

Dealing with Fears and Worries

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These are unprecedented days for most of us, and most people are experiencing some degree of concern as we all adjust to an ever-changing situation. We are not used to being unable to fairly accurately predict what our next days or weeks will look like. We are all being forced to live on a day-by-day basis. Jesus had something to say about that. After drawing attention to God's care for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, Jesus said: *"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today"* (Mt. 6:34, NLT). Sounds like a call to living mindfully!

Right now, it's pretty normal to feel unsettled and concerned. That's heightened if you or your child has a pre-existing struggle with anxiety. Below are a few things to keep in mind:

On Staying Informed:

1. Use **reputable** sites for staying informed, but **limit** how often you refer to them. You want to stay informed, but it does **not** need to be minute-by-minute, especially if you are anxious. Limit your social media, which can spread poor information and plenty of stress!
2. Here's the link to the Canada's public health information:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html>
3. From the **Institute of Child Psychology**, here's an informative video for parents called *Helping Children Manage Anxiety Related to COVID-19*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocddWZuLYbw&feature=youtu.be&mc_cid=05e9199e36&mc_eid=ab3150e488

On Self-Care:

It is always important for parents to have good self-care strategies. That is even more important now. *You will not be able to help your child deal with fears and worry if you are not managing your own.* We mental health professionals talk about parents/adults being the *external regulator* for children. Children *grow* in their ability to self-regulate (think of a 2-year old throwing themselves on the ground in despair when things don't go their way, and compare that to your own response to disappointment). When you

soothe your child, your child learns how to do that for themselves. When your child watches you soothe yourself, your child learns how to do that for themselves. The younger your child, the more you are needed to act as the *external regulator*.

Develop, maintain, or increase some good self-care strategies, which are activities and practises that help decrease your stress level. This can be very individual: a bubble bath with candles works for some, but others prefer going for a run. Make a list of things you already know are effective, and then try some others and add them to your list. Vigorous activity is an excellent choice because it prompts the release of endorphins (natural “happy drugs”).

Ideas for Self-Care:

Physical activity – including: dancing (even alone! Have a dance party in the kitchen!), walking, running, on-the-spot workouts (push-ups, sit-ups, burpees, etc.), yoga, pilates, etc. Check out Youtube for some workouts that would work for you.

Quiet, creative and relaxing activities – including: reading, puzzling, woodworking, knitting, baking, etc.

Christian contemplative practises – including: Centering Prayer, Christian Meditation, Lectio Divina, embodied prayer (involving your body in the prayer by including movement such as dancing like Miriam did after God rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians (See Exodus 15), or other postures like kneeling), and Breath Prayer. There are apps to consider trying, such as: *Pray as you go*, and *Centering Prayer*.

Breath Prayer – Deep breathing is an essential part of relaxation (aside: another reason exercise is effective is that it prompts deep breathing, which clears out stress hormones like cortisol). Breath Prayer combines deep breathing and prayer. Choose a short verse, prayer, or song and inhale through your nose during the first part, and exhale through your mouth during the second part. Try to slow and deepen your breathing. Repeat this for several minutes, keeping your focus on the prayer. For example:

(in-breath) Jesus loves me

(out-breath) This I know

or,

(in-breath) When I am afraid

(out-breath) I will trust in you (Psalm 56:3)

Other Relaxation Techniques - I suggest that you begin with the free MindShift™ app, which was developed by Anxiety Canada (see <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/new-mindshift-cbt-app-gives-canadians-free-anxiety->

[relief/](#)). Scroll down to the Chill Zone, and try out the various calming strategy choices listed there. There are other free apps as well, so take a look around and find something that you like. Either with an app or on your own, try some relaxation techniques, including:

Body Scan - focus your attention on your toes (for example), and spend a few moments with your attention on whatever you may feel there. You don't have to change anything, just notice what you notice. Then move to your lower legs (if you really want to draw this out, choose your feet, or your ankles) and do the same thing. Repeat this over and over, slowly moving up the body, paying attention to various parts of your body. This can be as short as 5-10 minutes, or as long as 45 minutes. I suggest that you begin by using an app to guide you, although it's not necessary.

Tense and Relax - Tense all the muscles in your feet - *hard!* Hold for a few seconds and notice how that feels. Then relax the muscles, noticing what that relaxation feels like. Take a deep breath in ... *hold* ... and blow it out. Now tense your leg muscles. Make the muscles hard and push your knees together. Hold! Notice how that feels and take a deep breath in, hold, and then blow it out as you relax. Move through your whole body, alternately tensing-noticing and then relaxing-noticing various muscle groups (make fists, tense arms, suck in stomach, raise shoulders, wrinkle up all facial muscles, etc.).

Deep Breathing - there are various ways to breathe deeply. Here are a few suggestions for use with children:

Square breathing - inhale for a count of 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, and wait for 4 before beginning again. Repeat several times, slowly. You can use a finger to make a square on a surface or in the air.

Figure-8 breathing - using your finger, trace a figure-8 while you breathe in on one loop, and breathe out on the other. Gradually slow down and deepen your breathing.

Hot chocolate breathing - pretend that you are holding a steaming cup of hot chocolate. Imagine the smell of the hot chocolate as you inhale deeply through your nose, then cool off your imaginary drink by blowing out slowly. Repeat several times, slowly.

Cow-cat breathing - Get down on all fours, with your hands flat on the ground. Make sure that both your hands and your knees are shoulder-width apart. Breathe normally. As you breathe out and lift your chin up, make yourself like an old cow, with your belly drooping down (your body will look like a gentle valley). Then, as you breathe in and tuck your chin towards your chest, make yourself like a cat with an arched back (now your body will look like a

little hill). As you breathe, move back and forth from an old cow on the out-breath, to a cat on in the in-breath. Slow down your breathing and your movements, keeping it relaxed. Do this for several minutes.