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PAUSE 

CONTROL 

WIN 

# UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS



This guide has been developed by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA), in partnership with East Midlands Mental Health Support Team within Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT), as part of the local 'Where Will it End' campaign.

The guide will help you understand what emotions and feelings are, how to recognise them, and how you can control them. If you haven't already, you may want to watch this video before reading the guide.



**If you are a parent or carer, please use this guide to navigate conversations with your child about emotions and feelings and how they can impact their behaviour. The VRA has developed an animation in partnership with Staffordshire Police for children aged 5 to 10.**

Visit the 'Where Will it End' webpage to watch the animation: [www.wherewillitend.co.uk](http://www.wherewillitend.co.uk)

# TABLE OF CONTENT

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**What are emotions & feelings?**

**Why do we have emotions & feelings?**

**How can I recognise what I'm feeling?**

**How can emotions & feelings affect us?**

**Why is it important to understand my emotions & feelings?**

**The Fight, Flight, Freeze Model**

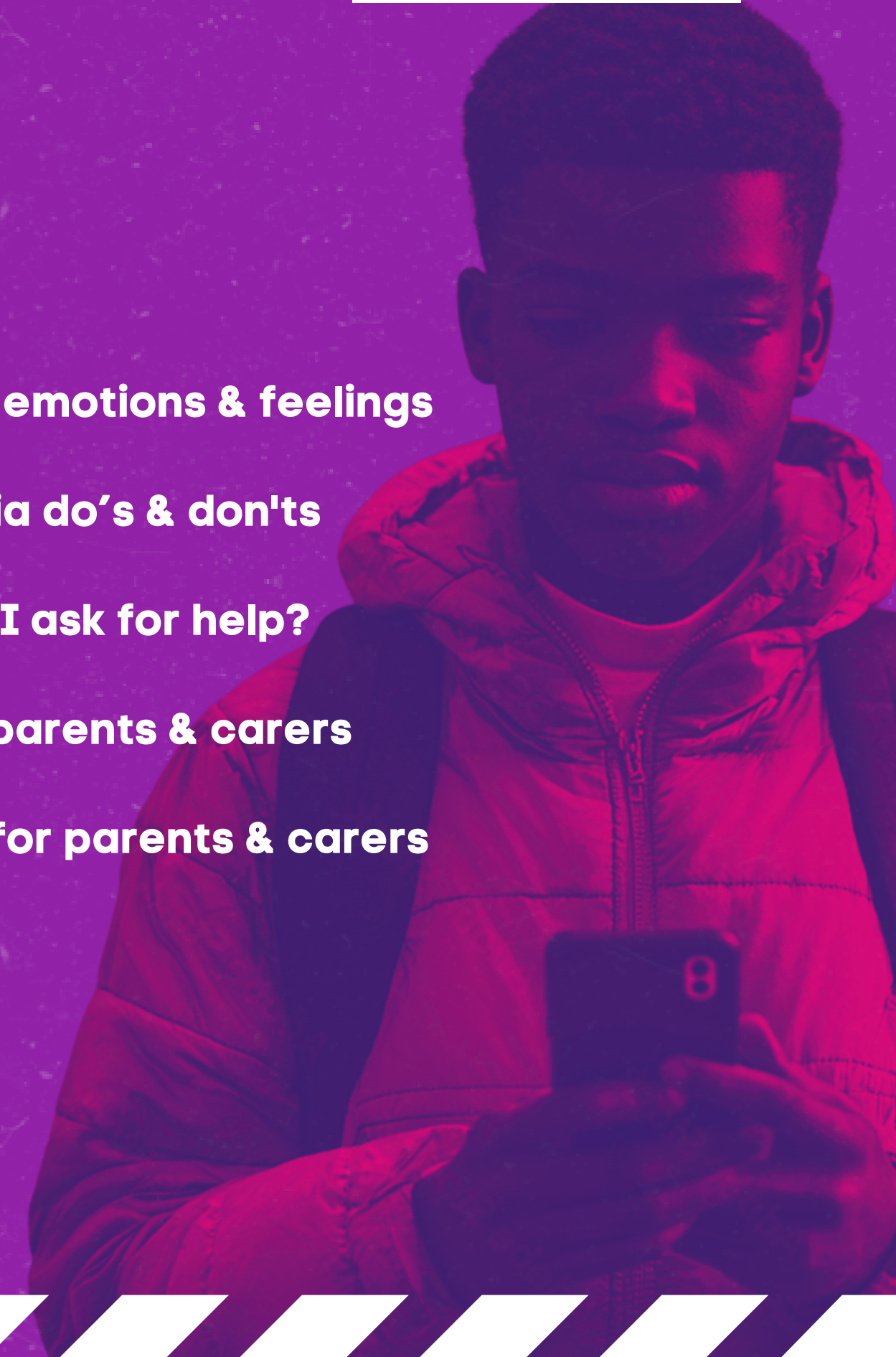
**Controlling emotions & feelings**

**Social media do's & don'ts**

**Where can I ask for help?**

**Advice for parents & carers**

**Resources for parents & carers**



# WHAT ARE EMOTIONS & FEELINGS?

The terms **emotions** and **feelings** are often used together. However, understanding the difference between them is important as they connect to our everyday experiences and play an important role in how we see and interact with the world.

## ‘EMOTIONS’

Emotions usually involve three parts:

- **A subjective experience** - this means we all experience emotions differently. What might annoy one person, might make another person really angry.

- **A physiological response** - this is how our body reacts to our emotions. When we feel certain emotions, our bodies can physically react. For example, when we feel nervous we may feel sweaty.
- **A behavioural or expressive response** - this response is the way we behave or change our body language based on our emotions. For example, if we feel threatened we may tense our fists ready to protect ourselves.

Everybody experiences emotions. They can affect the decisions we make and our behaviour even before we realise we have them.

## ‘FEELINGS’

We all experience feelings differently. Unlike emotions, feelings are shaped by personal experiences, beliefs and memories. Feelings are personal reactions to our emotions, which can be different depending on our individual experiences and perspectives. They can persist over longer periods, affecting our mood and behaviour.

# WHY DO WE HAVE EMOTIONS & FEELINGS?



Everybody has emotions and feelings, but have you ever wondered why we feel these emotions? Let's explore!

## **Our brain is the boss**

Our brain is like the control centre for our emotions. It helps us feel different things based on what's happening around us. There's a special part of the brain called the limbic system that helps us understand our feelings. When something surprising or scary happens, like a loud noise, this part of the brain helps us to react quickly.

Dr Dan Siegel's hand model of the brain explains what happens when we feel angry and lose control of our behaviour:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdaUZ\\_wbD1c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdaUZ_wbD1c)

## **Chemicals in our body**

Our bodies have tiny messengers that help control how we feel called neurotransmitters. For example, when we feel happy, our brain releases a chemical called 'dopamine'. This is like a little cheerleader that makes us feel good.

## **What happens when we feel?**

When we feel emotions, our bodies react in different ways. If we're scared, our hearts might beat faster and we might breathe quickly. If we're happy, we might smile and feel warm inside. Our brains also try to make sense of what's happening, which helps us understand why we feel a certain way.

## **How we show our feelings**

Emotions can make us act in different ways. For instance, when we're excited, we might jump up and down or shout with joy. But when we're sad, we might want to take a quiet moment to ourselves.

# HOW CAN I RECOGNISE WHAT I'M FEELING?

## Emotions you may recognise

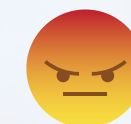
Emotions and feelings are triggered by events in our everyday lives, and are part of being human. Sometimes our emotions can surprise us, but recognising these emotions can help us to know how we are feeling.



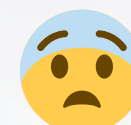
**Happiness** - Often results in smiling and feeling positive about a situation or person.



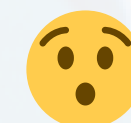
**Sadness** - Can often lead to crying, not wanting to take part in social activities, and feelings of unhappiness or upset about a particular situation or person.



**Anger** - A strong feeling of frustration and unhappiness. It often results in increased heart rate, tension, and possibly aggressive behaviour towards another person.



**Fear** - When we feel scared or worried about something or someone we feel threatened by. It can cause physical changes like increased heart rate, sweating and heightened alertness.



**Surprise** - Often triggered by an unexpected event. It can be positive or negative and usually involves a physical reaction like gasping or widening of the eyes.

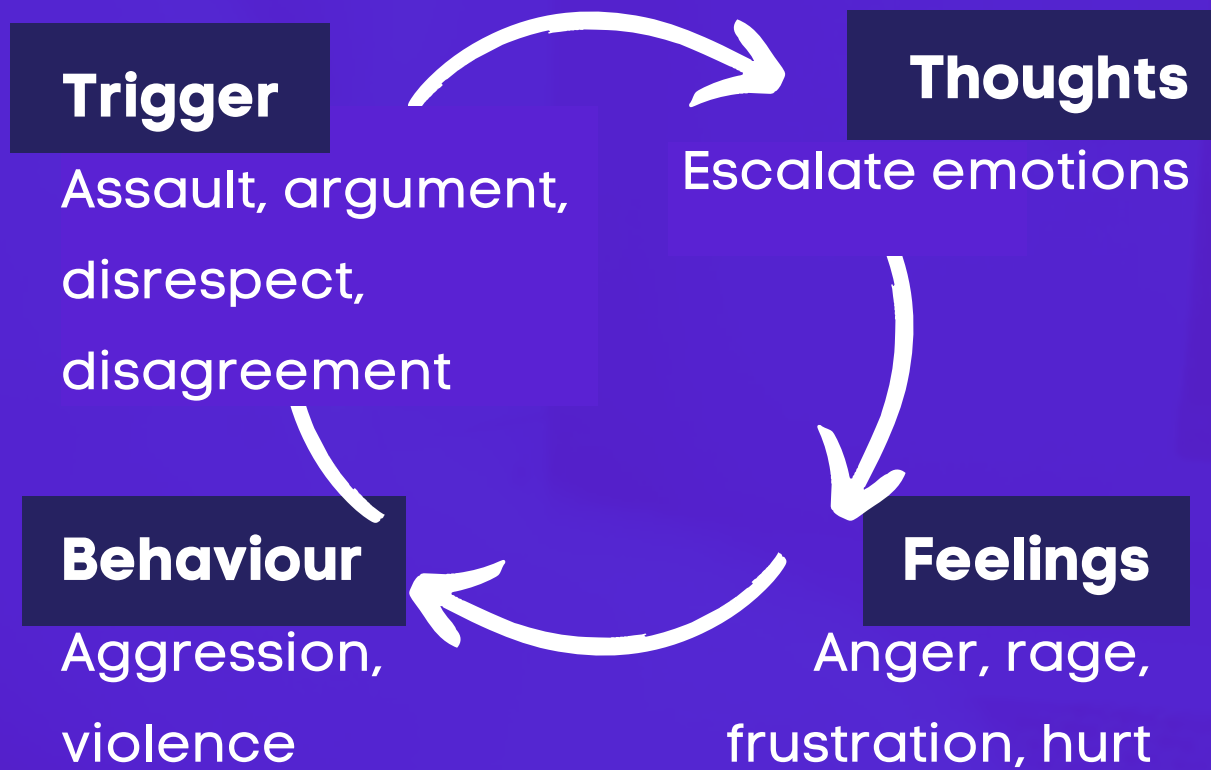
# HOW CAN EMOTIONS & FEELINGS AFFECT US?

When we experience emotions, different things happens in our bodies. These include:

**Physical changes:** Emotions trigger physical responses in our body such as an increased heart rate, sweating and changes in breathing. For example, fear might result in a rapid heartbeat and quick breathing, preparing the body for a fight-or-flight response (we explain more about this on page 10).

**Our thoughts:** Our brain assesses the situation or thing that has triggered our emotion, which can influence the intensity and type of emotion we experience. This assessment helps us to interpret the situation and significance of the emotional trigger.

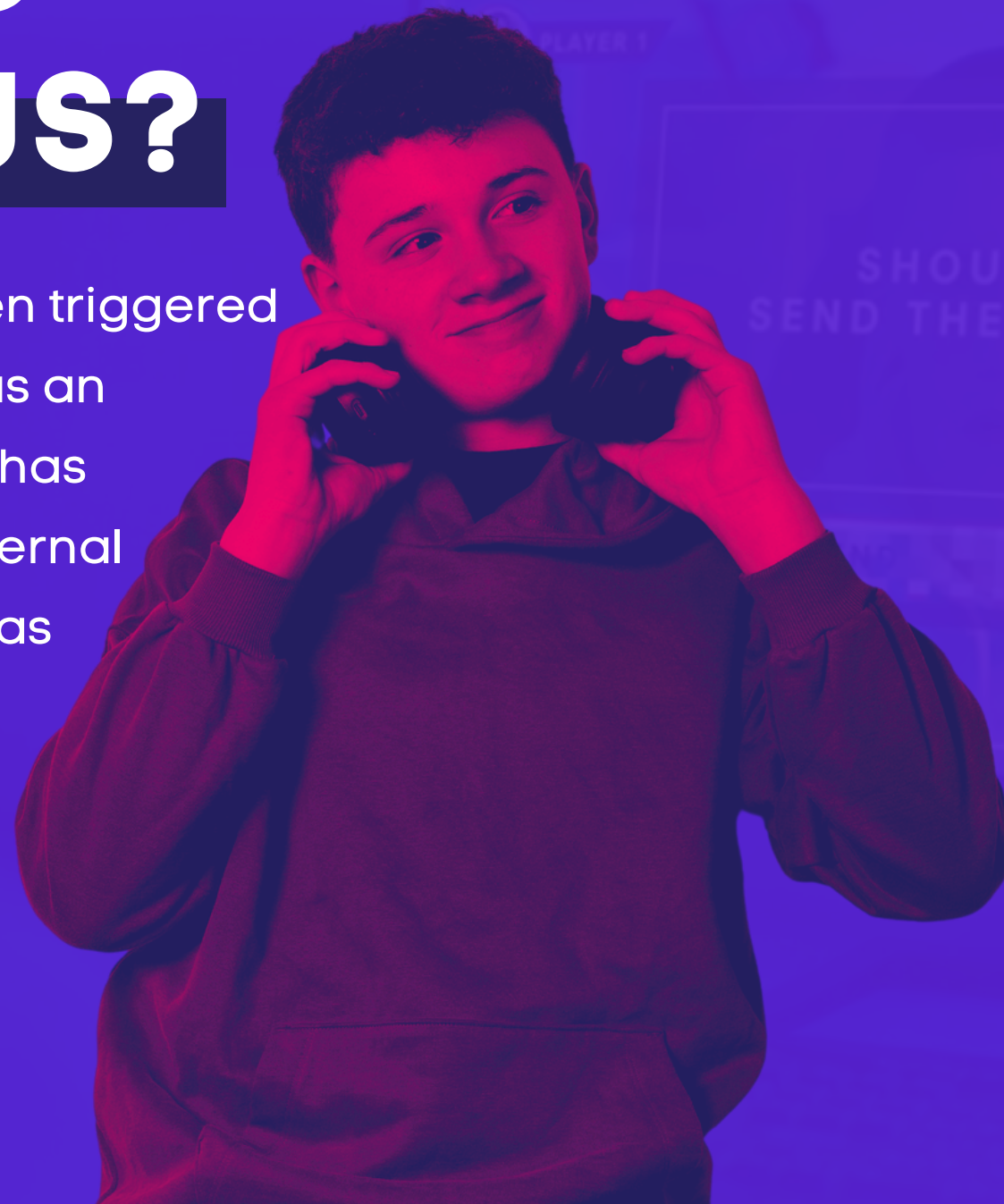
**Our behaviours:** Emotions often lead us to respond in a specific way, such as smiling when happy, avoiding a threat when afraid, or lashing out when angry. The image on the left shows how a trigger can influence our behaviour.



# HOW CAN EMOTIONS & FEELINGS AFFECT US?

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When we feel angry, it is often triggered by an external factor such as an argument. Once the trigger has happened, we then have internal thoughts that assess what has happened.



These thoughts can escalate our emotions and increase our feelings, resulting in anger or rage. When we have these feelings, we may then display negative behaviours and behave in an aggressive or violent way.

It's important to remember that everyone feels emotions in their own way.

What makes you happy might not be the same for someone else. Our past experiences and the things we believe in can change how we feel. So, emotions are important because they help us to understand ourselves and connect with others.

The next time you feel happy, sad or even a little scared, remember it's all part of being human.

# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND MY EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS?

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Being able to tell the difference between emotions and feelings is important for a number of reasons:

## **Emotional awareness**

It helps to improve self-awareness, helping us to recognise our emotional state and underlying feelings. This awareness is the first step in managing emotions effectively.

## **Improved communication**

By understanding the difference between emotions and feelings,

you can talk more clearly about how you feel. This can help people to understand why you are behaving a certain way.

## **Better emotional regulation**

Being able to recognise our emotional reaction from our feelings allows us to better control our emotions. This can help when making decisions and can prevent us from reacting without thinking about the risks and consequences.

## **Better understanding of others**

Understanding that other people may experience similar emotions but understand and control them differently helps us support others.

## **Different emotions make us act in different ways**

Have you ever wanted to shout at someone who was being annoying? Or wanted to give someone a hug when they were really sad? Have you ever really wanted to take the last piece of cake? Wanting to do these things is because of our emotions. Emotions can make us act in different ways but it's important to remember that we can control our emotions and act in a way that would be better for us in the long term.

# THE FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE MODEL



## FIGHT

You stand your ground and try to tackle the situation head-on. This response kicks in when you feel like you need to defend yourself. Example: Someone pushes you in the hallway, and you push back without thinking.



## FLIGHT

You feel the need to escape. Your brain tells you to get away from the situation as quickly as possible. Example: You see a big argument starting, and instead of getting involved, you walk away to avoid trouble.



## FREEZE

You feel stuck - like your body won't move. Your brain decides that staying still might be the safest option. Example: A teacher suddenly calls on you in class, and your mind goes blank. You don't know what to say, so you just sit there, frozen.

# CONTROLLING EMOTIONS & FEELINGS?

Understanding how we feel is an important part of feeling safe, happy and healthy. It involves understanding what our bodies are telling us. Here are a few ways to help you recognise and understand your feelings more clearly:

## **Pay attention to how you feel**

Our bodies often give us clues about how we are feeling. For example, stress might feel like tightness in the chest, while happiness might feel like a warm sensation spreading through the body. By becoming more aware of these physical sensations, you can better understand your emotions.

## **Reflect on your thoughts**

Feelings are closely linked to our thoughts. Take a moment to reflect on what you are thinking.

Are your thoughts negative or positive? Are they focused on the past, present or future? By reflecting on your thought patterns, you may be able to identify the emotions that are influencing your feelings.

## **Keep a journal**

Writing about your experiences, thoughts and feelings can help you process and understand them better. A journal allows you to explore your emotions over time, identify patterns, and gain a deeper understanding of what triggers certain feelings.

## **Practice mindfulness and meditation**

Mindfulness and meditation can help you become more present and aware of your feelings. These practices encourage you to observe your feelings without judgment, which can lead to greater clarity and understanding.

## **Identify triggers**

Situations, people or environments can trigger certain emotions. By identifying these triggers, you can better predict and understand your emotional responses. This awareness can also help you prepare for or stop these reactions in the future.

# CONTROLLING EMOTIONS & FEELINGS?

## **Speak to friends, family or trusted adults**

Sometimes, others can see our emotions better than we can. Trusted friends or family members can help you to understand your emotions and feelings. They might notice patterns or behaviours that you don't see yourself.

## **Develop an emotional vocabulary**

Having a good emotional vocabulary can help you explain your feelings better. Instead of saying you feel "bad", can you explain this better? Do you feel 'frustrated', 'disappointed' or 'anxious'? The more specific you can be, the better you will understand your emotions.

## **Pause, control, win**

If somebody does something to make you feel sad, angry or frustrated, PAUSE before reacting. This allows you to take a step back and think about what's the best thing to do next. Sometimes, our emotions can make us react in a way that makes things worse. But when we take the time to do something positive, such as going for a walk, talking to family or friends, listening to music or playing a game, it can help calm our emotions and allow us to think about the risks and consequences of our behaviour.

## **Widgets or stress balls**

Widgets and stress balls can help when feeling anxious or nervous by managing our emotions and helping us to calm down. The widget or stress ball helps to distract us when we feel overwhelmed by engaging areas of the brain that help us maintain attention.

# CONTROLLING EMOTIONS & FEELINGS?

## Practice deep breathing

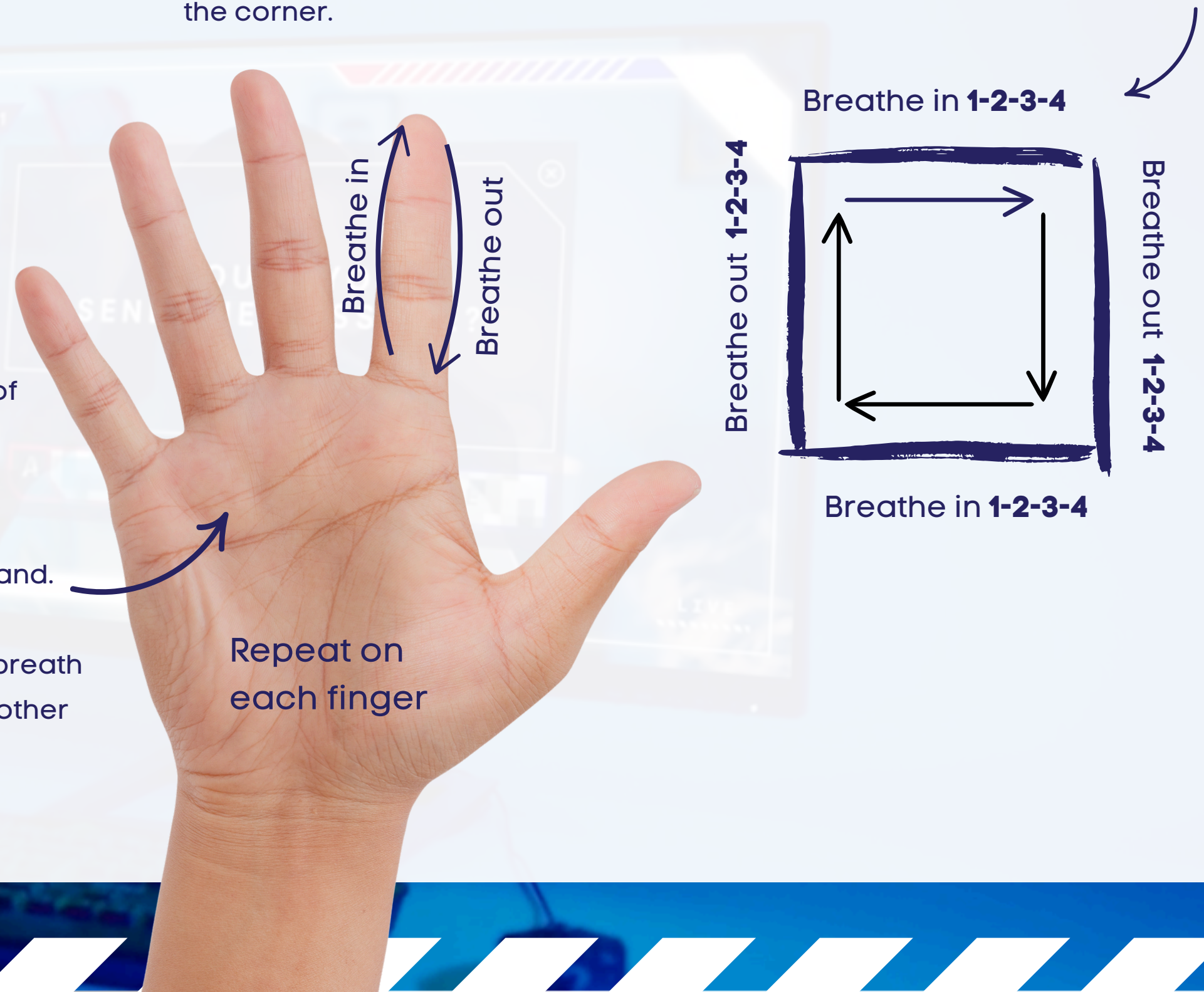
Simple breathing exercises to help you calm down when you feel overwhelmed. This can help you recognise when you need to take a moment to understand your feelings better. Here are two examples of different breathing techniques to try:

## Finger breathing

Use your finger to follow the edge of your fingers on your opposite hand. As your finger traces up your first finger, take a slow deep breath in through your nose. As you trace down your finger, take a slow deep breath out through your mouth. Repeat this as you trace up and down your other fingers as many times as you need to.

## Box breathing

Imagine you are drawing a square in the air. As you draw the first side of the square, breathe in and count slowly to 4 and pause at the corner. Draw your next side as you breathe out and count to 4, pausing when you get to the corner.



# CONTROLLING EMOTIONS & FEELINGS?

## Hot chocolate breathing

Imagine you are holding a cup of hot chocolate in your hands. Bring your hands towards your face and breathe in through your nose. Imagine what your drink smells like. As you breathe out, imagine gently blowing the steam.

## Breathe in through your nose

**1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10**

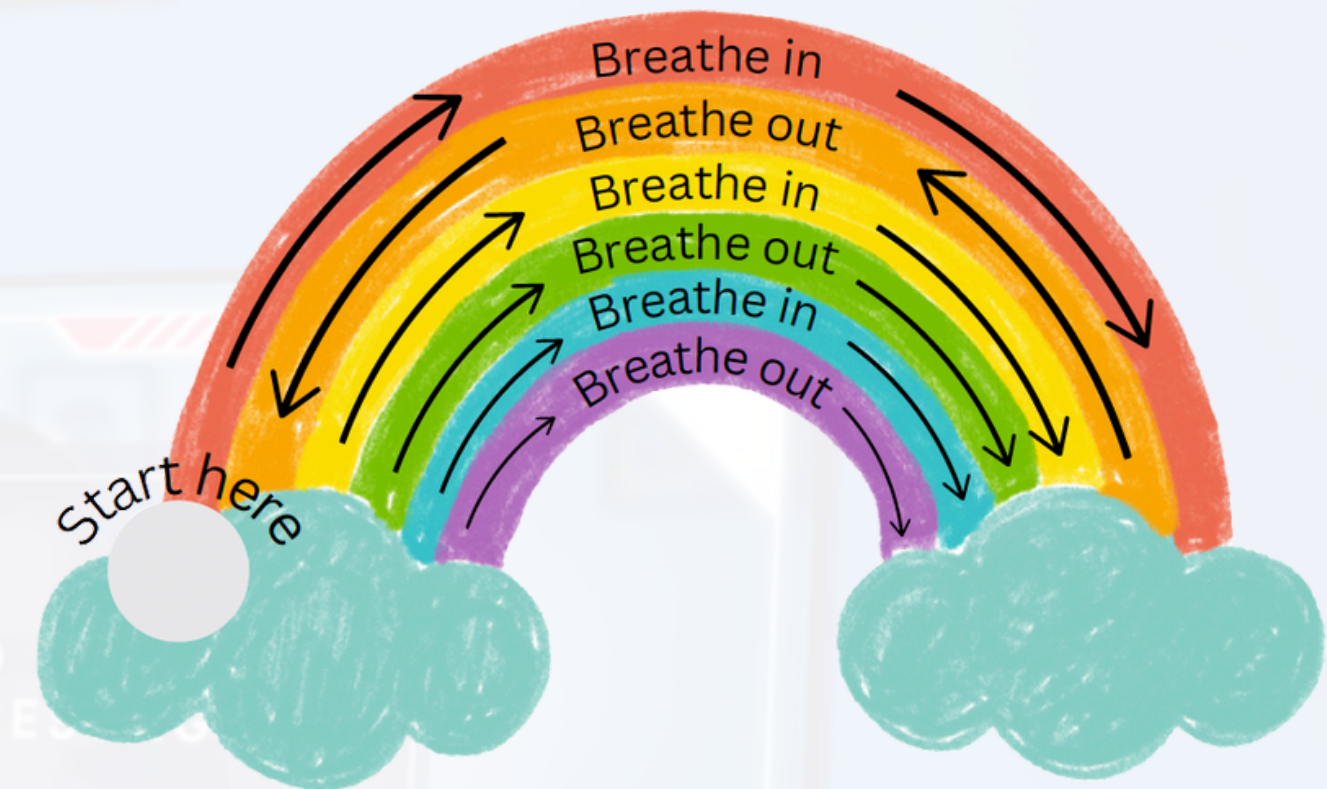
**and out through your mouth**

**1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10.**

Repeat as many times as you wish.



Breathe in through your nose...



## Rainbow breathing

Place your finger where it says 'start here'. Follow the red line with your finger and breathe in. When you get to the other side, follow the orange line with your finger and breathe out.

Repeat this for each line.

# SOCIAL MEDIA DO'S AND DON'TS

Social media is a powerful tool for communication and expressing our thoughts, but it can also bring up emotional responses that can be difficult to manage.

Understanding the difference between emotions and feelings can help you navigate social media better. Here are some **do's** for managing emotions and feelings online:

**Pause, control, win -** Take a moment to identify your emotional state before you post. Are you feeling angry, sad or excited? Understanding your emotions can help you decide whether posting is the right thing.

**Practice empathy -** Try to understand the emotions and feelings of others. Consider their experiences and feelings before reacting or commenting.

**Use positive language -** Use language that is positive and supportive of others. Having positive conversations with others online will create a better experience for yourself and others.

**Set boundaries -** Know your limits and take breaks from social media if it begins to negatively impact your emotions or feelings. It's okay to step back and prioritise your emotional well-being.

# SOCIAL MEDIA DO'S AND DON'TS

Social media is a powerful tool for communication and expressing our thoughts, but it can also bring up emotional responses that can be difficult to manage.

Understanding the difference between emotions and feelings can help you navigate social media better. Here are some **don'ts** for managing emotions and feelings online:

**React without thinking -** Avoid reacting to something you see online and posting without thinking of the risks and consequences. Emotional reactions can lead to us posting or commenting that may harm relationships and that we later regret. Before posting, take a step back and do a positive activity such as talking to a friend or parent, listening to music or playing sport. This way you can think about how you want to respond.

**Overshare emotions -** Sharing every emotional detail might not be suitable for everybody. Consider what is appropriate to share and what you should keep between you, your friends and family.

**Engage in negative content -** Avoid arguments or negative conversations that can escalate emotions and increase feelings of anger or frustration.

**Neglect self-care -** Don't forget to take care of your own emotions. Engage in activities offline that make you happy and help to balance the emotions you may experience online.

**Compare yourself to others -** Remember, not everything you see online is a real experience. Some people may show things differently online in comparison to their real life.

# WHERE CAN I ASK FOR HELP?

If you're struggling to control your emotions and the way you are behaving, try talking to a friend, teacher, brother or sister, parent or carer, or another family member you trust.

## Local support

If you would like professional support, you can refer yourself, or your child, through the Single Points of Access below. Please contact the area that best describes where you live.

If you live in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands or Stoke-on-Trent, **call: 0800 0 328 729**

If you live in East Staffordshire, Tamworth, Lichfield, Cannock, South Staffordshire or Stafford, **call: 0808 178 0611** or **email CaFSPA@mpft.nhs.uk**

## Other local resources

Staffordshire Connects has lots of information about mental health and general well-being, including support services you can contact.

[www.staffordshireconnects.info/kb5/staffordshire/directory/advice.page?id=0rWBovMeR5E](http://www.staffordshireconnects.info/kb5/staffordshire/directory/advice.page?id=0rWBovMeR5E)

Stoke-on-Trent 0-19 Hub covers all localities in Stoke-on-Trent. You can speak to your school nursing team during school term or you can call the Hub on **0808 178 3374** or message them through their **ChatHealth** text messaging service on **07520 615723**

[www.mpft.nhs.uk/services/health-visiting-and-school-nursing/stoke-trent-clinics-service/drop-schedule-0-19](http://www.mpft.nhs.uk/services/health-visiting-and-school-nursing/stoke-trent-clinics-service/drop-schedule-0-19)

Sandbox has many resources, such as a mood tracker, to help you recognise your emotions and feelings and what happened to cause these. [www.thesandbox.mindler.co.uk/post/recognising-emotions](http://www.thesandbox.mindler.co.uk/post/recognising-emotions)

# WHERE CAN I ASK FOR HELP?

## National support

Childline offers free support to children and young people all day, every day. You can contact them by phone, online or text.

[www.childline.org.uk/](http://www.childline.org.uk/)

Young Minds supports children and young people up to the age of 25 by phone, online or text. [www.youngminds.org.uk/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/)

Shout offers free support to anybody struggling to cope.

[www.giveusashout.org/](http://www.giveusashout.org/)

Mind UK offers free support for all ages by phone or online.

[www.mind.org.uk/](http://www.mind.org.uk/)

## Helping others

If a friend or someone you know is struggling to control their emotions, and this is having an impact on how they are acting, talk to a trusted adult. Remember, we don't have to let our emotions control us. Your friend might make things worse for themselves by behaving a certain way. Speaking to somebody you trust and getting your friend support will help to keep them safe.

## Further resources

Below are further resources to help you understand and control your emotions and feelings:

### Resources for children

- '[Barbara Throws a Wobbler](#)' by Nadia Shireen introduces emotions and feelings for children around 5-7 years old.
- '[Milo's Monster](#)' by Tom Percival helps children aged 3-5 understand feelings of jealousy.
- '[A Volcano in My Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger](#)' by Eliane Whitehouse and Warwick Pudney presents a clear and effective approach to helping children and adults understand and deal constructively with children's anger.
- '[I am angry](#)' by Michael Rosen and Robert Starling helps children aged 3-7 understand that feeling angry doesn't last forever.

# WHERE CAN I ASK FOR HELP?

## Resources for young people

**Mind UK** has lots of information for young people including tips for building self confidence and dealing with anger.

[www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/feelings-and-experiences/](http://www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/feelings-and-experiences/)

### 'Eat, Move, Sleep: How Small Choices Lead to Big Changes'

by Tom Rath is a quick read on general well-being for young people aged 14+.

'Mind Your Head' by Juno Dawson, Dr Olivia Hewitt and Gemma Correll covers topics such as anxiety and depression, addiction, self-harm and anger for young people aged 16+.



# ADVICE FOR PARENTS & CARERS

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Encourage children to express their feelings by using simple language. Ask them questions like, "How do you feel today?" or "What makes you happy/sad?" This helps them to start identifying and naming their emotions.

**Use visual aids** - Introduce emotion charts or flashcards with different facial expressions. Children can point to or choose a face that matches how they feel. This visual representation can help them identify their emotions more easily.

**Encourage storytelling** - Ask children to share stories about their day or events that made them feel a certain way. This practice allows them to connect their experiences with their feelings and understand them better.

**Play feelings games** - Engage children in games that involve acting out different emotions. For example, have them mimic happy, sad or angry faces. This fun activity can help them recognise and express various feelings.

**Model emotional awareness** - Show children awareness of your own feelings. Share when you are feeling happy, sad or frustrated, and explain why. Children learn a lot from observing adults, so modelling emotional awareness is crucial.

**Create a feelings journal** - Encourage children to draw or write about their feelings in a journal. They can illustrate what made them feel a certain way, which can help them process and understand their emotions.

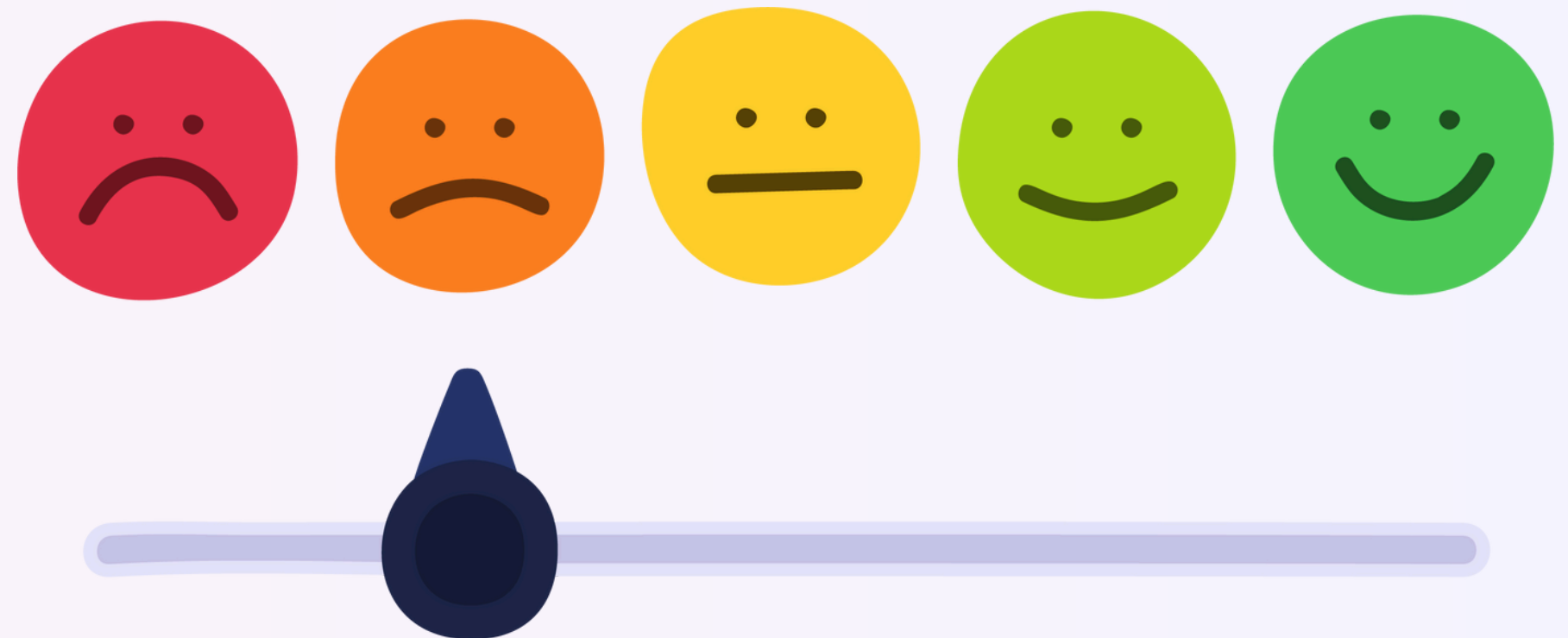
**Practice deep breathing** - Teach children simple breathing exercises to help them calm down when they feel overwhelmed. This practice can help them recognise when they need to take a moment to understand their feelings better. Find examples under 'Controlling emotions & feelings'.

# RESOURCES FOR PARENTS & CARERS

[wherewillitend.co.uk](http://wherewillitend.co.uk)

## Activity 1 - Emotions Thermometer

This thermometer can help determine how your child is feeling, especially if they are struggling to describe their emotions and feelings. Being able to identify how your child is feeling can help you to identify what they need from you in that moment. This may be having a cuddle on the sofa, going for a walk, having some alone time or practicing one of the activities on the next page.



# RESOURCES FOR PARENTS & CARERS

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## Activity 2 - Where do I feel emotions in my body?

This activity explores how we experience different emotions in our bodies.

**Method** - Read out the emotions below and ask your child what they feel in their body when they feel this emotion.

Happy

Embarrassed

Excited

Stressed

Sad

Guilty

Angry

Afraid

Nervous

Jealous

You may want to ask them to write or draw where they feel these emotions on their body. We have created a worksheet for you to use, download it [here](#).

If you have different coloured pens available, you may want to ask your child to use which colour they think best describes that emotion.

You can use and adapt this exercise to suit your child. If your child is engaging well, you might want to ask them questions such as 'which emotions do you feel more regularly?', 'which emotion makes you feel your best/worst?' or 'what do you do when you feel angry?'. If your child is more reserved, you may want to focus on the drawing/writing and try asking these questions another day.

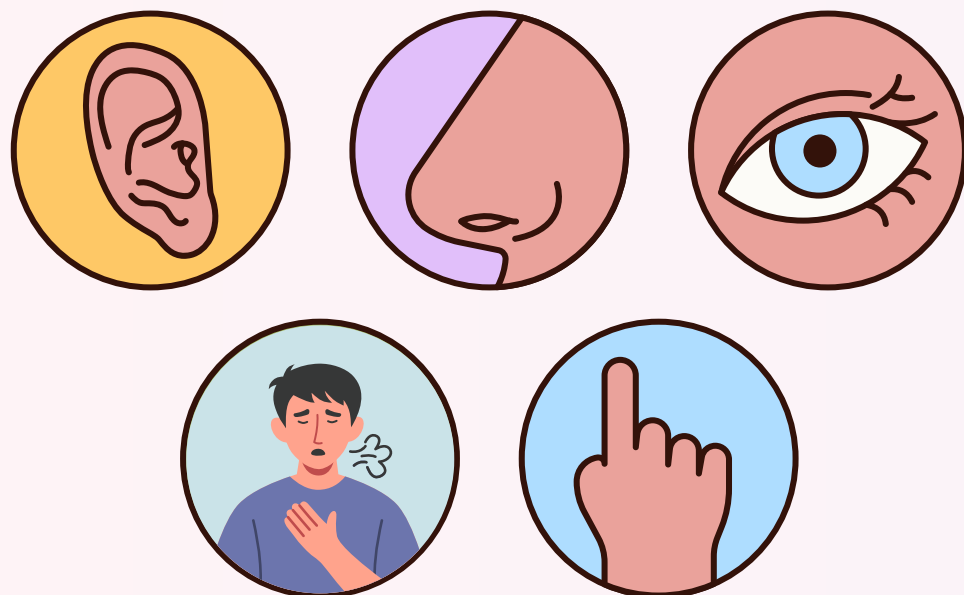
# RESOURCES FOR PARENTS & CARERS

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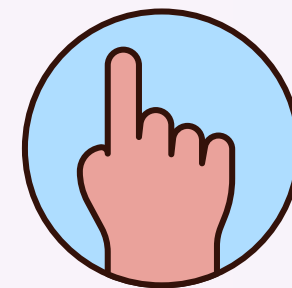
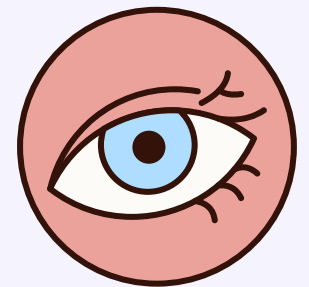
## Activity 3 - 5 4 3 2 1 Senses

This activity is a good distraction technique to do with your child when they appear overwhelmed by their emotions.

**Method** - Ask your child to look around them and name:



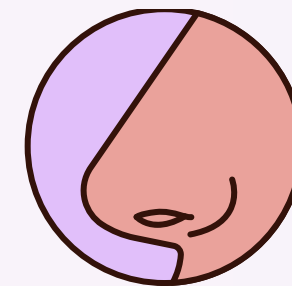
**5** things they can see



**4** things they can touch



**3** things they can hear



**2** things they can smell

**1** slow deep breath





**Violence  
Reduction  
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