

MENTAL HEALTH



STUDENT TOOLKIT

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Breathing exercises



Some days, our stress levels peak, our anxiety heightens, and we can feel our hearts race. So, how do we calm everything down?

When we are stressed, we move into our sympathetic nervous system - this is our fight or flight mode. When we are working in a fight or flight mode, our hormones are telling our body that we are in a dangerous or stressful situation, we may experience some of these symptoms:

- Our hearts beating faster.
- Our breathing being more rapid.
- Feeling hot or clammy.
- Feeling we cannot see straight or focus.
- Having headaches.
- Feeling agitated.
- A need to run (because our blood rushes to our limbs and muscles).
- A need to lash out or fight (because our brain tells our body we are not safe).

When we are in our fight or flight mode, no amount of telling us to 'calm down' will help. But we can learn to regulate our emotions and calm ourselves down.

Our focus is to help our brain and body to shift into the calm and relaxed mode. When we are calm and relaxed:

- We can breathe easily.
- Our body is clam.
- Our mind is relaxed.
- Our metabolism is activate.
- We feel in control.
- We can relax, unwind, and feel peaceful.

Breathing exercises will help you to relax and become calm.

They will:

- Aids regulation in that moment.
- Develop fine motor skills.
- Support concentration skills.
- Develop colour recognition.
- Strengthen handwriting skills.
- Encourage relaxation.
- Develop focus.
- Create a focus on the present.
- Calm a restless mind.
- Develop inner quiet.
- Reduce stress and anxiety.
- Can improve sleep.

Practice one or more of these breathing exercises for 10 - 15 minutes daily. Sit or lie down in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. After each exercise, take time to notice how you feel.

Alternate nostril breathing

1. With palm facing upward, place left hand in lap.
2. Make a peace sign with the right hand and place the tip of the index finger and middle finger on each side of the bridge of the nose.
3. Place the ring finger and the little finger on the left nostril and place the thumb on the right nostril.
4. Close the right nostril with the thumb. Exhale and then inhale slowly through the left nostril.
5. Close the left nostril with the pinky and ring finger and release the thumb on your right nostril. Exhale and then inhale slowly through the right nostril. Repeat the cycle nine more times.

Coherent breathing

1. Inhale gently and smoothly through the nose while counting to six.
2. Exhale smoothly while counting to six.
3. Continue this pattern for 5-10 minutes.

Tip: To keep time, silently count to six as you inhale and exhale, or go to coherence.com to find a free clock.

Alternate nostril breathing

1. Throughout the exercise, leave the tip of the tongue against the top of the mouth behind the upper front teeth.
2. Exhale through the mouth, pushing the air out around the tongue.
3. Close the mouth, and inhale through the nose for four counts.
4. Hold the breath for seven counts.
5. Exhale through the mouth, pushing the air out around the tongue for eight counts.
6. Inhale and repeat the cycle three more times

Diaphragm breathing

1. Breathe slowly and deeply into the abdomen.
2. Put a hand on the navel and notice it rise and fall.

Three-part breathing

1. Inhale slowly and deeply.
2. Imagine filling the abdomen first, then the middle rib cage, and then the upper chest.
3. Exhale slowly, imagining the air emptying from top to bottom.
4. Pull in the abdomen slightly to expel all the air from the lungs, and repeat the cycle.

Breath breathing

1. Use the imagination to move the breath to different parts of the body.
2. Breath in and out through the top of the head, heart, lower abdomen, or base of the spine.

Exam stress

Priority sheet and action ladder



When we feel like we have too much to do, we can quickly spiral into feeling:

- Overwhelmed
- Suffocated
- Panicked
- Stressed

This can mean that we begin procrastinating, avoiding or starting everything and finishing nothing.

For many, it can feel like 'everything is a priority' and it all needs to be done NOW. So, how do we identify the priorities, and reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed and stressed, so that we can be more productive?

A priority sheet is a simple way of identifying the importance and urgency of a task and being able to separate them. These are important skills for school, the workplace, and life! Start by listing all the things you need to do, then put them in order of urgency (what is coming up first?).

Action ladders help us to identify what we want to achieve and what we need to do to get there. Breaking it down helps us to feel less stressed.

Exam strategies

When exams begin, nerves and anxieties escalate. However, with the right strategies we can calm our central nervous system and relax our minds to perform at our best.

Did you know: One study found that students performed 4.8% better if they took a bottle of water to exams. Perhaps not that shocking, as drinking cold water regulates our central nervous systems and calms us.

Before exams: Focus on calming your mind and helping your body to perform effectively.



Good nutrition: eat a balanced meal the night before and that morning.



During your exams, get 30-45 mins light to moderate exercise each day to manage nerves.



Ensure you have a good sleep routine and an early bedtime.



Before your exam, eat a crunchy or chewy food to regulate your emotions.



Pop an icepack on the back of your neck or on your collar bone to calm your nervous system.

During exams: Regulate your emotions and relax your body and mind.



Take a cold water bottle to sip.



Breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4.



Keep your internal voice positive and keep your mind focussed.



Tense your toes and release, then legs and release, tummy, hands, shoulders, to relax.

After exams: Release and clear the stress in your body.



Get some fresh air to let stress go.



Hydrate to remove stress toxins.



Listen to your favourite songs.



Do something that makes you laugh.

PRIORITY SHEET Not all tasks are equal - identifying the priority level allows us to plan our time most effectively.

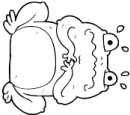
<div>Urgent and important (Work with a deadline) Do it NOW!</div>	<div>Important but not urgent (Work with deadlines) Plan when to do it - do it later</div>	<div>Not important but urgent (Tasks other people could do on your behalf) Can someone else do this for you?</div>	<div>Not urgent and not important (Want to do but not needed) Distractions</div>
<div>eg: Revising for an exam this week or submitting a piece of work with an urgent deadline.</div>	<div>eg: Learning something new and productive, or reviewing lesson notes/work, or finding time to unwind, relax, do some exercise and eat.</div>	<div>eg: Making sure your friends are ok, or planning a trip, or taking the dog for a walk.</div>	<div>eg: Playing video games or gaming, or excess TV/internet browsing, or gossiping with friends, or looking at WhatsApp etc.</div>



"If you have to eat a live frog, do it first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you for the rest of the day" - Mark Twain

To put it simply, eating the frog is the process of identifying your most difficult task of the day and completing it before you do any other work.

If you have to eat two frogs, eat the bigger one first. Identify which task is more challenging, and do that first thing.



ACTION LADDER

Goal:

Step seven:

Step six:

Step five:

Step four:

Step three:

Step two:

Step one:

Starting point:

Feeling overwhelmed



Priority sheet and action ladder

As with exam stress, priority sheets and action ladders can be a useful tool when we start to feel overwhelmed. When you feel like you have too much to do, try using one or both of these tools to help give you a clear plan of action and focus on one thing at a time.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation allows us to:

- Recognise our emotions.
- Respond to our emotions and calm ourselves.
- Develop our resilience.
- Increase our confidence.
- Increase our self-esteem.
- Resist highly emotional overwhelming responses to triggers.
- Be more able to control emotions or redirect them to positive actions.
- Return to our calm and relaxed mode (and away from fight or flight).
- Adjust to changes in situations.
- Manage unpredictability.

Some self-regulation activities include:



Stroke a favourite animal



Arts and crafts - make something



Breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4.



Play a card or board game



Have a cold drink



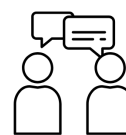
Eat a crunchy snack



Get moving - run, skip, jump, swing, bounce



Listen to music



Talk to someone



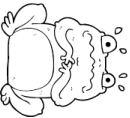
Curl up under a blanket with your favourite toy



Colour something in...

PRIORITY SHEET Not all tasks are equal - identifying the priority level allows us to plan our time most effectively.

<div>Urgent and important</div> <div>(Work with a deadline)</div> <div>Do it NOW!</div>	<div>Important but not urgent</div> <div>(Work with deadlines)</div> <div>Plan when to do it - do it later</div>	<div>Not important but urgent</div> <div>(Tasks other people could do on your behalf)</div> <div>Can someone else do this for you?</div>	<div>Not urgent and not important</div> <div>(Want to do but not needed)</div> <div>Distractions</div>
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Step five:

Step four:

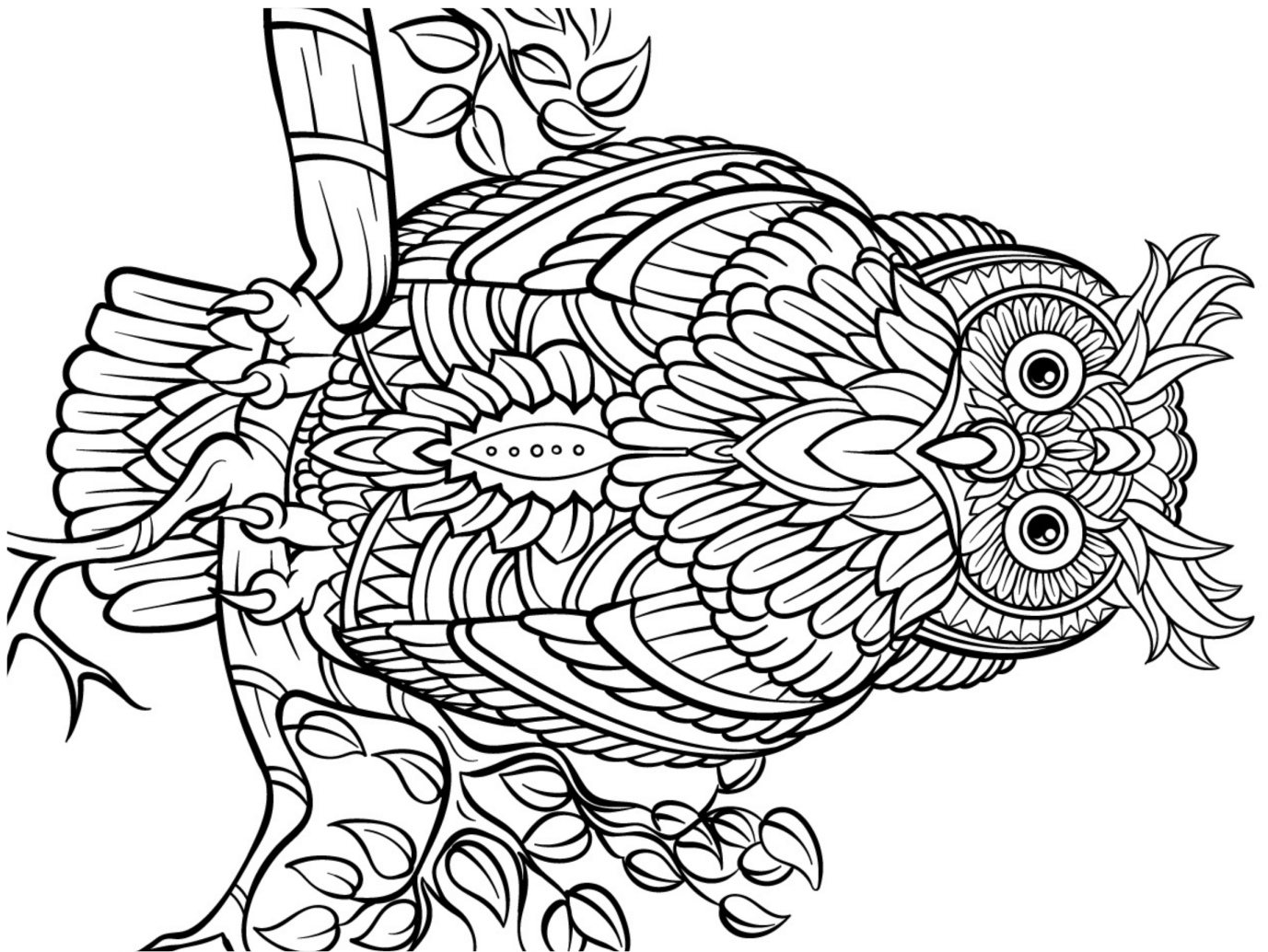
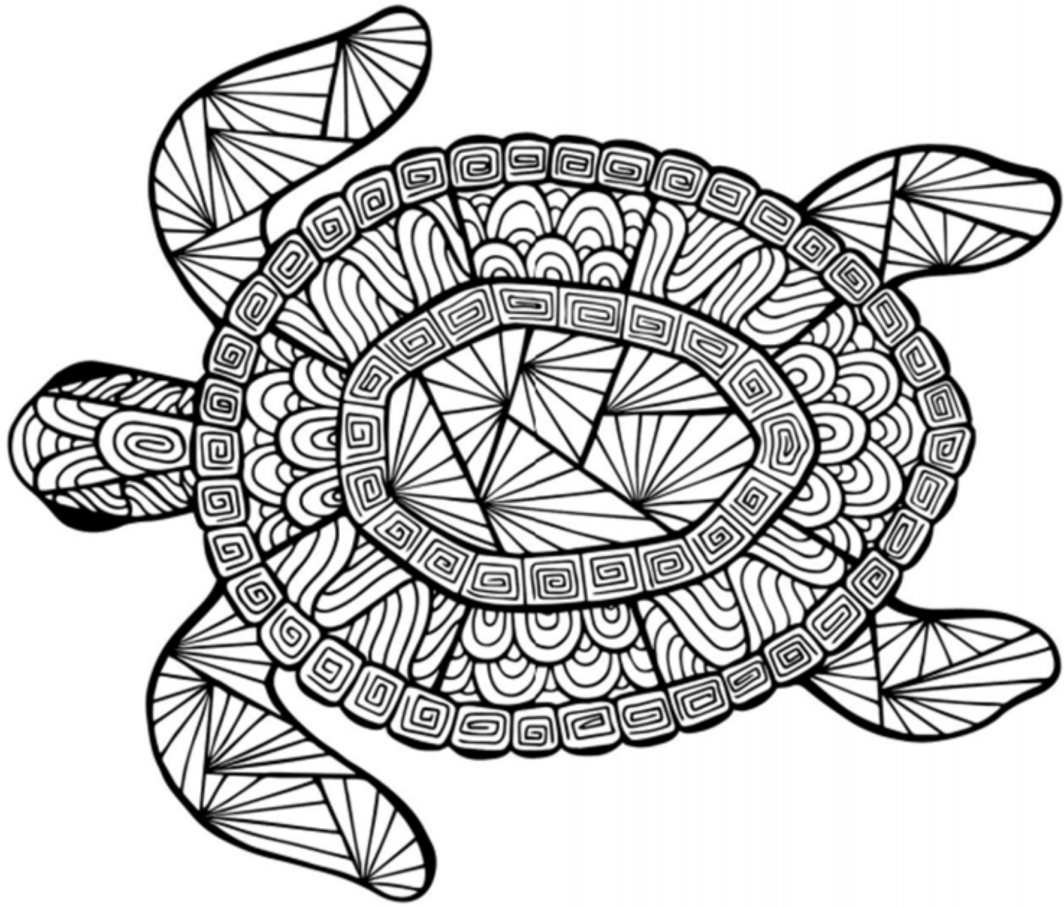
Step three:

Step two:

Step one:

Starting point:

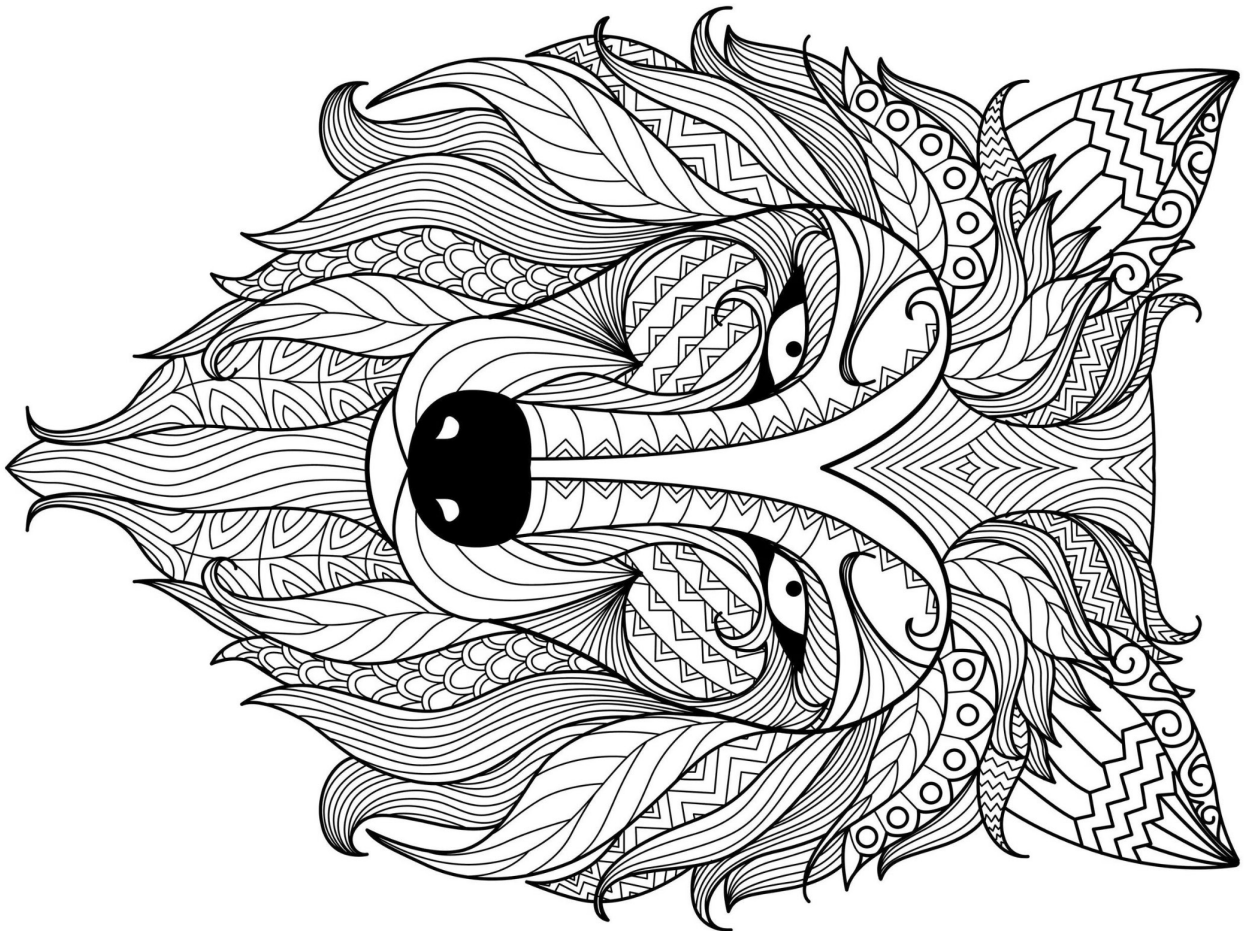
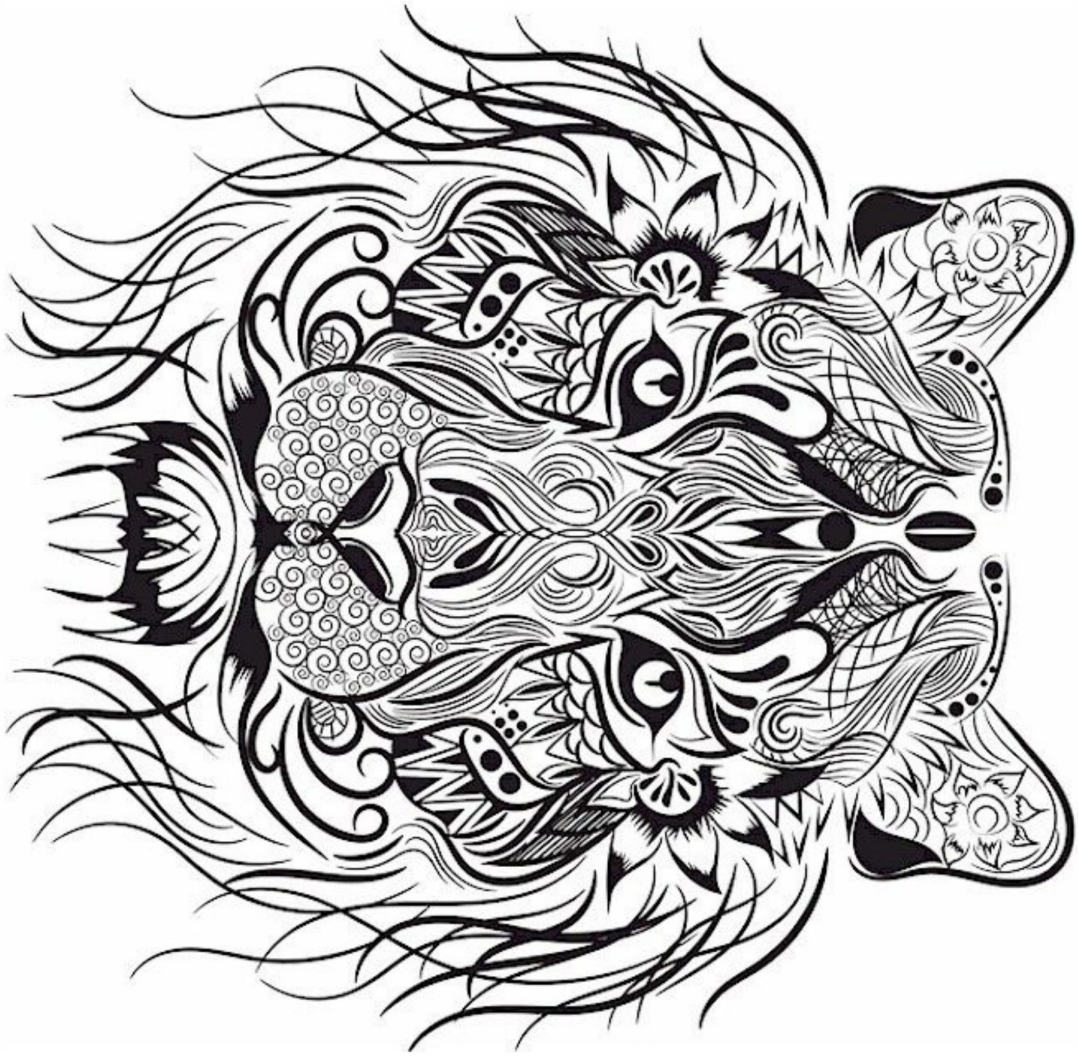
SELF-REGULATION ACTIVITY SHEET



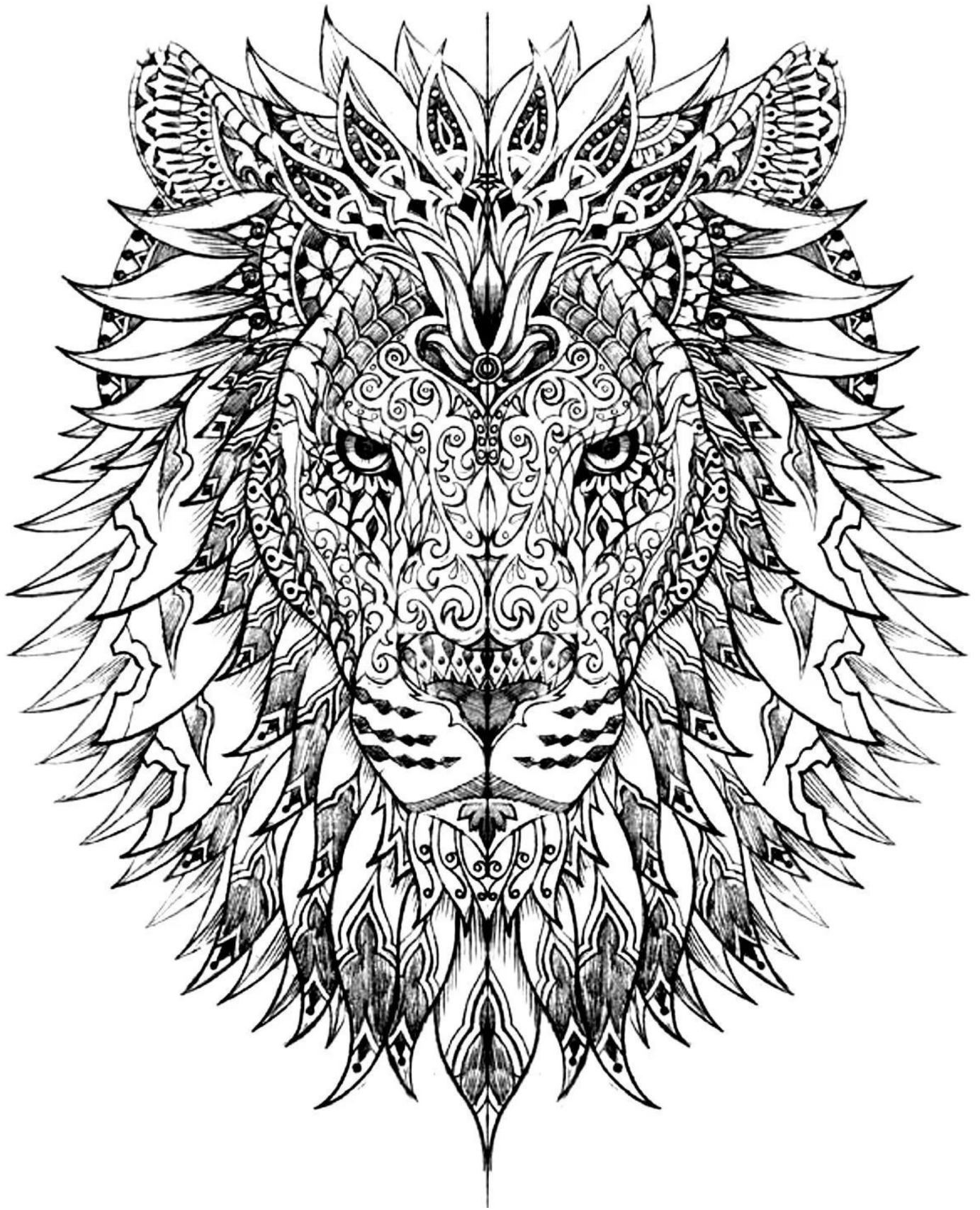
SELF-REGULATION ACTIVITY SHEET



SELF-REGULATION ACTIVITY SHEET



SELF-REGULATION ACTIVITY SHEET



Feeling worried or anxious



Problem solving grid

When we are overwhelmed with worries, it can be challenging to find solutions. Take time to problem solve, one at a time using a problem solving grid:

Problem:	What do I want to achieve?	What are the possible options to solve the problem?
Which option feels best to solve the problem?	Do I need any help? If so, from whom?	
Steps I need to take:		

Things I can control

Often, it helps to recognise that in life, there are some things that you simply cannot control and therefore it is a waste of your energy to worry about them. There are, however, things that you can control, and it is important to realise that your actions influence these things.

Things you CANNOT control: Other people's behaviour, mistakes made in the past, other people's decisions and what they do with their time, who is kind to you, other people's friends, other people choosing to be honest or not, other people accepting help, other people accepting you, other people choosing to apologise or not, the weather, traffic - you cannot predict what might happen in the future.

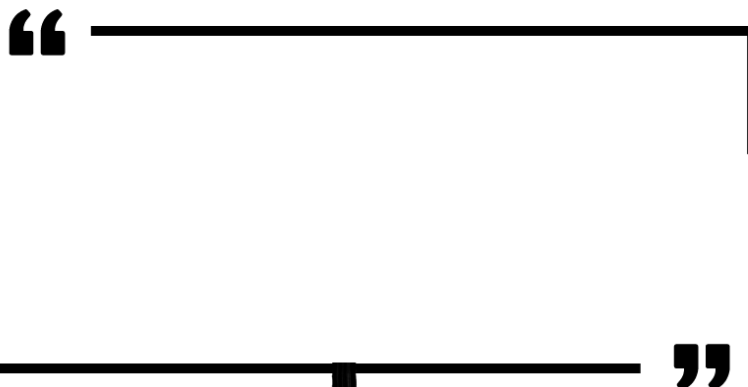
Things you CAN control: How much time you spend online, your self-care, decisions you make in the future, how you respond to other people, your actions, how hard you study, your attitude, doing your chores, listening, keeping your promises, keep trying, apologising when you do something wrong, doing your homework, being honest, being kind, ASKING FOR HELP.

How can I solve my problem?

Sometimes, it can help to use a simple flow chart to establish how you can deal with a particular problem, then use an action ladder to work it through:



*What is
your
worry?*



*Is there something
you can do about it?*

YES!

*This is a practical worry
that needs some attention
to find a way forward.*

NO!

*This is a hypothetical
worry or a 'what if' worry
where our brain is checking
that we are safe.*

YOU CAN



Write an
action
plan



Ask for
help



List all the
solutions

**TAKE
ACTION**

YOU CAN



Write 5
positives



Calm your
mind



Take some
deep
breaths

ACTION LADDER

Goal:

Step seven:

Step six:

Step five:

Step four:

Step three:

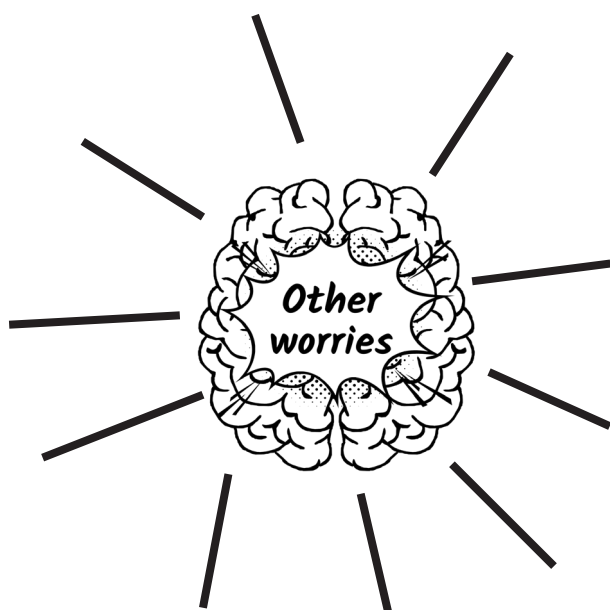
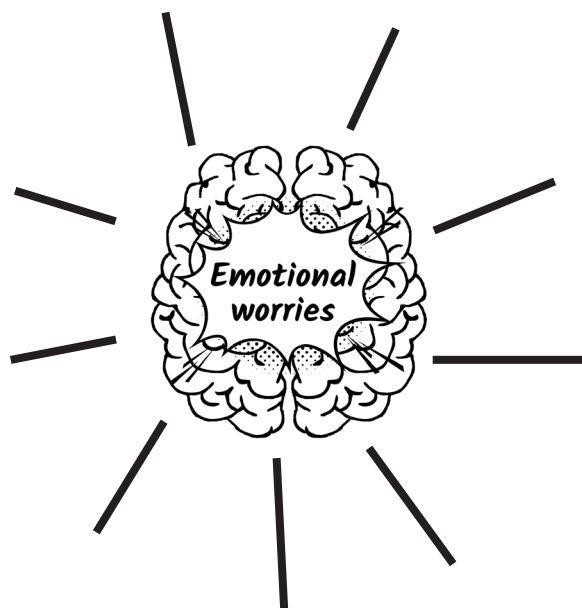
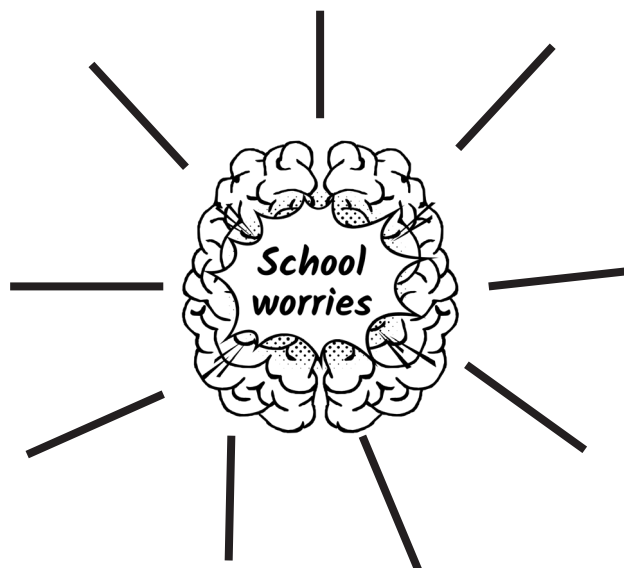
Step two:

Step one:

Starting point:

Brain dump

Sometimes, when we feel overwhelmed, we can lose sight of what the actual issues are. This is a great way to gain clarity and identify what is needed.

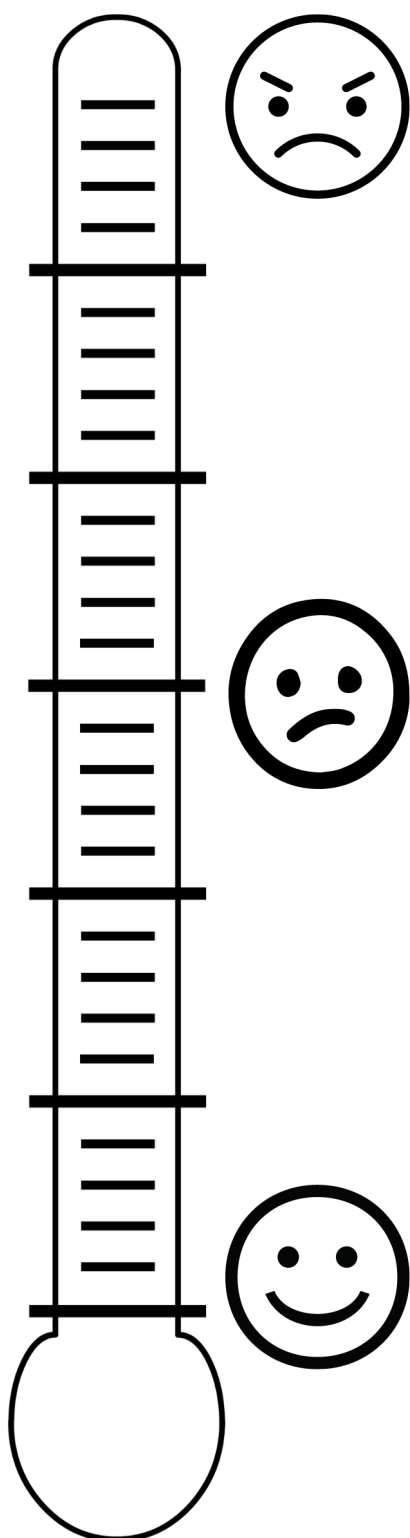


Feeling Angry



Feelings thermometer

It can sometimes be difficult to recognise what our emotions are and how to respond to them. For example: excitement and anxiety are both emotions that create adrenaline in the body. Reflecting on your feelings is a great way to start recognising your feelings. Just colour in the thermometer from green at the bottom to amber and then red at the top. Beside each emoji, write something that makes you feel this way:



“

”

“

”

“

”

Feeling sad



Self-care cup

Whilst we all talk about self-care and recognise its importance, recognising when our self-care is low or the early warning signs that something is out of balance is important to support our well-being.

Self-care is all about taking care of ourselves. Imagine you are a car - you wouldn't expect to drive all the way to the coast without petrol. Self-care is the fuel we give ourselves to have the energy and mental well-being to cope. Regular self-care improves our physical health, our mental health, our self-esteem, our focus, our concentration and reduces our stress and anxiety levels.

*Signs that I am
exhausted or
overwhelmed
(empty cup)*

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



Things that empty my cup:

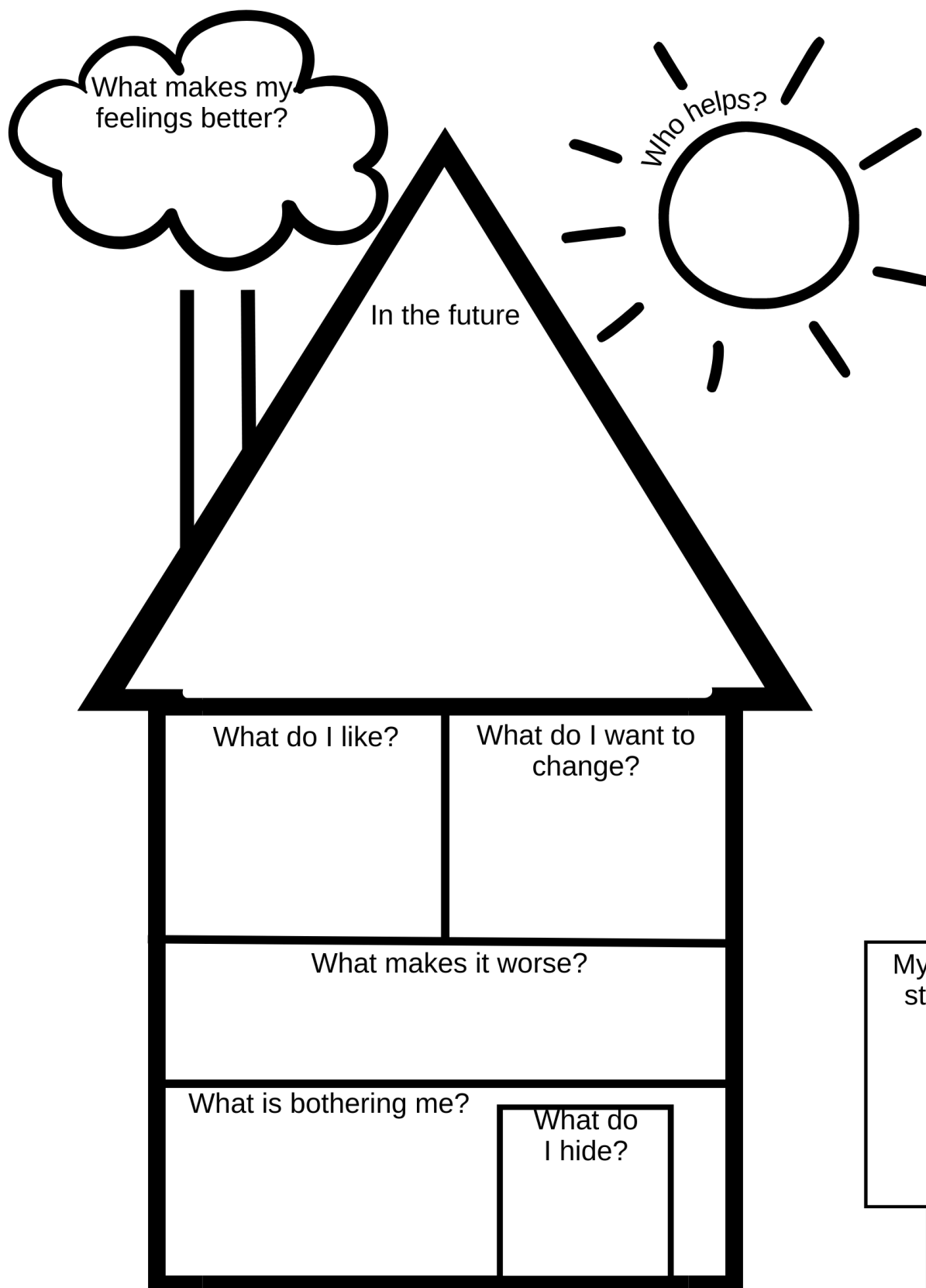
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Activities that boost my mood:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Feelings house

Sometimes, we know that things are bothering us, but it can feel hard to put into words. So, when someone asks 'what is bothering you?', the question feels impossible. Try using this technique - it may help.



The diagram is a large house shape with a triangular roof and a rectangular base. The roof is divided into two sections by a vertical line. The left section contains a cloud with the text "What makes my feelings better?". The right section contains a sun with the text "Who helps?". The base of the house is divided into four sections: two side-by-side at the top, one wide section in the middle, and two side-by-side at the bottom. The top-left section contains the text "What do I like?". The top-right section contains the text "What do I want to change?". The middle section contains the text "What makes it worse?". The bottom-left section contains the text "What is bothering me?". The bottom-right section contains the text "What do I hide?". To the right of the house is a separate rectangular box with the text "My next steps:".

What makes my feelings better?

Who helps?

In the future

What do I like?

What do I want to change?

What makes it worse?

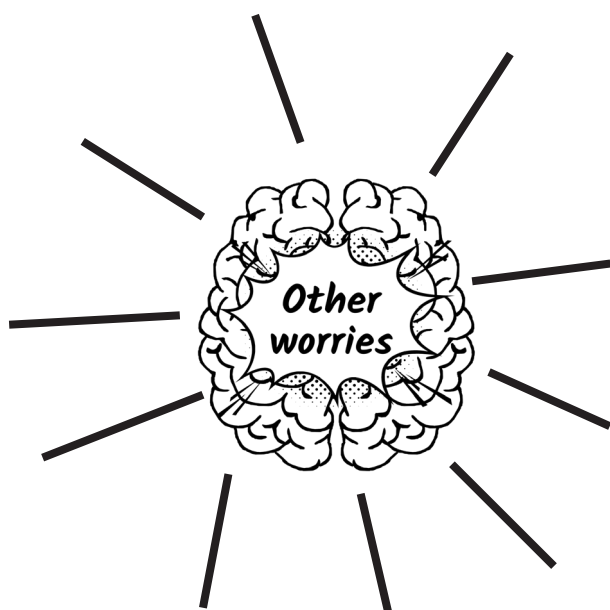
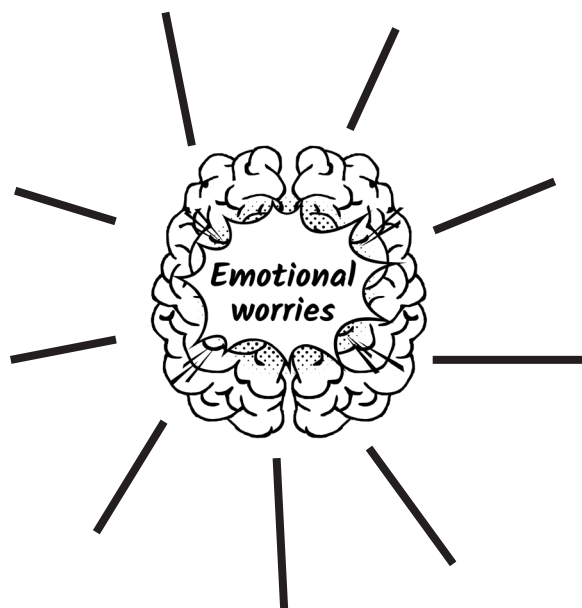
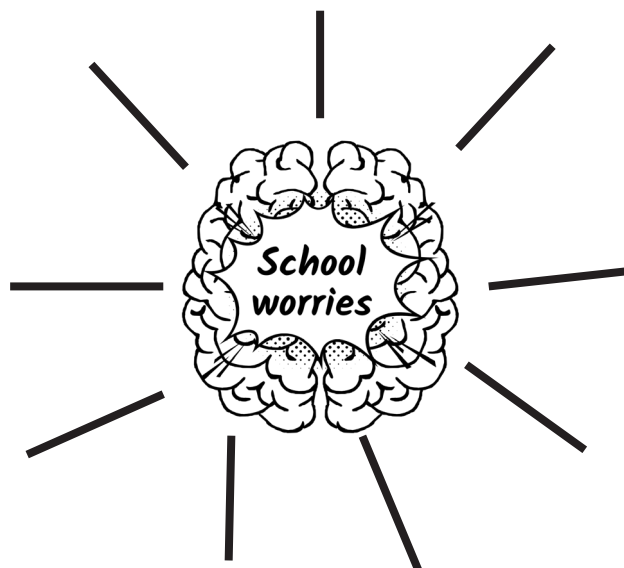
What is bothering me?

What do I hide?

My next steps:

Brain dump

A brain dump may also help...



Grief



When we lose someone, it can be difficult to process the feelings of grief we have. It is important to remember that expressing grief and crying is healthy. It is often helpful to remember the person we have lost and note down memories we have of them.

