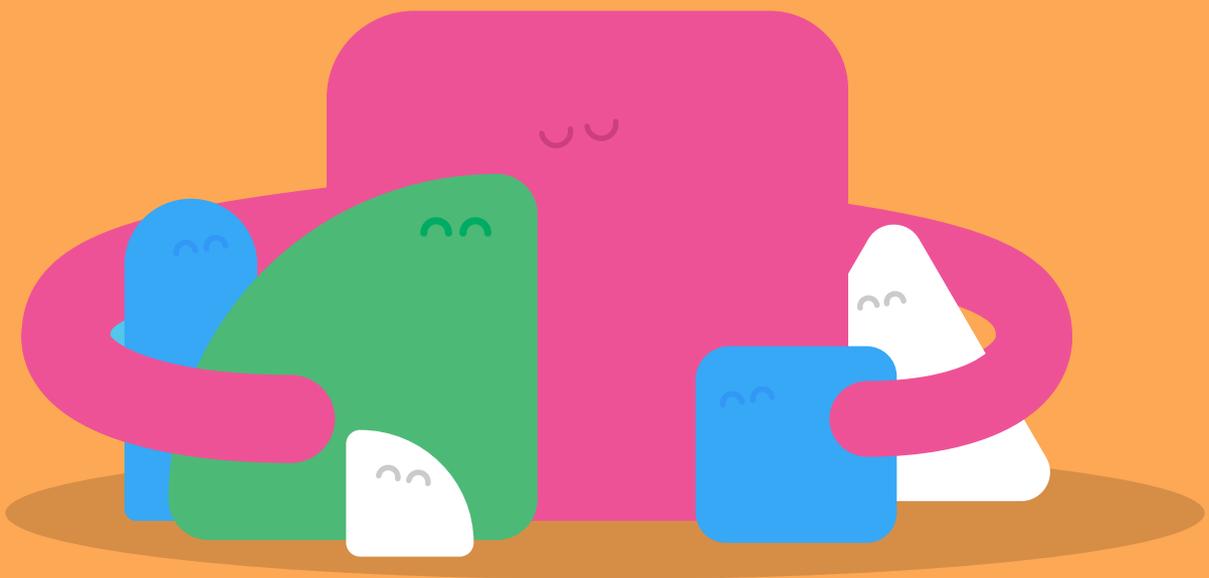


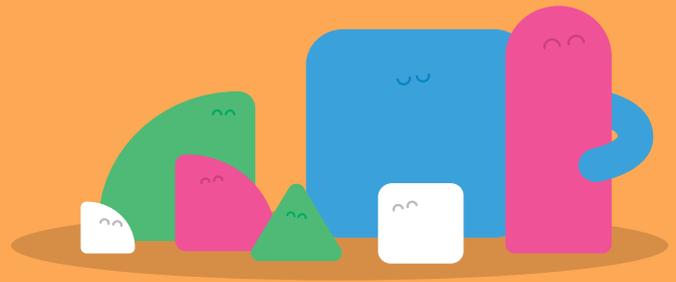
Parent guide

1ST & 2ND CLASS

SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

Lessons 1-10





1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 1: My Wellbeing

Lesson Summary:

The aim of this lesson is to support children's understanding of wellbeing and improve their self-esteem. Children learn about what 'wellbeing' means, which is the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy. They talk about what helps their wellbeing (e.g. school, work, sleep, physical activity, nutrition, play, and relationships). They also look at what helps them feel special and unique, and what they can do to feel good in themselves.

Try It At Home Activity: 'What can you do to feel good?'

In this 'Try It At Home' activity, children are asked to draw a picture of them doing something that makes them feel good (e.g. playing, walking, talking to a sibling or friend, playing with an animal, or whatever makes them feel good!), and share this with you.

To encourage your child to reflect on what they did in class, ask them more about 'what makes them feel good' in their own lives. Show genuine interest in their picture, and explore with them why they drew what they drew. You could also ask your child questions such as:

- What makes this special for you?
- Do you think everyone in your class would draw the same thing as you?
- What else do you do that makes you feel good?



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

- When talking about 'wellbeing' with your child, it can be helpful to talk about **what makes you feel well in yourself**, and how you learnt that. Talk to them about the basic steps we all need to actively take every day to balance our wellbeing (e.g. having proper sleep, exercise and food), so we're better able to enjoy life.
- **Play** is a hugely important aspect of a child's life and is considered a right of the child in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Not only is play a right for children, it's absolutely essential for their growth and every aspect of their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development.
- **Playing with your child** deepens your emotional connection and helps them to feel special. A short blast of quality time with parents gives children the chance to counterbalance the negative feelings they can carry around with them all day. Consider this 'special play time' as refilling your child's emotional cup so they can go back to exploring their world full-up with love and possibility. Here is a great podcast on playing with your child with Hayley Rice, Play Therapist: <https://play.acast.com/s/a-little-birdie-told-me/14-hayley-rice>
- **'Free play'** is exactly what you might expect; typically free of adult supervision, it allows children to

explore and experience the world around them. Free play is like a testing ground for life, where children learn to make friends, to cooperate with others as equals, to negotiate rules, to creatively solve their own problems, and to develop a mastery over their worlds.

Now that you know how beneficial free play is for your child's development and emotional wellbeing, you may wish to ask yourself:

- Is my child getting any time for adult-free play?
- Could a supervised activity be exchanged for a less supervised one?
- Does my child get opportunities to resolve their own challenges before I fix things?
- Could I allow them to do one new thing today which I had not let them do before? (Safely of course!)

Perhaps you could begin to identify some small changes in your routine which would allow your child to taste more freedom, excitement and challenge all rolled into one.

Just as play is important for wellbeing, so is downtime. It's important to remember that less is more. Children nowadays often have very busy schedules, and have little time to rest, recharge and relax. Because we want to do what we think is best for our children, we feel pressure to enrol them in lots of activities so as not to deprive them or miss an opportunity to nurture potential talent.

Having downtime is crucial for children's wellbeing, so it can help to reduce external activities and commitments by focusing on the ones your kids really like. Whilst many children enjoy the distractions of watching a screen, it is also important that they engage in relaxing time with rejuvenates them (e.g. free play; reading; nature).

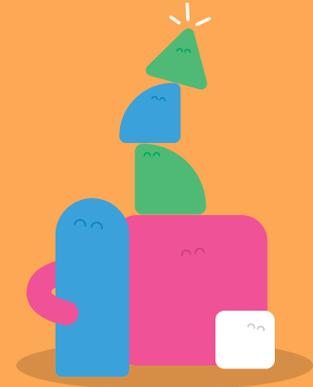
Resources:

To learn more about wellbeing and how to support your own wellbeing as well as your child's, check out the following sources:

- The Department of Education have published the following information on their website about wellbeing. This is updated quite regularly: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9cda4-wellbeing-information-for-parentsguardians/>
- Minding your own wellbeing as a parent is crucial. Here is a free video course by HSE Health and Wellbeing called 'Minding your Wellbeing Programme', which consists of 5 video sessions on practicing self-care; understanding our thoughts; exploring emotions; building positive relationships; and improving our resilience: <https://www2.hse.ie/healthy-you/minding-your-wellbeing-programme.html>

1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 2: Keeping Me Well



Lesson Summary:

The aim of this lesson is to gain an understanding of feeling safe, including when something feels okay and not okay, and continuing to help children to recognise what they need to feel well. In this lesson, children realise what their 'inner superhero' is and how to recognise unique attributes in themselves and others. We look at improving wellbeing and resilience by building self-esteem.

Try It At Home Activity: 'You're a Superhero!'

In this lesson, children were asked to draw themselves as a superhero, identifying what makes them feel special and what they are good at (i.e. their superpower!). In class, they walked around and looked at one another's drawings and offered suggestions as to what kinds of superpowers could be added to each other's drawings.

In this 'Try It At Home' activity, it's time for them to show you their drawing. Show interest in their picture, and explore with them why they drew what they drew. You could ask them:

- Why did you draw yourself as that type of superhero?
- Tell me about your special powers. Feel free to add any positive traits you know about your child.

Next, your child has been asked to draw you as a superhero and to label your superpowers!

Finally, feel free to have a nice discussion with your child about the similarities and differences between you and your child's superpowers.



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

- It is important that children develop a **positive sense of self**. As a parent, you have a great influence over the self-esteem of your child: "The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice." (Peggy O'Mara). Self-esteem is all about how you feel about yourself and your abilities. It includes self-confidence, self-respect and an ability to be self-reliant. The more positive a child's self-esteem, the better they will be at dealing with life, and the more confident, happy, proud, and motivated they will be. They will make friends easier and be more giving.
- Here are 5 tips for building your child's self-esteem and encouraging them:
 1. Say "I love you" and mean it every day and show them plenty of affection in your greetings and goodbyes. There is also real power in telling your child "I like you" and taking the time to let them know what it is you really like about them.
 2. Spend time with your child on the things they enjoy and show real interest in them and the things that are important to them. It gives them the message "You are worth my time. You are a valuable person".

1. Try to focus on the positive aspects of your child's behaviour, and find ways to offer realistic and honest praise as often as you can. Keep criticism to a minimum – it doesn't produce positive behaviour. If you want more of certain behaviour, praise your child for it. Honest praise is the quickest way to build your child's self-esteem. Try to be firm on routines and boundaries as they help a child feel safe.
2. Recognise your child's special talents and help them to build on them, and remind them that not everyone is good at everything. Supporting your child in their passions is another way to celebrate their uniqueness and individuality.
3. Be a good role model. Start by building your own self-confidence and thinking of ways to nurture your own wellbeing. Model self-compassion (e.g. "That was hard and I tried my best."). The more positive the parents' self-esteem, the more positive your child's will be, as you are a mirror to their feelings about themselves.

The way we talk about ourselves as parents in front of our children is very important. Children pick up instantly how we might be critical of aspects of ourselves or our lives (e.g. our appearance, our ability to cope with challenges and unexpected situations in life). It's very difficult to model a suitable response to children at all times (after all nobody is perfect), but it's just something to consider.

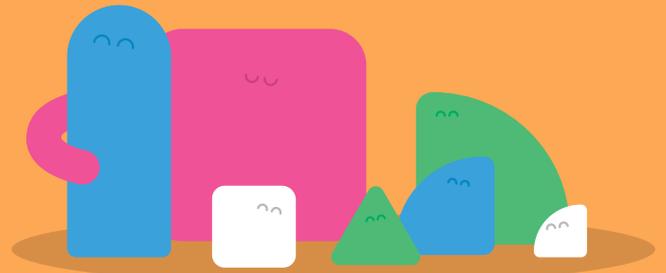
Resources:

To learn more about celebrating our uniqueness and diversity, see the following sources:

- Practical ideas from Reggie Joiner: <https://theparentcue.org/celebrate-uniqueness-2/>
- Additional ideas from Wendy Wisner and Amy Morrin: <https://www.verywellfamily.com/celebrate-childs-uniqueness-5071090>
- For key steps to raising inclusive kids by Ashley Cullins: <https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/raising-inclusive-kids>
- For help with parental self-care, check out these sources:
- A Lust for Life's online article on parental self-care: <https://www.alustforlife.com/tools/mental-health/why-parental-self-care-is-essential-for-childrens-emotional-wellbeing>
- RTÉ Today Show video piece on parental self-care: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=308146103160351>

1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 3: My Feelings



Lesson Summary:

The aim of this lesson is to help children identify the Four Big Feelings (i.e. happiness, sadness, fear, and anger) and where they are felt within their bodies. Children explore the Four Big Feelings and talk about when they have experienced these in their lives. A focus on how the four feelings are felt within the body helps children to identify these feelings better as they happen, as well as exploring degrees of worry using the 'Worry Gauge'.

Try It At Home Activity: 'Big Feelings' & 'Worry Gauge'

Everybody worries sometimes. The 'Worry Gauge' asks children to scale their worried feelings. It is a useful tool for children to use to check in with their worried feelings, to name their worry on a scale of 0 - 10, and to practice how to calm those worries down. Being aware of their own level of feelings and being able to identify their triggers enables children to take control and assess what might be the best way to cope with their worry.

The 'Worry Gauge' shows children that feelings can have different intensities or strengths, which they can share with others like you, their trusted adult, which helps them to understand that not all feelings are equally intense, and they all pass in time.

In class, children were asked to draw their 'Worry Gauge' and to name specific situations where they feel different intensities of worries (levels 0; 3; 6; 10). You may like to explore this with them.

Children also practiced a simple way to calm their worries called 'Dragon Breathing'. They were asked for their number on the Worry Gauge when they were feeling a bit worried, and then encouraged to take a deep dragon breath in and breathe out strong like a dragon breathing fire. When they were finished, they were asked for their new number, which was hopefully a little lower (even going from a 6 to a 5 is a big improvement!).

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

- It is very important for children to begin to express, process and talk about their feelings. This is what I call the 'language of feelings'. The Four Big Feelings are the most commonly felt feelings and a good start for children to talk about.
- Focusing on where feelings are felt within our bodies helps children to recognise the important link, so they can recognise that calming our bodies can help to them.
- Decades of attachment research shows us that attuning to children's needs and being with them in their big feelings helps them to feel more secure and build trust in you and the world. After all, you are there to 'organise' their feelings. Sometimes children need help organising an internal experience

- that is overwhelming. Whatever the cause, children need their parent's help because they are often still too young to do it alone. It is through the repeated process of parents helping their children organise internally that they learn how to manage feelings as they grow.
- I love the meme "When their storm meets our calm, co-regulation occurs". When children are struggling with big feelings, they feel as if they are in a small boat on rough seas trying very hard to navigate away from the rocks. But when their chaotic boat meets the parent's calm boat, the parent is able to calm their child right down
- What is important here is how the parent manages to calm their own sea, which is why parents need to work on nurturing calm from the inside out. Not an easy ask!
- Here is a 'Self-Check' I recommend for parents: When you're in contact with your child during their big feelings, ask yourself:
 - What is happening inside my nervous system (how do I feel)?
 - What tone of voice am I using?
 - What is my body language communicating?
 - Do I feel safe right now?
- Cultivating safety to mirror calm and containment is a tall order. In those incredibly tough moments, use your compassionate voice to answer the following:
 - What do I need right now to feel safe?
 - Do I need to take a deep breath, to take five, or to call someone to help me?
- A really valuable way to actively tune in to your child is to focus on the need behind your child's behaviour: what are they trying to tell you through their behaviour? That is the 'secret message' behind their big feeling. It can be helpful to ask yourself:
 - If my child's distress could speak, I wonder what would it say?
 - If my child's big feelings had a message, what would it be?
- Thinking of our child struggling to handle something difficult encourages us to help them through their big feelings.



Resources:

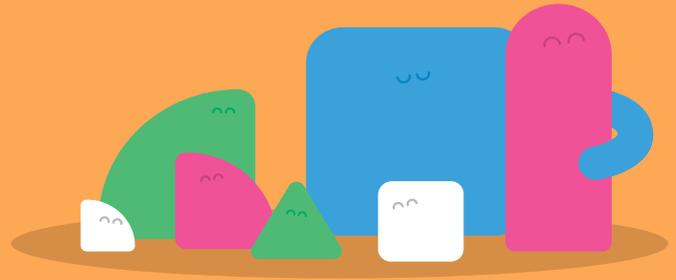
To learn more about feelings and emotions, check out the following sources:

- Dan Siegel's 'Parenting' video series based on his amazing 'Whole Brain Child Book': <https://dalailamacenter.org/programs/speakers-series/daniel-siegel/>
- A child-friendly movie about this topic is 'Inside Out'. It may be worthwhile watching this with your child. Check the link here for more information: <https://www.common sense media.org/movie-reviews/inside-out>
- Instagram page: The Big Life Journal has practical resources and ideas: <https://www.instagram.com/biglifejournal/?hl=en>

For help with managing big feelings:

- A Lust for Life's online article on how to validate children's feelings:
<https://www.alustforlife.com/tools/mental-health/validation-of-childrens-feelings-promotes-positive-mental-health?app=true>
- Mental Health Ireland's video on parenting anxious kids and managing big feelings:
<https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/compassionate-support-for-parenting-anxious-children-and-teens/>

To explore more about your own emotions, check out Brené Brown's podcast 'Unlocking Us' where she explores feelings, vulnerability and emotion with interesting professionals - <https://brenebrown.com/podcast-show/unlocking-us/>



1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 4: Wise Owl

Lesson Summary:

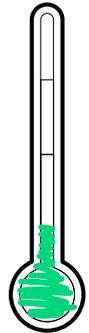
The aim of this lesson is to help children to understand their automatic physiological ‘Fight, Flight, Freeze’ response to threatening situations (see explanation you can share with your child below).

Children grow in understanding of the different ways humans respond when we feel scared or threatened, which results from our bodies producing stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Because we cannot access our rational brains when we feel threatened or unsafe, the children learn to call on their rational brain (or ‘Wise Owl’) to help them to calm down, so they can think more clearly to make a rational decision.

Try It At Home Activity: ‘Self-check-ometer’

In this ‘Try It At Home’ activity, your child is encouraged to look at the ‘Self-check-ometer’ with you. They colour in their ‘Self-check-ometer’ and read about what happens at each zone (i.e. green; yellow; orange; red). You could explore with your child how their body feels at each zone. This ‘Self-check-ometer’ encourages children to check in with themselves, name their feelings, grade them from green to red, and recognise not all feelings are equal.

For example, in the **green** zone, you are feeling good, have no fears at all, and can problem solve. In the **yellow** zone, you may be feeling worried and a slight loss of control. In the **orange** zone, you may be feeling quite anxious and you feel like you are about to lose control. Finally, in the **red** zone, you are overwhelmed by a big feeling (like fear) and you feel out of control: “I was so scared I was in the red zone, I had lost control and my body started to shake”, or “I’m in the yellow zone right now because I keep asking you to reassure me about the party. I should take a few deep breaths so I don’t go into the orange zone”.



Dr. Malie’s Top Tips:

- For the ‘Self-check-ometer’ activity, it is helpful for children to talk about feelings that might be felt at the green, yellow, orange, and red zones. For the green zone, children might say words like ‘relaxed’ or ‘zen’. If you feel comfortable, it can be worth explaining to your child that feelings like ‘excited’ can also exist in the yellow zone because being excited might mean a small loss of control also.
- Teaching children to rate the intensity of their feelings helps them to accurately judge the intensity of the feeling, to identify the current threat, and eventually choose an appropriate way to cope with the feeling. It is important to associate daily events with feeling intensity. This gives the child concrete reference points to associate with each level of intensity (e.g. “That loud noise put me in the red zone”).
- Here is more information on how to use the ‘Self-check-ometer’, which in this instance is called an ‘Anxiety Thermometer’, although it can be used with any feeling: <https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/2022/anxiety-thermometer.pdf>
- Within this lesson, children also learned how to support themselves when they enter the orange and red zones. One of the strategies that we practised in the lesson was “Shaking on Purpose”, which supports children to regulate their bodies by releasing built-up tension and adrenaline by shaking their bodies, which in turn helps to ground them, shift fearful thoughts and improve their sense of control. Try it together!

Fight, Flight, Freeze Explanation

Here's a good way for you and your child to understand the 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response ('Love in, Love out', Dr. Malie Coyne, Harper Collins Ireland, 2020):

Imagine you're allergic to wasps, and one flies straight into your bedroom through the window. What's the first thing you'd do? If you're feeling up to it, you might find something to kill it with or steer it back out of the window (that's 'fight'). You might run the heck out of the room to shout for help ('flight'). That would be me! Or you might stand totally still ('freeze') until the wasp flies away, because that's what your parent told you is the best thing to do.

The 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response is automatic – we do it without thinking. It's something we share with animals, and it makes us react immediately to danger without even thinking about it. When faced with a real or imaginary threat, we often feel like our power has been taken away from us. To get our power back, we react in one of these three ways:

1. Fight: We might get angry, shout, or lash out. This is our way of controlling the threat.
2. Flight: We might run away or avoid situations. This is our way of controlling what's around us.
3. Freeze: We might go stiff and feel like our bodies can't move, or that we can't think clearly because our minds have gone blank. This is our way of controlling ourselves.

Resources:

To learn more about the 'Wise Owl' and what happens during the 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response, check out the following helpful resources:

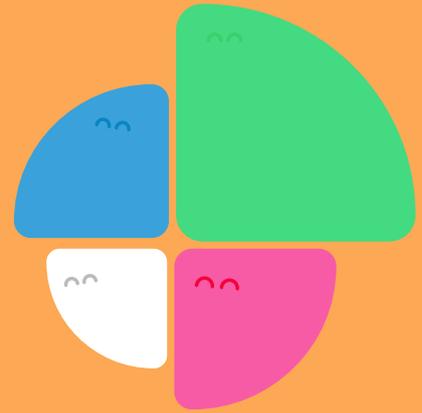
- This video explores 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' at an accessible level for children in 1st and 2nd class:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VQUOr-R3eA>
- A video on the 'Amygdala Hijack' from Irish author and teacher, Fiona Forman:
<https://vimeo.com/166080701>
- This article introduces the 'Guard Dog' and 'Wise Owl' which are helpful concepts:
<https://buildingbetterbrains.com.au/guard-dog-and-wise-owl/>
- HeySigmund.com by Susan Young has brilliant anxiety resources, like this piece:
<https://www.heyigmund.com/anxiety-in-children-anxiety-in-teens/>



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

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’.



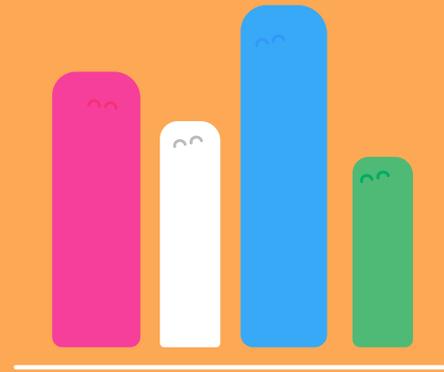
Resources:

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>

1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 6: Friends



Lesson Summary:

The aim of this lesson is to learn to recognise what makes a good friend and to become more aware of how feeling safe with others feels. Children explore the characteristics of 'healthy friendships', what makes a good friend, what they look for in a friend, and how a good friend makes them feel. They learn to identify what is okay and what is not okay in friendships. They carry out activities to explore what actions make a good friend, when they have been a good friend to others, and when others have been good friends to them.

Try It At Home Activity: 'Friendship Flowers'

In this 'Try It At Home' activity, children are asked to think about the learning from class today about what makes a good friend and how to be a good friend. They are now asked to write or draw three actions which build friendship, so they can be reminded of the practical things needed for friendship. They are also asked to write or draw three characteristics (e.g. kind) which might build friendship, so they can think of traits to look for in a friend.

To encourage your child to reflect on what they did in class, you could ask them why they chose the actions or characteristics they chose and what experiences led them to choose these. Perhaps you could share with them what things are important to you in a friendship!



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

- Nurturing friendship throughout our lives is paramount to our wellbeing, which is where you play a crucial role for your child. According to an RTÉ Radio One piece by Ruth Kennedy based on a 'Today with Claire Byrne' podcast with me on friendship: <https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/living/2022/0221/1282074-dr-malie-coyne-on-spotting-the-signs-of-a-toxic-friendship/>

"Friendships and human connection is the key to our emotional and physical health. We learn about who we are through our relationships. Humans are so deeply social and our most joyful and sad moments derive from a feeling of belonging with close others. Our sense of joy, self-worth and belonging develops in our early relationships with our family, which over time progresses to the close bonds we form with the friends we choose. Friendships provide us with the crucial social support we need to survive in the world.

The benefits of friendship last longer than the good times we have with them. There is solid science behind why you like someone and want to spend time with them. When you have a good laugh with someone, you feel like the very best version of yourself. And why is that? Because it releases your feel-good brain chemicals. When we are born to our mothers we have a release of oxytocin in our brains, which is our love hormone. Well, that gets released when you're really close to a good friend, and also you have endorphins which can act as a pain reliever and serotonin which is an anti-depressant. So, loads of really good chemicals are released when you're with somebody that you're enjoying spending time with."

- In helping your child to nurture friendships, Author Velloso's four elements needed for friendships to grow are a good guide for parents to be aware of. These include:
 1. close physical proximity.
 2. regular interactions.
 3. a compatible outlook on life.
 4. and a shared commitment to being there for each other.
- In her book 'We Should Get Together: The Secret to Cultivating Better Friendships', Velloso calls these factors 'seeds of connection', because when they are all present, a healthy friendship can bloom. However, if any of these components are lacking due to circumstance or not being actively nurtured, the greater the likelihood of failure.
- Use your own experience of friendship to model to your child how to create and build friendships. For example, talk to them about someone new you met and how you started up a conversation. Children will see that it takes action to make a friend.
- Talking about maintaining friendships with your children is beneficial, so that they're reminded that friendships involve a level of effort and commitment (e.g. enjoying experiences together, staying in touch, and doing nice things for one another). Your child really benefits from your support in helping them to arrange to meet friends outside of school, as well as emphasising the importance of kindness to others.
- It may be worth reducing the significance of a 'best friend' from the child's perspective. Sometimes there is pressure from peers to rank friendships at this age. This can cause upset if a child feels they don't have a best friend. This can also be a problem if your child falls out with a friend or the friend isn't around. Remind your child of the benefit of them having a few friends; they don't need to just have one.

Resources:

To learn more about friendship, check out the following sources:

- Here is a comprehensive list of 24 picture books about how to be a good friend:
<https://teachingwithchildrensbooks.com/books-about-friendship/>
- RTÉ published a recent report on how children value friendship in school:
<https://www.rte.ie/news/education/2020/12/11/1183726-school-report/>
- Here are 12 brilliant evidence-based tips on helping your child to make friends:
<https://parentingscience.com/kids-make-friends/>

Lesson 7: Feeling Safe and Unsafe

- **when they felt the friendship got thorny.** How did they feel? What did they do?
- It is crucial for parents to **model assertive behaviour**. Seeing their parents being assertive (e.g. maybe just in the shops or in other everyday situations) will help children to learn this skill and become more assertive themselves. If, like many parents, you find this difficult, perhaps these resources might help:
 - Paterson's 'The Assertiveness Workbook'
 - Alberti & Emmons' 'Your Perfect Right'
- According to Educational Psychologist Ms. Sarah O'Hanrahan, passive children could become passive adults if they don't learn assertiveness skills at a young age, which can be harder to learn as an adult. The power of saying 'no' is important in building self-esteem. Passive children often put their heads down or walk away when somebody says something mean to them. On the other end of the scale, you have a child who uses physical or verbal aggression towards others. Neither of these communication styles (passive or aggressive) gets their needs met. **Finding a balanced and assertive way to deal with situations is healthy communication.**
- Below are a few tips for a child to build on their assertiveness skills, derived from <https://www.independent.ie/life/how-to-say-no-the-art-of-assertiveness-35236675.html>
 - **Keeping eye contact and using a power pose** is a method of standing up for yourself in an unspoken kind of way. It involves having relaxed shoulders, standing with your two feet on the ground with your head up and maintaining eye contact with the person you are speaking to. Even doing just that much can be so empowering.
 - **Having short assertive statements at the ready** in advance of any interactions is great. This means that you don't get tongue-tied. Neutral responses like 'That's your opinion' can be helpful as they give you something to say and you hold onto your power. If things are getting too heated, it can help to walk away from it. However, if you feel you are avoiding things out of fear, then it's time to talk to your trusted adult and problem-solve a way forward together.
 - **'Fake it until you make it'** is good advice for children who find it really hard to be assertive, as we all have to put on our poker faces sometimes if we are not feeling confident inside. Standing up for yourself is not about being aggressive; it is about getting your point across in a clear assertive manner and not losing your power.
 - Finally, **it would really help to practice role play exercises at home**. For instance, ask your child to direct you on playing the 'mean' role towards them (e.g. 'You're not playing with us'). Using the skills learnt above (power pose, and clear and short assertive statements), encourage your child to respond to you in an assertive way. After you are finished acting, it is important to shake off your roles and do something nice together.

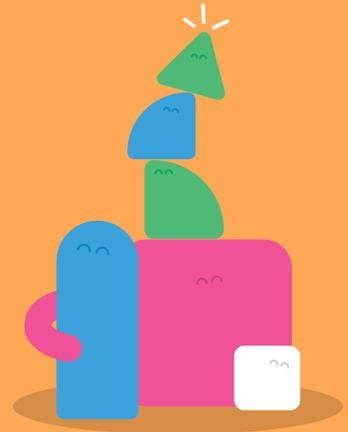
Resources:

To learn more about supporting your child in becoming more assertive and confident, check out the following sources:

- Some children benefit from attending after schools' clubs which nurture their confidence, such as drama, music, dance, Scouts, or sports that are not overly competitive.
- Here are 10 simple strategies for you to support your child in becoming more assertive: <https://psychcentral.com/lib/teaching-child-be-assertive>

1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 8: Boundaries



Lesson Summary:

The aim of this lesson is to help children to manage feelings in tricky relationships. Children discuss what a tricky friendship is, including being excluded. They role-play a scenario where a child is excluded, and use flashback and flash forward activities to figure out how a solution might be found to the tricky situation. Children use what they learnt about assertiveness in Lesson 7 to come to these solutions.

Try It At Home Activity: 'Left Out'

This 'Try It At Home' activity leads on from a discussion on tricky friendships in class. It is a reminder for children and adults that all of us can feel left out at times. Your child is asked to draw a time where they felt left out or somebody else felt left out. They are encouraged to empathise with the person excluded by thinking about how they felt when they were left out in the past. They are asked to problem solve and figure out how that person might be included, and to think about how it feels to include others. You could ask your child:

- What did it feel like for you or the other child to feel left out?
- What could you do next time if you or another child is being excluded?



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

- It is important to understand what 'bullying' is, so we can respond appropriately:

"Bullying is defined as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. This definition includes deliberate exclusion, cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying (such as homophobic or racist bullying or bullying of those with special needs.)"

(p.8, 'Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, DES, 2013)

<https://assets.gov.ie/24429/3b6f3db2de154ebaa1f69a0856c97c8e.pdf>

- It is of the utmost importance that children feel they can come and talk to their trusted adult (i.e. a parent, teacher, club leader, family member, etc.) if something like this is happening to them at school, at an after-school club, or in any of their social spheres. See the 'Resources' section for links on how to support your child.
- One of the best ways to prevent bullying is to build compassionate communities, and nurture kindness in children towards themselves, and kindness towards others. Here is an excerpt from my book 'Love In, Love Out' (Harper Collins Ireland, 2020):

- “Self-compassion is about nurturing our relationship with ourselves and learning to be our own good friend. When kids who are struggling practise self-compassion, powerful things can happen: they experience a boost in their brain’s feel-good chemicals, which lowers stress, anxiety and low mood; and their sense of self-worth, resilience and ability to cope with challenges improve.

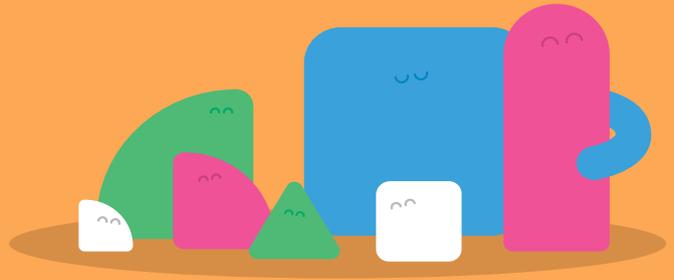
We all speak to ourselves unkindly sometimes, which has huge power over how we feel and how we make sense of our experiences. Children can be their own worst critics and judge themselves very harshly. They may be comparing themselves to others and feel like they don’t quite measure up. Repetitive critical self-talk can lead to low self-worth and increased anxiety. Explain to your children that an ‘inner bully’ is something we all experience”.

- We can help children to turn down the ‘inner bully’ voice by encouraging them to say kinder things to themselves. Brilliant books which teach self-kindness tools are Fiona Forman’s ‘Self-Kindness for Kids: Whizzo-Voice to the Rescue!’, and Louise Shanagher’s ‘Kindfully Me’ series. Both talk about the benefits of mantras or affirmations for children to develop a kinder inner voice, like ‘I’m good enough,’ ‘I am safe,’ ‘I am loved,’ ‘I’m not alone’, or ‘I don’t need to compare myself to anyone.’
- Another powerful way to build children’s compassion muscles is by giving to others. A growing body of research has shown that volunteering improves children’s mental health. Being kind to others boosts serotonin, which increases satisfaction and wellbeing, also known as a “helper’s high”. It reduces stress, strengthens the immune system, and increases happiness. These benefits are especially significant for children today, who are at risk of developing anxiety and depression at younger ages, as it empowers them to make a positive difference in someone’s life.
- Giving is a ‘WIN-WIN’ for the giver and the receiver, in that the giver feels a sense of purpose and wellbeing, connection to community, a sense of perspective on life and an appreciation for life’s blessings; whilst the receiver benefits from knowing they are ‘held in mind’ by another child who values them in their common humanity.

Resources:

To learn more about supporting your child with bullying, check out the following resources:

- Read your child’s school’s ‘Anti-Bullying Policy’ and share any concerns with School.
- Here are a few links for helping children to manage bullying:
<https://www.parents.com/kids/problems/bullying/bully-proof-your-child-how-to-deal-with-bullies/>
<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2018/0112/932881-how-to-help-your-child-deal-with-bullying/>
- Here is a parent’s guide if your child is displaying ‘bullying’ behaviour:
<https://childmind.org/article/what-to-do-if-your-child-is-bullying/>
- Finally, here is a Loving Kindness Meditation for Children by Louise Shanagher:
<https://youtu.be/pOE6V6o2y-4>



1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 9: My Time and Screen Time

Lesson Summary:

The aim of this lesson is for children to think about their time online and what they do during 'screen time'. The class collaborates on what the internet is used for in their lives, and what kinds of activities could be done instead of screen time to make them feel healthier. We refer back to what we need to feel well generally (e.g. balance of sleep, play, eating well, exercise and being outside, spending time with friends / family, etc).

Google's 'Be Internet Legends' video is played for the class (see alfschools.com), and children are asked to remember the 5 pillars of the Be Internet Legends Code, including:

- Be Internet **Sharp / Alert / Secure / Kind / Brave**

Try It At Home Activity: 'My Screen Time'

In the 'My Screen Time' activity, children are asked to write or draw what they do on the internet on page 1. On page 2, they are asked for some ideas for activities they can do without screen time. Of course, screen time is not inherently bad. Children access screens for leisure time, they sometimes work with and create with screens in school, and technology can facilitate communication with friends, family and relatives abroad. However, it is important that children do not spend too much time on screens, and for them to become aware of how they feel if they spend too much time watching television or playing with a tablet (e.g. lack of energy, trouble sleeping, more family fights, may find normal life a bit boring).



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

If you have time, check out these two Additional Activities from the 'Be Internet legends' online safety resource:

Watch the Legends Family Adventure: Watch three short films, made with Aardman Animations, which follow a family as they go on an adventure in Interland. [Click here.](#)

Play Interland: Explore the themes covered in the lessons and Legends Code video, with four levels to explore. [Click here.](#)

Colour in your own Internaut! Print out the Be Internet Legends Activity Sheet. [Click here.](#)

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

Most children love screen time (as do adults!). As parents, we all struggle getting our children off their screens. When you think about the role of screen time in your child's life, rather than counting the amount of hours, it can be helpful to think in terms of your child's overall health and how they spend their time in general. Dr. Anderson, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, suggests parents use a

Lesson 9: My Time and Screen Time

'developmental checklist' to consider whether your child is engaged in activities important for healthy development. Try asking yourself:

- Is my child sleeping enough and eating a somewhat balanced diet?
- Are they getting some form of exercise every day?
- Are they spending some quality time with family?
- Do they use some screen time to keep in touch with friends?
- Are they invested in school and keeping up with homework?

If you can answer YES to most of those questions, then it's probably not a problem if your child watches an extra episode of their favourite show. The reverse is also true. If your child is spending so much time gaming that you can't get them to exercise or eat properly, that's a sign that you need to intervene. If the worry is that your child is having too much screen time, it's not about how much time that actually is, it's about what it infringes on.

Following from this, here a few tips on setting healthy boundaries from the same article:

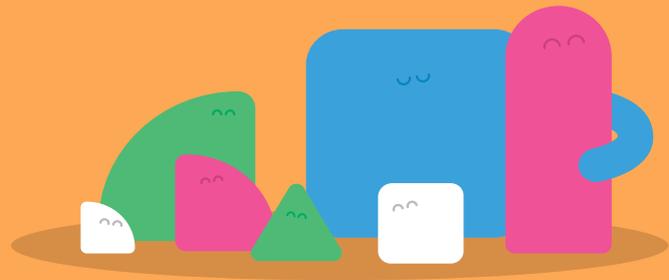
<https://childmind.org/article/screen-time-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

- **Start with compassion.** Unstructured screen time can be a source of comfort and entertainment for many kids. Letting your kids know that you understand their needs is a simple way to reduce stress for everyone. You can say to your kids, "Look, I know you need a break. I know you need to relax" and set a limit.
- **Brainstorm alternatives.** When we tell kids not to do something, we almost always need to suggest what to be doing instead. Put together an "activity menu" with a younger child that lists their preferred non-screen activities (like crafts, listening to music, reading or walking the dog). That way, when they're feeling bored or overwhelmed, they'll have easy choices at the ready.
- **Keep a schedule.** It can also be helpful to set specific times of the day or week when your kids know they'll be allowed to use their screens. For instance, maybe the 30 minutes before dinner are always open for screen time or 3 times a week for gaming. That kind of structure helps kids know what to expect and cuts down on their requests for screens at other times.
- **Stay the course.** Once you set up a system, you may find that your kids push back against it. Maybe they'll be moody for the first few days and get angry. That's what's called an extinction burst. It's natural for children to test new boundaries to see if they're firm, but if you can stick to your plan and tolerate their irritation for a few days, pushback will likely fade as kids settle into their new routines.
- **Model healthy screen use.** If you make a point of setting aside your own screens during set times, your children will be more likely to do the same without putting up a fight. Plus, taking breaks from tech has the added benefit of helping you limit your own media intake and giving you moments of mindfulness with your kids.

Resources:

To learn more about online safety, visit the following sources:

- This Irish website has information, advice and free education resources addressing a range of internet safety issues and concerns for young people, teachers and parents: <https://www.webwise.ie/>
- For child-friendly stories to explain being safe online to children aged 3-7, check out: <https://www.childnet.com/resources/digiduck-stories/>
- For more information on Google's 'Be Internet Legends', please visit: <https://parentzone.org.uk/beinternetlegends>



1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 10: Being Safe Online

Lesson Summary:

The aim of this final lesson is to learn about being safe online. Similar to Lesson 9, children explore the 'Be Internet Legends' programme by Google. They learn about and practice the 5 Be Internet Legends Code pillars, including Be Internet: **Sharp, Alert, Secure, Kind and Brave**. They also learn about some potential dangers of being online (for example, others deleting your creation on a game, phishing sites, social media, etc.).

As a final exercise, we had a class discussion on what pupils learnt about in the A Lust for Life Schools Programme as a whole (see below).

Try It At Home Activity: 'What I Learned' Bookmark

This 'Try It At Home' activity pulls together all of the content the children have completed within the last 10 lessons.

In this activity, children are asked to design their very own bookmark including their favourite things they learnt from the A Lust for Life Schools Programme. Take a look at your child's bookmark and have a chat with them about the different things they learnt and remembered.



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!

For example:

1. How to look after their wellbeing
2. Feeling good about themselves
3. What feelings are and how to identify them
4. How to manage their Big Feelings
5. Fight, Flight, Freeze
6. What makes a good friend and a tricky friend
7. Feeling safe in friendships
8. Feeling unsafe in friendships and what to do
9. The internet, screen time, and being safe online

It might also be helpful to look back at the lesson Parent Support Sheets (available in 1 booklet on alfschools.com) as a reminder of what was covered in the programme.

Share with your child what was the highlight for you. Praise your child on having completed the programme and give yourself a pat on the back too!

Following the completion of this programme, it can be helpful to keep practical reminders of the strategies and ideas learnt and explored within the programme visible and easily accessible so that they are available to support children when and as necessary. For example, you could put up completed 'Try It At Home' activities or art pieces children made in school on the fridge, mantelpiece or other areas around the home.

Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

In finishing up the A Lust for Life Schools Programme, I'd just like to say it's been a real pleasure contributing to the A Lust for Life Schools Programme Parent Support Sheets, and I am really grateful for the opportunity to engage with you.

As parents we all want the best for our children from the moment they are born. We read up on all the latest parenting advice, we listen to the opinions of family, friends, professionals, the stranger at the supermarket, often relying on the outside world to set our compass on the dos and don'ts of being a good parent. Whilst we could all use a few tweaks (myself included!), let me say one thing loud and clear: **You already have what you need to be a 'good enough' parent.**

When I say this, I am talking about the positive intentions you have for your child, your natural instincts in being able to attune to them, and the incredible power of your child-parent relationship in modelling for them what it means to be human, compassionate and resilient in a less than perfect world.

Realising the treasure trove of qualities you already have as a parent can help you to develop a lens through which you can filter the advice you're exposed to. It's about learning to listen to your own inner wisdom and nurturing your confidence to make choices about which advice to follow if any, and how it fits it with your own unique situation.

In that spirit, I really hope that you have found something which resonates with you in these Parent Support Sheets which can help you to build on your child-parent connection with compassion for you and your child, so you are in a 'good enough' place to support your child through the rollercoaster of life.

Big hugs, Malie x

More Resources:

1. Be Internet Legends' have supported some of the content within Lessons 9 & 10. For more information on Google's Be Internet Legends, please visit: <https://parentzone.org.uk/beinternetlegends>
2. Breslin, N. (2018). *The Magic Moment*. Dublin, Ireland: Gill Books (and other story books).
3. Coyne, Malie (2020). *Love in, Love out: A compassionate approach to parenting your anxious child*.
4. Forman, F. (2019). *Self-Kindness for Kids: Whizzo-Voice to the Rescue!* Co. Kildare, Ireland: Outside the Box Learning Resources.
5. Hoffman, K. Cooper, G., Powell, B., & Benton, C.M. (2017). *Raising a Secure Child: How Circle of Security Parenting Can Help You Nurture Your Child's Attachment, Emotional Resilience, and Freedom to Explore*. New York: Guilford.
6. Shanagher, L. & Finerty, R. (2018). *Mindfully Me 3-Pack*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press.
7. Siegel, D.J. & Bryson, T.P. (2012). *The Whole Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York: Random House.
8. Smiling Mind App ~ Developed by psychologists and educators and designed to help children with the stresses of everyday life using body-scan meditations, mindfulness, relaxation, breathing and guided imagery. It has different exercises depending on age.

1. Headspace (for kids) App. Offers a great array of features, from quality meditations to daily videos, as well as sleep- and exercise-specific content, customized for various age groups.
2. Stop, Breathe, and Think Kids App ~ Offers children a playful and interactive way to discover and develop their superpowers of sleep, being calm, learning to breathe and resolving conflicts. Largely aimed at children aged 5-10.
3. www.parentline.ie ~ A national, confidential helpline that offers parents support, information and guidance on all aspects of being a parent and any parenting. Parents can call 01 873 3500 Monday – Thursday 10am to 9pm and Fridays 10am to 4pm.