

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From ***What's the Buzz?*** A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



Lesson 11: handling worry

In this lesson your child learnt that worrying, in the main, is normal because it helps us to make sense of our world. Your child also learnt that most of us do much better when we learn to understand our worry patterns and work with them to fix the problems driving them. Here are a number of sensible ideas parents can use at home to reduce their children's susceptibility to worry and anxiousness.

What's happening at home?

It is fair to say that a few children are predisposed to worry. They are our "natural born worriers". Beyond this, a sensible beginning point is to assess the influences occurring within your family: a separation, a divorce, constant fighting, financial difficulties, racial taunts, recovery following a car accident, a sick family member, even a story aired on the evening news can trigger feelings of distress, dread, and helplessness.

Get to know their worries

Do you know what your child worries about? Is there a reoccurring theme? Do their worries concern self-esteem, perfectionism, separation, fear, death or are they related to social encounters. Once you know then it is possible to teach specific strategies to work with.

Be the best role model

Let your children see you logically talk your way through worries and problems. Whenever you can, allow them to witness you using positive self-talk and positive thinking to find solutions. As we 'talk it out loud' the logical order of what can be done enhances our motivation and chances of success. Show your children how they can also rely on this. Let them hear you say, "I know I can deal with this. I need to think about it. First, I'll....."

Make time to talk about the highs and lows of the day

Many parents gently, but deliberately build this time into evening meal conversations. It is a perfect forum to share successes and discuss troubles that may have arisen during the day.

Always deal with worries in the daytime!

Why? You know what it is like; in the gloominess of dark at bedtime everything seems at its very worst and positive thoughts are hard to gather.

A useful way to help your child deal with worry is to get them to draw it, along with ideas to deal with it. Then, get them to place it into their worry tin. It's just a matter of buying a small tin with a slot in the lid. For extra security, so the worries can't possibly escape, you might buy a tin with a tiny padlock on the lid. Once the worry has been discussed, drawn, written, and folded up into the slotted tin it doesn't need any further energy spent on it. The fascinating part is that when the worries are looked at weeks later most children will say, "Those worries are pathetic now!" This in itself delivers a healthy message about how much value we should give to worrying. As most of us have learnt over the years so few of our worries actually come to fruition. Using a worry tin in this way is a powerful teacher of this for children.

Empower your child



Remind them that worries are thoughts within their control.

In this lesson, we purposely used the term 'worry bugs'. Our suggestion is for you to draw your own 'worry bug' for your child to see. Incorporate thought bubbles and speech captions just as your child did in the lesson. Share how you deal with your worries and be sure to ask about the 'Worry scale' in their folder. Might this be something to be used at home?

Always use a logical 3-step plan to minimise worry

1. Work out how serious it is.

Use a worry scale similar to the one your child has brought home from this lesson. Ask your child to rate their worry anywhere between 1 to 5, with 1 being a slight setback and 5 being an irreversible disaster. So often worriers tend to catastrophize and think the worry is much, much worse than it really is. Rating the worry helps to keep it in perspective.

2. Gently challenge their worried thinking

Ask logical and realistic questions as; "Well, what usually happens?" "What is most likely to happen?" "What plans can be made to deal with it?" By consistently using this logical approach, children learn that the worry is not very likely, and contingency plans can always be made. Realistic thinking replaces frightened thinking, and as it does your child can effectively begin to problem solve.

3. Teach your child to switch worried thoughts to happy ones

Train them to tell their worry that they are stronger than it, and it will never beat them, even if they have to say it out loud! Switch to a happy thought and to stay with it teach them to get up, walking away and do something that makes them feel happy.

The problem of too much reassurance

It is vital to reassure children that they are safe and you understand their worries. However, when we talk too intensely about a child's worries, dissect and rehash them this can unintentionally leave the child with the impression that there must be something very serious to worry about. Be watchful of striking a healthy balance between being supportive and offering too much helpful talk.

Get a worry doll

OXFAM, the international aid organisation, sells 'Guatemalan worry dolls' in many cities around the world. These dolls are crafted around the image of Guatemalan children wearing traditional costume. The idea is the worry doll can take care of a child's worries so they can sleep peacefully. So before climbing into bed it's time for your child to tell each of their worries to the worry doll, place it under their pillow, and let the doll deal with them!

Never forget – humour, playfulness and light-heartedness

Well placed humour inspires a lightness that reaches a long way towards disarming worry. Never be shy about telling your child a funny or disarming story to help put things in perspective.

A few children need a worry specialist

Growing up is hard for some children. Sometimes they go through phases where they seem to have a bigger worry each day. Always follow your instincts as this is the time to seek expert professional support; a school counsellor, a psychologist, a paediatrician, a psychiatrist, a social worker or someone linked to a local community health centre. The influence of a skilled professional can have your child experimenting with interventions and ideas that will amaze you, and leave them feeling far more in control.



*"There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship."
Saint Thomas Aquinas*

