

# Back to School Anxiety

## A guide for young people

When you have been off school for the holidays, you might be feeling anxious about returning. Like many other young people, you might have become used to being off school and therefore feel nervous about getting back into the swing of things again. The important thing to remember is that this is NORMAL and you can use this guide to help you make the transition back to school

### get prepared

Try your best to spend the days leading up to going back to school to get back into a routine. Make sure your bed time gets back to normal and that you set an alarm to get up at the time you would usually get up for school. This might be difficult at first but it will help you get a good night's sleep and make it much easier to get up for school again when you need to.



### talk & ask questions

If you're feeling worried/anxious, chances are that someone you know is feeling the same way. Talk to your friends and family about how you're feeling as this can help you feel better just by getting it off your mind.



### breathe and ground yourself

If you start to notice you're feeling anxious, just remember that it's normal and take a big, deep breath into your stomach for 4 seconds and then take a big, deep breath out for another 4 seconds. Repeat this to help to reduce your heart rate and feel calmer. You might also want to try using a grounding technique. Try the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method to look for:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can feel
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste (or most recently tasted)



### get help with your anxiety

You can use this guide to help better understand your feelings of anxiety and learn some strategies for how to better manage it and feel better. But, if you continue to struggle, you can always make a request for support with your school's Mental Health Support Team (MHST). Just ask a member of staff at school to discuss this with us and we can help you to get the right support.

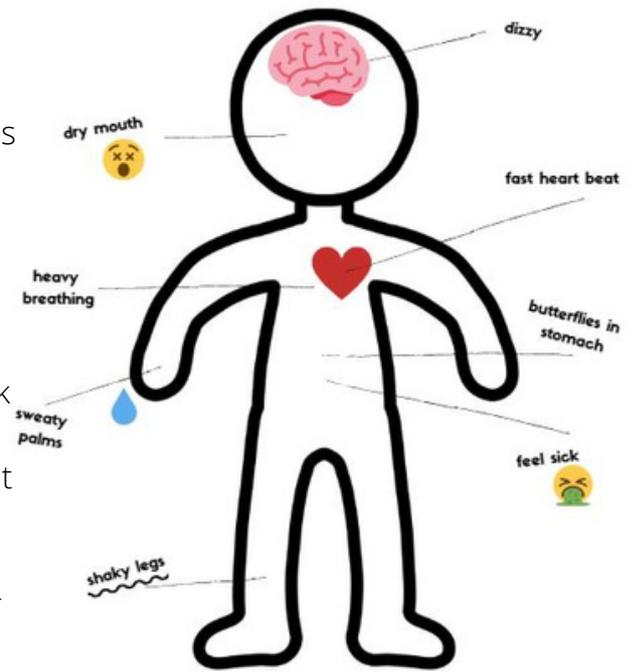


## symptoms of anxiety

When feeling anxious, we all experience some physical symptoms which can be unpleasant and upsetting. It's important to remember that these are NORMAL body reactions to a feared situation that everyone experiences at some time or another. What symptoms do you recognise when you're feeling anxious?

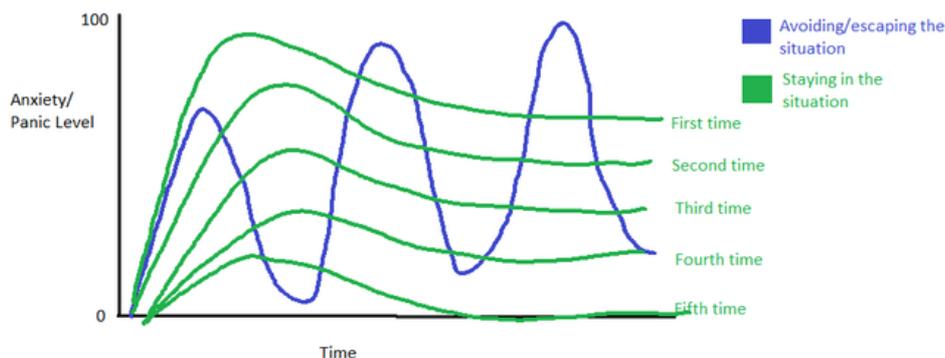
## the fight or flight response

Humans developed this response as cave men because it was a much more dangerous time to live back then (think running away from saber tooth tigers and hunting for food). The Fight or Flight response meant that cave men's bodies went into survival mode whenever their brains sensed danger. This meant their heart rate and blood pressure would increase so they had a better chance of running away (flight) or fighting the danger (fight). We all react in different ways when we feel anxious and our Fight or Flight response kicks in, but it's important to remember that it is normal!



## habituation (the more you do it, the easier it will get)

Evidence shows that the more we avoid feared or uncomfortable situations, the more anxious we will become. This is because our body and brain are learning to fear that situation. For many young people, the longer you have spent away from school and the more you have become used to being at home, the worse your fear/anxiety around school has become. This is because you haven't had any opportunities to test out that fear and teach your brain that there is nothing to be worried or scared about. You will therefore need to HABITUATE back to school. This means that, the first time you go back to school, you will most likely experience the symptoms of anxiety because your fight or flight response has reacted to the feared situation. However, what we know is that, the longer you stay in that situation, the less anxious you will feel. This means the more times you go back to school, the easier it will become. The good thing is that this is NORMAL and that you can re-teach your brain over time that there is nothing to be scared of.



It's a little bit like jumping in a cold swimming pool. At first, all you want to do is get out of the pool. But, the longer you stay in the pool, the more you get used to it and you no longer want to get out.