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*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 4th packet with instructions to build your own **FAMILY COPING SKILLS TOOLBOX:** All your favorite feel-good tools in one place!
(Psst! This is another 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. The 2nd packet looked at your current diet, sleep, exercise and leisure habits to see if any improvements could be made to help prevent stress. The 3rd packet addressed "coping skills" that can help manage stress *in the moment*, and bring it back down to tolerable levels. This week's packet will provide instructions on how to make your own Family Coping Skills Toolbox to have on hand for whenever you feel the need to bring stress levels down a few notches.

Why a Family Coping Skills Toolbox?

As you may recall, coping skills are the methods people use to deal with stressful situations. There are adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. The purpose of a coping skills toolbox is to help you choose adaptive strategies by making them accessible and easier to employ when you need them. The idea is to gather all your favorite coping tools in one place, such as on a shelf in the family room (make sure it's within reach of the children!). Then when you or a family member is feeling stressed, you can remind each other to use it! You can even use it together!

Hopefully, you've taken the time to try some new strategies from last week's checklists and practice them to see what really works. Once you know what strategies you like, follow the instructions below to guide you in assembling your toolbox. There are many suggestions and resources listed. Don't feel like you need to include all of them. Choose what works for you and your family to make your toolbox your own.

FAMILY FORUM TIME!

Family Coping Skills Toolbox

The following graphic will guide you through the process of selecting items to include in your toolbox. The "box" itself can be an actual box or basket, crate, bag, etc. (You may wish to print this page for easy reference while assembling your toolbox.) Links to additional examples/resources for each element are listed below. These are just suggestions; your toolbox can include anything that works for you and your family.

<h1>Let's make a Coping Skills Toolbox!</h1>	<h2>What is it?</h2> <p>A Coping Skills Toolbox is a place for you to keep things that calm you down in periods of distress. If you have everything gathered in one place, it's easier to remember to use your coping skills, rather than using negative behaviors.</p>	<h2>Self-Soothing</h2> <p>(Comforting yourself through your five senses)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Something to touch</u> (ex: stuffed animal, stress ball)2. <u>Something to hear</u> (ex: music, meditation guides)3. <u>Something to see</u> (ex: snowglobe, happy pictures)4. <u>Something to taste</u> (ex: mints, tea, sour candy)5. <u>Something to smell</u> (ex: lotion, candles, perfume)
<h2>Distraction</h2> <p>(Taking your mind off the problem for a while)</p> <p><u>Examples:</u> Puzzles, books, artwork, crafts, knitting, crocheting, sewing, crossword puzzles, sudoku, positive websites, music, movies, etc.</p>	<h2>Opposite Action</h2> <p>(Doing something the opposite of your impulse that's consistent with a more positive emotion)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Affirmations and Inspiration</u> (ex: looking at or drawing motivational statements or images)2. <u>Something funny or cheering</u> (ex: funny movies / TV / books)	<h2>Emotional Awareness</h2> <p>(Tools for identifying and expressing your feelings)</p> <p><u>Examples:</u> A list or chart of emotions, a journal, writing supplies, drawing / art supplies</p>
<h2>Mindfulness</h2> <p>(Tools for centering and grounding yourself in the present moment)</p> <p><u>Examples:</u> Meditation or relaxation recordings, grounding objects (like a rock or paperweight), yoga mat, breathing exercises.</p>	<h2>Crisis Plan</h2> <p>(Contact info of supports and resources, for when coping skills aren't enough.)</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"><p>Family / Friends Therapist Psychiatrist Hotline Crisis Team / ER 911</p></div>	<h2>Put it all together!</h2> <p>Once you've gathered all of your items, put them together in a box or other container, decorate it to your heart's content, and put it in a place where you'll remember it. Then USE IT!</p>

Additional examples/resources for the above:

Self-soothing resources:

Touch: [Make your own stress-ball](#)

Hear: [5-minute and under guided meditations for beginners](#)

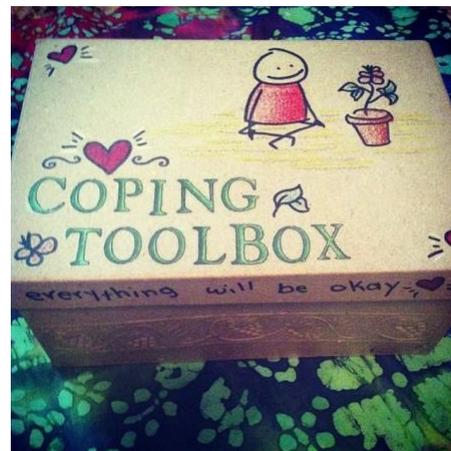
See: [6 Ways to Make a Calm Down Jar](#)

Opposite Action: [10 Practical Examples of Opposite Action](#) (Read to learn more)
[Changing Emotions by Acting Opposite to the Current Emotion](#) (print for ready-reference in your toolbox)

Emotional Awareness: [Free printable emotions poster](#)
[Free printable emotions chart](#)
[Free printable emotions flashcards](#)

Mindfulness: [Deep breathing printables](#) (free)

Some pictures of others' toolboxes:



A Word About Deep Breathing...Again (because it's worth repeating!)

One technique that should be included in everyone's toolbox is a deep breathing exercise. 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

Once you've assembled your Family Coping Skills Toolbox, remember to use it! Remind each other to use it! Use it together! In fact, you don't have to be stressed to use the toolbox because practicing the skills while you're calm will help you remember to use/do them when you ARE stressed, and it will actually make the skills more effective when you need them.

IMPORTANT: If you feel you or someone you love could benefit from the help of a professional therapist (counselor, social worker, psychiatrist), please see the downloadable list of [Counseling Resources in the OPS Area](#) included at the end of the blog post.

To Learn More

If you'd like to learn more about coping skills toolboxes and/or you're interested in even more resources/strategies to include, please visit the following online resources:

[Fostering a Growth Mindset](#)

[Circle of Concern/Influence/Control](#)

www.CopingSkillsForKids.com

[Deep Breathing Exercises for Kids](#)

[Wheel of Coping Skills](#) (an alternative to a toolbox)

[My Cope-Cake](#)

