TOOLBOX PROJECT®
TOOLS FOR LEARNING ▾ TOOLS FOR LIFE

Building resilience, self-mastery, & empathy for others

PARENT HANDOUT

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When you put your children to bed at night, do you think about whether they are stronger people because of the things you have said or done that day? Do you ask yourself if your words and actions make them stronger?

—Adapted from Brooks & Goldstein, *Raising Resilient Children*

For further information, visit our website or email info@toolboxproject.com

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What Is TOOLBOX?

TOOLBOX is an SEL[1] (Social and Emotional Learning) program that supports children in understanding and managing their own emotional, social, and academic success. The foundation of TOOLBOX is 12 human capacities that reside within all of us. Through its simple metaphor of Tools inside us, TOOLBOX brings forward a set of skills and practices that help students access their own inner resilience at any time, in any context.

Children learn 12 simple yet powerful Tools. With practice, these Tools become valuable personal skills: self-awareness, self-management, and relationship-building which, in turn, foster responsible decision-making. Because the "practices" are simple and the 12 Tools become a common language that is shared, children adopt the Tools and master them quickly.

TOOLBOX begins with a teacher providing instruction on how to use the Tools. Through modeling and daily classroom practices, the teacher subsequently supports his/her students to use the Tools to build self-knowledge and self-trust. Schools note rapid improvements in communication, civility, and conflict resolution in the classroom, on the playground, and across the entire school community. Providing parents and caregivers with the Tools and information on how to incorporate the practices into the home setting allows for continuity and reinforcement of skills for students.

As parents, using these 12 Tools for ourselves helps us to be "the kind of parents we most want to be." With practice, these Tools become our own personal skills. Self-awareness and self-management are two of our most important emotional intelligences. Modeling these skills (Tools) ourselves, is perhaps the most powerful catalyst for our children to learn to use their Tools.

Stepping back from the grip of our own emotion to see a child in new ways — is often our best solution.

—Bonnie Benard, *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*

[1] The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning (SEL) as "the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." The skills and practices of TOOLBOX directly build the five competencies defined by CASEL.

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The Task of Parenting

All parents want their kids to be happy, healthy, and successful. Parenting includes preparing your child to be resilient within a complex world. We encourage you to help your child locate and learn to use his/her inner Tools to navigate the complexities of daily life.

> I like to think of my love for my children as the "slack net" spread beneath a performing aerialist. I hoped that they would not view with alarm or undue apprehension the necessity for its being there but rather climbed as high as they might go, secure in the knowledge of its support. It was frightening to know that pulling the corners too tight could send them bouncing off into oblivion and leaving the knots too loose might plunge them into certain disaster…
> What I wanted most for my children was that they be able to soar confidently in their own sky, wherever that might be, and if there was space for me as well, I would indeed have reaped what I had tried to sow.
>
> —Helen Claes (modified by Mark Collin)

A Healthy Parent:

1. Learns to love tight enough to keep their child safe, and loose enough to allow their child to grow and thrive.
2. Understands it is okay and normal to be a parent who makes mistakes (i.e., a "good enough" parent), and realizes that trying to be a perfect parent simply feeds negative self-judgment.
3. Knows the importance of separating the child from the misbehavior. This lets us love unconditionally even when mistakes occur.
4. Helps his/her child access their inner compass to go within to find solutions.
5. Remembers that the child has an underlying need:
    - to belong, to contribute, to be accepted
    - to push you away and pull you in at the same time
    - for safety and independence, as well as interdependence
    - for firm parental boundaries and a need for personal freedom
    - to learn natural consequences of behaviors (punishment does not encourage a child to learn from a mistake)

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Child Resilience

The three most important factors in developing childhood resilience:

(from Bonnie Benard, *Resiliency: What We Have Learned)*

1) Caring Adult

- "I believe in you"…as a human being
- Adult kindness, integrity, authenticity, and self-disclosure
- Understanding that no matter how awful a child's behavior, the child is doing the best he or she can, given his or her state of being right now

"Every child has impeccable reasons for behaving exactly as they do!"

2) High Expectation Messages

- "I believe in you"…in your capacity and ability
- "You have everything you need to be successful."
- "I know you can do it, even if it is difficult."
- "We treat each other with kindness in our family."
- "I know in your heart you want to do the right thing (i.e., Courage Tool)."

3) Opportunities for Meaningful Contribution

- "I know you can contribute to your own solution."
- "You are a problem-solver"
- "What three Tools can you try?"

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Tool Descriptions and Hand Gestures



Breathing Tool

I calm myself and check-in.

Concept: Awareness of breathing brings immediate calm and time to think. It is a bridge to self-reflection that guides us toward effective choices and positive change. Cultures across the world have recognized the breath as a gateway to wisdom. Without the healthy ability to practice inner-calm and self-reflection, it is difficult to learn, relate with others, or know oneself. Attention to breathing is key to self-control, understanding, and genuine connection with others.

Hand Gesture: Touch thumbs and index fingers together in front of you as if holding a tape measure; slowly pull hands apart while taking a breath. On exhale, bring hands slowly back together. Repeat three times.

Quiet/Safe Place Tool

I remember my quiet, safe place.



Concept: Quietness gives one strength. When we have a "place" of solace, safety, and quiet, then creativity, imagination, and self-expression emerge naturally. One way we feel safe is when we have a quiet, safe place *physically*. The Quiet/Safe Place Tool is a way of remembering our quiet stillness. When we listen from the quiet place within our hearts, we make space to hear our natural wisdom.

Hand Gesture: Place hands over ears while bending head slightly forward. Close eyes and "go to" your quiet/safe place…any time.



Listening Tool

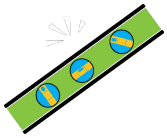
I listen with my ears, eyes, and heart.

Concept: Listening with one's heart is the key to strong relationship and conflict resolution, leading us to empathy. When we breathe from a quiet place inside, the ability to listen to what we are saying to ourselves and each other becomes easier.

Hand Gesture: Emulate a carpenter tapping on a wall and listening for the location of a stud behind the wall. With two fingers, gently tap near your ear reminding yourself to "listen into" what is being said.

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Empathy Tool



I care for others. I care for myself.

Concept: Empathy is noticing how another person is feeling and being able to understand what they might be feeling. Empathy is caring about someone else. Empathy is the root of tolerance, kindness, and forgiveness. Turned inward, this becomes care and understanding for oneself.

Hand Gesture: Place hands in front of you, palms up, as if holding an imaginary level. Slowly raise the left hand, as you slowly lower the right hand. Reverse the motions repeatedly (like a "see-saw.").



Personal Space Tool

I have a right to my space. You have a right to yours.

Concept: We all have an indelible right to our personal space and the responsibility to give others the same right. Noticing the physical space around us helps us see our own needs and how we may be impacting others. In addition, this Tool encompasses intelligence through awareness of our body wisdom: body language, sensations, gestures, position, posture, voice tone, quality, and volume.

Hand Gesture: Outstretch hands in front of you, palms forward, with elbows relaxed. Slowly move hands apart and together again, delineating a curved boundary around you.

Using Our Words Tool



I use the "right" words, in the "right" way, at the "right" time, for the "right" reason.

Concept: Careful use of words encourages understanding, connection, and intimacy. Careless or offensive words harm relationships. By learning the importance of words and how they impact relationships, the Using Our Words Tool gives us a voice to ask for what we want and need. This is a skill we must learn. Using the "right" words, at the "right" time, in the "right" way, for the "right" reasons creates the possibility for deeper connections to self and others. Using Our Words well helps us with clarifying misunderstandings and conflict resolution.

Hand Gesture: Hold an imaginary pencil and "write" your initials in the air.

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Garbage Can Tool

I let the little things go.

Concept: We do not have to take unkind words personally (into our personal space). We can take responsibility for what we do with other people's words and actions and how we feel about them. Sometimes the best choice is to throw harmful words away. Sometimes we need to listen more carefully to what is behind the words. This Tool has its origins in the martial art of Aikido, The Art of Peaceful Reconciliation. It is one of the children's favorites.

Hand Gesture: Place one hand on your hip creating an open semicircle. With the other hand, make a "throwing-away" gesture into the open space under the arm. Or, make a "thumbs-up" sign with one hand, then flip thumb down (as if closing the lid on the garbage can).

Taking Time Tool



I take time-in and time-away.

Concept: There are many useful ways to use time intelligently for one's well-being and the well-being of others. When we choose how to use our time we can be more effective. Stepping back and taking Time-Away renews our resiliency. Taking Time-In (within oneself) to self-reflect leads to better self-understanding and more authentic connections with others.

Hand Gesture: Gently tap your wrist (an imaginary wrist-watch) with your index finger.



Please & Thank You Tool

I treat others with kindness and appreciation.

Concept: Please and Thank You are "magic words" that make people feel good. Expressing gratitude and giving thanks are basic principles of kindness and generosity. This opens the doorway to intimacy and caring relationships. When added politely to a request, the word "please" encourages others to be helpful and kind. Saying "thank you" lets people know you value them. These simple words create warm connections with others.

Hand Gesture: Hold a pretend key and turn your wrist as if opening an imaginary lock.

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Apology & Forgiveness Tool



I admit my mistakes and work to forgive yours.

Concept: A sincere apology opens the door to self-responsibility and forgiveness. It takes self-esteem and inner strength to admit a mistake and do the "right" thing. Using the Apology & Forgiveness Tool is a step towards maturity. Forgiveness takes equal strength. It requires letting go of anger and judgment. It does not mean we have to forget, but there can be a willingness to forgive. If we are still holding the hot ember of anger, resentment, or hatred, we are the one still getting burned.

Hand Gesture: Clasp hands together as though gluing two sheet of paper together.



Patience Tool

I am strong enough to wait.

Concept: Patience is the ability to wait quietly. Patience develops our capacity for tolerating situations that are not in our control. Children learn patience when we model it. If patience is not modeled, children may learn to be impatient, demanding, and impulsive.

Hand Gesture: Place palms together in front of you, fingers straight. Slowly rub hands together, slowly and gently. Feel the sensation of the hands warming each other.

Courage Tool



I have the courage to do the "right" thing.

Concept: Courage is having inner strength and bravery to do the "right thing" even when it is difficult. When we feel troubled by our own or others' behaviors, it takes courage to use our Tools when others are not using theirs. Helping children to have courage lets them explore the unfamiliar. Courage, from Latin *cor* ("heart"), means to act with "heart." Acting with courage is following one's heart.

Hand Gesture: Place one hand over your heart. Gently pat your chest while breathing in deeply (internally saying "Grow strong heart. Grow strong.").

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Parenting Principles

1. **It is our task as parents to be the safety net for our children.** This includes loving them unconditionally and teaching about boundaries with positive discipline.

2. **Becoming an engaged parent requires a willingness to be self-aware and to develop a self-reflective, non-judgmental consciousness.** Parents need a daily practice of reflective observation, taking inventory, and separating personal reactions from the true needs of the children.

3. **Parents have embodied within them the seeds of a healthy and nurturing parenting experience.** Regardless of our past experiences or current circumstances, at the core of every parent there is an innate felt-sense of wellbeing, wholeness, and goodness.

4. **As Parents we must model and practice the behaviors we desire in return.** Children live what they learn. Children are watching us. Children put their trust in us.

5. **When parents use their inner Tools, they are able to model emotional intelligence and are more able to help their children have the same.** As parents or caretakers of children, it is our responsibility to use the Tools which provide a common language and a framework for this wholeness and goodness to thrive.

6. **As parents, we work to understand how our family of origin experience influences our feelings, thoughts, and reactions to our children's behaviors and needs.** I work to understand how I project my inner condition onto my outer circumstances and commit to learn how to work with these filters of past experiences. Understanding projection is essential.

7. **We do not have to be a perfect parent but simply a "good enough" parent.** Parenting is an evolutionary process and there are no short-cuts. We see the building of a family and the parenting process, with all of its inherent paradoxes, as an opportunity to practice and learn about parenting, commitment, and service.

8. **As parents we see the inevitability of conflict or opposing desires as an opportunity to build intimacy and develop our differentiation.** As parents we are committed to non-violence through self-control and self-discipline.

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