

## ***Normal Reactions and Techniques You May Find Helpful Following an Upsetting Incident***

**Following Friday's events, some of you may be feeling a range of emotions that are completely normal and expected under the circumstances. We spoke to some girls this morning in school (15.2.16) and we thought the following information and techniques may be useful, particularly if you don't have the opportunity to talk to friends this week.**

If you have experienced an upsetting situation it is possible that you will experience many of the feelings, physical symptoms, thoughts and behaviour patterns described below.

*Please tick the boxes which regularly apply to you.*



### **Feelings**

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Fearful / Scared  
Emotionally numb  
Furious / Raging  
Sad / Tearful  
Irritable  
Overwhelmed / Helpless



### **Physical Symptoms**

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Restless  
Heart racing  
Disturbed sleep pattern  
Sweating  
Tense muscles



## Thoughts

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I'm to blame for what happened  
I'm out of control  
Why has this happened?  
Something awful might happen  
Flashbacks or nightmares of the event  
It's going to happen again



## Behaviour Patterns

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Restless and distractible  
Angry outbursts and antisocial behaviour  
Avoiding social contact  
Hyper-alert and easily startled  
Avoiding things relating to the trauma  
Quiet and withdrawn

### *Life Events:*

Often after an upsetting incident it is difficult to understand what happened and reason through why it might have occurred. Recalling and trying to process these events is common and, even though this may be upsetting, it can be helpful in order to eventually resolve these difficult emotions.

### *Thinking Styles:*

It is common to question how we think about situations and it is good to tell others how you are feeling.

*Behavioural Explanations:*

Experiencing an upsetting event can affect our behaviour. We might avoid certain places, activities or people. This may be because they are directly related to the incident, or that it triggers a memory. This is a normal reaction.

## **How have you been coping so far?**

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You may have been dealing with at least some of these emotions already. Think about what you've done so far to cope, and how effective these strategies have been.

- Think about how you might have coped well with difficulties in the past.
- What is going well currently and what you are doing to achieve that?
- What coping strategies and support do you have available to you? Could you be making better use of these?
  - Social support - speaking to people; family, friends, relatives, colleagues, etc.
  - Confidence - being sure of your own ability to cope.
  - Problem solving - being able to work out solutions to problems.
  - Self-awareness - knowing how you are thinking, feeling and behaving.
  - Looking after yourself - making sure that you have some time to yourself. For example going for walks, having a relaxing bath, etc.

## **Relaxation**

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It is important to make time to relax and do activities that are enjoyable. This can help to improve your mood by calming the body and mind. It can also help you to sleep. Without taking the time to unwind, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

Relaxation can involve doing something that you enjoy, or just being by yourself. Good examples might be reading a book or having a bath. Exercise is also particularly effective at helping us to relax. What you do does not really matter. Try to choose something that you will look forward to and that gives you a break. Doing an activity that you enjoy will also give you less time to spend worrying. Here are a list of activities that might help you to relax.

Suggestions:

- Do some exercise (e.g. swim, cycle)
- Read a book
- Watch your favourite TV show
- Go to the cinema
- Do something creative (e.g. draw, paint)
- Visit a friend or family member
- Have a bath

Try to add some of your own ideas into the box below. You will know what works best for you.



Try to find time to relax every day. This might seem difficult, but it is worth making time for. It can help you to feel a lot better.

There are also some exercises described in the next few pages. They are specifically designed to help you to relax.

### **Controlled breathing**

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This simple technique involves focusing on and slowing down our breathing patterns. Many people find this simple exercise very relaxing. It can be particularly helpful for those who feel dizzy or light headed when they feel worried or stressed. This sometimes happens because people's breathing changes and gets quicker when they feel upset.

Learning controlled breathing exercises can help you to manage these feelings more effectively. It can also help to give your mind and body a chance to calm down.

Remember, you can use this exercise to help you relax at any time. You could even use it to help you get off to sleep.



### **Beginning**

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Get into a comfortable position.



### **Middle**

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Work out a stable breathing rhythm. Perhaps try to breathe in for three seconds, hold this breathe for two seconds, and then breathe out for three seconds. It can be helpful to count as you do this (e.g. IN: 1-2-3, HOLD: 1-2, OUT: 1-2-3, HOLD: 1-2).



### **Ending**

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Repeat this action for a few minutes. You should soon begin to feel more relaxed. If you were feeling dizzy then this should also get better after a few minutes.

### **Muscular relaxation**

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Tension often builds up when we feel upset or stressed. Muscular relaxation exercises can help you to control such unpleasant symptoms. They can reduce physical tension and help you to relax in general.

During this exercise you have to tense and then relax different muscles in your body. You should focus on the feelings that you experience whilst doing this. With practice you will then be more able to recognise and respond to the onset of tension.

You can work through as many muscle groups as you like. Don't feel that you have to cover every muscle in your whole body. It can be helpful to stick to the same muscle groups each time you practice. That way you can get into a routine which you can easily remember. If you practice this nearly every day you will probably notice an improvement after a couple of weeks.



## **Beginning**

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Find somewhere comfortable and quiet where you won't be interrupted. You can either sit or lie down to practice this exercise. Begin by focusing on your breathing. Try to have a slow and comfortable pace. You could use the controlled breathing technique described earlier. Do this for a few minutes to prepare for the muscular relaxation exercise.



## **Middle**

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Try to tense each muscle group for around five seconds. Don't tense the muscle too tight. Focus on the sensations that this brings. Then relax your muscles for a similar length of time, and again, focus on how this feels. Then move onto the next muscle group. Try to remember to keep your breathing at a comfortable pace throughout. Below are some suggestions of muscle groups that you may wish to work through:

- Legs - point your toes and tense your muscles as if you were trying to stand up.
- Stomach - tense your stomach muscles.
- Arms - make fists and tense your muscles as if you were trying to lift something.
- Shoulders - shrug your shoulders. Lift them up towards your ears.
- Face - make a frowning expression. Squeeze your eyes shut and screw up your nose. Clench your teeth.



## **Ending**

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It can be helpful to spend a few minutes just lying quietly in a relaxed state. See if you can notice any tension in your body and try to relax it. Otherwise, just let the tension be. If your mind wanders, try to bring your concentration back to your breathing.

Finally, count down silently and slowly: 5-4-3-2-1-0, and come out of the relaxation in your own time. See if it's possible to carry that relaxed feeling into whatever you do next.

## **Distraction**

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Distraction is a good technique if you're feeling upset. This can also give you space to deal with a situation in a more considered and positive manner. It is also helpful when you don't have the space or time to use a more proactive approach, such as a relaxation exercise.

Distraction simply involves trying to take your mind off uncomfortable thoughts. You can do this by trying to focus on something unrelated. Often this helps them to pass. It is still important to remember that the symptoms of anxiety are not harmful or dangerous. Even if you didn't use distraction or relaxation techniques, nothing terrible would happen.

Ideas to help distract you from any troubling thoughts include:

- Try to appreciate small details in your surroundings.
- Count backwards from 1000 in multiples of 7.
- Focus on your breathing, for example, how it feels to breathe in and out.
- Count things that you can see that begin with a particular letter.
- Visualise being in a pleasant, safe and comfortable environment (e.g. being on a beach).
- Listen to your favourite music. Try to pick out all the different instruments and sounds that you can hear.

As with any relaxation exercise, it may take a few minutes before you begin to feel like it's working.

## Activity Diary

Try to plan activities to fill your week. This can help you to make good use of your time.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Morning							
Morning							
Lunch							
Afternoon							
Afternoon							
Dinner							
Evening							
Bedtime							

## Final Word

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Hopefully, some of these ideas will be helpful. You can continue to use the techniques you found helpful long into the future and they should continue to benefit you. If some of the ideas are not particularly helpful at first, it is perhaps worth sticking with them for a few weeks to give them a chance to work.

**Remember, talking to a friend or adult will usually help.**

*The following service may be able to offer support, information and advice, if needed, before you return to school.*

**CAMHs (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)**

**Tel 0151 293 3662**