

# Anxiety Coping Skills

## Self-Care to remember:

**Sleep**- Aim for at least 8 hours of sleep each night. Try to go to bed at the same time each night and wake at the same time each morning. Sleep in a cool, dark area, and create a bedtime routine for consistency. Ask about our sleep hygiene tips if sleep is a challenge!

**Exercise**- Adding exercise each day will reduce anxiety by helping the body regulate through movement. Going walking, doing small exercises throughout the day, bouncing on a ball, or dancing to a favorite song are all things to try.

**Nutrition**- Try and maintain stable blood sugar. Eat 3 meals and 2 snacks per day. Try to eat protein, healthy fats, vegetables, and fruits. Bring snacks with you to activities to help with this.

## Techniques to try:

### **Grounding with 5,4,3,2,1**

- What are 5 things you can see?
- What are 4 things you can feel?
- What are 3 things you can hear?
- What are 2 things you can smell?
- What is 1 thing you can taste or would like to taste?

**Butterfly Hug**- Cross your arms in front of your chest and place your hands on your biceps. Slowly lift your fingertips off the upper arm and place it back down. Alternate between hands. Continue 10-20 pats then squeeze- like giving yourself a hug.

**Lady bug**- Interlace your fingers, so you come to hold your hands together. Gently and slowly lift your fingertips away from the back of your hand and release back down. Repeat on both sides. Continue for 10-20 times. You should notice your thoughts slowing down or reducing.

**Square Breathing**- Slowly begin to take a deep inhalation and count to 4. Hold your breath for the count of 2, then slowly exhale for 4 seconds and then again hold your breath for a count of 2. Adjust your breath for your body to optimize your experience.

**Soothing Techniques**- Try repetitive motions such as chewing gum, rocking in a chair, or swinging. Listen to music, pet your pets, imagine someone you love giving you a big hug with affirmations of what is good about you, or touch something that is comforting like a piece of fabric or smooth stone.

**Body Scan**- Scan your body by starting at one end and noticing all major muscle groups. Search and ask your body, "where do I notice discomfort?", then focus on that area and take 3 deep breaths. Continue this through the body. Example: start with your feet, then ankles, then shins, quads, hips, low back, stomach, chest, high back, shoulders, neck, arms, hands then up to head.

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## Tips for parents of teens:

**Modeling**- Children learn primarily through observation. Although it may not be as obvious during the teenage years, they are still noticing how you do things. They will look to you during times of stress for how to handle difficult situations. Modeling self-care, taking deep breaths, and presence in the moment will help your child learn how to regulate for themselves. Try some of the various techniques we offer for yourself and see how your teen follows along.

**Validation**- Naming your teen's experience will help them connect their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors together so that they can learn how to communicate what they need to you and others around them. This will also remind them that they are not alone in this experience and that you are with them through the challenge. Letting them know that you see and support them through anxious symptoms will also let them know that it's an okay experience to talk about with your family. You don't need to change what is happening, but you can offer verbal and nonverbal support (hugs, sitting with or next to, eye contact, etc.). Every child is different, and many teens don't want to talk through things, but it's important for them to know that you're there if they need to.

*Phrases to try:* "It is understandable to be scared when there are so many new things happening." "Meeting new people is hard and I'm really proud of you for pushing yourself to try." "I remember when I first started high school and was feeling so nervous." "Starting a new job is stressful. Let me know if there's anything I can do to support you through it."

**Consistency** – While nothing in life can be completely predictable, offering consistency to your teen can help reduce anxious feelings. Creating a consistent routine for most days, bedtimes, or difficult situations can be helpful. Consistency is also important in presence. If you tell your teen that you are going to do something or be somewhere, following through is important. And if you can't follow through, then apologize to them and rebuild trust by showing consistency in the future.

**Communication** – Although teens don't always want to communicate, it is still important for them and your family. Get creative with communication when anxious symptoms are high. Come up with a way to communicate about hard things while stress is low and then use this plan as needed. You can work with them to find ways that work best for them and offer coping skills that you've seen be helpful before.

*Creative communication to try:* thumb-o-meter (thumbs up means "I'm good," sideways means "I'm okay but don't need anything" and thumbs down means "I need support. Please come check in."), text each other check ins about symptoms even when you're at home (this can feel funny to some parents, but offers teens a bit of separation from the intensity that some experience when asking for help), write notes to each other at the end of the day about how things went, get a magnetic "feelings chart" for the refrigerator that allows the teen to pick the face that best describes their day.