

# THE COPING MENU: EVERYDAY SELF-REGULATION FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS

**How to use this menu:** When a teenager's nervous system is overwhelmed, they cannot process logic or lectures. The goal isn't to fix the problem immediately, but to help them regulate their emotions so you can communicate effectively. Work with your teen to pick a few "go-to" items from this menu before a stressful moment hits. As a fellow parent navigating the highs and lows alongside our Socorro students, I know how easily their stress can become our stress. Remember: your calm presence is the most powerful tool in the room.

---

## ● Quick Resets (The "Appetizers")

*Fast, accessible strategies for immediate grounding when anxiety spikes or a meltdown is brewing.*

- **The 5-4-3-2-1 Method:** Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.
- **Cold Water Splash:** Splashing cold water on the face or holding an ice cube triggers the mammalian dive reflex, instantly slowing down a racing heart rate.
- **Box Breathing:** Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4. Repeat four times.
- **Bilateral Movement:** Tapping alternating knees, walking, or tossing a ball back and forth offloads nervous energy and helps the brain process stress.

## ● Deep Regulation (The "Main Courses")

*Activities that require 15-30 minutes to help the body fully transition out of "fight or flight" mode.*

- **Heavy Work/Physical Exertion:** Doing push-ups, running, sweeping the garage, or engaging in a tough workout to physically process the buildup of adrenaline.
- **The "Brain Dump":** Writing down every single worry, frustration, or task on a piece of paper for 10 straight minutes, without worrying about spelling or making sense.
- **Creative Focus:** Engaging in a structured, low-stakes task that requires focus but not academic brainpower—like drawing, building something, or organizing a physical space.
- **Change of Scenery:** Physically leaving the room where the stress started. Stepping outside for 15 minutes of fresh air and sunlight to reset the environment.

## ● Co-Regulation (The "Sides to Share")

*Strategies that require you, the parent, to help anchor them.*

- **The "Side-by-Side" Conversation:** Teens often open up more when you aren't making direct eye contact. Go for a drive, walk the dog together, or cook side-by-side to lower their conversational defenses.
- **Silent Support:** Sometimes sitting in the same room, reading a book or doing a quiet task while they decompress, provides comfort without the pressure of having to talk.
- **The Validation Check:** Asking, "Do you want me to help you solve this, or do you just need to vent right now?" ● **Daily Maintenance (The "Desserts")** *Proactive habits that build long-term resilience and emotional health.*
- **Tech-Free Buffers:** Establishing a solid 30 minutes of no screens right before bed to improve sleep quality—the foundation of all emotional regulation.
- **Protecting the "White Space":** Ensuring there is unstructured downtime in their week where they don't have to produce, perform, or be evaluated by anyone.

---

### A Note for Parents: The "Pause"

If an interaction is escalating into a fight, you have the right to hit pause. **Try saying:** "I care about you, and this is important. I'm getting too frustrated to be helpful right now. I'm going to take 15 minutes to cool down, and then we will try again." Modeling how to step away gracefully is one of the best self-regulation skills you can teach them.