

# Helping kids cope with fear, doubt, anxiety & stress



During these times of uncertainty, it is important that we recognize when our children just need a few minutes to “calm down”. As Behavior Techs, we spend our days trying to help “our” kids to become aware of an unsettling feeling and how to cope with and manage those feelings. It is important to model a sense of security and assure your love and protection. Try to acknowledge and offer praise when your children make positive coping statements or uses their coping strategies.

Each one of our children are different in so many ways and the tools, strategies, and coping skills we use for one student might not work well or even be an option for another student. Throughout the year we have focused on offering every child a way to release negative energy. It is a constant trial and error! Many times, we benefit from asking the child if they can name a few things that may make them anxious and what calms them or helps them feel safe during these times. By doing this, we help them learn to manage their emotional responses to their triggers and this is also a great way to help you create a cool down kit specific to their needs.

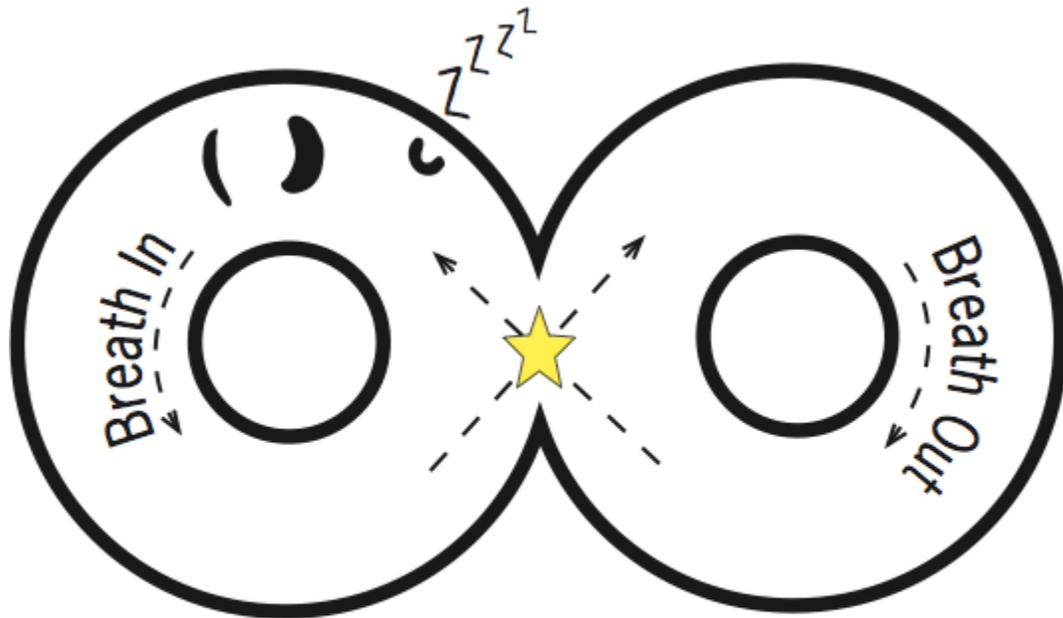
Many of our kids know what calms them and how to best use their strategies and others simply just don’t know where to start. We’ve included a few strategies we use often that many of our students are familiar with. Whether there are tools and coping skills you and your kids are already familiar with or a few new things to try out, we hope that you’ll encourage them to utilize their strategies daily, continue to make good choices and remind them Mrs. Alicia & Ms. Gillis will be checking in and keeping in touch.

## **Simple Breathing Techniques**

The fastest way to reduce stress for many of our students is deep breathing and many times this creates an instant relaxation response. Encourage your child to breathe right when he/she starts feeling stressed and remind them not too fast and not too slow... in through the nose, out through the mouth. When they're anxious or under stress, using deep breathing will slow their heart rate and regulate their physical responses to anxious feelings. Many of our teachers incorporate guided meditation into their daily schedule. Teaching daily deep breathing when kids are calm helps kids learn to control their breathing on their own. There are several guided breathing/meditation websites for kids and I'm sure many of our teachers will also share a few of their favorites with you as well.

Some children may benefit from using a visual cue to notice their breath. Simply putting a hand on their chest or stomach and noticing the rise and fall of the breath is a great way to help them notice this. We have also attached a copy of The ZONES of Regulation Lazy 8 Breathing technique some of your children may be familiar with.

# Lazy 8 Breathing



Trace the Lazy 8 with your finger starting at the star and taking a deep breath in.

As you cross over to the other side of the Lazy 8, slowly let your breath out.

Continue breathing around the Lazy 8 until you have a calm body and mind.

## How to make your own breathing visual cue!

Our little ones may also enjoy making their own “breathing wand”. You will need a toilet paper or paper towel roll, markers or other decorative things, streamers or thin ribbon that is light enough to be moved easily by their breath.



1. Take a toilet paper or paper towel roll and cut off the top (about an inch thick) and set aside.
2. Cut a straight line all the way up the remainder of the roll.
3. Use this cut to tighten the roll to roll it thinner and tape on top and bottom to hold it in place.
4. Allow child to decorate the roll with paint, markers, stickers, etc.
5. Tape strands of thin light ribbon or streamers along the inside of the small ring you cut off earlier.
6. Tape the ring on top of the thinner roll to make the wand.
7. BREATHE and notice what you see! 😊

- **Offer a piece of putty (many of their favorites) or a stress ball.**

A simple source of distraction that not only reduces anxiety and helps calm some children, but also may help children reduce impulsive behaviors helping them to concentrate and focus a little more. Therapeutic putty is also often used to strengthen grip and improve motor skills. We've included a couple DIY projects on how to make a few of these things using simple household items you may have.

### **How to Make A Stress Ball with Flour and A Balloon**

To make our own stress balls you'll need some pretty basic supplies that hopefully you have at home. You will need:

- Balloons
- An empty water bottle (or other bottle with a small neck opening)
- Flour
- Funnel
- Sharpie marker & small Amount of yarn (If you want to add a face and hair).



1. Pour **3/4 cup** of flour into your bottle. A funnel makes the job go easier.
2. Next, blow up the balloon a little bit, and put it over the neck of the bottle. Make sure some air stays in the balloon. Then transfer the flour from the bottle into the

balloon. This will probably take some tipping back and forth, some tapping of the bottle, and a little bit of patience.

3. Once all the flour is in the balloon, remove the balloon from the bottle and **slowly** let the remaining air out of the balloon. If you go too fast, the air could blow too much of the flour back out.
4. Tie a knot on the balloon, (a little bit of flour might come poof-ing out when you do this, that's OK).
5. Draw on a face using a sharpie marker. You can also add some yarn hair if you'd like.
6. And your stress ball is finished!

### How to Make Playdough

You will need:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup cold water
- 1 tbsp oil
- 2-3 drops food coloring



Directions: Mix dry and wet ingredients separately. Slowly add the wet ingredients to the dry ones and knead well. You now have your own non-toxic playdough 😊

## Sensory Hands



These are another tool your child can use similar to a stress ball. These are quickly made with just latex gloves and household items. Fill each glove with a different texture (flour, rice, split peas, beans, cotton balls, or dry oatmeal. Any filling will work, and flour is a favorite. It is super soft and fun to play with.

- **Offer sensory beads and or balls in a bin.**

Many of our kids enjoy the small sensory beads that resemble small fish tank/aquarium pebbles. Sensory bins create a soothing experience and explore sensory stimulation.

These can easily be made with a small bin or large Tupperware & some items you may have around the house such as rice, dry noodles, dry beans, bird seeds, sand, beads, marbles, etc. This is also a great way explore and learn while engaging the students in their senses and there are several ideas online and on Pinterest you can create with your children by simply googling “sensory bins” We’ve included an example of what we use with the students:



- **A stress walk or few minutes of exercise**

Whether it be a walk to the stop sign or a simple pathway up and down the hallway, our students are very familiar with a stress walk when they simply need to just walk away for a few minutes. Some enjoy running, even if it's just back and forth to the fence or a safe area in your front yard (they like to be timed every now then and they'll get enjoyment from beating their previous time). Include a few jumping jacks, push-ups, squats, or any other exercise they may like or throw on some music and let them dance it out. One of the healthiest ways to blow off steam is to get a little exercise.

- **Color or draw**

Coloring can help kids feel calmer, mentally clearer, happier, and more relaxed. There are many learning benefits as well, such as fine motor development, concentration, and help to develop hand and eye coordination. Coloring and drawing can provide children with a purpose, motivation, and it can add a sense of pride and achievement. It is a great way to provide children the opportunity to gain self-confidence and a sense of self-worth. Many of our teachers have done directive drawing with our students and this can be a fun activity to do together as a family. One of the websites we use often is <https://www.artforkidshub.com/how-to-draw/>. Another one we found recently that is <https://www.creativebloq.com/free-kids-drawing-lessons> and there are several other similar websites out there.

- **Journal writing**

Some children may be a bit more open to writing about their feelings rather than talk about them. Writing about what's on their mind, their concerns, worries, fears, and what is bothering them can be helpful in getting these thoughts out of their head and into the open. Encourage students to write about their worries followed by one positive thought, this helps break the cycle of negative thinking that can increase anxiety. Our younger students who are not yet writing can draw what they are feeling and label the illustration with simple words like mad, scared, sad, happy, etc. Some students may also enjoy making a worry box rather than a journal. Have your child

decorate an old tissue box with her/his favorite things, cover with construction paper and color or decorate it with stickers. Help them to write their worries of the day and place them in the box one-by-one.

- **Create a quiet place**

Many times, our kids just need a few minutes to be left alone. A quiet place is ideal because it can help reduce sensory overload and help the child recover without interruptions. Offer a safe, quiet, distraction free place where he/she can take a moment to themselves where no one bothers them. Encourage them to sit in their own quiet place and listen to the sounds around them or put music on low & just encourage them to quiet their minds. Often time's kids need to release negative energy and if they want to scream or cry, this is usually when we encourage them to just "let it out"!

While browsing through websites we found a fun project some of our little ones may enjoy releasing those negative feelings. [Hope4hurtingkids.com](http://Hope4hurtingkids.com) offers several resources, articles, and comprehensive emotions management plans that you may find helpful for both you and your children.



A Scream Box is a fun and effective way to vent some of those intense emotions that build up inside like anger, fear and stress. While breathing, physical activity and talking about it are great ways to help deal with difficult emotions, sometimes you just need to scream! Handled correctly, this can be a therapeutic way to vent some of that frustration. Screaming

however is not always socially acceptable or appropriate. That's where the Scream Box comes in handy.

Gather up the following supplies:

- An empty cereal box
- A paper towel roll
- Old newspaper or packing paper (regular paper or tissue paper can also work)
- Tape (duct tape works best, but packing tape will also suffice)
- Construction paper or wrapping paper to cover the cereal box
- Items to decorate your box (markers, pencils, stickers, glitter or whatever you want to use)

Directions:

1. Pack the paper towel tube and the cereal box full of paper. This helps to muffle the sound when you scream.
2. Cut a hole in the top of the box just big enough for the tube to fit in.
3. Insert the tube into the hole and duct tape all the way around the area where the tube meets the box.
4. Decorate your box however you would like.
5. Use the box when your child is frustrated, angry or stressed and other calm down techniques aren't working. Just pull out their scream box and allow them scream into the cardboard tube. It doesn't eliminate sounds, but it will muffle the screams and allow them to "get it out."

Now's the hard part! How do we decide when "Time's up"? A few minutes sounds ideal but that is not always the reality. In real life situations, it will take "several" minutes before being able to identify exactly what that unsettling feeling was, why kids reacted the way they did, and many times you'll never know because they choose not to share it with you at the time. We all cross our fingers that we can get down to the bottom of it and hope they can express their feelings and tell us what was bothering them but that doesn't always happen. Allow children time to readjust and regulate their emotions. Reconnect with your child with positive actions and words. Be patient, provide a calm, reassuring presence without talking too much to your child. Although it is important to acknowledge that there was a problem, discuss what self-calming techniques your child utilized, and reinforce with the child how the technique was successful, but it is also important not to dwell on the past and move forward. If talking about it is too stressful for the child, simply let it go!

We hope you'll find a few of these strategies and coping skills helpful and encourage your children to use them daily. We will be working along with your children's teachers in the coming weeks to provide you all with some social/emotional lessons to help this transition into homeschooling as smooth as possible for everyone. Please send our love, offer a hug and a kiss from us and let our kids know we miss them terribly!

*Lots of Love,*

Mrs. Alicia & Ms. Gillis

