SESSION PLAN

Youth Group: Ages 10 to 16

Topic: Breathe Through It: Coping with Anxiety & Stress

Learning objective:

- Help young people understand what anxiety and stress are
- Recognise the signs and how they affect the mind and body
- Provide healthy, practical coping strategies
- Build confidence in knowing they are not alone

Materials Needed:

- Stress scale poster or whiteboard
- Sticky notes or pens for causes of stress
- Coping cards or mini toolkit printouts
- Breathing and grounding visuals

Icebreaker – "Stress Scale" (3 minutes)

Draw a scale from 1 to 10 on the board:

🟢 **1 = Calm /** 🟠 **5 = Nervous /** 🔴 **10 = Overwhelmed**

Ask:

- "Where are you on the scale today?"
- "What kind of things make you feel like a 9 or 10?"
- "What brings you back to a 2 or 3?"

This opens up safe sharing and shows that everyone feels it sometimes.

Understanding Anxiety (4 minutes)

Explain clearly:
Anxiety is your brain's way of trying to protect you - but sometimes it gets the danger wrong.

What it can feel like:

- Racing heart
- Feeling sick or needing the toilet
- Sweaty palms
- Shaky or dizzy
- Wanting to run away or freeze
- Worried thoughts that don't stop

Make it relatable:
"Imagine your brain is a smoke alarm - it goes off even when you just burn toast."

What's Stressing You Out? (4 minutes)

Group brainstorm or sticky note activity:
"What causes stress or anxiety in young people?"

Common answers:

- Schoolwork or exams
- Friend drama
- Social media or body image
- Family problems
- Pressure to be perfect

Let them know: "Your feelings are valid - even if others don't always understand."

Coping Strategies Toolkit (6 minutes)

Introduce the "5-to-Thrive" Coping Toolkit:

1. Breathing Reset:
2. Try box breathing - in for 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4
3. Grounding 5-4-3-2-1:
4. Name 5 things you see, 4 feel, 3 hear, 2 smell, 1 taste
5. Write It Out:
6. Brain dump on paper, journaling worries or drawing
7. Move It Out:
8. Walk, stretch, dance, run - move the emotion through
9. Talk It Out:
10. Speak to someone you trust - friend, teacher, youth worker

Interactive bit: Let each young person choose one they want to try today or use next time they feel stressed.

You're Not Alone (3 minutes)

End with reassurance:
"Feeling anxious or stressed doesn't mean you're weak - it means you're human."

Final question:

- "What's one thing you'll try next time anxiety creeps in?"

Let them write or say it as a personal pledge.

Optional Follow-Up:

- **"My Calm Card" – wallet-size guide with go-to strategies**
- **DIY worry jar or journal decorating activity**
- **Invite a mental health mentor or peer support leader**