

COPING SKILLS
— FOR KIDS™ —
WORKBOOK

*Over 75 Coping Strategies
to Help Kids Deal with Stress,
Anxiety and Anger*

By Janine Halloran, MA, LMHC

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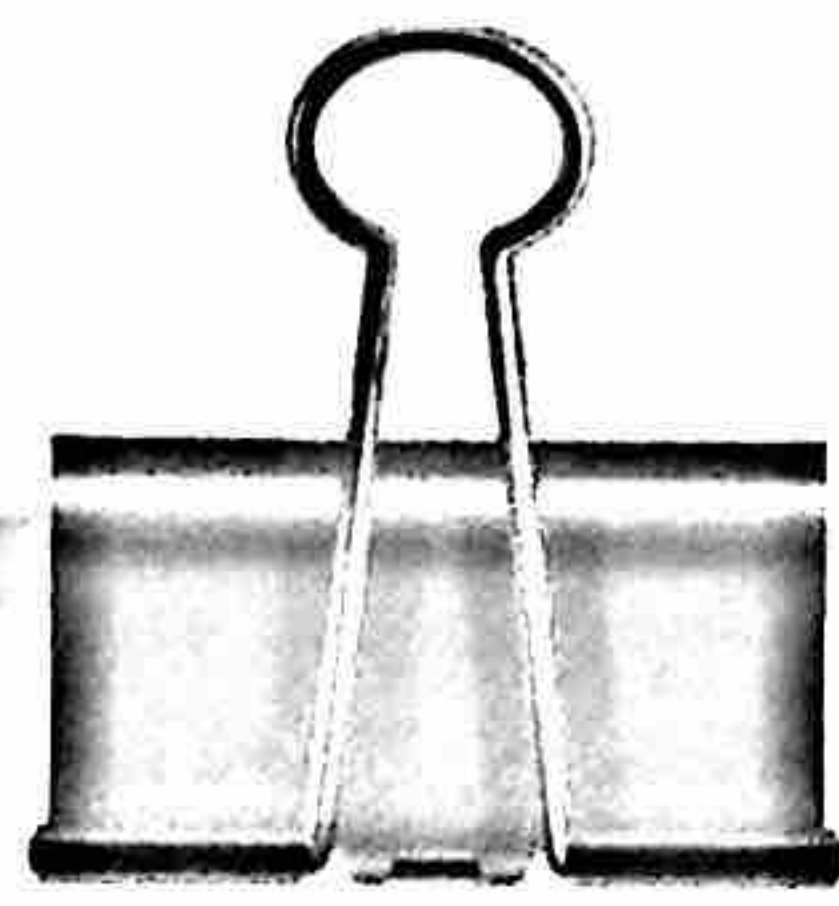
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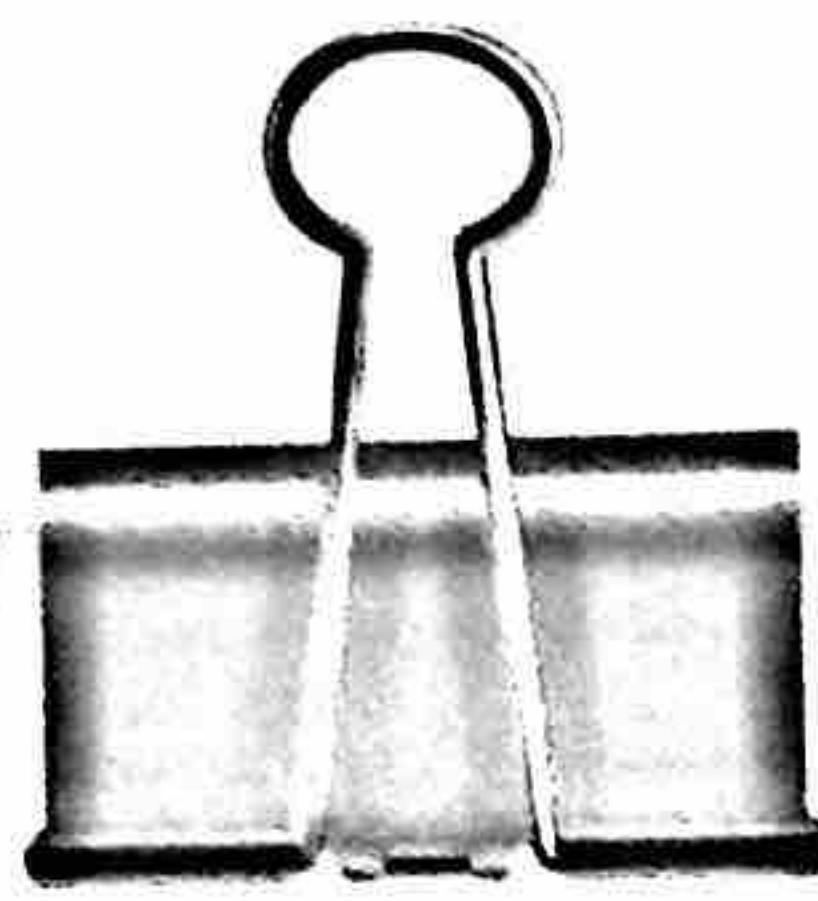
A NOTE TO PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH KIDS

I'm Janine Halloran, and I'm a Licensed Mental Health Counselor who has been working with children and adolescents for over 15 years. Professionally, I've worked in a variety of settings, including substantially separate classrooms, typical school settings, social group settings, and community mental health centers. I'm also a mother of two, a boy and a girl, who are both in elementary school.

Throughout my professional career, I've had a desire to teach kids healthy ways to cope. When I was working as an elementary school counselor, my principal once asked me what goal I wanted to focus on for the year. I knew that a lot of the students in my school were stressed, anxious or angry. They didn't always have the words to express what they were feeling. Some of them stuffed it down inside until they exploded, or acted out by hitting or kicking or biting. They didn't always know what they could do to process and manage these big feelings. At the same time, I knew they could learn coping skills to deal with their feelings in safe and healthy ways. I told him that I wanted the focus for all kids in the school to be on developing their coping skills.

I knew that learning healthy ways to deal with anger, stress, frustration, worry, etc. would serve them well in both the short term and on their journey to becoming well-adjusted adults. Learning how to cope with big, difficult feelings in elementary school helps children grow into teens and adults who can cope with life's stressors in healthy and productive ways.

I've seen children's coping skills improve in just a few sessions. I've had clients who just needed to clarify what skills they already had and then identify a few more they'd like to add. Once they had their list of skills, they were able to more easily deal with their emotions.

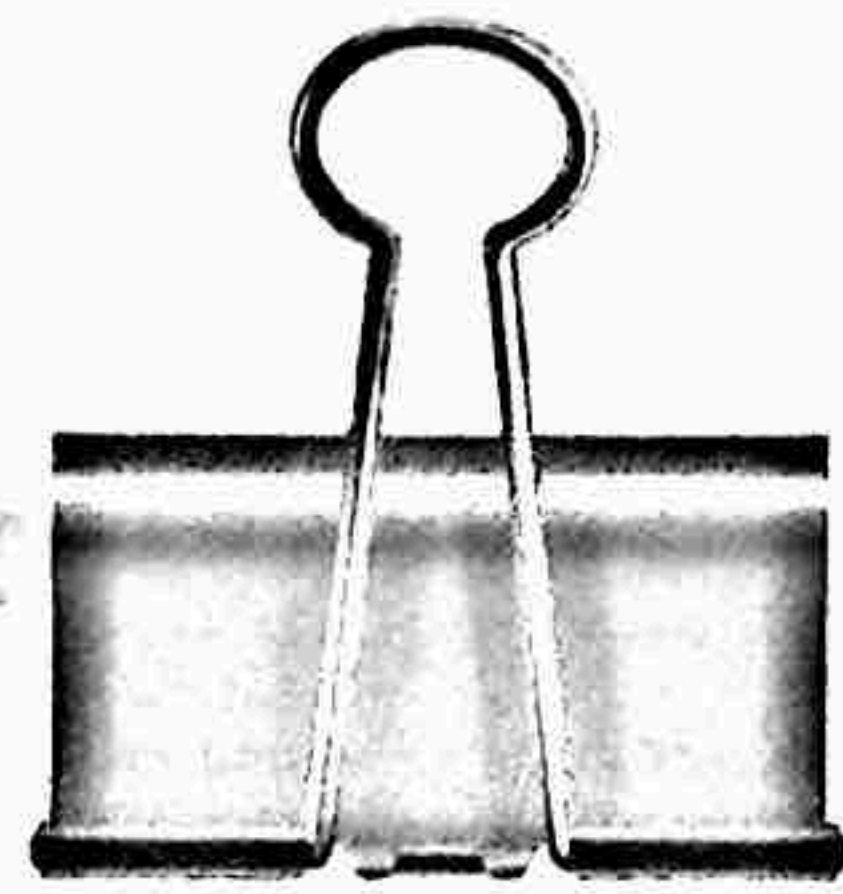


I've also seen coping skills improve over longer lengths of time. There's a client I've been working with for a few years who has struggled with anxiety. When she first started seeing me, lots of things made her anxious. She was anxious about friendships, about school and about being apart from her mom. She now has a long list of coping skills to choose from. Which coping skill she chooses depends on what is going on at the moment for her – what works in that moment changes depending on whether her stress and anxiety is about school work, about friends or about her family. It's been incredible to see the growth in her ability to cope with anxiety and stress.

While this has always been a focused goal of mine whenever I work with children as a therapist, I also have worked with my own children to help them manage their big feelings in a safe way. When my son was in kindergarten, he struggled significantly. He was awesome at school, but at home he was having a really challenging time keeping his body safe. He was dealing with a lot of anger and it was having a significant impact on our family.

My husband and I worked as a team to help our son develop healthy coping skills to deal with his big feelings. Every day wasn't perfect, but, over time, we were able to get him to a better place where he can express his feelings and understand that it's okay to be mad, frustrated, worried or scared. Now he knows some strategies he can use to help with those big feelings.

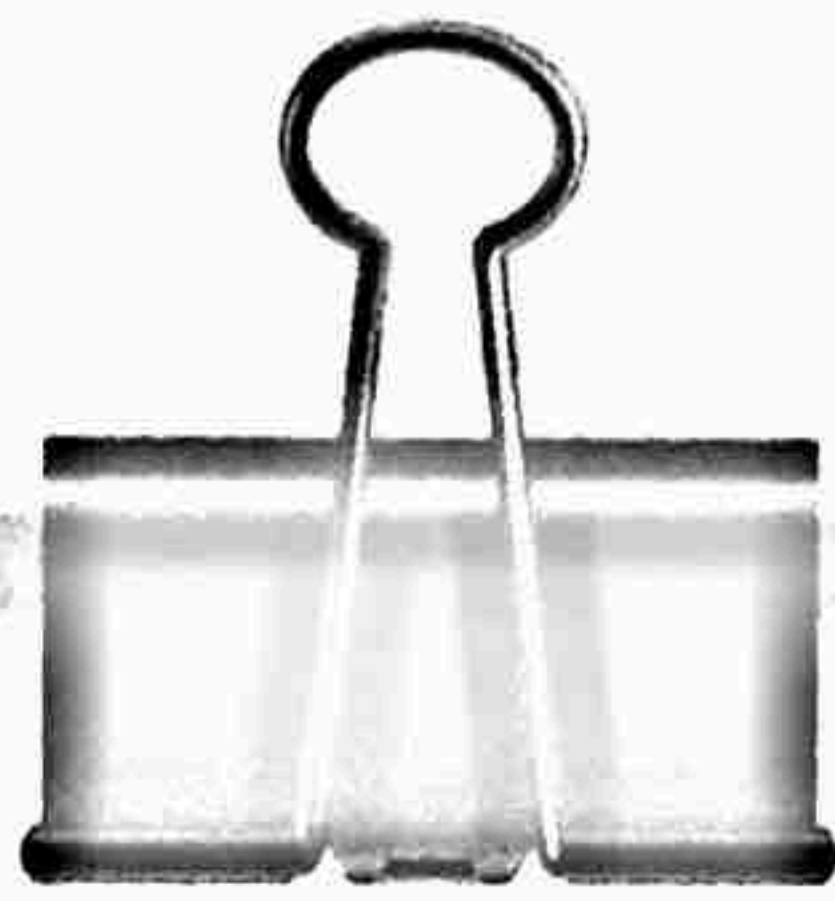
Throughout the years, I've created some resources that I use in my work with kids to help teach them how to cope with big feelings. It is such a passion of mine that I founded a whole business based on this goal. I founded Coping Skills for Kids (copingskillsforkids.com) with the goal of helping kids learn how to deal with tough feelings, like anxiety, stress and anger, in healthy ways.



This book is a collection of the most useful and effective ideas and activities I've used in practice (and as a mom) to help children learn and practice coping skills. You don't have to start at the beginning and go through every single coping skill in order. Using the **Coping Skills Checklist** as a frame of reference, figure out the coping skills your client already has, then start to identify potential new coping skills. As you get to know your clients, you'll get a sense for what will and won't work for them. But I always say, try everything once, just to see. You never know which kids will respond to what coping skill. I've seen some tough angry kids love yoga and art, and some anxious little ones just love getting their emotions out by punching a punching bag.

While this book has a lot of ideas, I've also found other great resources to help kids deal with feelings. In the back of this book are several that are great for parents, children and professionals. I always like to have a well-rounded collection of products and resources to use with children. What works for some kids may not work for others, so it's good to have a toolkit for every situation.

I also know you have wonderful ideas that you've found helpful in your work for kids. I'd love to hear from you. If there are coping skills that you've found helpful, feel free to email me at info@copingskillsforkids.com. I'd love to add them to the resources I have available. Let's all help each other!



A NOTE TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

This book is designed to be a support to help your child figure out different ways to learn to cope with stress, anxiety and anger. You can work through this book with your child, or your child can read it on his or her own.

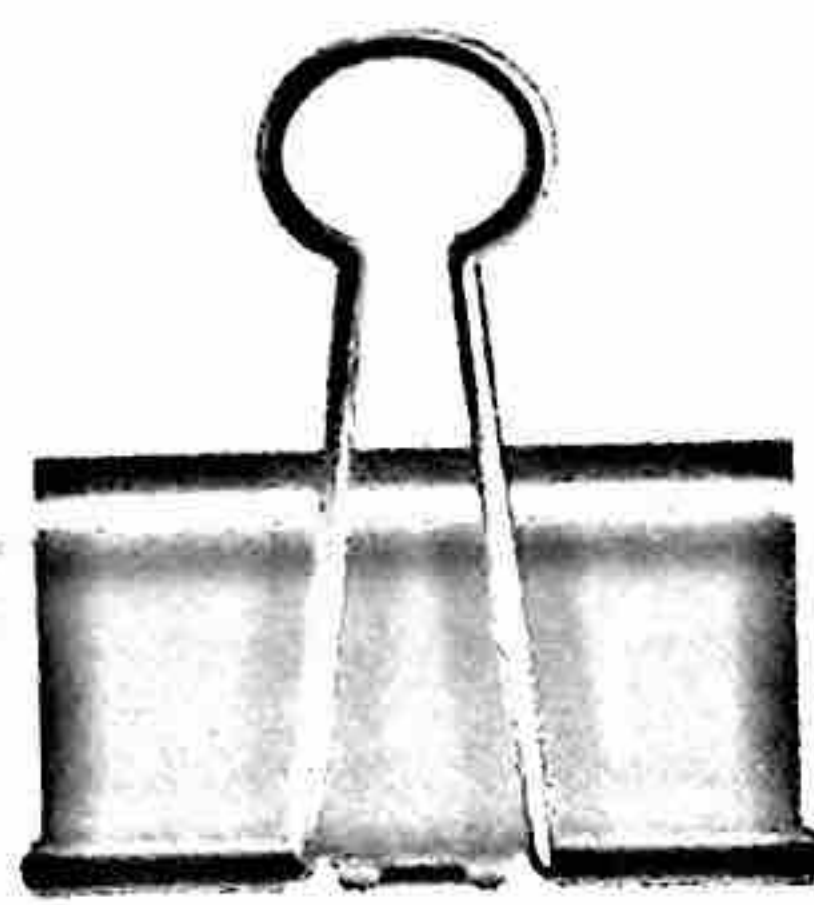
When kids read this book on their own, they may find some of these exercises a little challenging. If they get stuck, encourage them to seek help from a trusted adult when they need it. This may be you or someone else who lives in your home. It may also be another family member. Or it may be a therapist or school counselor.

Note: Some of the coping skills in the book include doing activities that need adult supervision.

While I am a licensed therapist with years of experience working with children and adolescents, this book is not meant to be a replacement for seeking face-to-face therapy for your child.

If you've noticed the following symptoms with your child, then it's time to reach out for more help.

- Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks (e.g., crying regularly, feeling fatigued, feeling unmotivated).
- Trying to harm or kill oneself or making plans to do so.
- Out-of-control, risk-taking behaviors that can cause harm to self or others.
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart, physical discomfort, or fast breathing.
- Not eating, throwing up, significant weight loss or gain.



- Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships.
- Repeated use of drugs or alcohol.
- Drastic changes in behavior, personality or sleeping habits (e.g., waking up early and acting agitated).
- Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that can lead to failure in school.
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities like hanging out with friends or going to classes.

(National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.)

If you feel like your child needs more help, please seek support for them by finding a therapist. A few good places to start:

Your Pediatrician's Office: They may have therapists they recommend and refer patients to regularly.

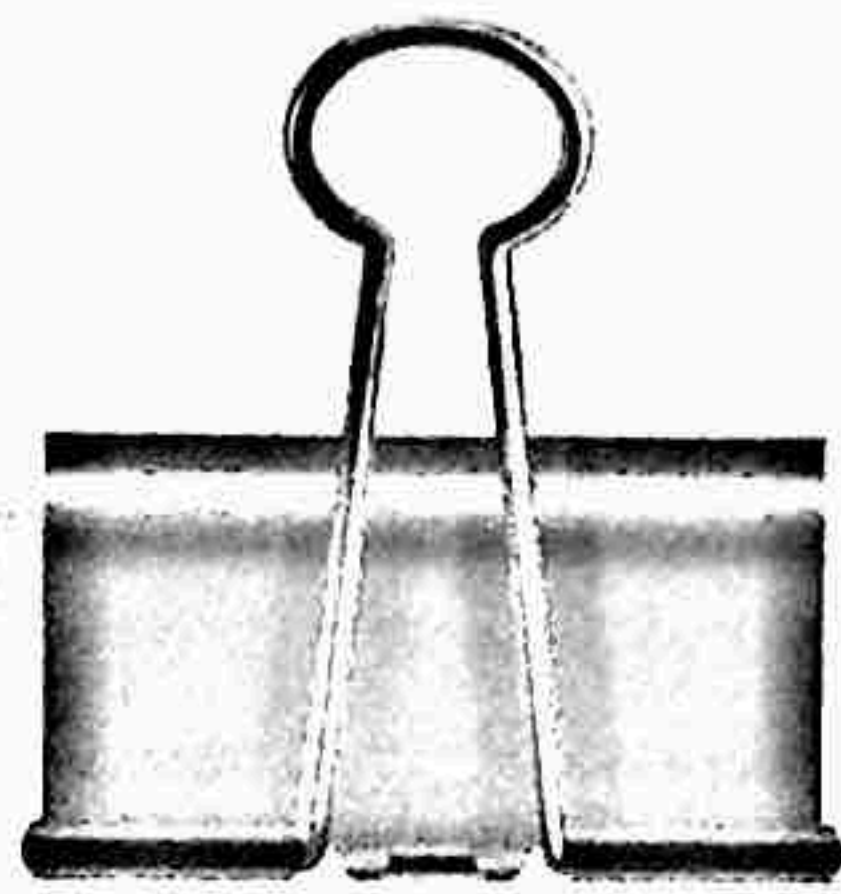
Your Child's School Counselor: They may have a list of therapists they know and recommend.

Your Insurance Provider's Website: You will know that you are already covered to see that therapist if you start on your own insurance provider's website.

PsychologyToday.com: You can search by zip code or by city, and get a list of all the licensed therapists in your area.

Another great way to get support is by talking with other families who are coping with similar issues. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has local chapters all over the nation and provides family-to-family support. Facebook groups are also a great place to get support. If there isn't one in your area, start one!

One of the best ways for you to help support your child is to learn about your own ways of coping, and teach them by example. You are your child's first teacher. Show them how you deal with the stressors you face, talk about it, and encourage them to practice with you.



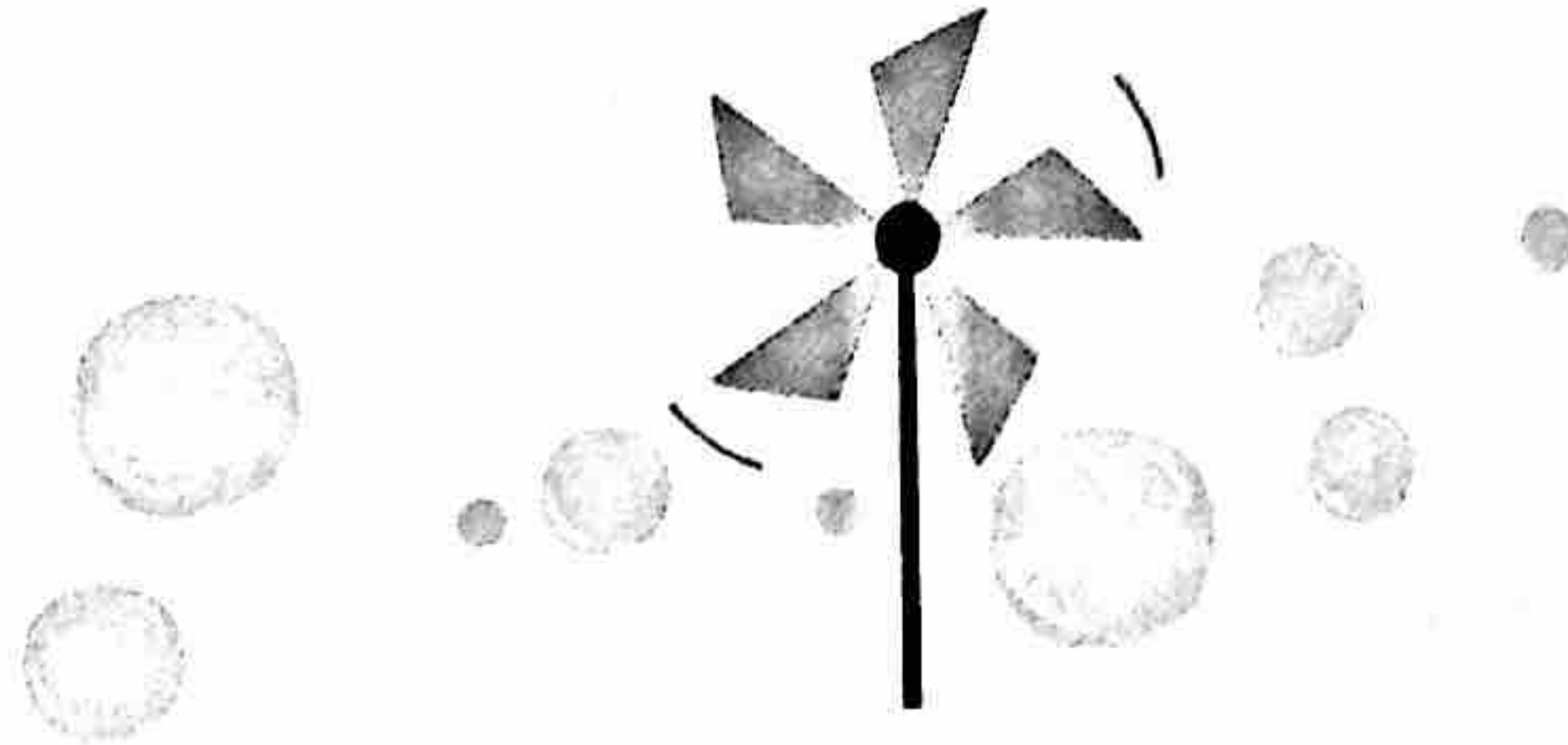
A NOTE TO KIDS

This book is meant to help you learn more about yourself. This book can help you figure out what you like to do and what relaxes you. It's also meant to help you learn more about your thoughts and feelings and what stresses you out.

By the time you finish reading this book, my hope is that you will have figured out different ways to cope with your stress, anxiety and anger.

There are just a few things I wanted to share with you before you start reading:

- You can read this book on your own or with a trusted adult.
- Some of these exercises *require* adult supervision. **Check with a parent/guardian or trusted adult** before starting any of the activities.
- Some of the printable worksheets can be challenging to do on your own. If you get stuck, you can do them with a trusted adult who knows you well. They'll be able to help you figure out your answers.
- **Don't break any of your family's rules when you use this book.** Always check with them first!



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Chances are, if you are reading this book, you want a little help learning how to cope with big feelings. Maybe you get stressed out and don't know what to do. Or you get angry and have a hard time expressing it in a safe way. Or you get really anxious at school or home. Or perhaps you can relate to what these kids are experiencing:

Aidan, a tired 7-year-old boy, just home from a busy day at school.

He's a little sleepy and a little hungry. He asked to play with blocks when he got home and his mom helped him get them out. Suddenly, he growls "argh!!!!" and a block tower goes tumbling to the ground. "It's not working!!" he says with tears in his eyes and frustration in his voice. A block bangs off the wall, thrown by this frustrated little guy.

Julia, an 8-year-old girl, is anxious about her science test.

She thinks she's going to fail. She worries that her parents will be disappointed in her and she'll lose her privileges of playing with friends and screen time. She studies and studies, but as soon as the test is in front of her, her mind goes blank. Her palms sweat and her cheeks flush. "Why can't I remember?!" she thinks to herself.

Paul, a 10-year-old boy, whose parents are getting a divorce.

"Why did it have to change?" he wonders. "I hate changing houses. I always forget something!" He misses how it used to be. "What will happen to me?" His parents keep asking him to talk, but he doesn't want to.

Isabelle, an 11-year-old girl, worried about her sick grandma.

In the middle of her math class, her mind wanders to her grandma. She went to visit her this past weekend. She's concerned about her grandma's surgery. "I hope the surgery goes okay. I wonder when grandma will be home?"

Faced with stressful situations, these kids could use some coping skills! Everyone needs a good set of coping skills. But people don't always specifically focus on learning these skills. I'm here to let you know that **you can** and **you should**.

Everyone at one time or another experiences stress. Adults can get stressed about tons of stuff like work, money, family or the future. But did you know that kids can get stressed too? Kids can worry about schoolwork, family, friendships, the future, and sometimes kids worry about adult problems, like money.

Stress isn't always bad. A little stress can help you stay alert, focus or study better for tests, but too much stress is harmful regardless of age. When you are experiencing too much stress, it impacts you in three ways: your emotions, your thoughts, and your behaviors.

Too much stress has an impact on your **emotions**. You may feel sad, anxious, restless, angry or a mix of different emotions. Sometimes it's hard to identify what you are feeling, and sometimes it's hard to feel those feelings without getting overwhelmed or shutting down.

Too much stress can impact your **thoughts**. You can have a hard time looking for the positives or problem-solving when you are having a stressful time. It can be hard to focus your mind and pay attention in class to learn new things.

Too much stress can affect your **behavior**. If you are feeling angry, you may punch a wall, or worse yet, another person! You might not feel like eating, or you may have a hard time sleeping, or you might not want to leave your room and refuse to go to school.

I've seen the trouble people have when they don't have healthy coping skills, and the positive things that happen when they learn to replace their negative coping skills with more positive ones. Learning things now as a young person will help you as you get older and become an adult. If you are a kid who has good coping skills, you will likely grow into an adult with good coping skills. When you have good coping skills, you can:

- Pay attention in school and learn
- Get along better with others
- Manage your emotions in a safe and healthy way (something called self-regulation)
- Make connections with other people
- Start and maintain positive friendships

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

This book is divided into four categories:

Calming Coping Skills - designed to help you relax.

Distracting Coping Skills - designed to distract you and keep your attention when you might otherwise be focused on a certain stressor.

Physical Coping Skills - designed to help you rebalance your energy, either to energize you or to help you manage your excess energy in your body.

Processing Coping Skills - designed to help you work through thoughts and feelings you have about challenging situations.

In each category, there are several skills to try. To get the most use out of this book, use the **Coping Skills Checklist** available later in the section as a way to keep track of what skills you already know work for you and which skills you want to try.

First, go through each section one at a time and:

- Check off the ones that work for you
- Cross off the ones that don't work for you
- Circle the ones you want to try

Only cross off those items that you have already tried and you **know** that you don't like. Don't automatically cross a coping skill off the list just because you *think* you won't like it. Instead, I challenge you to give it a try. And even if it doesn't work for you now, don't be afraid to go back to it later. What doesn't work at one time in your life may work at another point.

You'll notice, on the **Coping Skills Checklist**, there's room for you to add in your own. Think of this book as a starting point of creating a coping skills list. Figure out what works for you that is covered in this book, and then add in your own. The best place to start is by thinking about the hobbies and activities you enjoy right now and add those as ways to cope.

Here's something that people don't always think about when it comes to coping skills. Different types of coping skills will work at different times, in different places and for different stressors. When you're sad, you may want to lie down. And if you're at home, you can totally do that! But what if you're at school in the middle of social studies? I bet the teacher wouldn't like it if you just closed your book and put your head down on your desk.

You should also choose a coping skill that works to match the feeling you are experiencing. If you're angry, reading a book may not be the best option. Perhaps choosing to squeeze play dough would be better in that moment. Reading a book may help later when you want to distract yourself and you've calmed down a bit.

Use the **Rate Your Stress** worksheet as a way to track how you feel before and after you use a coping skill. This is a way to measure how much a skill helps you.

After working through this book, you can create your own individual list of coping skills that you can use any time you are experiencing stress. There's a worksheet in **Section 6: Putting it All Together**, that you can use for this, the **My Coping Skills** worksheet.

COPING SKILLS CHECKLIST

CALMING SKILLS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing with a pinwheel | <input type="checkbox"/> Remember the words to a song you love |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing with bubbles | <input type="checkbox"/> Run water over your hands |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing with prompts | <input type="checkbox"/> Carry a small object |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing with shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Touch things around you |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing with a stuffed animal | <input type="checkbox"/> Move |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing with a feather | <input type="checkbox"/> Make a fist then release it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing using your hand | <input type="checkbox"/> Progressive muscle relaxation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Explosion breaths | <input type="checkbox"/> Positive self-talk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hands to shoulders | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a shower or bath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hoberman Sphere | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a drink of water |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volcano breaths | <input type="checkbox"/> Counting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus on sounds | <input type="checkbox"/> Block out sounds with noise-cancelling headphones |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a mindful walk | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a break |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yoga | <input type="checkbox"/> Homemade lava lamp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imagine your favorite place | <input type="checkbox"/> Zen garden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have a mindful snack | <input type="checkbox"/> Calming jar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 54321 grounding technique | <input type="checkbox"/> Use your senses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding self-talk about the present | <input type="checkbox"/> Trace a pattern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Think of your favorite things | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea time or hot cocoa time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Picture the people you care about | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Say the alphabet slowly | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | |

DISTRACTION SKILLS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write a story | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative thinking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crossword/Sudoku/Word Find Puzzles | <input type="checkbox"/> Make up your own game |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bake or Cook | <input type="checkbox"/> Plan a fun event for the future |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer or do Community Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Start a new hobby or learn something new |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do a Random act of kindness | <input type="checkbox"/> Laughter is the best medicine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read a good book | <input type="checkbox"/> Your favorite things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean | <input type="checkbox"/> Sort/Organize something |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play with a pet | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend time in nature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play a board game | <input type="checkbox"/> Go to a museum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play video games | <input type="checkbox"/> Do a crafting project |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distraction by a screen | <input type="checkbox"/> Start a garden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play with a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | |

COPING SKILLS CHECKLIST

PHYSICAL SKILLS

- Squeeze something
- Use a stress ball
- Shred paper
- Use bubble wrap
- Use a sand tray
- Jacob's Ladder
- Hold a small stone
- Shuffle cards
- Make something
- Use a fidget
- Walk
- Exercise
- _____
- _____

- Dance
- Punch a safe surface
- Play at the park
- Make an obstacle course
- Swing on a swing
- Jump on a trampoline
- Jump rope
- Scooter
- Go swimming
- Stretches
- Tumbling/Gymnastics
- Yoga
- _____
- _____

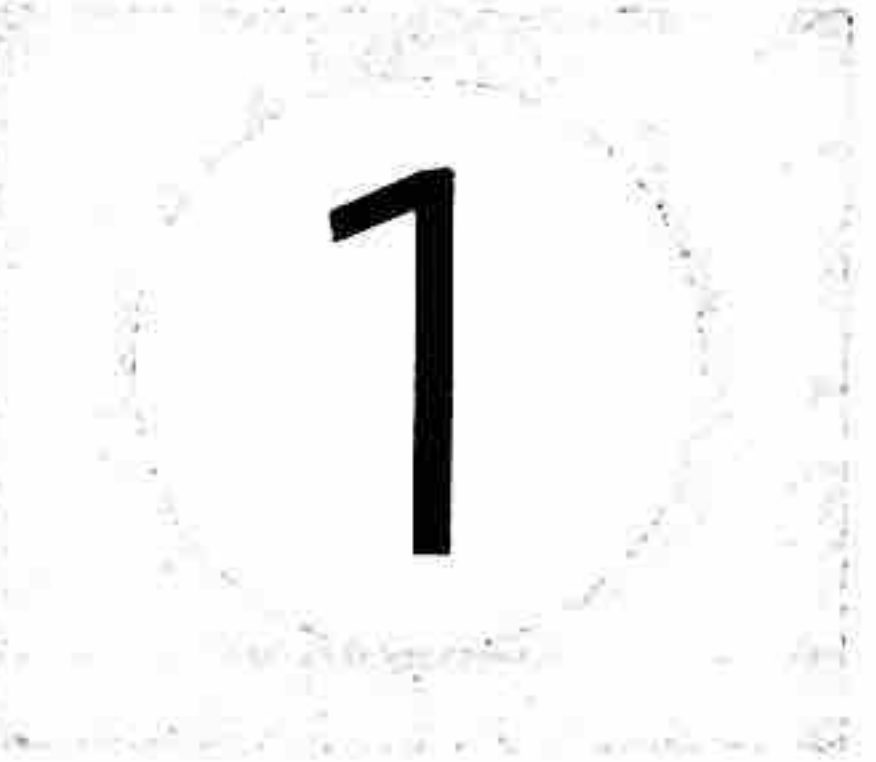
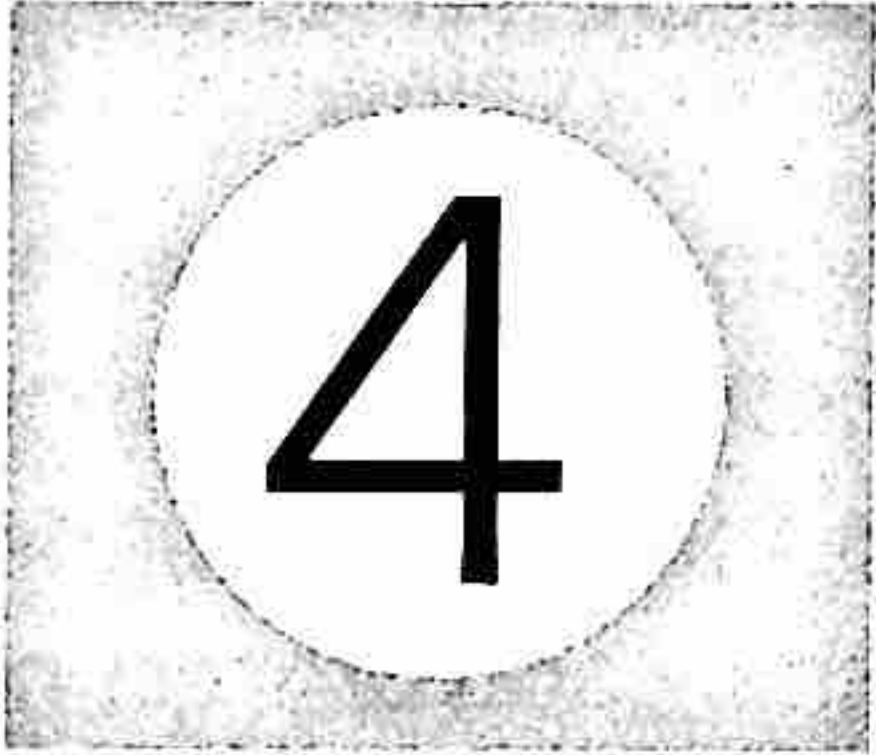
PROCESSING SKILLS

- Intensity of feelings
- Feelings thermometers
- Feelings as colors
- Where do I feel things in my body
- Understanding my triggers
- Levels of stress
- Track my stress
- Map my stress
- Write in a journal
- In a perfect world....
- Write songs
- Write poetry
- Write music
- _____
- _____

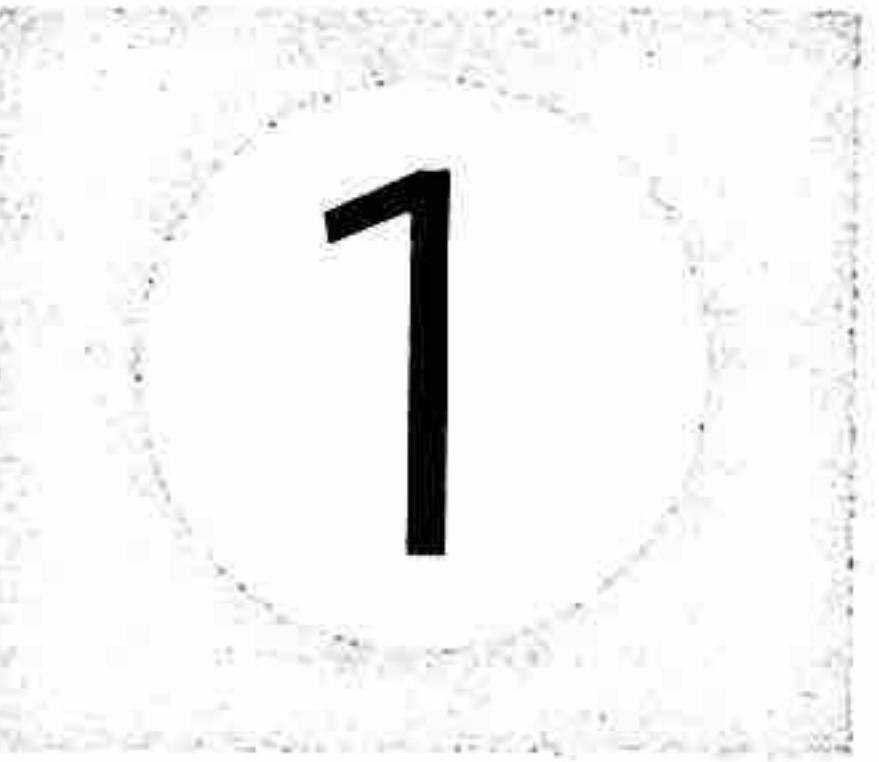
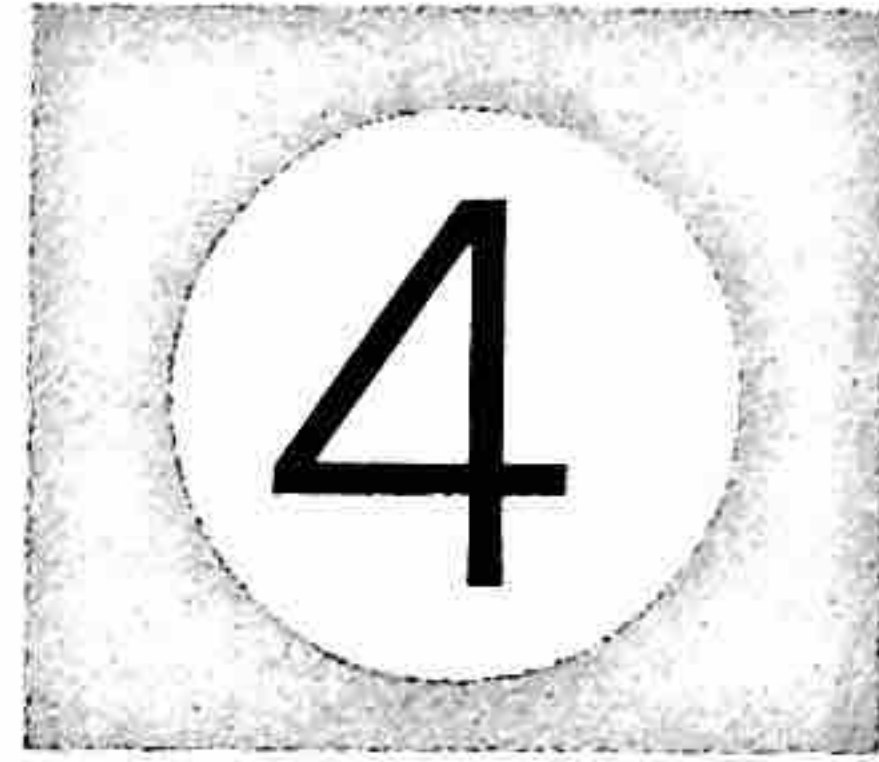
- Draw
- Talk to someone you trust
- Create a playlist
- Write what's bothering you and throw it away
- Comic strip what happened/what can I do next time
- I wish...
- Write a letter to someone
- Use "I statements"
- What I can control vs. What I can't control
- Make a worry box
- _____
- _____

RATE YOUR STRESS

BEFORE



AFTER



Remember those kids from the beginning of the chapter? Let's go back and see their coping skills in action!

Aidan –

His mom comes in, gets down to his level, and talks to him using a calm and gentle voice. "You seem frustrated. Do you want to jump on your trampoline for a few minutes while I get your snack ready? Then I can help you build your tower."

Julia –

Her mom reassures her that no matter what kind of grade she gets, her mom will always love her. They talk together and the mom suggests having her imagine a calm place. They talk about all the details in Julia's calm place: what she sees, what she hears, what she feels, and what she smells. Then her mom asks her to imagine it for a few minutes while taking deep breaths. Julia's mom explains that Julia can think of that calming place whenever she feels stressed, like during a test, to help get her to a calmer place.

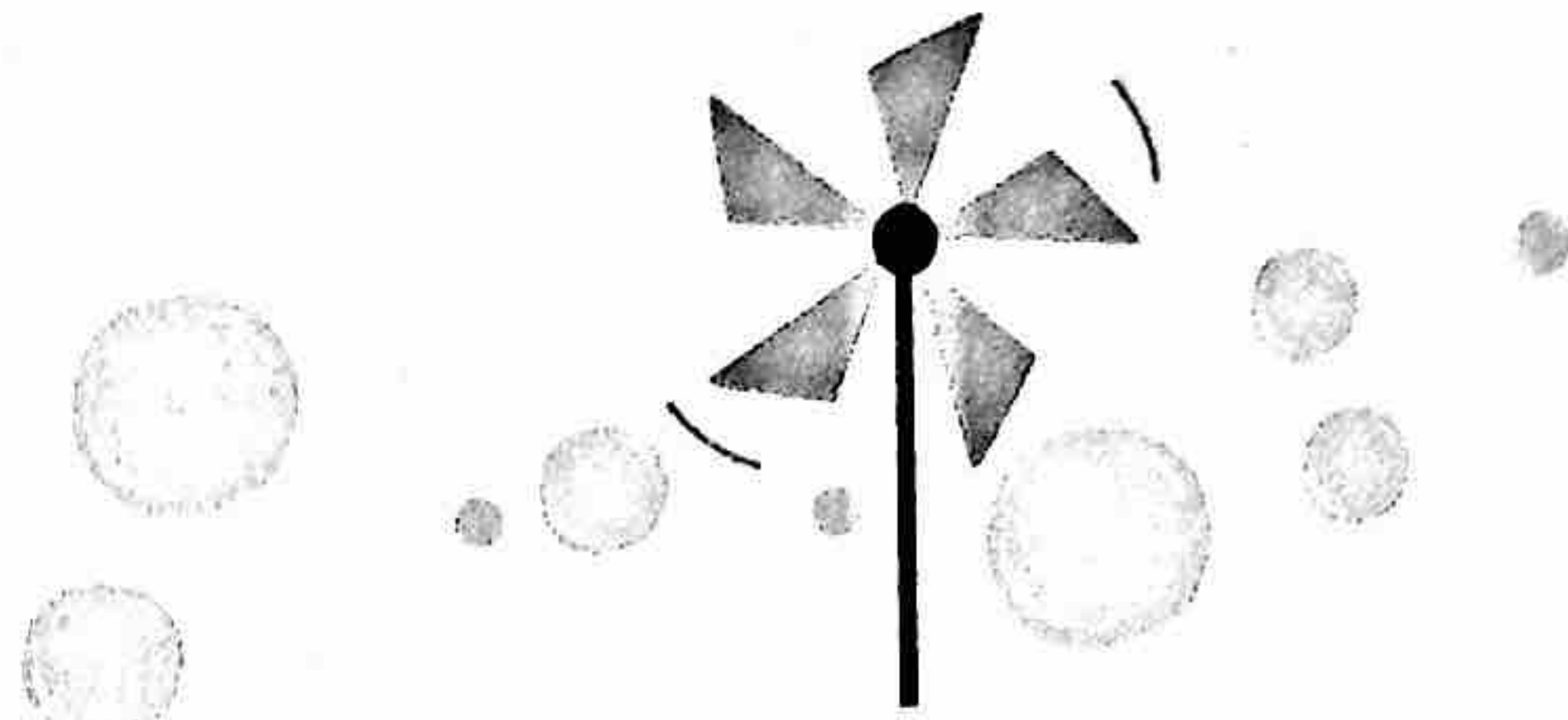
Paul -

His dad offers him a journal where he can write his thoughts, his questions, his feelings, and his frustrations. His dad explains that this will help him think and process more of what is happening. And his dad tells his son that any time he wants to talk, both his mom and dad are here to listen.

Isabelle -

Isabelle thinks about doing something kind to help keep her mind occupied. She's thinking of making her grandma a craft or a special treat. Doing this kind act will keep Isabelle busy and occupied as she's waiting for news about her grandma.

Are you ready to get started and build your coping skills list? Let's go!



SECTION 2

CALMING COPING SKILLS

The techniques described in this section are meant to help you calm down and relax when faced with stressful or overwhelming situations.

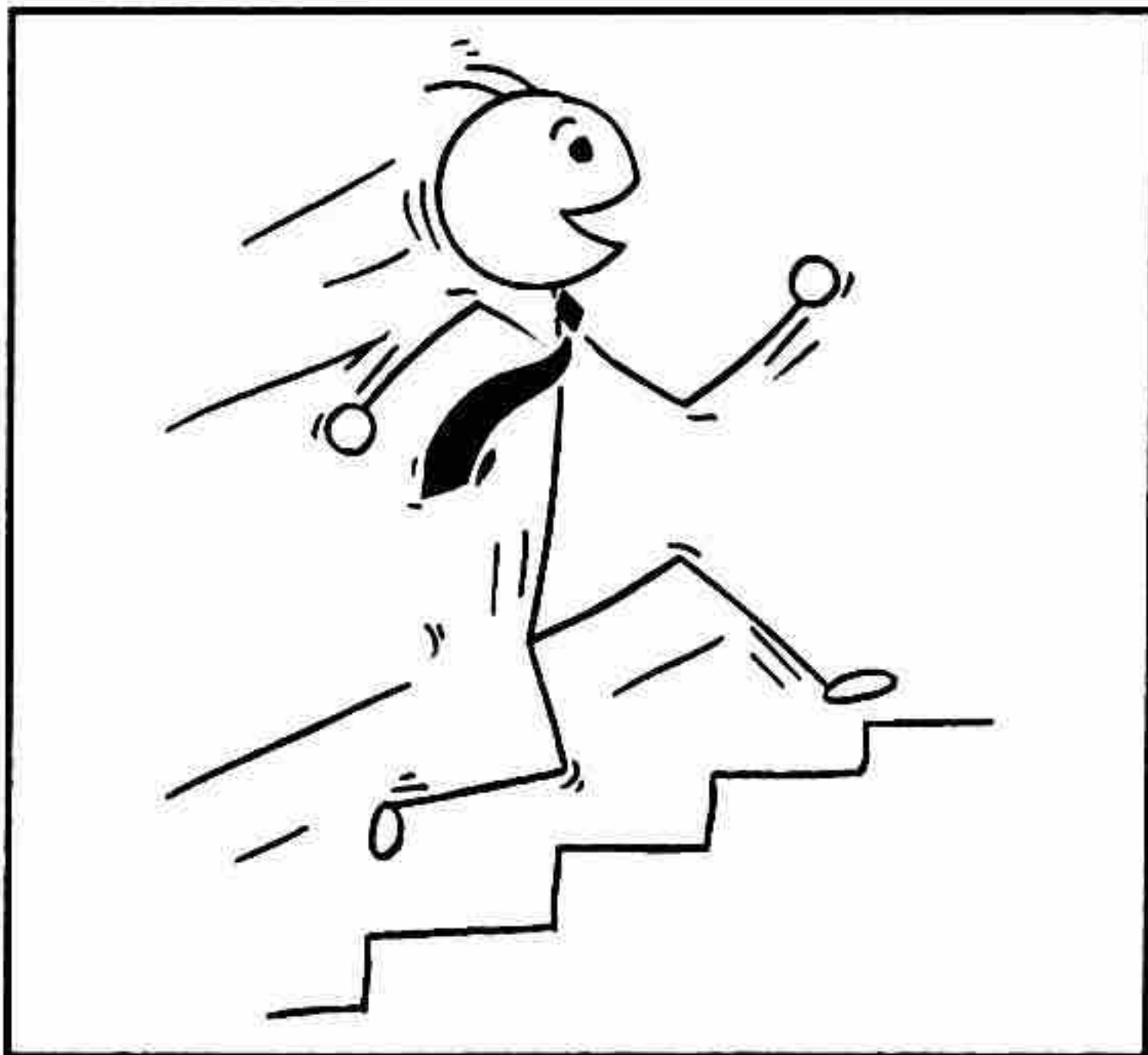
The first part of this section focuses on breathing. I know, everyone always says, "take a deep breath," but there is a physical reason why deep breathing is so important.

To help understand why deep breathing and calming coping skills are so important, let's have a quick lesson on your Autonomic Nervous System. The Autonomic Nervous System controls the automatic systems in your body that you don't think about - things like breathing, digestion and heart rate.

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

Flight, Fight or Freeze

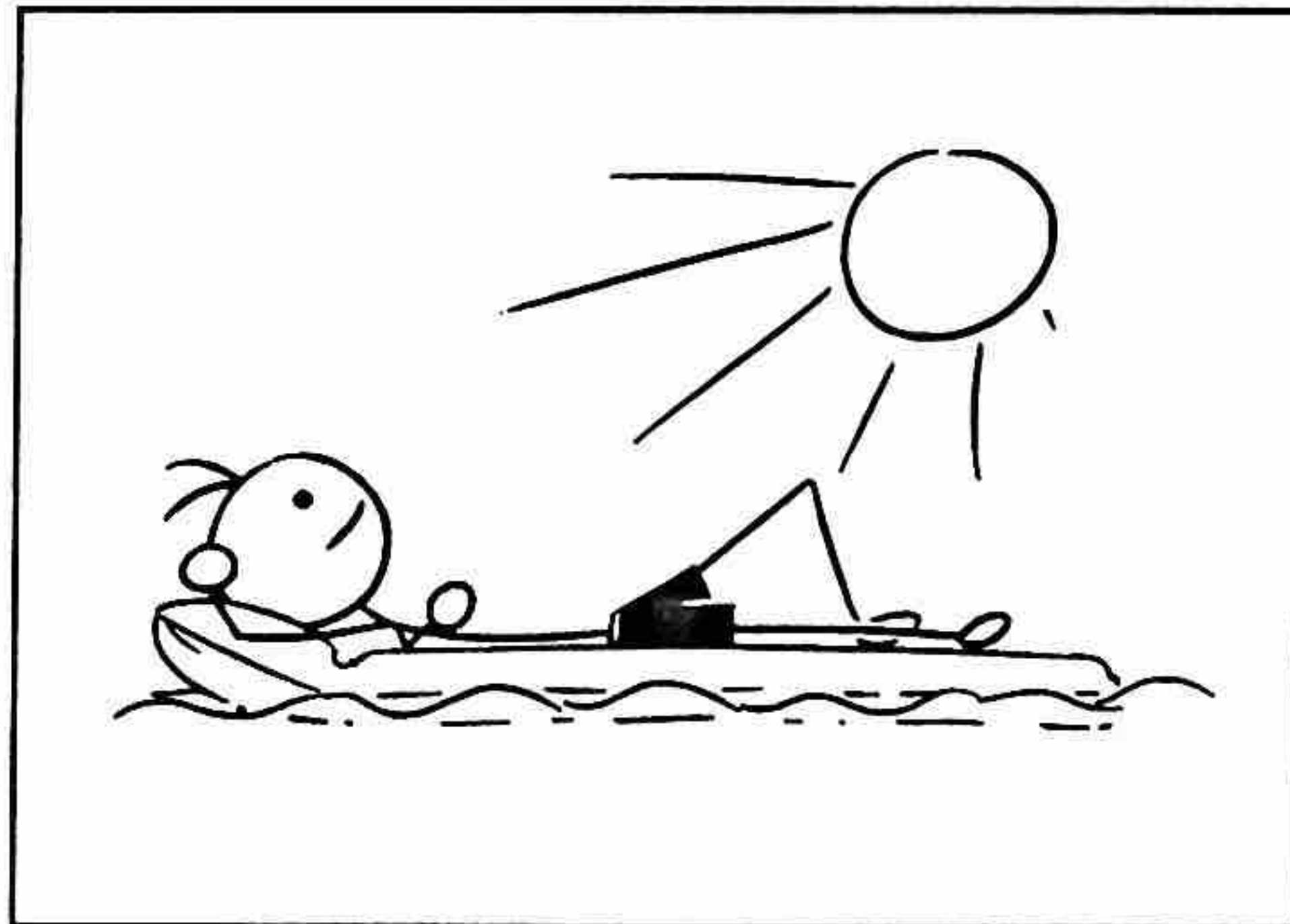
Sympathetic Nervous System



- Your heart rate increases
- Your pupils dilate
- Your muscles contract
- Your stomach stops many of the functions of digestion

Rest and Digest

Parasympathetic Nervous System



- Your saliva is increased
- Your heart rate drops
- Your muscles relax
- The pupils in your eyes constrict

When you are calm, your body is in what is known as “rest and digest” mode. Your breathing is normal, your muscles are relaxed and your heart rate is normal. When you experience a stressful event your body automatically goes into what is known as “flight, fight or freeze” mode. Your heart rate increases, your stomach stops digestion and your breathing becomes more shallow.

The goal of calming exercises is to get yourself from “flight, fight or freeze” mode back to “rest and digest” mode. Deep breathing helps get more oxygen into your bloodstream, opening up your capillaries. It has a physical effect on your body to help you calm down and lower stress.

In the first section, there are fun playful ways to work on deep breathing.

The next section focuses on your mind; in particular, mindfulness meditation and yoga. Your mind is a powerful tool you can use to help calm yourself down. You do have control over your thoughts and the more you practice, the better you’ll get at it.

The third section has grounding techniques. These are great to use if you are feeling overwhelmed.

The last section has some other ideas for activities you can do, or items you can make or use, to help yourself calm down. Try some today and see how they work for you.

DEEP BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Deep Breathing with a Pinwheel

Breathe in through your nose and expand your belly, then breathe out to turn the pinwheel. You can practice breathing out slowly or more quickly, using the speed of the pinwheel as a measure. Then you can figure out which way works and feels best for you.

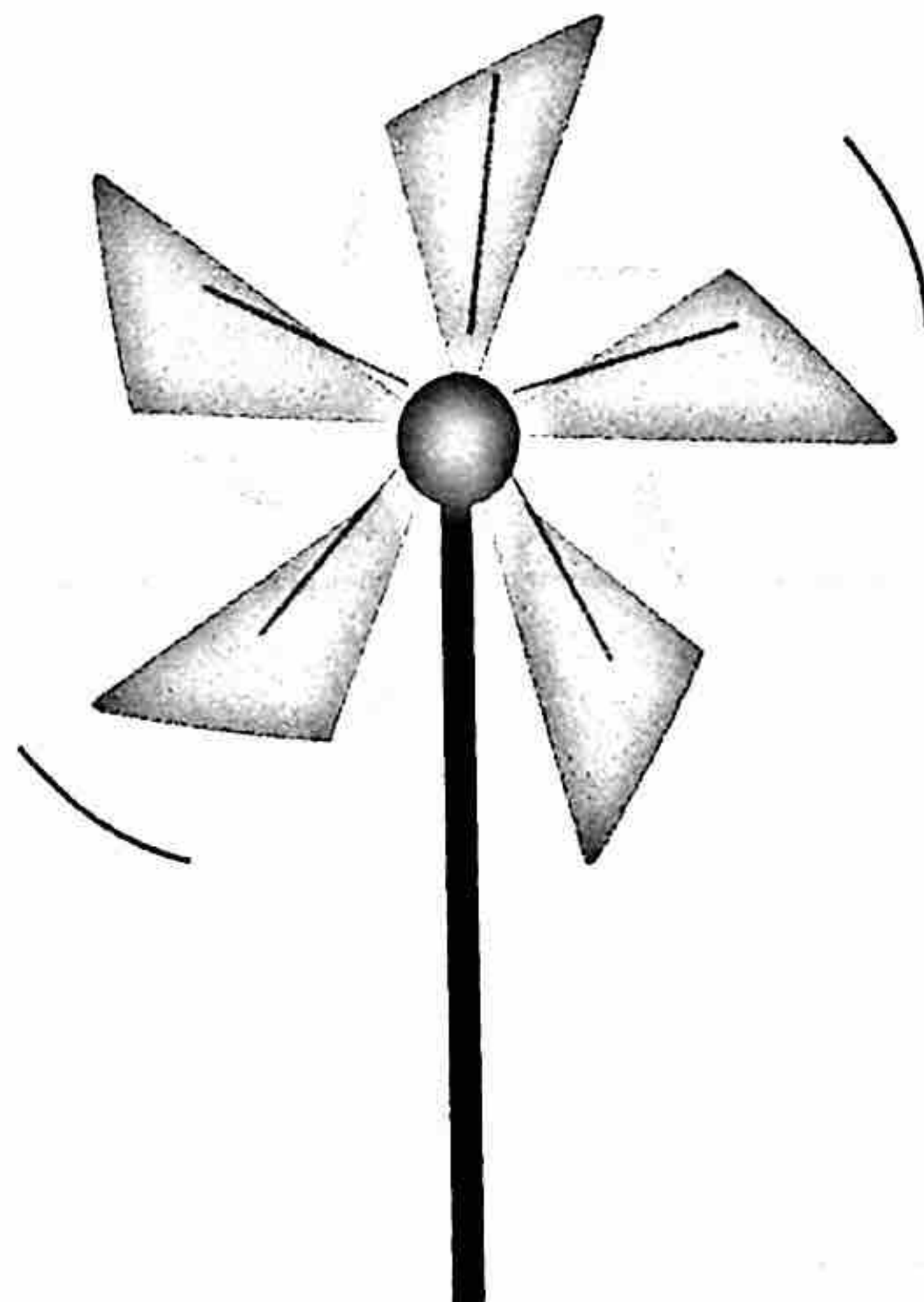
You can buy a pinwheel at a store or you can make your own. If you want to make your own, you can use the template provided after these directions.

What you need:

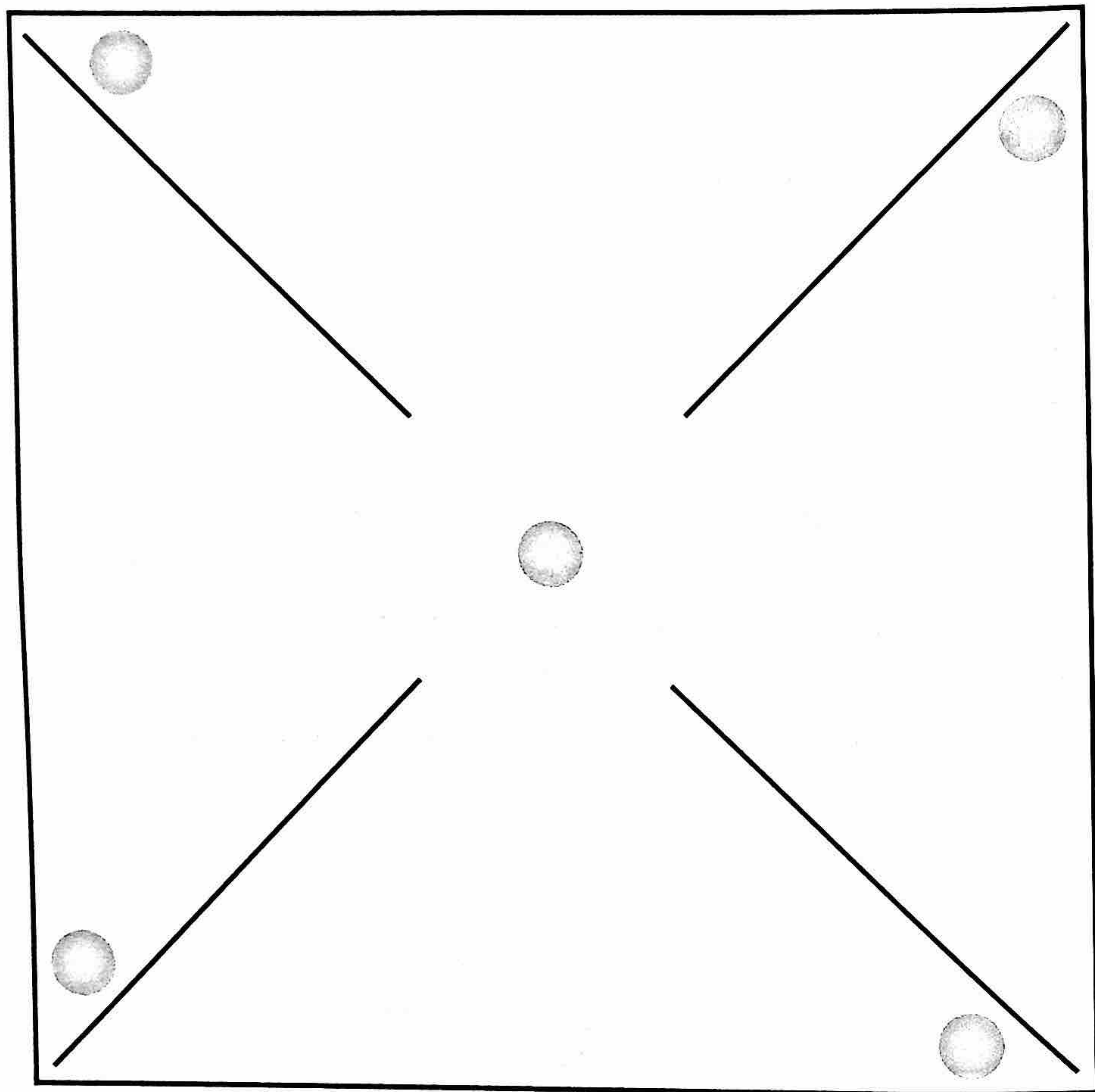
- A pencil with an eraser
- A pushpin
- Scissors

1. Cut out the template of the pinwheel, and then cut along the lines.
2. Take a pushpin, and take each corner with a dot and push it onto the pin.
3. Then push all of those through the dot at the center of the pinwheel.
4. Finally stick the pushpin onto the eraser of the pencil and blow it!

To see one in action, watch the [Make Your Own Pinwheel](http://copingkids.com/videos) video at copingkids.com/videos



MAKE YOUR OWN PINWHEEL



Deep Breathing with Bubbles

Blowing bubbles is a great way to slow down and breathe. Breathe in through your nose and expand your belly, then breathe out. You have to control your breath to make the bubbles without popping them.

Deep Breathing with Prompts

For some people, just saying take a deep breath is not enough. Having a prompt is a helpful way to learn to breathe in and out. Once you know the prompts, you can say them to yourself to help you. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Breathe in like you're smelling a flower; breathe out like you're blowing out birthday candles.
- Breathe in blue sky, breathe out gray skies.
- Arms up and breathe in, arms down and breathe out.
- Breathe in and out like Darth Vader.
- Pretend your belly is like a balloon. Breathe in and make the balloon bigger, then breathe out and make the balloon shrink.

Deep Breathing with Shapes

Sometimes you need a little more structure and playfulness around how to actually teach yourself how to take a deep breath. Using shapes is an easy way to keep track of breaths in and out. You can use your finger to trace the shape so you know where you are in your breathing. Try each and see how they work for you!

Visit copingkids.com/videos to see these in action.