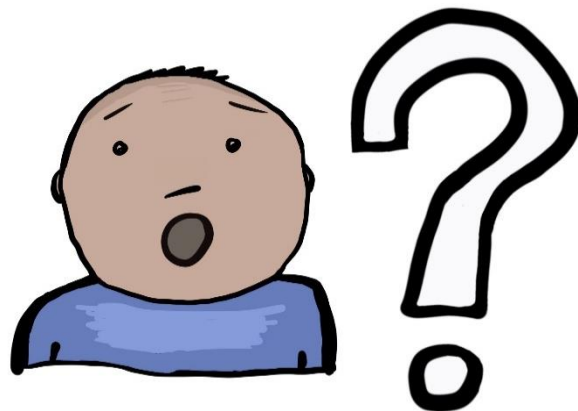


The big question...

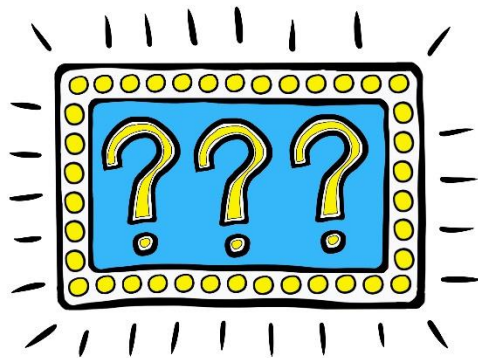
Am I going to die?

A guide for living with this big question.

Wow, that IS a big question.



It is a big AND important question, isn't it?



Maybe you're asking that question because you hear all the numbers on the news about deaths?

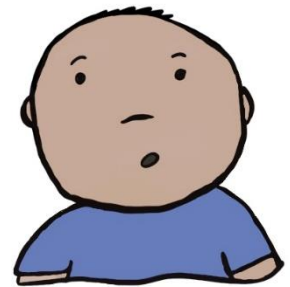
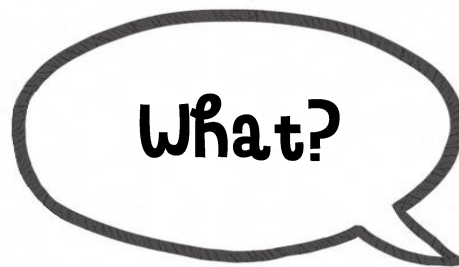
Maybe you're asking because you've got a health condition or are taking medication that means you get poorly more easily or

your body finds it harder to get better quick?

Maybe you're asking because you've been told to "shield", so that it's less likely you'll catch COVID-19?

Phewf, it's a **big** question.

And, do you know what?



You're not the **only** person asking it.

In fact, **lots** of people, of all ages, all around the world, have been thinking the very same thing!



So, let me check in with you,
how often is this **big question**
around for you?

- each time I go to sleep**
- when I wake up in the morning**
- it pops in many times throughout
the day**
- once a day**
- just when.....**
- (fill as fits)**

How does the big question make you feel? (tick all that fit for you)

ikky

numb

urghh

angry

sad

panicky

worried

anxious

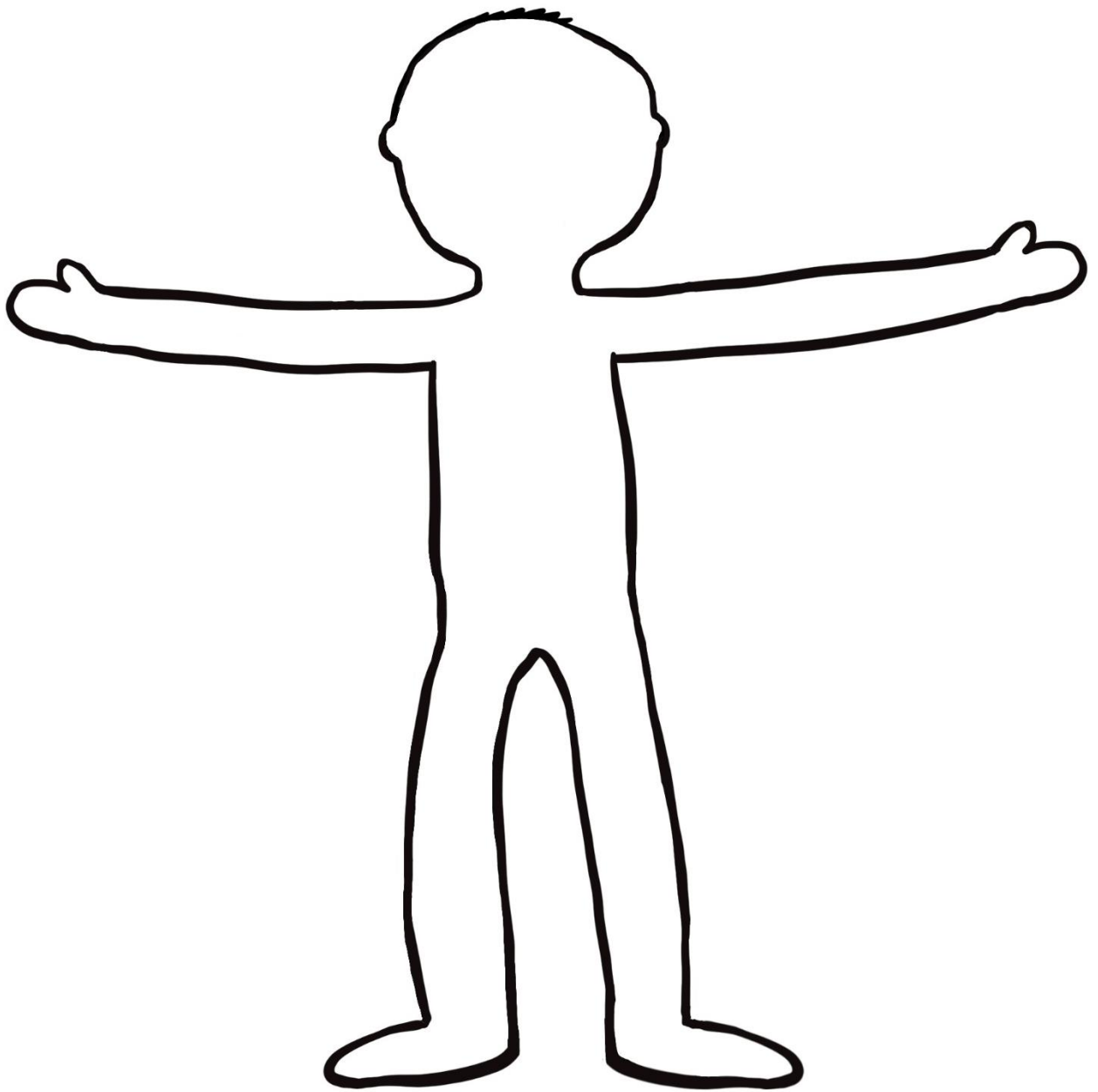
terrified

low

fearful

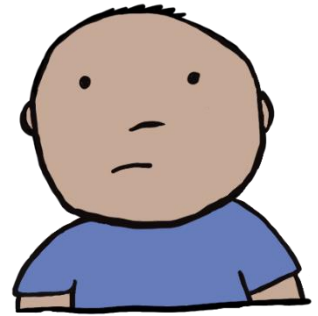
.....

Where do you **feel** it in your
body? (add colours if you like)

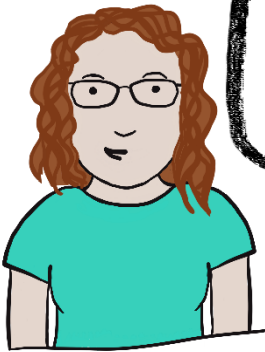


You might find that your brain has been noticing your body in new ways . . .

Yeah, my chest often feels tight



Any thoughts when you feel that?



Well, then I start thinking I've got COVID

and then I think "what if I can't breathe?"

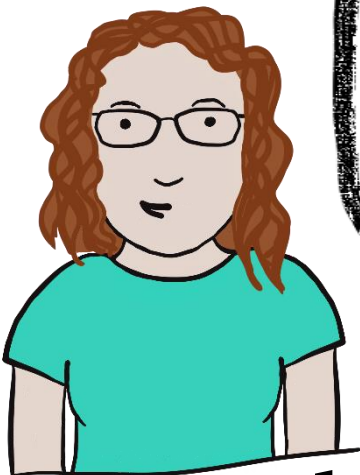
and then I think "does that mean I'm going to die?" so then I think

"arghhhh -
I'm dying" ...



Yeah, thoughts can spiral out
of control like that . . .

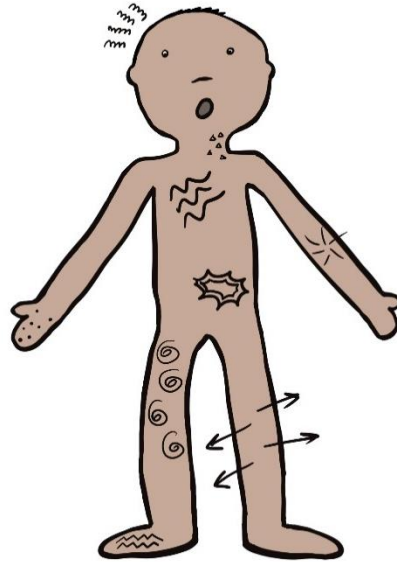
You then feel even more
anxious and worried. It can be
pretty scary.



What thoughts do you have?

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners and a thick black border. It is positioned at the bottom of the page, below the question, and is intended for the user to write their answer to the question.

The thing is bodies are actually really **noisy**



Just take a moment now . . .
Focus on *one* body part

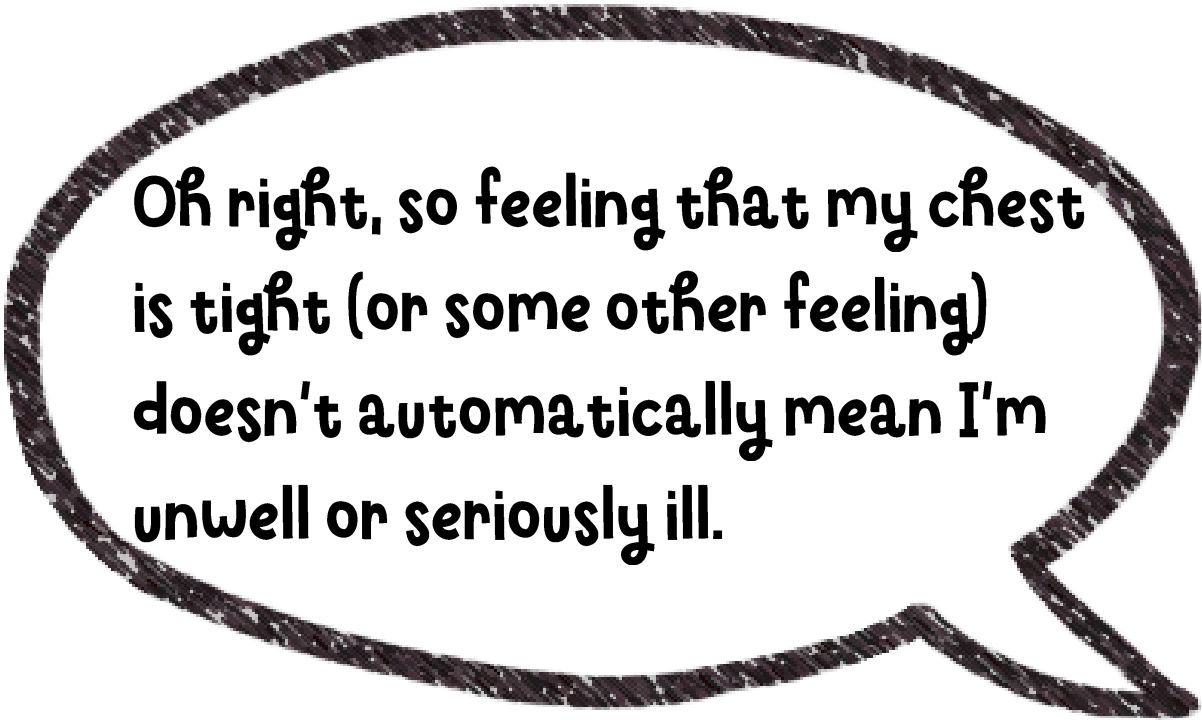
What can you feel?
Any soreness? Does it feel hot or tight?
Pins and needles?

Now move that bit of your body

What happens to those sensations now?
Have they changed at all?

If we can become **curious** and gently **explore** our body, we can notice that most of the time, how it feels is just how it feels *at that moment*.

The sensations in our body actually change moment to moment.



Oh right, so feeling that my chest is tight (or some other feeling) doesn't automatically mean I'm unwell or seriously ill.

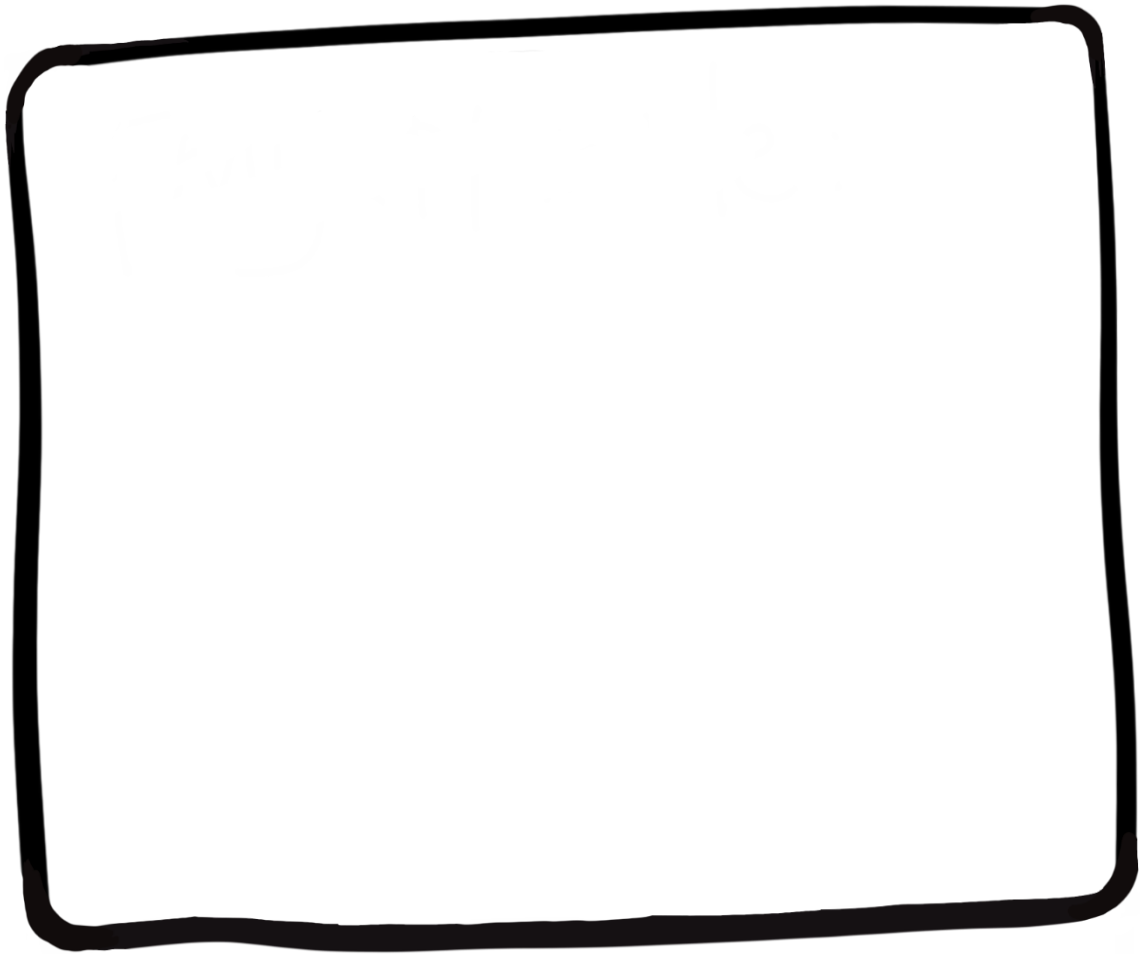
Exactly.

And, if we're feeling worried or stressed, it massively affects our body so it's always worth doing something to calm your body down.

For example:

- ☆ Do some deep belly breaths
- ☆ Imagine you're in your favourite place that makes you feel really calm
- ☆ Go get focused on doing something you **ABSOLUTELY** love
- ☆ Get physical - jump around to your favourite song, do some yoga stretches
- ☆ Draw your feelings and thoughts - even just scribbling can be good!

What will you **try** next time you notice your body has got all antsy?
(Draw or write it here)

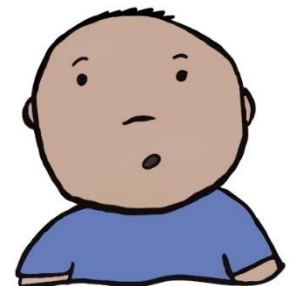


Sometimes a big question isn't hanging about by itself . . .

Sometimes there are other big questions about too . . . like



So, am I going to die?



Well, we're agreed, it's a big question *and* important question.

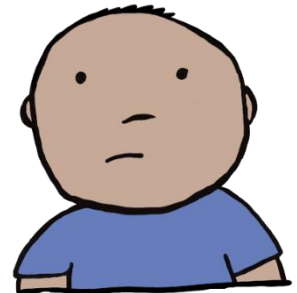
The tricky thing with these big & important questions is that they're often really hard to answer

I mean, we're all going to die at some point, aren't we?

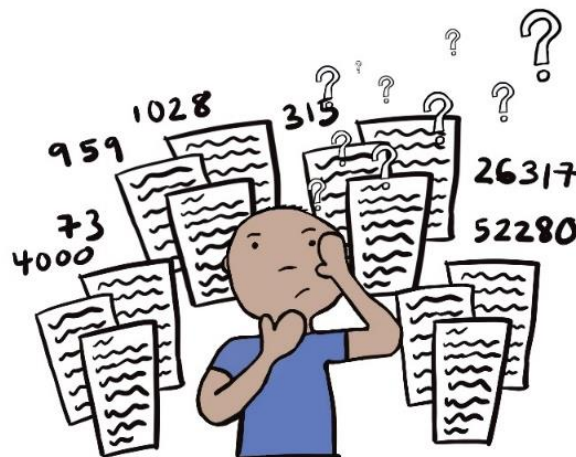
But you want to know am I going to die if I catch COVID-19?

The short answer is, we don't know, we can't know – but that doesn't really help does it?

Nope.



So, we *could* try going down the science route reading up on all the stats and numbers . . . trying to work out the *actual* answer.

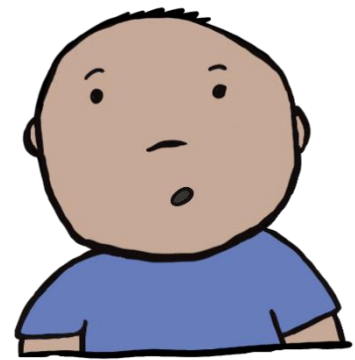


Doing this could do one of two things:

1) fry our brain even more, making us way more worried as we learn about more stuff

Or 2) it could quiet it, but just for a moment.

**What? Just
for a moment?**

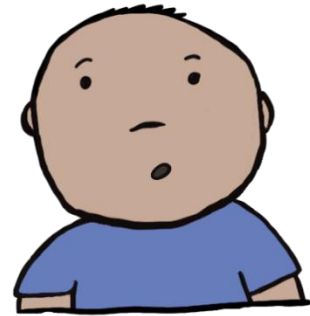
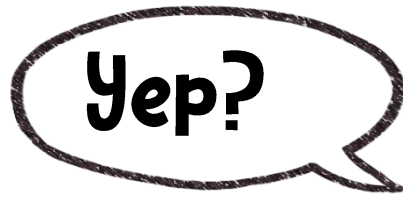


Yep, I said “just for a moment”, because reassurance is a strange beast. And it is most especially strange with these big questions where our brain wants a definite answer when there isn't one.

In these cases, reassurance only works for a little bit and it's not long before we need it again.

It's kind of like a rollercoaster . . .

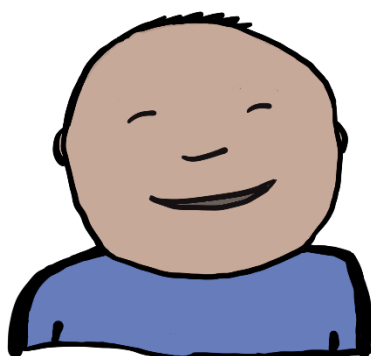
So, we get really stressed out and filled with anxiety. We get some reassurance and then we calm down. All good, right?



Well, not really . . . because our brain really knows it is an **unanswerable** question, it starts to **doubt** the reassurance we've been given.

We start thinking or asking, "what if" "but", and before we know it the worry has **built right up** again

We then get some more reassurance and feel better again . . .



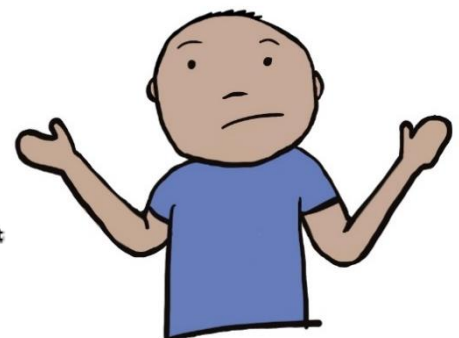
But, before long doubt **creeps in**
(maybe we hear new information)
and . . . well, you get the picture . . .



Phewf, this is exhausting,
and rollercoasters make
me feel sick.



**Ok, so reassurance doesn't
work, and I can't get my
question answered for
certain, now what do I do?**

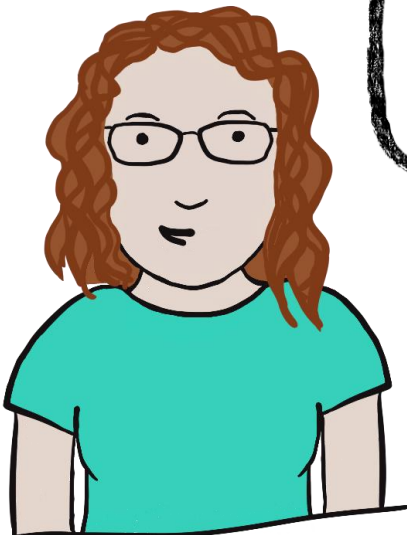


Do? Well, in a sense
nothing

WHATTTTTT????
Do **nothing**?



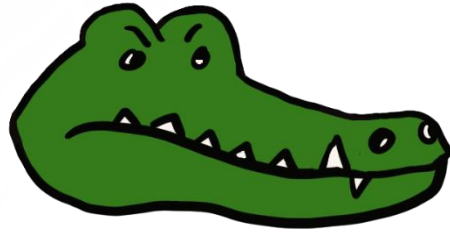
Well, let me
explain . . .



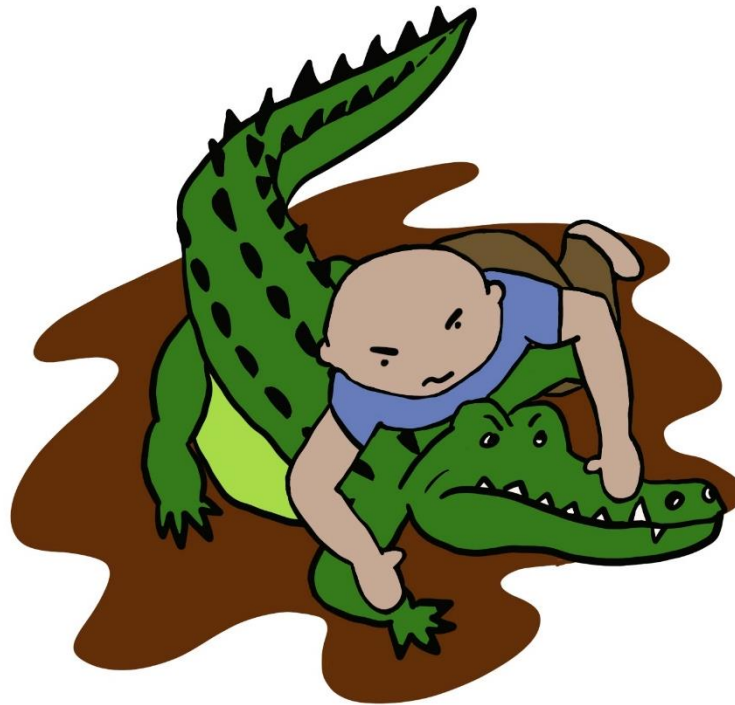
Ok...

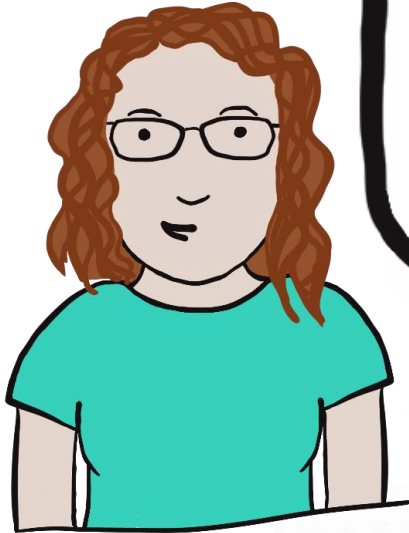
Imagine the big and important
questions/worries are like a crocodile.

A crocodile that's in the way – it's big and it's scary.



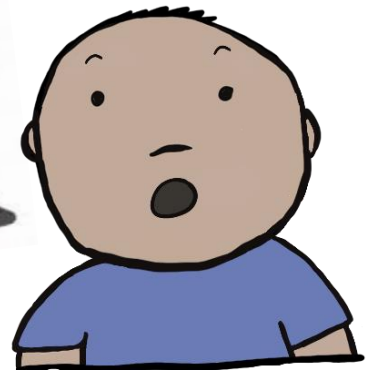
Now, I could try wrestling with it but no matter how hard I try, I'm not going to get rid of it, **and** (annoyingly) I can't focus on anything else whilst I'm wrestling it.





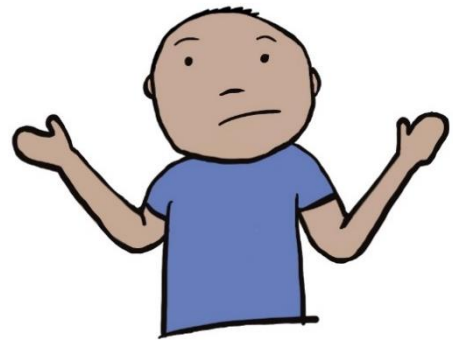
Hmm . . . so what can I do?
Well, I need to stop trying to
wrestle it and just let it be.
I don't actually need to enter
into a fight with it

**Stop wrestling?
But it's a crocodile!**



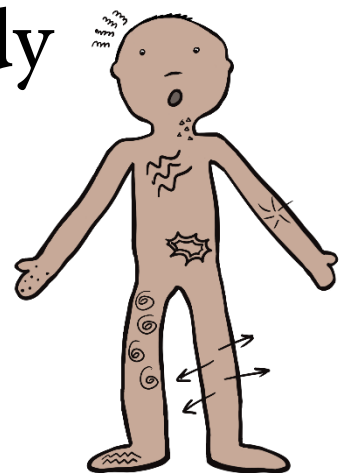
I know, it's big and it's scary but
all the wrestling is getting in the
way of me enjoying life and
doing what is important to me.

Ok, so no wrestling,
but what do I do?



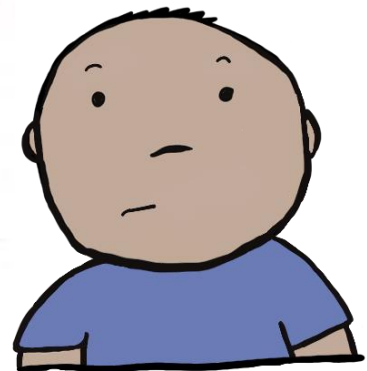
So we have to develop our “just being” muscle . . . It’s the one where we can acknowledge there’s something big and scary that we can’t sort out, but we don’t stay stuck there with what we can’t control. Instead the first thing we do is notice “this is a thought and it’s tough.”

Then we notice how our body is feeling right in that moment. Perhaps noticing how worry feels in our body.

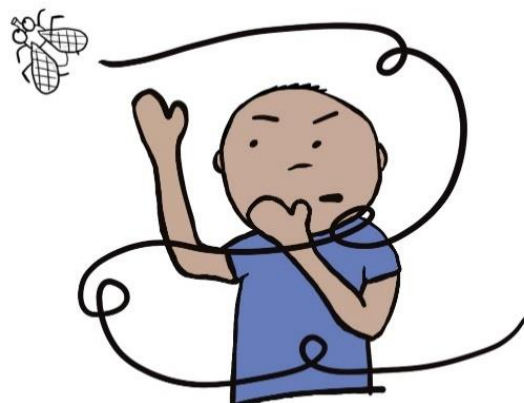


And finally we might start looking at what we **can** control - like our breathing and doing things that we enjoy, doing things that are important to us.

Hmm... so I just have to work on letting it be?

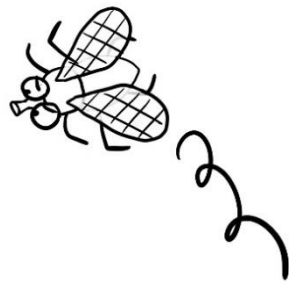


Yep. Like a fly buzzing round our head, we could use up LOADS of energy trying to swot it away, getting really hot and sweaty and annoyed in the process

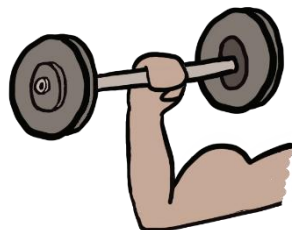


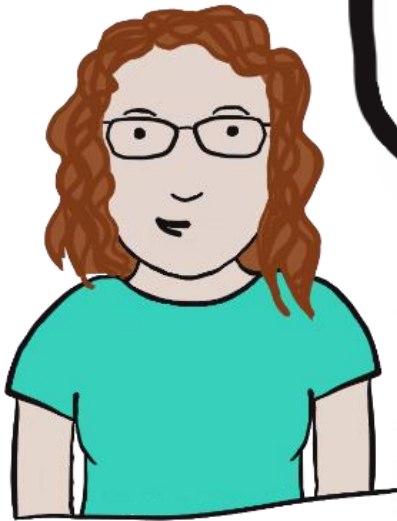
OR, we could just notice the fly is there. We can let it do its buzzy thing, whilst we focus on doing some important stuff eventually the fly gives up.

Flies are quite pesky though as they do come back. So, we have to just let them buzz again. If we keep focusing on what is important to us, and then it gives up again.



We basically do the same thing with our brain and our thoughts. With practice, we can build up our “letting it be” muscle. I’m not saying the thought isn’t big or important, it’s just if we can’t do anything about it, it’s best to let it go.



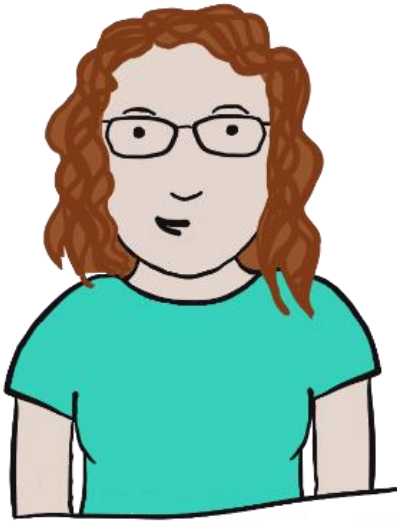


It's not easy to do though . . . it takes a lot of practise . . . AND it takes of a lot of strength to do something other than wrestle the crocodile . . . but, you can do it!

Yeah ok maybe I can, but how do I actually stop wrestling?

Good question! Well, telling ourselves to not think something just doesn't work --- try this . . .

Don't think about a chimpanzee in a tutu dancing on a giant banana.

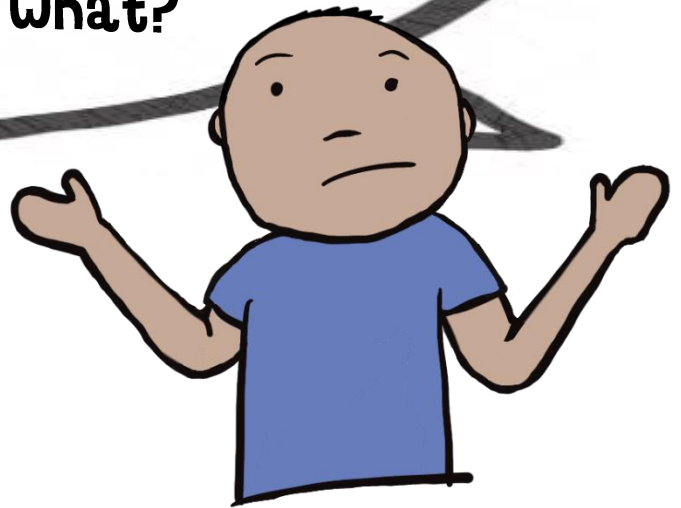


Ok, what happened?

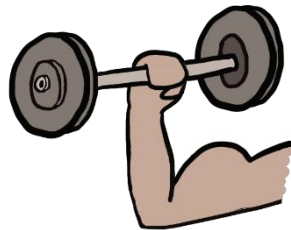
Well I got an image of chimpanzee in a tutu dancing on a giant banana, and its tutu was rainbow coloured.



Ok so, just telling myself not to think about the big question of "am I going to die" doesn't work... now what?



To get us to the place of "letting it be", we need to develop our "letting go" muscle

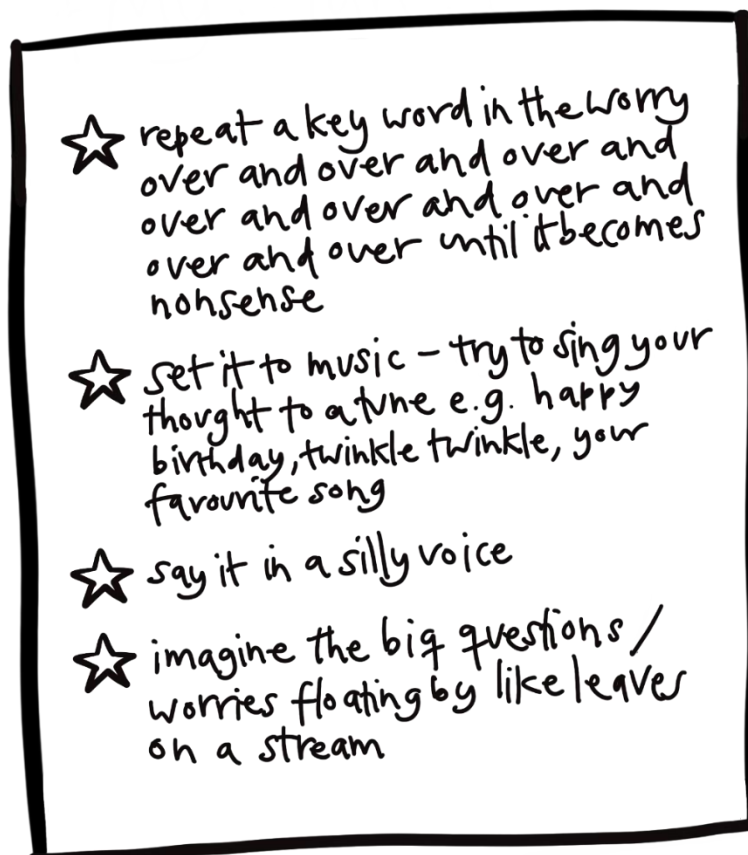


This means we need to find little ways to give our brain a breather so that we can think of all the other marvellous things we'd rather be doing than worrying about

the big questions we can do nothing about . . .

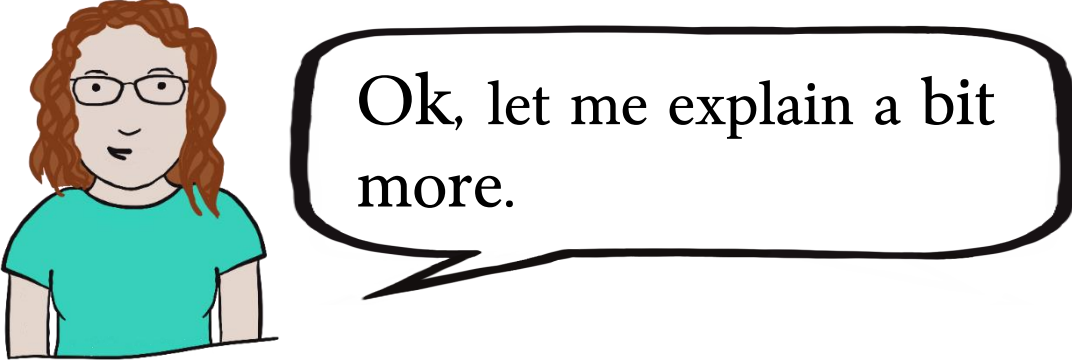
It's important to know that our thoughts are just thoughts. They are things that happen in our brains. Thoughts are definitely not necessarily true! *And* they are definitely not always helpful!

It helps if we get playful with our difficult thoughts – these might sound silly but they really do work . . .



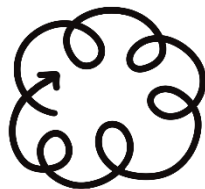


Hmm...



Ok, let me explain a bit more.

Our brains are solution-finding machines. They try to be helpful but they often get stuck, thinking about the future / planning for the what ifs, or going over and over things that happened in the past.



When we've really got stuck wrestling the crocodile, when we're all caught up in our worrying thoughts and we're feeling really anxious, often the first step is "grounding" ourselves – we need to get

Out of our thoughts and connect to right here, right now. Something called mindfulness can really help us develop a “being right here, right now” muscle.

Mindfulness can help us to refocus away from our thoughts to the present moment. From there we can go towards what’s really important. You might want to check out an app like Smiling Mind, but for now, try this . . .

All your big thoughts and feelings can be a bit like being in an emotional storm.

When boats are in a storm, they drop an anchor so they can hold steady until the storm passes.

It can take a while sometimes for the storm to pass but dropping anchor helps us feel safer and gets us away from the ups and downs of thoughts.



Drop the Anchor

Stand up (or you can do it seated) and plant your feet firmly on the floor. They're your anchor.

Just notice where you are and take some slow deep breaths.

Feel your feet and push them down into the floor. Feel the tension in your feet and leg muscles.

Now just notice the feelings that are around.

Stretch out your back or your arms and feel those muscles.

Just notice worry is here.

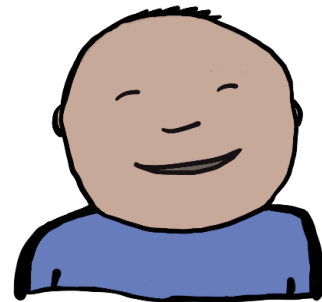
Now notice 5 things you can see.

Now 5 things you can hear.

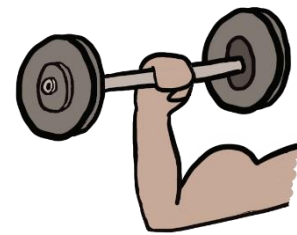
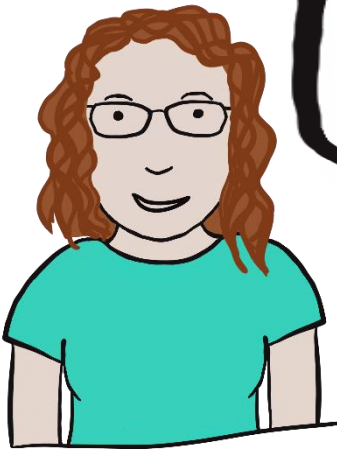
Breathe. Your anchor is dropped and you can now decide where you want to go / what you want to do next.



Oo, I feel more steady
and a bit calmer.



Great! It's not a quick fix though.
Muscles have to be worked to grow.



You could also imagine that your feet are the roots of a tree, growing deep down into the earth.

There are all sorts of “grounding exercises. They are really simple, quick things that can give our brains and bodies a breather. Why not try the exercise on the next page too . . .

5-4-3-2-1

Try this (if it helps, imagine yourself as a pirate in a crow's nest):

5 things you can **see**

4 things you can **feel** (e.g. air on your face, watch on your wrist)

3 things you can **hear**

2 things you can **smell** (you can imagine the smells)

1 thing you can **taste** (maybe your breakfast)



When we get worried and stressed, our body feels it too and it can be hard to relax, so there's also a “**relaxation muscle**”.

Just telling ourselves to relax doesn't work though. And, when we've been stressed for a while, it takes a bit of practise.

Make **space** for 20 minutes each day to grow your relaxation muscle

Ways to Relax :

- ☆ Take a walk 'through your body'
- tense and relax each part, from your toes and feet, all the way up (aka Progressive muscle relaxation)
- ☆ Create a safe place in your mind.
- build up a really rich picture of sights, sounds, smells...
- ☆ Imagine a walk on a beach or through a jungle
- ☆ Focus on your breathing
e.g. "belly breathing" or colour breathing

These are just some ideas to get you going. There are SO many videos and sheets out there, keep looking until you find what you really like.

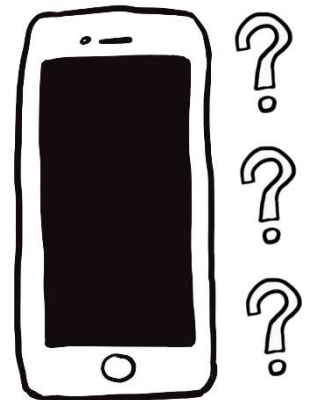
You might also want to check out my friend's "Self Care Kit"

<https://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/patients-and-parents/coronavirus-resources-for-children-and-families/>

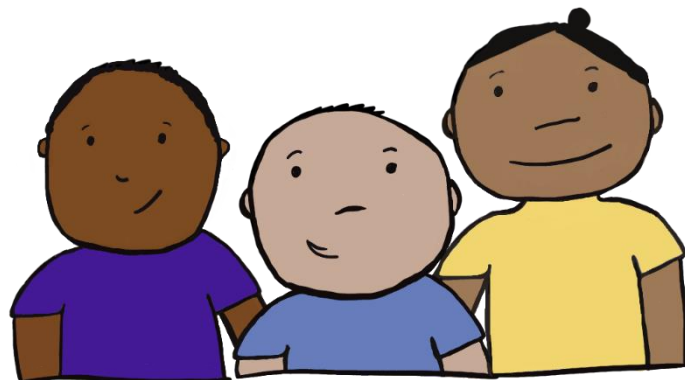


One thing I haven't mentioned yet is to try to notice what you spend your **time** doing and what that makes you **feel**. More relaxed? More anxious? Unsettled? Calm? Happy? Irritated?

Make sure you check in with yourself about whether social media is helpful to you right now. Most people are one time or another decide to take a break for a bit.



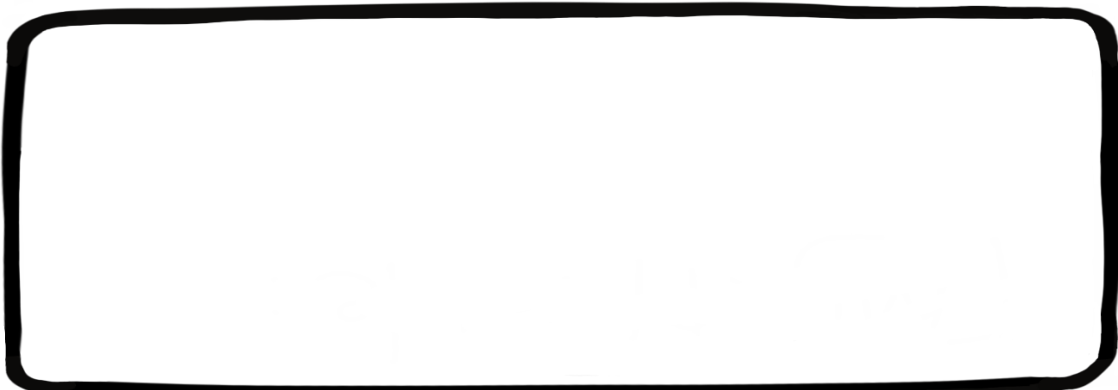
Also, don't forget about the people around you, that care about you. Share your thoughts and worries with them.



Sometimes people's responses aren't that helpful and it's ok to tell them what we would prefer them to do instead, for example,

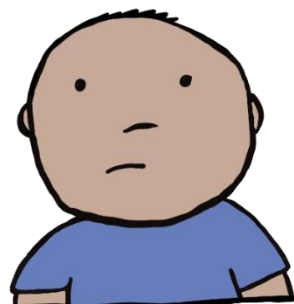
"When I tell you big worries, please don't tell me it will be ok, you don't know that...please give me a hug, tell me you're here with me and tell me it's ok to have this thought or feeling"

What would **you** like your family to say?



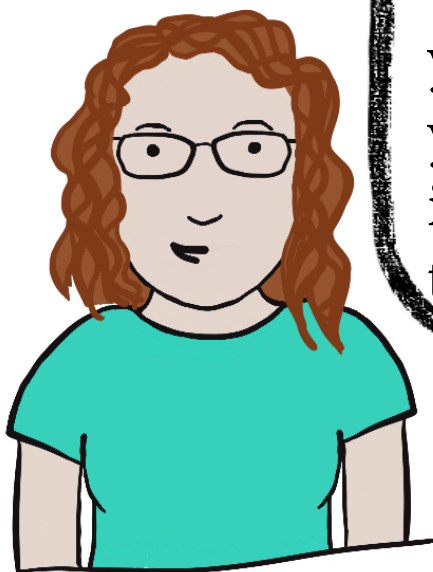
Sometimes we worry that we might upset people if we talk about our big worries.

Yes, I do! I feel bad if they get upset.



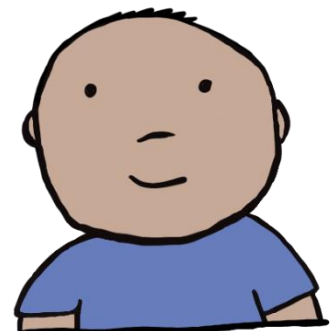
I get that, but feelings are feelings, there's nothing wrong with them (though they're not always comfortable!) and they are upset because they love you. It means they care.

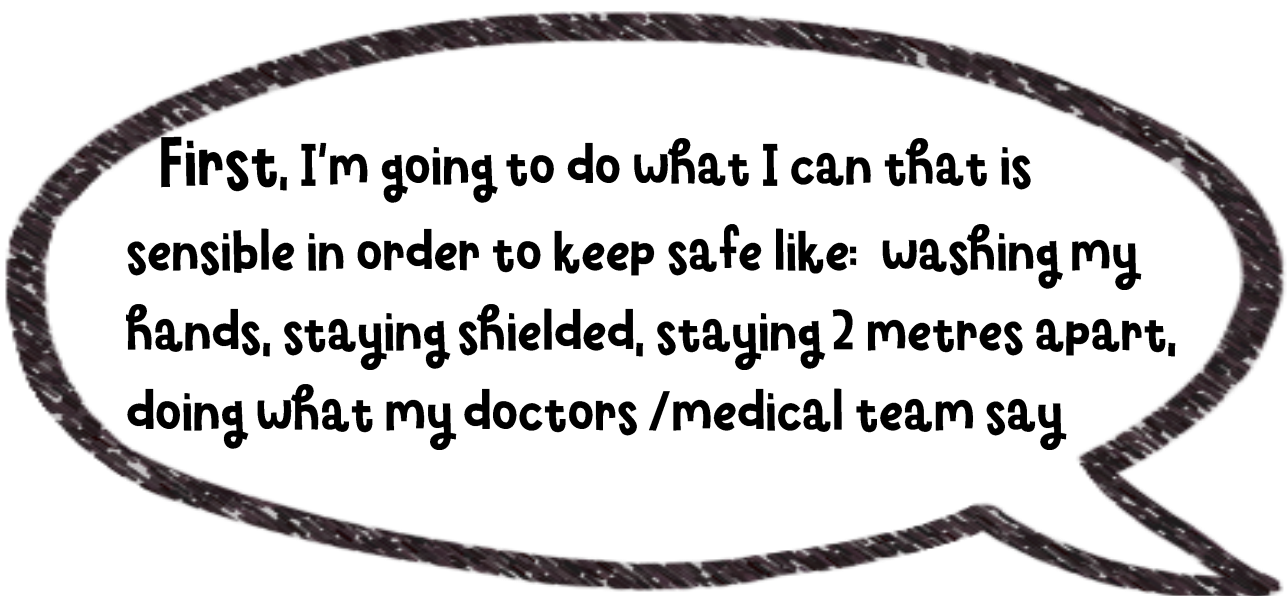
And I can guarantee that they **absolutely** do not want you to be struggling with things by yourself!



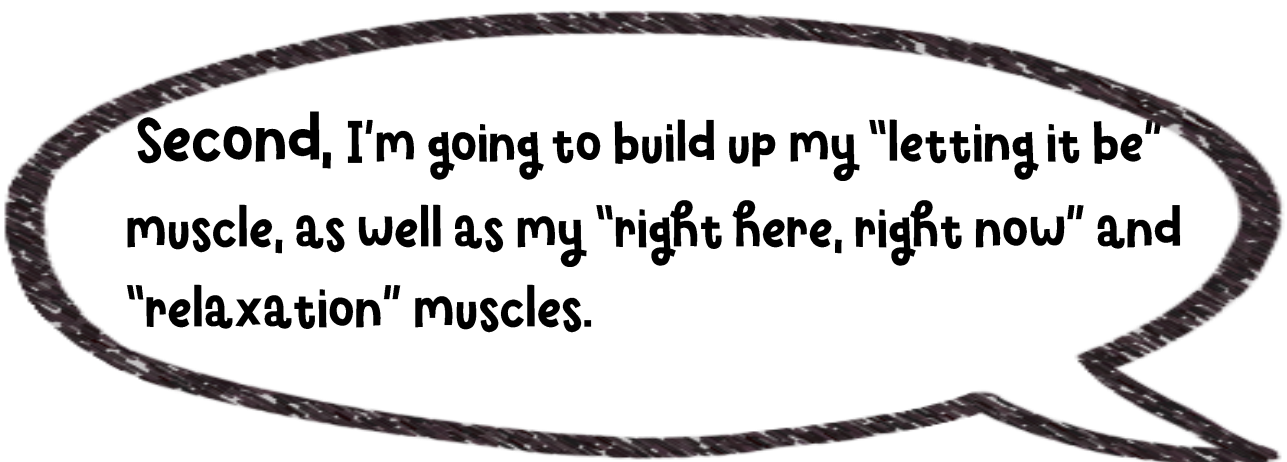
Oops . . . I got a bit carried away with everything, but I have given you lots of ideas to try so that you can enjoy life whilst big and important questions are around that we can't answer.

Yeah it is a lot but thanks. It is helpful. I've been thinking about what I'm going to do...





First, I'm going to do what I can that is sensible in order to keep safe like: washing my hands, staying shielded, staying 2 metres apart, doing what my doctors /medical team say



Second, I'm going to build up my "letting it be" muscle, as well as my "right here, right now" and "relaxation" muscles.



I'm going to work at letting the crocodiles lie.

What are you doing to do? What is your first step? Who do you need to help you?

Use the form on the next page if you like

My Plan :

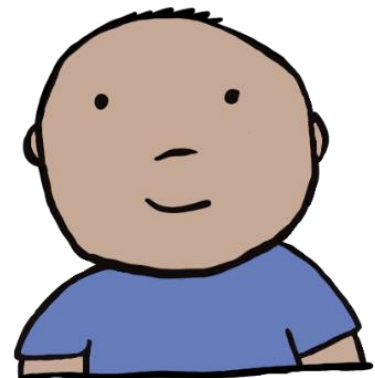


It's probably worth me saying that because the big question is **important**, it will probably pop up again. It is that pesky fly that keeps coming back.

It might pop up after hearing the news, or after hearing someone you know has got COVID. And you might start getting really worried and anxious again.

That's ok, it doesn't mean you've failed or that these ideas aren't working, it's just how brains are.

**Ok, so some days will be
harder, some easier but I
can cope**



Yep and just remember, you don't need to wrestle the crocodile!

