

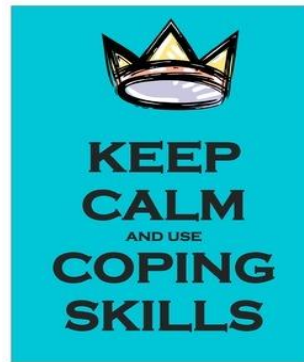


*Our children,
our hope,
our future*

May is Mental Health Awareness Month!

At OPS, we are celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month by providing families with information and exercises designed to foster conversations about mental health between parents/guardians and children. The information and exercises will be focused on identifying stressors, identifying stress symptoms, ways to manage stress, and developing coping skills.

This is the 3rd packet addressing
COPING WITH STRESS:
What can I do *in the moment*
to reduce my stress level?
(Psst! This is the FUN packet!)



Review

In the first packet, we took a look at what stress is, what causes stress, and how to know when you are stressed. In last week's packet, we looked at our current diet, sleep, exercise and leisure habits to see if any improvements could be made to help prevent stress. Hopefully, you and your family learned a little about yourselves and each other and have already started one or two small changes. This week, we will look at what's called "coping skills" that can help manage stress *in the moment*, and bring it back down to tolerable levels.

What are Coping Skills?

As we learned last week, a small amount of stress is actually beneficial for motivation and focus, but when stress gets too burdensome or chronic, it becomes detrimental to one's health. While taking better care of oneself can help reduce and prevent the impact of stressful events, there are still times when stress gets the better of us and we need to cope with its acute effects to bring it back down to manageable or tolerable levels. To do this, we use coping skills.

Coping skills are the methods people use to deal with stressful situations. Everyone has coping skills, and almost anything can *be* a coping skill. Some methods work better than others, which can depend on what is causing the stress (i.e., reading is a great coping skill when you've had a hectic week, but may not be your first choice after spending hours upon hours studying for a test. You'd probably choose something more active or outside, like walking or going to the park.). More importantly, some methods are "adaptive" (constructive) while others are "maladaptive" (destructive). For example, deep breathing and thinking reassuring thoughts are *adaptive* coping strategies to use when dealing with an anxiety-provoking stressor. Avoidance, however, is maladaptive in this example because while it is *very* effective at reducing anxiety in the moment, it does nothing to help reduce the anxiety in the long-term (in fact, avoidance makes anxiety worse!). Therefore, the stressor actually has a greater negative impact next time.

You may have noticed from the above example that maladaptive coping strategies can be very effective even if they are not constructive. Over time, many people come to rely on them and feel they “need” these strategies in order to cope with what stresses them. This is why it is so important to learn *adaptive* coping strategies at a young age. As long as we’re developing habits, they may as well be good ones.

-----FAMILY FORUM TIME!-----

Worksheet 1: What coping skills are you using?

Instructions: The Coping Skills Assessment below will help you begin to think about what your habits are when you feel stressed. Print or copy one sheet per person in your family and ask each person to complete the assessment separately. Then come together as a family to discuss the questions on the next page. (Hint: You may find that many of the maladaptive strategies are the same as the behaviors we called “stress symptoms” in the first week’s stress assessment!)

Congratulations!! Surely, there’s at least one coping strategy you’re using that you’re proud of. Give yourself credit!! Take a moment to pat yourself on the back!

You should also pat yourself on the back for recognizing the ones you want to change. As with any other habit, it will take time and a conscious effort to break the old cycle of behavior and develop a new one. The fun part is trying out all the possible new coping skills!

-----FAMILY FORUM TIME!-----

Worksheet 2: Coping Skills Checklist

Instructions: The Coping Skills Checklist below will help you generate lots of ideas about new coping skills to try. You do NOT have to limit yourself to this list, but you DO have to make sure any new skills are adaptive. Once each person in the family has completed the checklist, discuss together the questions on the next page.

A Word About Deep Breathing

One technique that should be on everyone’s list to try is deep breathing. Also called belly breaths, diaphragmatic breathing, or abdominal breathing, this method has been scientifically proven to have profound effects on the heart, brain, digestion, immune system, and perhaps even the expression of genes.

There are many methods of deep breathing exercises including meditation, yoga, guided imagery, repetitive prayer, tai chi, and progressive muscle relaxation. And there are countless ways to help children learn how to belly breath correctly. For more information, please see the links listed under “To Learn More” below. Much like exercise has become an established practice for optimal health, so, too, will deep breathing practices become an essential part of wellness.

Next Steps

Now that you’ve identified a bunch of new coping skills to try, it’s time to practice them! That’s right, practice! Don’t wait until you’re stressed to try the new skill; spend some time having fun just using/doing the new skill now, while you’re NOT stressed. This will help you remember to use/do it when you ARE stressed and it will actually make the skill more effective when you need it.

NOTE: This is one of those steps that usually gets skipped because we tend to think time spent having fun is wasted. PLEASE DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP!! You are not wasting time; you are building adaptive coping skills!!

Plus, practicing will help you determine which strategies you truly like to do and how they affect you. You'll need to know that when it comes time to choose one!

Next week's packet will provide instructions to create a Family Coping Skills Toolbox.

To Learn More

If you'd like to learn more about coping skills, please visit the following online resources:

www.GoodTherapy.org: Coping Mechanisms

www.CopingSkillsForKids.com

[Just Breathe: Body Has a Built-In Stress Reliever](#)

[Relaxation Techniques: Breath Control Helps Quell Errant Stress Response](#)

[Deep Breathing Exercises for Kids](#)

Worksheet 1: What coping skills are you using?

Instructions: Print or copy one sheet per person in your family and ask each person to complete the assessment separately. Then come together as a family to discuss the questions on the next page.

COPING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Color in how often you use each of these positive or negative coping skills to cope with your feelings!



ALWAYS

SOMETIMES

NEVER

USE MY WORDS TO HURT OTHER PEOPLE'S FEELINGS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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TAKE A "TIME-OUT" FROM THE SITUATION

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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USE MY BODY TO HURT OTHERS (HIT, BITE, KICK, PUSH)

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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YELL AND SCREAM

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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DO DEEP BREATHING OR COUNT TO TEN

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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MAKE THREATS OR LOOK THREATENING

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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TALK TO A FRIEND OR SIBLING ABOUT MY FEELINGS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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TALK TO AN ADULT ABOUT MY FEELINGS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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NAME-CALL OR INSULT OTHERS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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HURT MYSELF

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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EXPRESS MY FEELINGS IN A POSITIVE WAY

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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FIND SOMETHING TO DISTRACT ME

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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THROW OBJECTS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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CRY

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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USE BAD WORDS OR SWEAR/CUSS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Worksheet 1: What coping skills are you using?

Questions for discussion:

1. Which skills do you think are adaptive? Which are maladaptive? (Mark each on the assessment)
2. Which are you most proud of?
3. Which would you most like to change?
4. For the ones you'd like to change, when are you most likely to do that?
5. Do you notice any patterns between you and other family members?
6. Did you learn anything new about yourself or another family member?

Worksheet 2: Coping Skills Checklist

Coping Skills Checklist

1. Check off the ones you do now
2. Circle the ones you want to try
3. Cross off the ones that don't work

CALMING SKILLS

- Deep breathing using a pinwheel
- Deep breathing with bubbles
- Deep breathing with a stuffed animal
- Deep breathing using a feather
- Take a mindful walk
- Yoga
- Imagine your favorite place
- Think of your favorite things
- Picture the people you care about
- Say the alphabet slowly
- Remember the words to a song you love
- Run water over your hands
- Carry a small object
- Touch things around you
- Move
- Make a fist then release it
- Positive self-talk
- Take a shower or bath
- Take a drink of water
- Counting
- Block out noises
- Take a break
- Calming Jar
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DISTRACTION SKILLS

- Write a story
- Crossword Puzzles
- Sudoku
- Bake or Cook
- Volunteer/Community Service
- Random Acts of Kindness
- Read
- Clean
- Play with a pet
- Play a board game
- Play video games
- Screen time
- Play with a friend
- Start a garden
- Creative thinking
- Make up your own game
- Plan a fun event
- Start a new hobby
- Do a crafting project
- Your favorite things
- Be silly and laugh
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Coping Skills Checklist

1. Check off the ones you do now
2. Circle the ones you want to try
3. Cross off the ones that don't work

MOVEMENT SKILLS

- Squeeze something
- Use a stress ball
- Shred paper
- Bubble wrap
- Use a sand tray
- Jacob's ladder
- Hold a small stone
- Shuffle cards
- Make something
- Use a fidget
- Walk
- Exercise
- Dance
- Punch a safe surface
- Play at the park
- Make an obstacle course
- Swing on a swing
- Jump on a trampoline
- Jump rope
- Scooter
- Go swimming
- Stretches
- Tumbling
- Gymnastics
- Yoga
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PROCESSING SKILLS

- Write in a journal
- Write songs
- Write poetry
- Write music
- Draw
- Talk to someone you trust
- Create a playlist
- Write what's bothering you and throw it away
- Write a letter to someone
- Use "I statements"
- Make a worry box
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SENSORY SKILLS

- Use a weighted blanket
- Sit in a bean bag
- Wrap up in a soft blanket
- Eat a crunchy snack
- Use a body sock
- Crawl through a tunnel
- Sip a drink through a straw
- Do wall push ups
- Turn upside down
- Stretch on an exercise ball
- Play with water beads
- Use mermaid fabric
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Worksheet 2: Coping Skills Checklist?

Questions for discussion:

1. Which skills do you are you most excited to try?

2. Look back at your answers for questions 3 and 4 on the first worksheet. Which skills from the checklist could replace the maladaptive strategies? Consider which would best work for each situation.

3. Are there any new skills you want to try that others in your family also want to try?