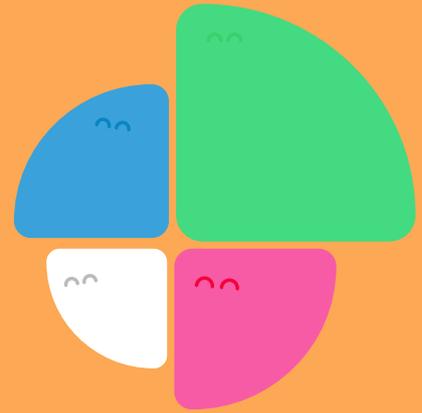


1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 5: I Am In Control



Lesson Summary:

Following from lessons 3 and 4, the aim of this lesson is to learn and to practice different 'anchoring' strategies to cope with children's big feelings and the 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response.

An **'anchoring' strategy** is a tried and tested technique to bring a child back to feeling safe and calm within their bodies, like what an anchor does for a boat. The aim is to release built-up tension and stress hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) through physical activity – like relaxation, play, and physical touch – which will help to ground them, shift their fearful thoughts and improve their sense of control. The children are reminded again about the power of their 'Wise Owl' in helping them to re-engage with their thinking brains.

Try It At Home Activity: 'Four Big Feelings – Anchoring Myself'

To date within the A Lust For Life Schools Programme, children have learnt a variety of 'anchoring' or self-regulation strategies. These have included; Figure-8 Breathing; the 5-4-3-2-1 Game; Shaking On Purpose; Butterfly Breathing; Dragon Breathing; and Sensory Activity (see below).

In this 'Try It At Home' activity, children are asked to talk to you about some of their anchoring strategies which they have learnt, to practice them at home, and draw their favourite one. Kids really enjoy when parents join in so check out the instructions below!



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

Here are some of my favourite anchoring strategies, which you can practice with your child:

- **Dragon Breathing** – Link your fingers under your chin, inhale a big dragon breath through your nose and lift your elbows up to frame your face. Exhale, lifting your head up and opening your mouth wide to make a 'Hah' sound towards the sky like a dragon blowing fire. Lower the elbows back down to meet at the bottom by the end of the 'Hah' sound. This is a good energising technique which helps build confidence.
- **Shaking On Purpose** – Jump up and down, scream or make noises and make your whole body shake. Try it with a grown up or a friend. Because being in Fight, Flight, Freeze mode blocks your natural expression of fear, 'Shaking on Purpose' helps you to let some of your feelings out in a safe way.
- **Figure-8 Breathing** – Children often use this exercise on their own, quietly and privately wherever they are (even in class!). Imagine your index finger as a pencil drawing a figure 8 on your skin or using your big toe to draw a figure 8 on the ground. As you are drawing the first half of the figure 8, breathe in for three. When you get to the middle, hold your finger still for one. Then, for the second half of the figure 8, breathe out for three. When you get to the middle, hold for one again. Repeat three or four times.



- **The 5-4-3-2-1 Game** – This is a great technique for anchoring you to the here and now, using your senses during panicky moments. It is best practised for the first time when calm.
 1. Describe five things you see in the room.
 2. Name four things you can feel (e.g. 'my feet on the floor' or 'the air in my nose').
 3. Name three things you hear (e.g. 'traffic outside').
 4. Name two things you can smell, or two smells you like.
 5. Name one good thing about yourself.
- **Heartbeat Exercise** – The key to using exercise to relieve anxiety is to work the body hard using rhythmic activity like running or jumping jacks. Time yourself doing jumping jacks for 30 seconds, then lie down and place your hand on your heart, relax, breathe deeply and feel your heartbeat slowing down.
- **Sensory Activity** – Engaging your senses is a great way to release anxious tension. When you feel anxious, do something as simple as pour liquid between containers over and over again. Have a try at making 'Slime' or 'Glitter Jars', or create a 'soothing box' of toys (e.g. squishies, kaleidoscope, shaker) to help calm you down.
- **Butterfly Hug** – Cross your arms in front of you and pat your shoulders, alternating right- and left-handed pats. Alternate gentle squeezes of each shoulder. Add on by visualising a safe place or silently repeating a word or phrase that represents security (e.g. 'I'm safe'). Alternating between left and right reduces anxiety as it activates both sides of the brain. Comforting touch also releases oxytocin, which helps your body to calm down.
- For my book 'Love in, Love out', one of the most fascinating things I learnt was that, not only do we release adrenaline and cortisol when stressed, but we also release oxytocin, our 'cuddle' hormone. In other words, when our children are experiencing big feelings, they are seeking support and connection from us as their parents. They need us as their anchor: an emotionally healthy parent who is solid and reliable, firm and constant, stable and secure, not perfect, but 'good enough'.



Resources:

To learn more about supporting children in managing big feelings, check out the following:

- Article by Author Fiona Forman about managing stress and building resilience: <https://www.alustforlife.com/tools/mental-health/helping-children-develop-resilience-manage-stress-and-strong-emotions-using-the-90-second-rule>
- Article by Skipping Stones on brain-based activities to support regulation: <https://www.goskippingstones.com/blog/2021/4/25/practical-solutions-to-support-success-at-home-and-in-the-classroom#:~:text=Breathing%20Activities%20%2D%20Blowing%20is%20a,bubbles%20will%20do%20the%20trick>