

Back to School Anxiety

Back to school time can be a stressful time for teachers, parents and children alike.

Whether a child is returning to school after the summer break or is starting school for the first time, the transition will take some time to adjust to and can cause feelings of worry or anxiety, which indeed are normal feelings and emotions to have at a time of change.

In younger children, separation anxiety is common, where children find it difficult to be separated from their parent / guardian even for a very short time. In older children and teenagers, they tend to experience social anxiety or worry about school more.

Here are some ways to identify anxiety in children:

Difficulty concentrating, often appearing distracted.

Difficulty sleeping or waking at night with bad dreams.

A sudden change in behaviour for example, outbursts of anger, irritability, crying or becoming more clingy.

Complaining of pains in their tummy.

Disinterest in eating.

Negative thinking.

Quieter than usual or just not themselves.

Reluctance to attend school.

How to help:

- Talk with the child about going back to school or starting school for the first time, so that they know a little bit about what to expect.
- Listen to how the child is feeling and remind the child that they are loved, they are safe and that it is ok for them to feel how they are feeling. All feelings are ok. Remind children that feelings come and go, just like visitors, they only stay for a short time and then they go again.
- If possible, arrange a tour of the school before the school term begins. This may help to alleviate any worries about starting in a new school.
- Talk about all the positive things about going back to school, for example re-connecting with friends, making new friends, engaging in favourite subjects and activities, games, sports and so on.
- Spend time together as much as possible doing all the things that bring fun, laughter and joy. Make a list of all the child's favourite things to do and do as many of those as you can.
- Check in regularly with how the child is feeling and let them know that you are there to support them. Younger children may not be able to regulate their feelings on their own and will need support to help make sense of how they are feeling.

Calming strategies and support:

Mindful breathing practices such as 'Hot Chocolate Breathing' can help. Imagine you are holding a cup of delicious hot chocolate in your hands. Notice how the cup feels in your hands. Take a deep breath in through the nose and smell the aroma of the warm hot chocolate. Now slowly and carefully breathe out through the mouth to help cool down your roasting cup of hot chocolate. Continue until you feel nice and relaxed.

Mindful listening – child may close their eyes if they are comfortable to do so and listen carefully to notice how many different sounds they can hear inside the room and then how many different sounds they can hear outside the room.

Go on a nature walk – being in nature brings a calming influence and helps us to relax. Go a step further and engage the senses by asking the child to identify 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch, 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can smell and to think of 1 kind thing they can do for themselves or someone else.

Shape Breathing - Hold out their hand and trace up along the length of each finger whilst breathing in, hold breath for 2 seconds (if possible) when you get to the tip of each finger and then slowly breathe out for as long as you can, as you trace down the length of each finger. Repeat until they have completed their hand and repeat if necessary.

Blowing bubbles and imagine your worries floating away in the bubbles.

Draw or write about how they are feeling on a scrap piece of paper or in a journal such as in ‘My Gratitude and Mindfulness Journal’.

Where to get help:

Early intervention for anxiety is important. Please speak to your GP about any worries or concerns you may have about your child’s anxiety.

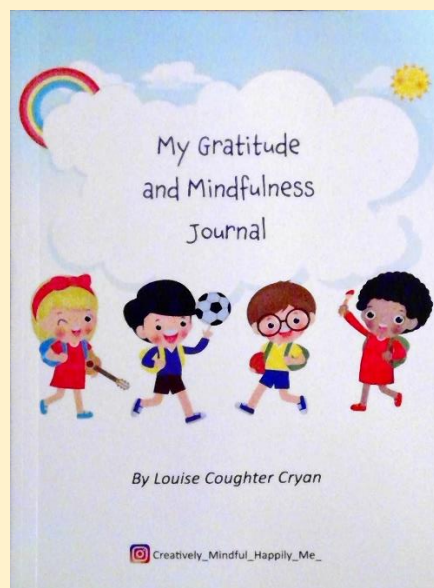
For support and information about going back to school, please see gov.ie/backtoschool

‘My Gratitude and Mindfulness Journal’ focuses on the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing for children.

It is packed full of engaging & fun mindful activities, positive affirmations, inspiring quotes, poetry, and activities which encourage self-compassion & kindness, building self-esteem and much more!

Each journaling page is different & encourages children to practice gratitude & to reflect on their emotions and feelings and know that all feelings are ok.

Children will learn coping strategies & techniques to help address some of the ways that they may be affected by emotions such as anger, worry or anxiety.



Orders can be processed by email to contactlouisecrian@gmail.com


The book retails at €15.00. Postage is per An Post rates.

The book is also available from: Castle Book Shop, Castlebar / www.mayobooks.ie / The Book Shop, Bridge St, Westport / Smyths Newsagents, Claremorris / Easons Castlebar / www.schoolbooksireland.ie / Vintage Plaza, Kiltimagh. Co. Mayo


Sample pages from the book

Lá/Day:	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wedns	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Bliain/Year:				
Month:	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Seisúir/Season:	Spring			Summer			Autumn			Winter		
Aimsir/Weather:	cloudy	sunny	wet	dry	warm							


Draw a face to show how you are feeling today:




Happy




Sad




Worried



Scared



Okay



Other

Write or draw
3 things that you are grateful for: *Grateful means things that you are happy to have in your life.*

1)

2)

3)

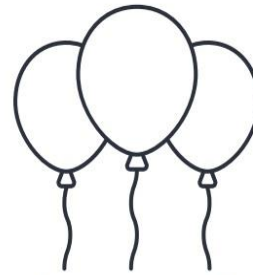
The best part of my day was:

1 thing that made me smile was:

I believe in myself!

My Day

Draw and colour in your favourite part of today:



Balloon Breathing

When I feel angry, sad, scared, anxious or frightened, I can practice my **Balloon Breathing** to help me feel better.

1. Find a comfortable place to sit down and when you are ready, close your eyes.
2. Put your hands on your tummy and imagine that your belly is a balloon.
3. Take a deep breath in through your nose and feel your tummy rise, just like a balloon filling up with air.
4. Hold your breath for 2 seconds.
5. Breathe out through your mouth and feel your belly fall, as your balloon deflates.
6. Practice your balloon breathing 5 times.
7. Notice how you are feeling now. Are you feeling a little better?

Remember!

It's okay to feel angry, sad, frightened, anxious or scared. Everybody feels like this sometimes.

Don't try to ignore these feelings. It can help to draw, write or talk about how you are feeling with someone you trust, for example your parent(s), guardian(s), an older brother or sister, a friend, relative or teacher.

Sharing how we feel with someone helps us to feel happier and more calm.

Feelings are just like visitors, they only visit for a short while.



**Laugh until your belly hurts,
and then laugh a little more!**

Unknown.

Laughter is often the best medicine. It can cure almost anything!

Write or draw: What makes you laugh?