

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* for Early Learners: A complete social skills foundation course



Lesson 15 of 16: Worry – knowing about it, and dealing with it

After the Buzz presents ideas for parents, guardians and educators to encourage the generalisation of the social thinking the children have learnt in the session. Children rely on our commitment to consolidate these skills by modelling them, and emphasising the language and the ideas used in the lesson.

Here are few coaching tips to help children fend off worry. Most of us do better when we learn to understand our worry patterns and then learn how to take some control.

What's happening at home?

Some children are simply predisposed to worry – 'natural-born worriers'. Beyond this, consider the influences that may be occurring within your family: separation, divorce, constant fighting, financial difficulties, racial taunts, recovery following an accident, sick family member, even a story aired on the evening news can trigger feelings of anxiety and distress.

Be the best role model – once again!

Let your children see you logically talk your way through your worries and problems. Whenever you can, allow them to witness your positive self-talk and positive thinking to find solutions.

Normalise worry

A little anxiety is normal. It is a valuable way to plan, prioritise and cope with life's experiences. Worry becomes a problem when it's ever-present causing sadness, insomnia, under eating or overeating, poor concentration, poor memory, poor access to rational thinking, poor academic performance, and if it invites disturbing thoughts.

Share the worry with a friend, Mum or Dad, a teacher, or a trusted adult

A worry shared is a worry halved!

What is the worry?

That's right – teach children to name their worry, and say it, "I feel worried about..."

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

Many parents cleverly build a time to share the day 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 shadow of darkness at bedtime everything seems at its very worst and positive thoughts are much harder to gather. Cultivate bedtime as a time for loving and optimistic talk!



Free your child with a ‘worry tin’

One 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’ – 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 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 kids say, “Those worries are so small 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.

Always use a logical three-step plan to reduce worry

1. *Work out how serious the worry is:* Rating the worry helps to keep it in perspective. It keeps it as real as it should be (see page 173, ‘Worry – my catastrophe scale,’ in our first book, *What’s the Buzz? A social skills enrichment programme for primary students*). As kids use the worry scale, they learn to identify the intensity of the feeling, question it and choose a solution to keep it in check. It places abstract information into a visible and measurable format.
2. *Gently challenge your child’s worried thinking:* Ask logical questions such as, “Well, what usually happens?” “Hey, what’s most likely to happen?” “What plans can we make to deal with it?” Realistic thinking, offered calmly and matter-of-factly, replaces frightened thinking and teaches a way to battle panicky thinking.
3. *Teach your child to switch worried thoughts to happy ones:* Train your child to tell their worry that they are much stronger than it is and it will never beat them, even if they have to say it out loud! Teach them to switch to a happy thought when worried thoughts creep in.

The problem of too much time and reassurance spent on worries

It is vital to reassure children that they are safe and you understand their worries. However, when we talk too enthusiastically about their worries with them we can, quite unintentionally, leave the child with the impression that there must be something very serious to worry about. Be careful to strike a healthy balance between being supportive and offering too much helpful talk.

Your humour 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.

Get a ‘worry doll’

OXFAM, the international aid organisation, sells ‘Guatemalan worry dolls’ 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 it. You could do the same with a special soft toy too!

Diaphragmatic breathing and progressive muscle relaxation

These are wonderful anti-anxiety tools. The accumulation of evidence to support this fact, especially through brain imaging, is compelling. Most of us gain benefits from these techniques!

How to teach diaphragmatic breathing

- Assist your children to find a place to lie on their back. Ask them to place one hand on their chest and the other comfortably on their tummy.
- Direct them to close their mouth and take in a deep, slow breath through their nose. Count for them: ...1, 2, 3, 4...as they breathe in. The hand on their abdomen should rise a little more than the hand they have on their chest. Tell them this is how it should be.
- Get them to hold their breath for four seconds. Count for them while they hold it:...1, 2, 3, 4...
- To exhale teach them to release their breath through their mouth using tight almost closed lips (pursed lips) as this slows the exhale. Once again, count: ...1, 2, 3, 4... as they breathe out.
- Continue to count to help set the pace for them. The goal is to teach them to slow their breathing down so each inhalation and exhalation takes about four or five seconds.
- Repeat this cycle up to 10 times.

How to teach progressive muscle relaxation

Dim the light a little and light a large candle to signal the beginning of this relaxation. Atmosphere is important. Find a comfortable place to lie or sit and encourage the children to wriggle a bit to get comfortable. Say, "Now get ready to recharge."

"Begin by thinking about things that have been hard or unfair for you today – things that made you annoyed or fed-up. What we are about to do will help you let go of any bad feelings you might be carrying."

"Be still. Feel your body relaxing. Stretch to make yourself as long as you can. Keep your back and legs on the floor. Come on; make yourself as long as you can. Hold the stretch." (Wait and count to four.) "Let it go and relax."

"Now do the same with just your right leg. Tense the muscles – hold them tight." (Wait and count to four.) "Let the muscles relax. Do the same to the left leg now – stretch, tighten and hold it." (Wait and count to four.) "Let go."

"Go to your feet. Right foot first. Wiggle your toes. Now push your toes wide apart. Hold the stretch." (Wait and count to four.) "Now relax them. Let's do the left foot – wiggle your toes and push them wide apart. Hold the stretch." (Wait and count to four.) "Then relax them."

"Let the feeling of relaxation gently move from your legs, up your back and arms, and down into your fingers. Stretch your fingers wide apart and hold them apart while you count... 1, 2, 3, 4...relax them."

"Do the same for your shoulders."

"Move your thoughts to your face. Close your eyes – squeeze them tight. Let them relax. Then tighten your face again. Keep it tight to the count of four. Relax your face again. Now tell your mind to relax." (Wait and count to four.)

"Keep your eyes closed, if you can, while you listen to this story."

Read a relaxation story, or part of a story being enjoyed to finish up.

Photocopiable and Online Resources

These resources can also be downloaded from www.whatsthebuzz.net.au