

MY LITTLE
BOOK ABOUT
WHAT TO DO
WHEN I DON'T
KNOW WHAT
TO DO

Hello!

My name is Dr. Emma and I'm a psychologist. A psychologist is someone who helps people to understand how they feel, think, and behave.

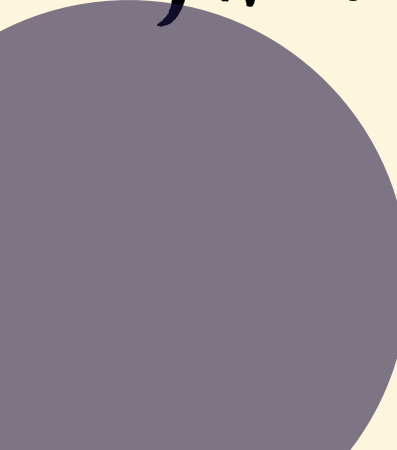

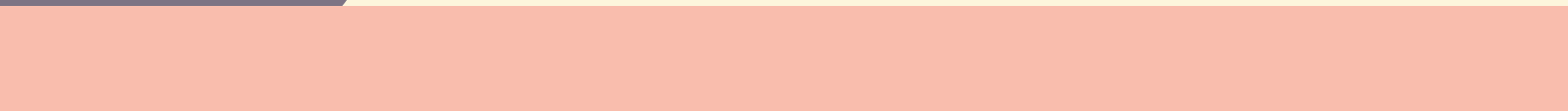
Sometimes life is tricky and we can get overwhelmed by our feelings. When this happens (and it happens to all of us!) there are some skills you can learn. They don't change the situation, but they do change how you feel which can help you to feel less worried, scared, anxious, or angry,

I have put some ideas together for you. You might want to give all of the ideas a go, you might want to ask your favourite adults to join in.

You don't have to do this -it's completely up to you. These are just suggestions that might help you to feel a little more in control of your feelings, which in my mind is never a bad thing!

Dr Emma x

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BREATHING

Breathing is **SUPER** important in managing our feelings. Thankfully we are lucky to always have our breath with us and it's free!

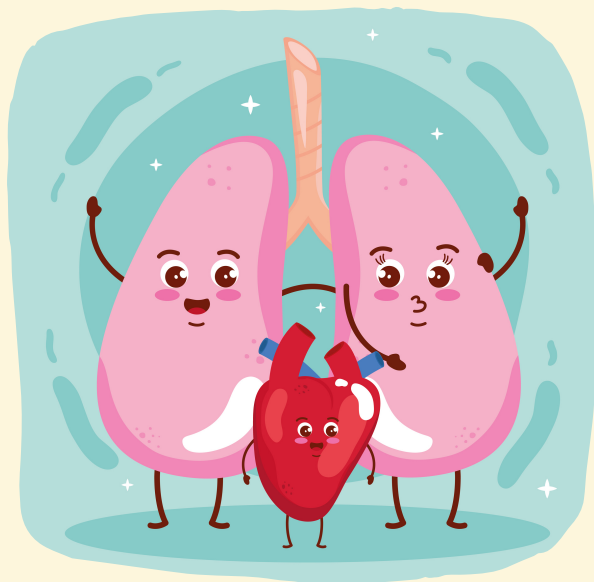
I'm sure people have spoken to you about breathing when you feel worried, scared, anxious, or angry before - but I'm going to tell you why it works in case you don't know that bit - I think knowing why something works makes it work better too!

When we feel worried, anxious, or angry a tiny part of our brain called the amygdala (which is like our emergency alarm) sends out a message to the rest of our brain and body. This is to prepare us to run away, hide, or fight something it feels is dangerous. It is there to protect us, but it sometimes gets overexcited and sends out those messages when we don't need to do those things.

BREATHING

One of the messages it sends out is to our heart and lungs. It tells them to beat fast and breathe more quickly to get lots of oxygen into our body to power our muscles. This is why sometimes when we feel anxious, worried, or angry our breathing changes. The good news is that messages can be sent back the other way too.

If we choose to breathe slowly and deeply, a message goes back up to our amygdala to let it know there isn't anything to worry about which turns off the alarm.



BREATHING

There are lots of ways you can control your breath. Box breathing is my favourite as it was created by the Navy Seals to help them in combat - I reckon if it works for them it can work for me too!

HOW TO BOX BREATHE:

STEP 1: BREATHE IN SLOWLY WHILE YOU COUNT TO FOUR IN YOUR HEAD.

STEP 2: HOLD YOUR BREATH FOR THE COUNT OF FOUR

STEP 3: BREATHE OUT SLOWLY TO THE COUNT OF FOUR,

STEP 4: HOLD YOUR BREATH TO THE COUNT OF 4.

If you do this 8 times you should start to feel a little calmer.

Five-finger breathing and figure of 8 breathing (I'll let you google these ones) are also really good ways to control our breath, and more good news is - no one even needs to know we are doing it.

GRATITUDE

When there is something worrying in our life, it can be really difficult to think about other things. In fact, our brain LOVES thinking about scary things, it's a habit that we all have called a **NEGATIVITY BIAS**. Luckily for us, our brain is like a muscle and we can pretty much train it on what to focus on.

Gratitude means to be grateful for the good things in our lives. It doesn't mean we shouldn't be worried about the challenging things or sad about the sad things, it is simply about reminding ourselves that there is always good if you look hard enough for it. This gives us some balance and stops everything from feeling so overwhelming.

**THE MORE YOU PRACTICE GRATITUDE,
THE MORE YOU WILL TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO SEE THE GOOD STUFF AS WELL
AS NOTICE THE SCARY STUFF.**

GRATITUDE

Practicing Gratitude is free and easy to do once you start. You can write things down in a journal or you can share them with the people who are special in your life.

TRY FINISHING THESE SENTENCES.

TODAY I AM GRATEFUL FOR...

SOMETHING THAT WENT WELL THIS WEEK IS...

3 GOOD THINGS FROM TODAY ARE...

It doesn't need to be big. It can be as simple as you found something to watch on Netflix really quickly rather than having to scroll for ages, or that your bed felt extra warm and cosy this morning, OR even that your friend was the first person you saw this morning in school.

DANCING & MOVING

Worry thoughts start in our brain. They are fears about what might happen in the future. And, although the future hasn't happened yet - they can feel very real.

One way to interrupt any worry thoughts you may have is to move your body. My favourite way to do this is to turn up my music and dance around my room or have a "Kitchen Disco" with my family. Moving in happy way helps to distract your brain and sends happy hormones called endorphins and dopamine around our body.

**IT'S FUN AND IT
FEELS GREAT TOO!**



SNUGGLING

I don't know if you have a pet but I do know you that you probably have some special people in your life. Snuggling with a pet or a special person releases a hormone in our body called Oxytocin (you say it like Ox E Toe Sin).

This is the hormone that makes us feel connected and safe. This means that Snuggling up watching TV, reading a book, or listening to a favourite song can make you feel better.



SAFE PEOPLE

When we feel overwhelmed, we can sometimes feel alone with our feelings. We might feel silly or we might not want to worry anyone else. But guess what, your special people don't want you to worry alone! Sharing our worries safely with the right people always makes us feel better even if it feels scary at the time.

When you are feeling calm, think of 3 safe people in your life that you can turn to when you start to feel overwhelmed. Then, let them know that's what you are going to do.

That way you have a plan for who you can tell when things feel tough.



KNOWING WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP

Sometimes we don't always ask for help when we need it. We can leave it too long because we don't want to worry someone (but you now know who your safe people are) or our feelings might be lurking under the surface and we might not know how worried, anxious, scared, or angry we are until we are REALLY overwhelmed (and by then it's a little too late).

KNOWING **WHEN** TO ASK FOR HELP IS AS IMPORTANT AS
KNOWING WHO WE CAN ASK FOR HELP.



KNOWING WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP

When you are calm have a think about how you know you are beginning to feel overwhelmed.

DO YOU HAVE RACING THOUGHTS?

DOES YOUR TUMMY FEEL TIGHT?,

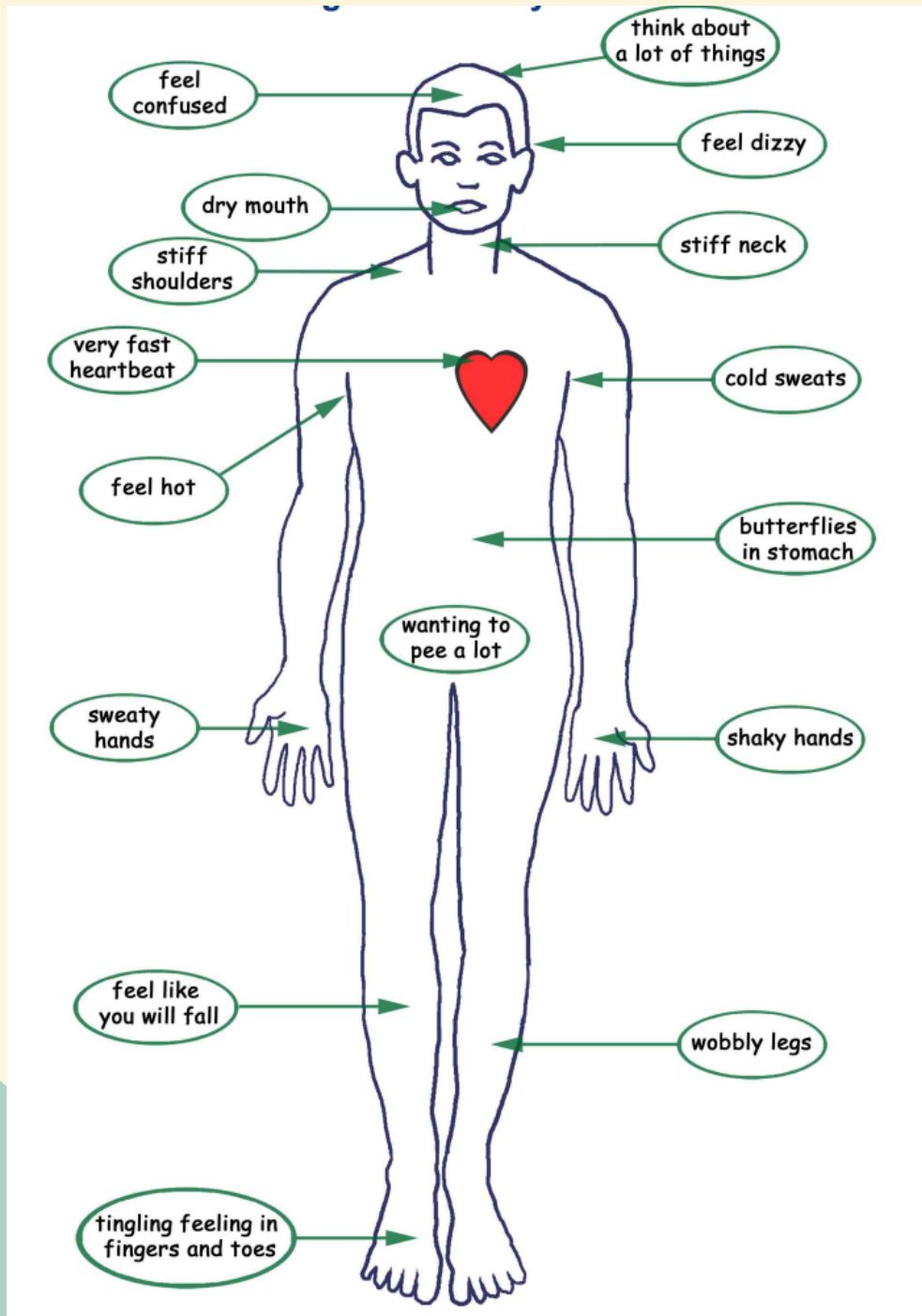
DOES YOUR FACE FEEL HOT?

THEN ASK YOURSELF, WHAT COMES FIRST?

See if you can find the **earliest** warning sign that your amygdala (remember that word from earlier) is sounding out the alarm. Then do one of the five things above. The earlier you catch it and, the quicker you do something about it, the more quickly you can calm yourself down.

(If it's easier you can draw out the outline of a body and draw lines with words or numbers to track back the first thing you feel or think I've added an example on the next page).

KNOWING WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP



REMEMBERING HOW BRAVE YOU ARE

When things are tough, uncertain, or scary. It's OK to feel worried, anxious, scared, sad or angry! Most people feel like that at tricky times so it's normal that you would feel that way too. Having big feelings doesn't mean that you aren't brave or resilient. In fact, it means the opposite - you have lots going on in your life and you are still managing to do a lot of things you would normally do. That is the definition of brave.

TRY AND COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE:

I AM BRAVE BECAUSE...

(Tip: If you find it tricky, ask one of your safe people to help you. I bet they have lots of ideas about how brave you are. It's OK to rely on others to remind us of our skills)

HELPING OTHERS

When something scary or unpredictable happens, or if you are feeling worried about things that haven't happened yet, one way to feel both better AND brave is to focus on something that helps somebody else.

This reminds you that you are not alone, that there are things that you CAN control AND, it releases serotonin and dopamine (which are happy hormones) into our body

WHAT ARE THREE THINGS THAT YOU COULD DO THAT
COULD HELP SOMEONE ELSE?

END NOTE

We all feel worried, scared, anxious, angry, or sad at times. It's a good job too because making us feel these things is our brain's way of trying to make us do something to keep us safe.

FEELINGS ARE ALWAYS THERE FOR A REASON.

It's our job to learn about ourselves so that we can work out what that reason is and then **CHOOSE** what we are going to do next. The more we learn about ourselves, the easier it becomes to understand our feelings.

WE ALL HAVE TO LEARN THIS, IT'S NOT JUST YOU!

These are just some ideas for you to try. You can try the ones that suit you the best, and you get to decide which ones (if any) to give a go.

I hope some of this helps

Dr. Emma x

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Emma Woodward is a child psychologist and mum to 4 boys. Her passion lies in supporting children and young people to develop the skills that they need to thrive in their future.

Emma is the director of The Child Psychology Service, which is a nationwide service providing psychological support to children, young people, and their families and schools throughout New Zealand.

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