

THE MOODERATORS

Teacher & Caregiver Guide:

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM SONG



**The Kids
Mental Health
Foundation™**

GoNoodle

For more information and learning resources visit [KidsMentalHealthFoundation.org](https://www.KidsMentalHealthFoundation.org).

Welcome to the Teacher Guide for The Mooderators.

This series is in partnership with The Kids Mental Health Foundation, created by the experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

The Kids Mental Health Foundation and GoNoodle are working together to bring elementary schools fun, engaging episodes on social and emotional wellness. We hope these guides can give you more insight into children's mental health and activities you can bring into the classroom.



**LOOKING FOR
THE CAREGIVER
CONTENT?**

Check out page 10!

Overview

We want our Mooderators episodes and guides to help you navigate mental and emotional concerns that young children face every day.

Each episode features a song from The Mooderators, Skylar and Clara. These songs feature four social-emotional goals: energize, focus, calm and support.

In this guide, we've included:

- Insights on the how and why behind each topic
- In-class activities to further engage students
- Caregiver pages that explain each topic and offer activity adaptations for home
- Links to further reading on OnOurSleeves.org

What We'll Focus On

"The Nervous System Song" is an episode that teaches children the normal functions of the nervous system and how it responds to anxiety. We'll help children be more aware of their bodies so they can then use calm-down strategies for their stress.

In this guide, we will:

- Identify the different ways the nervous system responds to anxiety.
- Describe the nervous system responses as normal, temporary and sometimes uncomfortable.
- Compare typical anxious feelings with anxiety disorders.

The Nervous System: Doing Its Job

“ Our bodies are very smart
Keeping us safe no matter what
We can feel out of control at times
The nervous system is doing its part

Cause if we are in danger
And something's not right
It activates
And off goes the alarm
Cause if we are in danger
And something's not right
It activates
To keep us unharmed ”

It's evaluation day at your school. You notice your palms sweating, heart racing and stomach churning with “butterflies.” Why is your body doing this?

That's the nervous system. Our nervous system – our brain, spinal cord and nerves – activates to keep us safe from physical dangers. Sometimes it also activates when there is no physical danger. That's because our nervous system keeps us alert, focused, and ready to perform. It's ready to “fight, flight or freeze,” even when there's no danger.

In our example above, we need to feel motivated to focus on the evaluation. However, this reaction is a “false alarm” because there is no true physical danger. We can feel irritable (“fight”), avoid the situation (“flight”) or struggle to function (“freeze”).

Adults are used to these feelings, but for kids, nervous system responses can be very surprising. It can be worrisome for kids to feel “out of control” in their bodies, without knowing why. We want kids to understand that while these feelings are normal, there are ways they can calm down their bodies.

NEXT STEPS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Do a basic overview of the nervous system. Talk about the nervous system activating to keep you safe.
 - For example, you're walking down the street and a bike rider almost hits you. You jump back quickly and feel your heart racing and muscles shaky.
- Talk about emotions and how the brain responds to stressful events.
 - Examples include: Worried feelings - “butterflies” in stomach, racing heart, sweaty palms
 - Ask children if any of these reactions have happened to them.
 - Brainstorm ways to calm our bodies when we have nervous system reactions. Examples include doing deep breathing exercises, going outside for a walk, or talking with someone.

“False Alarms:” Our Bodies Prepare Us

If we feel nervous
During a class presentation
This false alarm is a normal sensation
It helps us prepare
To do our best

Explaining the nervous system to kids can calm their worries about the unknown. There is a reason your body feels different, and it's nothing you've done wrong.

The body anticipates “dangers,” and may even react when there's no real physical danger.

The body doesn't know the danger isn't real, so it reacts the same as it would to something real. For example, a class presentation isn't dangerous, but the body may react as if it is. That may include dizziness or an upset stomach.

Feelings of worry in your body are necessary! They help you stay alert when faced with a difficult situation, so that you prepare and perform well. However, though everyone experiences worry and can have their nervous system activate, for some children these feelings can become frequent, intense, and difficult to control. This is when we worry about an anxiety disorder.

NEXT STEPS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Discuss different “false alarms” that children experience. A few examples include:
 - Before a big test
 - When meeting a brand new friend
 - Asking the teacher a question
 - Working in a group
- Some kids may benefit from hearing the difference between typical anxious feelings we all feel and an anxiety disorder. You can share that everyone is different, but that some signs may include worrying most days of the week, feeling like you can't turn off worrying, and intense body reactions that interrupt daily life and make it difficult to function.
- Encourage your students to talk to you or a trusted adult if they feel like their worries are more than just uncomfortable, but keeping them from enjoying life.

Body Reactions: Uncomfortable, Normal, and Temporary

Palms are sweaty and my muscles are tense
Tummy is hurting feeling out of breath
It's alright, it's not forever, It's temporary
Your body's just getting ready

Nervous system reactions are sometimes uncomfortable. It's important to remember, however, that they are normal, as well as temporary.

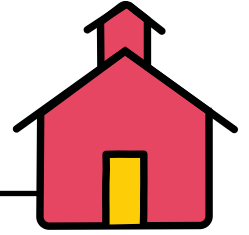
What are some ways the nervous system may react?

- Headache
- Tense muscles
- Sweaty palms
- Racing heart
- Upset stomach
- Fast breathing

NEXT STEPS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Complete the “My Body Feels Like...” activity with students to review the body's various responses to worry.

Student Activities



“My Body Feels Like...” focuses on how the nervous system responds to anxiety.

My Body Feels Like...

Materials: “My Body Feels Like...” body outline, cut-out image sheets, markers, crayons, colored pencils, glue sticks

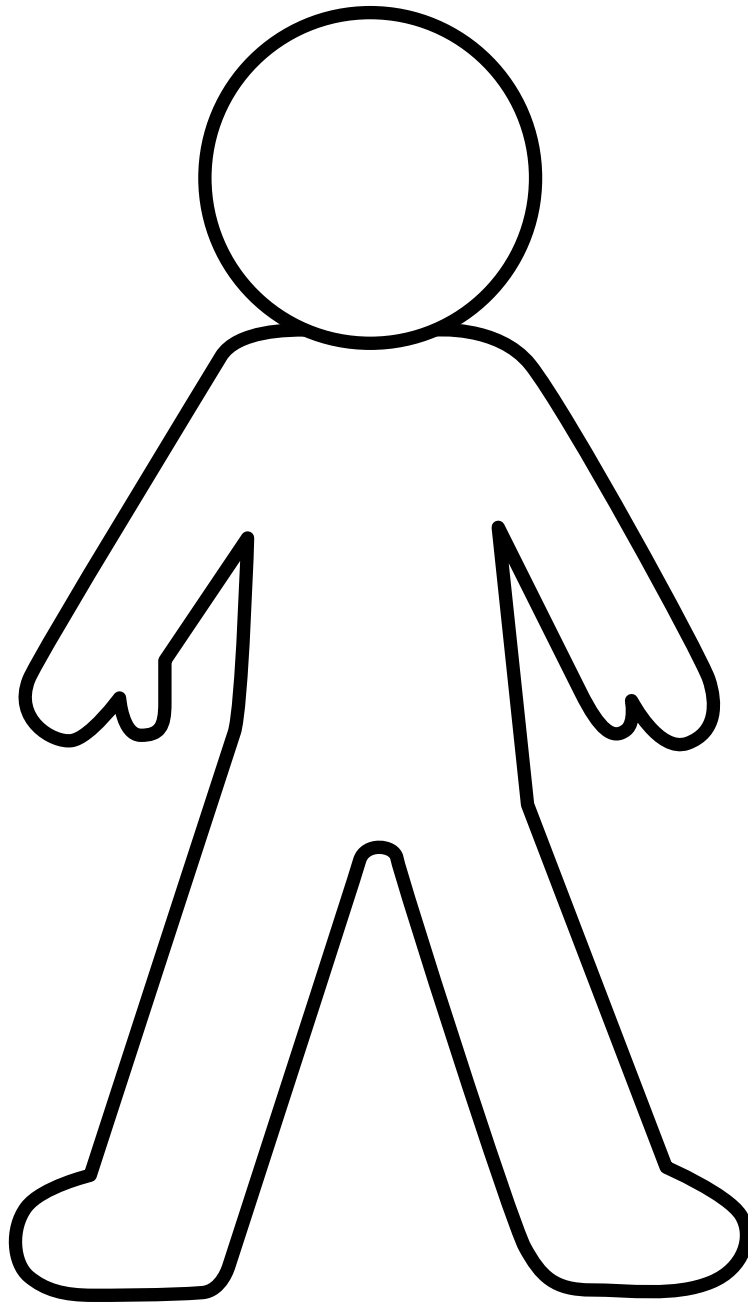
Objectives: This activity is to teach children how their body responds to anxiety. It:

- Gives children concrete visuals and language to use when describing their body (picture of butterflies for “butterflies in stomach”).
- Emphasizes that these body responses are normal, often uncomfortable but temporary.

DIRECTIONS

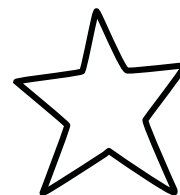
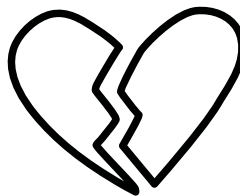
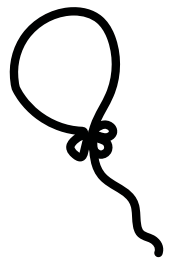
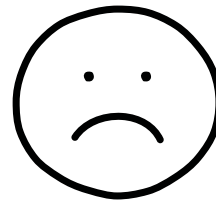
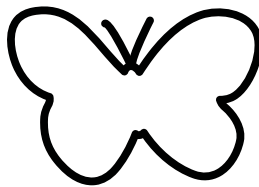
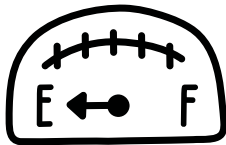
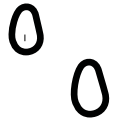
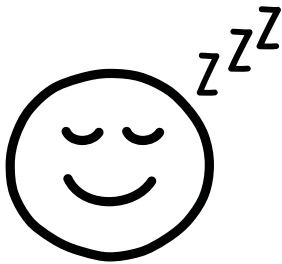
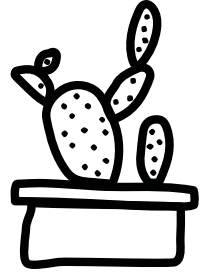
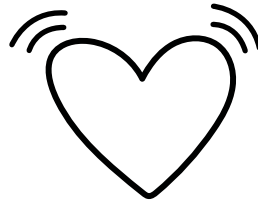
- Print out the “My Body” outlines and image sheets.
- Encourage children to color and then cut out the images.
- Talk about anxious feelings. Create different scenarios when this feeling occurs. You can also use these examples:
 - Let’s say you have a big test coming up tomorrow. What does your body feel like?
 - It’s your first day on the soccer team and you don’t know any of the other players. How does that make you feel? What is your body doing?
 - A classmate has been making fun of you. You need to confront them about this bullying. How does that make you feel?
- Ask them to place the cut-out images, or draw their own, on the appropriate body part. You may need to explain one to get them started.
 - “Rocks” or “butterflies” on the stomach
 - Heart with wiggly lines on the chest
 - Shaky lines around the legs
- Follow-up questions:
 - How do you make yourself feel better when you are worried?
 - When you’re worried, what are some ways to calm yourself?
 - Who can you talk to when you’re worried?

MY BODY FEELS LIKE...



MY BODY FEELS LIKE...

(Cut out and paste on body outline)



Welcome to the Caregiver Guide for The Mooderators. This series is in partnership with The Kids Mental Health Foundation, created by the experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

The Kids Mental Health Foundation and GoNoodle are working together to bring caregivers fun, engaging episodes that cover various mental health topics. We hope these guides can give you more insight into children's mental health and activities you can bring into your home.

Overview

We want our Mooderators episodes and guides to help you navigate challenging social-emotional concerns that young children face everyday.

"The Nervous System Song" is an episode that teaches children the normal functions of the nervous system and how it responds to anxiety. We'll help children be more aware of their bodies so they can then use calm down strategies for their stress.

Objectives

In this guide, we will:

- Identify the different ways the nervous system responds to anxiety.
- Describe the nervous system responses as normal, temporary and often uncomfortable.
- Compare typical anxious feelings with anxiety disorder.

The Nervous System: The Body Reacts

The Nervous System and Your Child's Emotions

Children have big emotions. These emotions can be confusing, especially when they make the body feel out of control. Why does this happen?

That's the nervous system. Our nervous system – our brain, spinal cord and nerves – activates to keep us safe from physical dangers. Sometimes it also activates when there is no physical danger. That's because our nervous system keeps us alert, focused, and ready to perform. It's ready to "fight, flight or freeze" even when there's no danger.

Though there's no physical threat, this reaction to a "false alarm" can still be useful. It can help us focus and perform well.

Normal, Uncomfortable and Temporary

You may have noticed the sweaty palms you get before a big presentation. Or the knot in your stomach. These are both nervous system responses.

For children, these body responses can be confusing. It's important to explain that these reactions are normal, even though they are uncomfortable. You can also comfort your child by reminding them these reactions are temporary and that there are things they can do to calm their nervous system down.

NEXT STEPS IN THE HOME

1. Sympathize with your child: It can be comforting for your child to hear that you too experience big emotions. You can share how you also get worried and what happens to your body when you do. Emphasize that these reactions are temporary.
2. Plan ahead: Discuss with your child what you can do to calm your body during stress. That might be as simple as deep breathing or taking a walk outside.
3. Create a “calm” corner: Establish a part of your home where your child can retreat to when big emotions arise. You can include comfort items like stuffed animals or pillows. This should be a small break for a few minutes. We want to encourage kids to face their fears and anxieties rather than avoid them.

Anxiety: Could It Be Something More Serious?

You may notice your child's emotions and reactions are not as temporary as you expected. This could be a sign of a more serious issue, such as an anxiety disorder.

Signs of an anxiety disorder include:

- Worrying more days than not
- Inability to turn off the worry
- Constant physical symptoms (belly aches, headaches, nausea)
- Irritability
- Difficulty with sleep
- Avoidance of activities

If these are interrupting daily life, contact your child's doctor and share your concerns.

At-Home Activities

My Body Feels Like...

Materials: “My Body Feels Like...” body outline, cut-out image sheets, markers, crayons, colored pencils, glue sticks

Objective: This activity is to teach children how their body responds to anxiety. It:

- Gives children concrete visuals and language to use when describing their body (picture of butterflies for “butterflies in stomach”).
- Emphasizes that these body responses are normal, often uncomfortable but temporary.

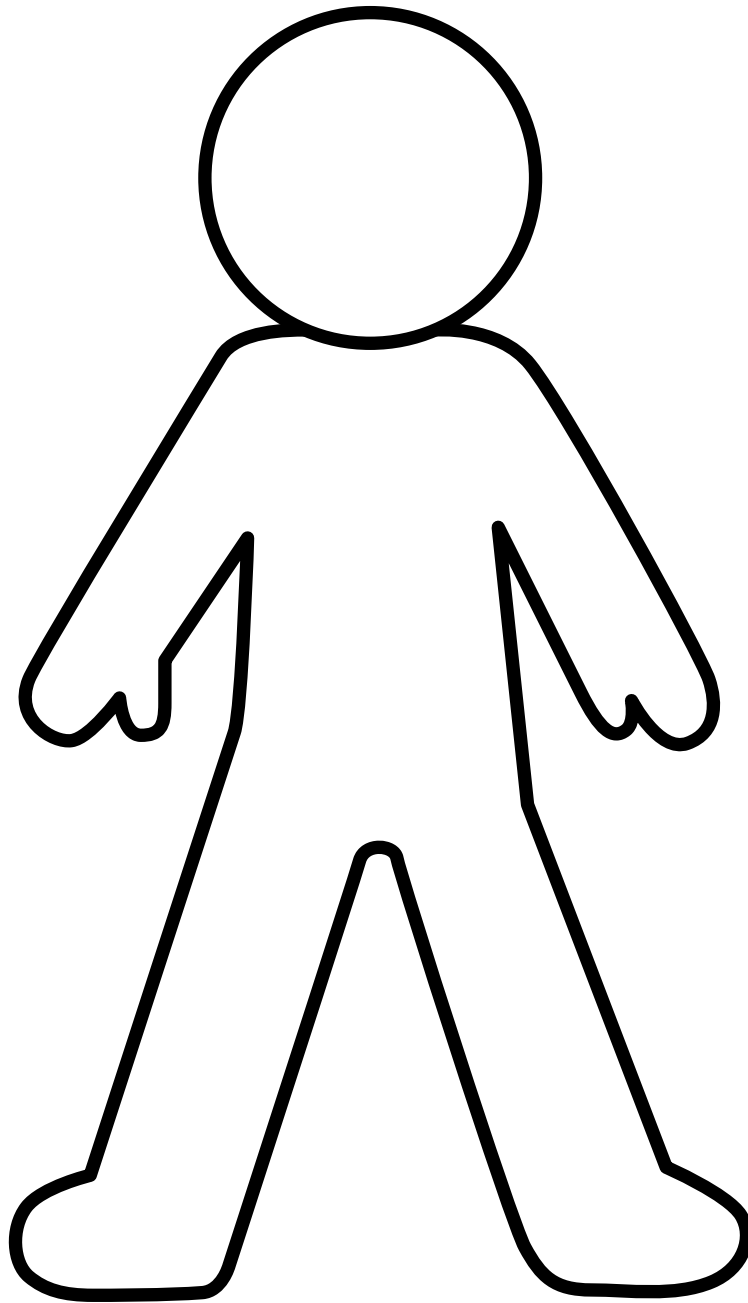
Directions:

- Print out the “My Body” outlines and image sheets.
- Encourage children to color and then cut out the images.
- Talk about anxious feelings. Create different scenarios when this feeling occurs.

You can also use these examples:

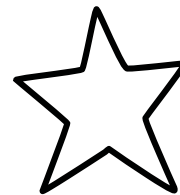
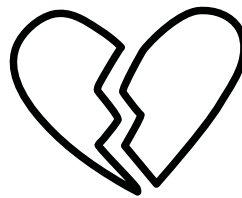
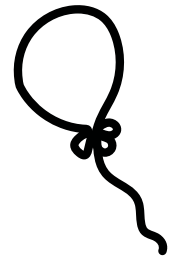
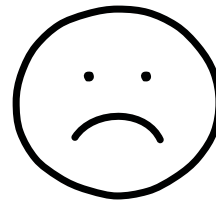
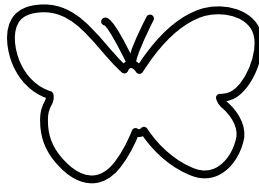
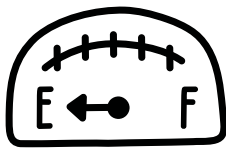
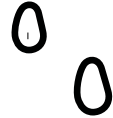
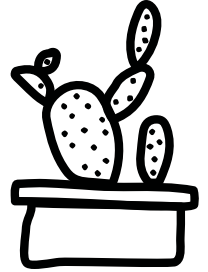
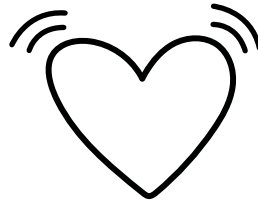
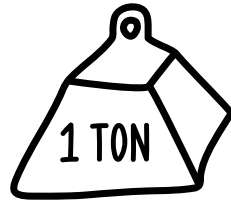
- Let’s say you have a big test coming up tomorrow. What does your body feel like?
- It’s your first day on the soccer team and you don’t know any of the other players. How does that make you feel? What is your body doing?
- A classmate has been making fun of you. You need to confront them about this bullying. How does that make you feel?
- Ask them to place the cut-out images, or draw their own, on the appropriate body part. You may need to show them one to get them started.
 - “Rocks” or “butterflies” on the stomach
 - Heart with wiggly lines on the chest
 - Sweat on palms
- Follow-up questions:
 - How do you make yourself feel better when you are worried?
 - When you’re worried, what are some ways to calm yourself?
 - Who can you talk to when you’re worried?

MY BODY FEELS LIKE...



MY BODY FEELS LIKE...

(Cut out and paste on body outline)



At-Home Activities (cont'd)

Worry Box

Materials: Cardboard box/shoe box, things to decorate it like markers, construction paper, stickers, crayons, colored pencils, glue sticks

Objective: Teach your child to learn to let go of worry thoughts throughout the day by scheduling a "worry time" to notice and write down their thoughts. If worries come up during the day, remind your child that they have a time coming up when they will be able to express their worries. This will take practice but your child can learn to train their brain! Once worry time has ended, change focus by going to another activity or reflecting on something that went well.

Directions:

- Have your child decorate a cardboard box (the size of a shoebox).
- With your child, pick a time of the day as their "worry time." This can be especially helpful for kids who have difficulty sleeping, if scheduled at the beginning of the bedtime routine.
- Have your child sit and write down their worries for about 10-15 minutes and put them in the box.
- Allow your child to choose whether or not they share what they wrote down.

Links to More:

Interested in learning more about helping kids with anxious feelings? Check out these links at KidsMentalHealthFoundation.org.

<https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-resources/anxiety/kids-anxiety-whats-normal>, or search "Anxiety Normal" at KidsMentalHealthFoundation.org

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