

# Coping Skills for Emotions

**What:** Teaching children and adolescents skills to cope with upsetting feelings—calm anxiety, fear, and anger OR improve sad mood.

**Why?** When children or adolescents don't handle upsetting feelings well or are overwhelmed by them they have trouble getting along and aren't able to try out key skills for change (e.g., exposure, behavioral activation/getting active, behavioral change).

**Skills:** Exercise, Getting a hug, Breathing, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Imagining positive image, Listening to music, Dancing, Calling a friend, Taking a break, Reading, Going on-line, Meditation, Focusing on something else, Concentrating on a playing a game, what else?

**How** to teach the skill...

Tell about it; Model It; **CLIENT PRACTICES IT!**

**PRAISE EFFORT. GIVE FEEDBACK RE: DOING IT ALL THE WAY.**

**ASK CHILD FOR FEELING AND RATING BEFORE AND AFTER (0-10, OTHER METHOD)**

**(In Session Experiment)**

If the first skill wasn't helpful, try another one. Real life stuff often works best.

**Discuss and Assign First Weekly Practice.** *Did you notice feeling better just now? How was it helpful? What are other activities that help you feel the same way?*

**Every Week Practice Questions:** *When do you/your child need to use a coping skill? What helps to you remember to use the skill? What might get in the way (problem solve!). Remember, rate feelings before and after and/or report back how using the skill worked.*

**Discuss how long and when the child should practice. Make a plan.**

**Points to Remember:**

- Young children: parents/caregivers have to know the skill and scaffold for children. They can't remember and do skills solo. School-age & adolescents need caregiver support as well.
- Learning and practicing skills before they are needed (in a time when not nervous or depressed) is sometimes helpful.
- Real life coping skills (exercise, music, getting a hug) that kids use anyway, often trump "therapy" coping skills (progressive relaxation, imagery).