

**RESILIENT  
RUTLAND**



# **Anxiety: helping your teen to help themselves**

**One in a series of webinars commissioned by Resilient Rutland to support parents/carers and families.**



# Summary Notes

## Anxiety: helping your teen to help themselves

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### JUST BE THERE...

The first and most important thing you can do for your anxious or stressed teen is to just be there. Remaining physically and emotionally present in their lives, no matter what life might throw at them, is of huge importance. If they know that they can rely on your unconditional care then they will be far more able to tackle the obstacles and opportunities that life throws at the.

- You don't have to fix, walk with
- The little things are still the big things
- Listen to understand
- Remind them that you love them
- Try to avoid 'I told you so'. Mistakes are important, let them learn from them gracefully

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*How can you let your teen know you're there and you care?*

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### WHEN IN DOUBT... SLEEP

Sleep is the most important thing and there is very little that doesn't feel a whole lot better after a good night's sleep and chronic sleep deprivation fuels the fires of anxiety and depression. Sadly, sleep is often seen as a punishment or chore rather than being embraced as a wonderful thing! Try to have open and honest conversations with your teen about the role of sleep, what optimal sleep might look like for them (and you) and encouraging them to keep an open mind. Try to develop a shared understanding that a 'Big Sleep' can help them hit the reset button on their anxiety.

- Talk to your teen about sleep, be curious and explorative in these discussions
- Try to take the stigma out of sleep and help them find the benefits for themselves
- Mood Journaling and noticing how differently they feel after a good sleep can help
- Think about how to create a good environment for sleep
- Be mindful about what you're role modelling here
- Celebrate sleep and speak positively about it

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*What small change could make you a better sleep role model?*

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### GETTING IT OUT BY SPEAKING, WRITING OR CREATING

A problem shared is a problem halved.... And the sharing doesn't have to be with another person. Simply taking the big scary, distressing thoughts in our head and turning them into something more tangible is a really important process. There are lots of ways of doing this and no right way – we might talk to a parent, friend, dog or counsellor (not in that order!), or perhaps we'll write a journal, or

free write or create poetry, or maybe we'll use our music or our art to express ourselves. It's not about finding THE right way, it's about finding OUR right way.

- How do you get your problems out of your head?
- Explore with your teen the different forms of expression. What might work for them?
- Never underestimate the power of a beautiful journal and pens
- It's okay if they want to keep what they create to themselves
- If they do choose to share with you, note what a privilege that is
- Dogs are great listeners and never judge. If you don't have one, maybe a neighbour does..

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*Is it ever okay to read a teen's journal without their permission?*

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## CONTROLLING THE CONTROLLABLE

In life, there are always some things we can control and some things we can't. By focusing in on the things that we are able to control, the world can begin to feel a bit more manageable and we can quell some of our worries and anxieties a little.

- What can your teen control? Do you need to let go of anything and hand the reigns over?
- Can they be given additional things to control / be responsible for?
- Positive control over physical wellbeing e.g. sleep, diet, exercise is great, so long as it's contributing towards health, but keep a careful eye for disordered behaviour (when it is controlling them)
- Creating routines and schedules and lists can help take control when there are too many thoughts or to dos
- Bullet journaling can be a great tool for teens who want to take control and express themselves

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*Is your teen ready to take control? If not, how can you support them to develop?*

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## TOLERATING THE UNCONTROLLABLE

Whilst there are many things we CAN control, there are also many that we can't. Helping our teen to understand this and consider how to manage the distress that this can cause is a useful life skill.

- There are a whole set of skills that can be taught here called 'distress tolerance', which is an arm of dialectical behaviour therapy
- A simple acceptance of what we cannot control can be a good first step
- Look to what we CAN control (e.g. us). When frustrated what we can't (e.g. other people)
- Don't dwell. Can we distract ourselves or move away from what we cannot change?
- We can change how we feel even if we can't change how things are – breathing and relaxation
- Mindfulness approaches can allow curiosity without rumination

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*How much time should we spend worrying over what we cannot change?*

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## LEARNING TO SELF-SOOTHE AND CREATING A SELF-SOOTHE BOX

It's very helpful to have a range of go-to strategies that can be used in moments of distress or challenge, or which can be used to proactively calm us. Different things work for different people at different times, so it's helpful to be open minded and flexible.

- Breathing and relaxation strategies
- Coupling anxious moments with calming activities – e.g. hand wash / hand massage
- Creating a self-soothe box – unique to you!
- Consider calming activities like reading, colouring
- The power of music to flip our mood – create a calming playlist

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*What would go into your self-soothe box?*

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## NOTICING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Different thoughts race through our head all the time, some good, some bad, some indifferent. When we are anxious or low, these thoughts can often be very negative and we can get stuck in negative thought cycles, also known as 'cognitive distortions' or 'thought traps.' A key treatment for anxiety is cognitive behavioural therapy, which teaches us to recognise these thoughts and break the cycle, which in turn impacts on our behaviour. Even without professional input, we can begin to recognise negative thoughts and question them.

- Mind reading - we assume what others are thinking 'She thinks I'm stupid....'
- Filtering – focusing on the facts that confirm our negative viewpoint and filtering out the good stuff
- Labelling – giving ourselves negative labels based on small facts – e.g. 'I'm a failure' after failing a test
- The first step is to notice these thoughts
- The next is to look for the evidence for them – always wonder 'What would a friend / parent say?'
- Finally, we challenge them and consider if there is a different way of thinking

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*Notice each time you start falling into a thought trap. Be curious about it.*

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## TALKING TO OURSELVES LIKE WE'D TALK TO OUR DOG

This simple hack is surprisingly effective. When we stop and take note of how we talk to ourselves, it can be pretty horrifying. We'd never dream of being so unkind or demanding of our friend or our dog... so if in doubt, try to catch negative self-talk and replace it with the soothing words and tones we'd use when talking to someone we cared about...

- Notice negative self-talk
- Consider how we talk to those we care about
- Try to exercise self-care and compassion by talking kindly to ourselves too
- Pick up friends and family when you catch them being cruel to themselves as well

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*Do you treat yourself with kindness? What could you do differently?*

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