

# EASE at Home (Grades 4-7)

Strategies to help children cope with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

Sometimes it's hard for adults to know what to say or do to ease a child's worries, especially during times of change and uncertainty. As the most important big people in their world, parents and caregivers can help children feel safer and soften the sharp edges of whatever is happening to make their worries grow.

## Creating Rhythms and Routines

### What is it?

When the world feels upside down, the repetition of routines and a regular schedule help create a sense of order. Routines don't have to be elaborate and can include small acts that create moments of connection and comfort for your child.

### How?

Involve your child in creating a daily schedule that works for your family. Make sure to include time for fun, creativity, and quiet time. Print and post a [schedule](#) or try out a [scheduling app](#). Establish some new routines or revisit old favourites. Examples include:



Have a special one-on-one connection time in the morning and before bed

At dinner, ask everyone to share one thing they learned or one thing that surprised them that day



Have a certain meal on a certain night, like Taco Tuesdays or Spaghetti Sundays - invite your child to help or even take over the cooking on these nights



Schedule time for bubble baths - light a candle and play some soothing music to make it even more special

Older children still find comfort from the routine of bedtime rituals and may want to be read or sung to again even if this hasn't happened in a while



**Hint:** Having regular reminders of what's coming next will help smooth transitions from one thing to the next.



Everyday  
Anxiety  
Strategies for  
Educators

EASE (Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators) is a collection of classroom resources that have been adapted for parents and caregivers to help children manage anxiety and worries at home.



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## Helping Children Find Their Feelings

### What is it?

Children may have a hard time identifying the intense and confusing feelings that come with all the changes in their world. They might be feeling frustrated, worried, restless, hopeful, angry, and overwhelmed all at the same time. So many swirling emotions could result in disrupted sleep, irritability, increased fights with siblings, and physical complaints like stomach aches. Learning to recognize emotions and find acceptable ways to express them can keep them from staying bottled up inside or acted out in unsafe ways.

### How?

Talk about feelings with your child. Read books or watch videos about different emotions and ask if your child is having any of the same feelings. Some examples include:

#### My Heart

by Corrina Luyken



Share some of the feelings you have been having lately. Let your child know that you accept that these feelings are normal and temporary and that you are coping with them in healthy ways

#### The Red Tree

by Shaun Tan

Acknowledge all the feelings your child experiences. Be present and supportive without trying to fix or change how they feel. For example, "It's okay to be feeling a little nervous now - it's a sign your emotions are working as they should."



#### How is She Feeling?

by Disney Enterprises



Invite your child to express feelings through drawing and painting, writing, dancing, music, or even having a good cry

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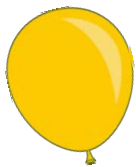
## Relaxation Skills: Calm Breathing

### What is it?

Children are usually not aware that worries and other difficult emotions can 'show up' in their bodies as physical discomfort, such as headaches and muscle tension. Regularly practising fun relaxation exercises can help bodies and minds feel loose and calm and dial down stress and worries when they do arise.

### How?

Practicing slow, deep breathing is one of the most effective ways to feel relaxed, centred, and focused. Encourage children to breathe slowly in through the nose, allowing the belly rise, hold for a few seconds, then slowly exhale through the mouth, causing the belly to fall. Repeat the cycle 5-10 times to start and build up to a few minutes for a more powerful calming effect. Add some fun by trying the following:



Imagine blowing up a balloon in your belly on the in-breath, then slowly letting it deflate on the out-breath

Pretend to smell a flower while breathing in, then blow gently to cool down a hot drink while breathing out



Use an app with guided breathing instructions, like the [Breathr App](#) from Kelty Mental Health or [Mindshift](#) from Anxiety Canada

Follow along with a video like this [Calm Breathe Bubble](#)



**Hint:** Calm breathing is best practiced regularly and when your child is already calm so they can remember how to do it when they feel upset. Learn to identify your child's triggers so that you can do some calm breathing together before things get out of hand. It's always easier to deal with strong emotions before they get too overwhelming.

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## Relaxation Skills: Tense & Relax

### What is it?

When kids and adults feel worried, they tense up physically. This muscle tension can feel uncomfortable and contribute to general feelings of unease. *Tense and Relax* involves children learning to tense up, hold, and completely relax each muscle group, one at a time. The longer and more fully a child can work through the whole body, the more powerful the relaxing effect will be.

### How?

Help your child understand the difference between feeling tense and feeling relaxed by asking them to imagine themselves as:



A body builder flexing their muscles one by one

A runner shaking to loosen up all their muscles before a race



Stiff, uncooked spaghetti, then soft, cooked spaghetti

Read a tense and relax [script](#) out loud - use a calming tone and pick a quiet time like after lunch or before bed when you won't feel rushed

Follow along with a guided [tense and relax exercise](#)

**Hint:** Just like Calm Breathing, Tense and Relax is best practiced regularly so it will be more effective when needed for calming the body down.



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## Helping Children Move Their Bodies

### What is it?

Moving our bodies has many benefits for our physical, mental, and emotional health. Build in big or small movement breaks throughout the day to decrease stress and increase fun!

### How?

When possible, get outside to enjoy the fresh air, remembering to follow [physical distancing guidelines](#) to keep you and others safe. There are lots of ways to get active that don't require a lot of equipment or time. Use your imagination and interests to come up with your own activities or try some of these examples:



Observe nature and track observations in a notebook; or try [Geocaching](#)

Jump rope, kick a ball, toss a frisbee, play hopscotch, tag, or Red-Light Green-Light or check out some [classic outdoor games](#)



Pump up the music, and dance or follow along with videos like [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#) and [GoNoodle](#)



Go on a scavenger hunt to find things like a feather, a y-shaped stick, a flat stone, a rock with a spot on it, five different leaves, something natural and red - see these [scavenger hunt printables](#) for more ideas



Build an obstacle course with stations to cycle through. For example:

1. do 10 jumping jacks
2. jump over a row of canned goods
3. spin around 5 times
4. balance a cushion on your head for 10 seconds
5. pretend to hula hoop (or really hula hoop!)

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## Creating a Helpful Mindset

### What is it?

It's natural to have more worries than usual during times of uncertainty, but some can be unhelpful and persistent, fueling greater anxiety and stress. Parents and caregivers can help children express and cope with worries and shift unrealistic or overly pessimistic thoughts into more helpful and balanced thoughts. To learn more about helpful thinking, visit [Anxiety Canada](https://www.anxietycanada.com/).

### How?

Talking to your child about their worries lets them know that they're not alone - we all have frightening thoughts or images that pop into our heads from time to time. Many worries are about the future or things that *could* happen, so prompting your child by asking "What if?" may help them talk about what's on their mind. Some children may prefer to write about or draw their worries than talk about them.

Write down worries and put them in a "worry box" for safe-keeping - re-visit worries later if desired



Focus on what they CAN do - they can't control when school will open, but they can visit with friends online



Together, think of three things you are grateful for each day and picture holding these things in your open hands



When unrealistic or unhelpful worries crop up, help your child come up with more helpful ways of thinking:

### Unhelpful Thought

I'm stuck at home  
I'm going to get sick  
I'm missing out on everything!



### More Helpful Thought

I'm safe at home  
I'm doing everything I can to stay healthy  
I'm grateful for all the things I CAN do