

Helping Children to Manage Exam Stress and Anxiety

**Christ Church NW3
Parents and Carers
29th March 2018
9.00-10.00**

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Today we will think about...

- The impact of stress on children's health
- Spotting the signs of stress
- Helping your child cope with exam stress
- How to build your child's resilience

Impact of Stress

Healthy Stress



Taking a test

Short term

Performing

Long term

Competing

Too much pressure

- Channel adrenalin into performance
- Motivates us to do well
- Boosts confidence
- Able to cope

Unhealthy Stress



Too many jobs to do

- Too many stressors
- Poor coping strategies
- Feel overwhelmed / unable to cope

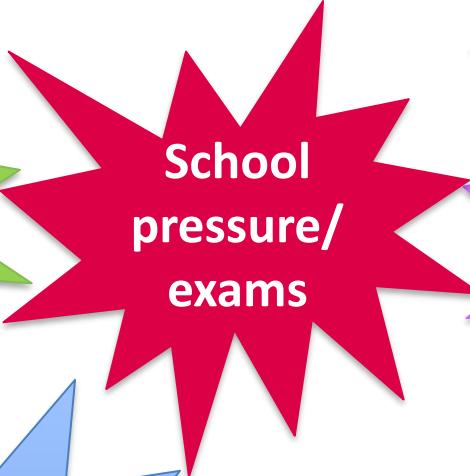
*Unhealthy amounts of stress can impact on physical health, mental health, brain development and cognitive functioning

What causes my child stress?

- Discuss with your child what causes them stress and what could be changed to reduce that stress?



Bullying/
friendship
issues



School
pressure/
exams



Parental
stress



Busy
schedules



World affairs
/news

What factors contribute to stress?

- Lack of sleep
- Exposure to social media / devices
- Few outlets for stress

Balancing expectations

What is the right amount of pressure to put on your child?

Where is the line between motivating your child to do well and pushing them too hard?

Do your expectations match up with your child's expectations?

Do your expectations match up with school's expectations?



*Your child may be putting unnecessary pressure on themselves if they are worried about your expectations. Children often worry about letting you down, disappointing you or failing. This can increase their anxiety.

Discuss this with them and reassure them about their worries.

Signs of Stress

1. It's important that you recognise if your child is showing signs of stress so you can address this.

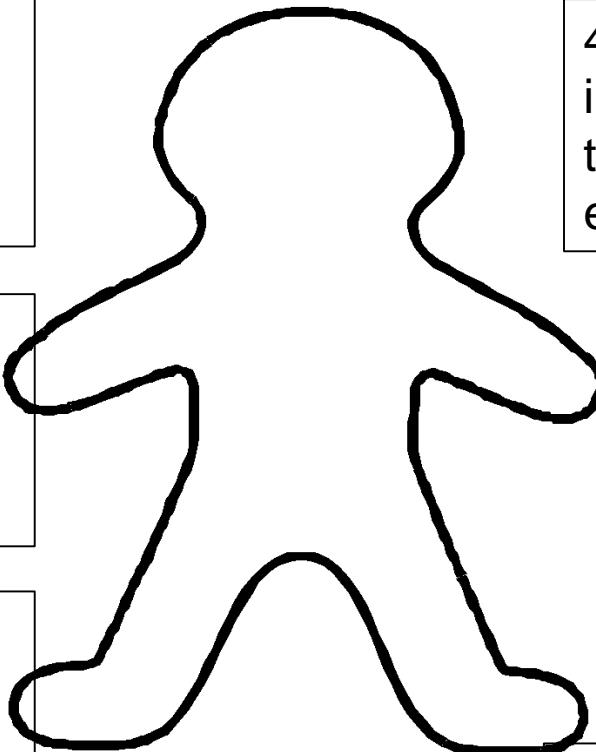
2. It's important that your child is also able to recognise how they feel when they are stressed.

3. Having an increased awareness about how we feel when stressed can help us to notice it sooner and do something about it before it completely overwhelms us

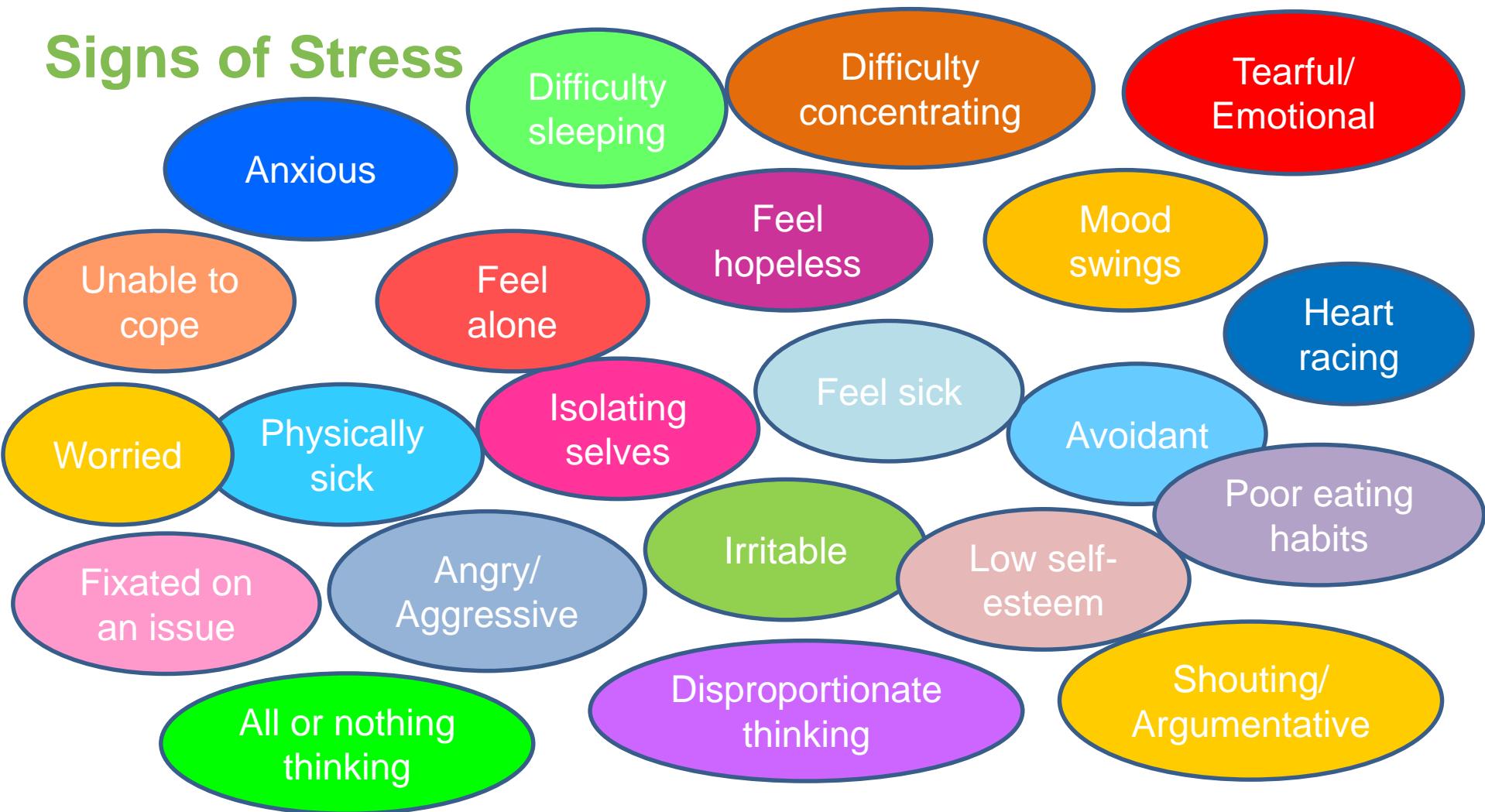
4. Ask your child to write inside a stick man how they feel physically and emotionally when stressed.

5. Ask your child to practice “noticing” when they are stressed – this awareness in itself can help a child to regain control of the situation

6. The more they practice this, the better they will be at managing their stress



Signs of Stress



* Your child might not display any signs when stressed, some children are good at hiding it.

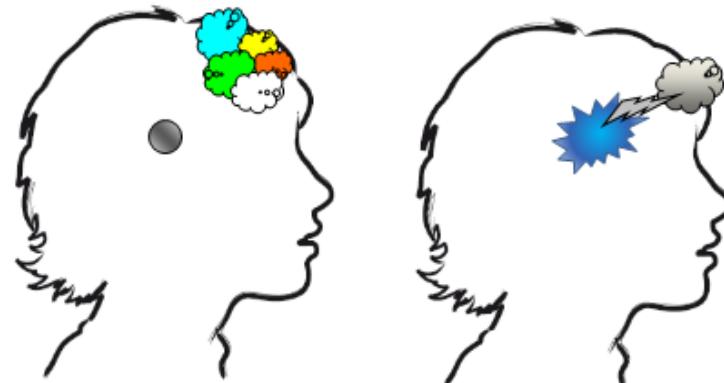
* These are just some signs of stress

* If your child shows any of these signs, it does not mean that they are stressed but it is important to check in with your child if you are concerned

Why we don't always manage stress effectively

- When stressed, we can get stuck in fight / flight / freeze response
- This impacts our ability to think rationally about the situation as we are stuck in a survival response
- Oxygen goes to our muscles to prepare us to fight or flee - we need oxygen in the brain to help us to think rationally
- Help your child to practice breathing exercises to help them calm down when stressed or panicked
- The ability to calm ourselves down = Self-regulation
- Showing your child this image can help them see visually what is going on inside their head when they are overwhelmed with stress

The Thinking Brain and the 999 Brain



Emotional resilience

- Being able to bounce back when things go wrong
- Strategies to manage life's challenges
- Managing negative feelings
- Being able to ask for help
- Being able to self-regulate

Strategies to reduce stress

- Discuss with your child what strategies they use to reduce stress and help them re-think the strategies if they are not so healthy!



What can you do?

1. Talk about coping strategies

- Ask your child what strategies they use to cope with stress
- Share healthy strategies you use
- Think together about healthy and realistic strategies
- Relaxation techniques

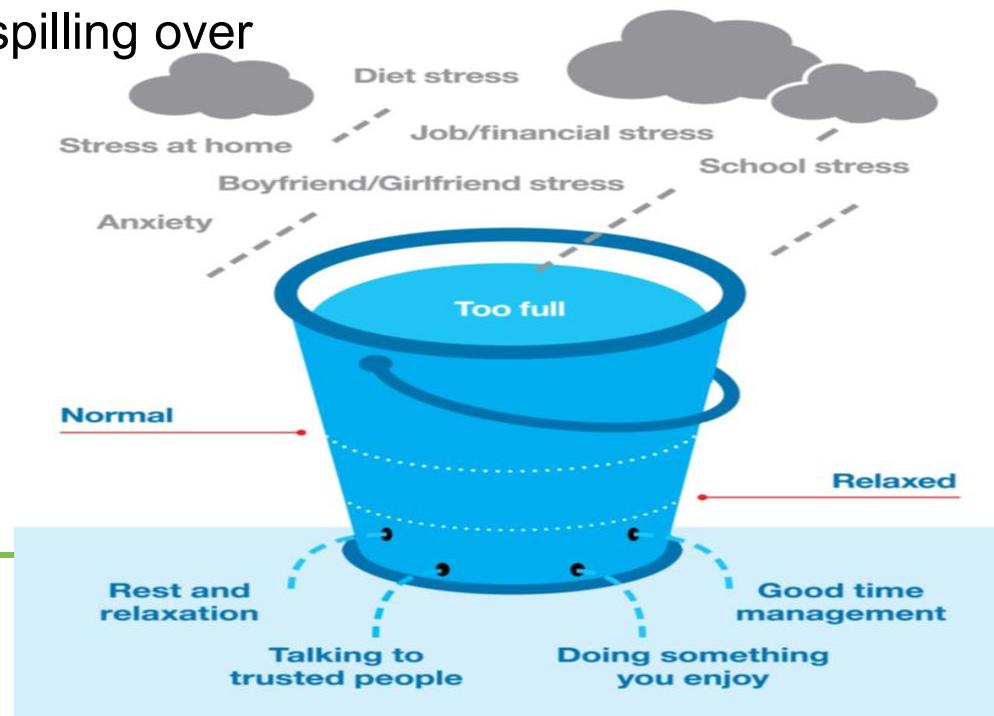
2. Encourage your child to talk about their feelings (and talk about yours!)

- Small and big feelings:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=10&v=nCrjevx3-Js

Learning how we cope with stress

- Try the “stress bucket” activity with your child to help them understand the benefits of managing stress
- Take a cup / bucket and as a family, write down on little bits of paper, all of your stressors and put them in the “stress bucket”
- Then discuss strategies to cope with stress, every time someone says a healthy strategy, you can remove a stress from inside the bucket
- This shows that we need healthy strategies to stop our internal “stress bucket” from spilling over



What can you do?

3. Have supportive conversations

- Validate feelings
- Take it seriously, give full attention
- Be empathetic
- Stay calm
- Think about the right time and place e.g. in the car, walking, doing an activity together
- Talk about your own experience
- Problem solve together
- Be approachable

What can you do?

3. Reframe thinking

- Use resilient language:
 - “You can do this!”
 - “You put so much effort in!”
 - “It’s good to make mistakes, that’s how we become even better!”
- Unhelpful vs positive thinking
- What went well today?
- When have you coped well before?
- Put things into proportion

What can you do?

4. At home

- Provide regular routines, rules and consistent boundaries
- Time for fun and relaxation
- Lots of praise
- Healthy meals / snacks
- Physical activities
- Play together
- Yoga, Mindfulness, Meditation
- Read stories

What can you do?

5. Dealing with own stress

- Be aware of personal stressors
- Recognise how you feel when stressed
- How does your stress effect how you react to your child
- Evaluate your strategies for dealing with stress
- Role model healthy coping strategies
- Consider what might be behind your child's behaviour before you react
- Manage expectations and pressure

Scenarios

Thinking about the strategies we've discussed:

- What could you do to support your child in these situations?
 - What could you do to build their resilience?
1. Your child constantly compares themselves to other children in their class and their siblings. They don't feel that they are good enough.
 2. Your child is feeling stressed about their exams
 3. Your child is feeling overwhelmed by the number of extra-curricular activities they are doing
 4. Your child is worried they might be letting you down

Where to get Advice and Support

- Teachers / support staff
- Family / Friends
- School Nurse
- GP

Information:

- MindEd for Families -
<https://www.minded.org.uk/families/index.html#/>
- Charlie Waller Memorial Trust -
<https://www.cwmt.org.uk/resources>
- Pooky Knightsmith blog - <http://www.inourhands.com/>
- Young Minds -
[http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for children young people](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_children_and_youth)

