



Brighter Futures for Kids
helping little people cope with big feelings

Boost Your Child's Happiness:

Instant actionable tips for nurturing children when
they are stressed, anxious or overwhelmed



Frances Weston
www.brighterfuturesforkids.com



Hi, I'm Frances



I'm passionate about helping children and young people cope with life's challenging and distressing times. I've been a child counsellor and play therapist for almost 30 years working both in private practice, and within the NHS in the UK in 2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) teams.

I've written this e-book to offer information and practical suggestions to help parents who are concerned about their child's mental health. It's packed with useful tips to support you in supporting your child, and helping them build emotional intelligence, cope with difficult situations and thrive. Sometimes just having a few ideas about what to do and what to say can make all the difference.

I hope you find it helpful. Do reach out and let me know, or connect with me on social media.



Warmest wishes

Frances x



What's happening in your child's life at the moment?

- Has your child experienced a heartbreaking bereavement, the breakup of their parents' relationship, distressing abuse, or another kind of trauma?
- Or perhaps they are struggling with anxiety that is interfering with their life, or they are being bullied, or they are having angry outbursts that they can't seem to control?
- Or are you worried that your child has low self-esteem or seems to be sad and depressed? Perhaps they are having difficulty sleeping, their appetite is concerning you, or they can't seem to make or keep friends. Maybe their school work is suffering, or they are refusing to go to school at all.
- Or maybe, they seem overwhelmed by the pressures and stresses of modern life - worried about exams, friendships, the environment, and other world issues such as Covid-19. These issues, combined with the ever present distraction and pressure of social media, can sometimes make young people feel overwhelmed and anxious.





The latest UK government figures show that 1 in 8 children and young people have a diagnosable mental health condition (that's 3 in an average sized classroom!) and an even higher number are experiencing emotional difficulties which are going undiagnosed.

The fact that many services designed to help are underfunded and oversubscribed adds to the problem, and means you as a parent are often left to cope with these very worrying issues affecting your children on your own, or face months on a waiting list before being able to access specialist help.

This guide is designed to help you understand how stress affects children, and give you some practical ideas for instantly helping your child or teen, and hopefully preventing more serious problems arising. It is not meant as a substitute for seeking professional help if this is needed (guidance on this can be found on pages 11-12) but as a means of empowering you to help your child in the meantime.



Recognising the signs that your child may be struggling with stress or overwhelm

When children and young people experience upsetting or challenging situations, it's hard for them to understand and express their feelings as they lack the emotional maturity and don't have the vocabulary that we do to help them.

So the signs that something is wrong can often be mistaken for what we might think of as bad or difficult behaviour – but really your child or teenager is letting you know something is wrong in the only ways they know how.

You may notice some of the following signs...

Is your child:

-  Struggling to pay attention and concentrate
-  Trying to control people and events
-  More tearful than normal
-  Having difficulty managing emotions – frequent meltdowns
-  Having difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
-  Having issues with food – a loss of appetite or comfort eating
-  Feeling agitated or angry





- 🦋 Experiencing unexplained pains like tummy aches and headaches
- 🦋 Having high expectations for themselves, including schoolwork or sports
- 🦋 Avoiding activities or events .e.g. sleepovers, school, spending time with friends
- 🦋 Displaying defiance and other challenging behaviours
- 🦋 Unable to cope with change or uncertainty
- 🦋 Needing lots of reassurance

“

There is no such thing as a ‘bad kid’ – just angry, hurt, tired, scared, confused, impulsive ones expressing their feelings and needs the only way they know how. We owe it to every single one of them to remember that

~ Jessica Stephens





Understanding and Interpreting your Child's Behaviour

Children who whinge and whine often just feel powerless and unable to cope.



Children who are bossy and controlling worry that they won't get their needs met

Children who taunt or compete with their siblings often need to feel more valued for who they are, and crave a stronger connection to their parent

Children who don't listen often feel that what they want is not acknowledged

Children who disrespect you are showing you that they don't feel connected enough to you

Children who rebel usually need a chance to feel more powerful and competent

“

Thinking of your child as behaving badly disposes you to think of punishment. Thinking of your child as struggling to handle something difficult encourages you to help them through their distress
~ Anon





How To Talk to Your Child When They are Upset or Angry



Sometimes its hard to know what to say when our children are upset, angry or anxious.

“

When your child is having a meltdown don't talk. Don't try to reason. Don't get angry. Your child can't hear you. Just be silent and loving until the storm passes. Words can come later

– Anon

When things have settled, these suggestions will help you get started:

Tell me all about it
That was really scary, sad etc
I will help you work it out
I know this is really hard for you
I'll stay close so you can find me when you're ready
I'm listening
Its ok to be sad/angry
I hear you
I want to be here for you
I know it doesn't feel fair and I can see why you're upset
I'm here with you. You're safe.
Do you want to do some dancing or running to get rid of the stressy energy?
What would you like to say to your worry/anger/sadness? What might it say back?
Lets draw it
What does it feel like in your body? Whereabouts do you feel your worry/fear/anger?
Match your breaths to mine
What's something we could do to help you feel better?





Instant actionable tips for helping your child cope when they seem to be struggling

Create a “safe” place in your home for your child to go when they seem stressed or overwhelmed - this could be their bedroom or yours, or a quiet space elsewhere in the house. Make sure they won't be disturbed by anyone and let them have some time to chill for a while. Reassure them that you are close by if they need you.

“

When little people are overwhelmed by emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos

- L R Knost

Encourage your child to create a safe place in their mind they can go to, where they feel relaxed and happy – it might be visualising a grandparent's or friend's house, or a holiday home by the sea, or a place associated with a happy memory (or it could be a made up place) . . . somewhere they can imagine when they are feeling overwhelmed or upset.

Play soothing music during down time - playing soft, soothing music can help children to calm down and can relieve stress. Help them create a playlist of their favourite music. Spotify has some good examples of music using binaural beats in the alpha frequencies (8-12 Hz) which are believed to encourage relaxation, promote positivity and decrease anxiety. Your child would need to listen to these with either headphones or earbuds to gain the benefits of the binaural beats.

Encourage safe contact with pets - time spent with animals is known to calm children and young people, brighten their mood and help them relax. This is why I incorporate Animal Assisted Therapy in the face-to-face Saplings and Seedlings programmes I offer to children and young people, and include my therapy dog, Bertha, in sessions if requested.

Be aware of physical symptoms of stress and provide activities to distract your child - calming activities, such as reading, going for a walk, or having a relaxing bath may help to alleviate some of the physical symptoms





Teach your child relaxation techniques they can try, such as deep breathing exercises. One idea would be to encourage your child to blow bubbles using a little pot of bubbles and a wand. It's a great way for them to practice deep breathing as they have to breathe in deeply and blow out slowly and carefully to make the bubbles. Or you could try asking your child to lie on their back and place a small teddy or other soft toy on their belly. Encourage them to breathe in and move the teddy upwards, then breathe out to bring it down again. This encourages deep belly breaths which are very calming. When I work with children in my Seedlings and Saplings programmes I teach a range of breathing and relaxation exercises to calm anxieties and reduce the intensity of other powerful feelings – children love to try them and find them really effective.

Help your child focus on solutions rather than on what might go wrong when they are worrying about something – explore their worst-case scenarios with them and think and talk together about how to find solutions and sort the situation out if the worst should happen. Encourage them to believe that they can handle it, or you can handle it together, so they feel empowered and confident.

Teach positive self-talk to your child - helping children to be aware of the negative way they talk to themselves, such as the use of “I can’t” or “Nobody likes me” and help them to develop a more positive way of talking to themselves

Discuss alternative ways of handling difficult feelings - talk to your child after a meltdown or anxiety attack about how the situation could have been different or what strategies could have been used (by both of you) to make the situation better. My online programmes, covering a range of issues, explain how to help children and young people express difficult feelings in healthy ways.

Help your child to get ‘grounded’ - here is the formula to do this: Encourage your child to take a moment to look around and find 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch, 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste. This process is called grounding, and it really helps when your child seems overwhelmed, or to have lost all control of their feelings.

Encourage your child to write or draw how they are feeling - ensure that they have some creative materials to hand for this – crayons, pens, big pieces of paper, or a journal, some stickers etc and encourage them to be creative without worrying about being perfect





Hugs – wrap your child in your arms for a genuine, warm hug.

Touch is soothing and will make them feel loved, safe and connected, and cause their brain to release serotonin, a happy, calming hormone. Combine this with a snuggle together on the sofa to encourage your stressed child to rest – overwhelming emotions such as grief, anger and fear can be exhausting.



Incorporate exercise into their day and take them outside if possible -

even a few simple stretching exercises can really help reduce stress, and just 10 minutes outside walking or playing catch in the fresh air can help a child feel happier, calmer and more grounded. This is due to the release of oxytocin – another ‘happy hormone’ and the significant reduction of stress hormones that occurs after exercise and being exposed to the sounds of nature. I incorporate Ecotherapy into my Seedlings and Saplings programmes for children and young people, as there are so many mental health benefits to be gained from spending time in nature.

Reward any efforts your child makes to manage their feelings positively -

when a child shows effort or is able to manage and express their feelings in healthy ways, let them know you have noticed and are proud of their efforts.



Environment – try to provide a positive, calm home environment for your child to reduce the levels of stress hormones. Work on keeping your own feelings under control – model healthy behaviour in relation to expressing any anger, fear or anxiety you may be feeling. Help your child maintain a healthy lifestyle with good sleeping habits, calm bedtime routines, limited screen or computer time in the evenings, a healthy diet rich in B vitamins which help healthy brain functioning, and positive family times e.g. board games, sharing chores, baking, and so on.

Take care of yourself – often whatever is affecting your child is something that is affecting the whole family for example, a bereavement. Often our focus is so much on making sure everyone else is ok, especially our children, that we can neglect to look after ourselves. It is not selfish to focus on yourself sometimes; you may also need some support to help you cope and be able to be there for your children. Even if you are not directly affected, it can be super stressful and very tiring trying to cope with an angry or anxious child and you will need to recharge your batteries whenever you can. I may be able to help you as alongside my work with children and young people, I also offer bespoke programmes of support for women which can be accessed in person or virtually, from anywhere in the world [Find out more here](#)



Seek help from a professional – sometimes, despite our best efforts as parents, we can see our children are still struggling and we need to ask for outside help. This doesn't mean you have failed! Quite the opposite in fact. Recognising that your child needs extra help and getting it for them is a sign of a great parent! Mental health problems which are not addressed during childhood or adolescence can not only mar a child's experience of life at the time, but can also lead to serious difficulties in adulthood. Early intervention is key.

“

The longer a child is left without help for a mental health problem, and the more often it recurs, the more likely it is to cast a shadow over their entire life. Early high quality help, offered quickly and combined with ongoing support to prevent problems coming back, is essential.

- Khan 2016

Signs that indicate you may need professional help for your child or teen:

- 🦋 Your child is feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks (e.g., crying regularly, feeling fatigued, feeling unmotivated).
- 🦋 They are out-of-control, and indulging in risk-taking behaviours that can cause harm to themselves or others.
- 🦋 They experience sudden overwhelming fear for no obvious reason, sometimes with a racing heart, physical discomfort, or fast breathing.
- 🦋 They're not eating, or they're throwing up, and there has been significant weight loss or gain.
- 🦋 They are having severe mood swings and/or angry episodes that cause problems in relationships.
- 🦋 You suspect repeated use of drugs or alcohol.
- 🦋 You've observed drastic changes in behaviour, personality or sleeping habits (e.g., waking up early and acting agitated).
- 🦋 Your child is having extreme difficulty in concentrating and this is causing problems with school work.
- 🦋 They have intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities like spending time with friends or going to school.





Taking the next step: How to find professional help for your child or teen:

If you notice any of the signs listed on the previous page, and feel your child or teen needs additional help, there are a number of options open to you:

- 👉 You may like to try one of my [online courses](#) to help you support your child at a deeper level. As well as videos for you and your child to watch, there are downloadable workbooks for your child to complete, and lots of support and advice for you as a parent.
- 👉 If you live close enough to Derbyshire in the UK, you can bring your child to see me in person at my beautiful premises, Sunshine Barn. Full details of the face-to-face Seedlings and Saplings programmes I offer can be found by visiting my main website [here](#)
- 👉 If you think your child or teen needs to work with a counsellor but you are too far away to work with me in person, see if you can find someone in your area. Try speaking to a health professional with knowledge of services local to you, or you could visit online directories such as:-

counselling-directory.org.uk in the UK

psychologytoday.com in the UK and worldwide



I hope you have found this ebook helpful and informative and it will be a resource you can refer to again in the future. Remember, you are not alone, and I am happy to help if you need further support.

About the Author

As one of the leading counsellors and coach/therapists in her field, Frances is known for using transformational techniques and innovative strategies to help her clients transform their lives and move forward positively.

Alongside her considerable qualifications and professional experience, Frances has a wealth of life experience which gives her an ability to relate to her clients and put them at their ease. As well as working with children and young people professionally, she is a mum and stepmum, and has eight grandchildren.

She has spent almost 30 years working in her own successful private practice based in the UK seeing adults and children, and also worked for 14 years as a part-time Highly Specialist Child and Adolescent Therapist in the NHS.

As one of the first therapists in the UK to introduce animal assisted therapy into her practice, Frances also pioneered the introduction of this innovative approach in her work with children within the NHS.

Frances' work has been featured in numerous publications and professional journals; she had her own column called 'Counsellors Casebook' in the British Journal of School Nursing for several years, about her counselling work with children, and was a member of their Editorial Board. She has often spoken on BBC Radio on issues around mental health and wellbeing.

She is accredited by the BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) and adheres to their Code of Ethics and Practice. She is also a senior accredited member of the NCP (National Council of Psychotherapists); and a founding member of the Coaching Division of the BACP.

