

Helping Children Manage Worry & Anxiety.



Care Pack
11–12 years


SMILING
MIND

Introduction

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As we all move through these challenging times together, parents, carers and teachers have the added responsibility of supporting the young people in their care as they grapple with rapid change and uncertainty. Mindfulness is an active, practical and appropriate response to the sense of overwhelm many of us are currently feeling.

Mindfulness has been practised for centuries and in many different cultures around the world. Academic research shows that when we pay attention to what is happening in the present moment, with openness and curiosity, and without judgement, we activate many wellbeing benefits including higher self-awareness, higher emotional regulation and reduced stress. It can also be a very useful tool that allows us to focus on the positive elements of life as they happen.

Integrating mindfulness into everyday life with the children in our care can have profound benefits for both adult and child. Smiling Mind offers a range of engaging evidence-based experiences and activities designed by wellbeing educators. You are encouraged to experiment and explore the wide range of meditations and activities with your child.

This second module, *Helping Children Manage Worry & Anxiety*, contains four specific mindfulness topics to progress through with your child to assist them to turn towards the positive, especially in times of challenge:

- Unhelpful Thoughts
- Anxious Mind & Body
- Bouncing Back

These three topics combine to deliver a comprehensive toolkit to assist in supporting and boosting the emotional wellbeing of your child.



Here is a step by step guide to get the best out of this module designed specifically for 5–7 year olds:

1

Take a few minutes to read the topic overview written for parents, carers and teachers.

- This will orient you to the purpose and intention of each topic and set up some background for conversations with your child.



2

Listen to the mindfulness meditation with your child in a quiet place without distraction.

- Spend a few minutes afterwards inviting your child to share their experience and their thoughts and feelings following the meditation.
- Share your own experience, thoughts and feelings with your child.



3

Ask your child to select one of the activities at the back of the book.

- Use the activity to collaborate and continue the conversation.



Unhelpful Thoughts

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Humans have a wonderful capacity to think. It is estimated that we have up to 60,000 thoughts each and every day. We love to turn ideas and wonderings over in our minds, examine them from many angles, predict, plan and imagine. In addition to these ‘forward focused’ thoughts, we are also particularly good at resting upon things that have already happened. We examine past events, press rewind in our minds, replay snippets of dialogue and re-experience emotions ‘staying with’ the experience for some time after it has concluded. Young people on the verge of adolescence have much to think about and turn over in their minds.



This is especially true if a recent experience has been negative. Due to our evolutionary negativity bias which is our tendency to notice and respond to negative stimuli more strongly than positive stimuli, we often find ourselves doing more mental work on the negative aspects of life. Ingrained beliefs and unhelpful thinking patterns are good examples of this. They can suddenly appear or be triggered by something we see or hear, and then begin to build in intensity, taking us away from the present moment and whatever task is at hand. Unhelpful thoughts can take us on a long and worrying journey unless we gently unhook ourselves and mindfully get back to what we were doing in the first place.

COVID19 represents a new and uncertain challenge to us all. It is understandable that unhelpful thoughts may appear as we navigate this and endeavour to stay safe and well and protect those we love. Too much exposure to the unrelenting news cycle is especially triggering for both adults and children alike. In an attempt to feel more in control, we may seek out information that overwhelms us and makes things worse. For the young people in our lives, gentle conversations about what they are viewing online are important at this time.

Young people look to us as role models and guides on how to navigate change and handle new and possibly unsettling experiences. They intuitively know that there is a source of wisdom in trusted and caring adults. It is up to us therefore

to confidently provide calm and emotionally stable support during these uncertain times. We can do this most effectively through modelling effective ways of responding to difficult thoughts and challenging emotions. This doesn't mean ignoring, suppressing or trying to get rid of them. Instead, we learn to notice what we are thinking and feeling and respond to ourselves with care and kindness. Smiling Mind is here to help with this. Mindfulness is a way to shift focus, calm down and gently return to the present moment.

We invite you to practise the following meditation with your 11–12 year old as a way of cultivating the ability to turn towards one's own experiences with care and kindness. Doing this together is especially important if your child is struggling. Children thrive on caring and trusting relationships with others and you as their parent, carer or teacher have a vital role to play.

After sharing the mindfulness practice together, have a conversation about how the experience felt and how mindfulness can help us to manage unhelpful thoughts and be kind to ourselves. After taking time to explore this together, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your young person to choose one as an activity. These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we do encourage continued conversation and collaboration with your child as they complete them.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation. A good one for this topic is: Breath and Sounds.

App Location:

- All Programs
- Kids & Youth
- 10 – 12 Year Olds
- Mindfulness 208 – Self Compassion
- Daily Mindfulness Guide – Breath and Sounds

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/33/154/154/>



Continue the conversation using one of the activity sheets at the back of this booklet:

Out With The Tide

This activity encourages young people to consider the outgoing tide as a metaphor for letting unhelpful thoughts go so that we can continue on with our day with mindful awareness.

Unhelpful Thoughts Unhooked

Using a natural concept such as passing clouds, young people are encouraged to let unhelpful thoughts pass by. This activity encourages non-attachment to worries so that we can get on with the rest of our day mindfully.



Deepen the conversation by exploring these questions together. Remember, there are no wrong answers:

How do you try to stay in the moment and not worry too much about things that have happened in the past?

How do you try to stay in the moment and not worry too much about things that have not happened yet and might not even happen?

When we experience thoughts and feelings that upset us, what can we do to gently move them on so we can get back to what we were doing?

Anxious Mind & Body

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Humans have worried for millennia. Our brains have evolved over thousands of years, tossing thoughts, ideas, worries and emotions around, sometimes all at the same time! Worries are often about the future and how it might unfold for us. Sometimes these worries become more deeply lodged and are harder to budge. Mindfulness can help with this. Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity and without judgement. It helps us get better at noticing where our attention is and choosing where we would like it to be.



Mindfulness helps us to train our mindfulness muscle by helping us get better at focusing on one thing at a time. As parents, carers and teachers, we can model this by focusing our own attention on the present moment and not allowing ourselves to be drawn into unhelpful thinking, especially during these challenging times. With a constant stream of negative news, many adults and children are feeling the effects of COVID19 and levels of worry and anxiety are rising.

For many young people, worries begin in the brain and quickly move into their bodies. Common bodily reactions might include stomach aches, restlessness and increased heart rate. These uncomfortable sensations in the body can be a sign of an anxious mind. Feeling anxious for much of the time can be very tiring and lead to poor sleep. Mindfulness is a way to regularly tune in and become aware of how thoughts and emotions are impacting us physically.

Through gentle conversations, young people can be warmly encouraged to share their worries with a trusted adult rather than carry them alone. A conversation with a caring adult can help them to make sense of their worries, knowing an adult is there as a source of support and reassurance.

We invite you to share the meditation with your 11–12 year old as a starting point. Doing this together is especially important if they are struggling. Young people thrive on caring and trusting relationships with others especially when they are finding things challenging.

After sharing the mindfulness practice together, have a conversation about how the experience felt and how mindfulness can help us to manage anxious feelings. After taking time to unpack this question, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your child to choose one as an activity. These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we do encourage continued conversation and collaboration as they complete them.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation. A good one for this topic is: My Internal Weather.

App Location:

- All Programs
- Kids & Youth
- 10 – 12 Year Olds
- Mindfulness 106 – Thoughts and Feelings
- My Internal Weather

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/23/141/141/>



Continue the conversation using one of the activity sheets at the back of this booklet:

Caught in a Storm

This activity acknowledges that we can all experience an emotional storm of thoughts and feelings and it can be helpful to have some strategies in our toolkits in readiness for these times.

My Internal Weather Report

Using weather as a metaphor, this activity encourages young people to match up their emotions to weather words and make connections between the two. This activity can help build wellbeing literacy.



Deepen the conversation by exploring these questions together. Remember, there are no wrong answers:

How do things feel in your body when you are very worried and experiencing uncertainty?

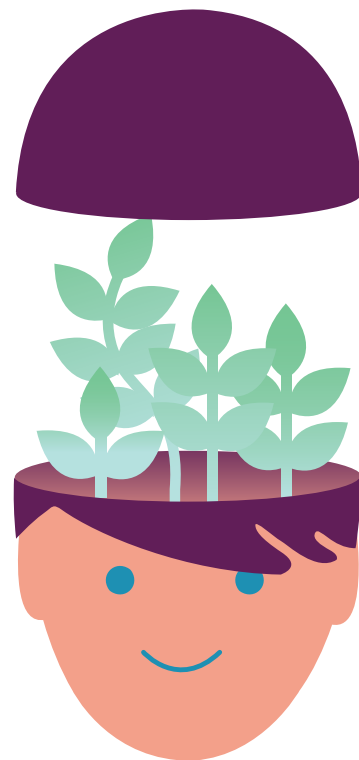
Who and what can help you when persistent worries won't easily dissolve and move on?

How does it feel when you share your worries with a trusted adult and you can begin to engage with the present moment?

Bouncing Back

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We hear the word resilience a lot these days. Resilience is the ability to bounce back when we experience challenges or things don't go the way we planned. Resilient people find ways to cope when life gets tricky and uncertain. This happens to us all from time to time. At the moment, we are all feeling the effects of the global pandemic. Young people need help to develop resilience, especially in the midst of so much uncertainty and stress. As teachers, parents and carers, we already know that life is full of ups and downs and the importance of having tools to manage this. Mindfulness is one such valuable tool that we can use to build resilience, lower stress and support our wellbeing.



Mindfulness is especially important when we experience setbacks and failures. Due to our evolutionary negativity bias, which is our tendency to notice and respond to negative stimuli more strongly than positive stimuli, we can often find ourselves doing more mental work on the negative aspects of life. When we mindfully focus on the present moment with openness and curiosity, and without judgement, we're able to step back and access a broader perspective and not get so caught up with anxious thoughts. This in turn helps us get on with the task at hand.

Having things go in unexpected or undesirable ways can be a learning opportunity. It is in these moments that we can let go of old ways of doing things and find new ways to overcome challenges. Mindful awareness of the present moment helps us do this by enabling us to assess challenges calmly and with a clear head. When young people see adults doing this, it can be a powerful learning experience.

Positive self-talk at these times can also help and, as parents, carers and teachers, we can model this behaviour to young people. When we tell ourselves that we'll be okay, that we are strong enough to deal with a situation and that there are better times ahead, we begin to build positive

patterns of thinking that strengthen with practice. This positive process allows our minds to think more flexibly and creatively providing access to a broader range of possible strategies and solutions.

We invite you to share the following guided mindful movement exercise with your 11–12 year old. This exercise is a great way to shift awareness from anxious thoughts to being more present. We recommend doing this together as young people thrive on caring and trusting relationships with others, especially when they are finding things challenging.

After sharing this mindfulness practice together, have a conversation about how the experience felt and how mindfulness can help us bounce back when things are challenging. After taking time to unpack this question, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your child to choose one as an activity. These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we do encourage continued conversation and collaboration as they complete them.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation. A good one for this topic is: Letting Go of the Day.

App Location:

- All Programs
- Families
- After School
- Letting Go of the Day

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/483/1377/2809/>



Continue the conversation using one of the activity sheets at the back of this booklet:

Up and Down Days

Activating positive self-talk, especially when we are finding things challenging is an important skill. Young people can build a supply of affirming words and ideas in [this activity](#) to assist them when their internal voice is unhelpful.

'You've Got This' Letter

[This letter writing activity](#) encourages young people to write a supportive letter to themselves for a time in the future when they might need a boost. This letter is not for anyone else and can be stored away until needed.



Deepen the conversation by exploring these questions together. Remember, there are no wrong answers:

How do people you admire and look up to after a challenge so that they can keep going?

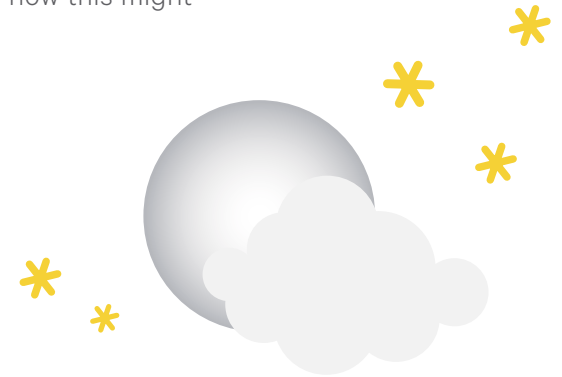
Can you remember a time when things have been hard and you have learned an important lesson through the experience? (if you can share a childhood experience of your own, this can be very helpful)

When your day is a bit up and down, what do you like to do to stay positive and keep going?

Out With The Tide



Have you ever been to the beach and noticed that the tide is going out? As the sand becomes more exposed, the water calmly heads back out to the deep ocean. Changing tides are governed by the moon as she uses her gravitational pull twice a day, every day. Imagine being able to drop unhelpful thoughts into the ocean and let the moon take care of the rest? Write and draw how this might help on days when worries are playing on our minds.



Unhelpful Thoughts Unhooked



Sometimes we can find ourselves very attached to unhelpful thoughts. Allowing them to pass you by takes practice but is worth it. Imagine them as clouds and let them go, floating away in a blue sky. Write and draw how this might help you to engage with life here and now.



Caught in a Storm

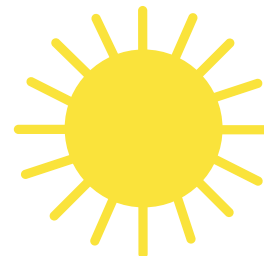
Imagine being caught in a sudden storm. What is happening around you? How are you feeling and what might you do? This can happen inside our bodies from time to time. Draw an 'inside' storm approaching and write a list of things you might do to weather the storm and turn towards the sun once it passes. Write some emotions words for both the storm and the sun coming out again..



My Internal Weather Report



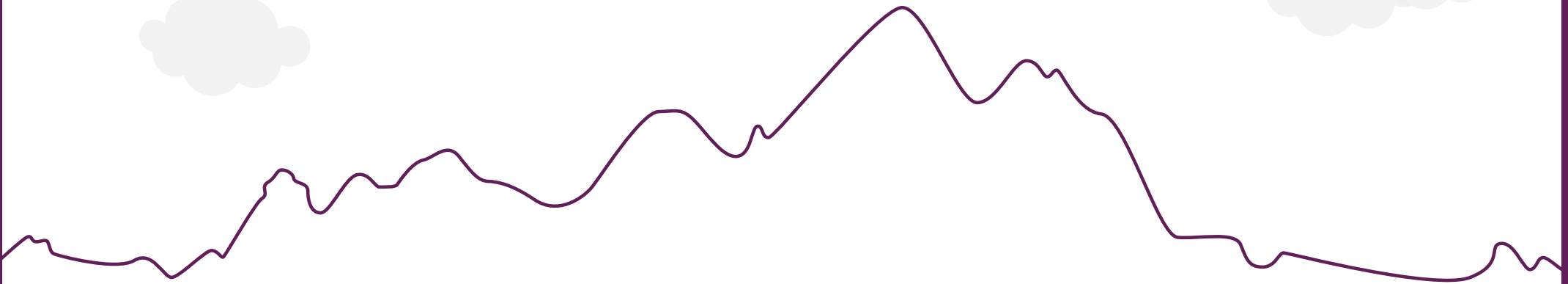
When things are not going well, it can feel quite stormy on the inside. When things are going well, we can feel full of sunshine. Our internal weather report gives us important information about our emotions. Make a list of emotions you feel from time to time and match them up with weather words. Illustrate your list.



Up and Down Days



Life is full of ups and downs. When we tell ourselves that we are strong enough to deal with a difficult situation and there are better times ahead, we begin to open the door to ideas that help us to see more clearly. Write and draw what you like to say and do when things feel cloudy.



'You've Got This' Letter



Sometimes, we have one of those days where everything seems to fall apart. Getting through these days, understanding that everyone has them from time to time can help. Make a list of things you like to do to make yourself feel better after a not so great day. Who helps you on the way to feeling better?

Dear Me,

From your good friend, Me.





Smiling Mind

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Smiling Mind is a not-for-profit organisation that works to make mindfulness meditation accessible to all.

Visit us online or download the free app to get started.

