

A Parents and Carers Guide to **Looking After You** When your child is anxious about school

Somerset Educational Psychology Service

The Importance of Self-Care



Parenting can be a challenge and parenting an anxious child even harder!

When our child is very anxious it is natural to feel very anxious with them. It is also natural to feel many other things relating to our child's avoidance of school; guilt, shame, confusion, worry, anger, frustration, sadness, hopelessness etc.



Sometimes we can put aside our own needs and focus entirely on our child and others.

When we do this, we risk becoming "burnt out" and having no energy left for anyone or anything! Like a jug that continually pours out and eventually is completely empty.

We, like a jug, need a refilling so we can continue to give to others and in particular, help our child.

Sometimes we push down our own emotions to care for our child so much that they eventually burst out in unexpected and uncontrolled ways.

Like a bucket of stress that eventually overflows, so too will our emotions if we continue to absorb our child's anxieties and ignore our own feelings.



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The Importance of Self-Care

When our child is getting more anxious, it is important to keep ourselves as calm as possible so we can respond to their anxiety in a logical and helpful way, rather than with emotion which can sometimes make the situation worse. Even trying to push away our feelings can make the situation worse as we can become irritable, impatient and snappy.

Here are some things you can try 'in the moment' to keep yourself calm in a safe way (like putting some 'holes in the bucket' to let out some of the stress):

- **Stop and breathe (just focus your breath for a few moments)**
- **Give yourself a 'verbal hug' (positive and encouraging self-talk)**
- **Compare with harder times you've got through/others in worse situations**
- **Remind yourself of the plan**
- **Use progressive muscle relaxation, breathing and visualisation to keep yourself as calm as possible.**
- **Use all your senses to tune into what is all around you ('grounding')**
When you notice your emotions rising, use these strategies again.



Immediately After

Congratulate yourself on what you did well!

Ask yourself: How am I feeling and what do I need?
(e.g. distraction, self-soothe, cry, talk...).

Ongoing and Longer-Term

Our self-care is an ongoing journey and needs our attention every day. Once the anxious moment has passed we can then focus on looking after our own wellbeing so we can continue to be the competent parent our child needs, as well as living a life we value.

Here are some key areas to spend a little time each week giving some of your attention (like re-filling our 'resiliency' jug):



Diet: balanced and nutritious



Sleep: as consistent and quality as possible



Rest and relaxation: 'no-pressure' moments to unwind and switch off from responsibilities, no matter how briefly



Exercise: regular and whatever intensity works for you. Even better if outdoors – bonus fresh air!



Social support: keep connected with friends and family, even 'virtually'



Express emotions: in whatever way works for you (talking, art, writing, dancing...)



Learn new coping skills: self-help guides, classes, 1:1 support



Hobbies: activities you enjoy and make you feel good about yourself



Contributing to others: 'giving back' to feel a helpful member of the community in some way



Have goals, dreams and a plan: look forward and imagine a "better" future



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Other Sources of Support



Your GP

Somerset Parent and Carer Toolkit

https://www.cypsomersethealth.org/parent_and_carer_toolkit

Anna Freud Centre

www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-parents-and-carers

Family Lives

www.familylives.org.uk

Mencap www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/children-and-young-people/support-parents-and-carers-children-and-young-people

Mind

www.mind.org.uk 0300 123 3393

NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/

Samaritans www.samaritans.org 116 123

Sane www.sane.org.uk 0300 304 7000

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-anxiety

Please see the online training resource

“Emotional Based School Avoidance:

What it is and what to do about it” for more guidance on the information in this leaflet.

Produced by:

Somerset Educational Psychology Service

March 2021



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