

SKILLS FOR

Big Feelings

Family Handouts



Written and illustrated by
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Disclaimer

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Skills for Big Feelings A Guide for Teaching Kids Relaxation, Regulation, and Coping Techniques

Written and illustrated by Casey O'Brien Martin, LMHC, REAT, RN

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FAMILY RESOURCE 1

Naming Our Feelings

This week, we learned about the importance of naming our feelings. We also identified what it feels like in our bodies to have big feelings like stress, anger, sadness, anxiety, or worry. Most children experience a full range of emotions, but they do not yet have the emotional vocabularies to describe all the feelings that they experience beyond the basic terms like sad and mad. We started our first session by talking about what some of the big feeling words mean, such as stressed, angry, and worried. Here are some activities you can do at home to work on expanding your child's emotional vocabulary:

- Write down a big list of feeling words together.
- Make a face and body posture that matches each feeling.
- Create a noise to match each feeling.
- Create "emotional thermometers" for different feeling states and discuss what would make the "temperature" of a feeling change (e.g., from fine to a little annoyed to disappointed to frustrated to mad to angry to furious to enraged).
- When reading books or watching a movie, pause and ask what your child thinks certain characters are feeling and why they may be feeling that way. Discuss how body language and facial expressions give you clues to other people's feelings.
- Play emotions charades (i.e., take turns acting out a feeling nonverbally and guessing the feeling).
- Talk about your own feelings in an appropriate manner. Remember some topics may not be appropriate for children, so be sure to use good boundaries when practicing this.

There is power in being able to name and acknowledge your feelings. In the book, *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*¹, Siegel and Payne Bryson write about the importance of identifying feelings and how we can “name it to tame it.” When we engage the left side of our brain in thinking about the right word to describe our feelings, this can help diffuse our big feelings. Naming our feelings can also help us own them, which can help lessen their power over us.

You can model this by using your words to name and express feelings appropriately. It is helpful for our children to see us doing this in our day to day lives. They need to see you using your words and naming how you feel, too. Here are some examples of this:

- “I am feeling frustrated because your room is a mess.”
- “I am feeling anxious because I have this big work deadline soon.”
- “I am feeling irritated with your tone of voice.”
- “I am so proud of how hard you worked on this project.”

Accepting All Feelings

Once children understand that they need to name and acknowledge their feelings, they must next understand and believe that all feelings are acceptable. Some children may think there are good and bad or positive and negative feelings. They might try to resist acknowledging their “bad” feelings. This is not helpful. The famous psychologist Carl Jung² said that “what you resist not only persists, but will grow in size.” It is important for your children to realize that every single person—even counselors, family members, and teachers—has all different feelings all the time. Some feelings might make us more comfortable, and others uncomfortable, but there are no wrong or bad feelings. Feelings will come and go, like visitors. We want to emphasize that each child has choices they can make, even when they have big feelings.

¹ Siegel, D. J., and Payne Bryson, T. (2011). *The whole-brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*. Random House.

² Jung, C. (n.d.), as cited in Seltzer, L. F. (2016, June 15). You only get more of what you resist-why? *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201606/you-only-get-more-what-you-resist-why>

Skills to Practice This Week

Each week, your child is going to learn three new skills to practice at home. Make this an opportunity to connect and practice together! The skills are fun and very brief, so they won't take more than a couple of minutes to do. Work with your child to figure out a time and place where you can make practicing the skills part of your daily routine. Some examples could be before bedtime in the child's room, after teeth brushing in the kitchen, or before homework in the living room. Don't make practicing the skills stressful or turn it into a struggle. The reason we encourage the children to practice the skills during the week when they are feeling calm is that the more often they practice the skills, the easier it will be for them to use them when they are having big feelings, as their muscle memory will kick in.



Flying Bird

Cross your arms on your chest with your fingers pointed up towards your neck. Interlock your thumbs. Take some slow, deep belly breaths while you tap your hands, or wings, in a pattern — one and then the other.



Smell the Flower

Imagine you are holding a flower and breathe in through your nose to smell the wonderful scent. Next, pretend you are blowing out a candle by blowing air out through tight lips.



Frog Mouth

Pretend you are a frog and open your mouth as wide as you can to stretch your jaw wide open. Hold the stretch for ten seconds. Now, relax and release your mouth as much as you can and use your hands to massage your jaw on both sides. Do you feel the difference between the tense and the loose sensations?

FAMILY RESOURCE 2

Triggers, Sleep, and Nutrition

This week, we learned about triggers. Being hungry, using too much technology, or not getting enough sleep or physical activity can be triggers for many of us. Since everyone is unique, we all have different triggers. It's important to know what our triggers are so we can be prepared to practice our skills. We can't avoid our triggers, but we can learn to cope with them more effectively.

You can help your child with their overall wellness by ensuring that they are getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, limiting and monitoring their media usage, and increasing their physical activity. This session, we will focus on nutrition and sleep, but we will talk more about some of these issues in future sessions.

Research on the ties between diet and mental health in children and adolescents notes that there are "significant relationships between unhealthy dietary patterns and poorer mental health."³ Encourage your children to stay hydrated and eat a well-balanced diet, limiting caffeine and sugary foods/beverages.

Getting enough sleep is extremely impactful for children's development. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) recommends that children six to twelve years old get nine to twelve hours of sleep each night. They report that getting enough sleep regularly contributes to "improved attention, behavior, learning, memory, emotional regulation, quality of life, and mental and physical health."⁴ The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends turn-

³ O'Neil, A., Quirk, S. E., Housden, S., Brennan, S. L., Williams, L. J., Pasco, J. A., Berk, M., & Jacka, F. N. (2014). Relationship between diet and mental health in children and adolescents: a systematic review. *American Journal of Public Health, (104)*10, e31-e42. <https://www.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302110>

⁴ Paruthi, S., Brooks, L. J., D'Ambrosio, C., Hall, W. A., Kotagal, S., Lloyd, R. M., Malow, B. A., Maski, K., Nichols, C., Quan, S. F., Rosen, C. L., Troester, M. M., & Wise, M. S. (2016). Recommended amount of sleep for pediatric populations: A consensus statement of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. *Journal of clinical sleep medicine: official publication of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, 12*(6), 785–786. <https://www.doi.org/10.5664/jcsm.5866>

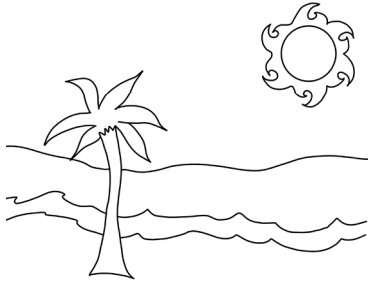
ing off screens 30 minutes before bedtime.⁵ They have published a free online resource on bedtime routines called “Brush, Book, Bath.”⁶

⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics (2016, June 13). *American academy of pediatrics supports childhood sleep guidelines*. American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/AAP-Supports-Childhood-Sleep-Guidelines.aspx>

⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics (2014, June 7). *Brush, book, bed: how to structure your child's nighttime routine*. Healthy Children. <http://bit.ly/bedroutine>

Skills to Practice This Week

Continue to practice the skills from last week while adding in these three new skills:



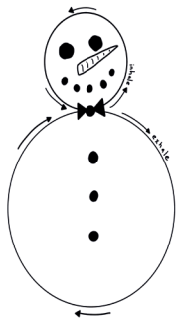
Sun and Sand

Envision you are at the beach on a beautiful summer day. Sit criss-cross applesauce on the sand. Breathe in and stretch your arms up high above your head, reaching towards the sun and lengthening your body. Feel your shoulders stretch. Now, breathe out and reach your arms out in front of you towards the sand. Hold the stretch for ten seconds and relax here.



Gorilla Hug

Wrap your arms around your torso and give yourself a big, giant gorilla hug. Squeeze if it feels comfortable. Uncross your arms and try again with the opposite arm on top. Uncross your arms and now try giving yourself a big, giant gorilla hug over your shoulders. Now try again with the opposite arm on top.



Snowman Stress Melter Breath

Place your pointer finger on the bow tie and follow the arrows as you trace your finger around the snowman's head while you breathe in. When you come back to the bow tie, start to breathe out a very long and slow breath as you trace your finger around the snowman's body. Repeat and feel your stress melt away.

FAMILY RESOURCE 3

Helpful and Unhelpful Thoughts

Our lesson this week was on how your thoughts affect your feelings, which impacts your behavior, and how your behavior then reinforces your thoughts. So, when you change your thoughts, you interrupt this cycle and can change your feelings. Understanding and applying this concept can be helpful for everyone, including children.

You can help your child be a detective to figure out what they are thinking. Just because they think a certain thought, does it mean it is 100 percent true? Practice making up helpful and unhelpful thoughts and identifying them. Many of us have inaccurate or unhelpful thoughts. It is important that your child does not start to believe that their unhelpful thoughts are true.

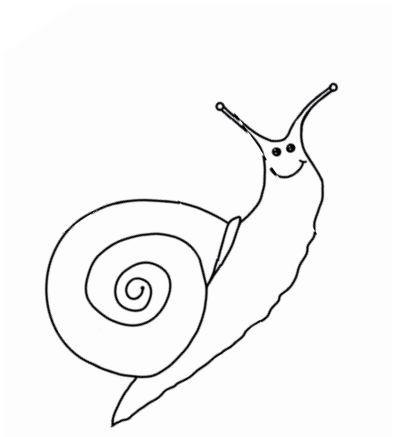
Our brains don't know how to distinguish between when we are just thinking a thought and when it is actually happening. This means that if your child has an unhelpful thought (e.g., "What if a meteor crashes into my house?"), their body will engage in a cascade of effects that will physiologically increase arousal, tension, and stress. When your child changes their thoughts to a more helpful thought, they can change their feelings and bodily responses as well. Children can learn that they have the power to control their own thoughts!

Most children will need reminders that there are differences between feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. You can remind them that they will have many different feelings and that it is okay. Feelings will come and go. Some feelings are uncomfortable, but children can still healthily express their feelings and make positive choices.

Big Takeaways:

- Your thoughts control how you feel and your feelings impact your behavior.
- Not all of your thoughts are true or accurate.
- Helpful thoughts make you feel comfortable, and unhelpful thoughts make you feel uncomfortable.
- If you change your thoughts, you can change how you are feeling.

Skills to Practice This Week



Snail Shell

Imagine you are a snail in a lovely garden with beautiful flowers all around. Take a break from the garden by hiding inside your snail shell. Gently push your head down to hide inside your shell as you lift your shoulders up towards your head. Hold this position for ten seconds. Now take a big breath in and stretch out of your shell by lifting your head and heart up high and pulling your shoulders back down as you breathe out.



Flat Tire

Breathe in while flexing your arms up above your head to make a tire shape. Now, breathe out while very gently and slowly lowering your arms and making a "shhh" sound. All the air drains out of the tire, just as all the stress flows out of your body.



Helpful, Happy Thoughts

Think about helpful, happy things that you like, whether they're memories, games, animals, places, music, or people. If you are comfortable, close your eyes for a minute and think of your helpful, happy thoughts.

FAMILY RESOURCE 4

Feeling-Breath-Thought-Skill

This week, we practiced changing unhelpful thoughts into helpful thoughts and using the strategy called Feeling-Breath-Thought-Skill (F-B-T-S.)

F = Name your **feeling**. "I am feeling _____."

B = Take three slow, deep **breaths**.

T = Choose helpful, happy **thoughts**. "This is just a feeling. It will pass. I will be okay."

S = Pick a **skill** to practice. "I choose _____."

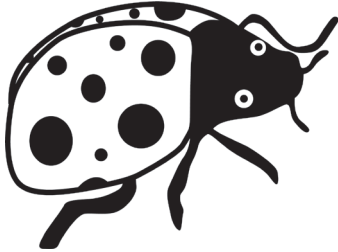
Modeling

It is important to model emotional regulation and using healthy coping skills for your children. Children are like sponges, and the old-fashioned "do as I say, not as I do" mentality just doesn't work. We can tell a child to do something, but they are more likely to do it when they see us doing it ourselves. So, if you over-react to something or make a mistake, acknowledge it to your child and apologize for it. Model the behavior you wish to see in your children.

You can narrate your thoughts aloud to teach your children the F-B-T-S process. For example, you might say, "Oh no! My coffee just spilled all over my new jacket! I am feeling embarrassed and angry with myself!" and take three deep breaths to calm yourself. Then model helpful, happy thoughts such as the fact your jacket wasn't white and the coffee probably won't stain. Finally, choose a skill to curb your big feelings, such as Snowman Stress Melter Breath.

Skills to Practice This Week

Fly Away, Ladybug

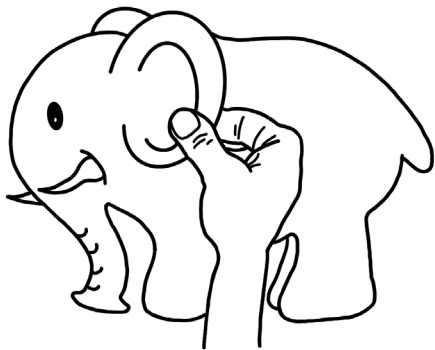


Imagine a lucky ladybug landed on your nose and is tickling you. You don't want to use your hands to touch her, but you want her to fly away home. So, pucker up your face really tight. Squeeze your nose and eyes. Feel all the wrinkles and stiffness in your forehead, cheeks, mouth, and eyes. Hold this position for ten seconds. Now, relax and loosen all of your face muscles so they melt and soften again.



Buddy Breath

Lie down and place an object, such as a stuffed animal, on your belly. Take a slow, deep breath in, filling your belly up with air, and watch the object rise. Now, breathe out very slowly and watch the object slowly fall with your belly. Repeat a few more slow, deep breaths in and out as you watch the object rise and fall gently with the rhythm of your breath.



Elephant Ears

Take your thumbs and pointer fingers and place them on your ear lobes. Pull down gently and lightly massage, starting at the bottom of your ear lobe and working your way up to the top of your ear.

FAMILY RESOURCE 5

Measuring Challenges

This week, we learned that there are different kinds of challenges, obstacles, or problems in life and we used a scale to measure them. The first type of challenge in our scale is a small rock challenge and it's barely noticeable. It elicits little to no reaction from you. It's something like a pebble in your shoe or a shirt that fits too tightly. Since you can resolve these small rock challenges quickly, your general mood is unaffected.

The next type of challenge is a medium boulder challenge. Your child can solve this challenge by using some of the strategies they learned in group. An example of a medium boulder challenge would be someone kicking the back of your seat on a plane or in a movie theater. This is an annoying obstacle, but it is solved easily by using strategies such as asking the person to stop or moving away from them. Other strategies could be discussing the issue, ignoring the annoyance, walking away, sharing an object, or using helpful, happy thoughts. You might feel annoyed with a medium boulder challenge, but you can handle it.

The next type of challenge is called a big hill challenge. You usually need some help from someone to solve this kind of challenge and it might impact several people or take a while to solve. An example of a big hill challenge would be running late to work when you have a high-stakes meeting or a verbal or physical altercation. You would be feeling pretty upset or bothered! Some strategies to solve big hill challenges include asking for help, apologizing, or compromising.

The last type of challenge is called a huge volcano challenge. This takes longer to solve because there's no quick and easy solution for it. It may impact a lot of people, and you will likely have strong emotions as a result of it. You might feel furious, enraged, panicked, or terrified. It may be an unsafe or dangerous situation, like an emergency, so strategies you use to resolve the challenge may be big, like calling 9-1-1, running away, or yelling for help. An example of this type of challenge would be if you were injured in a bad car accident or in any situation that you felt was too much to handle physically or emotionally. When challenges come up this week, you can help your child measure the challenge using this scale. You can also make up challenge scenarios together and measure them.

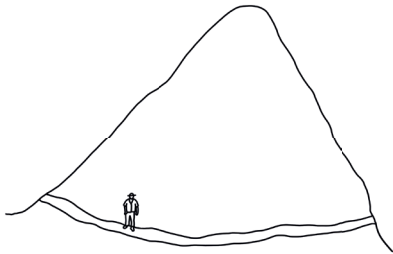
Skills to Practice This Week

Measuring Challenges

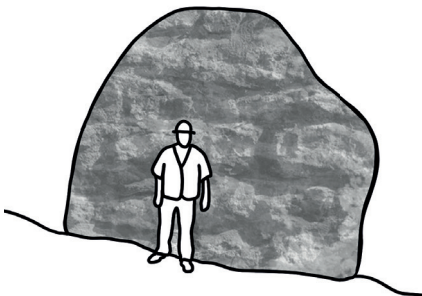
If you have a challenge, take three deep breaths and ask yourself how big the challenge is. Is your response equal to the challenge? If not, which skills can you use to cool down?



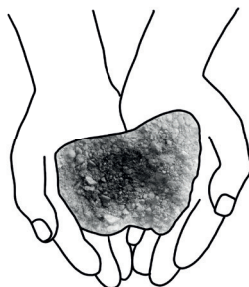
Huge Volcano



Big Hill



Medium Boulder



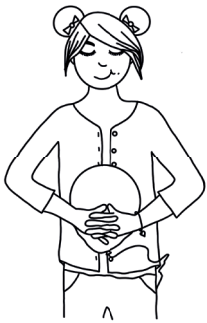
Small Rock

Ski Jumper



Raise both of your arms up above your head and then swing them back behind you as you bend slightly forward at the waist, keeping your back straight. Now, continue to swing your arms as you rock forward and backward and feel the air rushing by your arms. When you lean forward, your arms swing back, and, when you lean back, your arms swing forward.

Balloon Breath



Interlace your fingers and place them on your belly. Imagine you are using your breath to inflate a balloon in front of your belly. What color is your balloon? Breathe in slowly and lift your arms out in front of you as the balloon blows up. Now, breathe out through your mouth to make a “pfft” raspberry blowing sound with your lips as you slowly lower your arms back down, making the balloon deflate.

FAMILY RESOURCE 6

Equal Measurements

This week, we learned about matching our responses to our challenges so that they are equal. Sometimes, your child may have a “huge volcano” response to a “small rock” challenge. We practiced making equal measurements by matching the response with the challenge size. You can extend this learning at home by making up scenarios and responses and discussing whether or not they are equal measurements.

If your measurements aren't equal, it would be a great time to practice F-B-T-S:

- Name your **feeling**: “I am feeling _____,” because my problem is “_____.”
- Take three slow, deep **breaths**.
- Choose helpful, happy **thoughts**. “This is just a feeling. It will pass. I will be okay. This is a big hill challenge. I can get some help to handle this!”
- Pick a **skill** to practice. “I choose _____.”

Avoidance and Anxiety

It is an entirely natural response to want to avoid something that doesn't make you feel good. However, if you let your child avoid something that makes them feel upset, while it may temporarily decrease upset feelings, their feelings will become more intense and more problematic to deal with later. Your child may begin to experience anticipatory anxiety, and it will be even harder to cope with. Examples of this would include lingering at the doorway at the school drop-off zone because your child doesn't want you to leave, or letting your child stay home from school because they were teased yesterday. Another example is leaving a park because a dog is nearby as your child feels upset around dogs. Researchers have noted that

avoiding situations that increase anxiety “stops children from mastering appropriate coping skills and maintains anxiety in the long term.”⁷

The takeaway here is not to let your child avoid everything they are afraid of. If your child has a phobia, they will benefit from working with a professional to directly address it. Otherwise, have your child practice Feeling-Breath-Thought-Skill (F-B-T-S) and use the skills they are learning. Validate their feelings and encourage them by saying something affirming (e.g., “I know you can do this,” “You are going to get really good at handling difficult things and calming yourself down,” “I know you have the tools to deal with your big feelings!”).

Consider making up a family motto with a positive self-talk phrase embedded into it, such as “in this family, we are problem-solvers!” When your children come to you with an issue, you can remind them of the motto, allowing them to empower themselves to solve their own problems. They may impress you with their solutions.

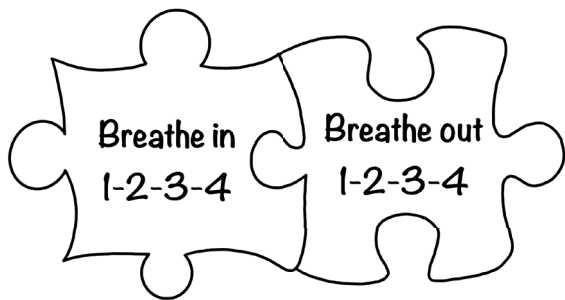
⁷ Kendall, P. C., Swan, A. J., Carper, M. M., & Hoff, A. L. (2018). Anxiety disorders among children and adolescents. In J. N. Butcher & P. C. Kendall (Eds.), *APA handbooks in psychology®. APA handbook of psychopathology: Child and adolescent psychopathology* (pp. 213–230). American Psychological Association.

Skills to Practice This Week



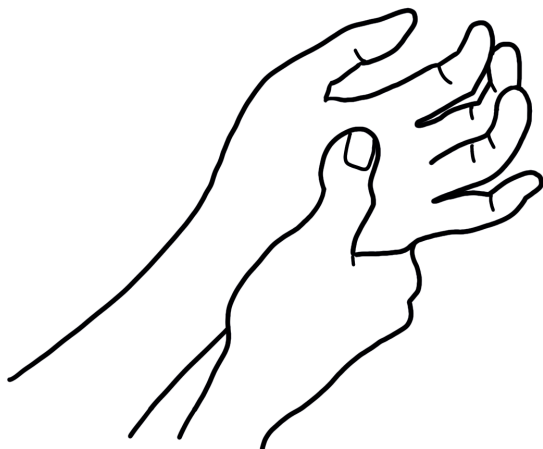
Orange Squeeze

Imagine you are holding oranges in both of your hands and squeeze the oranges as tightly as you can to make orange juice. Hold the squeeze for ten seconds and squeeze every last drop out. Now, relax your hands. Can you feel the difference between feeling tense and feeling relaxed? Now, breathe in and squeeze the oranges, and then breathe out and let the oranges drop.



Equal Breathing

Breathe in through your nose while counting to four in your head. Breathe out through your nose while counting to four in your head. You want to match the size of your inhale to the size of your exhale as you take slow, deep breaths through your nose.



Hand Massage

Hold your left hand in your right and put your right thumb on the pad of your left palm under your pointer finger. Use your thumb to massage in circles, working your way from the inside to the outside of your palm. Next, squeeze and pinch each finger. Now, flip your hand over and rub the top of it. Repeat on the other hand.

FAMILY RESOURCE 7

My Relaxing Happy Place

This week we practiced visualizing our relaxing happy places. Ask your child if they want to share about their relaxing happy place. Visualization is a powerful yet simple tool. You can remind your child that they can use this skill anywhere and at any time. When we do visualizations, we try to tap into all of our senses. What do you see, smell, or taste? Are there other people around? What noises do you hear? What is the temperature in your relaxing happy place? What does it feel like?

You can extend the learning at home this week by looking up and practicing some guided visualizations with your child. You can also write a guided visualization together. A helpful resource to listen to visualizations can be found in the references below.⁸

Flexibility

You can encourage your child's flexibility by giving positive feedback when you observe your child being a flexible thinker: "You wanted fries, but we only have broccoli left. I like how you used your skills and were such a flexible thinker here and ate your broccoli without an issue!" If your child struggles with changes to routines or transitions, you can remind them that you would like them to practice being a flexible thinker before a transition.

You can model being a flexible thinker and using F-B-T-S yourself. In situations where it is appropriate, it can be beneficial for children to hear you think your thought process aloud: e.g., "I wanted to see the movie at 10:30, but it's not playing at our usual theater. I feel annoyed, but I will stay positive and be a flexible thinker, and switch our schedule to see the movie at the other theater instead."

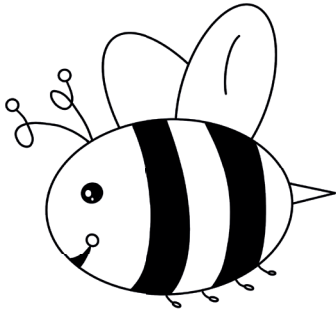
⁸ CHOC Children's. (n.d.) *Guided Imagery*. CHOC Children's. <https://www.choc.org/programs-services/integrative-health/guided-imagery/>

You can challenge your child to play the flexible-thinking game. Ask them to think of and do as many things as differently as possible, such as brushing their teeth with the opposite hand, taking a different route to school, switching where they usually sit on the couch, or completing things in a different order than usual.

Additional ideas to encourage flexibility are as follows:

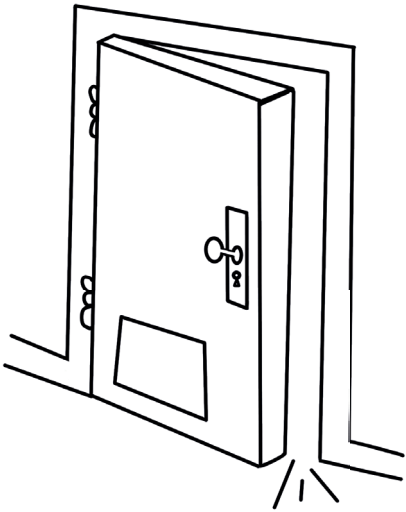
- Discuss a problem and brainstorm a list of as many different ways to solve it as possible.
- Play a game you usually play, but change one of the rules.
- Use a rock and some dough to show the difference between flexibility and inflexibility. Show how you can make creative and interesting shapes with the dough because of its flexibility.
- Play a game in which you try to think of as many different uses for a random object as possible. Be extra silly with this one!
- Play a game in which you create a story one line at a time. Have one person begin the story with a single line, and then pass the story to the next person, who adds on a line, and so on.
- Point out when characters are showing flexible or inflexible thinking in TV shows or movies.
- Read some of these books with your children on flexible thinking:
 - *Your Fantastic Elastic Brain* by JoAnn Deak
 - *Bubble Gum Brain* by Julia Cook
 - *My Day is Ruined! A Story Teaching Flexible Thinking* by Bryan Smith and Lisa Griffin

Skills to Practice This Week



Bumble Bee Breath

With your lips sealed firmly, take a deep breath in through your nose. Now, breathe out and make an “mmm” sound like a bumble bee buzzing. Try to buzz as long as you can. If you are comfortable, you can try it again while covering your ears.



Door Squeeze

Imagine you are playing hide-and-seek with your friends, and you want to sneak through a door quietly. Sit or stand up very tall and straight and suck your stomach in. Now, hold your stomach tightly for ten seconds to make it through the door. Remember to continue to breathe as you hold your stomach muscles tightly! Okay, now relax and unclench your stomach.



Unicorn Breath

Place your pointer finger on the sparkle. Trace the unicorn horn down the right side as you breathe in through your nose. Next, trace the bottom of the unicorn horn from right to left as you hold your breath in. Finally, trace the unicorn horn up from the bottom to top as you breathe out. Repeat and feel the unicorn sparkle!

FAMILY RESOURCE 8

Sunny Breathing

This week, we learned about Sunny Breathing, which is when you pair a short word or phrase (such as “be calm”) with slow, deep breaths. You repeat the words in your mind while synchronizing each part of the word or phrase with your breath. For example, you can inhale and think “be” and exhale and think “calm.” You and your child can brainstorm a list of both silly and calming words to use this skill with.

Media Exposure and Attentional Bias

In week two we addressed how media can be a trigger for some children and we will briefly explore that here. Attentional bias means that people pay attention to some things and ignore other things. Sadly, we live in an era where we can't control everything our children are exposed to, such as scary events at school like lockdown drills or bomb threats. However, many children worry about things they overhear their family members talking about or issues they see on TV, such as violence on the news. Due to the attentional bias that many children have toward threats, it is important to have age-appropriate boundaries around what you share with your children. You also want to monitor how much and what type of media content your child has access to. A recent study on children's use of tablets in the home suggested that unmonitored use of tablets can have a negative impact on children, especially in terms of “reduced social interaction, fatigue, and increased family tensions due to excessive usage.”⁹

⁹ Hadlington, L., White, H. and Curtis, S. (2019). “I cannot live without my [tablet]”: Children's experiences of using tablet technology within the home. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 94, 19-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.12.043>

In terms of what media content children are exposed to, 89 percent of the top-selling video games contain violent content, and almost half of that was considered serious in nature.¹⁰ The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has stated that there are many negative outcomes associated with media violence, including “aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed.”¹¹ The AAP recommends media time for children two to five years old to be less than one hour per day of “high-quality programming.” For children older than six years old, they suggest that parents put “consistent limits” on media types and times, while ensuring that media use does not replace other activities like sleep and physical activity. They also encourage having certain times and places in the home that are media-free.

¹⁰ Media Education Foundation. (n.d.) *Media violence: facts and statistics*. <https://www.mediaed.org/handouts/ChildrenMedia.pdf>

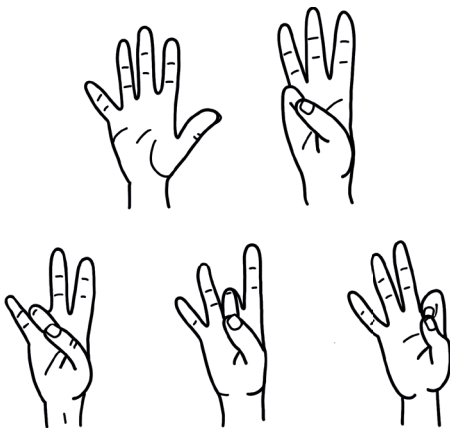
¹¹ American Academy of Pediatrics (2016, October 21). *American academy of pediatrics announces new recommendations for children’s media use*. Healthy Children. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/AAP-Announces-New-Recommendations-for-Childrens-Media-Use.aspx>

Skills to Practice This Week



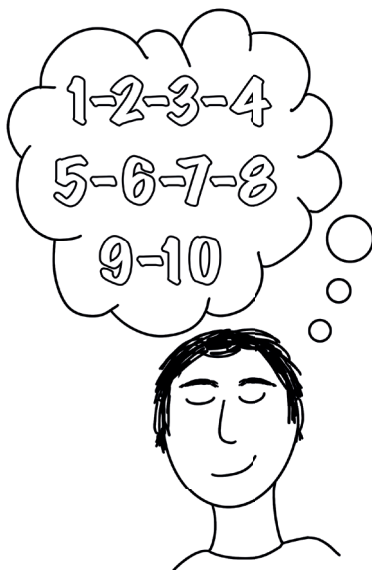
Ice Cream Twist

Stand up and cross one ankle over the other. Put your arms out straight in front of you, and then turn your thumbs towards the floor so your palms are facing out. Cross one wrist over the other and interlace your fingers together. Then, turn your hands in towards your heart. Breathe in and out through your nose slowly as you place your tongue on the top of your mouth. Untwist yourself and try crossing your ankles and wrists in the opposite direction.



Finger Aerobics

Start with an open hand. Breathe in and out through your nose while touching your thumb to your pinky. Breathe in and out through your nose while touching your thumb to your ring finger. Breathe in and out through your nose while touching your thumb to your middle finger. Breathe in and out through your nose while touching your thumb to your pointer finger. Switch hands and try it again. Then, try it with both hands at the same time.



Counting for Calm

Count ten slow, deep breaths while you think about each number. Then, count backward from ten to one while breathing slowly and deeply. You can also try skip-counting while breathing if you want to experiment. Repeat until you feel calm.

FAMILY RESOURCE 9

Positive Self-Talk

This week, we learned about positive self-talk, which is having some useful words or phrases that you can repeat or think to yourself to soothe you. Positive self-talk makes you feel better when you are having big feelings, feeling stuck, or upset. Positive self-talk is also useful when your child knows one of their triggers will be happening soon. Since children can't avoid their triggers, this will be another skill they can use when facing their fears. Positive self-talk will help them feel more confident when dealing with challenges. To extend this week's learning at home, you can develop some positive self-talk phrases with your child.

Movement

In recent years, many children are becoming more sedentary. This is concerning because movement and physical activity benefit not only the body, but also the "brain structure, brain function, cognition, and [children's] school achievement."¹² The link between mental health and movement is being studied more each year. A recent study demonstrated that children with zero days per week of physical activity were about twice more likely to have anxiety.¹³ In addition, European researchers conducted a study of over 11,000 adolescents and found that sports participation and frequent physical activity both "independently contribute to greater well-being and lower levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms."¹⁴

¹² Chaddock-Heyman, L., Hillman, C. H., Cohen, N. J. & Kramer, A. F. (2014). The importance of physical activity and aerobic fitness for cognitive control and memory in children. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 79(14), 25-50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mono.12129>

¹³ Zhu, X., Heagele, J. A. & Healy, S. (2019) Movement and mental health: behavioral correlates of anxiety and depression among children of 6-17 years old in the U.S. *Mental Health and Physical Activity* 16, 60-65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhpa.2019.04.002>

¹⁴ McMahon, E. M., Corcoran, P., O'Regan, G., Keeley, H., Cannon, M., Carli, V., Wasserman, C., Hadlaczky, G., Sarchiapone, M., Apter, A., Balazs, J., Balint, M., Bobes, J., Brunner, R., Cozman, D., Haring, C., Iosue, M., Kaess, M., Kahn, J., ... Wasserman, D. (2017). Physical activity in European adolescents and associations

The takeaways here are that physical activity and movement are beneficial for improving both the body and the brain. Ensure that your child is getting enough movement and physical activity every day, whether that means running around the backyard, dancing, jumping on a trampoline, or playing sports.

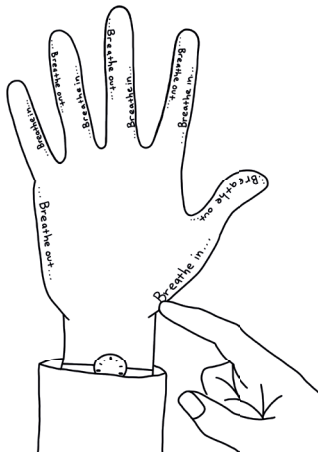
with anxiety, depression and well-being. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, (1)111. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/s00787-016-0875-9>

Skills to Practice This Week



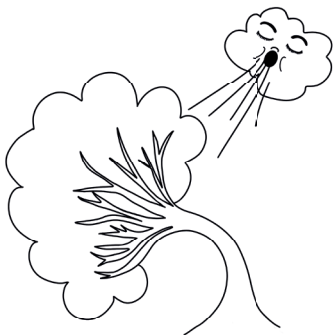
Sandy Toes

Imagine you are barefoot at a beautiful beach, standing in the sand near the shoreline. Bend your knees to press your legs and feet as far down into the sand as you can. Curl and press your toes down into the sand and hold for ten seconds. Then, shake your feet and legs out and feel them loosen and relax.



High-Five Breath

Open your hand up like you are going to give a high-five. Take your other pointer finger and place it at the base of your thumb. Slide up your thumb slowly as you breathe in and slide down your thumb slowly as you breathe out. Repeat this movement and breathing for each finger. Then, trace the other hand.



Strong Tree Blowing

It is a very windy day, and you are a strong tree that is slowly blowing back and forth in the wind. Reach your arms up above your head as you breathe in. Interlace your fingers above your head. Bend at the waist to your left as you breathe out. Breathe in and come back to the center. Now, breathe out and bend at the waist to your right. Breathe in and come back to the center. Lower your arms down slowly by your side.

FAMILY RESOURCE 10

Mistakes and Supports

This week, we learned about the importance of making mistakes, since making mistakes are how we learn and grow. We also discussed our support systems. Identifying your support systems, or the supportive people in your life, is a great skill for children to learn. You can extend the learning at home by brainstorming different environments that your child spends time in and have them list supportive people in those other places.

Perfectionism and Making Mistakes

If a child strives for perfection, they will often feel frustrated or disappointed because perfection is impossible to achieve. When a child has perfectionistic tendencies, they may often get upset and either shut down or overreact when they make mistakes. You can help your child learn to be comfortable with making mistakes by talking about your own mistakes. You can also use the Measuring Challenges tool to help put small mistakes into perspective. For example, explain that you made a mistake by burning your eggs, which is a small rock problem, and you plan to resolve the issue by cooking more eggs.

You can also reinforce the concept that mistakes are okay by making statements, such as “mistakes are how we learn” and “It’s okay to make mistakes.” You can also talk to your children in an age-appropriate manner about some of your own mistakes and do some research together on some of the famous failures in society.

Be sure that you set realistic and age-appropriate expectations for your child. If you have unrealistic expectations for your child, this could lead to a fear of making mistakes, a fear of failure, or even procrastination. Sometimes, children who have perfectionistic tendencies may procrastinate to avoid making mistakes on a task or project. You can help your child by setting

realistic goals and breaking them down into smaller, more manageable, steps so they don't feel overwhelmed.

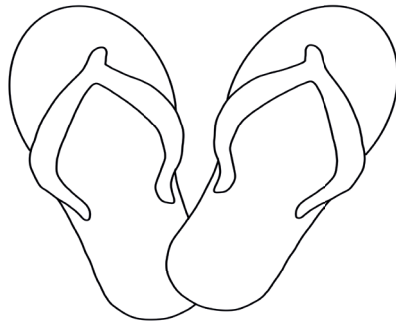
Lastly, rather than praising your child by calling them smart, try to reinforce the *effort* they are displaying instead. For example, instead of calling them smart, you can comment on their work ethic. When you praise effort instead of ability, it helps children develop a growth mindset. A growth mindset will help your child stay more persistent with future obstacles. This change in how we praise our children is especially helpful for children who are perfectionists. For more information about growth mindset, please check out Carol Dweck and her colleagues' work at <http://www.mindsetworks.com>.

Skills to Practice This Week



Tap Tap Squeeze

Tap your right hand to your left shoulder and think of the word "I." Tap your left hand to your right shoulder and think of the word "am." Then, squeeze both hands together and think of the word "calm." Repeat the motion while thinking the phrase "I am calm" with each movement.



Flip Flop Nostril Breath

Press your right thumb against your right nostril and breathe in slowly and deeply through your open left nostril. Then, lift your thumb up and place your pointer finger on the left nostril and breathe out and then breathe in through the right open nostril. Then, lift your pointer finger up and press your right thumb against your right nostril again, breathing out and in slowly and deeply through your open left nostril. Repeat in this pattern.



Letting Go

If you are comfortable, close your eyes and visualize you are holding a balloon. Imagine blowing all your big feelings into the balloon, tying the balloon, letting it go, and watching it float away into the sky. As the balloon floats away and disappears, you feel calmer and more peaceful.

FAMILY RESOURCE 11

Mindfulness and Gratitude

This week, we learned about the importance of being grateful. We also learned about mindfulness. Being mindful means paying attention, on purpose, to what is happening in the present moment. When you are mindful, you aren't judging what is happening; you are just observing it. If you are mindful, it is hard to get swept away by unhelpful thoughts.

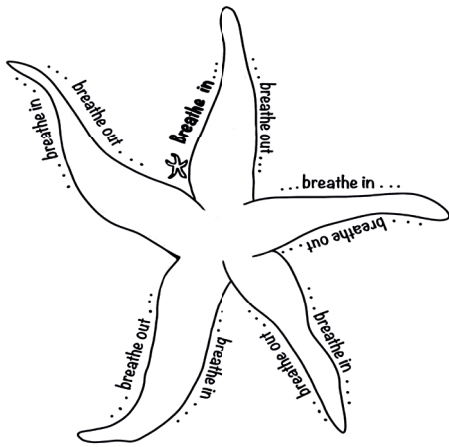
Having gratitude means that you realize what you are thankful for. Being mindful helps you be more grateful. You can continue this learning at home by creating moments to recognize gratitude. For example, you can choose a specific time of day (e.g., during dinner, after brushing teeth, etc.) when everyone shares one thing that they are grateful for.

Skills to Practice This Week



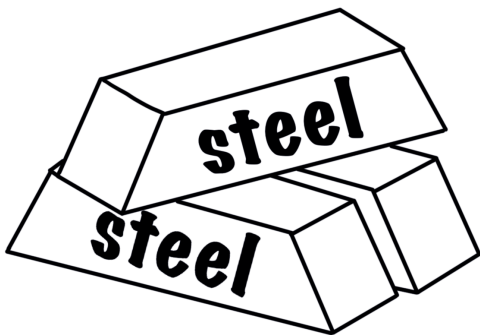
Shake Wiggle Shake

Put on some music and begin by shaking and wiggling one foot. Then, shake and wiggle the other foot. Then, shake and wiggle each leg. Then, shake and wiggle your hips. Then, shake and wiggle your hands, arms, and shoulders. Then, shake and wiggle your neck and head. Now your whole body is shaking and wiggling!



Starfish Breath

Place your pointer finger on the baby starfish. Trace up as you breathe in and trace down as you breathe out. Trace the pattern, breathing in and breathing out, as each arm of the starfish is traced, and you feel relaxed and calm.



Steel to Jelly

Breathe in and tense all the muscles in your whole body as if they are made of steel. Tense your feet, legs, stomach, arms, hands, shoulders, neck, face, and jaw. As you slowly breathe out, relax and loosen all of your body's muscles as if they are turning from steel to jelly. Relax your feet, legs, stomach, arms, hands, shoulders, neck, and face.

FAMILY RESOURCE 12

Closure

Today was our last session together, and we talked about the importance of identifying what we have control over. This can help us when we have big feelings, are overwhelmed, or are feeling out of control. We also picked our top five favorite skills we have learned over the past twelve weeks in the group. Ask your child which skills they picked!

When children have big feelings, they might not feel like they have a lot of choices, or they might not feel like they have a lot of things they can control. In times like this, it is useful to brainstorm with them at least one thing that they can control in that moment. Giving a child very structured and limited choices such as sitting in the blue or red chairs may also be helpful. When children have too many options, it may cause them to feel overwhelmed.

Since transitions, or progressing from one activity to another, can be challenging for many children, you can give your child some control by using a timer. Time is a concept that can be hard for children to understand, so you can purchase a visual timer or find a visual timer app or website. Some children may need additional support with this. In this case, it may be helpful to problem-solve aloud with them what they can get done in that period of time. For example, they may benefit from a more concrete transition warning, such as adding ten more blocks to a tower before pausing to brush teeth, or finish reading the end of this paragraph before pausing to get a snack. You can also use a timer to make a non-preferred activity more fun, such as racing to see how many toys they can pick up in three minutes.

Caregiver Self-Care

All children act out or misbehave at some point, and when they do, it can be extremely stressful for parents and caregivers. Caregiver self-care is so important. The skills in this book were written in a fun, child-friendly way, but they will also work for adults! Please practice the skills

with your children and find some healthy coping skills that work for you as well. There are some great relaxation apps available for adults and children. You can find a list at www.whole-childcounseling.com. It will go a long way as a caregiver when you model good self-care and know how to deal with your feelings appropriately. Please remember to have empathy, compassion, and forgiveness for yourself as well. At times, parenting can be trying.

Mindset Shift

Dr. Ross Greene from Lives in the Balance¹⁵ writes about a simple but profound concept, which is, that kids would do well if they could do well: “In other words, if the kid had the skills to exhibit adaptive behavior, he wouldn’t be exhibiting challenging behavior. That’s because doing well is always preferable to not doing well.” Dr. Greene has different parent training programs about his model. His belief that a child is not purposefully or deliberately acting out and that children, like the rest of us, do the best that they can do at any given moment, is an important concept.

Ideally, this mindset shift will help you not take things personally if your child acts out because you won’t see their misbehavior as coming from a deliberate place. You can start being curious about their behavior instead and try to figure out what skills they need more help developing. Over the past twelve weeks, your child has learned *many* skills to handle big feelings, and, hopefully, with your guidance, they will continue practicing these skills and incorporating F-B-T-S at home.

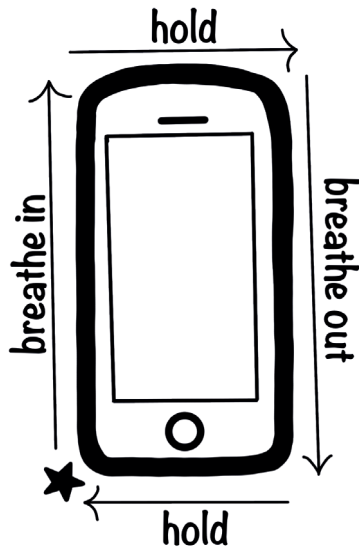
¹⁵ Greene, R. W. (2009). *Kids do well if they can*. Lives in the Balance. <https://www.livesinthebalance.org/kids-do-well-if-they-can>

Skills to Practice This Week



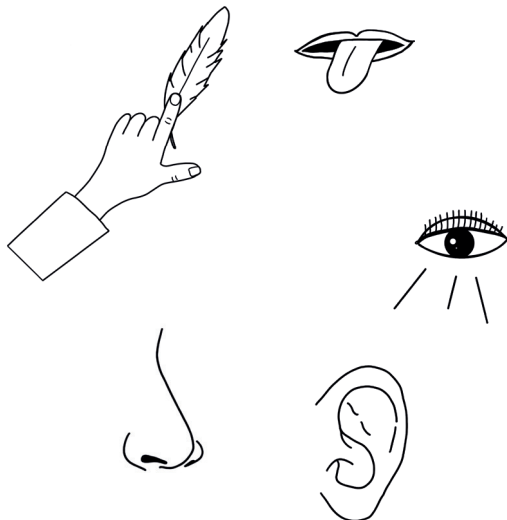
Finger Lock

Lift your right arm straight up at heart level, and then bend it towards you. Point your right thumb down and curl your fingers in. Take your left arm and curl your left fingers underneath your right fingers. Breathe in as you pull your fingers against each other. Breathe out as you relax, soften, and release.



Cell Phone Breath

You can practice with a real phone if you want, but you don't need an actual phone. Start by placing your pointer finger on the star. Breathe in as you trace the cell phone up along the left side. Hold your breath in as you trace the top of the phone. Breathe out as you trace the right side of the phone. Now, hold your breath out as you trace along the bottom of the phone. Repeat.



Grounding

Look around you. Take a slow, deep breath. Use your senses to name five things you can see. Name four things you can touch. Name three things you can hear. Name two things you can smell, and name one thing you can taste.