



# THE CARD SYSTEM

## FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

All children feel anxious or afraid sometimes, but there are things parents can do to reduce their child's fear and anxiety. The CARD System (Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract) provides groups of strategies that parents can play to help their children cope with stressful situations. Originally used to help reduce children's fear and pain from medical procedures, CARD can also be used in other stressful situations. Playing your CARDS will engage your child and give them a voice when they feel anxious or afraid.

**COMFORT:** Help your child accept negative thoughts and feelings. Let them know these are normal and will pass. Coach your child to be courageous and to be the 'boss' of their worry.

**ASK:** Listen and talk to each other. Ask your child how they are feeling and answer any questions they have honestly. Use words that your child can easily understand and follow their lead. If your child doesn't seem interested or is not ready to talk, that's okay. Tell them they can always come to you if they have questions.

**RELAX:** Children see and feel what their parents are doing and often do the same. Model relaxation for your child. Speak to your child in a calm and normal speaking voice.

**DISTRACT:** Try to keep normal routines and limit the amount of time your child focuses on whatever is making them anxious.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR PLAYING YOUR CARDS

### COMFORT

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- Talk with your child about what they can do to cope with anxiety. They will feel like they have some control.
- Empower your child to overcome negative thoughts and feelings (“You are stronger than you feel!”)
- Validate your child’s concerns and feelings. Tell them it’s OK to be upset.
- Avoid focusing on the worry. Limit exposure to media or news.
- Be mindful of the conversations you have with family members.
- Create daily routines that give your child predictability and control.
- Create a comfortable environment for your child.
- Tell your child what you are doing to help.

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### ASK QUESTIONS

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- Answer your child’s questions using age-appropriate language.
- Possible questions you can ask your child:
  - › What questions do you have?
  - › How are you feeling?
  - › How can I help you to be more comfortable?
  - › What are your friends saying?
  - › What fun thing can you do today?

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### RELAX

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- Do things that your child enjoys to help them feel more secure and connected.
- Practice taking deep belly breaths with your child.
- Listen to a mindfulness or relaxation activity and practice together.
- Practice positive self-talk (“This may be hard, but I can get through it!”).
- Practice being grateful (Think of 5 things you are grateful for while brushing your teeth).
- Physical activity is important to help us relax (playing catch, stretching, biking, walking).
- Be flexible and adjust expectations if needed.

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### DISTRACT

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- Talk about things that are important to your child such as sports, dancing, or art.
- Read books.
- Colour, draw, do crafts, scrapbook.
- Watch movies.
- Play games.
- Work on puzzles.
- Play outside.
- Play with a favourite toy.
- Help with your child’s homework or activity book.

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# HOW WILL YOU PLAY YOUR CARDS?

**HOW WILL  
YOU COMFORT?**

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**WHAT WILL  
YOU ASK?**

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**WHAT WILL YOU  
DO TO RELAX?**

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**HOW WILL  
YOU DISTRACT?**

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