

Distress Tolerance Skills

East Islip Parent Training
May 31, 2023

Overview

- What is Stress and Distress Tolerance
- Relaxation Techniques
 - Cognitive/thoughts
 - Behavioral Techniques

The stress response

- **Stressor**-is a situation that the person experiences and is threatening in some way (e.g., academics, social stress, family discord, world events, trauma, significant life changes)
- The threat relies on one's ability to cope: our **distress tolerance**
 - How we interpret a stressor determines whether a stressor is + or – and/or the severity of the impact
- **Stress Response**-complex set of physiological changes that help us deal with the stressor (e.g., increased heart rate, increased adrenaline, tightening of muscles)

Distress Tolerance: What is it?

- The ability to manage emotional stress without feeling overwhelmed
- Allows a person to survive an immediate emotional crisis without making it worse
- Helps to cope with feelings when they don't know exactly what they want or need at that moment
- We can teach this!
 - We teach methods that induce the **relaxation response**: the process of effectively moving the mind/body from the stress response to the relaxation response

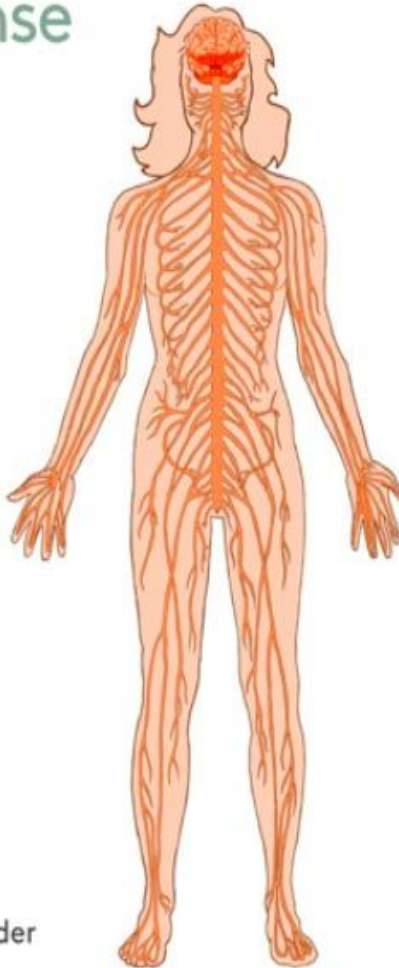
Relaxation Response

(Para-sympathetic)

↑ Oxytocin
Endorphins
Blood flow to uterus

↓ B.P.
Heart Rate
Muscle tension
Brainwaves

- Mental focus
- Full Attention
- The Zone
- Meditation
- Calm environment
- Warm / Hydrated / Empty bladder
- Rapport / Confidence



Fight or Flight

(Sympathetic)

↑ Adrenaline
Catecholamine
Blood flow to arms/legs

↑ B.P.
Heart Rate
Muscle tension
Brainwaves

- Fear
- Stress
- Intellect / Analysis
- Cold / Hungry / Full Bladder
- Disturbance
- Observation
- Changes

Benefit of the relaxation response:

- Decreased heart rate
- Decreased blood pressure
- Slowed breath rate
- Decreased need for oxygen
- Increased blood flow
- Reduced muscle tension
- Decreased incidence of headaches and muscle pain
- **Fewer emotional responses:** anger, crying, anxiety, apprehension, frustration
- Improved concentration
- **Better able to handle problems**

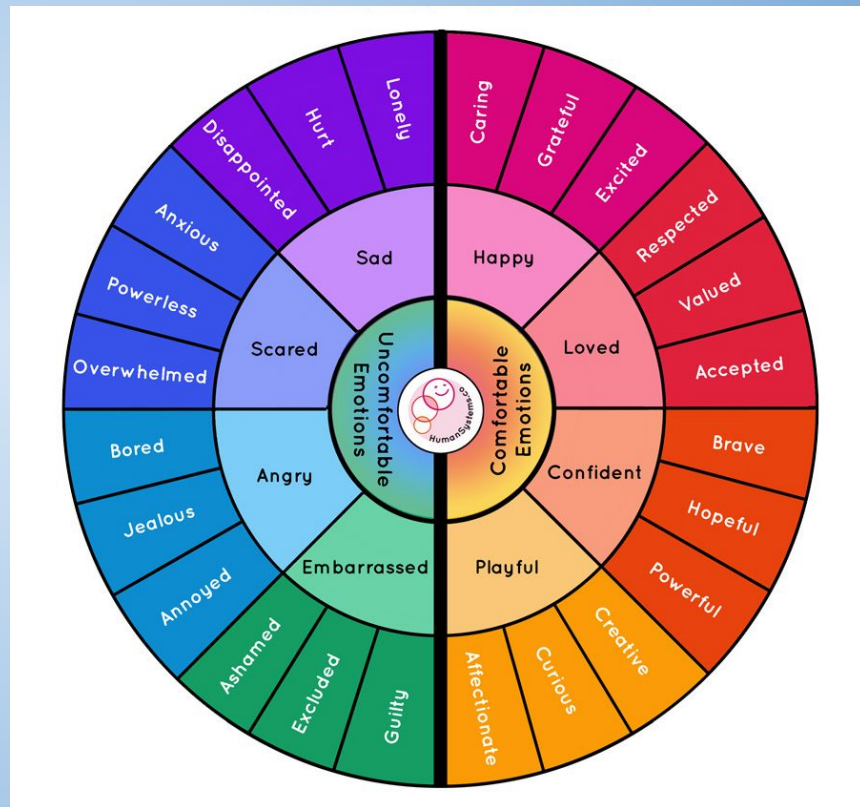
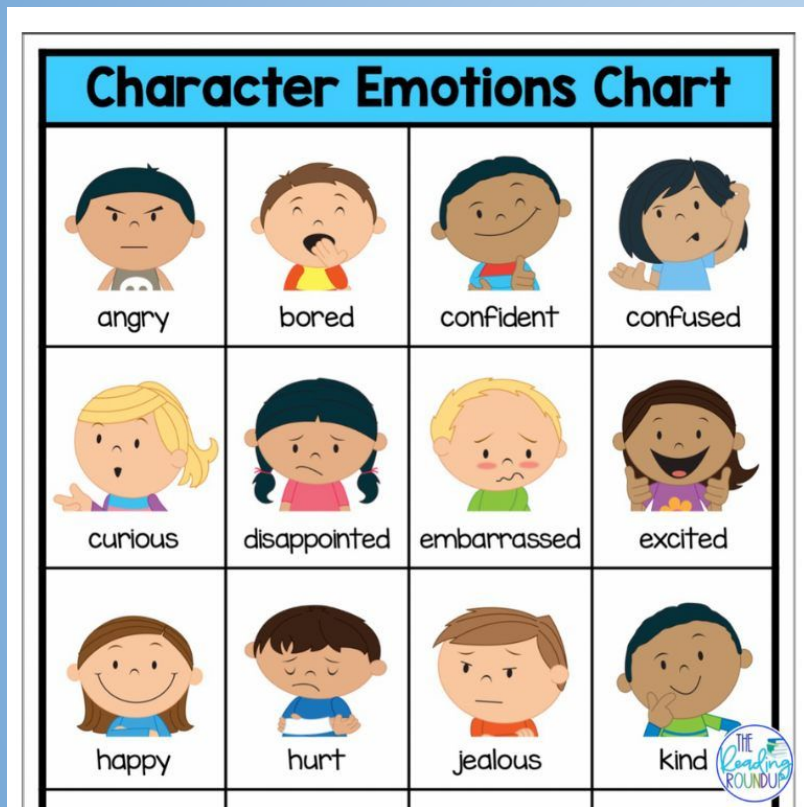


Tips for using relaxation techniques

- Keep an open mind!
- Try each method several times
- Not all methods work for every person - experiment to see what works best
- Practice daily for a minimum of 10 minutes
- Incorporate visuals
- Model how and when to use the techniques
- Reinforce the use of relaxation techniques

Cognitive/Thought Techniques

Teach the ability to recognize emotions



Grounding: Being in the present moment

- Our brains can only think about 1 thing at 1 time
- Use your senses to focus on **here** and **now**
- This allows us to get out of ruminating, thinking about the past, or the future
- Can practice this also with food to really slow the brain down

5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 GROUNDING EXERCISE



5

Things you can
SEE



4

Things you can
FEEL



3

Things you can
HEAR



2

Things you can
SMELL



1

Things you can
TASTE

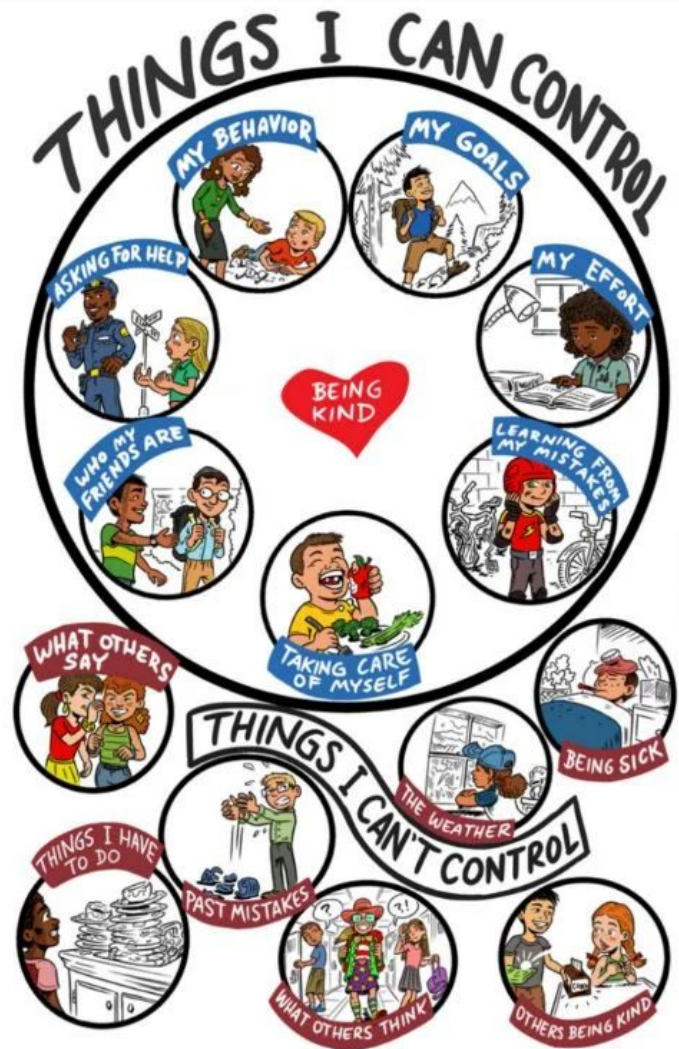
An objective perspective

- Trying to remove oneself from the situation and see things objectively
- Practice learning the difference between facts and opinions
 - Opinions are associated with stronger emotions
- Regularly practice describing the facts, rather than opinions



Acceptance

- Building awareness of what a child has control of, or does not have control over
- Accepting the things that you don't have control over
- Coping thought:
 - "It is what it is"
 - "I am in control of me"
 - "Right now I have feelings I don't like. They will be over soon."
 - "This won't last forever"
 - "I'm stronger than I think"
 - "Thoughts are just thoughts. They aren't always true"
 - "Keep calm and carry on"



Behavioral Techniques

Create a Go-To Calming Location

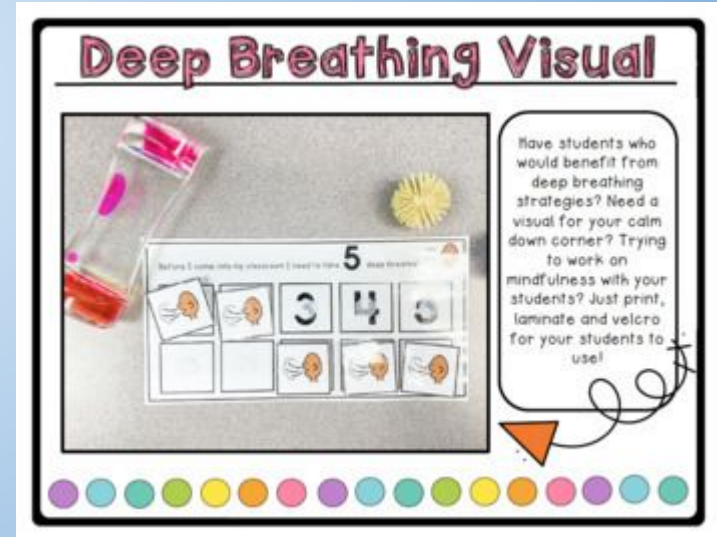
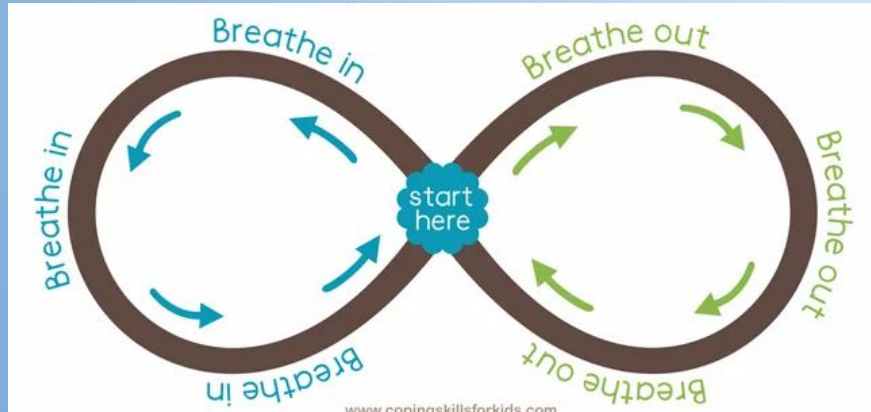
Taking a break can be an effective relaxation technique.

Create a designated place for this with visuals of calming strategies.



Deep Breathing

- Activates the parasympathetic nervous system: decreasing stress when you engage in abdominal/diaphragmatic breath
- Can also pair a mantra with each breathe:
 - Breathing in, I grow calm
 - Breathing out, I smile



DEEP BREATHS



COUNSELOR Kent

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

When we are angry, upset, or frustrated, our body tightens. Practicing tensing and relaxing your muscles teaches you to relax your muscles, soothing the body.



Tipping the Temperature

- Temperature: changing the temperature to cooling activates the dive reflex, a physiological response which lowers your heart rate to help calm you.

Put your face in a bowl of cold water for 30 seconds



Hold ice/ice pack under your eyes for 30 seconds



Exercise

Intense exercise can reduce some stress that is being experienced.

- Running in place
- Jumping jacks
- Push ups
- Intense dancing

Or, activities such as yoga pair movement with deep breathing



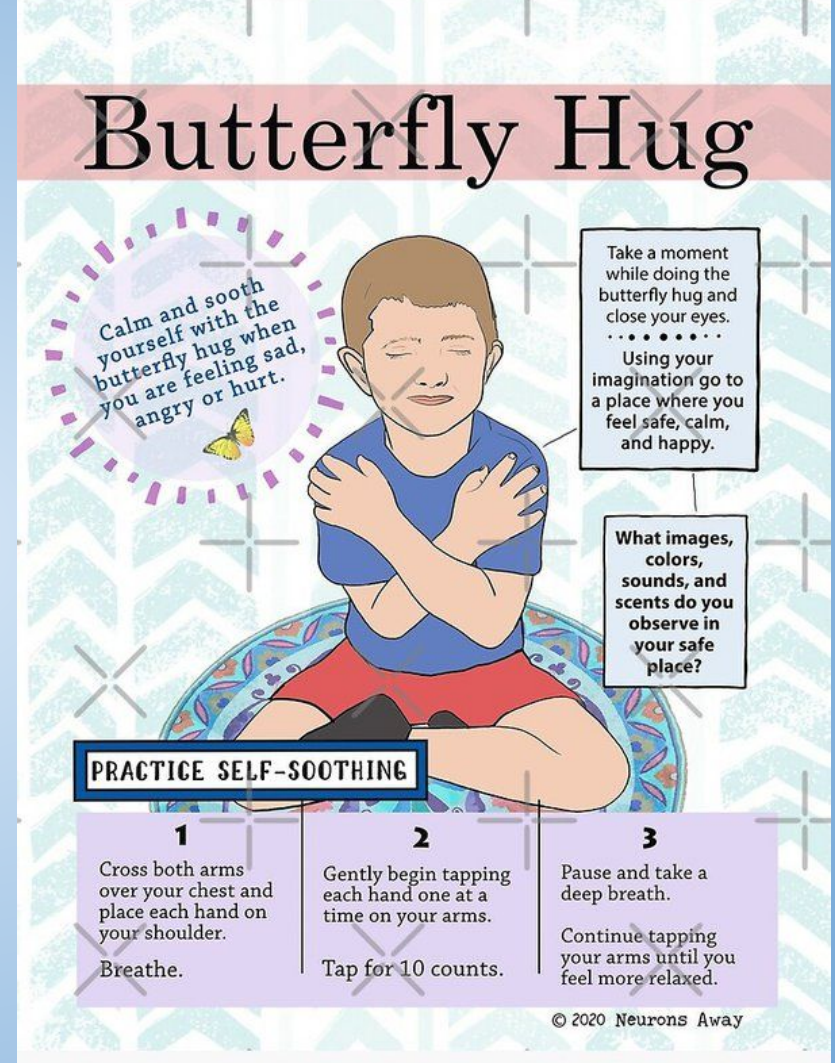
Use Imagery to Create a Mental Vacation

- Have a “60 second vacation” location in mind
- Use all senses to imagine you are in your location of relaxation
 - I see...
 - Hear...
 - Smell...
 - Touch...
 - Taste...



Sensory Input

- Face massage
- Deep pressure
- Butterfly Hugs
- Can incorporate other preferred sensory (i.e., lavender lotion)
- Fidgets
- Glitter Jars



Distraction

When all else fails, simply distracting the child can work.

Use humor, engage in a preferred task, or something that is highly distracting. Use distraction for a short period of time, and then shift back towards emotion regulation skills once emotions have de-escalated.

