

# Clare Traynor

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@ADHDFoundation



#ADHDConf

EQUAZEN<sup>®</sup>

Pioneer in Research. Expert in Health.



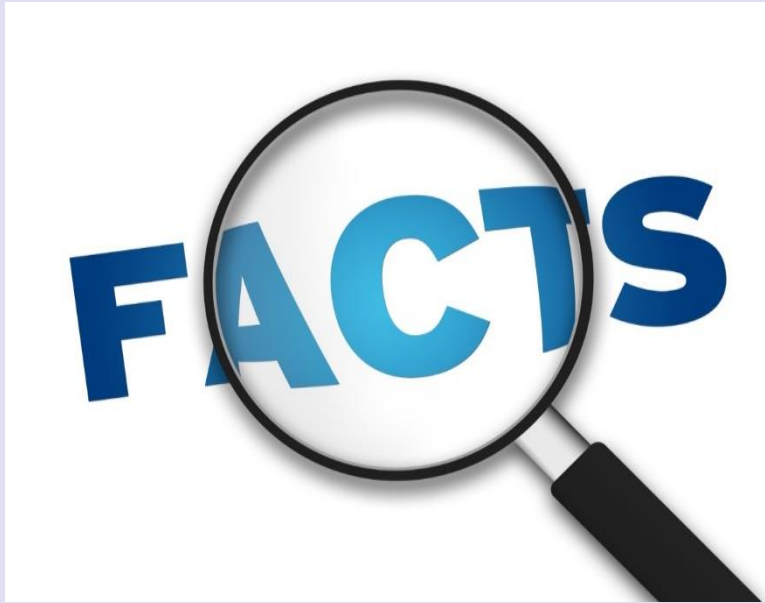
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# Creating happy school days: supporting anxiety and mental health



# Why do we need to actively 'create' - The harsh reality

The growing number of children and young people experiencing poor mental health is one of the biggest challenges facing our teachers.



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# The Harsh Reality





# There is a positive.....



Over the course of their education, children spend over 7,800 hours at school.

That is a lot of potential happiness/ too much time not to enjoy it.

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# What would a happy school day look like .....



# What are the barriers?





# So how can we make happiness..... Through relationships



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# So how can we make happiness ..... through sleep.

Children and young people who usually get less than the recommended 9 hours sleep on a school night are more likely to feel that worries get in the way of school work (32% vs 22%), according to a survey of over 1,100 10-11 year-olds and 13-15 year-olds carried out by Place2Be (2019).

More than half (56%) of children and young people say they worry “all the time” about at least one thing to do with their school life, home life or themselves – and those getting less sleep are less able to cope with worries, saying they often don’t know what to do when they’re worried (22% vs 18%), and once they start worrying, they cannot stop (36% vs 28%).

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# So how can we make happiness ..... teaching resilience.

Building Resilience- children need to be taught to have a treasure chest of resources that they can call upon when needed. This will help children to manage big emotions and regulate.

What would go into your child's treasure chest?

We call them calming bags. What would go in your child's bag?

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# So how can we make happiness ..... through exercise.

**Be active** –Find an activity that children enjoy and make it a part of your life.

What can you do as a family?

What have you found that is really effective. Can this be added into the school day?

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So how can we make happiness  
..... through a safe, predictable  
routine.

### **Routines and Structure are important**

Establish consistent daily routines and structure. Routines reduce anxiety and regular daily patterns emphasize predictability.

Can this be supported with visual aids?

So how can we make happiness  
..... through teaching children  
about feelings and emotions.

### **Help Children Identify Feelings**

Help your child notice different feelings by naming various feelings she or others may experience.

Explain how people show their feelings (through faces, bodies, words) and that showing your feelings is an important way for others to understand how you are feeling.

Help your child notice how different feelings “feel” in his own body, for example tight hands, butterflies in stomach, etc.

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# Provide Opportunities for Communicating about Feelings



Answering honestly and accurately to 'how are you feeling' is soooooooooo difficult?

Do you notice how your child is feeling.

Use a scripts to validate and acknowledge your child's feelings as a starting point.

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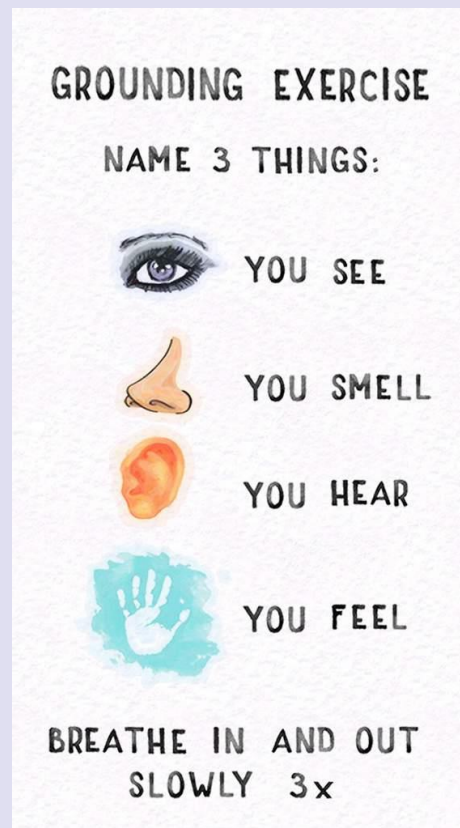
# Provide Soothing and Comforting Strategies

Comforting and soothing a child are very helpful strategies that parents can use in relieving anxiety. These strategies communicate to the child that she is safe and cared for. Verbal reassurances of safety and love, rocking, cuddling, holding, massage, singing, and telling stories are just some of the soothing and comforting strategies that parents can use.

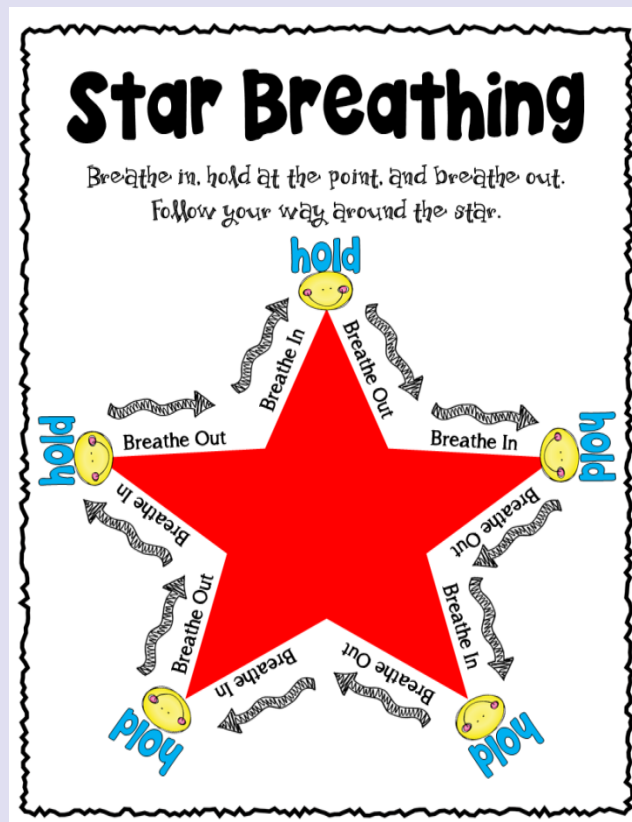
How are children being supported in school?

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# Teach children to ground themselves



# Teach children to ground themselves



So how can we make happiness  
..... through understanding anxiety  
is fear.

### **Respect Your Child's Fears**

Children are generally not helped when parents tell them to stop being afraid of something. What is helpful to most children is an approach in which you acknowledge their fears and at the same time let them know that you will help them overcome these fears.

**PLEASE DON'T DISMISS THE FEELING! It's a lost opportunity!**

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# So how can we make happiness .....Modelling and encouraging being brave

## **Encourage Brave Behaviour**

While children are generally not helped when parents demand that they face their fears all at once, they are helped when parents can gently encourage them to approach feared situations. This is because exposure to feared situations leads to desensitisation and reduction of the fear and anxiety.

However, approaching feared situations can be difficult for anxious children since they would rather avoid them.

Can the situation be chunked to make it far less daunting.

The child can then grow in confidence as they overcome each hurdle.



# So how can we make happiness.....

## Remember the happy times

Keep a record of the happy times!

Photograph album, blog, happiness jar. Spend time everyday reflecting of the happy times. Mix home and school memories.



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# So how can we make happiness..... Feel good by giving to others.

**Give to others** – How can children contribute to the school community and wider community.



# So how can we promote happiness?

Huge national campaigns to raise awareness of mental health.

Schools play a key part in turning national aspiration into reality.

Encourage all adults to listen- to really listen. And hear the feelings and wishes of the children and to work with, not do to.

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Thank you for listening



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