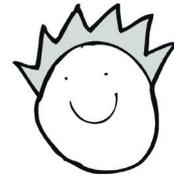
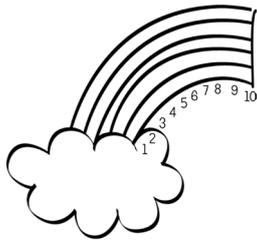


BACK TO SCHOOL

A parent/carer guide to supporting your child, yourself and your family with managing worry about going back to school.



“There is no such thing as a perfect parent.
So just be a real one” Sue Atkins

During these usual times we will all be affected differently, don't be too hard on yourself, you are doing the best you can in a really difficult and, for many, worrying time.

We hope that this booklet gives you some hints and tips on managing your own thoughts and feelings, you will also find suggestions/links for activities/games which you can do with your family or alone if you prefer. A similar booklet has been produced for schools and your child may be looking at some of these activities with their teacher if they are currently in school. If they are in school and using the children's version, you may find it helpful to talk to your child about some of the things in this booklet and the things they have been doing at school. If they are not back at school you can use this resource to begin to prepare them for going back.

Most importantly, be kind to yourself and talk to people if you are struggling. Throughout the booklet there are QR code links for you to scan that will take you to services that are here to help. Or you can also visit <https://www.liverpoolcamhs.com>



Ideas and exercises used with permission of Merseyside Youth Association

RECOGNISING FEELINGS

We are in a time unlike anything any of us have ever experienced before; a time of uncertainty and change, and many people are feeling anxious and worried about what is going on. This is a normal response to an abnormal situation! There is a lot of information available online - this is great but it can also be confusing, so we have brought together some information, suggestions and links to trusted resources. We hope this will be helpful.

It's really important to take some time to reflect on how it is affecting how we feel. You can use the activity below to start to reflect on that.

Which song lyrics/emojis best show how you/your children feel? On a scale of 1-10 how are you feeling?

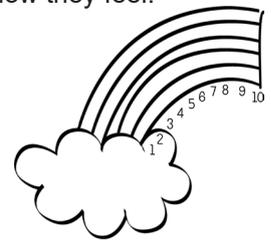
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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The scale is a horizontal line with 10 numbered markers. Below the scale, there are several items:

- "Because I'm happy" with a headphones icon
- An angry face emoji
- "Today I don't feel like doing anything" with a headphones icon
- A sad face emoji with a tear
- A smiling face emoji
- "I feel good" with a headphones icon
- A thinking face emoji
- "I will survive" with a headphones icon
- "Rescue me" with a headphones icon
- A sad face emoji with closed eyes
- "I will get back up again"
- A happy face emoji

Some schools are using the rainbow scale when talking to children about how they feel.



What might be making you/your family feel this way?

Is there anything that you can change that you know would take you further up the scale, or things you need to keep doing in order to stay up there? Even if it only moves you one place up the scale.



Some of the things that I know take me and my family down the scale are...



Just like our body can be healthy or get sick, so can our minds. Mental health is something we all have. It affects the way that we think, feel and behave. Making small changes to improve our own mental health and emotional wellbeing can make a huge difference to our family.

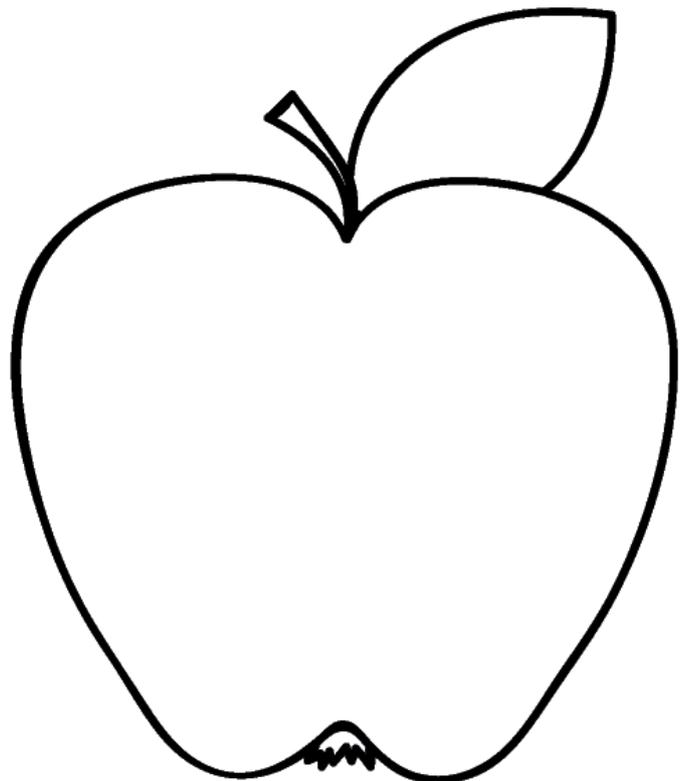
What influences/makes up your mental health?



Have you ever been on an aeroplane and given the instruction to put your own oxygen mask on before helping your children? This is because we can only help and support others if we first take care of ourselves.

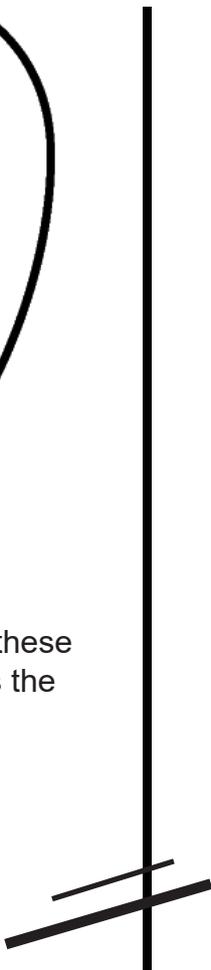
We can take care of our mental health in similar ways to how we take care of our physical health. Think about things that you know help you to relax and feel good....

You might want to write them in the apple. Remember they don't have to be time consuming or expensive things, sometimes it's as simple as remembering to take a deep breath.



How about trying to take on the 5-a-day for your mind challenge. Can you aim to do 5 of these things every day for a week? Even 1 or 2? Take notice of how doing these things impacts the way you feel.

Why not try taking on the challenge as a family?



DEALING WITH WORRY/ANXIETY

Anxiety is a feeling we all get in a situation that is threatening or difficult. Anxiety feels like fear. When it's there a lot of the time, caused by a problem in our life that can't be solved, we call it worry. If it is a sudden reaction to a threat, like looking over a cliff or being confronted by an angry dog, we call it fear.

Although worry, fear and anxiety are unpleasant, they can all be helpful:

- they keep us alert and give us the 'get up and go' to deal with problems;
- they make our body ready for action - to run away from danger or to attack it - the 'fight or flight' response.

THINGS THAT PARENT/CARERS HAVE SAID THEY ARE WORRYING ABOUT AT THE MOMENT

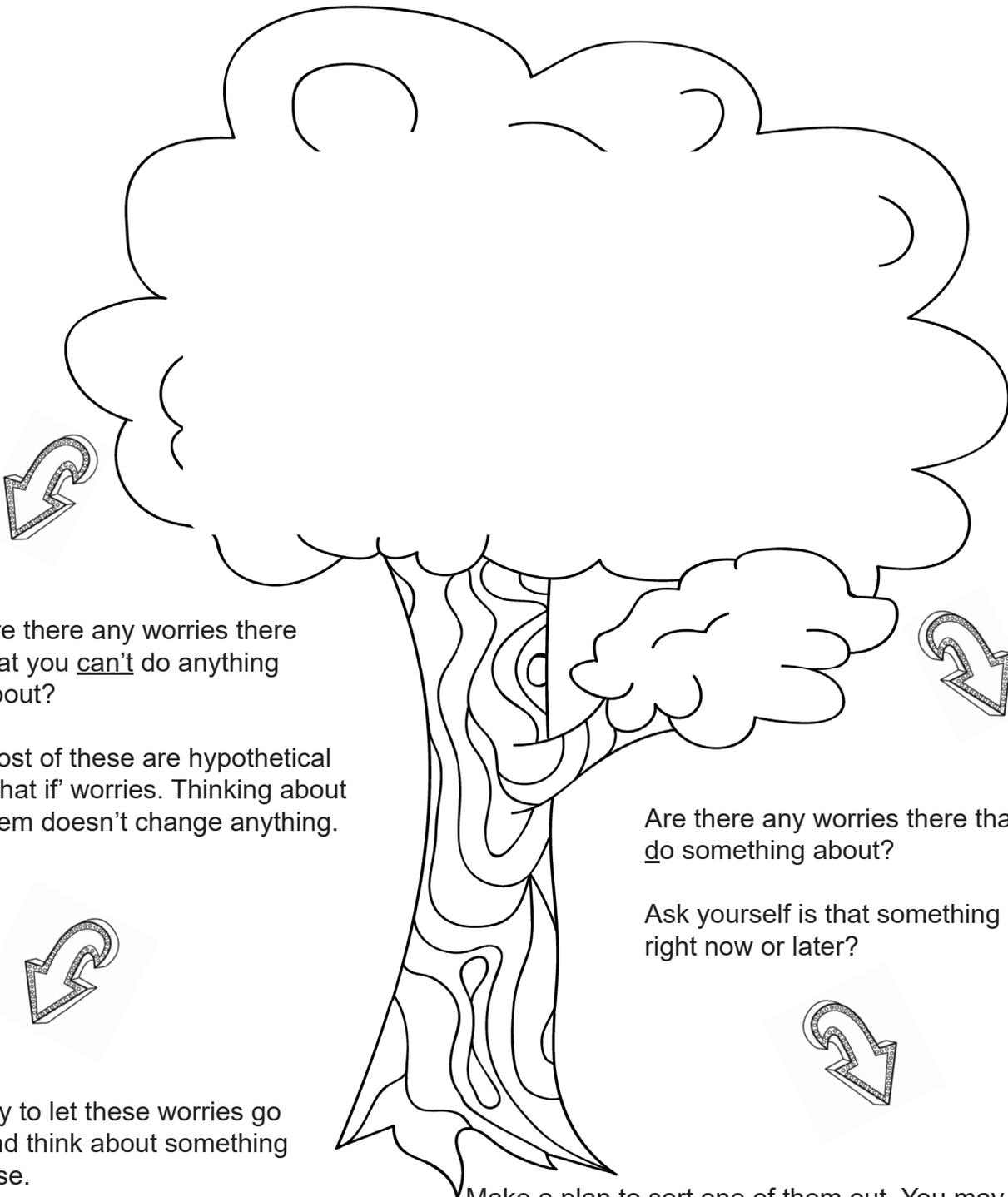
- ◇ Will my child be safe? Will my family be safe?
- ◇ How will my child cope with things being so different?
- ◇ If my child isn't coping will they be able to come home?
- ◇ How do I support my child with their worries/concerns?
- ◇ How do I reassure my child?
- ◇ Will my child's future be affected?
- ◇ What if my child refuses to return to school?
- ◇ I want to keep my child at home, am I doing the right thing?
- ◇ I'm worried about how my child is behaving/coping – is it 'normal' or cause for concern?
- ◇ Where can I get more information, advice or support?
- ◇ How do I help my child get back into a routine?
- ◇ I'm worried my child didn't/isn't learning enough at home.
- ◇ My child is struggling to sleep/ I'm struggling to sleep.
- ◇ My child/I'm scared to leave the house.
- ◇ I'm worried other parents will disagree with/judge the decisions I make about my child.
- ◇ I'm trying to keep vulnerable/elderly family members safe.
- ◇ How do I support my child manage loss?
- ◇ Will my child get the right support at school to manage how they feel?
- ◇ My child is doing better at home.
- ◇ How will children be supported to re-establish friendships groups?
- ◇ Will my child be separated from their friends?
- ◇ What are the practical arrangements for my children going back to school?
- ◇ What if other parents have different rules e.g. walking to school, activities outside school?
- ◇ If my child has a social worker, is it still just up to me when my child goes back to school?



All of these worries and concerns are on top of all the other worries caused by the current pandemic! It is completely natural that you may be feeling more anxious than usual.

Some anxiety is good for you. It keeps you alert and can help you to perform well. But only some! These feelings become a problem when they are too strong or when they carry on even when we don't need them anymore. They can make you uncomfortable, stop you from doing the things you want to - and can generally make life difficult. The worry tree activity can help you and your child to manage worries.

Picture your worries sitting in the top of this tree.



Are there any worries there that you can't do anything about?

Most of these are hypothetical 'what if' worries. Thinking about them doesn't change anything.

Are there any worries there that you can do something about?

Ask yourself is that something I can do right now or later?

Try to let these worries go and think about something else.

If you are struggling you could try some grounding techniques.

Make a plan to sort one of them out. You may need support with this. There are a number of agencies on the Liverpool CAMHS website.



Scan here for free meditations and grounding techniques from headspace.

If you can't sort it out right now you can let that worry go and think about something else. Once your plan is made or you have sorted the problem, try to think about something else.

GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

When our mind is racing, grounding brings us back to the here-and-now and is very helpful in managing overwhelming feelings or anxiety. It is a great way to calm down quickly.

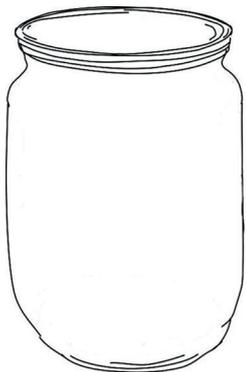
Hold an object in your hand and really bring your full focus to it. Look at where shadows may fall on parts of it or maybe there are shapes that form within the object. Feel how heavy or light it is in your hand and what the surface texture feels like under your fingers. This can be done with any object you have lying around or one of your favourite objects.

Distract yourself

There are several ways to distract your mind so it stops thinking about whatever it is that is worrying you and focuses on something that isn't emotionally driven. Here are two quick ways to do it:

- Pick a colour. How many things in different shades of that colour can you see around the room or out of the window? Still feeling stressed? Pick another colour.
- Count backwards by 7, starting at 100. It isn't that easy and needs you to concentrate. This one can also be helpful to do when you are finding it hard to sleep.

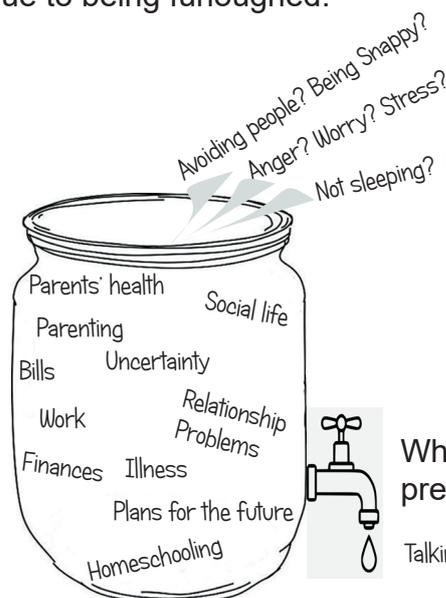
GETTING A BALANCE



Our response to stress is a bit like this jar. When it is full it will overflow causing us to feel, think and behave in certain ways. When we have lots of sad, frustrating, frightening or stressful things happening in our life, this can make us feel angry, sad or worried, and we might behave differently to how we normally do.

Think about some of the things you are experiencing at the moment that are affecting how you feel - they could be positive and negative. For example you may be enjoying spending more time with your children, but also stressed due to being furloughed.

How full is your jar?



What is spilling out of it?

What helps to get rid of the pressure?

Talking? Fresh-air? Exercise? Crying?

Have you got a good balance between things that cause stress and things that alleviate stress?

When our jars get full of stressful or negative things this impacts on: how we behave; how we feel; our thoughts and even our physical health.

Ask yourself and/or your child the following questions:



How am I behaving at the moment?

How am I feeling at the moment?

How is my physical health at the moment?

What am I thinking about a lot at the moment?

There might be some things that you could change/remove from the jar. For example if spending ages looking on Facebook at everyone else's homeschooling success is causing you stress, then this is something you could reduce or stop completely. Other things are not so easy to control. That's where our coping strategies come in. These are the things that make us feel good, and relieve stress - remember the apples?

Coping strategies act like taps - letting out the pressure in the jar. For example having a catch-up with friends, exercise, walking the dog or making a list and getting things in order. Sometimes these strategies can become unhelpful. For example over-eating, drinking too much and taking out our anger on others can make us feel better in the short-term, but can lead to further stress being added to our jar.

What are your coping strategies? Think of them as taps on the outside of the jar. Are any of them negative (these are the ones that add more stress in the long-term). Can you swap them with a few more positive ones? This may not be easy to do. Don't forget that there is support available to help you.



Scan here for tips on how to cope with every day living



HOW DO I GET SUPPORT?

For Myself?

One of the most difficult steps to getting support is often taking the first step and asking for help. Remember that we all have mental health and there is nothing to be ashamed about - would you be embarrassed to visit the doctor to talk about a headache?



With the right support we can prevent things from getting worse and be in a much better place to support our children.

For further support you can contact your GP, or find information by scanning the codes. You can also contact Talk Liverpool 0151 228 2300 (Mon to Fri 8am – 6pm)



For My Child?

If you are concerned about the mental health of your child you could ask to speak to the mental health lead at your child's school or contact the mental health support team at you nearest YPAS+ hub (Liverpool schools only).

They may suggest support from one of our mental health support teams or recommend another service. Sometimes a few simple changes and a bit of extra support at school can make all the difference.

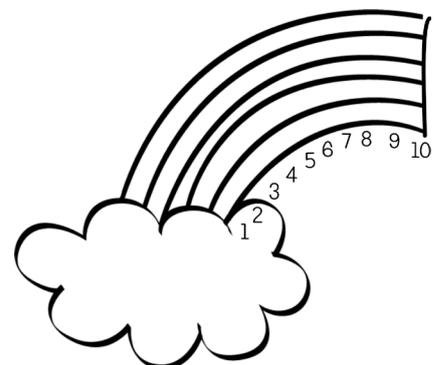
Things to pass on to school that can help are:

- ☆ Any changes in your child's behaviour or mood
- ☆ Any changes in circumstances at home that may impact on your child's feelings
- ☆ Any specific things at school or home that you think your child is struggling with.

Using the rainbow scale or a simple how do you feel from 1-10 can help you talk to your child about how they are feeling.

If you feel that your child needs urgent care or support, please contact the CAMHS crisis line:

Crisis 24/7 – tel: 0151 293 3577 or freephone: 0808 196 3550 Email: CrisisCare@alderhey.nhs.uk



Support for children with SEN is also available from the Education Psychology Service: epsadmin@liverpool.gov.uk

This Journal was put together by Liverpool Learning Partnership, Merseyside Youth Association, Liverpool CAMHS mental health support teams, YPAS Parenting Team and Parent/Carers from YPAS, Fresh Plus & LivPaC.

