



# WHAT TO DO WHEN I'M WORRIED, SCARED OR NERVOUS

There's lots we can do to help ourselves calm down if we feel scared or anxious.

## Fear and anxiety

Fear is a normal and healthy emotion – although it's not very pleasant. It often has physical signs like feeling sick, tense, shaking, sweating, or getting butterflies in the stomach. If we're scared or frightened because we're in real danger, we need to respect that fear and act on it (i.e. run away from the angry tiger that is chasing us and shout for help).

Anxiety (feeling worried or nervous) is generally fear in the wrong place. We can feel anxious about something that hasn't happened, might not happen ... or something that isn't happening at the moment (like messing up a test or a date; or people being mean to us).

Think of it like a see-saw: With fear, our response to a threat is balanced and in proportion to a real threat; with anxiety we are weighed down and more fearful than is necessary.

## What can I do?

If you feel anxious, there are many things you can do to help yourself feel better:

**Say it:** Talk to someone you trust about how you feel: it usually helps to get things out. They may be able to help you work out a good plan for dealing with your anxiety or its root cause.

Services like Kidline, 0800 What's Up, or Youthline also offer to listen and support you.

**Breathe:** Breathe in for 3-5 sec, out for 3-5 sec. Keep on until you feel calmer. Some people like to draw the sides of an imaginary square or a star while they are doing this. It's a great thing to do while you're waiting to make that speech in class, or sing solo at assembly.

**5,4,3,2,1 Grounding:** Think of five things you can see, four you can touch or feel, three you can hear, two you can smell and one you can taste. This lets your upstairs brain get back in control. It's a really good thing to try after you've had a fright when you need to calm down.

**Relax:** Your anxious body is like a stack of stiff raw spaghetti. Lie down, and working your way up from your toes let it relax and become floppy like cooked spaghetti. Maybe try this if you can't sleep at night because you're all worked up over something.



**Distractions and apps:** We can use activities to take our mind off things (“distract ourselves”). Try telling yourself jokes, drawing stars, reciting times tables, or listing all the characters in your favourite story as you wait at the dentist. There are also lots of apps available to help with anxiety that work by either distracting or calming us (see links).

**Exercise:** Works as a distraction and also to release emotions and tense muscles. Walk, swim, dance ... do yoga or stretches. It will all help.



**Calming jars, and bottles:** Put glitter, sequins, beads, food colouring, water and maybe hair gel or clear glue or in a bottle or jar and screw the lid tight. Shake it and imagine that’s how your jumbled thoughts look when you’re anxious. Watch how everything settles after a few minutes if it stays still. Try shaking your jar when you’re upset, and calm down as it does.

**Happy place:** Find one in your head – or in real life – and go there when you need to.

## USEFUL LINKS

“What is Resilience?”, “Loving Ourselves”, “Handling our Feelings”, “What are Feelings?”, “Stress”, and “Managing our Functions” Life Education Factsheets.  
“Calm Down and Release the Amygdala”, 16 January 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zs559gulGDo> 12 December 2017.  
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Youthline <https://www.youthline.co.nz/contact-us/>  
What’s Up? <http://www.whatsup.co.nz>



## REFERENCES

“Coping Skills Spotlight: 5,4,3,2,1 Grounding Technique”. Retrieved from: <https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/2016/4/27/coping-skill-spotlight-5-4-3-2-1-grounding-technique> 11 December 2017.  
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The Brain from Top to Bottom, McGill University, nd. “Managing Stress”. Retrieved from: [http://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/capsules/outil\\_jeune02.html](http://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/capsules/outil_jeune02.html) 12 December 2017.  
Women and Children’s Health Network, 14 April 2016. “Stress – Learning to Relax”. Retrieved from: <http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=287&id=1738> 11 December 2017.