

## Supporting your child during a mental health crisis

Knowing what to do if your child is experiencing a mental health crisis can be extremely difficult, but many people have found that planning ahead when things are calm can help.

### Have things written down

Writing things down helps to make them clearer in your mind and can help other people like mental health professionals to quickly understand the situation and work out what to do and what not to do to minimise distress and provide comfort when necessary.

#### Useful things to write down

- A list of things that trigger distress, the signs to be on the lookout for that suggest things aren't good, and the things that help.
- A list of who you can contact and how to contact them if necessary
- Keeping a journal of crisis episodes, appointments and any treatments can save you from trying to remember and explain things to people.

### Develop strategies

Work together to identify and develop techniques that you know will allow each of you the opportunity to keep calm in the difficult moments.

#### Strategies that may help

- Many people find that sensory comfort helps, such as thinking about what's going on in the moment with each of the 5 senses, or having something handy that you know to be soothing for when you notice anxiety building.
- It might help to put together a self-soothe box with items that provide comfort in moments of stress, like photos or objects that trigger memories of happy moments, or perhaps different textured fabrics, old childhood toys, music, scented items or anything else that works.

## Practice calming techniques

There are also some physiological exercises and wellness techniques that you can do to maintain or restore physical and mental calm.

### Physiological exercises that can help

- Many people find that taking big deep belly breaths helps. You can do this by sending the breath into your tummy instead of your chest and inflating it like a balloon. Hold it in for a few seconds and then slowly let it out. Just doing 3 or 4 of these can make a big difference.  
<https://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/resources/patient-information/therapies/abdominal-breathing.pdf>
- During moments of crisis, putting the adrenaline towards aerobic activity such as jogging or even fast walking can help to reduce anxiety and tension and distract the mind from the thoughts that cause them.
- The body's physiological systems can't differentiate between anxiety and excitement, which means that it is possible to convince yourself that it's the latter rather than the former by thinking of something exciting, by whooping and cheering or by singing a song associated with excitement.
- Different people find different things help them, whether it's physical exercise or simply putting the kettle on and having a cup of tea. Once you find something that works, write it down on your list of dos and don'ts for next time.

### Some additional resources that may help.

- NHS advice for supporting the mental wellbeing of others. Better Health: Every Mind matters <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>
- For information on how to access NHS Mental health services visit <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/>