

A Guide to Coping Skills
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* Validate Your Child's Experience

Let your child know that they are not alone in their experience and that other children also experience depression in their lives. Also let them know that there are many ways to help with what they are going through.

* Taking Care of Yourself

Taking care of basic needs can help children feel better both physically and psychologically, even though it may feel very hard to motivate your child to do these activities. Talk to them about the benefits of engaging in these basic needs and support small steps toward this goal.

Personal basic needs include:

- ✓ Eating healthy
- ✓ Drinking water
- ✓ Getting enough sleep each night*
- ✓ Personal grooming (showering, washing hair, using deodorant, wearing clean clothes, etc.)

Good sleep hygiene is so important! Some tips include:

- ✓ Avoid stimulating activities close to bedtime
- ✓ Encourage daily exercise daily, but avoid exercising after early evening
- ✓ Develop a consistent bedtime routine
- ✓ Only use your bed for sleeping
- ✓ Avoid screens for 30 minutes prior to bedtime
- ✓ Check with your pediatrician for guidelines on the amount of sleep that is developmentally appropriate for kids at different ages

* Stress Management & Mindfulness

Identify sources of stress in your child's life and work with them to identify ways of reducing the impact of these stressors.

Try using relaxation strategies to manage stressful moments or intense feelings:

- Deep breathing: Distinguish deep breathing from normal breathing and explain that it can help calm our bodies when we're feeling overwhelmed. Try:

- Taking a slow breathing in through your nose for about 4-5 seconds
- Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for at least 4-5 seconds
- Wait 2-3 seconds before taking another breath
- Repeat for at least 5 to 10 breaths

*For younger children: try using bubbles to encourage slow, deep breaths

*For older children and teens: encourage “belly breathing,” noting how when we take deep breaths, our bellies expand (rather than our chests)

➤ Progressive muscle relaxation: See attached scripts (one for younger kids and one for older kids and teens) for ways to relax your muscles when feeling tense or agitated.

➤ Visualization: Encourage your child to close their eyes, take several deep breaths, and then begin imagining a place where they feel calm, content, and relaxed. Create a sensory experience by encouraging your child to focus on what they can see, smell, and feel in their calm place. There are also many scripts available online for a more guided approach; a sample script is attached!

Mindfulness & Technology. Several apps are available on smartphones that can provide guidance on using mindfulness techniques regularly to cope with symptoms of depression. Try exploring apps such as Calm, Headspace, and Breath2Relax.

* Cognitive Coping

Talk with your child about their thinking patterns and identify negative cognitions that they may be over-focusing on, such as “Things are never going to get better for me” or “I can’t do anything right.” Help your child find evidence that counters those thoughts and develop more positive self-talk, such as:

- ❖ “Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, no one is perfect”
- ❖ “There are so many things I’m good at, including _____”
- ❖ “My family loves me and is here to help me through this”
- ❖ “What’s important is that I tried”
- ❖ “I can do this”

* Problem Solving

Problem solving is often difficult for children experiencing depression. They can benefit from support around how to handle problems that may feel overwhelming or unmanageable. Here’s one approach to help provide support:

1. Define the problem
2. Brainstorm possible solutions

3. Think about the outcomes to those possible solutions, and think through who will be affected by the outcomes
4. Commit to a decision and carry it out
5. Have a contingency plan in case the solution doesn't work out as planned
6. Evaluate the outcome

* Activity Scheduling

Children who are experiencing depression often lose interest in fun or pleasurable activities and may begin to withdraw socially. They also tend to lack the energy and motivation to engage in activities. However, we know that participating in pleasurable activities is linked to improvements in mood. Share this information with your child, then help them identify pleasurable activities to engage in and find practical ways to add these activities into your child's schedule.

When you get started, avoid setting expectations that are too high. If depression symptoms are more severe, it would be unrealistic to expect your child to jump right into 5 pleasurable activities every day. Start small and slow, identifying simple pleasures that will be easy to incorporate into the day. Here's a sample list of pleasurable activities to get you started:

Hang out with a friend	Text or call a friend	Dance
Text a friend	Play a video game	Write in a journal or diary
Go for a walk	Go outside and play with your pet	Draw or paint
Read your favorite book	Watch your favorite movie	Bake a dessert with Parent
Play a game with your family	Go for a swim	Help make dinner
Ride your bike	Play your favorite sport	Arts and crafts project
Listen to music	Eat your favorite snack	Get cozy in a soft blanket
Do a puzzle	Go to a museum	Go the park

