

# Helping children and young people with additional needs cope with difficult feelings during the COVID 19 outbreak



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Bae Abertawe  
Swansea Bay University  
Health Board



**Facing the Challenge**  
**Wynebu'r Her**

# The current situation is making us all feel mixed up emotions.

I'm worried about what will happen if my Mum and Dad get ill!

Do we have enough toilet roll?

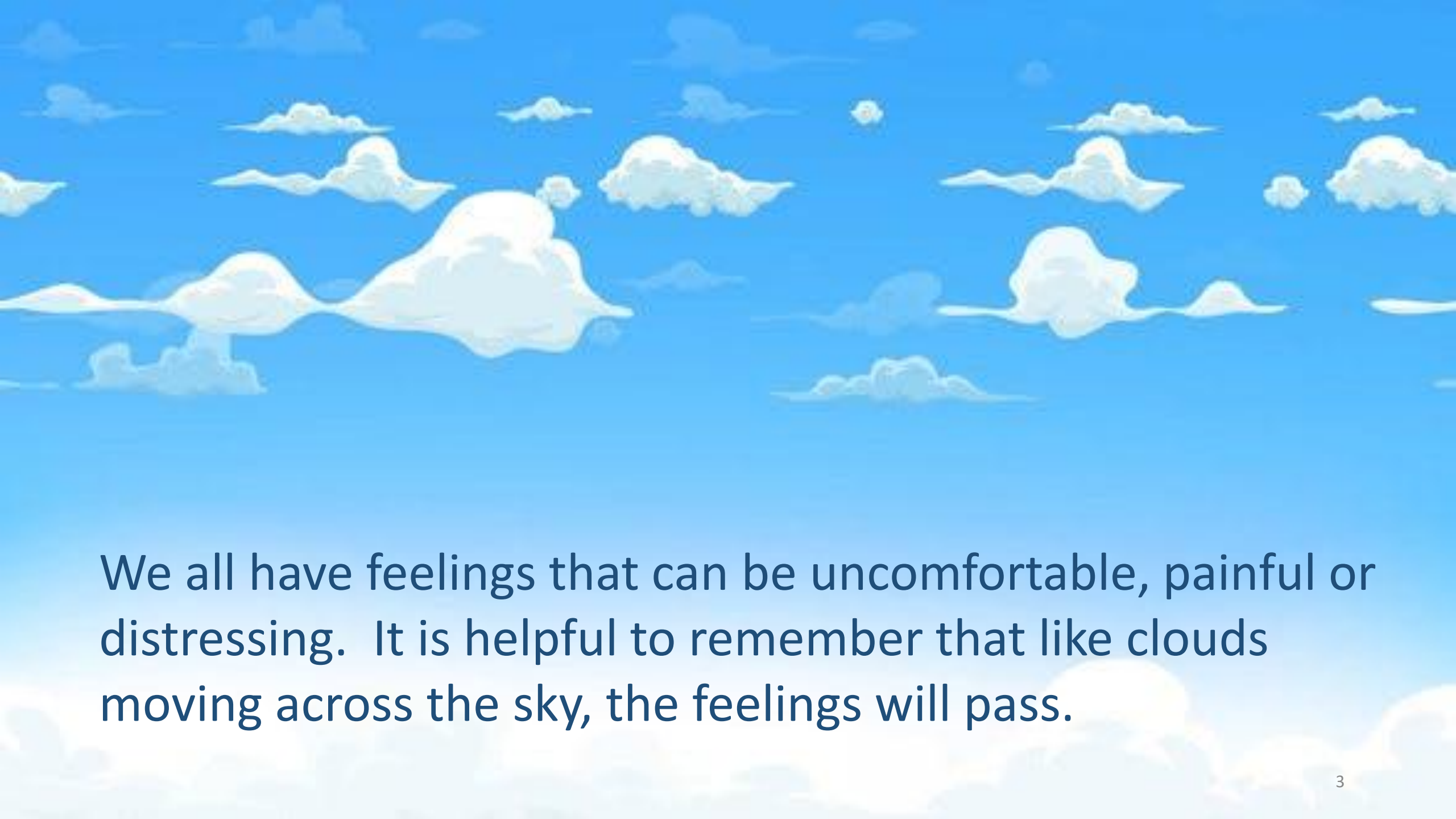
I'm missing my friends and nights out!

Who will look after the kids if I get ill?

Ahhh! The kids are so noisy and so messy!

I'm anxious about work and money!



A bright blue sky filled with various white, fluffy clouds of different shapes and sizes, scattered across the frame. The clouds are soft and voluminous, creating a serene and peaceful atmosphere.

We all have feelings that can be uncomfortable, painful or distressing. It is helpful to remember that like clouds moving across the sky, the feelings will pass.

The current situation is making children and young people feel mixed-up emotions too.

Everyone's home all the time! The house is too noisy!

Why aren't there any of my favourite biscuits?

Why is everyone so grumpy with me?

I miss going to school every day!

I want to watch my programme not the news!

I want to go to the playground and go on the swing!





Some children or young people with additional needs such as learning disabilities or autism can find it difficult to identify or verbally communicate how they are feeling. They may communicate uncomfortable feelings such as anxiety, anger or sadness to us through their behaviour.



# Emotions / Behaviour Iceberg

Behaviours we see on the surface

Head banging  
Spitting  
Biting Pulling hair Hitting

Emotions we can't see below the surface

Confused - not understanding what's going on  
Feeling stressed by change in routine  
Missing school  
Frustrated by lack of physical activity  
Bored and lacking stimulation  
Picking up on other people's stress  
Worry about virus  
Missing friends and relatives  
Missing going out to do usual activities

Try to respond to the emotions, not just to the behaviour

# Helping children and young people cope with their feelings.



The message we want to get across to children and young people is that everyone has uncomfortable feelings at different times. It is part of life. But sharing those feelings with the people us them can help.

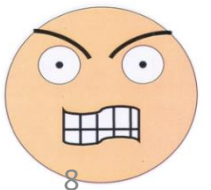
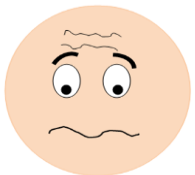
Children and young people with additional needs experience the same range of emotions as everyone else. However they often find it difficult to identify how they are feeling. If they don't really know how they are feeling, they will find it hard to use the coping strategies we teach them.

Children and young people have differing ability levels and they will not all be able to access all of the strategies in this booklet. However our main message of paying attention to what they may be feeling and responding to it, will apply to them all.



# Things that you can do to help children and young people cope with these difficult feelings

1. Let them know that it is OK to feel sad or angry or worried. Everyone has uncomfortable feelings. They will pass. Sharing those feelings with other people can help.
2. Help them recognise when they are feeling anxious, sad or angry.
3. Help them communicate to those around them about how they are feeling.
4. Help them develop skills to cope with difficult feelings

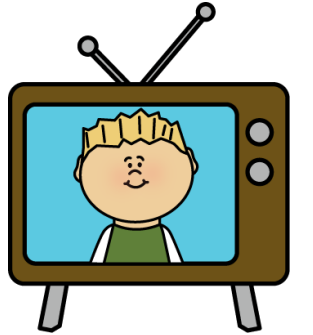




*Strategies to help children and young people identify feelings*

# Help children and young people identify feelings and talk about them

Draw attention to the feelings of characters in the films or TV programmes you are watching together and label them.



Watch films or shows with children and young people that help them learn about feelings.

Try, *Inside Out* or *Cbeebies emotion collection*  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/joinin/help-children-cope-with-emotions?collection=parenthood-tips-and-tricks>



Read stories with them about feelings.

Try, *When Sadness Comes to Call*, *Eland* or *The Huge Bag of Worries*, *Ironside*



*Strategies to help children and young people identify feelings*

# Help children and young people identify feelings and talk about them

Draw attention to your own feelings.

*Thank you, that cuddle made me feel so happy.*



Draw attention to your own uncomfortable feelings and model coping skills

*Not being able to see Nanna makes me feel sad, so I'm going to video-call her tonight*

*The dog knocking over the cup made me feel angry. I'm going to go in the garden to breathe the fresh air for a few minutes.*



Draw attention to your child's feelings

*You look like you may be feeling sad. When I feel sad I like to have a cuddle.*



*Strategies to help children and young people identify feelings*

# When you get it wrong.....

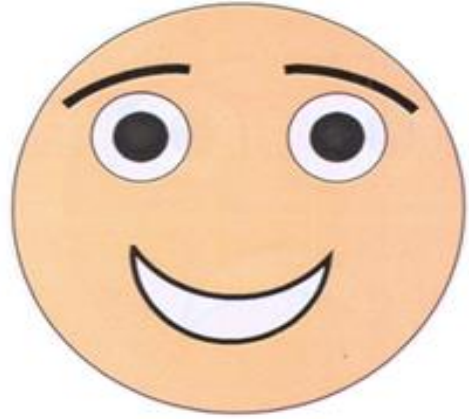
Don't beat yourself up if you do shout.

We all do that now and then, especially when we're stressed.

It's an opportunity to show children and young people;

- That we all struggle to cope with strong feelings
- That we can all get it wrong sometimes, but we can make it ok if we take responsibility for it and apologise.
- That relationships can be repaired when we say sorry and show we are sorry.

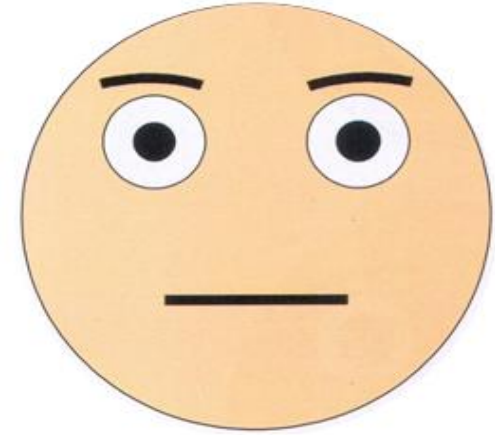




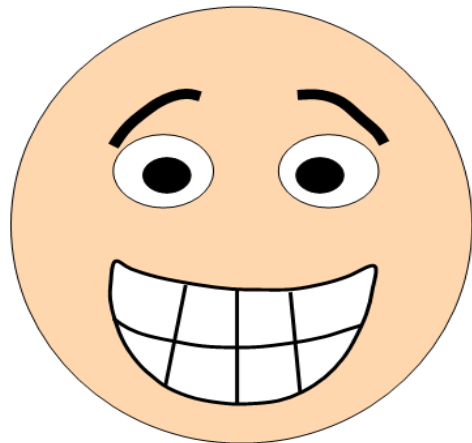
**Happy**



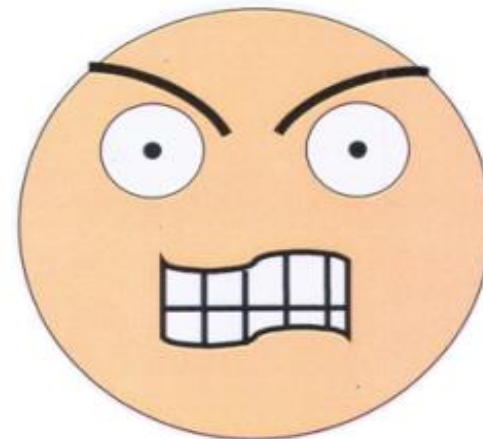
**Sad**



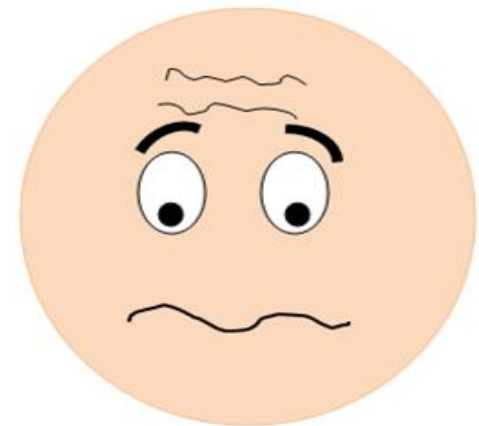
**OK**



**Excited**



**Angry**



**Worried**

## Strategies to help children and young people identify feelings

Use the emotions faces from the previous page

Ask children and young people to show you how different situations might make them feel.

Here are some possible situations but make up (and draw) your own that are relevant for your child.



Having an ice cream



Jumping on the trampoline



Falling over and hurting my knee



When dogs barks



When my tablet won't work



When my brother shouts at me



When I can't go to the park



Swimming



Playing with friends



When I'm ill



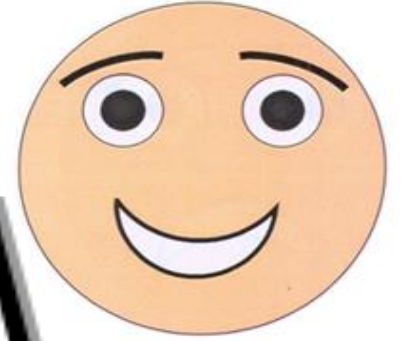
When I'm not allowed fizzy drinks



Opening a present



# Things that make me feel happy

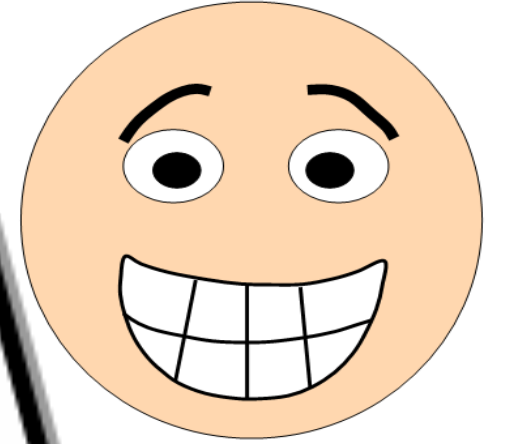
A large, blank, white, rounded rectangular area with a thick black border, intended for children to write down things that make them feel happy. The area is slightly tilted and has a subtle drop shadow.

# Things that make me feel sad

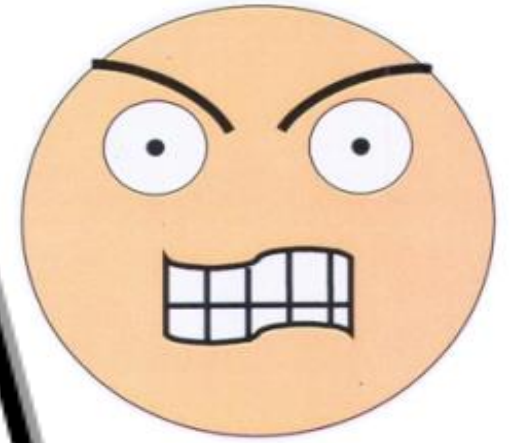


A large, white, rounded rectangular area with a thick black border, intended for writing or drawing. It is positioned below the title and to the left of the sad face emoji.

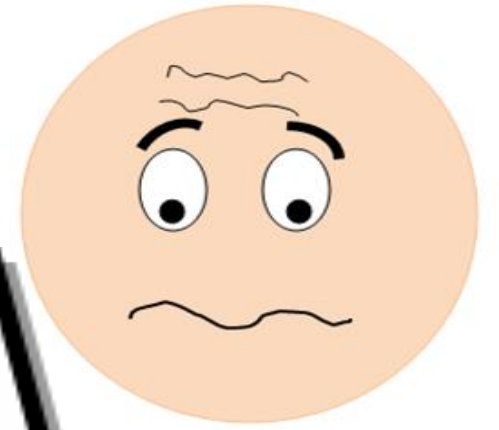
# Things that make me feel excited



# Things that make me feel angry

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a black border and a slight shadow, intended for writing down things that make the user feel angry.

# Things that make me feel worried

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thick black border. The box is tilted slightly to the right. It is intended for writing down things that make the person feel worried. The box is white with a subtle shadow on the right side, giving it a 3D appearance as if it's a piece of paper or a card.



## When we are anxious, worried or angry we can feel it in our bodies

Our muscles may feel tight and we can feel shaky and trembly

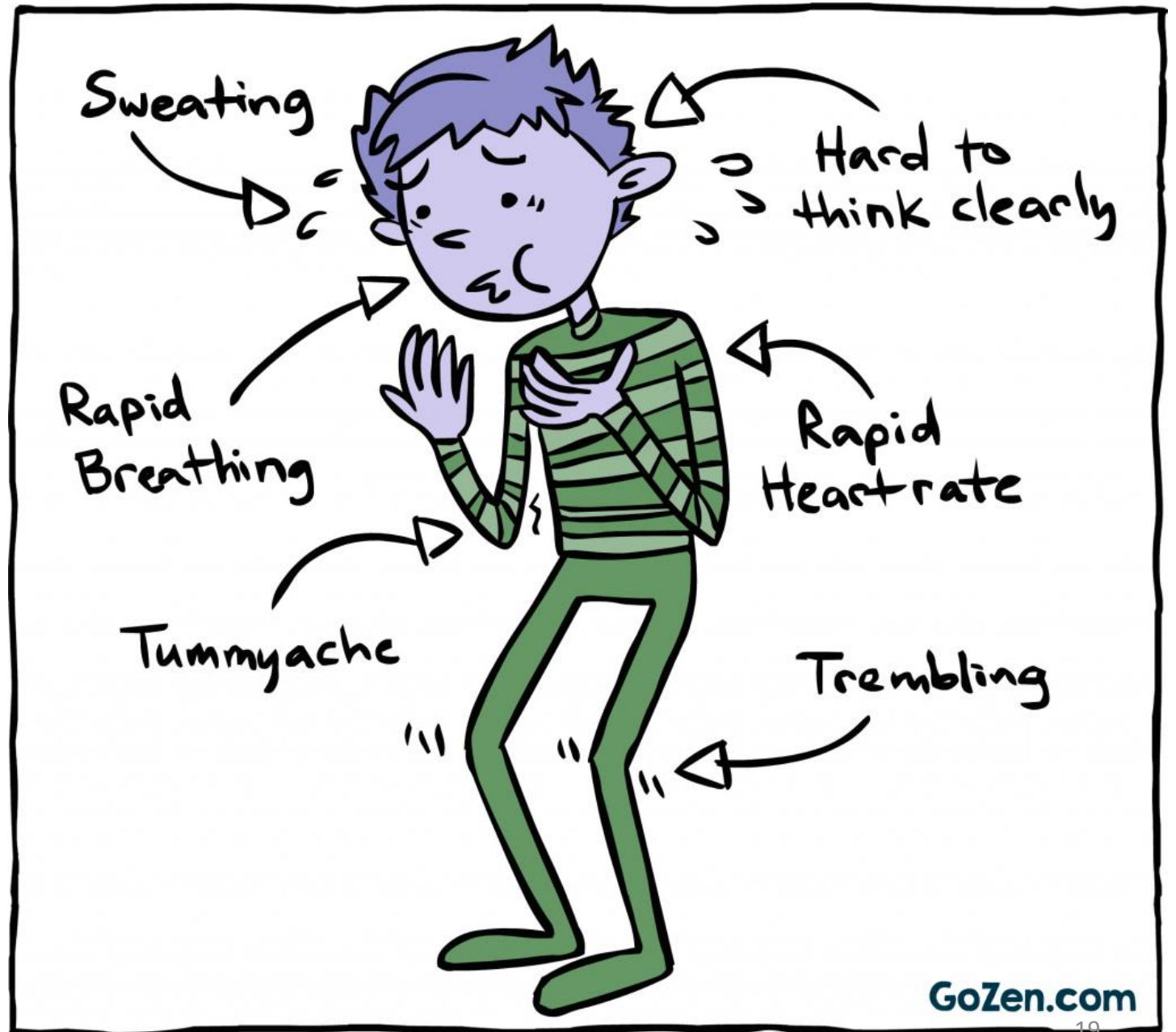
Our hearts may beat fast

We may breathe fast

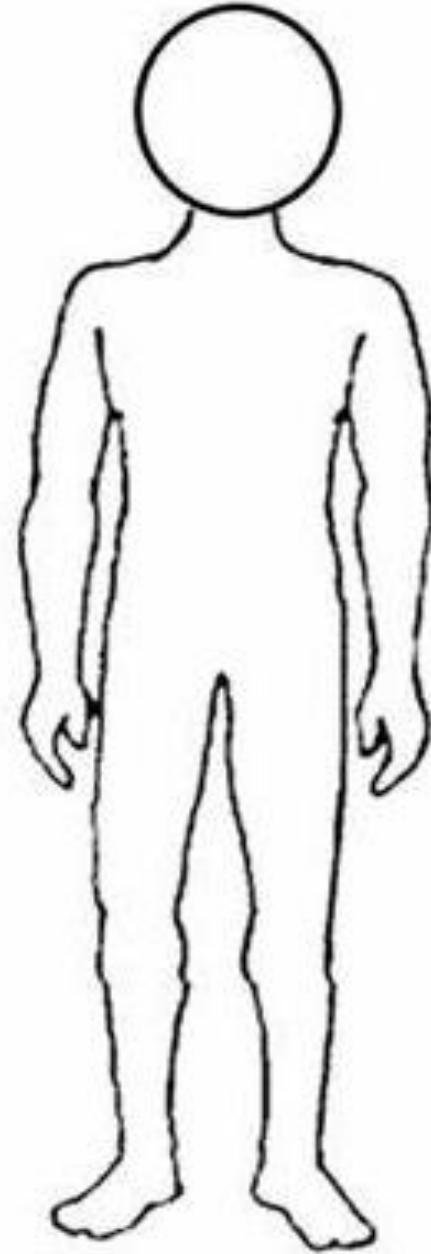
We may sweat

Our tummy may feel funny or sore

We may find it hard to think and our thoughts can race



You can use this page to draw how your body feels when you are feeling worried



# Strategies to help children and young people cope with the difficult feelings

The next part of the booklet describes strategies that might help children and young people cope with strong feels and so prevent them becoming overwhelmed by the feelings.

Some of the strategies aim to keep children general feeling calm (e.g. routine) while other strategies help children cope with the feelings when they are experiencing them (e.g. deep breathing). These strategies often require a bit of practice beforehand and almost always work best when used early before the feelings become overpowering.

Look out for early signs that children and young people are starting to experience difficult feelings. These will be different for different children but could include behaviours like fidgeting, pacing, losing concentration, being irritable, picking at skin. This is when it is best to use the strategies.



Strategies to help children and young people cope with the difficult feelings

# Exercise

Physical activity helps children and young people cope when they are feeling sad, anxious, or angry.

Exercise is a natural mood-booster and stress-buster

Build lots of fun movement into their day

At home



Dancing



Exercise videos



Yoga



Space hoppers



Races

In the garden



Football



walking dog



Trampoline



Swinging



Throwing and catching



Water play

Outside

*Remember government advice is that children with a health need (eg learning disability or autism) can leave their house more than once a day for exercise.*

*Strategies to help children and young people cope with difficult feelings*

# When children and young people are missing people or their usual activities

Although it is good to talk to children and young people about the things they are missing, we don't want them to be overwhelmed by sadness about the things they can't do because of Covid.

One way to help them cope with those feelings is to help them think about the lovely things they can do once this is all over.

Help children and young people write or draw pictures of the things they are missing on pieces of paper. Put each picture in a jar. This lets them know that one day soon they will be able to do all these things again. Writing & drawing them on paper makes it feel more certain that they will do the things again soon.

Once this is all over, and things free up, you can encourage children and young people to take out a piece of paper and then support them to do that activity.





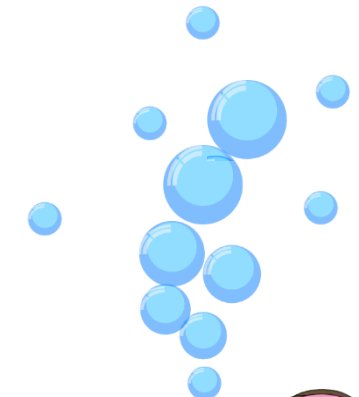
# Deep breathing can help us feel calm – tell children and young people....

Imagine you have a little balloon in your tummy. Tell me what colour it is.....

Now, breathe in slowly through your nose. Imagine the balloon inside your tummy is getting bigger and bigger.

Breathe out very slowly.

Imagine the balloon in your tummy getting smaller and smaller

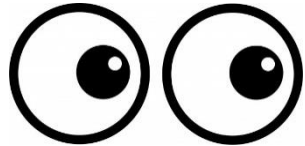


Children who find imagining a balloon too difficult could practice deep slow breathing with long out-breaths with a windmill or bubbles.

# Grounding activities can cool panic and help us stay calm. Ask children and young people to...

Breathe slowly and then tell me....

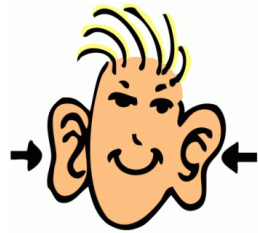
**5** things you can see



**4** things you can feel with your body – your hands, your feet or maybe on your skin.



**3** things you can hear



**2** things you can smell



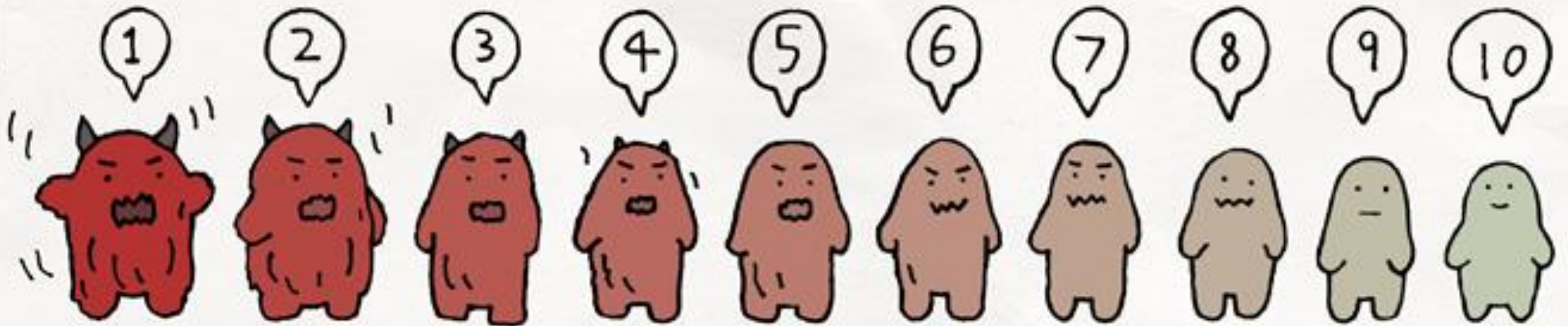
**1** thing you can taste



Strategies to help children and young people cope with the difficult feelings

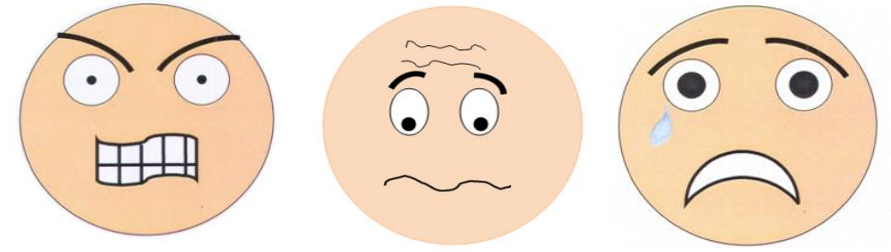
# Counting to 10 helps children and young people pause and calm....

If you're feeling very angry, count to ten...



*Strategies to help children and young people cope with difficult feelings*

## Things I can do when I feel .....



You can use the following worksheets to help children and young people think of the things they could do when they have uncomfortable feelings.

Prepare the worksheets with them at a calm time when they are not experiencing strong feelings.

When you notice signs that children are starting to experience uncomfortable feelings, use the sheets to remind you and them of the sorts of things that may help. All of the strategies work best if used early on, before children become overwhelmed by their feelings.

On the next page are some examples of activities & strategies children and young people may find useful. You can use those on the worksheets, but also help your children think of their own activities that may be helpful for them and then draw them together.





Talk to someone



Have a good cry



Have a cuddle



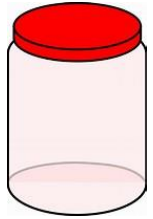
Cuddle a favourite toy



Wrap up in a blanket



Play video games



Use my jar



Watch a funny film



Listen to music



Do a relaxation or grounding



Deep breathing



Take dog for a walk



Play with family



Rocking



Play in the garden



Swing



Dance



Exercise



Listen to a story



Squeeze a stress ball



Using a spinner



Trampoline



Water play

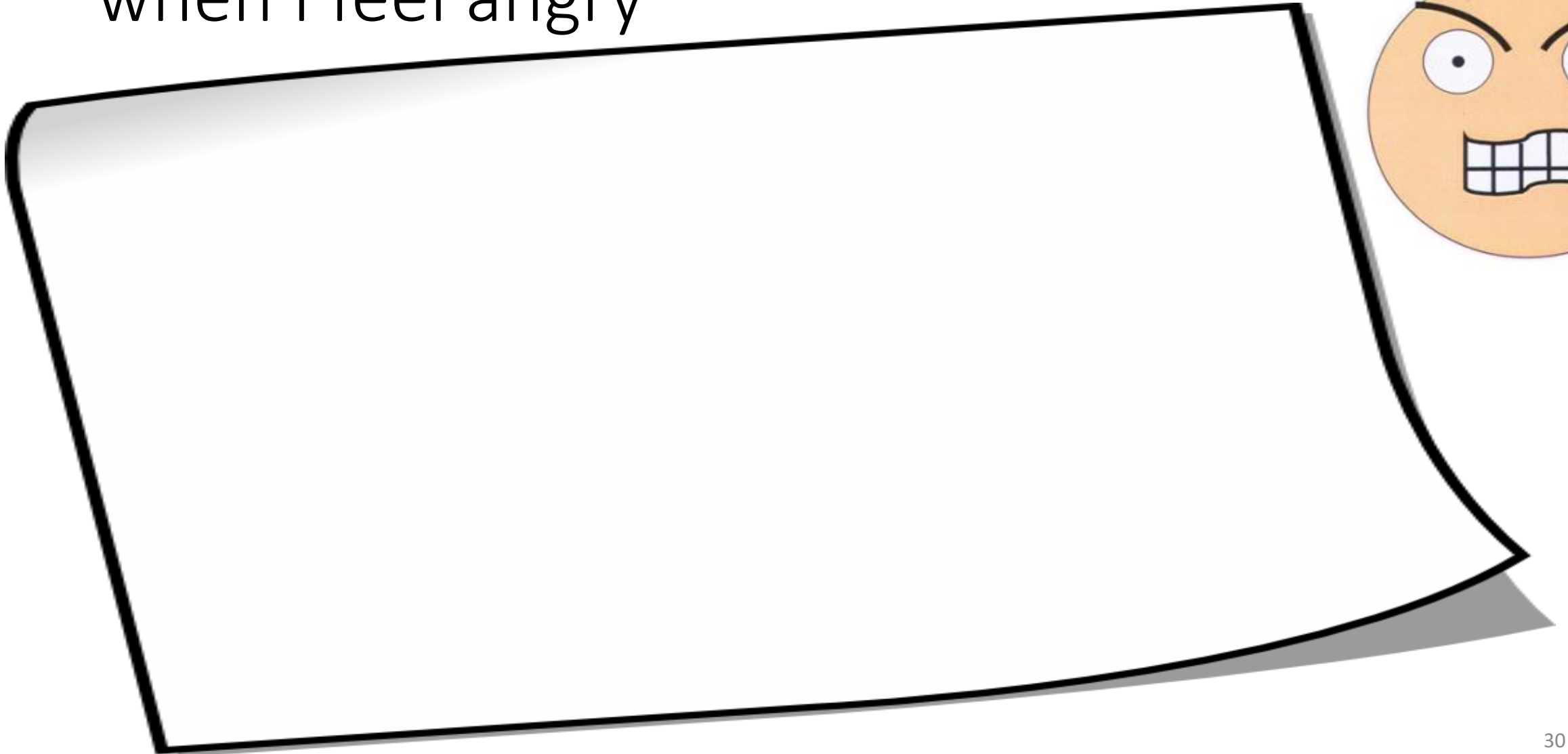
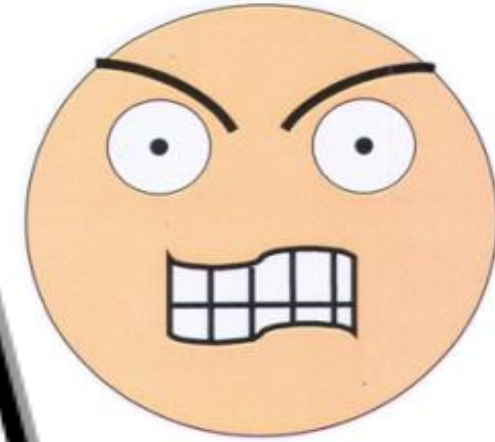




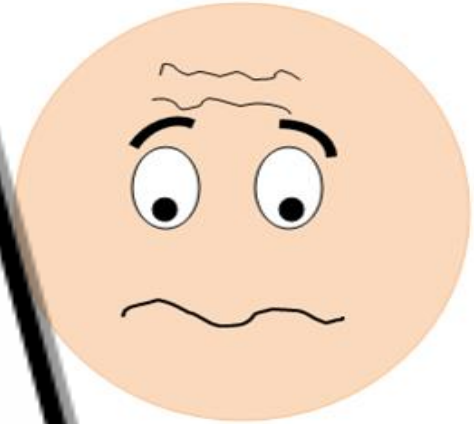
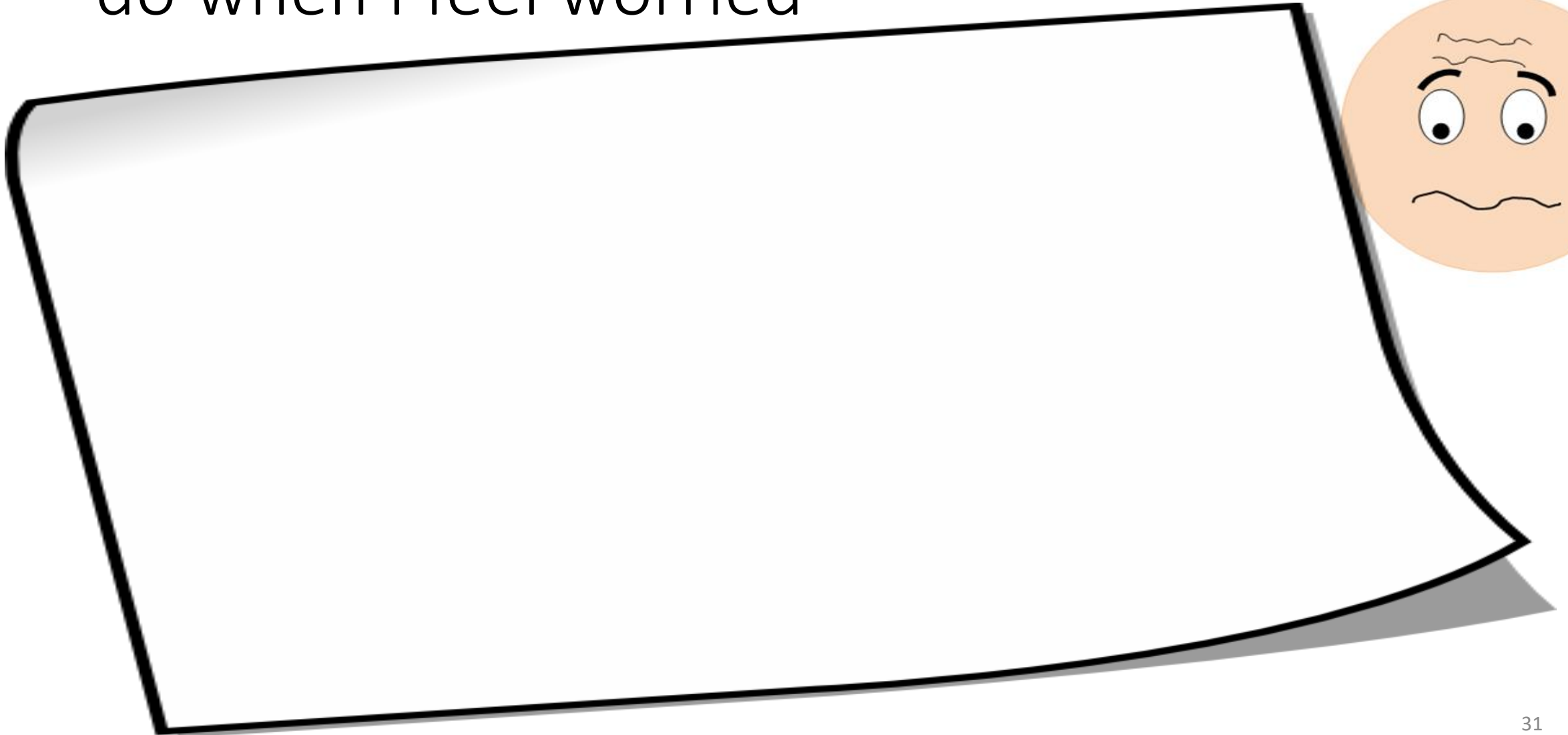
We all feel sad sometimes. Things I can do  
when I feel sad



We all feel angry sometimes. Things I can do when I feel angry



We all feel worried sometimes. Things I can do when I feel worried



# Routines

With schools and normal activities closed, children and young people will be out of their usual routine. We know that for those with additional needs this will often make them feel more anxious.

Routines help children and young people with additional needs such as learning disabilities or autism prepare and process their day ahead. If they know what is happening next they will feel calmer.

- Try to create a routine to children's days, balancing physical activities with less physical ones and independent activities with interactive ones.
- You can use the visual symbols below to make a Schedule or Now/Next Board to let children know what is going to happen each day. (Thank you NHS Fife Speech and Language Therapy). Otherwise you could use drawings or photos on your phone. Visuals help children process what is going to happen next, helping them end one activity and begin another.

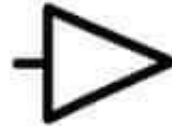




\_\_\_\_\_ 's schedule for today

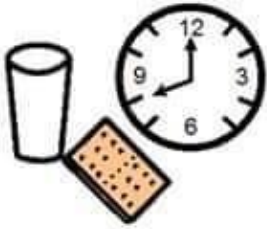


now



next





snack time



lunchtime



dinner time



baking



cooking



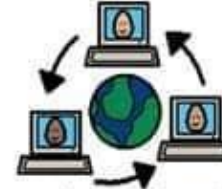
relax



phone time



tablet time



speak to family  
& friends online



email



computer time



video game



Internet



take photographs



watch TV



wash hands



cleaning



tidying



care for pets



dishes



play



play dough



dress-up/role play



Lego



building



game



jigsaw puzzle



card game



water play



sensory play



sand play



gardening



garden



singing



dancing



listen to music



playmusic



exercise



go for a walk



trampoline



