



# RESILIENT LIFE SKILL 3: SELF-CARE AND COPING WITH UNCERTAINTY

## INTRODUCTION

Learning to cope with change and uncertainty requires practice, planning, flexibility, and self-compassion. The idea of caring for ourselves can feel a bit strange to many. Some people assume a kind of selfishness is involved in the process, while others put it off because of business, fatigue, or a feeling of being overwhelmed.

Sticking to healthy self-care and coping plans can be particularly challenging in times of continued change and uncertainty like we are experiencing during COVID-19. There are many ways to engage in self-care, so, this piece explores some techniques we can teach to our children and teens to build healthy habits for life.

## WHAT IS SELF-CARE AND COPING?

Self-care is the intentional process of planning and implementing practices that are meant to care for one's own emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual health and wellbeing. Self-care is self-focused. This can sound like a bad thing, but in actuality, self-care is incredibly important as a kind of protective barrier that prepares us to face stress, uncertainty, and change in the future.

A classic image for self-care is a cup. Inside the cup is a constantly changing level of energy and capacity to manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Stress and stressful situations deplete our energy and capacity, effectively "pouring out" what is inside our cup. Therefore, we need to work on restoring our ability to manage stress in the future. Self-care practices such as sleep, eating healthy foods, and exercise can be beneficial preventative habits that help with the restorative process.

Coping is different. Coping is more reactionary than preventative. Coping is how one responds in the moment to negative or stressful situations and experiences. We need coping skills when situations arise that are unanticipated. Because we are all living with a lot of unanticipated, fluid circumstances daily, we need to teach our kids to plan for healthy ways to care for themselves, while also building skills to adapt and respond to the complexities that life will throw their way.



## **HOW DO I TEACH MY CHILD SELF-CARE AND COPING?**

One of the best ways we teach our children to engage in self-care and coping practices is to model them ourselves. Children and teenagers watch their parent's and caregiver's behaviors constantly, and pick up on the healthy (and unhealthy) coping mechanisms. How are you responding to stress and anxiety that arises in your life? What are your sources of comfort? Children will notice if you are dependent on alcohol, over-eating, tend to get angry, or detach yourself from others to de-stress. While it may feel counterintuitive, teaching your child starts with your own practice and commitment to self-care and healthy coping responses. Take time for yourself. Communicate why it is important for you to do so to your child. This does not have to include a lot of time or money, but does require an investment in your own wellbeing.

The big takeaway here is to “start with you.” The old idiom, “Do as I say, and not as I do,” will not work here. Modeling healthy self-care and coping is more important than explicit instruction.

## **WHEN SHOULD I TEACH MY CHILD SELF-CARE AND COPING?**

Anytime is a great time! You know your family best. Every family's schedules and dynamics are unique. The important thing is to talk to your child and then find consistent time to practice, and come up with a process for helping them respond to emotions and stressors in the moment. You can also plan for coping responses to stressful situations by asking your child or teenager ahead of time about what they can do to cope and calm themselves down.



# ACTIVITY, GRADES K-5:

## SELF CARE AND COPING STRATEGIES

---

### BUILDING A SELF-CARE PLAN

Self-care is a proactive process for managing stress. These strategies are things we can build into our lives on a regular basis to help minimize stress both now and in the future. Help your child build a self-care plan that will be practiced regularly. Your plan might include things like:

1. [Mindfulness](#)
2. Physical exercise
3. Sleep (at least 8 hours)
4. Healthy diet
5. Social interactions
6. School and education
7. Taking time for fun activities (that your child likes)!

### TEACHING HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

Remember, coping is how one responds in the moment to stress or a stressful situation. Below are some great strategies that you can teach your child to help them manage stress and other difficult emotions so that they can cope in healthy ways.



#### COPING STRATEGY 1: DEEP BREATHING

Deep breathing is one of the healthiest and most effective ways to cope with strong emotions and stressful situations because it helps to slow down the heartrate, which in turn, will help to calm those big feelings. Go back to the first module on [mindfulness](#) and deep breathing, and continue to practice these skills regularly!





## COPING STRATEGY 2: GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

“Grounding” is a technique that is proven to help with calming stress or anxiety. This is a great tool to use whenever a child is feeling stressed or overwhelmed at home, school, or other places because it can be done quietly without anyone noticing, and it will help to slow heartrate, calm nerves, and move forward.

1. Find a comfortable place to sit. If possible, close your eyes, or focus your gaze on a single object.
2. Begin taking deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.
3. Fully relax all your muscles while continuing to breathe slowly.
4. Keep breathing this way for approximately 30-60 seconds, or longer if it feels necessary.
5. If your eyes are closed, open them and while you continue to breathe, engage your senses by identifying the following things, one at a time:
  - 5 things you can see
  - 4 things you can feel
  - 3 things you can hear
  - 2 things you can smell
  - 1 thing you can taste

## COPING STRATEGY 3: HEALTHY DISTRACTIONS



Building out a list of healthy distractions is a helpful way to manage difficult or stressful experiences. This strategy is not intended to be the immediate go-to every time a child experiences stress, but can be used as a buffer to help reduce some stress in the moment. This approach then provides the opportunity to revisit a stressful or difficult experience later and talk about ways to cope and calm. Sometimes children need help distancing themselves from a stressful situation, and will need help transitioning to a distraction. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Do a painting or drawing activity with your child, and ask them to draw their favorite place, person, or activity.
2. Take a walk, bike ride, or run, and ask your child to identify as many kinds of animals, insects, or birds that they see along the way.
3. Read a book together.
4. Watch a favorite TV show or movie.
5. Play with their favorite toys.
6. Anything that they like to do for fun!



# ACTIVITY, GRADES 6-12:

## SELF CARE AND COPING FOR TEENS

---

### BUILDING A SELF-CARE PLAN

Building a self-care plan with teenagers is particularly important. Help your teenager identify a plan that includes the following elements, but may include things that are important to your teen, too. Below is a self-care planning sheet that teenagers can use as a reminder to commit to its practice.

1. [Mindfulness](#)
2. Physical exercise
3. Sleep (at least 8 hours)
4. Healthy diet
5. Social interactions
6. School and education
7. Things just for fun!

For your teens, use the attached "4 Quadrants of Self-Care" worksheet, and have them think about what they can do to take care of their emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual selves.

### TEACHING HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

Remember, coping is how one responds in the moment to stress or a stressful situation. Below are some great strategies that you can teach your teen to help them manage stress and other difficult emotions so that they can cope in healthy ways.



#### COPING STRATEGY 1: DEEP BREATHING

Deep breathing is one of the healthiest and most effective ways to cope with strong emotions and stressful situations because it helps to slow down the heart rate, which in turn, will help to calm those big feelings. Go back to the first module on mindfulness and deep breathing, and continue to practice these skills regularly!





## **COPING STRATEGY 2: DISCREET GROUNDING TECHNIQUES**

Sometimes, having other people around can create feelings of being overwhelmed, and some quick and discreet ways to calm down can be very helpful. Below are some ways to help feel more settled.

- a. Drink cold water and pay attention to how it feels going through your body.
- b. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and think of a person or place where you feel safe.
- c. Sing your favorite song to yourself in your head.
- d. Splash cold water on your hands or face.
- e. Grab an object (or carry one with you), and take note of all the small details like the temperature, texture, and color.



## **COPING STRATEGY 3: HEALTHY DISTRACTIONS**

Building out a list of healthy distractions is a helpful way to manage difficult or stressful experiences. Sometimes just hitting the 'pause' button and stepping away is just what is needed. Here are a few ideas:

1. Go for a walk, run, or bike ride.
2. Get out in nature and just watch and listen.
3. Turn off the phone for a while.
4. Watch a funny TV show or movie.
5. Call a good friend to just talk.
6. Do a creative activity like painting, drawing, or playing a musical instrument.



# FOUR QUADRANTS OF SELF CARE

Think about self-care in four categories: emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. How can you engage in rejuvenating self-care practices to “refill your cup”?

<b><u>EMOTIONAL</u></b>	<b><u>PHYSICAL</u></b>
<b><u>INTELLECTUAL</u></b>	<b><u>SPIRITUAL</u></b>

