

## **POINT 1- Parental Guideline of Coping Skill Development in Children and Care Giver Actions for Teaching These Skills**

### **Tool Introduction:**

Suicide prevention needs to start at birth with helping parents raise resilient children able to cope with the changes, disappointments, and array of feelings that come with living life. This is the first portion of a three-point plan. The idea behind this point of the plan is that to be resilient in life first requires being able to cope with life. We don't have the ability to cope with life without first having the skills for doing so. The more skills and mastery of those skills we have to cope; the better our ability and the more resilient we are in life. Coping skills start at birth with their mastery being by learning that world is safe. The child has learned to trust their caregivers and has a positive attachment to them. This is the foundation of our resiliency and the very first block for developing coping skills. The development of coping skills starts out as blocks with each new skill building on the previous skills. As children develop both physically and emotionally; they gain skills in speech, gross motor, and fine motor abilities they also gain coping skills. The development of coping skills in babies lays the foundation for improvement and mastery in toddlers. As toddlers start developing new skills; they will become the foundation for preschoolers. Each age group becomes the foundation for the next. This guideline serves to illustrate the coping skills of each age group and offers development appropriate actions for caregivers to teach and promote the development of positive coping skills in their child to improve the child's ability to cope with life making them more resilient. As their ability to cope with life in a positive manner improves there will be fewer meltdowns and undesirable behaviors to negative situations. It is important for caregivers to remember that your child is learning from you. They are watching your every move. They are going to do exactly what they see you doing. If you throw something in anger, they will do the same. The Best thing caregivers can do for their child is to let them see you handle negative emotions in a positive way. Show your child(ren) behaviors you want them to have. This starts with caregivers taking inventory of their own responses to negative situations and their own abilities to cope which is covered in the next points. Parents you know your child best, the care giver actions are just ideas that might work for you and your child. However, each child and situation are different so feel free to adapt them to fit your needs, and I strongly encourage using them as starting point in which to brain storm for your own ideas to try.

## **The Developmental Guidelines**

### **Infants**

#### **0 to 3 Months Old**

Crying and facial expressions are an infant's first coping skills. Crying is used to alert caregivers of a baby's needs to be fed, changed, or cuddled. Also, by reading facial expressions caregivers can tell if a baby is content, out-of-sorts, or uncomfortable. Infants also use crying and facial expressions to alert caregivers of pain and/or illness.

#### **4 to 6 Months Old**

As baby's communication skill develop coping expands to include sounds and gestures. Babies coo in contentment and fuss or whine when distressed. They will stretch out their arms indicating they want to be picked up, and point to desired objects.

#### **7 to 12 Months Old**

As they develop physically, they become more self-reliant and can retrieve the desired item themselves. This self-reliance leads to more coping options. Caregiver Actions- Responding to a baby's cries is essential to building the needed trust that world is safe. Talking to babies not only helps to develop language but lays the foundation to build on in teaching them to recognizing their feelings. If a baby is crying because of hunger, tell him he is hungry, and bottle is coming. Maybe, he is frustrated because it is taking too long. Tell him you know waiting is frustrating but a part of life. They won't know what you are saying at first, but recognizing feelings is the first steps to coping with them and naming them is the very beginning of this recognition. Young children are also easily distracted changing positions, activities, or scenery are great coping strategies for both caregivers and child.

## **Toddlers**

### **Ages 1 to 2 Years Old**

Strong feelings are very scary for young children and fuel strong emotions. Toddlers also experience feelings of anger, anxiety, fear sadness, and are easily overwhelmed by life. Care Giver Actions - Continuing to put names to feelings makes them more manageable and less scary. Also build on this as communication skills develop. Describe to them anger and other feelings as they arise. Giving feelings colors and shapes as you would imagine them to look provides a picture. This picture makes them less abstract to a child and less scary. Also, start describing feelings in term of their physical responses and effects. Example: nervousness causes sweaty palms and feelings of butterflies in the tummy. Just describe what you feel physically when experiencing the same emotion as the child. Example: when I am anger, my face feel hot.. do you feel that? Everyone has different physical reactions. This lays the foundation in helping to recognize feelings and their own responses to them. Toddlers are easily distractible and changing activities or introducing a new or favorite activity is a great way to help them cope. Bubbles are great for this age. Not only are they great for distracting but can be introduced to practice deep breathing as they learn and are able to blow them. Also finger plays, stories, and songs can be a great distraction and coping mechanisms for this age in public.

## **Preschoolers/ Younger Children**

### **Ages 3 to 6 Years Old**

Preschoolers are more focused and not as easily distracted as infants and toddlers. However, they can communicate, draw, and describe their own feelings. This is the age when you can demonstrate to the child what you do when feeling similar emotions. They are also able to describe feelings and physical responses asking them to do so continues to build on the recognition of feelings and their own unique physical responses towards them. Care Giver Actions - Taking them for a walk when angry, or tearing up paper. Demonstrate and have them take deep breaths to calm down. These kids are learning to count so practicing counting to calm down may help. Remember every child is different as is every situation. Think of coping skills as tools in a toolbox. The more you have the easier it is to find something that works.

## **Older Children**

### **Ages 7 to 9 Years Old**

All the foundational blocks for coping are in place. They can recognize their feelings and have been taught strategies to deal with them. They are becoming more independent and friends are more important. They all feel stress from school, their activities, and their friends. They are starting to experience stress from life more like the adult world. They are starting to learn which strategies work best for them and can understand the stop sign of the second point and using it as a tool to help self-regulate their own feelings. They can also be taught about journaling and are developing more advanced friendships and activities to use for coping. Care Giver Actions- introduce them to new activities like dancing, cooking, sports, and music. Help them find something they love doing and promote social connections. Introduce them to meditation, yoga, and provide journaling materials. Introduce and teach them the coping strategies of the second point. Share and teach your own coping strategies and stress relievers. Point out when strategies work and help the child inventory them. Also, should a coping strategy no longer work; point it out to them. Promote positive communication with them by asking open ended questions about their day and their interests. Spend time with them by doing their choice of activity. Find ways to participate with them in their favorite activity. Nothing will communicate to them of their importance to you and you love for them like doing something they know you hate just to be with them because it is something they love doing. Continue to do this throughout the tween and teen years and as their favorite activities change. Now is the time to lay the ground work to have the relationship you want for the tween and teen years. Begin meeting with them in their rooms on a regular basis for the discovery of their dreams, desires, fears, worries, and to assess their moods. Don't wait for them to come to you with their problems or for problems to manifest into poor choices and bad behavior. Go to them and make yourself available to them. Also, these regular meetings are the time to bring up your own concerns with them. Most importantly don't just listen with your ears use your heart as well.

## **The Tween Years**

### **Ages 10 to 12 years old**

The opinions of their friends are more important to them than the opinions of parents and caregivers. It is more important to them to belong to peer groups and fitting in with those groups. Their need to belong is so strong that they are easily peer pressured and will follow the group even at the expense of their own and their family's values and moral. Friends are becoming more important than family which will only be getting worse as they become teens. Care Giver Actions- It is vital to have an open line of communication with Tweens. They need set boundaries and limits. The need to know that there are consequences for their choices and actions. Charts are a visual reminder of your expectations, and acceptable behavior as their parents. It also reminds them that choices and actions have consequences. Having this chart puts the responsibility of the consequences for actions on the child instead of parents being responsible for the punishments. Kids know and weigh the cost of each of their actions. Parents must constantly apply the consequences of the action to the bad choice that was made. Also, listing desirable behavior with a reward also helps children feel secured and empowered as they are learning to make good choices, the costs, and the value of their actions. Tip: Consequences need to match the seriousness of the infraction, and rewards to need be something you are able and willing to do. Don't promise a Disney vacation for straight A's if you are not able to afford it. Parents must keep up their end of the deal when applying fair consequences and rewards. Ideally, parents and children will have agreed beforehand on appropriate consequences and rewards before the behavior infraction.

## **The Teens**

The teen years are an extension of the tween years but includes adjustments towards independence much like the toddler years. Teens are no longer children but aren't quite adults. There is a inner conflict between wanting to stay a child and wanting to be an adult. They will just as easy stay and join into adult conversations as run around and chase younger kids. They are often moody and unpredictable. They are figuring out who they are as a person and their place within the world. The adults within their world from teachers, parents, church leaders, and extended family all have a role in guiding children through the teen years leading them towards becoming an adult.

## **Ages 13 to 15 Years Old**

The beginning teens are developing interests in relationships with those they find attractive. They are capable of taking on more adult responsibilities but need limits to ensure they only take on responsibility that they are ready for, and aren't overburdened by too many. Just because they are capable of making straight A's while being the captain of a football team and volunteering every weekend, and getting all their household chores done to include looking after younger siblings every evening doesn't mean they are not stressed or that they are handling it all well mentally and/or emotionally.

**Care Giver Actions:** Parents need to be mindful of the child's activities and responsibilities. Don't encourage your child to participate in more activities but teach them to say no and only participate in extracurricular activities they care about and enjoy. If there are activities that you feel are important then share your concerns and create a plan that is suitable for you both. Kids will do whatever they **THINK** will make parents happy to please them. Parents please take care to ensure that your expectations are both reasonable and manageable. Continue the charts of consequences adjusting for new privileges and responsibilities with consequences for failure to meet the agreed responsibility.

## **Ages 16 to 19 Years Old**

Dating, Driving, First Jobs, School Dances, Proms, more Social Activities, college preparation, and high school graduation are all hallmarks of this age group. They are starting to take on more adult roles as they are becoming adults. They will be confronted with hard choices. Should they ride in a vehicle with an impaired driver, what if it is late or their only way to get home? The circumstances surrounding the situations they find themselves in make it difficult for them to find the right choice. Preparing teens for these new situations includes discussing different possibilities within different scenarios to help them make the best choices.

**Care Taker Actions-** Parents, remember teens aren't yet adults. They are learning how to become adults. They are going to make a lot of mistakes each in their own

learning experience. They are not just learning from the mistake of their actions. They are also learning about your reactions to their mistakes. They are learning if there will be lasting grudges and anger from mistakes which will lead to hiding, lying and keeping secrets of future mistakes. This could lead to feelings of self loathing and the consequences of which may lead to suicide. However, approaches of calmness, love, support and understanding that they are still learning to be adults in the wake of horrible mistakes builds trusts as they learn the world is indeed safe and no matter how big or bad the screw up their parents will love and support them helping to creating confident, happy, and well -adjusted adults.

**Note:** The adult brain is not fully formed into 25. Young adults are legally able to be adults. However, their brains aren't fully capable of it. Society hasn't caught up with the biology and we all believe 18-25 are fully capable logical adults. However, their willingness to take risks and belief in that nothing bad will happen indicate this lack of development and a need for parents to be a source of reason and logic to keep their kids safe and talk them out of bad ideas. Heck, for that matter regardless of age children may always need and/or want their parents. I know I do.

**Note 2:** The age descriptions offered in this guideline is the average age of typically developing children. However, there is a wide range of "normal" and what you are experiencing with your child at any given age may differ as children develop at different rates. However, if you ever have any concerns about your child's development don't hesitate to contact your doctor or other health professional. No one knows a child better than the mother, so trust your instincts, and give yourself that peace of mind.