

HELP YOUR CHILD BUILD A TOOLBOX OF SAFE, EFFECTIVE COPING SKILLS:



Coping skill 1: Stay physically active

Staying active is one of the most effective ways to stay mentally healthy and to cope with worry, sadness, and isolation. **During this uncertain time, physical activity is especially important for all children and teens, but making it possible may require creativity right now.**

Help your child brainstorm ways to stay active that work for your family setting. Some ideas might include:

- Going outside for a walk, jog, or bike ride
- Trying an online fitness workout or workout with a friend over the phone
- Playing hopscotch, or another active game in a park field
- 30 minutes of family fitness (jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups)
- Dancing to a favorite playlist
- Walking up and down staircases

If your family is not used to being physically active or if you have health conditions that make it difficult, this coping skill may feel hard. It's okay if you can do only a little bit. **Setting and tracking goals for physical activity can help, and achieving even small goals can be empowering.** Also, try to notice if your own feelings of worry, hopelessness, or despair feel a little bit better during or after physical activity, and help your child notice, too.

For a short video about the mental health benefits of physical activity, see:

<https://www.youtube.comTRAILS/physical>

Recommended websites to help children and teens use physical activity to feel better:

1. TRAILS Physical Activity Materials: worksheets, handouts, videos, and more!
<https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/behavioral-activation>
2. GoNoodle: Movement and mindfulness videos created by child development experts.
<https://www.gonoodle.com/>
3. American Heart Association-NFL Play 360: Quick videos, featuring NFL players:
<https://play60.discoveryeducation.com/videos>
4. KidsHealth Easy Exercises for Teens: <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/easy-exercises.html>
5. 30-Minute Hip Hop Fit Workout: <https://www.youtube.com/HipHopWorkout>





Coping skill 2: Make time for mental rest

Everyone around the world is experiencing increased worry right now, including children and teens. You can help your child take mental breaks by practicing a few minutes of relaxation or mindfulness together or teaching them how to do this on their own. **Research shows that even 5 minutes a day of relaxation practice can help reduce stress, decrease inappropriate behavior, boost concentration, and improve sleep.** Here are a few strategies you can try at home:

Grades Pre K - 2	Grades 3 - 6	Grades 7 - 12
<p>Animal yoga: Pretend to be different animals, and shape your body into curled up and stretched out positions. Imagine being that animal feeling cozy in places of safety, or relaxing in nature.</p> <p>Slow breath: Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 2, breathe out for 4 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times while lying down or sitting comfortably.</p> <p>Tighten & Relax: Move through each major body part, slowly tightening (10 seconds) and relaxing (10 seconds) the muscles in each one.</p>	<p>5 Senses: Spend 30 seconds focusing on each sense (sight, smell, sound, etc.) and observe what you notice.</p> <p>Imaginary vacation: Close your eyes and pretend you are in a favorite place – a beach, your room, a hot air balloon – and imagine, tell, or write about what it is like there.</p> <p>Mindful eating: Hold a piece of food in your hand (raisin, M&M, etc.) and look at, feel, and smell, it. Then put it on your tongue and notice its smell, taste, and texture before chewing and swallowing.</p>	<p>Body Scan: Mentally observe your whole body, one part at a time. Note where you feel tension, pressure, pain, or calm. Try to spread the calm throughout your body.</p> <p>Loving Kindness: Create a statement of forgiveness, kindness, wellness, or love and send it to yourself. Then in your mind send that message to loved ones, friends, family, neighbors, your community, and finally, the whole world.</p> <p>Tolerating Emotional Waves: Focus on the image of difficult emotions being like waves that come and go. You can ride the wave of each emotion, just tolerating it when it's present, and trusting it will eventually roll on and give way to a moment of calm afterwards.</p>

For a short video about relaxation, see: <https://www.youtube.com/TRAILS/Relaxation>

Recommended websites for children and teens to support relaxation, mindfulness, or meditation:

1. TRAILS Relaxation materials: worksheets, handouts, videos, and more!
<https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/relaxation>
2. Kids Health: Relaxation Techniques <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/relaxation.html>
3. American Psychological Association: tips for building resilience
<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience>
4. Go Zen: 50 Calm Down Ideas <https://gozen.com/50-calm-down-ideas-to-try-with-kids-of-all-ages/>
5. Mindfulness for Teens (includes videos and guided meditations) <http://mindfulnessforteens.com/>



Coping skill 3: Coping with big thoughts

When faced with stress or uncertainty, our brains are designed to focus on warning signs of danger. This “fight or flight” response increases our heart rate and makes us feel uneasy and tense. One way to feel better is to identify the source of our anxiety, and use careful thinking skills to calm back down. **You can help your child or teen learn to recognize worried thoughts and focus on more helpful thoughts instead.**

- Step 1:** Help your child identify their thoughts
(Ask: If you were a cartoon, what would your thought bubble say right now?)
- Step 2:** Help your child figure out if this thought is fully true, somewhat true, or not really reasonable
(Ask: How do you know this is true? Let’s find out more about this. How likely is this?)
- Step 3:** After discussion, help your child come up with a believable, but less worried thought
(Ask: What could you tell yourself instead that would help you feel less worried? What would you tell a friend who was having the same thought, to help them realize it wasn’t fully true?)

For a short video about coping with worried thoughts, see:

<https://www.youtube.com/TRAILS/Thoughts>

Recommended websites for children and teens to support coping with worried thoughts:

1. TRAILS Cognitive Coping Materials: worksheets, handouts, videos, and more!
<https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/cognitive-coping>
2. Observing our Train of Thoughts video <https://www.youtube.com/Train-of-Thoughts>
3. Reach Out: Challenging Negative Thoughts:
<https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-challenge-negative-thoughts>
4. Wellcast: Automatic Thoughts: <https://www.youtube.com/AutomaticThoughts>
5. HereToHelp: Healthy Thinking: <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/healthy-thinking>



Example worried thoughts about COVID-19	More helpful coping thought
<p>"I am going to get very sick."</p>	<p>"I am taking steps to stay healthy." "Even if I do get sick, this virus does not usually make children and teens very sick." "This virus is still very rare, much more rare than flu."</p>
<p>"My family is not safe."</p>	<p>"My family is doing a lot to keep us safe right now." "My family is following advice from very smart people who know what is best to keep us healthy."</p>
<p>"We are going to lose our housing because we won't have enough money to pay for it."</p>	<p>"All the people in charge of our community are working hard to make sure families have what they need." "There are a lot of services working right now to help families pay bills, find food to eat, and keep their homes." "It is unlikely, but if we did lose our house, my family would still be with me and would help keep me safe. It would be very hard but we would get through it together."</p>
<p>"I won't be able to deal with being so scared or isolated from my friends or relatives."</p>	<p>"I have experienced difficulty in the past. I am strong and can get through even really hard situations." "This situation might be scary or upsetting, but it's okay if I need help to get through it. Lots of people are asking for help right now, too." "I can still communicate with my friends or relatives by phone, video calls, texts, emails, and even sending letters or packages." "I'm not alone – kids all over the world are going through exactly what I'm going through right now."</p>
<p>"I can't leave my house without risking illness."</p>	<p>"The best health information right now advises people to leave their houses but just not come in close contact with others or create groups of more than a few people." "I can leave my house to go for a walk, go for a drive, ride my bike, sit on my front steps, and lots of other activities." "When I go out, I can take precautions and follow guidelines about how to be safe."</p>



Remember, the best way to take care of those you love, is to take care of yourself, too. During this stressful time, it is important that you do your best to treat yourself with kindness and compassion. As much as you can, try to: get adequate sleep, eat nutritious meals, build in both physical activity and moments of relaxation during the day, stay connected to sources of support, and reach out for help when you need it.