

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE WORRIED ABOUT **Coronavirus**



## **Are these worries normal?**

It is completely normal for children to worry in this kind of situation. This is a new situation for many of them, and unpredictability can be anxiety-inducing. There are several ways we can work together to help our children deal with these worries they may be experiencing:

## **Prevention Strategies:**

### **Limit news consumption.**

Even when it seems like they aren't listening, our children pick up on what they hear on the TV or radio. The tone of newscasters' voices may be enough to set off their worry alarm bells, and words like pandemic and outbreak can be fear-inducing for kids. Try to watch or listen to news after kids are in bed or opt for reading articles to limit their consumption.



### **Stick to routines.**

Kids thrive with boundaries and routines! Stick to an as-normal-as-possible routine while kids are out of school. Many of our children are used to having a visual schedule in their classrooms, so writing your daily schedule on a whiteboard or paper and reviewing it in the morning can help them feel ready for the day. Predictability can help ease kids' worries about other uncertainties!

### **Be open and honest.**

Kids may have questions about the Coronavirus, and it's perfectly okay to answer them! Let them share what they have heard with you and provide clarification or corrections if they have misinformation. Clear, concise answers from trusted adults can help prevent thoughts from spiraling! Keep the focus on what you are doing and can to prepare and prevent.

### **Set daily goals or intentions.**

Set small daily goals and track progress so kids can work toward something important to them! Make sure the goals are within their control. Set goals around how much they'll read each day, how many free throws they'll practice each day, or how many kind gestures they'll show toward family members each day. Track progress on a goal chart so they can have a visual reminder of the progress they're making!



### **Try a mindful practice.**

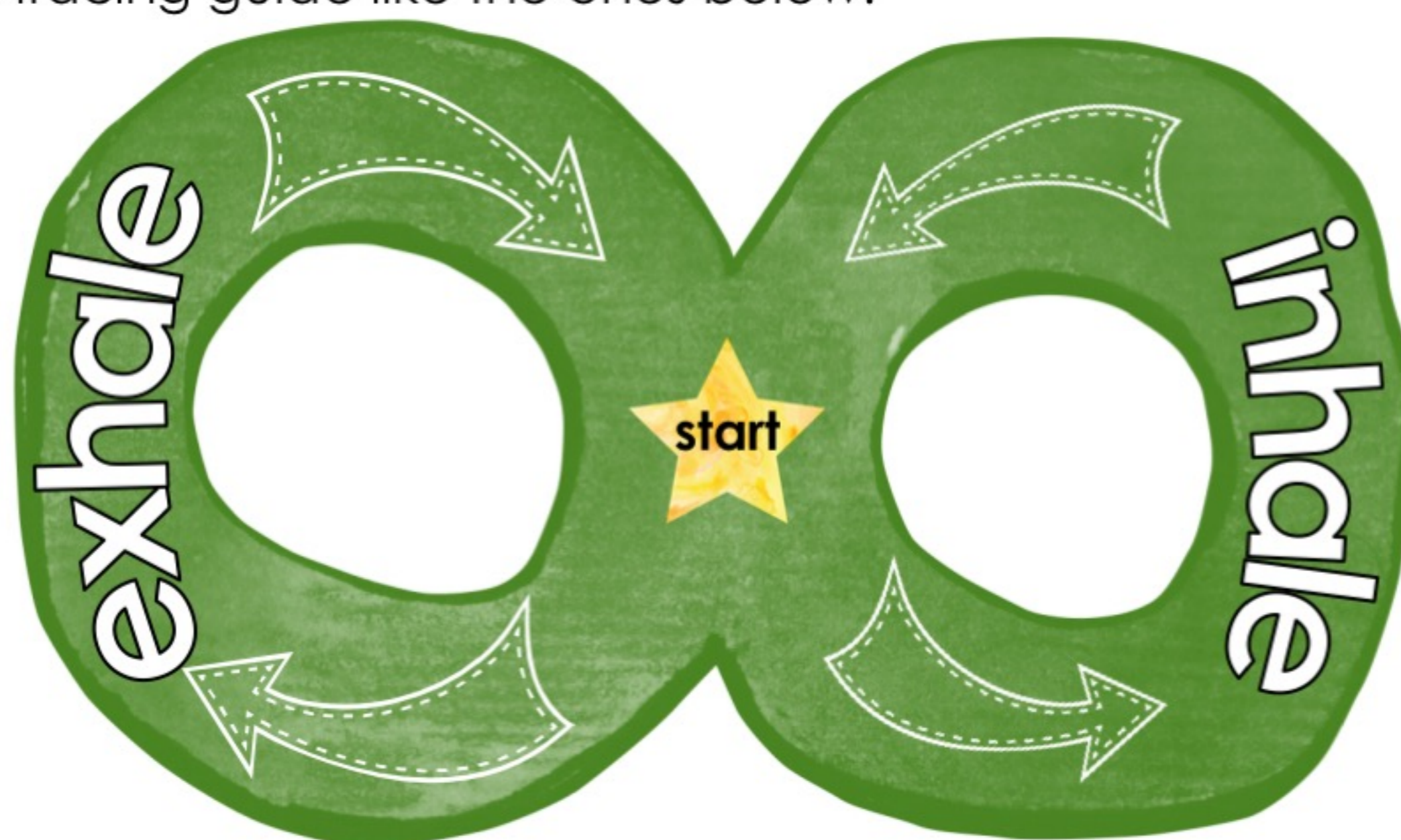
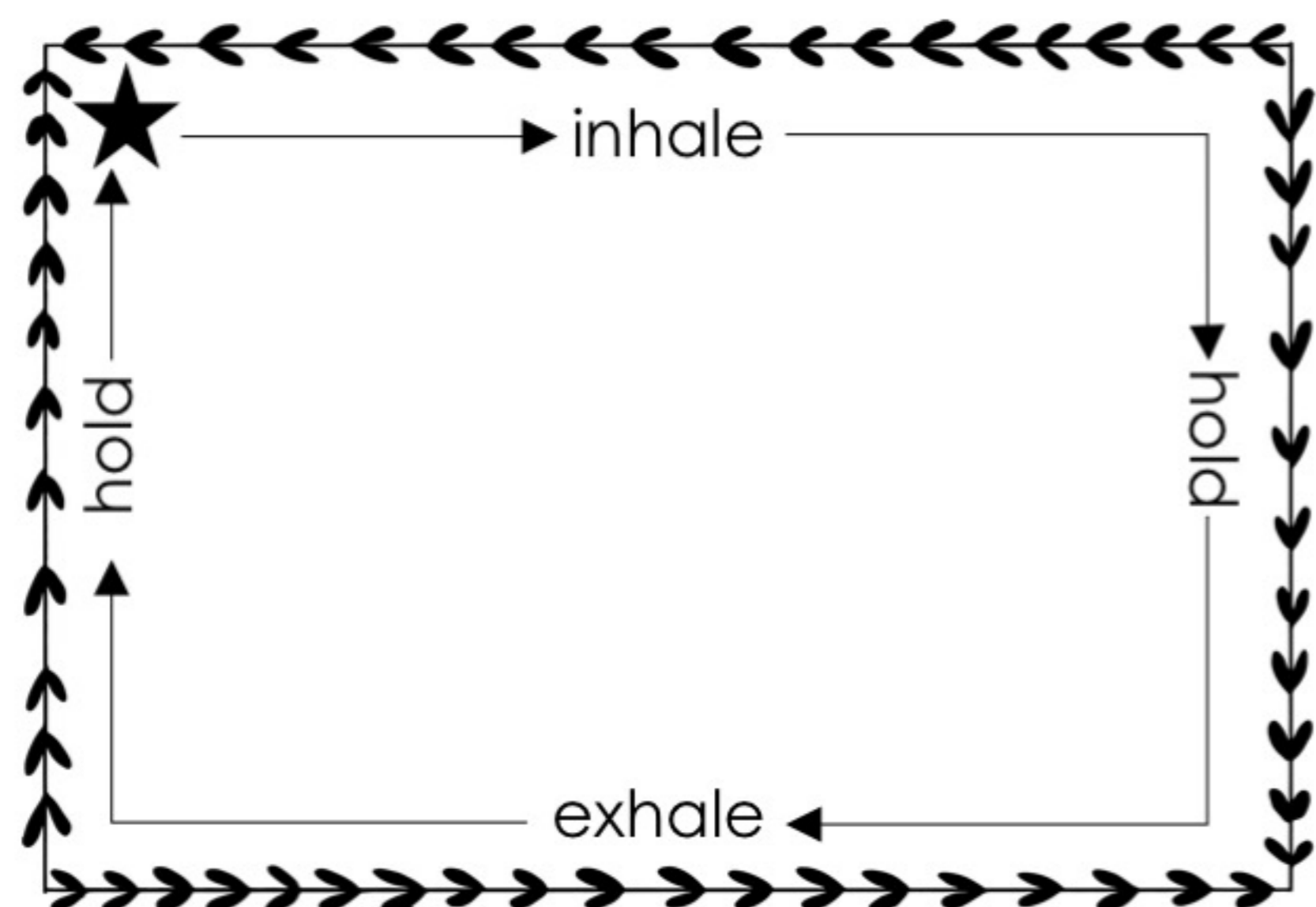
Mindfulness is an amazing practice for people of all ages. If you don't have a regular mindful practice already built in to your family time, try adding it to your routine. This can look like 5 minute morning or bedtime guided meditation (look for apps like Calm or Headspace) or simple mindful mandala coloring. Find a mindful practice that you all enjoy doing together!

# WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CHILD IS FEELING worried?

## Responsive Strategies:

### Practice controlled breathing.

If your child is showing signs of worry, take a moment to practice controlled breathing. You can simply count breaths for them (inhale 1 2 3 4 5 hold 1 2 3 4 exhale 1 2 3 4 5 6 7) or use tools like a pinwheel or bubbles. Help them slow their breathing and really exhale all of the air to calm their bodies and minds. Blow out slowly and completely while watching a pinwheel spin or trying to make a huge bubble. If you don't have these supplies on hand, use a simple tracing guide like the ones below:

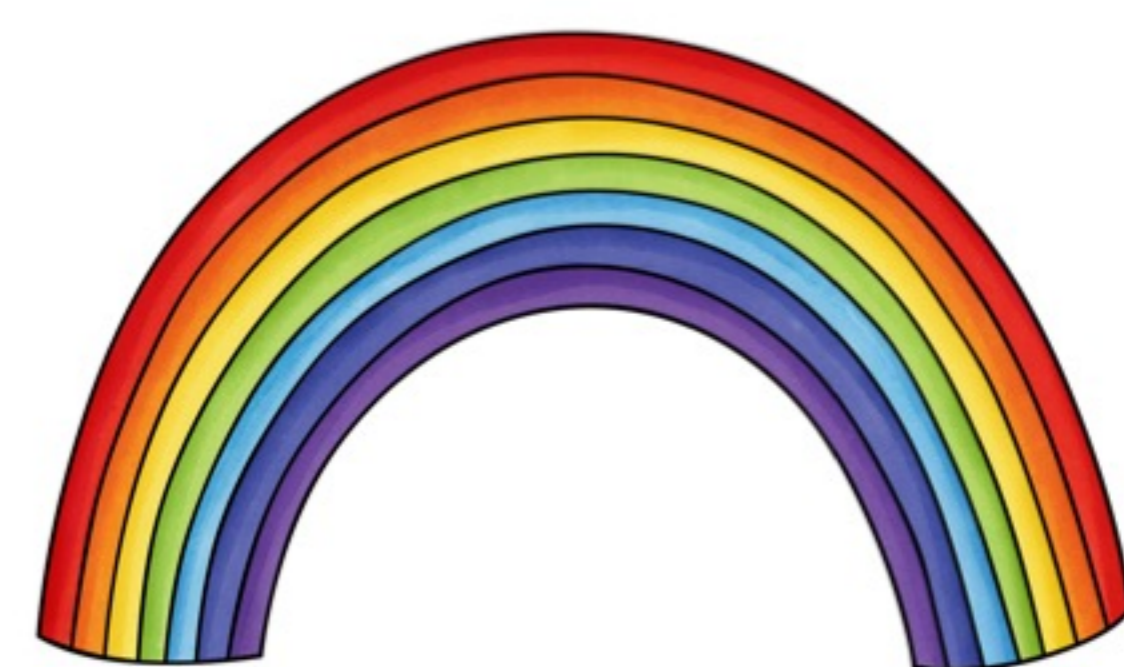


### Try Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

Help your child release tension from their body with a progressive muscle relaxation. In this exercise, children gradually tense up their muscles, hold for a moment, and then release them. Find scripts for this on your favorite mindfulness app or on YouTube (check the GoZen channel for age appropriate guides).

### Use grounding techniques.

Grounding strategies or techniques help kids re-orient to the present moment when the worries are too big. These techniques help kids connect with their current environment in the here and now when their minds are imagining potential future scenarios. Ask your child to name 5 things they see, 4 things they hear, 3 things they can touch, 2 things they smell, and 1 thing they taste. Or ask our child to name something in your immediate environment that is each color of the rainbow.



### Encourage creativity.

Have your child personify their worry by imagining what the worry might look like if it were a real person, creature or thing. Maybe it looks like a big dragon. Maybe it looks like a monster. Or maybe it looks like an annoying mosquito. Then, they can draw a picture or comic or write a story about themselves as a superhero who defeats the worry!

### Use a journal or feelings tracker.

Give your kids a journal to write about feelings or use a feelings tracker daily. Sometimes worries are so big it feels like they define our whole day, but when we keep track of our feelings throughout the day with a visual tool, it's easier to see that worries are a smaller part of a healthy balance of emotions.

### Final note:

It's completely okay to acknowledge our kids' worries rather than ignoring them. Acknowledging worries won't solidify them but it will help your child understand that worry is a protective feeling that alerts us to potential danger. We can help ourselves remember it's just potential danger though, and use strategies to keep our worries in check. It's natural to want to reassure our kids! We want them to feel safe and calm. Reassure when needed but avoid offering it too frequently as this can prevent kids from developing their own positive self talk. Practice things they can say to themselves when they're feeling worried like, "I can control my breathing," or "My family is taking care of me."