

Coping skills module

These activities equip children with techniques for coping which will help them stay calm in an emergency situation.

Activities can be worked through in order. You can do all activities, or you can pick and choose. We recommend that you deliver a minimum of two coping skills activities. If you are short on time, you could pick the following activities:

1. Introducing coping skills
and
2. Breathing with colour or Bubble blowing
and
3. Shield of strength or Guided imagery story or My favourite place

The 'Coping skills worksheet' is also optional, but could be used as a homework activity.

Learning objectives

By the end of the 'Coping skills' activities children will be able to:

- > Stay calm during an emergency situation.
- > Help others cope in an emergency situation.

Coping skills activity summary		
Time	Activity name	Supporting resources
5 minutes	Introducing coping skills	
10 minutes	Breathing with colour	Instructional video from First Aid Champions
5 minutes	Bubble blowing	
15 minutes	Shield of strength	'Shield of strength' worksheet Colouring pens/ pencils Scissors and sticky tape or glue
10 minutes	Guided imagery story	Guided imagery story
10 minutes	My favourite place	Plain paper Crayons or colouring pens/pencils
10 minutes	Coping skills worksheet	Coping skills worksheet

1. Introducing coping skills

Activity type



Learn

Suggested time



5 minutes

Suggested group size



Whole group

What you need

Introduction

This activity explores what our breathing is like when we are calm and when we are worried.

Activity description

Ask children to respond to the following questions:

- > Think about how you breathe when you feel worried or scared. Quickly or slowly? Deeply or shallowly?
- > How do you breathe when you are calm? Quickly or slowly? Deeply or shallowly?

You could summarise their ideas on the board.

2. Breathing with colour

Activity type



Learn

Suggested time



10 minutes

Suggested group size



Whole group

What you need

Introduction

This activity will help children learn to control their breathing so they can stay calm in a difficult or stressful situation. If you wish to show the children how this coping skill might be used in an emergency, you could watch the 'Flooding interactive film' together. The film can be found [here](#).

Activity description

Explain that:

- > We are going to learn a special way to stay calm by breathing deeply and slowly. It is called 'Breathing with colour'. If you don't have time to show the whole interactive film, skip to [this video for the breathing exercises](#).

Ask children to:

- > Choose a colour for good, relaxed feelings – maybe blue for a clear blue sky, or yellow for the warm golden sun.
- > Now choose a different colour for the uncomfortable feelings you want to get rid of – like grey, the colour of a rainy day, or red for the colour of danger.

As a group, discuss what the different colours mean to the pupils and what they associate them with.

With children sitting quietly in their chairs or on the floor, work through the 'Breathing with colour' activity:

- > Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. Imagine the air you are breathing in is your good colour. As you are imagining this, say to yourself: "In with the good colour."
- > Hold the 'good' air inside for a few seconds and let it fill you with good feelings.
- > Then calmly and slowly blow the air out through your mouth. Imagine the air coming out of your mouth is the negative or bad colour – you are slowly blowing those negative or bad feelings away.
- > We are going to practise breathing with colour a few more times:
 - Breathe in with the good colour, then out with the bad colour. Do this very, very calmly. Feel your arms and legs start to relax.
 - Again, breathe in with the good colour, and out with the bad colour. Now your stomach and shoulders are feeling relaxed.

- One last time, breathe in with the good colour, then out with the bad colour.
- > Now open your eyes and keep those good, relaxed feelings inside you. Do you feel calmer?
- > You can use this skill any time you need to cope with a difficult situation or need to feel calmer inside, not just during emergencies. Can you think of any other situations in which you might use it? Would it help before a SATs exam, for example? Could it calm you down if you are having a disagreement in the playground?

3. Bubble blowing

Activity type



Learn

Suggested time



5 minutes

Suggested group size



Whole group

What you need

Introduction

This activity helps children learn to breathe deeply and slowly so they can stay calm if they are feeling worried or upset.

Activity description

Explain that:

- > We are going to learn and practise a way in which we can calm our breathing if we are feeling worried or upset.

Ask children to:

- > Imagine you are going to blow a large soap bubble from a bubble pot with a stick. Now take the imaginary bubble pot in your hand – shake the pot, unscrew the top and put the bubble-making stick in front of your mouth.
- > Take a long, deep breath in through your nose and then slowly blow out through your mouth, imagining you are blowing a big bubble. Don't go too quickly – otherwise the bubble will burst.

Practise this a few times. Then ask the children whether they feel calmer, and when and where they could use this technique.

4. Shield of strength

Activity type



Learn

Suggested time



15 minutes

Suggested group size



Whole group

What you need

1. [‘Shield of strength’ worksheet](#)
2. Colouring pens/ pencils
3. Scissors and sticky tape or glue

Introduction

This visualisation and drawing activity helps children feel more confident and cope better in stressful situations.

Activity description

Before the activity:

1. Print out the ‘Shield of strength’ worksheet on A3 paper. You will need one copy for each pupil.
2. Have colouring pens and/or pencils, scissors and stick tape or glue available.

Explain that:

- > We are going to think about the abilities and qualities we each have, and how these could help us cope in difficult situations or emergencies, through an activity called ‘Shield of strength’.
- > Reflecting on these qualities and abilities can give you inner strength [check children’s understanding of this term] that you can draw on to feel more confident and cope better in a tough situation.

Ask children to:

- > Stand up. Think about something you do really well, something that makes you feel strong and confident. You might be really good at spelling, or you might be a great friend, a terrific football player, or a fantastic dancer. Close your eyes and picture yourself doing this confidently.
- > Keep thinking about the confidence you feel when you are doing what you are good at. Keep your eyes closed, and now imagine you are holding a shield in front of you with a picture of what you are good at on the front. Remembering these qualities can help keep you strong.
- > Now open your eyes. We are going to capture your abilities and qualities on a ‘Shield of strength’ that you are going to make.

Hand out the ‘Shield of strength’ worksheets and some colouring pens/pencils to each child, and then explain:

- > Your ‘Shield of strength’ worksheet has four sections:
 - Activities I am good at
 - Qualities I have

- Skills I have
- I would like to learn

You might also like to explore:

- > What we mean by an ability – activities that you are good at and skills that you have, for example, dancing, playing football, packing or planning.
- > What we mean by a quality – the good traits or values that you have, for example, you like to help others, you are good at listening, you are compassionate, and so on.
- > What else pupils might like to learn to help them become even stronger, for example, how to be a good listener, how to give first aid, how to plan.

Ask children to:

- > In each section of the shield draw or write the activities, qualities and skills that you have that help you feel confident and strong. Also draw or write anything you would like to learn that you think might help you become even stronger and more confident. Allow time for children to create their shields. Explain that they may want to ask their friends what they think they are good at, to help them fill the shield out.
- > Cut out the shield and the handle, then stick the handle on to the back of the shield. [You may need to help children with this.]
- > Hold up your finished shield in front of you. This is your shield of strength – you can look at this or think about what you have included when you are in a tough situation, remembering the qualities, abilities and skills you can draw on to help you and others cope better.

After everyone has finished, children could share some of their ideas by standing up and holding their shields in front of them and explaining what they have written. They can do this in small groups or as a whole class.

The shields could be made out of card so they are sturdier, and used to create a class display.

5. Guided imagery story

Activity type



Learn

Suggested time



10 minutes

Suggested group size



Whole group

What you need

1. [Guided imagery story](#)

Introduction

This visualisation activity gives children an alternative way to stay calm.

Activity description

Before the activity:

1. Print out one copy of the 'Guided imagery' story. You could also print additional copies for children to take home.

Children can lie or sit down with their eyes closed. Explain that:

- > Some situations we find ourselves in can be stressful and make us feel tense or worried.
- > We are going to use our imagination to transport us to a new place to help us feel calm and relaxed.

Ask children to:

- > Close your eyes.
- > Take some deep, slow breaths in and out and feel your body relaxing.
- > With each breath, relax: first relax your right arm, now your left arm, relax your stomach, now your right leg, and then your left leg, etc.

After a few minutes of breathing, read out the 'Guided imagery' story provided. Read slowly, in a calming voice and with plenty of pauses.

At the end of the story tell children to slowly open their eyes. Ask:

- > How do you feel?

You could hand out copies of the story to take home. If children are ever feeling tense or worried, they can ask their parents, guardians or a friend or sibling to read this out to help them feel calm.

6. My favourite place

Activity type



Learn

Suggested time



10 minutes

Suggested group size



Whole group

What you need

1. Plain paper
2. Crayons or colouring pens/pencils

Introduction

This visualisation and drawing activity helps children focus on something positive in a difficult situation. If you wish to show the children how this coping skill might be used in an emergency, you could watch the 'Thunderstorm interactive film' together. The film can be found [here](#).

Activity description

Before the activity:

1. Give out some paper and crayons or colouring pens/pencils to each child.

Explain that:

- > Sometimes when you are feeling worried or tense, thinking about a good experience or a place you like going to could make you feel better.
- > We are going to use our imagination to transport us to a place that makes us feel calm and relaxed.

Ask children to:

- > Close your eyes and imagine a place you like going to. It should be a place which makes you feel relaxed and happy, for example, a park or a beach.

Allow time for children to imagine where they are, then slowly introduce the ideas below:

- > Think about the sounds you would hear in that place, and what the place smells like. Do you smell flowers, freshly cut grass or delicious food? Can you hear waves breaking on the beach, birds singing, other children playing or dogs barking? What you see and hear will depend on where you are.

Allow time for the visualisation, then continue:

- > Slowly open your eyes. Now draw the place you have imagined, a place that makes you feel happy and safe.

After everyone has finished drawing their favourite place, ask a few of the children to show their pictures and share their ideas. Conclude the activity by explaining that whenever they feel upset or worried, they can close their eyes and imagine their favourite place.

7. Coping skills worksheet**Activity type**

Learn

Suggested time

10 minutes

Suggested group size

Individual

What you need

1. [Coping skills worksheet](#)

Introduction

This worksheet helps children to summarise some of the key things they have learnt in this series of activities.

Activity description

Before the activity:

1. Print out the 'Coping skills worksheet'. You will need one copy for each pupil.

Hand out the worksheet and explain to pupils that they will revise some of the key things they have learnt in this series of activities.

Worksheets can be completed in class or as a homework activity.

Shield of strength

- 1. Draw or write your strengths and what you'd like to learn inside the shield.
- 2. Cut out the shield and cut down the dotted line so you have a strip of paper.
- 3. Make the strip of paper into a loop to create a handle for the back of your shield.
- 4. Stick your handle on to the back of your shield.

Activities I am good at...	Qualities I have...
Skills I have...	I would like to learn...

Guided imagery story

You are walking through a green forest. It is a warm sunny day in spring. It is quiet all around you, except for the birds singing in the trees, some bees buzzing, and a small stream silently flowing nearby.

You stop walking and look up to see a hill. You decide you want to keep walking up it to get to the top, as you think there might be the most wonderful view. You are carrying two bags: one on your back and the other in one of your hands.

You keep walking, along the path that is leading you up the hill.

You walk for a while: left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. One foot in front of the other, you keep going up the hill. The only thing you hear is your feet pounding on the ground as you keep walking in silence.

The path is starting to get steeper. After a while you start feeling tired and hot. The bags feel heavy. You can barely lift your feet to walk. So you stop and look up – you can see you still have a long way to go before you reach the top of the hill. You take a few deep breaths to try and get some strength back. One breath in and one breath out. In and out. You have a drink of water from a bottle in one of your bags and then you sit down for a moment.

You feel less tired now. You stand up. You look up the path again, determined to get to the top. You decide to leave the bag you are carrying in your hand and come back and get it later. You drop it onto the ground with a big thud. Immediately, you feel lighter and stronger.

You begin walking again, feeling less tired and lighter than you did before. Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. One foot in front of the other, you keep going up the hill. Time passes and still you keep walking past the trees, onwards towards the top of the hill, feet pounding on the ground as you walk on in silence.

After a while you start feeling tired again. The bag on your back feels heavy and is weighing you down. You can barely put one foot in front of the other. You see a big rock further up on the side of the path. You walk up to it and sit down, feeling exhausted. All you want to do is stay sitting on that rock and not move for a while.

You look up the path and see the top of the hill is not that far away. You just need to get up and keep walking for a little while longer. You take a few deep breaths. One breath in and one breath out. In and out.

You decide to leave the bag you are carrying on your back and come back for it later, so you take it off and leave it on the rock. You stand up, feeling the lightest you have felt on the whole walk. You take a deep breath of fresh, clean spring air and start walking again, feeling so light without the bags. You know you can reach the top of the hill. You are so close now. One foot in front of the other, you keep going up the hill. Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot.

Finally, the trees start to get thinner, you come out of the forest, and out into the clearing on the top of the hill. You stop and look around at the amazing view: the green forest below where you have just come from, the river in the valley, and across the snow covered mountain tops in the distance touching the light blue sky that only has a few clouds in it. Birds are flying in the sky overhead, feeling as free and wonderful as you do. It is a beautiful and breathtaking sight. You feel incredible: light, strong, and calm. You feel like nothing can stop you from doing anything you want to do. You close your eyes and take a deep breath of the fresh air. In and out.

[Pause for 10 seconds.] Slowly open your eyes.



Coping skills worksheet

1. Complete the sentences with the words below.

shallowly deeply quickly slowly

- a) When I am worried or upset, I breathe_____and_____.
- b) When I am calm and happy, I breathe_____and_____.

2. Name at least one skill you have learnt that could help you stay calm in a difficult situation.

3. Choose one of the coping skills you have learnt. Imagine you have to teach someone else how to use it. Write some instructions for the coping skill.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

4. Practise the skills you have learnt at home with your family. Describe here how you feel after practicing.
