



Surfing the Worry Imp's Wave

10 TOOLS
TO DECREASE YOUR CHILD'S
CORONAVIRUS ANXIETY
A Digital Guide



By Sharon Selby, MA
Illustrated by Carl Lobos



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www.sharonselby.com

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The intent of the author is to offer information of a general nature to help you, but the information in this book does not substitute care or advice from a physician or licensed mental-health professional.





Dear Parents and Educators,

We are experiencing unprecedented times, as the Coronavirus pandemic continues.

With the serious concern about this virus, comes a lot of uncertainty and anxiety.

Anxiety is contagious and as social contagion theory explains, we become influenced by the emotions and actions of those around us.

Therefore, I have created this companion e-guide to my children's book, ***Surfing the Worry Imp's Wave***, to help you apply the strategies from the book to this current world-wide pandemic.

The page numbers which are referenced throughout this e-guide, refer to the related page numbers in my children's book: ***Surfing the Worry Imp's Wave***

~ Empowering children ages 5-10 yrs. to understand and overpower anxiety, available for purchase at www.sharonelby.com

I wish you and your families peace and good health during this time of dis-ease.

Warmly,
Sharon



Wiley Wise Owl Tool #1:

Is this a true alarm or a false alarm?



Yes the Coronavirus is a true concern but we need to emphasize to our children that the Coronavirus is only a true emergency for the people who are being treated in hospital for the Coronavirus.

We also need to emphasize that the people who are getting really sick from the Coronavirus, are mostly the elderly or people with pre-existing health conditions.

Play the True or False game that's on p.33 in the book, but use these scenarios:

- Someone's in hospital and being treated for the virus. (True alarm)
- Mom/Dad's working from home for now. (False alarm)
- Schools are closed for now. (False alarm)
- We need to be more aware of washing our hands. (False alarm)
- We're going to stay home more. (False alarm)

*Although the items that are marked as "false alarm" above are connected to the very serious Coronavirus, we want our children to realize that these are not emergencies that require us to call 911 at this moment.

We need to emphasize, to our children, that we all need to do our part to stop the virus from spreading, but the people who are becoming seriously ill are mostly the older people or people with pre-existing health conditions.

Wiley Wise Owl Tool #2:



Be A Detective!



Anxiety is about the future when we have the “What if?” questions or think of the worst case scenarios.

Anxiety is also when we overestimate the danger and underestimate our coping skills.

The first step with children is to find out how much information they already know and what they are believing. They may have misinterpreted information or heard inaccurate information that needs to be corrected.

We decide how much to tell our children based on their age. We need to share on a “need to know” basis - they don’t need to know everything.

We also need to be careful that we don’t project our own angst onto our kids. We need to be mindful that we don’t process every new development out loud in the presence of our kids. (For example, “Wow I can’t believe Disneyland has closed too!”) Hearing all these extra details adds more worry to what our kids are already experiencing.

It's very important that we talk about the facts, that they need to know at their age and stage of development, so as not to overestimate the danger. We need to emphasize that for children who are young and healthy, like them, this is similar to a bad flu and it is rare to have to be treated in hospital.

Depending on the age of your child, it can help to talk about the statistics.

For example, what is the total population of your country and how many cases have been confirmed?

In Canada, we have approximately 37.5 million people and the total number of confirmed cases is constantly changing, but we can say the number of current cases. Then, compare the image of a big jar of rice and explain that the chances of contracting COVID-19 are similar to finding one piece of orange rice in a huge jar of plain rice.



To build up our child's coping skills, we need to talk about the things that we can do.

When we feel anxious, we feel out of control and so it's important to know that there are things that we can do to be proactive.

For example, by washing our hands we can keep the virus away.

Show them this short video of a teacher explaining how hand washing works to keep us healthy against the virus. She demonstrates an experiment using a bowl of water, pepper and soap which repels the pepper, a symbol for the virus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvG6uBq-dV0>

This concrete visual gives our children a sense of calm that washing their hands a few times per day is very helpful. Of course, we want to be careful that they don't become obsessive about washing their hands, and so we model a reasonable amount of times per day to wash hands.

We can also talk about getting lots of sleep and eating well to keep our immune systems strong.

We also want to let our children know that the health professionals are taking care of everyone and putting plans in place to help us.

We can also talk about the positive side of socially distancing or socially isolating as it means spending more time together as a family. Perhaps one or both parents are now working from home and they are also home now, as schools are temporarily closed.

You can write up a list together of fun activities you want to do together during this "stay at home" period.

This can be a time to learn new domestic skills, create new artistic projects, watch meaningful movies, read great books, play, and connect.

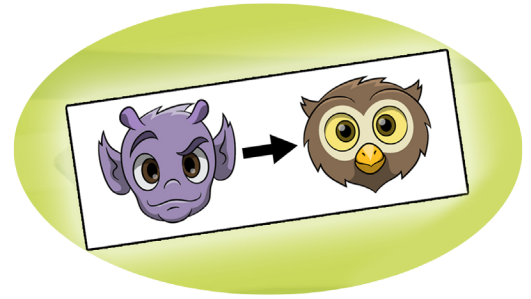


When life gives you lemons, use them to make lemonade.

Wiley Wise Owl Tool #3:



Change Worry Imp Thoughts to Wiley Wise Owl Thoughts



Worry is about the future and the Coronavirus is currently creating a lot of concern about the future. When our children start to have “What if?” thoughts (p.75-78), we need to help them recognize that this is their Worry Voice or Worry Imp and we need to change our thoughts to more helpful Wiley Wise Owl thoughts.

For example:

Worry Imp thought: “What if I get the Coronavirus or someone in my family does?”

Wiley Wise Owl thought: (Assuming you are all healthy right now) “We are all healthy right now and even if we do get it, for most people they experience it in the same way as they do with a bad flu.”

(Notice how the Worry Imp thought is focussed on the future, and the Wiley Wise Owl thought is focussed on the present as well as the facts.)

Worry Imp thought: What if Grandma or Grandpa gets it?

Wiley Wise Owl thought: “Grandma and Grandpa are healthy right now. They are staying home and doing everything they can to be sure they aren’t exposed to the virus. We can help them by having video chats. You might want to make them a craft or draw them a picture - they would really like that too.”

More examples of Worry Imp thoughts:

Worry Imp thought: “What if you die?”

Wiley Wise Owl thought: “I know this is all very worrying but I’m healthy right now. I’m being very proactive by washing my hands, eating lots of fruit and vegetables, drinking lots of water and getting lots of sleep. All of these things keep me healthy. I plan to live to be a very old person.”

Worry Imp thought: “What if there’s no more school until the summer? Am I going to fail?”

Wiley Wise Owl thought: “The government has said that they are going to support all students to ensure that they move into the next grade.”

Key Point: Anxiety feels 100% real and is a physiological and mental reaction to a *potential threat*.



Anxiety happens when we *overestimate danger* and *underestimate our coping skills*. The Worry Imp thoughts overestimate the danger and therefore we need to counter those thoughts with our Wiley Wise Owl thoughts which remind us of all our coping skills.

Activity: Have your child create a menu to go with the remote control that they made (p.51-52). Their menu can list their imagined channel numbers and their favourite places which go with each channel.

Wiley Wise Owl Tool #4:



We learn from mistakes and that helps our brain to grow.

Although, it doesn't fit to talk about the Coronavirus as a mistake, we can talk about perfectionism here. The main message we want to convey to our children is that life doesn't have to be perfect and change can bring positive experiences.

With your child, list all the ways that we are being asked to adapt and be flexible. Then, create a list of the positive effects.

For example: We are being asked to stay home, work from home and do school from home.

The positive effects could be:

- We get to spend more time together as a family
- We are slowing down our pace of life
- We are able to enjoy the simple pleasures of being at home
- There's time to work on projects around the house and be creative
- There's time to do baking and home made cooking

What other ways has your family adapted?

What are some more positive effects from these adaptations?



Wiley Wise Owl Tool #5:



Take big deep breaths to calm your amygdala alarm



When we feel distressed, we seek out attachment to help ourselves calm down. Your child may also need to do some deep breathing exercises with you as part of their bedtime routine. If your child is feeling some panic, it is helpful to lead them through some deep breathing exercises. On pages 62-64, you will find instructions for square breathing, hand breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.

They can also listen to me leading them through some deep breathing visualizations at these links:

Worry Wave Mindful Meditation:

<http://bit.ly/worrywavemindfulmeditation>

Surfing the Worry Wave Meditation:

<http://bit.ly/surfingtheworrywave>

Changing the Channel Meditation:

<http://bit.ly/changingthechannel>

Wiley Wise Owl Tool #6:

NAMING

Name our thoughts and feelings, put them in imaginary bubbles, and let them float away



This is a great visual tool for your child. If you have any bubbles in your home, you could bring them out and blow bubbles together while doing this exercise.

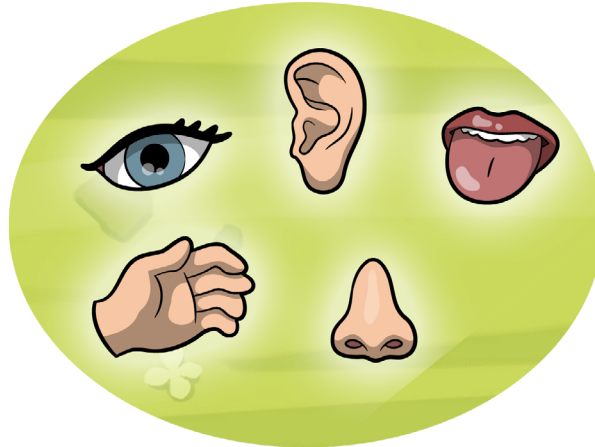
If not, you can have your child draw a picture with circles for bubbles, and have them write or draw their worry thoughts and feelings inside the bubbles and imagine they're blowing these thoughts and feelings away.

If they're getting worried at bedtime, they can imagine putting their worries in bubbles and watching them float away.

Wiley Wise Owl Tool #7:

STAY IN THE PRESENT!

I can stay in the present by using my five senses to notice what is happening around me right now



As we discussed earlier, anxiety takes us into the future, and therefore we need to bring our children back to the present. By using our five senses, it helps us to stay in the present.

Fun activities to do with your children, that bring them back to the present:

- Go on a nature walk in your garden and notice how the ground feels under your feet, the smells, the sights and the sounds you hear.
- Play “I Spy” in your house.
- Play “Hide the thimble” in your house. (This is a game from England that I used to love playing as a child. If you don’t have a thimble, find another small object.) One person hides the thimble and makes sure a small part of it is showing. The other person looks for it and as they get closer you say “warm”, or “hot”, and as they get further away from it, you say “cold”.
- When you’re eating dinner together, be mindful of the texture of the food and how every bite tastes. Try to incorporate some more of the senses by lighting candles and playing soft music.
- For the scent of smell, light a scented candle or set up a diffuser with essential oils.
- Play a game where you hide different foods of spices in brown paper bags or containers and they have to guess what they can smell. You could also play this game with the sense of touch.

Gratitude

When we stay in the present and focus on all for which we are thankful, it helps us feel calm and grounded.

There are many researched health benefits to practicing gratitude.

Robert Emmons, a leading gratitude researcher, has conducted multiple studies on the link between gratitude and well-being. His research confirms that gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.

A 2003 study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the terrorist attacks on September 11.

Suggested Gratitude Activities:

A Gratitude Jar or A Gratitude Box - Decorate a recycled jar or box. On strips of paper, write down, or for younger children, draw something for which you are thankful, each day and place in your jar. When someone in the family needs a “pick-me-up”, read a few notes or look at the pictures from the jar to remind one another of the positives in your life.



A Gratitude Rock - Find a smooth rock and leave it natural or paint it. Carry it in your pocket or place it on your bedside table. Hold or rub the rock and think of the three things for which you are grateful. You could also pass it around the dinner table and have each family member say their “I’m grateful for...” statement.



A Gratitude Tree - Find a branch, place it in a pot or vase with small stones to keep it in place. Cut out construction paper leaves, and write a gratitude sentiment on a leaf each day, and then add it to the tree using a hole punch and string.

You may need to create a list of prompts, for example:

I’m grateful for these three animals: _____

I’m grateful for these three things I hear: _____

I’m grateful for these three things I see: _____

I’m grateful for these three people: _____

Other Ideas:

- Make a poster with your kids to hang in your front window thanking all of the front-line workers who are helping us cope with the Coronavirus
- Write a letter or make cards for the front-line workers



“Every cloud has a silver lining.”



Wiley Wise Owl Tool #8:

Face My Fears!



This particular tool does not directly apply to the Coronavirus situation, but it is still applicable to talk about how we handle our fears in these kinds of situations.

When we feel anxious and worried about things that are out of our control, it is helpful to focus on activities that do empower us. It also models for children how to be helpful and responsible citizens.

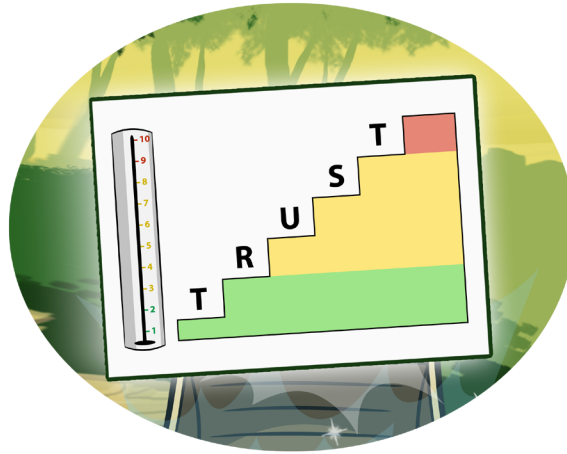
For example:

- Talk about different charities where you and your children could donate allowance money such as the YWCA (<https://ywcavan.org/>) and Doctors without Borders (<https://www.doctorswithoutborders.ca/>)
- Check in on elderly neighbours. Make them a card or a picture
- Play cards through a video chat with a relative such as a grandparents
- Read a book, sing a song, or play a musical instrument to a relative
- Think of ways, as a family, as to how you can help others during this challenging time. For example, in our community, the local seniors centre is collecting old phones and tablets to donate to seniors who in the past have relied on the library's computers for digital learning and communication
- Have a dance party with your family at home or on your front lawn
- Call your local seniors centre to see how you and your family can volunteer
- Write a song or a poem about the power of positive thinking
- Light a candle at dinner time as a way to show you're sending healing thoughts or prayers to all the people in the world who are sick with the Coronavirus right now

Wiley Wise Owl Tool #9:



Trust versus *Fear*



This tool is applicable when we focus on the very important concept of TRUST versus FEAR.

As shown on p. 99, we can choose to trust that everything is okay right now at this very moment, and if an emergency comes, then we'll handle it OR choose to worry all the time that something bad might happen.

Which way is going to lead to feelings of constant worry and angst and which way is going to lead to feelings of calm and peace?

We don't know what the future holds. We are not fortune tellers. The Worry Imp pretends to be a fortune teller and forecasts all the worst-case scenarios.



The Worry Imp can't predict the future and neither can we. Therefore. We need to focus on the present and TRUST that we're okay. We can take the path of worry or the path of trust, which path is going to help us feel better?



Have your child create a picture with the word TRUST and hang it on your fridge or in their bedroom.

For example:



Wiley Wise Owl Tool #10:



Exercise!



Exercise is going to be very important to help us while we spend so much time at home. If you have a dog, then going for dog walks together will help you feel better mentally and physically. If you're allowed to go for nature walks in your community, this will also help relieve stress. Nature is naturally calming and takes us away from all the media and distress in the world.

At home, you can have a dance party and set up an exercise schedule. Have fun as a family creating a fitness circuit, with push ups, sit ups, jumping jacks etc. If your child has a skipping rope or trampoline get them jumping every day.

Exercise helps us get away from screens. Perhaps you can set up a family game of nerf soccer in your basement or in your front yard? Whatever exercise equipment you have, see how it can be incorporated into a daily routine for everyone.

How about aerobics or yoga? On the internet, you can find many parent and child videos leading you through an aerobics routine or yoga routine.

Exercise helps a lot for alleviating stress, so I highly recommend that every family member gets into a daily physical routine.



Dear Parent,

The Coronavirus has changed our lives within weeks. These are very challenging times and we are all being asked to adapt and be flexible. Usually, our lives are relatively predictable and so these are new skills for most of us. With all the change, world news, and seriousness of this virus, anxiety is very high for everyone.

Our children pick up on our anxiety as well as the anxiety in the news, social media and in their environment. It is very important that we are able to support them by co-regulating. Co-regulating means that as we, as parents, keep ourselves calm, this helps our children to feel less anxious. This is why I have decided to create this free and dedicated guide with specific strategies for calming the Coronavirus anxiety. I want to help you and everyone you care for, feel more calm.

My hope is that by reading this guide you will find more ways to be of help to those you care about.

I hope these strategies and ideas bring you more peace of mind too.

I hope you and your family stay well.

Sending you loving kindness,

Warmly,



Sharon



This e-guide was created by Sharon Selby, MA, Registered Clinical Counsellor. It is the companion guide for Sharon's children's book on understanding and overpowering anxiety:

Surfing the Worry Imp's Wave

available at www.sharonelby.com

Additional Resources:

Sharon's blogs:

<https://www.sharonelby.com/anxiety/how-to-address-the-big-what-ifs-with-our-kids-such-as-the-corona-virus>

<https://www.sharonelby.com/anxiety/5-more-tips-on-handling-coronavirus-anxiety-in-kids>

<https://www.sharonelby.com/anxiety/1-tip-for-parents-for-handling-anxiety-about-the-coronavirus-with-kids>

Sharon's TEDx Talk on **The Impact of Anxiety and What We Can Do About It** (for tweens and teens)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP1I1BC8DJM>

"Life is 10% what you experience and 90% how you respond to it."

~ Dorothy M. Neddermeyer