

# Responding To Reassurance Seeking: A Guide for Parents & Carers

We have created this visual guide for you to help you manage behaviours that ultimately require your reassurance and guidance.

We hope this will support you to give a structured response, and help you to teach children and young people how to cope when they are feeling scared or anxious or even slightly negative towards returning to school and other changes.

At the end of this resource, you will find some example worksheets which may also help.



Definition of reassurance in English:

## reassurance

Translate [reassurance](#) into Spanish

Pronunciation [?](#) /ˌrɪəˈʃʊərəns/ /ˌrɪəˈʃʊərəns/ [▶](#)

### NOUN

1 The action of removing someone's doubts or fears.

*'children need reassurance and praise'*

[+ More example sentences](#)

[+ Synonyms](#)

1.1 A statement or comment that removes someone's doubts or fears.

*'we have been given reassurances that the water is safe to drink'*

[+ More example sentences](#)

### Pronunciation [?](#)

reassurance /ˌrɪəˈʃʊərəns/ /ˌrɪəˈʃʊərəns/ [▶](#)

Children will naturally seek reassurance when their anxieties/fears escalate.

A general response to this from parents and carers is verbally minimising their fears or compensating on their behalf. However, if we are to build children's resilience to change and adversity then we need to help them to increase their capacity to manage the unhelpful thoughts and feelings they are having.

It is hard for us to now imagine a time when we return to some kind of normality

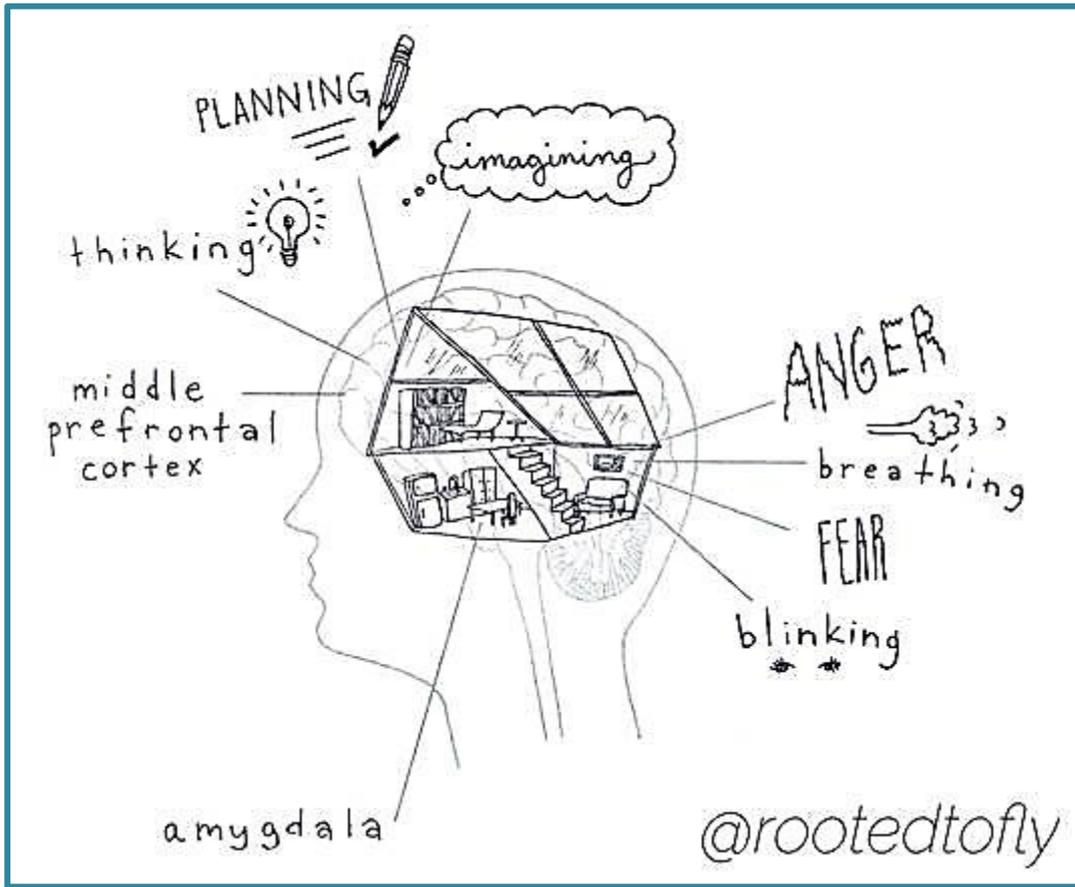
It is most likely that there will be a phased return to school and work but even now we are struggling to envisage this transition and are aware of the potential for resistance, fear, anxiety and ultimately avoidance.



First, let's look at the brain...

## UPSTAIRS

Thinking / Planning / Reasoning / Imagining



Breathing / Fear / Anger / Emotions

## DOWNSTAIRS

Sometimes the downstairs part of our brains can take over our ability to reason through the emotions so we sometimes get stuck and focus on the fear.



We then become aware of the physical experiences of fear such as an increased heart rate or shallow breathing.

The thinking part of our brain which helps us rationalise fear is then hard to reach so we can sometimes seek reassurance from others or even try to avoid the situation we are fearful of altogether.



# Imagine a **WASP** is coming towards you...

1. If we use the downstairs part of our brain...



...We see a threat and feel worried the wasp may sting us, we panic and maybe run around to escape the wasp.



2. If we use the upstairs (rational thinking) part of our brain...



...We know that the wasp is more likely to sting if we flap around and run around, and that even if the worst case scenario does happen it will never be that bad anyway.

So we breathe through it and choose to face the fear and hope for the best.

We take a positive risk.

(The obvious disclaimer here is if we are likely to have an adverse anaphylactic reaction to a wasp sting of course!)

# So how can you help?

Teach a skill to children and young people when they are seeking reassurance with something they are afraid of.

For this we will use an example of a return to school when lockdown eases.



## The acronym we use is APPLE



A

is for

Acknowledge

Notice and acknowledge the thought or fear about returning to school as it comes to mind.

It is important to acknowledge thoughts.

P

is for

Pause

Try not to react as you normally would do just allow for a pause and focus on the breath.

Listen to your breath. In and out. Just pause.

P

is for

Pull Back

Tell yourself that this is just a worry talking, the need to travel with this worry right now is most probably not going to be helpful to you.

Don't believe everything you think! Thoughts are not statements of fact.

L

is for

Let Go!

Let go of the thought or feeling, you don't have to respond to the thought, you can actually imagine them as clouds and let them float away just like they came into your mind they can go away.

They are not real. You are in the present moment and going back to school is in the future.

Explore the present moment.

E

is for

Explore

Parents and carers: it is vital you try not to reassure too much at this stage.... The fearful thought has brought about some emotions that are uncomfortable so we need to ground the child or young person into the present moment. Remember: anxiety is generally aroused when we negatively predict things that may happen in the future.

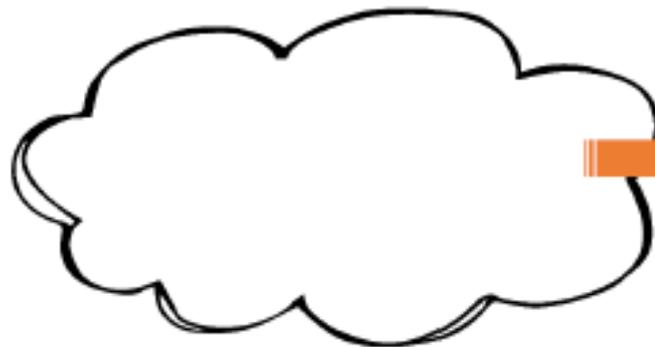
It is now we give an essential skill to the child or young person to shift focus away from the fear based thinking to their breath.

Ask them to focus inwardly when they get caught up with unhelpful thinking: notice breathing, smells, what can be felt and what they can hear, essentially bringing them into the present.

# ANXIETY VS. TRUTH!

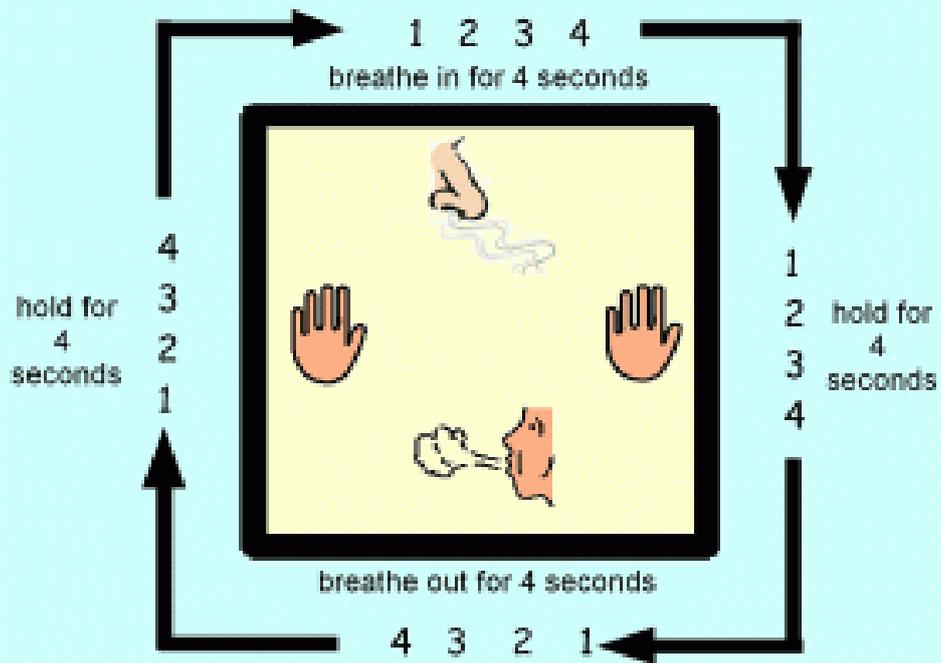
Whenever you experience anxiety, your mind might begin to race with thoughts that aren't always true. Anxious thoughts are often focused on the *worst* possible outcome. These thoughts can lead you to believe that things are worse than they actually are and that you are not capable of coping with it.

In the thought clouds, write a few anxious thoughts that you are experiencing, then try to challenge those thoughts by identifying what is actually *true* about your situation.



# SQUARE BREATHING



# ANXIETY PREP

It can be helpful to be prepared when you are going into a situation that you know might make you anxious. There might be helpful things that you can say or do before to help you better cope if you become triggered.

**WHAT'S THE SITUATION?**

**WHY MIGHT I GET ANXIOUS?**

**HOW HAVE I HANDLED IT BEFORE?**

**WHAT CAN I SAY OR DO TO PREPARE?**

**HOW WILL I KNOW I'M GETTING ANXIOUS?**

**WHAT COPING SKILLS SHOULD I USE?**



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