

# Understanding Worries

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

All children feel worried sometimes, it's a normal part of growing up. We can't take away our childrens worries but we can help them learn how to manage these feelings.



# Signs of worry

Children tend to describe physical sensations when feeling worried, rather than use the word “worried”.

Bad Stomach  
Butterflies  
Restless/fidgety

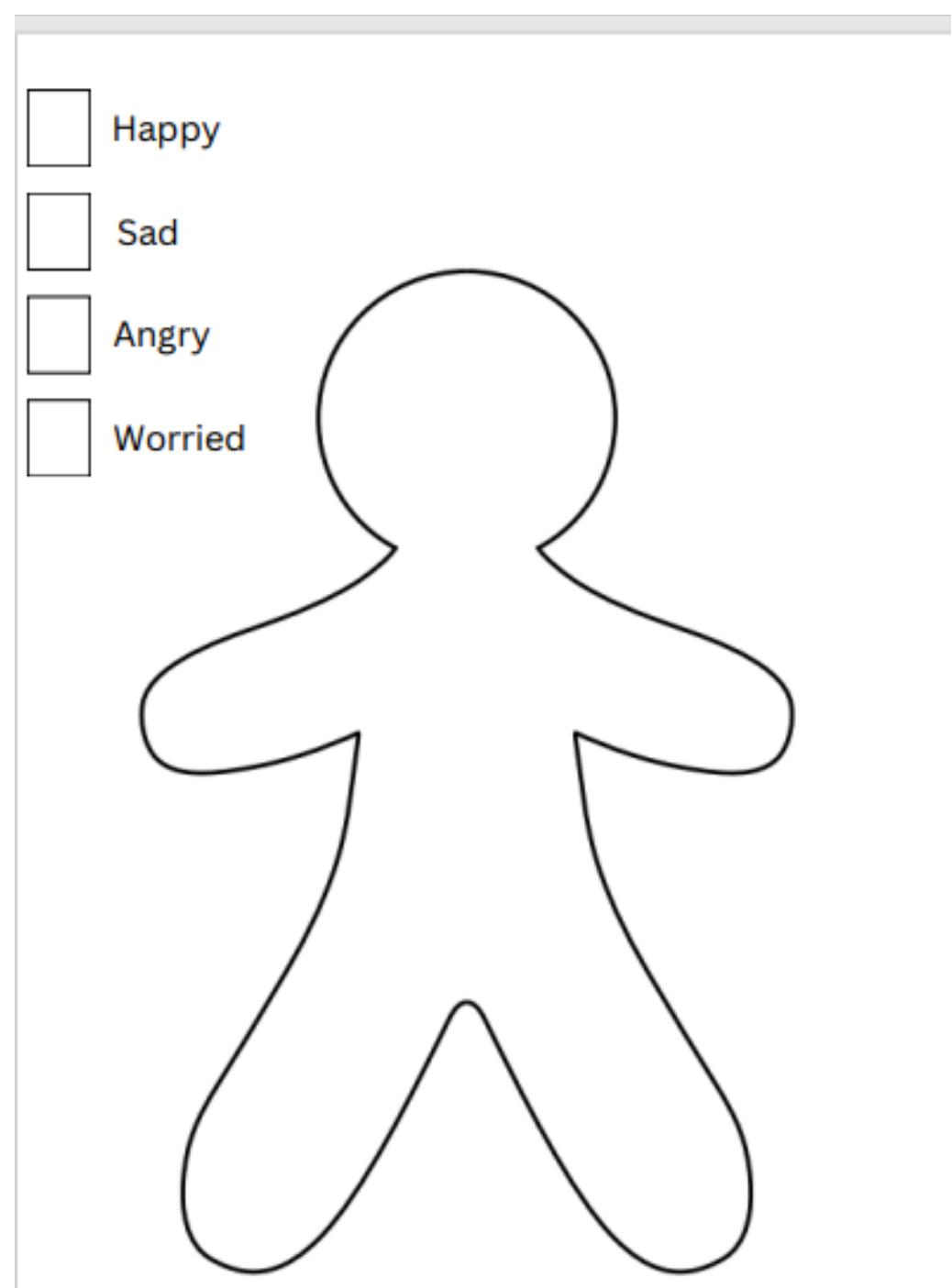
Headache  
Trouble eating  
Seeking reassurance

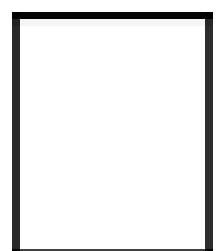
Unable to sleep  
Feeling sick  
Outbursts of anger/frustration

Often, children do feel like they are sick but can find it hard to link this with feelings of worry. This can make it difficult for parents and staff to judge if a child is sick and needs to stay home or is worrying.

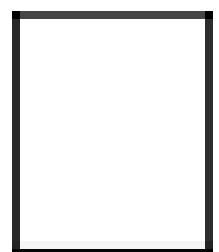
It can be helpful for children to identify what different emotions feel like in their body. To do this, we use a gingerbread man worksheet.

You can try this at home.

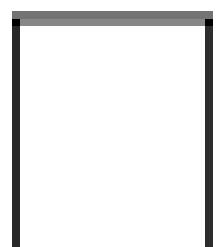




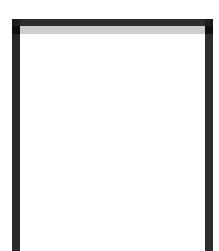
Happy



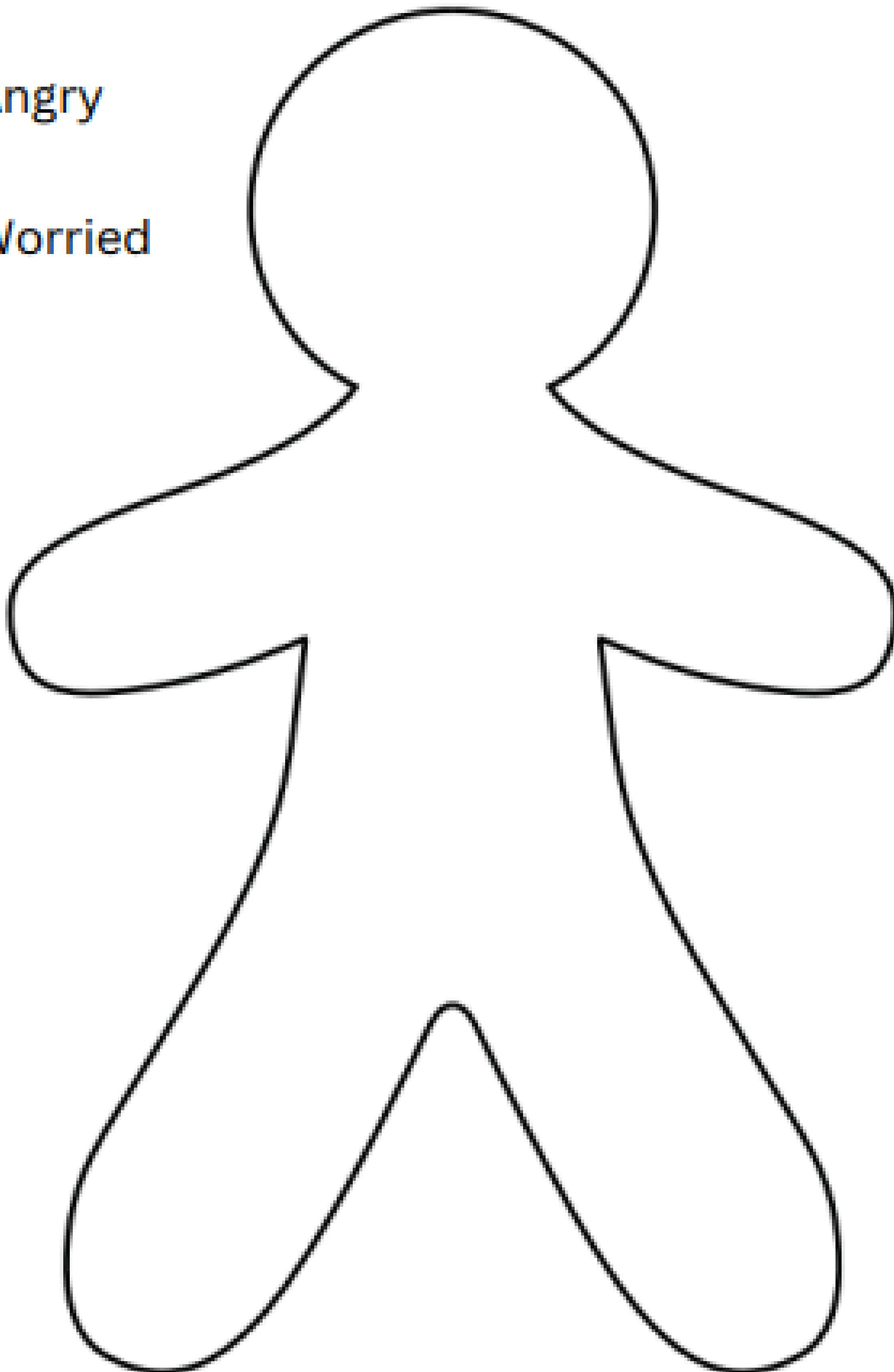
Sad



Angry



Worried



# Fight, Flight, Freeze

The fight, flight and freeze response has evolved to keep us safe from danger. However, some peoples response is triggered to quickly. This is why some people will worry about things that can seem small to others.



Fight



Flight(run away)



Freeze(unable to move, think or act)

As cavemen, our brains developed to protect us from dangers such as sabre-tooth tigers. These days, our fight-flight-freeze response can activate from things like going to school, public speaking or taking an exam. Our brain acts like we are in danger, when we might be perfectly safe.

Use the QR code to see a helpful video:



# Typical Worries

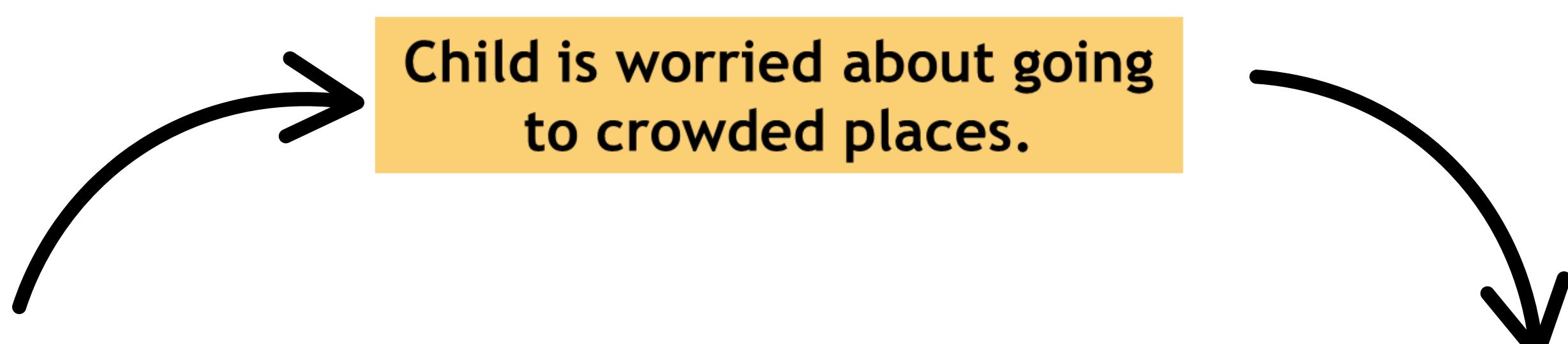
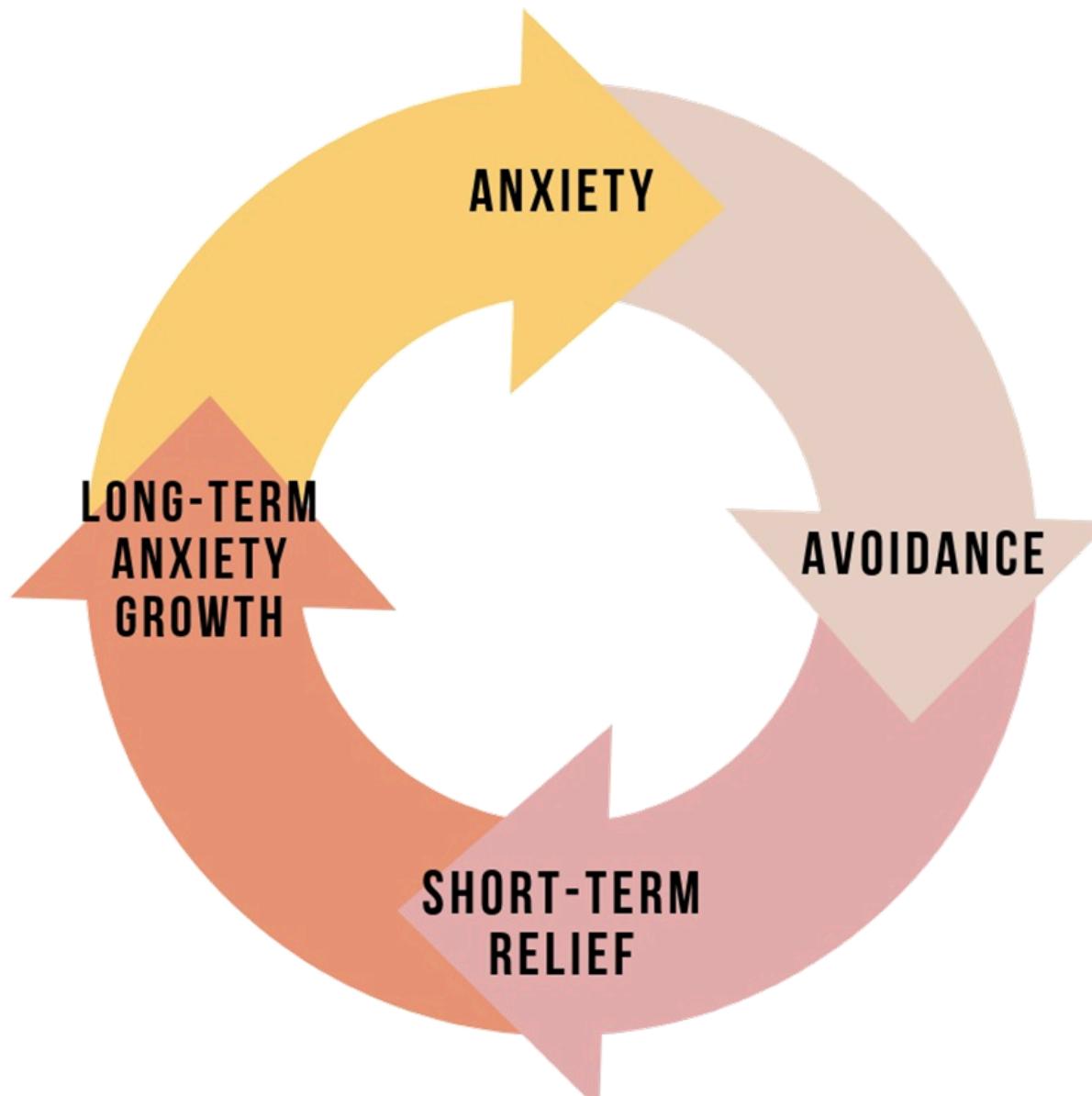
Age	Typical Fears
9 months- 3 years	Sudden movements or loud noises, toilets and large objects, strangers and separation from parents/caregivers
3-6 years	Animals, dark and Monsters/ghosts, sleeping or staying alone
6-12 years	Thunder, lightening, death, Tests/ Exams, Performance anxiety
12-18 years	Social anxiety, personal appearance, and Relationships, fear of failure and future
Adulthood	Financial affairs, Death or illness



# Worries Cycle

Some people will avoid their worries as this helps them feel calm. However, this can cause the worry to embed and grow.

Sometimes we are accidentally keeping children in this cycle without realising it.



Child learns that avoiding crowded places and being in control makes them calm.

Child is allowed to avoid crowded places and chose where to go.

Child feels relief from worries and calms down.



# Breaking the cycle

As parents, we want to minimise our children's worries and this can lead to allowing our children to avoid situations, for example: school.

Avoidance isn't always the best way to feel safe. Instead, children need the opportunity to sit with their discomfort to learn that anxiety is temporary.

## Top tips

1. Show you understand how they feel by saying something like: "**I know you are feeling worried right now**", and encourage them by saying: "**and I know that this is something you can manage**".
2. Break situations down into smaller steps.

For example: if they don't like being away from you, start with a short amount of time and build it up. This will build the child's confidence that it is a situation that they can manage.

3. Go heavy with the praise when they have put themselves in a situation they wanted to avoid

# How to Help

## Activities

Some children find it easier to open up when occupied by an activity. This can be as simple as talking while walking the dog.

Other ideas:

Drawing/Colouring or Painting

Building Lego

Listening to music on a car journey

While Cooking dinner together

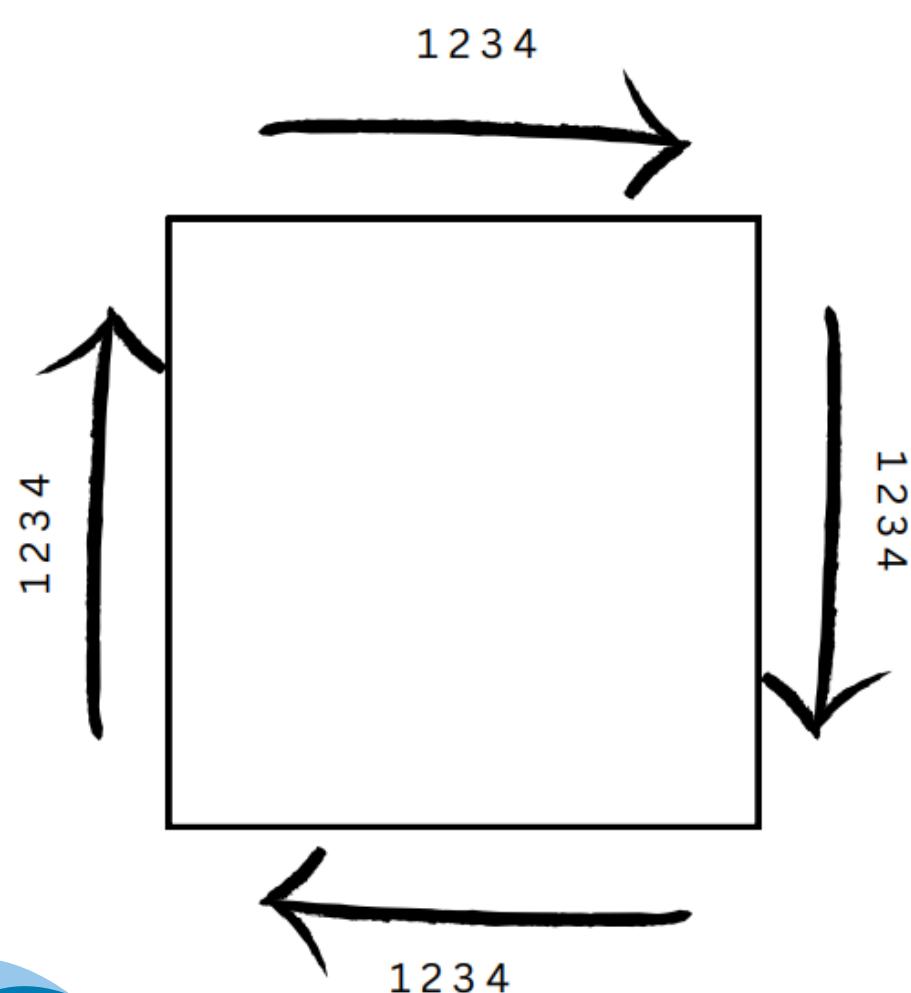


## Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques can help our body return to calm. However, these need to be practiced regularly.

### Square Breathing

Try to practice at home and in school



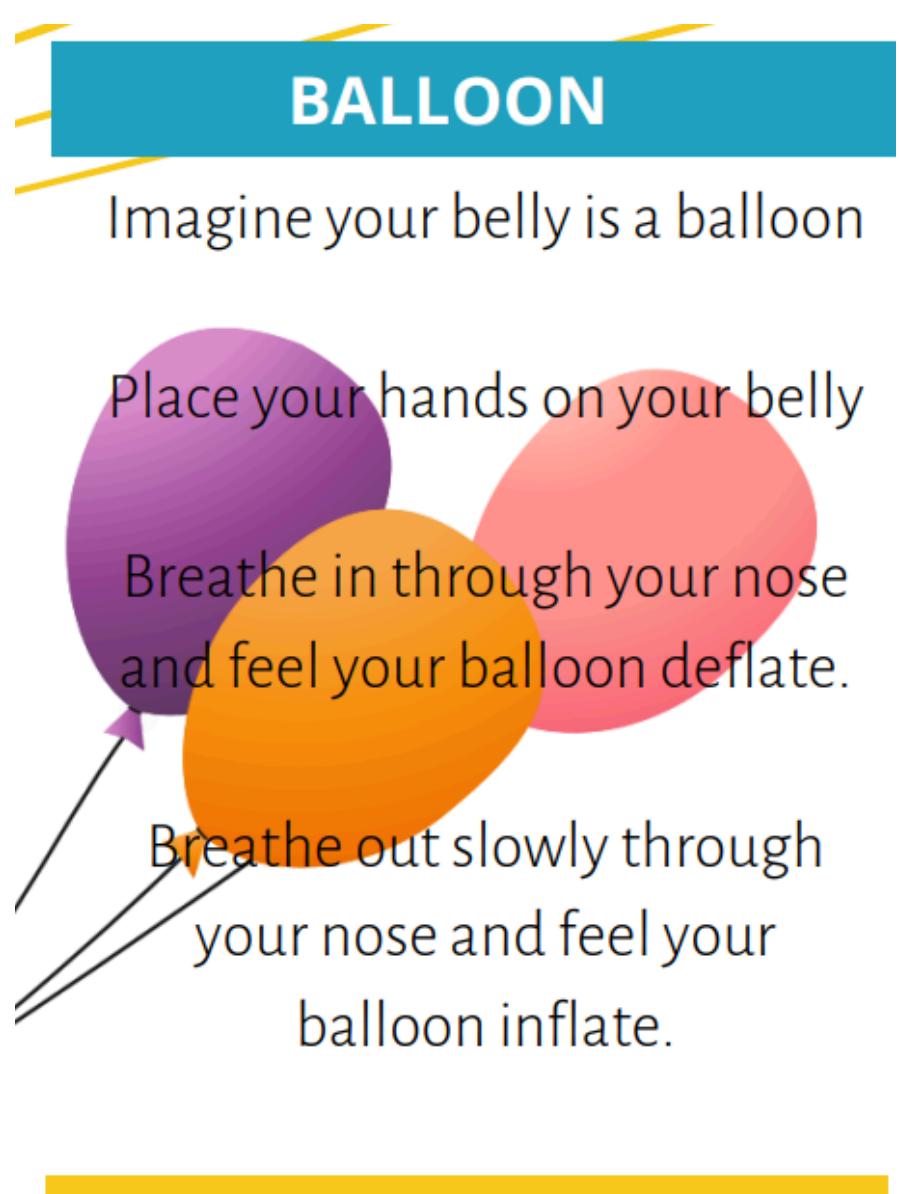
### BALLOON

Imagine your belly is a balloon

Place your hands on your belly

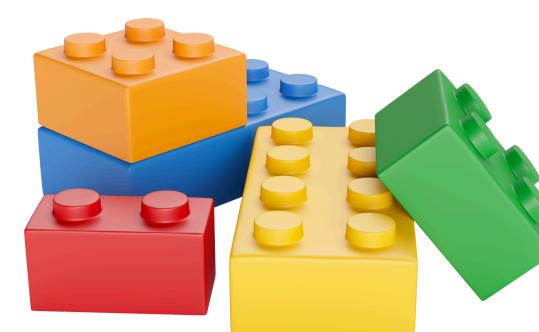
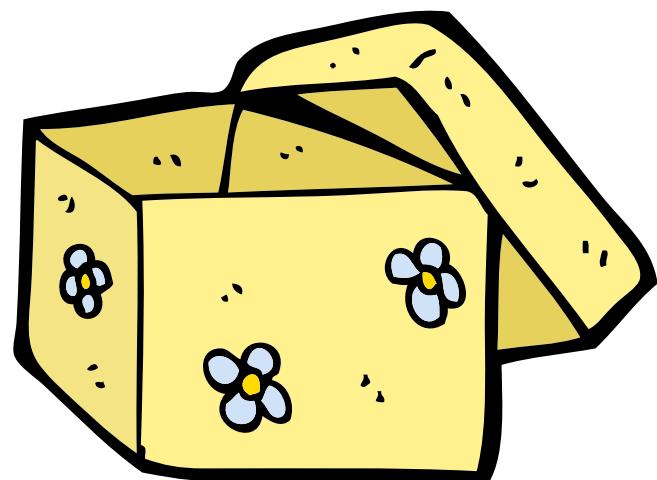
Breathe in through your nose and feel your balloon deflate.

Breathe out slowly through your nose and feel your balloon inflate.



## Self soothe box

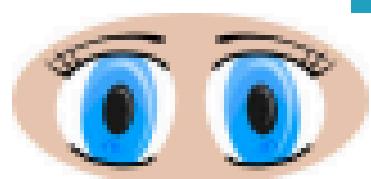
This is a box with all the items that help your child feel calm and help them to relax. The children can decorate the box and make it their own.



## Mindfulness

When I feel bad, sad, worried or scared, it is helpful and calming for me to notice:

**FIVE**



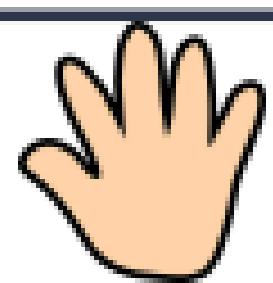
Things I can see

**FOUR**



Things I can hear

**THREE**



Things I can touch

**TWO**



Things I can smell

**ONE**



Thing I can taste