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resilient kids  
project

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THE  
**BIG EMOTIONS**  
*toolkit*  
for parents and educators!

free workbook &  
teaching videos



# About the Author



## **Niki Portus**

Mom, educator, therapist and coach.

Psychotherapist and coach Niki founded The Resilient Kids Project in 2016 and Rethink Your Life CIC to offer donations based therapy to children, families and adults on low incomes. She specialises in trauma, PTSD, C-PTSD and developmental trauma. Her main modes of practice are in EMDR and clinical hypnotherapy. She also has a first class honours degree in child development and has worked in Early Years education for over 18 years.

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# Welcome!

## **Does your child struggle with anxiety? Are you worried and anxious as a parent?**

As a parent it can often feel overwhelming to help your child manage big emotions.

Supporting children with anxiety can be hard. It is easy for things to spiral out of control so home life feels fraught and chaotic. You may feel like you are avoiding situations for fear of escalating your child's fear.

## **Children's feelings are big feelings, stuck in their body and making them feel yuck.**

Parenting with anxiety is even harder! Fear judgement, fear of making mistakes, fear of damaging your child.

As parents we endlessly worry about getting it wrong at the best of times.

I've been a parent and Early Years educator for nearly 20 years now and seen first-hand anxiety rise in both parents and children. I'm also a psychotherapist and coach specialising in trauma and attachment patterns.

I help parents manage their anxiety and fears as well as their children's.

The Resilient Kids Project has run since early 2016 as a live workshop series, teaching parents and children how to support their emotional wellbeing together.

It's now a free online resource!

This workbook goes with the video series teaching you some of the stabilisation and resourcing techniques I use with children, teens and adults.



Day 1

# Introduction

This workbook goes with the video mini series that talks you through each day of the 5 day challenge. The worksheets are designed as printable scripts which can be used both for 1:1 work and in class groups too. This first day is simply about exploring emotions and feelings with your child. You'll be amazed at how brilliant and imaginative your children are!



# Playful ways to explore big emotions

Let's talk about our feelings and draw them.

**What does your Cross look like?**

Is it an animal or a toy?

Is it big or small?

Spiky or soft?

**What does your Sad look like?**

What colour does your **Sad** look like?

Does your **Sad** have a name?

**What does your Scared or Worried look like?**

Is it **Mr Worried** or **Miss Worried**?

Are they smooth or bumpy or glossy or hard?

Now we mustn't forget, the most important one of all!

**What does your Happy look like?**

Day 1 worksheet

# Emotions Top Trumps

Name the emotion:

Power score:

Positive:

Negative:

Consequence:

Transformer action:

Name the emotion:

Power score:

Positive:

Negative:

Consequence:

Transformer action:

Day 2

# Safe space work



Our brain wants to keep us safe

It has an amazing system, called the Limbic system, that does just that.

The way our brain reacts to experiences can become the lens through which we see the world. Is the world a safe or scary place?

These experiences create our feelings and emotional responses. Do we feel scared or angry, ashamed, guilty?

These feelings can be triggered by the unconscious response to a situation which may be similar to the previous scary experience. Our brain builds patterns of recognition and stores this information in building blocks called Schema.

Schema are our internal models of the world.

The information is stored along with the physical response, known as a somatic response. Often it is stored in our throat, chest, our stomach or our heart.

The thing about this part of our brain though is it has no sense of time and no sense of what is real or not real.

So if we think about something which embarrassed us 2 weeks ago – we feel exactly the same thing. We may blush, feel a bit sick, feel humiliated.

These responses can last a lifetime!

With safe space work we exploit the fact the brain doesn't know what's real or not real and we create a safe haven in our mind.

This actually soothes and calms our nervous system. We can then change our state from fight/flight in to rest and digest mode.

The safe space is a sanctuary we can escape to. The more we use it the more we can reinforce the new neural pathways in our brain around a felt sense of safety.

Day 2

# Creating a safe space

This is a special place you can always retreat to when you feel worried or scared or sad. It's very special as it's inside your head and you can make it anywhere in the world.

Close your eyes. Be very still

Take 3 breaths – in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Now imagine a place where you feel completely safe and secure.

What does it look like?

Where would it be?

Do you know the place?

What can you see?

What time of day is it?

Can you hear anything?

Can you smell anything?

What are you wearing?

What can you feel?

What is the weather doing?

Look around, what else can you see?

How do you feel in this place?

(Now bi-lateral tapping whilst this is read back verbatim to the person.)

Day 2

# Building a safe house

This house will be very safe and have rooms where you can put your feelings so they feel safe too and don't have to come out. If you're scared or angry there's a room that's just right because you're the one who's going to build the house and furnish the rooms!

Close your eyes and be very still.

Take 3 breaths – in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Now you're ready to build the house and I'm going to write everything down.

What colour is your house?

How tall is it and how many floors?

What's it made of?

What does the roof look like?

How many windows does it have?

How many rooms?

What sort of staircase – does it have one?

And if it had a special room, to put our negative feelings, that's very safe - what would that room look like?

Would there be food? Our feelings need food.

Would there be furniture? You can have whatever you like.

Ok let's install your house in to your brain!

(Now use bi-lateral tapping – butterfly taping - whilst this is read back verbatim to you by your parent!)

Day 3

## Container and vault work



One of the biggest struggles with anxiety can be intrusive thoughts. These unwanted thoughts can end up seemingly going round and round as we desperately try and problem solve the situation with “what if’s?”

For older children and teenagers this can prove a real stumbling block both in and out of school.

Worrying about exams, friendship groups, changing schools or classes. Maybe things are difficult at home and they’re worried about you.

As much as we want to smoothe the way for them as parents and educators our children can often still feel powerless to deal with situations and challenges.

This worksheet is for creating a vault or a container in which to visually put the unwanted thought or feeling which may arise when tackling a challenge.

In the supporting video I discuss other fun ways we can support our children in dealing with unwanted big emotions.

Building resources around the concept of containment isn’t about pretending things aren’t happening. Rather it gives our children, and ourselves, the choice of how and when we will deal with the worry.

By knowing they can chose how to deal with something children feel more empowered.

Day 3

# Building a vault

You're going to create a Vault or special container to put away unwanted thoughts or feelings.

Close your eyes, be very still.

Take 3 deep slow breathes and feel the ground beneath you

Now picture a vault or a safe – somewhere secure to lock things away

What does your vault look like?

What is it made of?

What size is it?

What colour is it?

What is the door like?

What is the lock like?

Does it have a key or something else?

Where is it in the world?

Describe where the vault is?

What can you see, what can you hear?

Now close your eyes and begin to butterfly tap – left right left right

Day 4

# Anchoring a positive state



Imagine being able to activate a positive mindset or feeling any time you want to! Well you can when you practice a technique called Anchoring.

Anchoring is a technique used in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) coaching.

These 2 fun activities help your child feel empowered to conjure up their super powers as and when they need them.

They can use them in any number of ways. If they have an exam or test coming up and they want to stay ultra focussed (I use this on myself all the time – it's particularly good if you suffer from sensory processing stuff)

The worksheets have the scripts you need to use. You'll get them to access a positive memory and bring it to life. Again it uses the sensory experience of a positive state, much like in the safe space and containment work. This time though it's more dynamic and movement based too.

Day 4

# Super hero power up cards

Think of 2 super powers you need to tackle your challenge.

They could be courage, bravery, concentration or patience. It can be any positive mind states you think you need.

Now think of a different symbol to represent each power. You're going to draw the symbols on 2 pieces of paper with the **wrong hand!**

Once you've drawn your symbols you need to concentrate on them hard and think of where you want to place the first one on the floor

Stand on the first symbol and drawn in all its power.

Then do the same with the second symbol.

Then pick them up and again concentrate hard on them.

Which one feels like the biggest super power?

Place that one on top of the other one and find somewhere to put them on the floor again.

Stand on them both and take in all the powers!

## Day 4

# Magic Circle

(Find somewhere to stand. Now imagine that in front of you on the floor is a magic circle. It can be like a hoola hoop.

This circle can be any colour or texture. It might shiny or sparkly or maybe your favourite colour.

When you step in this circle it magnifies your powers.  
You need to think of a special power. Is it concentration? Focus? Bravery?

Stage 1: Now think of a time when you felt that special power. You need to use a memory.

Bring up the memory you're going to use.

Picture the time in your mind. It might have been when you went swimming and felt really confident, or if you got extra house points at school.

Stage 2: Now standing in front of your circle, close your eyes.

Stage 3: (parent to read out loud)

“See now what you saw then, see it now”  
“feel now what you felt then, feel it now”  
“hear now what you heard then, hear it now”  
“Make the colours brighter, and brighter”  
“make the sounds louder and louder”  
“if you had a dial to turn up how your feel turn the dial up to 10”

Stage 4: When you get to 10 you need to step forward in to your magic circle and hold the feeling at 10

Stage 5: Then step back out of the circle. Shake of the energy and open your eyes  
Now repeat stage 1 – 5     3 TIMES!!! Using the same memory

But on the third time you're going to contain the special power so you can use it at any time.

When you step in to the circle the third time you are going to rub your thumb and forefinger together. Keep your eyes closed, keep the magic at level 10 powers.

Step back out of the circle. Open your eyes. Look down at the circle and shrink it down small – then pick it up and put it on your finger like a special ring.

Day 5

# Body based healing

I love using bodybased work in my practice and firmly believe it to be the biggest break through in trauma therapy. There are many amazing scientists and psychologists sharing their knowledge out there on the internet.

In the video for this final part of the challenge I reference Peter Levine PhD who is the creator of Somatic Experiencing. His work is also available for free on youtube. Other pioneers who influence my work include Dr Stephen Porges who developed Polyvagal theory which underpins (or should) all contemporary trauma therapists work.

By understanding our nervous system and how we can soothe it we can have far greater self-regulation. In fact without body based awareness we are unable to self regulate.

Teaching these skills to our children, I believe, is one of the most important things we can do as parents and educators'. Many of my adult clients have little or no connection to their body state. In fact they may have experienced such trauma that they have disconnected from their body all together. This can be in the form of disembodiment or dissociation. These however are normal survival states of the nervous system when in overwhelm.

To help our children build resilience we need to teach them to not be fearful of body sensations and also to know how they can soothe themselves on a body based level.

The exercises in the video are soothing and containing. They are simple to do and ones I use a lot in practice, both on myself and with clients.

Bringing our body out of perceived threat response enables our brains to be fully back online. This means we have full cortical functioning and are no longer in the primitive reactive part of the brain.

It might seem strange I've left this bit until last but in my experience working with children and young people I feel they need tangible results first when they have anxiety. By giving them the skills to know what to do with the horrible thoughts and feelings they can then soothe their bodies.

The aim of this easy to follow 5 day challenge is to build up their toolkit (and yours!) so they can feel more empowered to deal with lifes many challenges.

Together you can help them flourish and grow.