

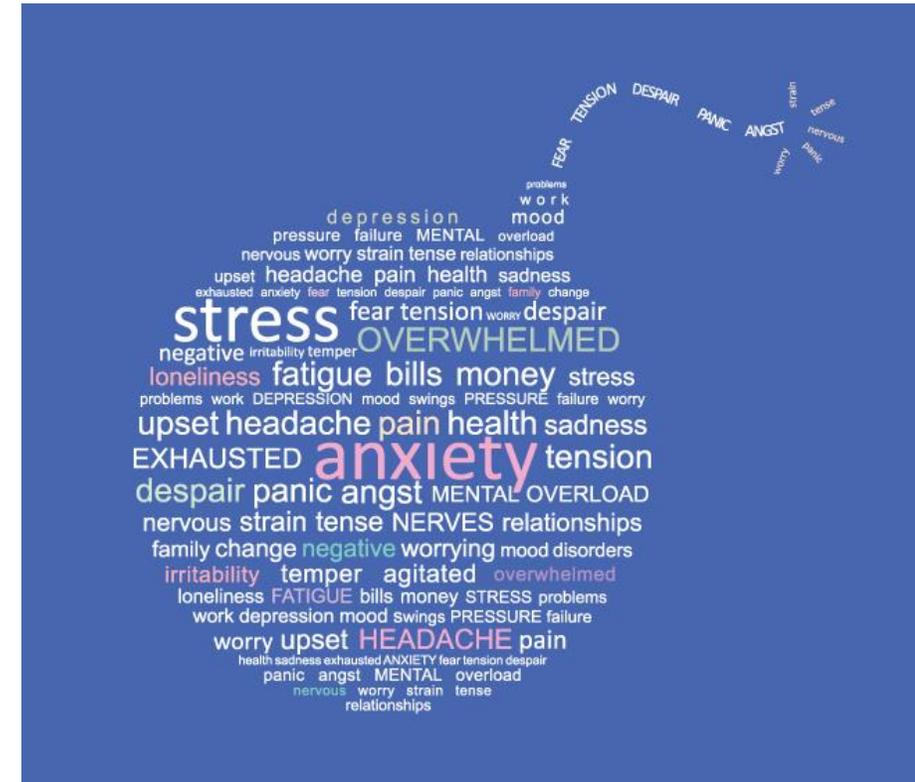


# Helping Young People Deal with Anxiety

NOVEMBER 2020

# What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear that is experienced as a combination of physical sensations, thoughts and feelings.
- All children and young people feel worried sometimes, and this is a normal part of growing up. At certain points, such as on their first day of school or before an exam, young people may become more worried, but will soon be able to calm down and feel better.
- Anxiety can become a problem when a young person feels stuck in it, or when it feels like an **overwhelming**, distressing or **unmanageable** experience.
- If this kind of worrying goes on for a long time, it can leave a young person feeling exhausted, isolated and limit the things they feel able to do.
- But, **there is lots you can do to help them**– including providing emotional support, working on practical strategies together and finding the right professional help if self-help strategies do not work.



# Why do young people feel anxiety?

- A young person may feel anxious for a number of different reasons, depending on the individual.
  - experiencing lots of change in a short space of time, such as moving house or school
  - having responsibilities that are beyond their age and development, for example caring for other people in their family
  - being around someone who is very anxious, such as a parent
  - struggling at school, including feeling overwhelmed by work, exams or peer groups
  - experiencing family stress around things like housing, money and debt
  - going through distressing or traumatic experiences in which they do not feel safe, such as being bullied or witnessing or experiencing abuse

[Why we feel anxiety](#)

# Anxiety and COVID-19

- Anxiety at this time is normal!
- For most of us, the pandemic has meant increased screen-time as we work, learn and socialise primarily through computers and mobile devices. For teenagers, opportunities for physical activity have decreased, and they have been unable to socialise with friends.
- School closures and social distancing measures are likely to have had a huge impact on the behaviour of young people. As adolescence is a period of developmental change in terms of biology and brain function, teenagers are particularly vulnerable to poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on teenagers, the worries teenagers reported were:

Loneliness & isolation (55%)

Academic worries (48%)

Juggling schoolwork (45%)

Loss of rituals like end of year activities or exams (43%)

Family relationship difficulties (42%)

If they experience any of these symptoms, it doesn't necessarily mean they have an anxiety problem. But if any of them are affecting their everyday life, they should be encouraged to talk to their parents / tutor to get support with self-help strategies, and potentially professional support if needed.

- panic attacks, which can include having a racing heart, sweating or shaking
- shallow or quick breathing, or feeling unable to breathe
- feeling sick
- dry mouth
- sweating more than usual
- tense muscles
- wobbly legs
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), diarrhoea or needing to pee more than usual
- getting very hot

- preoccupied by upsetting, scary or negative thoughts
- nervous, on edge, panicky or frightened
- overwhelmed or out of control
- full of dread or an impending sense of doom
- alert to noises, smells or sights
- worrying about being unable to cope with daily things like school, friendships and being in groups or social situations
- worrying so much that it is difficult to concentrate and/or sleep

- withdrawing or isolating themselves – including not wanting to go to school, be in social or group situations, be away from parents or try new things
- repeating certain behaviours, actions or rituals (often called 'obsessive compulsive behaviours')
- eating more or less than usual
- self-harming

[What it's like to live with anxiety](#)

# How to help a young person in an anxious moment

- **Breathe slowly and deeply together.** You can count slowly to five as you breathe in, and then five as you breathe out. If this is too much, try starting with shorter counts. If it works for them, gradually encourage them to breathe out for one or two counts longer than they breathe in, as this can help their body relax.
- **Sit with them and offer calm physical reassurance.**
- **Reassure them that the anxiety will pass and that they will be okay.** It can be helpful to describe it as a wave that they can ride or surf until it peaks, breaks and gets smaller.
- **Ask them to think of a safe and relaxing place or person in their mind.** If you haven't tried this before, agree with them when they're feeling calm what this place or person is. It could be their bedroom, a grandparent's house, a favourite place in nature or somewhere they've been on holiday. Sometimes holding a memento of a relaxing place, like a seashell or pebble, can help.
- **Try using all five senses together.** Connecting with what they can see, touch, hear, smell and taste can bring them closer to the present moment and reduce the intensity of their anxiety. You might think together about five things they can see, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell and one thing they can taste.
- **Encourage them to do something that helps them to feel calmer.** This could be running, walking, listening to music, painting, drawing or colouring-in, writing in a journal, watching a favourite film or reading a favourite book.
- Remember that everyone is different, and **each young person will need to explore different self-help techniques to find what works best for them.**

# How to help a young person manage their anxiety

- **In a calmer moment, talk with them about their anxiety.** Ask them what it feels like in their mind and body, and what things make them feel that way - it's important to empathise with their experience and validate their feelings.
- **Think together about whether there's anything in particular that's making them feel anxious.** Are there changes that could be made at home or school that would make things easier? If they are worrying about things that are outside of their control, it might help to name together who is responsible for managing the problem
- **Help them recognise the signs that tell them they're getting anxious, so they know when to ask for help or help themselves.** Getting to know these signs can make them less frightening and overwhelming when they happen.
- **Think together about the activities that help them to express themselves and reduce their anxiety.** They could try doing exercise, drawing or painting, writing in a journal, watching a favourite film, talking to friends or cooking and baking.



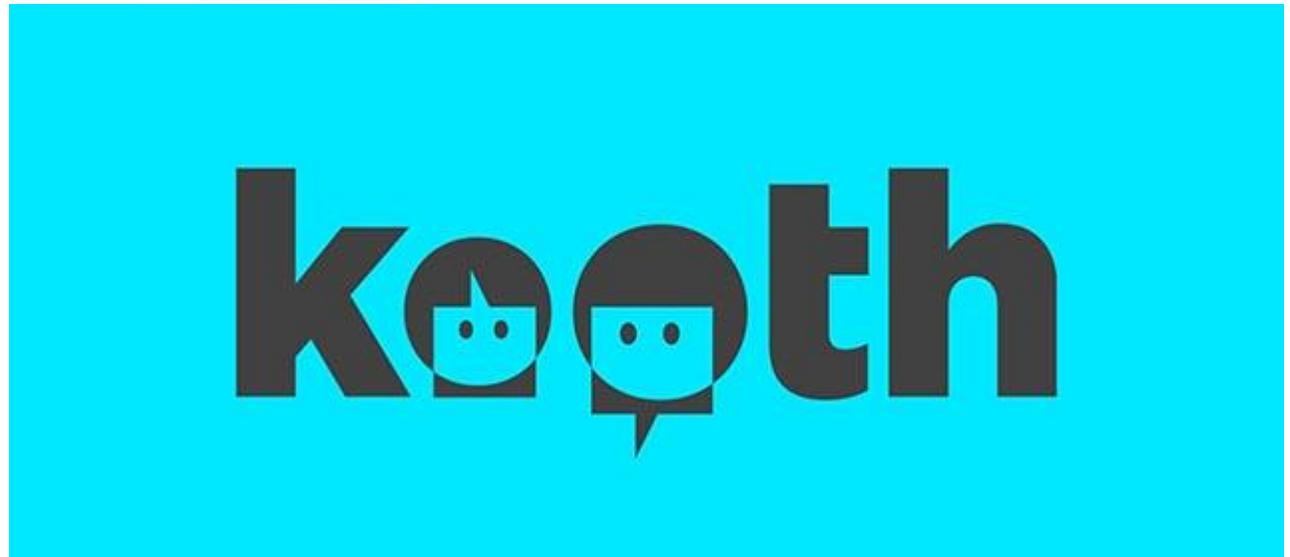
# How to help a young person manage their anxiety

- **Make a worry box or self-soothe box.** It might help them to write down their worries and put them in a worry box, giving them a physical place where their worries can be 'held'. Or they might prefer a self-soothe box, which they can fill with things that help them when they feel anxious – like photos, fidget toys, scented oils and positive quotes. You can find out how to make a worry box [here](#), or a self-soothe box [here](#).
- **Help them do the things we know are important for our mental health: physical exercise, sleeping well, eating healthily, drinking water and spending quality time with loved ones.** Regular exercise is particularly important for anxiety because it can help to reduce the symptoms in the body. It doesn't have to be strenuous – walking or gentle yoga can help.
- **Encourage them to cut out stimulants.** Coffee, caffeinated drinks and alcohol all trigger the physical symptoms of anxiety.
- **Spend quality time together and talk about other things.** Even if it's just for a little while, you can help them take their mind off their worries by having fun, relaxing and laughing. Activities like playing a sport, sewing or playing musical instruments are great for focusing the mind on the moment. You can find more activity ideas [here](#).
- **Try activities that help us to relax, such as mindfulness, yoga or meditation.** Teenagers might like to use a mindfulness or meditation app such as [Headspace](#) or [Calm](#).

# Recommended Resources for Young People

- [Four coping techniques for when you feel anxious](#)
- [The grounding technique](#)
- [How to make a self-soothe box](#)
- [How to cope with panic attacks](#)
- [Tips for coping with social anxiety](#)
- [What to do if seeing friends and family makes you anxious](#)
- [Anxiety UK](#) - for tools, tips and information on support networks

# Recommended Apps for Young People



# Helplines to recommend to young people

## No Panic

Supports people struggling with panic attacks, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and other anxiety-related issues.

Offers a specialist youth helpline for people aged 13-20. The opening hours are 3pm - 6pm, Monday - Friday; 6pm - 8pm, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Call 01952 680835 for a recorded breathing exercise to help you through a panic attack (available 24/7).

Information about call costs [here](#).

Phone: 0844 967 4848

Phone: 0330 606 1174 (Youth helpline)

Email: [sarah@nopanic.org.uk](mailto:sarah@nopanic.org.uk)

Opening times: 10am - 10pm, 365 days a year

## Anxiety UK

Provides information, support and advice for anyone struggling with anxiety.

Live chat service available.

Phone: 03444 775 774

Text: 07537 416 905

Email: [support@anxietyuk.org.uk](mailto:support@anxietyuk.org.uk)

Opening times: 9.30am-5.30pm, Monday-Friday

# Helplines to recommend to young people

## The Mix

Offers support to anyone under 25 about anything that's troubling them.

Email support available via their [online contact form](#).

Free [1-2-1 webchat service](#) available.

Free short-term [counselling service](#) available.

Phone: 0808 808 4994

Opening times: 4pm - 11pm, seven days a week

## YoungMinds Crisis Messenger

Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people across the UK experiencing a mental health crisis.

All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors.

Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.

Texts can be anonymous, but if the volunteer believes you are at immediate risk of harm, they may share your details with people who can provide support.

Text: YM to 85258

Opening times: 24/7

# Helplines to recommend to young people

## MeeTwo

A free app for teenagers (11+) providing resources and a fully-moderated community where you can share your problems, get support and help other people too.

Can be downloaded from [Google Play](#) or [App Store](#).

[Full helpline list](#)

## Childline

If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small.

Sign up for a free Childline locker (real name or email address not needed) to use their free 1-2-1 counsellor chat and email support service.

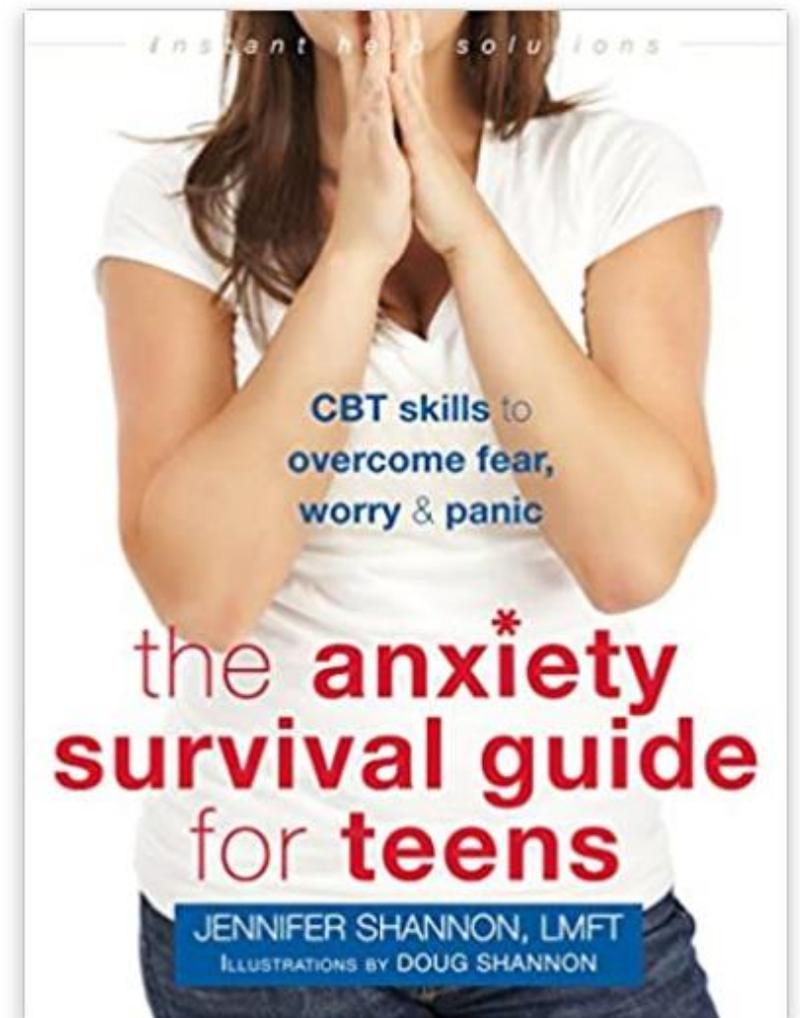
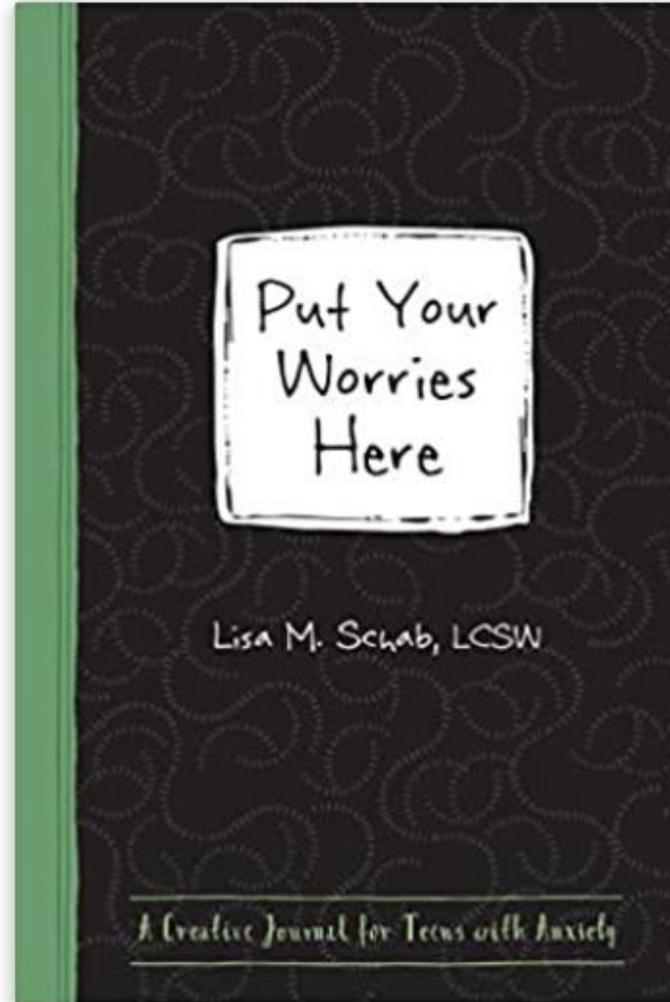
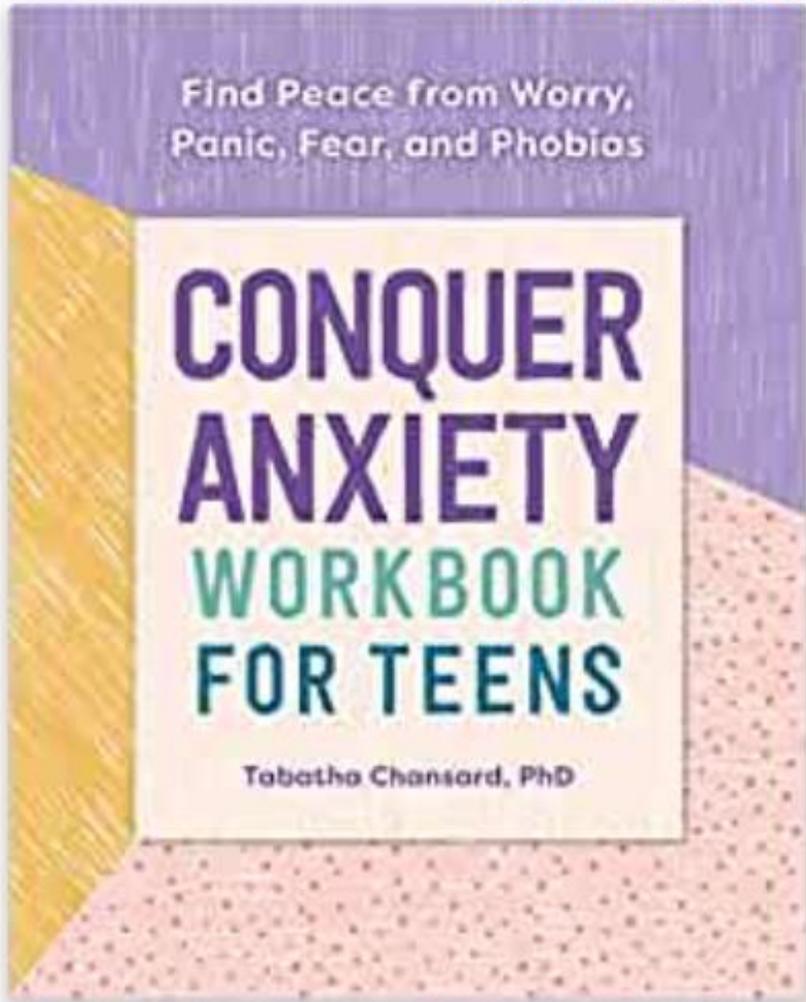
Can provide a BSL interpreter if you are deaf or hearing-impaired.

Hosts online message boards where you can share your experiences, have fun and get support from other young people in similar situations.

Phone: 0800 1111

Opening times: 9am - midnight, 365 days a year

# Recommended Books for Young People



# When & where to seek professional support

- It's a good idea to seek professional support if self-help strategies are not making the situation better and anxiety is affecting their life, for example if they are feeling persistently anxious, often having distressing thoughts, or avoiding things like going outside or speaking to others.
- **GP and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**
- Parents can speak to their GP with or without your child, or older students can go to the GP themselves. Together you can discuss whether referral to CAMHS, an assessment by a mental health specialist or referral for another kind of support is needed.
- The type of support or treatment offered will depend on their age and the kind of anxiety they are experiencing. Talking therapies such as **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** can help them to understand the thoughts and feelings behind their anxiety and find practical strategies to help them cope.
- **Medication** may be offered if their anxiety is very difficult to manage or talking therapy has not helped.  
[More Information On Medications Used To Treat Anxiety](#)

# When & where to seek professional support

- **Counselling and therapy**
- When self-help techniques have not worked, counsellors and therapists can provide emotional support and help them make sense of, and find ways to cope with, their anxiety.
- If it's an affordable option for you, you can find a private counsellor, therapist or family therapist, or support may be available via your GP from CAMHS