

# Anxiety

# Management

# Tool Kit



## Microscope Test

(Eyes) – All Ages

When you feel anxious, imagine putting your worries and fears under a “microscope.” What would you see? Note what you observe about the situation:

Who/What/Where/When

Feelings and Behaviors

Ability to control/change (for teens)

Knowing this yourself and what makes you tick is the first step to shrinking your worries.

## Bubble (Deep) Breathing

(Bubbles) – All Ages

Anxiety likes to take our breath away. Most people tend to hold their breath or take short fast breaths. Our muscles can't relax without oxygen!

Illustrate by practicing bad and good bubble blowing. The best bubbles come from big breaths that we let out slowly and smoothly.

Practice deep relaxing breaths using bubbles. Imagine blowing worries into the bubbles and watching them float away.

## Chill Charm

(Stone with word) – All Ages

Choose an object you see/carry/wear often. Look at it while you practice deep breathing and muscle relaxation. With each breath out, think of a word that you connect with feeling relaxed while you look at the object. Over time, you can see the item and think of your calming word to help you relax when you feel anxious.

## Stones and Spaghetti

Progressive Muscle Relaxation – All Ages

Practice tightening (hard as stone) and relaxing (limp like wet noodles) each body part individually or in sections. Feet & legs, backside, stomach, arms & hands, neck & shoulders, face & head. Tighten for counts of 5 to 15 (shorter for younger children, longer for teens). Release for the same length of time. Repeat.

## Mr. Busy & The 5 Sensations

Mindfulness and the 5-4-3-2-1  
Grounding Technique  
(Glove) – All Ages

Take a slow, deep breath and release.

- 5 – Look, name 5 things you can see.
- 4 – Focus on your body; name 4 things you can feel.
- 3 – Listen, name 3 sounds that you hear.
- 2 – Inhale, name 2 things you smell. If you don't smell anything name 2 favorite scents.
- 1 – Name 1 thing you can taste. If you don't taste anything, name your 1 favorite flavor.

## Catching Wrong Thoughts

(Sticky Hands) – Ages 12+

Talk about the different types of thinking errors that contribute to anxiety. Spread out “Wrong Thoughts” cards on table or floor. Try to “catch” one and give an example. Once you've got it, try writing your own anxious thoughts. Name the errors you caught.

Labeling	Fortune Telling
Mind Reading	Overgeneralizing
Catastrophizing	Personalization
Emotional Reasoning	Tunnel Vision
Black & White Thinking	Unreal Ideal

## Worry Monsters/Bullies

(Monster finger puppet) – Ages 4-12

Did you know that worries are like little monsters or bullies who make up stories to make us feel scared? They tell us lies to keep us trapped in our fears. We don't have to believe them, and it's ok to talk back to them. Draw a picture of your worry monster or bully. Give it a speech bubble showing what it's telling you. Draw a picture of you defeating the monster or bully. Then, use the monster puppet to practice using your own voice to talk back to it and stand up against the lies that have made you feel afraid.

## Put on Your Detective Cap

(Magnifying Glass) – Ages 12+

Write down your anxious thoughts. Imagine you're a detective. Good detectives focus only on evidence and facts, not guesses or assumptions. Ask yourself, "What evidence do I have that this is true? What evidence do I have that this is false?" Make sure to only note facts – things that really happened – not things you fear will happen! Then, decide how likely it is your worries will occur...most of the time what we fear is pretty unlikely. Then, create new, more realistic thoughts to tell yourself to replace the anxious ones.

## Worry Time

All Ages

Decorate the outside of a box with things that make you happy. Each time you worry, write it down and put it inside. Once per day, sit down with someone you trust. Pull out and talk about your worries for 15 minutes. The person can just listen, or work with you on solutions. When time's up, put the worries that feel better in the trash. If some are still bothering you, put them back in the box. Give them to your partner to guard overnight. No more worrying until the next day...time to get busy doing something fun or calming!

## Back Talk

All Ages

Talking back to adults may get you in trouble, but talking back to worries is actually a GREAT idea. They don't have anything important or helpful to say, so it's ok to let them know that you want them to go away and leave you alone. And you don't even have to be polite about it! Just remember, once you have told them who's boss, get busy doing something that helps you feel relaxed, calm, and in charge of yourself to take your focus off of your worries.

## Tension-Busting Tunes

All Ages

Music has a powerful effect on our feelings. We can use it to help when our anxiety is trying to take over. Make a list of songs that make you feel happy, comforted, relaxed. There are no rules about the type of music – any genre from any generation will work as long as it is soothing to you. Put the songs together on a playlist on Spotify, a CD, an iPod/iPad, a phone, etc. Then, when you feel the tension rising, press play and let your tunes ease your mind.

## Highs and Lows Journaling

(Small Notebook) – All Ages

Draw or write down your “lows” – maybe something that caused you to feel stressed, worried, sad, or frustrated.

Then, draw or write about your “highs” – something good or positive that happened that day. It might be something that makes you laugh, brings you comfort, or for which you feel grateful.

## Soothing Senses Set

(Assorted objects) – All Ages

Anxiety keeps us trapped in the past or the future. Tapping into our 5 senses helps us get back to the present. Get a small bag or container and inside place items for each of the 5 senses that you find comforting. Examples:

Sight – a picture of someone/something special to you, liquid motion toy, snowglobe

Smell – lotion, essential oil, scratch & sniff stickers

Sound – phone app with nature sounds, music, noise cancelling headphones, rainmaker toys

Taste – water, hard candy, gum

Touch – squeeze ball, putty, soft fabric, stuffed animal

## Happy Places

All Ages

Think about your favorite memories and how you felt when they were happening. Choose one from an especially happy time. Try to remember as many little details as possible about the sequence of events, your thoughts and feelings, and memories for all of your senses – sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch. Draw or write about it. Then practice going back to this time and place in your memory – first when you are calm and later when you are feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed.

## Stormy/Sunny Thoughts

Ages 4-12

Draw a person on a piece of paper, at the bottom in the middle. Draw a big cloud near the top on one side and a sun on the other side. In the cloud, write down your worried thoughts. Now think about some more cheerful thoughts to help you chase the storm away.

## Walk Away from the Buffet

(Paper plate & Post-its) – Ages 12+

Feeling overwhelmed can make us feel like we have too much on our plate. On post-it notes, put all of the things causing you to feel overloaded (one per post-it). Put them on the plate. Keep adding until you have everything you can think of that's causing stress.

There's probably a ***lot*** there – maybe even a lot of good things. But just like with dinner, we can only handle so much before we get sick. What things do you need to keep? What things can you leave on the buffet, share with others, or save for later?

## Move It or Lose It

All Ages

Exercise is a good way to reduce stress and worry. Any repetitive/rhythmic movement that helps us get out of our head and breathe more deeply will work. Take a pet for a walk, go for a run, climb, dance, lift weights, try a game of tag or hide-and-seek, play basketball with a friend, etc. Think of 3 types of movement or exercise you enjoy and one you might like to try. Notice how you feel before and after doing that activity.

## Yogi Stories

(Bendable figure) –Ages 4-12

Yoga is great for anxiety relief. It focuses on balance (mental, physical), breathing (slow, controlled), and being (focused, in the moment). With younger children, use interactive storytelling to keep their interest. Put the bendable yogi into poses as you create a tale; then you give the poses a try:

Mountain	Boat
Rag doll	Cow
Cat	Tree
Downward Dog	Child's Pose

<https://www.kidsyogastories.com/kids-yoga-poses/>

## Practice Makes Perfect

All Ages

To learn a new skill and move it to “muscle memory,” you need 2 things: ***time*** and ***repetition***.

When: Alert and not distracted

Where: Quiet and comfortable place

When: Set a realistic amount of time you can practice your relaxation tools regularly (5 min/day is better than 20 min/week).

The more you practice, the easier it will be to remember your coping tools when you need them.

## Anxiety Meter

(Thermometer) – All Ages

Imagine you have a special thermometer that measures your stress/anxiety level.

0--1--2--3--4---5--6--7--8--9--10

0=Calm & Relaxed

3=Pretty uncomfortable

5=Anxious but maybe you can cope

7=Very worried, not sure you can cope

10=Terrified, panicked, can't stand it

When you feel anxious, try to take your "temperature" to get a sense of what or how much help you need to return to a relaxed state.

## References and Resources:

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