



I can Cope!

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A Self-Exploration Workbook to Help Children
Develop Healthy and Effective Coping Skills

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I Can Cope!

A Self-Exploration Workbook to Help Children Develop Healthy and Effective Coping Skills

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Contents

Introduction: Counselor/Therapist Preparation.....	6
Overview	6
Emotional Coping Skills	6
Cognitive Coping Skills	7
Behavioral Coping Skills.....	8
Communication Coping Skills	8
Coping Skills Stumpers	9
Putting It All Together	9
Follow-Up Session.....	9
Using the Workbook.....	10
Getting Started	10
ASCA Standards for <i>I Can Cope!</i>.....	11
Pre- and Post-Workbook Inventory.....	12
<i>I Can Cope!</i> Chapters 1-8.....	13
Chapter 1: Explanation of Coping Skills.....	14
Chapter 2: Feeling Coping Skills.....	16
Chapter 3: Thinking Coping Skills.....	21
Chapter 4: Doing Coping Skills.....	23
Chapter 5: Talking Coping Skills	25
Chapter 6: Coping Skills Stumpers	27
Chapter 7: Putting the Coping Skills Together.....	29
Chapter 8: Follow-Up Sessions	31
Reproducible Student Workbook	33
About the Author	87
Using the CD.....	88



Introduction

COUNSELOR/THERAPIST PREPARATION

Overview:

Dealing with disappointments, frustrations, and challenges can be an everyday occurrence for most children, just as it is for adults. Children need to be equipped with tools that will help them effectively deal with their environment and the relationships within it. These tools—coping skills—help maintain emotional equilibrium. Coping skills are used to keep strong, intense, or fearful emotions in check by neutralizing whatever event, person, or thought is responsible for triggering those emotions. One can actively and consciously choose which skills are used, or passively and unconsciously rely on unassessed response patterns. How carefully and thoughtfully these responses are selected determines whether coping skills are effective or ineffective.

Many best-selling books have been written, and continue to be written, about resiliency as it relates to children. Research on resiliency in children has demonstrated that two key aspects of resiliency are the ability to problem-solve and the possession of strategies that enable one to cope with his or her life situations.

I Can Cope! is a self-exploration book that teaches therapists how to help children accomplish these two key aspects. Children will learn that effective, resilient coping comes from being consciously and actively connected to one's emotional, cognitive, behavioral and communicative processes. They will learn that healthy coping means:

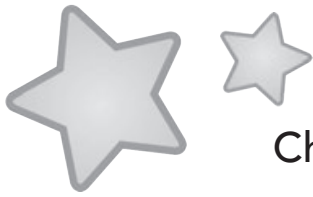
- Believing that one has options for dealing with life's circumstances.
- Developing accessible strategies to balance one's need for equilibrium.
- Taking responsibility for the status of one's environment.
- Having a process to critically and independently assess the effectiveness of chosen coping choices in order to augment one's repertoire of coping skills.

The program includes eight chapters. An explanation of the chapters follows.

Emotional Coping Skills:

Counselors/therapists can help children be in touch with their emotional skills by encouraging them to examine their answers to the following questions:

- Have I ever pretended to have a feeling that I didn't really have down deep inside?
- What was the feeling I pretended to have?



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Chapter 1: Explanation of Coping Skills

Overview:

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to introduce children to the concept of coping skills. This is accomplished in a non-threatening way by helping them understand that everyone has problems that need solutions. This inclusive approach helps children feel less defensive about discussing problems with which they may be dealing. Several different types of problems—school, family, peers, self—are suggested as areas in which solutions may be needed. Further, coping is presented and defined as a way to find solutions to these problems.

The concept of coping as a choice is addressed, encouraging the children to take responsibility in determining solutions for these problems. This “responsibility” promotes self-efficacy, a major factor in the development of positive self-esteem, as well as effective coping skills. The temptation to have others solve problems for them or to have others change what they are thinking, feeling, saying, or doing so the child will feel better is addressed and identified as ineffective coping. The chapter encourages children to focus on changing their own patterns of thinking, feeling, saying, and doing, in order to build their own repertoire of coping skills.

Finally, this chapter has children identify specific problems for which they are seeking solutions. The counselor/therapist may want to review the completed teacher and/or parents’ *Signs of Ineffective or Poor Coping Skills* (page 12) in order to help “guide” the children toward revealing problems they are experiencing.

Materials Needed:

For the facilitator:
None

For each child:

- Copy of *I Can Cope* workbook (cover and pages 1-8 or CD)
- Pencil
- Folder or 3-ring binder, to keep track of the child’s completed workbook pages

Pre-Lesson Preparation:

Reproduce/print the cover and workbook pages 1-8 for each child. Gather any other necessary materials.

Lesson:

Introduce the purpose of the lesson by explaining that:

Everyone has problems, and therefore, everyone needs effective ways to solve or deal with these problems

Problems can arise in any area of a person's life, such as home, school, or even within ourselves

There are ways to find solutions to problems that will allow children to feel good about themselves. These ways are called *coping*.

Invite the children to begin using the workbook. Distribute the workbook cover, pages 1-8, and a pencil to each child. Have each child write his or her name in the rectangle on the cover.

PAGES 1-4: Read aloud or have the children read workbook pages 1-4.

PAGE 5: Use page 5 as a jumping off point. Discuss with the children the importance of seeing coping as a choice. It is important to engage the children at this point. Most children enjoy the concepts of having choices and being responsible, therefore coping is presented in that manner.

PAGES 6-7: Use pages 6 and 7 to expand on the concept of children taking control and responsibility for developing their own effective coping skills. Discuss how many of us, even adults, sometimes feel overwhelmed with a problem. And we would like someone to solve it for us. Discuss with the children that resolving our own problems is rarely accomplished by expecting others to change what they are thinking, feeling, saying, or doing. Use examples of someone expecting another person to change so the problem goes away. Help the children understand that taking control of their own thoughts, feelings, actions, and the way they communicate is the effective way to cope.

PAGE 8: Have the children complete page 8. Encourage them to consider all areas of their lives (school, home, peers, self). Ask open-ended questions to stimulate their thinking process. You may want to use the information received in their *Signs of Ineffective or Poor Coping in Children* to guide the children in making their lists.

Advise the children that they will be spending time with you completing worksheets that will help them learn how to find positive ways to cope with their problems. Be encouraging by saying that you have confidence they can take control of their choices, be responsible, and find ways to cope.

Give each child a 3-ring binder or folder in which to place the completed workbook papers. If desired, collect the binders/folders.



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Chapter 3: Thinking Coping Skills

Overview:

Chapter 3 continues the development of coping skills through a process of reframing. Reframing is the ability to change how one thinks about one's circumstances followed up with putting those positive, accurate perspective changes into problem resolution. Reframing should not be confused with rationalization, which is a process of excusing, blaming, and finding unrealistic fault in others as rationale for why a problem is unsolvable. Reframing is self-empowering, rationalizing is self-defeating.

The primary goal of this chapter is to help children gain a realistic perspective of themselves as capable of, and empowered to, finding solutions to their problems. Rather than seeing themselves as weak and at the whim of problems in their lives, this chapter stresses that how they *think* about themselves, as well as how they *think* about their problems, can be determinants in whether they are successful in coping with the stressors in their lives.

These are big concepts for children to learn. However, presented in this basic way, children can be taught to challenge defeatist perceptions about themselves and about their capacity to solve their problems. Learning a process of challenging negative beliefs now, will serve them in future, more mature, coping-skills development.

With the help of the counselor/therapist, children are asked to consider their current thinking about themselves and their problems and determine which thoughts are helpful for dealing with problems and which are *roadblocks*, or negative, sabotaging, thoughts. Guiding children to focus on the helpful *Thinking Coping Skills* contributes to the growth of a repertoire of coping skills.

Note: There are situations in which children cannot, and should not, be expected to cope on their own. This chapter is not intended to imply, or to teach children, that they should be self-reliant in every circumstance. A future chapter (Chapter 6, Coping Skills Stumpers) addresses with children situations that require the recruitment of others to assist in finding solutions.

Materials Needed:

For the facilitator:

None

For each child:

- Copy of *I Can Cope* workbook (pages 17-23 and 47 or CD)
- Pencil
- Crayons
- Child's folder or 3-ring binder



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Chapter 7: Putting the Coping Skills Together

Overview:

The goals of this final chapter are threefold:

1. To work on solving a specific problem identified by the children
2. To help the children gain an understanding of the importance of having more than one coping skill accessible to them
3. To set the stage for the children to continue to use this deliberately considered coping process for future problems

Having the children select the problem on which to work helps them recognize the personal benefits to be gained from applying this process. It engages them at a personal level, which motivates understanding of how they can be active and equipped participants in solving problems with which they are confronted. It also allows the counselor/therapist an inside view into how children may be coping. (See Chapter 6 for suggestions on handling coping situations that may be overwhelming or dangerous to the children.)

Combining all four of the coping skills to address the problem brought forth by the children will assist them in seeing that coping is not a single solution process. Using, or over-using, one coping strategy will quickly fail when applied to all stressors one meets in life. Applying all four categories of coping to one problem compels the children to see the need for a collection of ways to manage dilemmas they encounter.

Finally, talking with the children regarding how they feel they have benefited from this program will encourage them to feel good about the work they have done and inspire them to utilize this process in the future. A *Finding Helpful Coping Skills* worksheet is supplied in the workbook (pages 50-51). It can be given to the children for individual use or used in follow up sessions with the counselor/therapist.

Materials Needed:

For the facilitator:

None

For each child:

- Copy of *I Can Cope* workbook (pages 42-44 or CD)
- Pencil
- Crayons
- Optional: Copy of *Finding Helpful Coping Skills* (workbook pages 50-51 or CD)
- Child's folder or 3-ring binder

THE FOLLOWING SAMPLES
ARE REPRODUCIBLE/PRINTABLE PAGES
INCLUDED ON THE CD-ROM

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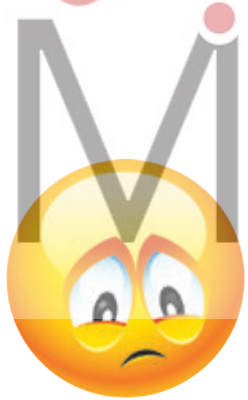
Cover

There are ways to help yourself feel better
when you have a bad day.
You can have solutions for dealing with your problems.

Finding solutions to problems is called

COPING.

Coping means that you have ways
to get your day back on track when
something happens to make you feel



angry,

sad,

scared,

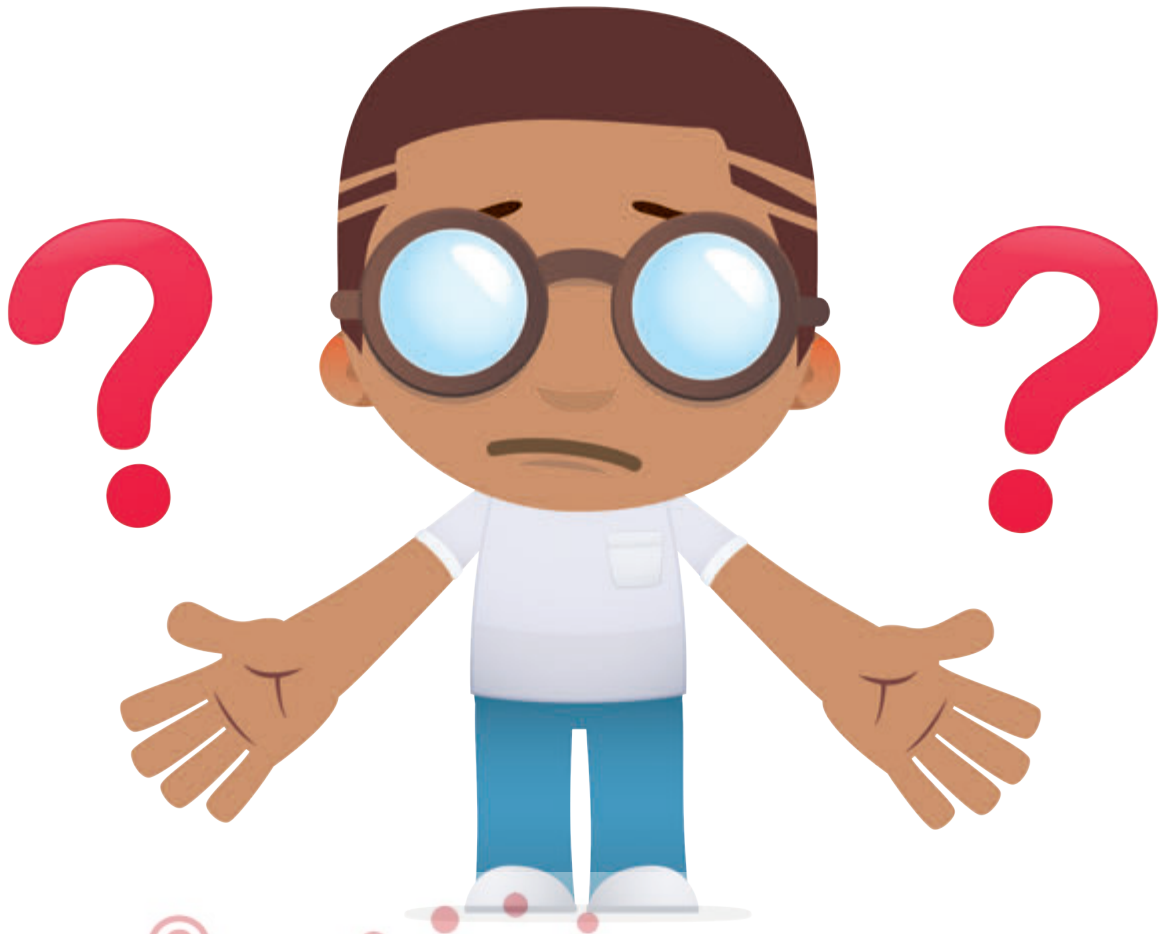


or



confused.





© **Sometimes, making a decision to cope can be hard.**

You may feel like you want other people to solve your problems for you.

You may want them to give you the answers to your problems.

Or, you may want them to change what they are doing, thinking, saying or feeling so that your problem goes away.

You can't change what other people do, think, say, or feel.

You can only change what **you** do, think, say, and feel.



And when you change what you do, think, say, and feel, you are building coping skills.

Coping skills help keep **you** in control of **you**.

By being in control of yourself, you can find solutions for your problems that really work.

Sometimes, you may only show one feeling to yourself and others.

You may feel **sad**,
and only show that you are **angry**.



You may feel **afraid**,
and only show that you are **angry**.

When you use only one feeling,
people believe that you only have one feeling.

THINKING COPING SKILLS

Thinking Coping Skills
are the things you say to
yourself that help you believe
you can solve your problem.



Thinking Coping Skills
help you believe
that you are stronger
than your problem.
They give you courage
and determination to find
a solution to your problem.

When you use your Thinking Coping Skills
to change what you believe,
you can make yourself feel better
and solve your problems.

Answer these questions to see what roadblocks you might have:

What do I believe about myself?

1. I believe I am _____
_____.
2. I believe I can _____
_____.
3. I believe I am not _____
_____.
4. I believe I can not _____
_____.
5. What do I believe about my problems?

6. Does my way of thinking about myself help me or hurt me in dealing with my problems?

7. Do I believe that I have the power to solve my problems?

Be aware of when your thinking starts putting up roadblocks.



**Get ready to
knock them down!**



PUTTING THE COPING SKILLS TOGETHER

Now that you have practiced with each separate kind of coping skill, try using your



**Feeling,
Thinking,
Doing**

and

Talking Coping Skills

together.

Remember these questions:

Can I begin to cope with my problem by being honest with myself and others about how I am really feeling?

Can I cope with my problem by changing how I am thinking about myself or the problem?

Can I cope with my problem by changing what I am doing?

Can I cope with my problem by changing how I am talking so that others better understand me and my problem?

Using the **Feeling, Doing, Thinking,** and **Talking Coping Skills** together can help you find more than one solution to your problem.