



Counselor's Corner

[Helping Kids Manage Their Worries About Coronavirus](#)

Many of our kids have been hearing about COVID-19 for weeks at school, from friends, on the news, at home, and on social media. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety and students might not know how to appropriately express their feelings about the situation, they might be holding on to some big worries. With schools closing, kids are out of their comfortable routines, which can contribute to even bigger worries. Here are some responsive strategies to help them manage these strong worries:

Responsive Strategies

1. Practice Controlled Breathing

- If your child is showing signs of worry, take a moment to [practice controlled breathing](#). Your child can practice deep breathing with numbers (inhale 1 2 3 4 5 hold 1 2 3 4 exhale 1 2 3 4 5 6 7) or use tools (e.g., pinwheel, bubbles, stuffed animal, shapes). Help them slow their breathing and really exhale all of the air to calm their bodies and minds. Please practice these different forms of controlled breathing with your child to calm their worries.
 - i. [Pinwheel Breathing](#)
 - ii. [Hoberman Sphere Breathing](#)
 - iii. [Bubble Breathing](#)
 - iv. [Stuffed Animal Breathing](#)
 - v. [Shapes Breathing](#)
 - vi. [1-minute Triangle Breathing](#)

2. Try Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Help your child release tension from their body with [progressive muscle relaxation](#). In this exercise, children gradually tense up their muscles and then release them. Find scripts for this at [Verywell Mind](#) or on your favorite [mindfulness app](#) or on Youtube (click image below).



3. Use Grounding Strategies

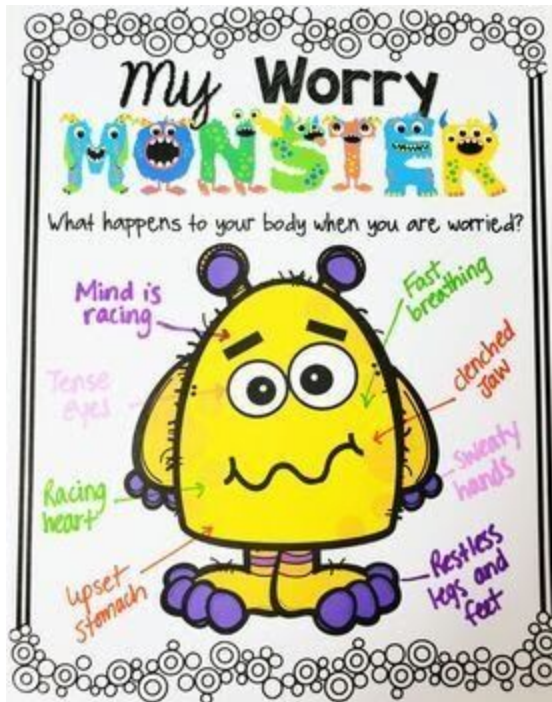
- [Grounding techniques](#) help kids reorient to the present moment when the worries are too big. These techniques help kids connect with their current environment in the here and now when their minds are imagining potential future scenarios. Try all of these [grounding strategies](#) to see which two your child likes best!

4. Set a Timer

- When it's hard to let go of worries, set a 3- or 5-minute timer. During those 3 or 5 minutes, tell your kids they are allowed to think about the worry all they want. But when the timer goes off, it's time to get up, change positions, move to a different room or environment, and think of something that makes them happy (i.e., happy thoughts, [funny jokes](#), funny videos, funny movies).

5. Exercise Creativity

- If you have a child who likes to draw or write, try a creative exercise. Have your child personify their worry by imagining what the worry might look like if it were a real person, creature or thing. Maybe it looks like a big dragon. Maybe it looks like a monster. Or maybe it looks like an annoying mosquito. Then, they can draw a picture or comic or write a story about themselves as a superhero who defeats the worry!



6. Use a Journal or Feelings Tracker

- Give your kids a journal to write about feelings or use a feelings tracker daily. Sometimes worries are so big it feels like they define our whole day, but when we keep track of our feelings throughout the day with a visual tool, it's easier to see that worries are a smaller part of a healthy balance of emotions.

			
BLUE ZONE Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	GREEN ZONE Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	YELLOW ZONE Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	RED ZONE Mad/Angry Mean Terrified Yelling/Hitting Out of Control

7. Create a Coping Skills Toolbox


- A Coping Skills Toolbox is a kit that you create to help your child calm down when they are upset, anxious or worried. In order to get the most benefit from this, you should create this kit before an issue occurs. When your child experiences anxiety, then they can pick out an item from their Coping Skills Toolbox. This is one of my favorite ways to help kids learn to calm their anxiety.



Blue Zone

Tools: Rest Stop

- Take a break.
- Think happy thoughts.
- Talk about your feelings.
- Ask for a hug.
- Draw a picture



Green Zone

Tools: Go Time

- Complete your work.
- Listen to the teacher.
- Remember your daily goal.
- Think happy thoughts.
- Help others.



Yellow Zone

Tools: Slow Down

- Take a break.
- Talk to the teacher.
- Squeeze my stress ball.
- Go for a walk.
- Take three deep breaths.



Red Zone

Tools: Stop

- Take a break.
- Squeeze my stress ball.
- Take three deep breaths.
- Count to ten.
- Talk about my problem.

Other Strategies

8. Acknowledge the Worries

- It's completely okay to acknowledge our kids' worries rather than ignoring them. Acknowledging worries won't solidify them but it will help your child understand that worry is a protective feeling that alerts us to potential danger. We can help ourselves remember it's just potential danger though, and use strategies to keep our worries in check. If you're looking for ways to explain worry to your child, [try these methods](#).

9. Avoid Participating in Worry Rituals

- If your child is demonstrating any type of worry or checking ritual (i.e. washing hands excessively), avoid participating or encouraging these rituals. This sends the message to kids that the rituals are necessary when they see the adult they're looking to for support doing it too. Remind kids of the everyday strategies and routines you already have in place to prevent or protect against illness, like washing before eating or wiping down shopping carts with disinfectant wipes.

10. Avoid Excessive Reassurance

- It's natural to want to reassure our kids! We want them to feel safe and calm. Reassure when needed but avoid offering it too frequently as this can prevent kids from developing their own positive self talk. Practice things they can say to themselves when they're feeling worried like, "I can control my breathing," or "My family is taking care of me."

11. Be Mindful of Your Own Worries

- Again, it's completely reasonable for everyone to have some level of worry. But kids do pick up on our feelings and notice our anxieties, and they will take cues from us. If you're feeling anxious, practice your own mindful or calming activities, call a friend or loved one, practice self care, or reach out for help. Even if you're stuck at home, your therapist may offer phone services or you can try an app like Better Help or Talkspace.

Source: [Coping Skills for Kids](#) and [Counselor Keri](#)

Supporting Our Students

Lastly, MCPS continues to add a number of resources to support the physical, social and psychological well-being of students during this difficult time. These resources can be found [here](#).