



Finding the off switch when kids worry

By Michael Grose

Rumination is the ruination of a peaceful mind. If you've ever spent a sleepless night worrying then you'll know how problems always seem bigger when you keep tossing them around in your head.

It can seem like everything is stacked against you. When this happens you've got to find the off switch so you can get away from your worries for a while. The same principle holds for children and teenagers when they worry. Their problems just seem to get bigger and they need to turn them off or tone them down so they can ease their anxiety.

There are eight easy-to-learn strategies that you can teach your kids to prevent them from ruminating – going over the same thoughts and worries over and over again.

Broaden their vision

Kids get tunnel vision when they worry. They often can't see the bigger picture. For instance, a young person may fret over minor work matters such getting the exact font match for an assignment they are working on, and neglect to get the sleep necessary for good learning the next day. Sometimes it takes a wise adult to remind children and young people about what really is important to them.

Put their attention elsewhere

Placing attention away from worries is an age old technique for parents and teachers. Commonly known as distraction, the act of focusing attention on something other than what causes them distress is vital for good mental health. Examples of distractions include – going outside, playing a game, shooting some basketball hoops or listening to music.

Give the worry a name

Somehow giving a worry a name makes it feel less scary and more manageable. My favourite picture storybook for toddlers '*There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof*' by Hazel Edwards personifies fear of the dark as a friendly hippo. Much more friendly and easier to boss around if you're a child.

Put your worries in a jar

Wouldn't it be great to put all your worries into a safe and throw away the key? As an adult you may do this when you take time out to watch your

favourite TV show; or lose yourself wandering for hours online. Children need something a little more practical. They can write their worries on some paper and lock them in away in a jar by the side of the bed at the end of the day. It's good to know that their worries can't get out because they are locked up tight.

Limit talking time

It's good if kids can talk about what's on their mind but talking needs to be contained to prevent their worries from dominating their lives. Set aside ten minutes a day to talk about their worries and then put worry time aside until tomorrow.

Normalise rather than lionise their anxiety

Anxious kids are very sensitive to their parents' concerns and worries. One way we build their concerns is by continually reassuring them that things will be fine. One reassurance should be sufficient most of the time followed by "*I've already talked to you about that.*" Continually going over old ground can allow worries to linger longer than necessary.

Give them the tools to relax

Some kids might take their mind off their worries by escaping in a fiction book or playing in the garden. Some children need a bigger set of tools including mindfulness and exercise to help them neutralise their worries. Pay attention to what helps your child sufficiently escape their worries.

Move baby, move

Get kids moving. Physical exercise is not only a great distraction but it releases feel-good endorphins that help children and young people feel better and more optimistic about the future.

For more on anxiety and the tools you need to support you raise kids who worry or feel anxious, our [Parenting Anxious Kids online course](#) is a fantastic resource.