

Children excel when they have caring, trustworthy, and supportive relationships with others in their lives. You as their mentor have a vital role to play.

In this session we discussed our experiences working with children in schools and our concerns.

We focussed on:

Stress and what it feels like.

The practice in schools of actively exploring the feelings children are experiencing – not something that was done when most volunteers were at school.

Value of aids such as teddies and soft toys, fidget toys etc.

Recognising a child's state when we are working with them – for example: tired, distracted, anxious – and responding to it.

The importance and value of establishing and responding to a child's particular interests and getting to know the child well

The value of making each session fun and using humour. This helps reduce learning stress and establish a bond with the child. Playing Games is an effective strategy to help students learn.

Mindfulness – this can be very valuable for students and volunteers and can be practiced in a very simple fashion. (See Smiling Mind, Be You and Beyond Blue websites, plus attached Stress Management handout.)

The following information has been compiled to build on those discussions.

Supporting and looking after a child's worries and stress can be tricky at times, so here is a simple three-step process to help guide you.

Step 1. Help the child identify and name their feelings

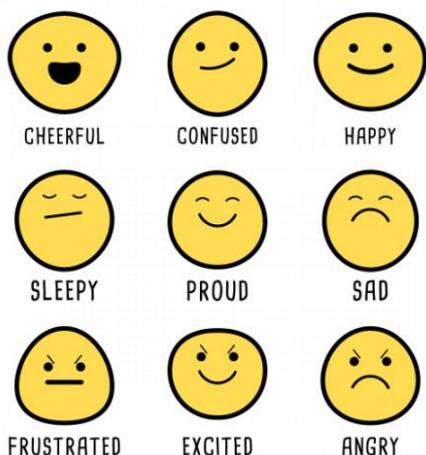
Often, our worries stem from unhelpful, intrusive thoughts. As adults, we can try to rationalise these unhelpful thoughts, by recognising that there is little point in worrying about something that may never happen. However, this concept can be difficult for children to grasp, especially when the unhelpful thought or feeling is at the forefront of their minds.

Firstly, ask the child how they are feeling. Helping the child to recognise and label what they are feeling is an intervention in itself and can support their regulation. It is important to recognise that feeling scared or anxious at a time like this is normal and okay, as it is an appropriate response to the uncertainty of our current world

If children are struggling for words to describe how they feel perhaps a visual clue can help:

Once they have decided how they feel you can have a chat with them about why they are feeling like this.

HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?





Date:

Check In



Date:

Check Out



Naming how you feel can become a natural and simple routine built into the beginning of the day or a mentoring session. Giving students practice at recognizing their emotions and determining how to manage those feelings in the classroom is a very useful strategy. The visuals are also great for students who are not as expressive or struggle to identify the exact emotion they are feeling.

Step 2: Once you have identified the child's feelings, talk about them and support them to find ways to help handle what is worrying them.

For many children, worry manifests in their bodies, rather than their words. For example, a tummy ache may be an indicator that they are worried about something. Lack of, or interrupted sleep, is also a common sign that your child may be experiencing some level of worry or stress. It is important to not only identify the signs of worry but to talk about the feelings the child is experiencing, by helping them to label their feelings.

Take some time to really listen, validate and allow the child to express what they are feeling. By having calm, open, and matter-of-fact conversations with the child about how they are feeling, and why they are feeling worried or stressed, you can actively move away from feelings of worry and towards a feeling of calm.

Talk with the child about new ways of seeing and managing what they are worried about, brainstorm ideas, and encourage them to find what will support them.

Step 3: What happens next depends on how the child is feeling.

If they are calm, happy and relaxed you can move into a learning task or activity.

If they are stressed or anxious or worried you may need to teach and use some **calm breathing** or mindfulness activities.

Calm breathing is explained in detail in the handout from *Anxiety Canada*.

Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity and without judgement.

Mindfulness can help children regularly tune in and become aware of how thoughts and emotions make them feel. Mindfulness helps us to focus our energy on the present moment – not the past, and especially not the future. By encouraging your child to listen to mindfulness meditation for just a few minutes each day, they will learn how to notice where their attention and energy is being spent, and how to redirect it to a better place.

There are some great resources to help you with this:

1) Anchor Your Mind with Movement

This activity is designed for Primary School Children. It can be accessed on You Tube at <https://youtu.be/buPuB4Sa0zU> It is also available on the Smiling Mind App. It was created through collaboration between Smiling Mind and the ABC.

2) **The Body Scanner** can be found on You Tube at <https://youtu.be/xLoK5rOl8Qk> Watch the video and then think about how you could do something like this with the student you are working with. You can do it sitting down rather than lying down. You just ask the child to slowly focus on different parts of their body.

3) Sitting Still Like a Frog Audio by Eline Snel

The audio exercises included with *Sitting Still Like a Frog* are based on mindfulness-training exercises for adults and developed especially for children and their parents. They form the core of learning to be more mindful at different times throughout the day

Mindfulness activities can be played from the links on this page or you can download them to your own device.

<https://www.shambhala.com/sittingstilllikeafrog/>

Sample Guided Relaxation from Green Child Magazine

Autumn Leaf on a Gentle Breeze

Whenever you want to calm yourself, all you have to do is close your eyes and focus on your breath. Count down from 5 and relax deeply Let's practice that right now together.
(slowly count down from 5 to 1)

Imagine yourself outside in the beautiful autumn air. Pretend for a moment that you are the wind. You glide peacefully along on this sunny, pleasant day. The air smells crisp all around you.

Along your journey you pick up some leaves that ride with you for a distance. How wonderful to feel the connection to these unique, beautiful autumn leaves, to know you are not separate but that you are one with everything you see.

Sometimes you are strong and others times you are very gentle. Feel your gentle strength now as you calmly blow across the trees and the rich earth.

And now from the wind, imagine changing into a leaf that's floating on the wind.

Feel yourself as a beautiful soft leaf bending back and forth with the wind, riding the wind very far and dancing in the wind. You do this so beautifully; gliding so gracefully. You are letting the wind carry you where it wants.

Now as the leaf, you turn over and look at the big sky. How vast and open it is.

Become the bright blue sky now. You cover the whole earth. Feel the clouds move all about you, floating along as the wind moves them gently.

Feel how large and protective you are. You cover everything, protecting the animals and the people. People gaze up at you in wonder to see how magnificent and beautiful you are.

Within the sky now, become aware of one particular cloud among the others. Become that cloud now. Feel the softness, the beauty, the lightness of your cloud body. You're like a big fluffy pillow!

Feel yourself as the cloud. Move and change shape as you want. You feel wonderfully light and happy just floating and dancing around.

How magnificent you are in all your states. From one leaf to the entire sky, you are part of everything and everything is part of you. And when you have troubles or worries, you can let them go and drift peacefully into a happy state - just by using your mind.

Start to slowly drift back down to earth, becoming yourself once again. Now open your eyes and look around you.

Other Useful Strategies

Reading Buddies



Reading Buddies can improve reading fluency, decrease anxiety in reluctant or stressed readers, and add a bit of cuddly fun to reading, making it even more pleasurable than it usually is!



Reading Buddies have the power to lure young readers out of that and into a more effective, deliberate reading practice that is more useful while simultaneously being less stressful because you're holding a plush toy (essentially a comfort object) or another favourite toy such as a dinosaur

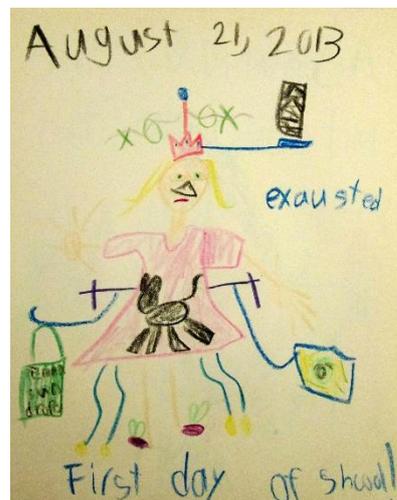
. It's a win-win!

Letting readers choose their Reading Buddy increases the likelihood that they will actually engage, so I believe choice is best. Look in the second hand shops for good quality stuffed toys and take a couple with you to mentoring sessions at school. The students select the buddy that they would like to read to.

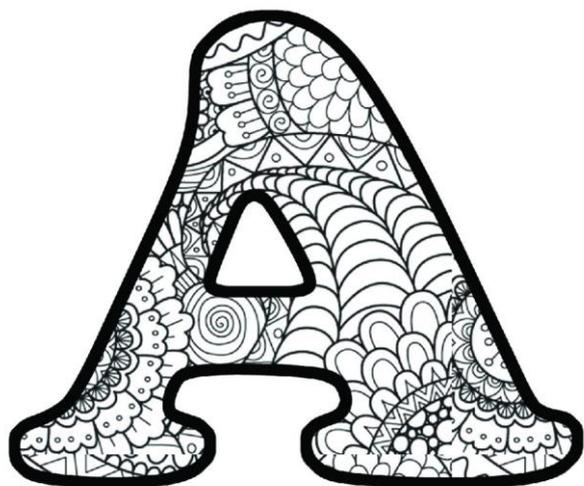
Drawing, colouring in, playing games

A small whiteboard with markers or sheets of paper and pencils are very popular with children. Being able to forget everything else and just concentrate on drawing a picture can be a great distraction for children.

Often while they are drawing you can talk with them about how they are feeling.



<https://www.mamaslearningcorner.com/color-by-letter-alphabet-worksheets/>



FREE! Coloring Letters

makebreaks.com

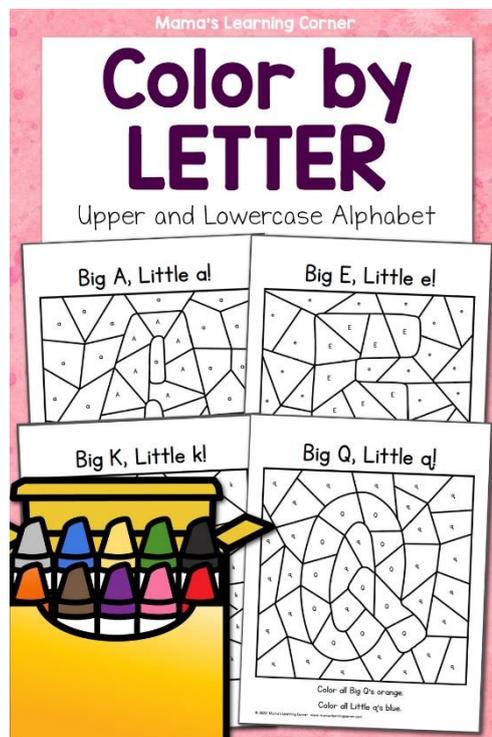
makebreaks.com

Hangman

Kids can learn more words and enrich their vocabulary while having fun with this skeleton hangman magnetic pocket game. This one is sold by Kmart for \$3



You can play the same game with just a piece of paper and a pencil, but magnetic or wooden letters are fun to handle and they can put in a line to make a word. Or



How to play hangman



Hangman is a simple word guessing game. Players try to figure out an unknown word by guessing letters. If too many letters which do not appear in the word are guessed, the player is hanged (and loses).

Setup the game by drawing a gallows and a underline for each letter in the unknown word. As letters in the word are guessed, write them above the corresponding underline. If a letter not in the word is guessed, draw a picture of a person on the gallows—one part for each incorrect letter guess. Most frequently, the person is drawn in 8 parts (for 9 letter guesses) in the order: Vertical line as part of the gallows. Horizontal line as support for noose, noose, head, body, left leg, right leg, left arm, right arm.

Alphabet connect the dots

From <https://www.coloring.ws/connect-difficulty.html>

