

Brief Behavioral Interventions for the Primary Care Provider: Resources and Handouts

Coping Box

The Big List of Self-Care Activities

Diaphragmatic Breathing for Young Children

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Grounding Technique: Five Senses Exercise, 3 different ways

Distress Tolerance: TIPP Skills

Distress Tolerance: A Calm Mind ACCEPTS

Distress Tolerance Skill: IMPROVE the Moment

Coping Box

A Coping Box may help children reduce feelings of anxiety and sadness; and boost self-esteem. It can also pave the way for self-care techniques they can take with them into adulthood.

1. Find a medium-sized box that is portable but large enough to hold many items. A shoe-box or old Amazon box works great.
2. Decorate the outside of the box
3. Place coping items inside the box. Below is a list of examples. Some may be more applicable to older/younger kids.
4. When child is distressed, sad, or anxious. Help them notice what they are feeling and assist them with use of the box.
5. The coping box can also be used daily as part of self-care routine.

Free printable visual calm down strategies cards (Google for ideas)

Scrapbook items (concert stubs, program from a play/musical)

Bottle of bubbles or a pinwheel to encourage deep breathing

Chew toy or chew necklace

Small puzzle

Fidgets such as Tangle Jr. or puffer ball; spinners

Stuffed animal

Stretchy resistance bands

Hearing protection ear muffs or noise canceling headphones

Chewing gum, hard candies, or lollipops

Calming scent

MP3 player with music and/or audiobooks

Book of yoga poses or printable yoga cards

Blank notebook and a writing utensil

Sensory bottle, plastic snowglobe, or calm down jar

Jump rope

Kaleidoscope or sand timer

Books to read

Activity books: dot to dots, mazes, word searches, I Spy, etc.

Stress balls

Play dough or silly putty

Photo album filled with photos of family and friends

Photos of people who inspire you

Small blanket, scarves, or fabric scraps

Bubble wrap

Rubik's cube

Small chalk board/chalk, coloring books, Magna-Doodle, or Etch-a-Sketch for doodling

Gel or plain eye mask

Tissue paper to rip - Fill a Ziploc with tissue paper and let kids rip it.

Light up toys, flashlight, or similar

Snacks with a variety of textures crunchy/chewy/soft

Pipe cleaners to twist and bend

Mini massager

Scratch and sniff stickers

Whistle, harmonica, party blowers, or similar small wind instrument

Small mirror for making silly faces and exploring emotions

The Big List of Self-Care Activities

Check the ones you are willing to do, and then add any activities that you can think of. Be sure to check in with a parent for activities that require their approval/involvement.

- Talk to a friend on the telephone
- Cook your favorite dish or meal
- Go out and visit a friend
- Cook a recipe that you've never tried before
- Invite a friend to come to your home
- Take a cooking class
- Text message your friends
- Go out for something to eat
- Organize a party
- Go outside and play with your pet
- Exercise
- Go borrow a friend's dog and take it to the park
- Lift weights
- Give your pet a bath
- Do yoga, tai chi, or Pilates, or take classes to learn
- Go outside and watch the birds and other animals
- Stretch your muscles
- Find something funny to do, like reading comics
- Eat your favorite ice cream
- Go for a walk in a park or someplace fun/peaceful
- Visit Web sites and keep a list of them
- Watch a funny movie (start collecting funny movies to watch when you're feeling overwhelmed)
- Go get a haircut
- Sleep or take a nap
- Go outside and watch the clouds
- Go to the movies
- Go jog
- Watch television
- Ride your bike
- Listen to the radio
- Go for a swim
- Go to a sporting event, like a baseball game
- Go hiking
- Play a game with a friend
- Do something exciting like surfing, rock climbing, or horseback riding
- Learn a new activity, such as kayaking or martial arts
- Play solitaire
- Play video games
- Go online to chat
- Visit your favorite Web sites
- Go to your local park and join or watch a pick-up game
- Go shopping

- ___ Do a puzzle with a lot of pieces
- ___ Go play something you can do by yourself if no one else is around, like basketball, bowling, handball, miniature golf, billiards, or hitting a tennis ball against the wall
- ___ Create your own Web site
- ___ Get a massage
- ___ Go for a drive in your car or go for a ride on just sit outside public transportation
- ___ Plan a trip to somewhere you've never been before or a dream vacation
- ___ Eat chocolate or something delicious
- ___ Go to a spa
- ___ Sign up for a class that excites you at a local library, college, or online
- ___ Go to a bookstore and read
- ___ Read your favorite book, magazine or newspaper
- ___ Go to your favorite café for coffee or tea
- ___ Read a trashy celebrity magazine
- ___ Visit a museum or local art gallery
- ___ Write a letter to a friend or family member
- ___ Go to the mall or the park and watch other people; try to imagine what they're thinking
- ___ Write things you like about yourself on paper
- ___ Pray or meditate
- ___ Write a poem, story, movie or play
- ___ Go to your church, synagogue, temple, or other place of worship
- ___ Write in your journal
- ___ Write a loving letter to yourself when you're feeling good and keep it with you to read
When you're feeling upset
- ___ Join a group
- ___ Write a letter to your higher power

Diaphragmatic Breathing for Young Children

1. To practice belly-breathing, ask your child to lie comfortably and place his hands on his belly (if he uses a stuffed animal, he can hold it on top of his belly if they lay down).
2. Ask them to inhale deeply through their nose.
3. Tell them to fill their belly with air as they inhale; they should feel it get bigger and bigger until the lungs are full.
3. Ask them to exhale slowly until all of the air is released.

Young children can use a stuffed animal to help make the breathing more visual: If their stuffed toy sits atop their belly, they will see it rise as his belly “fills with air”. Encourage them to make their stuffed animal rise as high as possible. Then, the child will notice the stuffed animal fall as the child feels their belly shrinking.

Children can also use shapes to visualize each breath. You or the child slowly draws any simple shape, breathing in or out with each line drawn.

Tips:

- Kids as young as three can practice belly breathing.
- If your child is having difficulty breathing slowly, have him or her exhale through a straw. You can tell them to pretend they’re snorkeling. You can also use bubbles to teach slow, deep breaths.
- It’s important to have kids first practice when they are in a relaxed state. Once they have the feel of belly breathing mastered (have them practice it daily), then they can apply it to when they’re feeling stressed. It’s hard to have a kid calm down if they don’t know what calm feels like, or, they don’t have a well-rehearsed strategy already in place.
- It’s great to practice belly breathing at bedtime. It can help kids who have trouble falling asleep.
- Go ahead and practice with your kids. After all, parenting is stressful. You deserve some relaxation vibes too.

Other Resources:

- Sesame Street Video demonstrating Deep Breathing for Kids:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=62&v=mZbzDOpylA
- Apps for older kids and teens:
CALM
Buddhify
Insight Timer
7 Cups

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

PMR is a helpful strategy for kids with anxiety difficulties, as they are often chronically tensing muscles. PMR helps the child learn to distinguish between the feelings of a tensed muscle and a completely relaxed muscle. This in turn teaches the child to “cue” this relaxed state at the first sign of the muscle tension that accompanies anxiety. PMR helps build awareness about anxiety triggers through physical sensations, and teaches an association between relaxed muscles and a relaxed mental state.

It is easier to have someone guide a child through this the first few times until the technique is learned. Tell kids this is like learning to turn their muscles from uncooked spaghetti into cooked spaghetti.

1. Lie down in a quiet room and take slow breaths
2. Think about the muscles of your head and face, now scrunch them up tightly and clench your teeth, hold that as you count to 10, then allow all of those muscles to relax. Notice that feeling of relaxation in your face, and your jaw loosening
3. Now concentrate on muscles of your shoulders and neck, tighten up your neck muscles pulling your head down, shrug your shoulders up, hold that uncomfortable tightness, for a count of 10, then let all those muscles relax and notice the feeling.
4. While continuing your slow breathing, move your attention to your arms and hands, tightening those muscles further and further, hold it as you count to 10. Then allow those muscles to relax.
5. Now think about the muscles in your legs, your bottom and your feet, tighten all these muscles up, feel the hard tension throughout your legs, hold it as you count to 10, then allow your legs and feet to relax as you continue your slow breathing.
6. Now that all of your muscles have relaxed, continue your slow breathing and take some time to enjoy the sense of relaxation. Focus on how the most relaxed areas of your body feel now.

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YouTube video demonstrations:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDKyRpW-Yuc> (cartoon demo)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaTDNYjk-Gw> (pictures and audio)

Grounding Technique: Five Senses Exercise, 3 different ways

Method 1:

- What are three things I can **hear**?
- What are three things I can **see**?
- What are three things I can **feel**?
- What are three things that I can **smell**?
- What are three things I can **taste**?

Method 2:

- What are **5** things I can **hear**?
- What are **4** things I can **see**?
- What are **3** things I can **feel**?
- What are **2** things that I can **smell**?
- What are **1** things I can **taste**?

Method 3: Select a specific food item

- What can I **hear**? (example: food wrapper)
- What can I **see**? (describe the food item visually)
- What can I **feel**? (what the food item feels like, texture)
- What can I **smell**? (describe scent of the food item)
- What can I **taste**?

Distress Tolerance: TIPP Skills

T – Temperature

Hold an ice cube, splash cold water on face, use an ice pack, blow AC

I – Intense Exercise

jumping jacks/rope, run around the block, YouTube aerobics videos

P – Paced Breathing

P – Paired muscle relaxation

Distress Tolerance: A Calm Mind ACCEPTS

A – Activities: Engage in an activity,. Read a book, make strawberry jam, go for a walk, call your friend, organize your room. Anything that keeps you busy and keeps your mind off the negative emotion will help. If you finish, move on to a new activity.

C – Contributing: Do something kind for another person. An act of service is also an activity that, as mentioned above, will help get your mind off of the problem at hand. Additionally, we feel good about ourselves when we help someone else, and that in itself can help you deal with stress.

C – Comparisons: Put your life in perspective. Is there a time when you've faced more difficult challenges than you're facing today? Maybe not—maybe this is the most intense situation and most intense emotion you've ever experienced. If that's the case, is there another person who has suffered more than you? Are you in your safe home, while in another part of the world someone else is searching for food and shelter after a natural disaster?

E – Emotions: Employ use of the opposite emotion. For example, if you are sad, watch a funny movie, read comics, watch funny animal videos, or watch a stand-up comedian. If you are worried, read stories about people who faced their fear, do something that you are confident in, or face your worry directly.

P – Push Away: When you can't deal with something just yet, it's okay to push the problem out of your mind temporarily. You can push away by distracting yourself with other activities, thoughts, or mindfulness. You can even set a time to come back to the issue.

T – Thoughts: Replace negative, anxious thoughts with activities that busy your mind, such as saying the alphabet backwards or doing a Sudoku puzzle.

S – Sensation: use physical sensations to get in the present moment. Touch a soft blanket, smell a nice sent, eat something really sour or cold, use an ice pack, listen to relaxing music.

Distress Tolerance Skill: IMPROVE the Moment

I – Imagery: Imagine yourself dealing successfully with the problem, and feeling accomplished when the situation is over.

M – Meaning: Try to find meaning in painful situations. What can you learn from this experience? Maybe you'll be more empathetic. Maybe you'll build new relationships. Maybe this will launch you on a healing journey. Find a reason, or a possible reason, to assign your present suffering.

P – Prayer: Prayer can come in any form that works for you. The prayer can be to any higher power, including God or the universe. Surrender your problems and ask to tolerate the situation a little longer.

R – Relaxation: We tense up during stressful situations thanks to our fight or flight instinct. Engage in relaxing activities to calm the distress you're experiencing. These activities can include deep breathing, yoga, a hot bath, and a relaxing walk.

O – One Thing in the Moment: Stay in the moment by letting go of the past and future. Adding old issues to the situation, or future tripping about potential consequences of the situation, will not be helpful in solving the problem. Find one thing to do and focus your entire self to that task. A one-track mind helps emotions feel less overwhelming.

V – Vacation: On the ideal vacation, you're able to take a break from all your stressors and return home ready to take on the challenges you left behind. Unfortunately, most of us aren't able to take a real vacation during a moment of crisis. Instead, you can take a vacation in your mind. Imagine yourself somewhere else, like taking an evening stroll around the lake or driving on a scenic road. Stay on your "vacation" as long as necessary, and revisit as often as needed. Hopefully, you'll "return" better able to tolerate your circumstances.

E – Encouragement: Encouragement doesn't have to come from an external source to be effective. Give yourself encouragement by repeating phrases or a mantra that is meaningful to you, such as "I got this", "I can improve this moment", or "¡sí se puede!". Say it loud, say it proud! You'll be amazed at your ability to motivate yourself to make it through a challenging time.