Focus on any areas that remain tense and consciously force them to relax.

**Why:** Engaging all five of our senses is the key to this activity. This is known as sensory immersion and it helps us trick our brains into thinking we are actually in this calming place. This will help reduce anxiety by creating a sense of calm and distracting us from negative thoughts.

## Muscle Relaxation

**How:** Sit or lie somewhere comfortable and close your eyes. Think of a place where you feel totally safe - many people choose a forest or beach. Imagine yourself in this place. Quietly to yourself, name five things you can see in this place, four things you can hear, three things you can feel, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. Remain in this place for at least five minutes.

**Why:** Engaging all five of our senses is the key to this activity. This is known as sensory immersion and it helps us trick our brains into thinking we are actually in this calming place. This will help reduce anxiety by creating a sense of calm and distracting us from negative thoughts.

## Muscle Relaxation

**How:** Allocate yourself 15 minutes at a set time each day and dedicate this time to worrying. During this time, write down all the things that you are concerned about - paying bills on time, doing chores, health concerns, work pressures. Next to each one, write out the worst-case scenario, then write out a solution or a way you could manage this if it did happen. During the rest of the day, every time you have an anxious thought, push it to one side and tell yourself you will think about that only during your allocated worry time.

**Why:** We all worry about things from time to time, but sometimes our worries can become obsessive. Getting our concerns down on paper, thinking through worst-case scenarios and limiting the time we allow ourselves to worry can help dispel general concerns and keep them in perspective. Making a proactive plan that you can use if the worst does happen will help you feel more in control.

## Challenge Anxious Thoughts

**How:** Write down a list of the things you are feeling anxious about. Then ask yourself questions like:

- What facts do I have that tell me this event is likely to happen?
- What evidence do I have against it?
- Can I give this a positive perspective?
- Can I control the outcome of this event?
- Have I dealt with this type of situation before? How did I overcome it then?

Write down your answers and put them somewhere easily accessible so that you can read through your solutions each time you have this anxious thought.

**Why:** It is very easy to believe all our thoughts, but they aren't always correct. Challenging our anxious thoughts can help us put them in perspective and diffuse our fear of them occurring. It also helps us to see that it is far more likely that many of our concerns won't happen, enabling us to focus more on positive thought patterns.

### Other things you can try:

**Exercise** - this will help burn off excess adrenaline created by the fight, flight or freeze response and promote the production of the happy hormone, serotonin.

**Distraction** - keeping yourself busy with tasks, chores or visiting friends can help take your mind off your anxious thoughts without you even realising.

**Sleep** - anxiety almost always increases when we aren't getting a good night's sleep, so try and make sure you are in bed by about 10pm.

**Be nice to yourself** - positive self-talk can have an amazing effect on your resilience and belief in yourself.

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