



YOGA FOR BACK TO SCHOOL ANXIETY TOOLKIT

A quick tip guide for older children/teens.



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AMAZING ME YOGA

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Introduction

Anxiety is one of the most common mental health issues in Ireland. Anxiety can feel like it is taking over everything. It can make our heart race, our thoughts run wild, our stomach sick and social situations exceedingly difficult. It can lead to panic attacks and feelings of unworthiness. The good news is that we can regain control. We can experience anxiety; we can feel it fully and then we can choose to let it go. Anxiety is a feeling and feelings are created with our thoughts. We can choose to change our thought patterns with practice.

Children may be feeling more stressed, worried, and anxious with the challenges that 2020 is bringing us. Understandably. This is a strange time. If we can provide our children with tools to get through these challenging times, teach them to find their own calm within the chaos, they will be able to come back to their calm through anything.

In this guide I have laid out a few simple ways we can help our children get back to the present moment and get back to their own true selves.

5 poses for anxiety



Yoga can help with anxiety as it really allows us to be in the present moment. By focusing on moving the body with the breath and how each pose feels we are staying in the moment and quietening busy minds. It can be challenging to go straight into a mediation so yoga can be a really good tool to prepare ourselves for stillness. Yoga can also help to release built up tension from our bodies and align us energetically.

Cat / Cow

Start in a tabletop position (knees below hips, wrists below shoulders). Inhale and drop the belly down towards the mat as you look forward. Exhale round your spine, arching your back like a spooky Halloween cat and relax your head, looking towards your belly button. Inhale, move through back to your cow pose, lifting your heart, dropping the belly. Exhale back to your cat. Move with the breath here, repeating at least three to five times.

Childs Pose

Start on all fours and then bring your hips back so that your arms are stretched out in front of you. Bring your forehead to rest on the mat or on a yoga block or bolster. Having the legs together will help to support your spine. This may not feel like a resting posture for everyone, so another option is to bring your big toes together and knees as wide as the mat and then fold forward, bringing the forehead towards the mat.

Forward Fold

Begin standing with your feet together or hip width apart. On an exhale, bend your knees and fold forward bringing your belly against your thighs. Bring your hands to the ground and let your head hang heavy. You may like to work on straightening the legs in time. You can stay here for three to five breaths or for just one exhale as part of a flow.

Puppy Dog Pose

Begin on all fours, knees above hips. As you breath in walk your arms out in front of you and bring your chest towards the mat. You may like to have a yoga block underneath each forearm if that feels better. Rest your forehead on the mat keeping your legs exactly where they started. Breath here for three to five breaths.

Legs up the wall

This is a wonderful restorative pose that helps your body to relax and restore. Start by sitting sideways against a wall and then swing your legs around so that you are laying on your back with your legs up the wall. Doing it this way will help you to get your bottom as close to the wall as you can. Straighten your legs, resting your heels on the wall. Your arms can rest beside you or bring them to your belly. Anytime you need a break during this pose you can bring your legs into a butterfly position by bending your knees and bringing the soles of your feet together. The more you practice this pose the longer you will be able to stay in it for. Try staying in this pose for at least two minutes or longer if you feel you need to.

Breathing techniques

These breathing techniques can really help us get into our parasympathetic system which is our rest and digest state. It is in this state that our bodies self-healing process can begin. We switch from worrying to nurturing our bodies' systems for long term health.

Alternate nostril breathing

This is a great practice before homework, school or just to come back to ourselves. Pay attention to the side you start on. Starting with the exhale through the left side is said to help calm us more.

1. Sit up tall. Make a fist keeping your thumb and little finger extended. Take a deep breath in through the nose. Using your right thumb, close the valve of your right nostril. Exhale out through left nostril.
2. Leaving your fingers where they are, take a deep breath in. Release your right nostril while moving your hand across so that the little finger comes to close the left nostril and exhale through the right nostril.
3. Keep your hand placement the same and breath in deeply through the right nostril.
4. Move your hand across to block the right nostril and exhale slowly and fully out through the left nostril.
5. Then keeping your hands in that placement, take a big inhale through the left nostril (the one you just exhaled from). Repeat this pattern for three to five rounds to feel more balanced.

Birthday candle breath

This is a great breath for when you find yourself feeling anxious, worried, or angry. It gives you a chance to stop and observe before you react.

Bring your hand out in front of you and imagine your fingers and thumb are birthday candles. You are going to blow them out one by one. Take a deep breath in, blow the first one out and then lower that finger or thumb down. Repeat this for all of them and you may even like to do the other hand. Maybe you do one for every one of your birthdays (8-year-old – 8 candles).

Bunny breath

Take three quick breaths in through your nose and one long breath out. Repeat these five to ten times.

I find this breath a brilliant one for coming back to the breath when you are feeling really upset and maybe even tearful. I like to mention that to the children even when I am practicing it in a fun way because that way you are giving them the tool to use it when they may need it most. It is great to learn these practices but learning how we can use them in our everyday lives can be just as important.

Aspirations

You have probably heard about positive affirmations; aspirations are similar but instead of making a statement they allow a willingness to be open to a new internal dialogue. Research has shown that stating something that you simply do not believe can cause an internal struggle. So, affirming 'I am strong' may not work for everybody especially if they truly can not believe it. An aspiration of the same nature would be 'May I be strong.' This allows us to change our inner dialogue and help us to move into that place with love and ease without causing any conflict in our minds.

In this section I have chosen a few of my favourite aspirations for your child to start and end their days with. Let them choose one or two that resonate with them. Then have your child (or give them help) to write them out on post-it notes or a piece of paper. They may even like to decorate it. Stick the written aspiration/s somewhere they can see it each morning / night like on a mirror or in their room and encourage them to repeat it to themselves three to five times. The more they say it, the more the mind can accept that it must be true. They can choose a different one for each week or

keep adding to their mirror/ space and repeat the ones that resonate with them that day. This is a practice that can be made your own and can have such positive effects. This is not limited to the children either, I have a nice collection on my own mirror that I use every day. Modelling practices we would like our children to adopt is a wonderful example to them.

Morning aspirations

May I be peaceful.

May I be joyful.

May I be strong.

May I feel empowered.

May I know that I am doing the best that I can.

I can take this one step at a time.

I can do hard things.

May I be mindful.

May I have the power to change how I feel in every moment.

When anxiety visits me, may I choose to breath it all away.

May I be fearless.

May I be present.

May I be happy.

May I feel confident.

May I release doubts and fears.

I am more than my anxiety.

I am loved.



Meditations

One-minute meditation

This is a script that the child can read through themselves and then practice or be guided by a parent / friend / carer.

Sit up tall on the ground or on a chair. You can close your eyes if it feels comfortable to do so.

Notice your breath. (pause)

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Now take a deep breath in through the nose.

Breath out through the mouth.

Breath in and feel your belly expand.

Breath out feeling a sense of letting go.

Breath in, expanding the belly and the lungs. Filling your body.

Breath out, releasing any tension and stress.

Breath in, this time feeling lighter.

Breath out with a noisy sigh as you let any stress go.

Do nothing moment

We are always so busy rushing around, from one place to the next. In this moment take the time to just do nothing. Lay down or sit in easy seat, close your eyes if you would like to and just breathe. You can set yourself a timer so you can fully gift yourself this time without rushing off to the next task. Try setting yourself between five and ten minutes. If your mind wonders, just bring your focus back to your breathing each time.

Grounding like a tree



Come into an easy seat or sit up straight on a chair with your feet firmly on the ground. Take three deep breaths. Imagine you are a tree. You can be any tree that you would like to be. What type of tree are you? Notice your feet like roots, going into the earth, holding you steady and strong. See your branches reaching up towards the sky. Notice the colour of your leaves if you have leaves at all. Feel that support beneath you as you stand in your power reaching up high. Take a few deep breaths here before slowly coming back to yourself.

Final Note



Thank you for reading through this guide. I hope it has been helpful to you and the child / children in your care. Please find more Yoga activities, mindful practices or book a class / event/ private session at www.amazingmeyoga.ie

You can also follow me on social media at

www.facebook.com/amazingmekidsyoga

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Love and Light,

Natasha Bryant