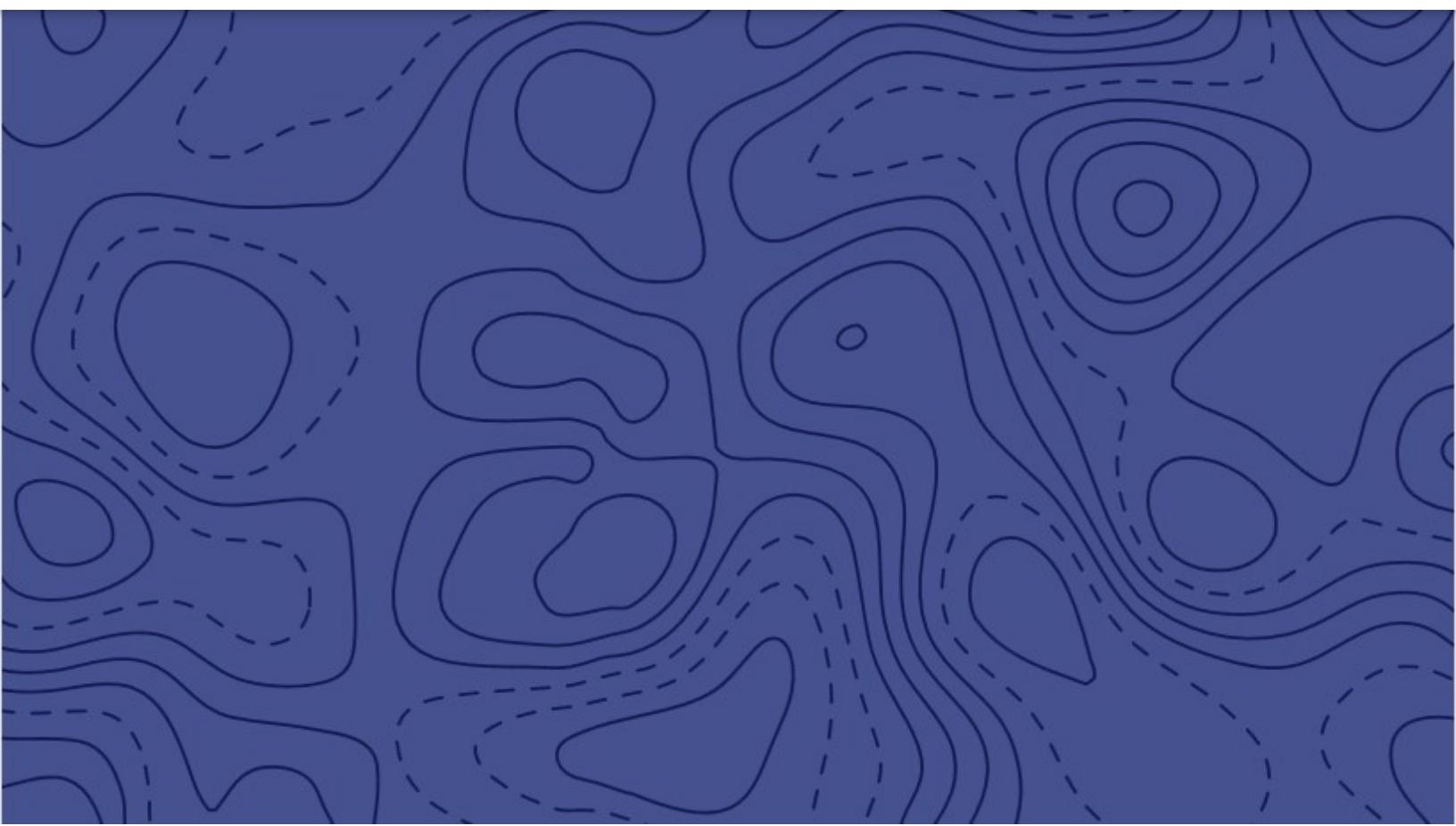




## **EXPEDITION Talking about anxiety stress-free**

Handy parent guide





**Centre RBC  
d'expertise universitaire  
en santé mentale**

**UDS** Université de  
Sherbrooke

*Centre intégré  
de santé et de  
services sociaux de  
la Montérégie-Centre*

**Québec** 

*Avec le financement de*



Agence de la santé  
publique du Canada      Public Health  
Agency of Canada

## WORKSHOP 1

# MY CHILD'S ANXIETY... HOW CAN I HELP THEM STEP OUTSIDE OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE?

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## OBJECTIVES

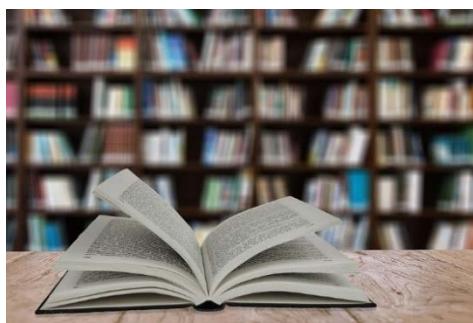
At the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Recognize the facilitator and the other group members;
- Understand the program objectives and the concept of comfort zone;
- Identify your child's avoidance behaviours;
- Understand the link between thoughts, emotions, sensations, and behaviours;
- Be able to ask your child questions to help them reflect on certain thought patterns.

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# A PICTURE THAT REPRESENTS ME





## COMFORT ZONE

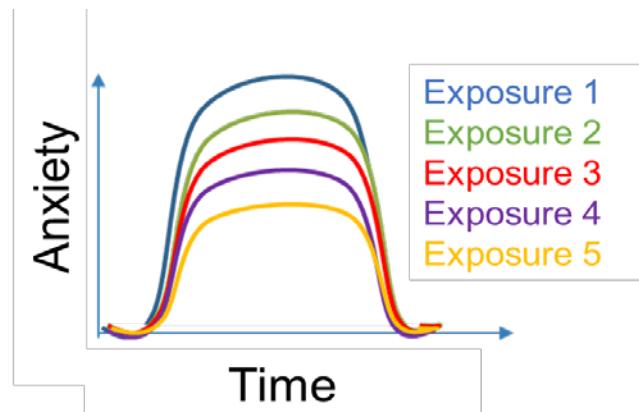
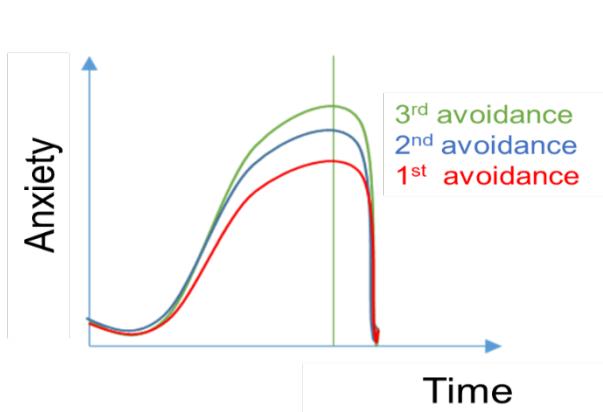
### Little reminder!

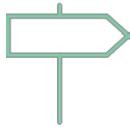
Your child's **comfort zone** is those parts of their life where they feel good or on familiar territory. It's the relationships, events, and environments where they know the routine and don't need to ask too many questions. Basically, they're comfortable, or at least they think they are (inspired by White, 2009).

Anxiety can happen when they **step outside of their comfort zone**, or even when they think about situations that are outside of their comfort zone. This means having to enter the fear zone. They don't know how to react, they're afraid of the unknown, and they don't feel good. This makes them want to avoid these types of situations and retreat into the safety of their comfort zone. This is called **avoidance**. Avoidance feels good in the short term because it instantly lowers their anxiety levels.

The problem with avoidance is that the more they avoid a situation, the more frightening it becomes. Their comfort zone shrinks, and they start to feel trapped inside it, or they begin to feel more uncomfortable each time they step outside it. At that point, they need to face their fears, which will help them to cope better or even get over their fears completely. This is called **exposure**. Exposure can be very uncomfortable in the short term because facing the scary situation will cause their anxiety level to rise. Remember that anxiety isn't dangerous; it's temporary and it eventually goes away. The more they expose themselves to a situation, the less anxious they'll feel about it.

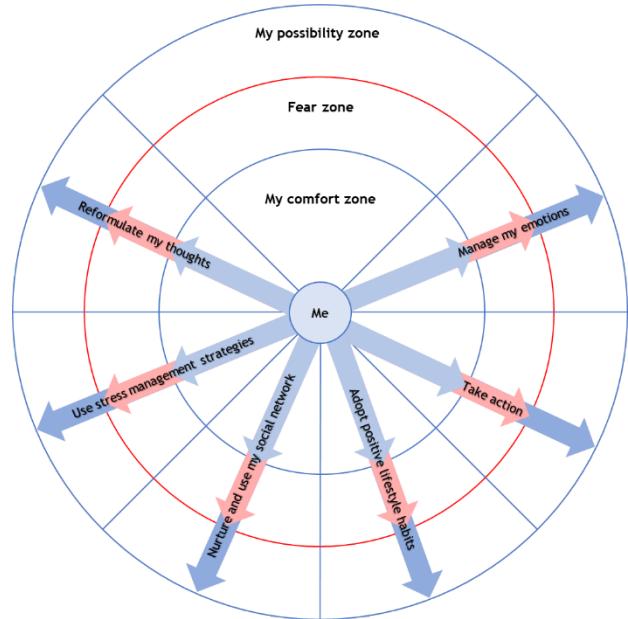
They'll begin to feel more comfortable, confident, and liberated. Stepping outside of their comfort zone is also a great learning opportunity (Forsyth and Eifert, 2007; Gosselin *et al.*, 2019; Harvey and Ilicic, 2014).





## To expand their comfort zone, your child must learn to:

- Reformulate their thoughts into healthy ones;
- Manage their emotions to better cope with them;
- Adopt new behaviours (take action!);
- Adopt healthy lifestyle habits;
- Use stress management strategies;
- Nurture and properly use their social network.



### Little reminder!

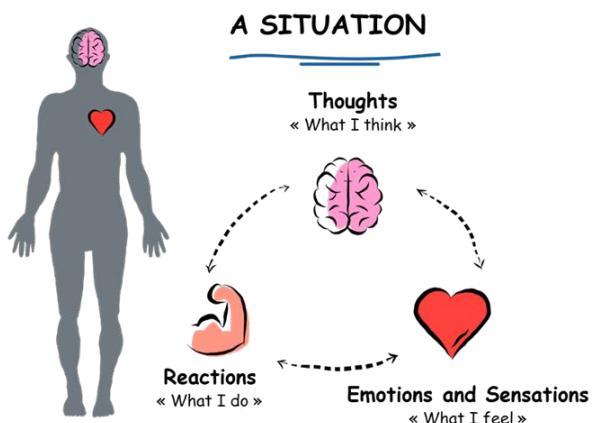
It's important to celebrate all progress made by your child, even if it's just in the way they see things.



## WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE ME?

### Little reminder!

This diagram shows how your thoughts, emotions, sensations, reactions, and behaviours are closely linked. The way you interpret a situation will influence your emotions and sensations, not to mention your reactions to the situation (Beck, 2011). Remember the example of the noise at night!



Depending on how you interpret a fact (your thoughts), your emotions and behaviours will be different. This mechanism is constantly at work. To control stress and anxiety, you need to learn to see things differently.

It's important to listen to your child and be empathetic. And watch what you say! Be careful not to make your child feel bad or downplay their feelings. Their distress is real. They're stuck in their perception of the situation, and their emotions and sensations provide validation for their experience. Often, their thoughts aren't entirely wrong, but they are overblown and not very helpful.



**To help your child reformulate their thoughts into healthier, more useful, and more realistic ones, you can prompt them to ask themselves some of these questions:**

- Am I sure about what I'm thinking? Why am I seeing the situation this way?
- Am I able to worry less about what others will think?
- Am I jumping to conclusions in deciding that this is a disaster?
- Is it realistic to expect everything I do to be perfect?
- What's the worst thing that can happen? What can I do to prepare myself? If the worst happened, would it really be that terrible?
- How would this situation affect my life? Would I remember it a year from now?
- Is there another way of looking at the situation? Is there anything positive about it? What can I learn from this situation?
- Do I have control over any part of this situation? How could I gain control?
- Have I experienced a similar situation in the past that turned out well? What strategies did I use?



## CONCLUSION AND INVITATION

**To conclude...**

You're encouraged to talk to your child about their comfort zone and their thoughts, to help them understand them better. For now, it's important to listen and observe.

## WORKSHOP 2

# THE ACCOMMODATION TRAP

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## OBJECTIVES

At the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Learn more about mindfulness and its benefits;
- Identify your child's type of intolerance;
- Understand the concept of accommodation;
- Identify accommodating behaviours that you use with your child;
- Replace their accommodating behaviours with new solutions;
- Discuss with your child the changes needed.

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## INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS

### **Little reminder!**

Mindfulness is a helpful attitude to develop in order to observe and notice what's happening inside yourself, without any judgment. Your child will learn several mindfulness exercises during the workshops. To increase the benefits of mindfulness, they're encouraged to practise the exercises at home. As a parent, you can encourage them to practise; you can even do some of the exercises with them, if they're willing. The best results are seen with time and practice.

Since everyone has their own way of approaching mindfulness, it's important to try different exercises. There are several guided meditations available on YouTube. You can help your child find the ones they like best.

# INTOLERANCES

## Little reminder!

Intolerances are like glasses that distort reality! Your child may be more sensitive to certain types of situations and tend to avoid them. Encourage your child to pay attention to these situations and take steps to expose themselves to them.

To watch the video capsule



# THE ACCOMMODATION TRAP

## Little reminder!

Accommodation consists in altering your parenting style to prevent or lessen the discomfort your child feels because of their anxiety (Thompson-Hollands *et al.*, 2014). Accommodation is normal, because one of your jobs as a parent is to meet your child's needs and protect them from harm. However, when you are too accommodating, these risks making your child's anxiety worse by encouraging them to avoid stressful situations. So, it's important to be aware of the harm that accommodation can do in the longer term.

**Here are some examples of accommodating behaviours** (inspired from Benito *et al.*, 2015; Lebowitz *et al.*, 2012):

- Changing the family routine and making exceptions;
- Providing too much security: phone calls, hovering, asking questions, etc.;
- Enabling your child when it comes to avoiding anxiety-provoking situations (school, social situations);
- Speaking or acting on the child's behalf;
- Following strict rules and rituals;
- Limiting their responsibilities and independence.

Several studies have shown that while these accommodating behaviours may lessen the child's discomfort in the short term, they actually maintain and even increase it in the long term (Ginsburg *et al.*, 2004).

**To behave in a way that is more helpful to your child, you can learn to** (inspired from Masia *et al.*, 1999):

- Listen carefully and be empathetic;
- Remind your child that you trust them;
- Encourage them to be independent and self-sufficient;
- Model and encourage brave behaviours;
- Do breathing or visualization exercises with your child;
- Provide opportunities for exposure;
- Plan opportunities for exposure (small steps);
- Be positive and supportive: celebrate all efforts;
- Remind them about emotion management strategies;
- Help them reformulate their thoughts using specific questions;
- Pay attention to your own emotions, which can influence accommodating behaviours;
- Seek help.

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1. Do I tend to adopt accommodating behaviours? If so, in which situations? If not, do I tend to push my child into scary situations too quickly?

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2. Which new strategies could I use to help my child manage their anxiety better?

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3. Based on the excerpt below, describe in a few sentences what you would like to discuss with your child.

"I know how hard it is for you to \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). I understand it scares you or makes you feel anxious. I want you to know this is completely normal and that everyone gets scared sometimes. But I also want you to know that it's my job, as a parent, to help you do better at the things you find hard, which is exactly what I've decided to do. We'll be working on this for a while, and I know it'll probably take some time, but I love you too much not to help you. We'll talk about this again soon, and we'll come up with ideas to help you cope better. I'm really proud of you!" (Lebowitz *et al.*, 2014).

4. Now, choose some strategies to replace your accommodating behaviours. Identify concrete ways to help you enable your child less and expose them more to the things that cause them anxiety. This will be your action plan.

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## CONCLUSION AND INVITATION

## To conclude...

You are encouraged to implement your action plan after having a conversation with your child. You can observe the changes and difficulties encountered in order to discuss them at the next workshop.

## WORKSHOP 3

# PREVENTING ANXIETY ON A DAILY BASIS

## OBJECTIVES

At the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Identify helpful and harmful lifestyle habits;
- Identify stress management strategies;
- Implement ways to support your child in the use of lifestyle habits and stress management strategies.
- To assess your learning and achievements;
- Implement strategies to prevent your child from relapsing.

## LIFESTYLE HABITS

### SELF-ESTEEM

**Nurturing your self-esteem helps to increase your sense of well-being and gives you a more positive self-image!**

To nurture your self-esteem, try identifying one of your strengths and applying it in your daily life. Your self-esteem improves when you make a positive assessment of yourself.

**How do you nurture your self-esteem on a daily basis?**

(Neff and Vonk, 2009; Neff, 2011; Seligman *et al.*, 2005)

### SPIRITUALITY

**Nurturing your spirituality is good for your mental health!**

Spirituality can help you maintain a positive attitude about the things that happen to you and also help you manage your stress. Spirituality isn't the same thing as religion! It's a way to connect with yourself, tune in to your needs, follow your beliefs, etc.

**Are you a spiritual person? Why?**

(Simard, 2006)

<p><b>HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS</b></p> <p>Maintaining healthy relationships with others and having a caring, supportive network contributes to good mental health!</p> <p>Having healthy relationships with loved ones where you can share your thoughts and emotions is a way to get to know yourself better and figure out who you are as a person.</p> <p><b>Are you satisfied with your network of friends? Why?</b></p> <p>(Claes, 2003)</p>	<p><b>SLEEP</b></p> <p><b>To be able to do the things you enjoy and feel good, you need enough sleep!</b></p> <p>Getting enough sleep can help you feel better, manage your emotions better, and have a better quality of life.</p> <p><b>Do you generally sleep well? How many hours a night do you sleep?</b></p> <p>(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>	<p><b>HEALTHY EATING</b></p> <p><b>A healthy diet is essential to good health!</b></p> <p>Eating a balanced diet will help you grow and give you the energy you need to get through your day. It will also help you do better in sports or school.</p> <p><b>Do you think you eat a balanced diet? Is this important to you?</b></p> <p>(Government of Canada, 2019; Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>	<p><b>EXERCISE</b></p> <p><b>Exercise can be a great way to take care of yourself every day!</b></p> <p>For example, sports can be an opportunity to make new friends, improve your self-esteem, lower your stress, and improve your concentration.</p> <p><b>How many times a week do you play sports?</b></p> <p>(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019; Simon <i>et al.</i>, 2005; Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>
<p><b>FUN</b></p> <p>Taking care of yourself every day also means taking time to have fun and do things you love—alone or with family and friends!</p> <p>For example, this can include spending time on a favourite hobby or simply relaxing. Having fun with loved ones is just as important as taking time for yourself.</p> <p><b>What makes you happy? Why?</b></p> <p>(Québec government, 2018)</p>	<p><b>BALANCE</b></p> <p><b>A healthy balance between the different areas of your life (family, friends, sports, school) is good for you!</b></p> <p>In fact, having a good balance lets you focus on all the important parts of your life and pay attention to your needs.</p> <p><b>Do you think you have a good balance in your life? Why?</b></p> <p>(Tel-Jeunes, 2019; Université de Montréal, 2015)</p>	<p><b>COMPASSION</b></p> <p><b>To feel more comfortable with others and enjoy more positive energy, you need to be compassionate with others and with yourself!</b></p> <p>For example, avoid having prejudices and making assumptions about other people. You can also do good deeds, truly listen to other people, or simply be kind to people.</p> <p><b>How do you show compassion for other people?</b></p> <p>(Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013; Neff, 2003)</p>	<p><b>MINDFULNESS</b></p> <p><b>Practising mindfulness can help you manage your stress!</b></p> <p>Mindfulness is a way to help you manage your emotions and resolve problems, because it teaches you to pay closer attention to the signals your body is sending you. It helps you to make links between your sensations, thoughts, emotions, etc.</p> <p><b>When do you practice mindfulness? Why?</b></p> <p>(Gosselin and Turgeon, 2015)</p>

<p><b>SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE</b> Being sedentary and not getting enough exercise has an impact on your physical and mental health!</p> <p>Exercise is a good way to manage your stress on a day-to-day basis, among other reasons because it lets you blow off steam. It also has an impact on your self-image, health, and well-being.</p> <p><b>When you exercise, do you notice any benefits? What are they?</b></p> <p>(Simon <i>et al.</i>, 2005; Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>	<p><b>INTERNET ADDICTION</b> Spending too much time on the Internet can become a problem and even get out of control!</p> <p>If you find that you're using the Internet and social media to forget about your problems, that you're not sleeping at night because you're staying up late online, or that you're spending too much time alone, talk to someone you trust about the situation.</p> <p><b>Do you feel the need to spend time on the Internet or social media to be happy?</b></p> <p>(Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>	<p><b>CONFLICTUAL RELATIONSHIPS</b> Arguing with loved ones can be bad for you!</p> <p>When faced with a conflict, you can decide to react or respond. You can use problem-solving strategies to work through it: assess the conflict, consider different solutions before choosing one, then take action.</p> <p><b>How do you typically manage your conflicts?</b></p> <p>(Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Rubenstein <i>et al.</i>, 2019)</p>	<p><b>LACK OF SLEEP</b> Frequent sleep deprivation can have a negative effect on your health and the way you handle stress!</p> <p>If you don't get enough sleep or don't sleep well, you won't have the energy for all your activities. When you're sleep deprived, it's also harder to manage your emotions.</p> <p><b>Do you ever have trouble sleeping? Why?</b></p> <p>(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>
<p><b>SUBSTANCE USE</b> Drinking alcohol or using drugs often or excessively has a major impact on your physical and mental health!</p> <p>These substances alter your perception of reality, which can increase your stress levels. Drugs and alcohol affect your behaviour and sleep, and also put you at risk of developing an addiction.</p> <p><b>Do you ever drink or use drugs? Why?</b></p> <p>(Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>	<p><b>ISOLATION</b> Feeling isolated and unable to rely on support from family and friends increases your stress levels and makes you feel bad!</p> <p>To get out of this situation, you might decide to talk to someone you trust or hang out with a different circle of friends.</p> <p><b>Do you ever feel isolated? How does this affect you?</b></p> <p>(Claes, 2003; Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>	<p><b>BURNOUT</b> Burnout can increase your stress levels and make you feel bad!</p> <p>To feel good, you need to try to find a balance and avoid taking things to the extreme. Focusing all your energy in one place is unhealthy. You need to do different activities to avoid burning out.</p> <p><b>Have you ever had a burnout? When?</b></p> <p>(Tel-Jeunes, 2019; Université de Montréal, 2015)</p>	<p><b>SMOKING</b> Smoking can be very bad for your health and your stress levels!</p> <p>You might smoke as a way to cope with stress, but this is only a short-term fix; smoking actually makes your stress worse in the long term. At first, you may feel more in control, but it won't take long before you develop an addiction that's extremely hard to break.</p> <p><b>Have you ever wanted to smoke? Why?</b></p> <p>(Conseil québécois sur le tabac et la santé, n.d.; Tel-Jeunes, 2019)</p>

1. Are there any lifestyle habits you think your child could improve?

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2. How can you help them to improve their lifestyle habits?

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3. Which lifestyle habit(s) can you change yourself in order to be a good role model for your child?

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## STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

### Little reminder!

Stress management strategies are things your child can do to better manage their anxiety when faced with a stressful or anxiety-provoking situation.

**You can encourage your child to adopt strategies to help them cope with their anxiety (inspired by *Mouvement Santé mentale Québec, 2014*):**

- Ask for help, talk about it, ask for support from their friends or parents;
- Do relaxation, breathing, yoga, and mindfulness exercises;
- Get plenty of sleep, pamper themselves, show affection, take it easy, disconnect;
- Try to see things differently:
  - Practise gratitude;
  - Live in the moment.
- Reformulate negative thoughts into more realistic, helpful thoughts;
- Laugh, have a good time, throw a party, have fun;

- Write down or draw their emotions and thoughts;
- Spend time with an animal that makes them feel good;
- Play sports, or do fun or creative activities:
  - Sports, exercise, walking, martial arts, combat sports, etc.;
  - Drawing, writing, art, drama, dance, music, singing, crafts, reading, photography, etc.
- Go on a cultural outing;
- Get in touch with nature: go for a walk in the forest, do some gardening.

1. Which three stress management strategies do you think would work best for your child in an anxiety-provoking situation?

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## AND AFTER...?

### Little reminder!

It's important to be prepared for the more difficult times that potentially lie ahead.

1. What are some signs that your child isn't doing well?

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2. What tools do you want to remember when things aren't going so well?

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3. What resources in your area could help you, if needed?

CLSC:

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Community organizations:

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School:

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**Parents' help line: <https://www.teljeunes.com/en/parents>**

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