

# Creative Coping Skills for Children

*Emotional Support through Arts and Crafts Activities*

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY  
BONNIE THOMAS



Jessica Kingsley Publishers  
London and Philadelphia

First published in 2009  
by Jessica Kingsley Publishers  
116 Pentonville Road  
London N1 9JB, UK  
and  
400 Market Street, Suite 400  
Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

[www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)

Copyright © Bonnie Thomas 2009  
Illustrations copyright © Bonnie Thomas 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS. Applications for the copyright owner's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publisher.

Warning: The doing of an unauthorised act in relation to a copyright work may result in both a civil claim for damages and criminal prosecution.

All pages marked ✓ may be photocopied for personal use with this program, but may not be reproduced for any other purposes without the permission of the publisher.

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Thomas, Bonnie, 1971-

Creative coping skills for children : emotional support through arts and crafts activities /  
Bonnie Thomas ; illustrated by Bonnie Thomas.  
p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-84310-921-1 (pb : alk. paper) 1. Children--Life skills guides. 2. Child development. 3.  
Emotions in children. 4. Creative activities and seat work. I. Title.

HQ767.9.T485 2009

155.4'1246--dc22

2008043850

#### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84310 921 1

ISBN pdf ebook 987 1 84642 954 5

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Athenaeum Press, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear

# Contents

Introduction	7
A Note about Materials Used in these Projects	9
A Note about Coping Skills	10
<b>Part 1: Coping Skills and Strategies</b>	<b>11</b>
Coping Skills and Strategies: A Starting Point	13
Putting Words to Feelings	18
My Book about Feelings	19
Finger Labyrinths	35
Thing-a-ma-finds	37
Reminder Rings	39
Support Bracelets and Necklaces	41
Support Bracelets and Necklaces: One Step Further	43
Stepping Stones and Power Pathways	45
A Box of Blops	52
Mandalas	54
Power Animals	59
Power Animals: One Step Further	60
Coping Skills Tool Kit	62
A Pirate's Survival Guide	64
Taking Care of Me	76
Wish Fairies	88
Wishing Wands	92
Butterflies	94
Snakes	96

Pirate and Princess Bags	98
Helping Children Manage Unstructured Time	100
<b>Part 2: Specific Interventions for Worried Children</b>	<b>135</b>
Worry Dolls	137
Worry Warriors	139
The Worry Dragon	141
Protection Shield	143
Dream Catchers	145
Worry Vacations	147
The Worry Wall	149
Worry Pizza	150
Time Out	152
Hope and Prayer Flags	153
<b>Part 3: Specific Interventions for Grieving Children</b>	<b>155</b>
Memory Stones	157
Mini Memory Garden	159
Memory Shrine	160
A Memory Candle	162
Messages to Heaven	163
Sewn Memory Creations	164
Prayer Flags: Part 2	166
My Little Book about a Big Loss	167
The Stomp Box	190

# Introduction

I have to admit I rarely read the introductions to books. I am usually too eager to move on to the content or I am really short on time. I'm an official Introductions Skipper. But as the writer of this book I can hardly skip this particular intro.

That being said, this book came about for one main reason—I wanted to write a book that helps both parents *and* professionals teach children coping skills in unique and engaging ways. There are some wonderful parenting books and other media that help parents teach their children coping skills. There are also some professional texts for therapists, social workers, teachers, etc. that address children and coping skills. But where are the books written for both parents and professionals combined? Where is that one simple text that addresses us as adults wanting to help children? I had trouble finding such a resource and that is what inspired me to write my own.

The ideas in this book come from my experience as a parent as well as my experience as a child and family therapist. I have worked with children as young as three and through the teen years.

Whether you are a parent, a professional, or both, this book is designed to help you teach a child some coping skills. Many children are dynamic, imaginative, and creative. Some children are much more cerebral and literal. Therefore, some interventions in this book are constructed around arts and crafts activities, where other interventions include workbooks, coloring pages, incentive charts, and prescribed rituals. Whatever the need for your child, there are many interventions in this book to try.

## A Note about Materials Used in these Projects

Many of the projects listed in this book contain a materials list. As a mother and counselor (with no budget for therapy supplies) I try hard to be frugal in gathering supplies for projects. I also try to be mindful and use recycled materials when possible.

The majority of the supplies used for these projects were either donated or found for free. I have listed ways I have accrued such supplies to help you do the same.

- Check your local recycling center for boxes, jars, wood, and various recycled goods. Some recycling centers even have an area put aside for items that are still usable, such as games (I use many game pieces in craft projects) and containers.
- Let friends and family know that you are collecting supplies such as fabric, yarn, clothing (cut the clothing into fabric squares), discarded jewelry (strip it for the beads and charms), buttons, and any re-usable arts and crafts supplies they no longer want or need.
- Let friends with small children know you would be glad to take on those little plastic figurines and loose game pieces that are usually at the bottom of the toy box. My peers also know I do play therapy with children and therefore they sometimes contact me before they donate any toys, puzzles, or games.
- Check those “free” piles of items that are put at the end of people’s driveways after they have had a yard sale.
- Check your local library for free magazines (many libraries have a section set aside for magazine exchanges). Magazines are great for collage and altered art projects.
- Collect paint samples from hardware stores. Paint samples are great to have on hand for collages, paper scraps, and Reminder Rings (instructions included in this book). Some hardware stores even have laminate samples for countertops, which are great for using in art projects.

- If you do need to purchase items, check a local dollar store first. Wooden clothespins are an item I purchase regularly, and these are cheaper at the dollar store than a department store.

## A Note about Coping Skills

Children learn coping skills via various means. One way is by observing adults around them. Whatever your role is with a child, they surely know how you cope with life's stressors. Do you tense up? Yell? Swear? Take it in your stride? Take deep breaths? Stop breathing? One of the easiest ways to help a child learn some healthy coping skills is to use them yourself and even voice it out loud when you are using them. For example, "I'm really angry that person pulled out in front of me. I'm going to take a deep breath and let it out."

Children also learn coping skills by observing how people and characters cope in the media. How do the characters in your child's favorite TV shows, movies, and books handle stress? If the characters are making poor choices and present with poor coping skills, is this affecting your child's perception of how to deal with their own feelings? This a great conversation topic for adults and children. Simply ask "Who is your favorite character in \_\_\_\_\_? How does that character act when he or she is upset? What do you think about that character's reaction? Does that reaction make things easier or harder for that character?"

In the end, however, children will learn coping skills via trial and error. Let your children, clients, students, etc. know that coping skills are a learning process and that some skills will work great for one child, and maybe not so great for the next. You can present it as an experiment (for those scientifically minded children) or an adventure (for those sensory seeking children) or a scavenger hunt (for those curious children) or even as a security plan (for those anxious children). We all need to "try on" different coping skills and see how they fit.

Everybody has different needs when it comes to coping with life's stressors. Children are no different. Some children need quiet and soothing activities in order to calm down, where others need more physical activity or intense sensory input in order to calm their bodies and minds.

Part 1

---

# **Coping Skills and Strategies**



# Coping Skills and Strategies: A Starting Point

Here are various coping interventions that you can review with a child. There are two separate lists here for your reference. The reason is that many children fall into one category or the other—the quieter calming interventions are for those children who need a break from sensory stimuli in order to feel calm. The other list is for children who need to release energy and sensory stimuli in order to keep calm. Of course, many children will benefit from interventions from both lists, but the lists have been separated for clarity. It's a great starting place to assess which coping skills the child has already tried and which have or haven't worked. You can also use these lists to find new coping interventions that the child may be willing to try.

If you are a counselor or other professional working with a child, you can incorporate these lists into a child's goals. For example, the child could try ten coping interventions from either list and rate them on a scale of 1 to 5 to determine which ones were most successful at helping them cope with stressors. From there you can create a coping plan.

When using these lists with a child you can have them draw smiley faces next to the strategies they have tried and an exclamation point or other symbol next to the ones they are willing/wanting to try.

The lists follow on separate pages to allow for easier photocopying. Instructions for items marked with an \* are included in the book.



## Quiet and soothing coping interventions

- Take a soothing bath
- Talk to a friend
- Meditate
- Pray
- Play some quiet relaxing music
- Hug a stuffed animal or pillow
- Create something
- Make a favorite recipe (with adult supervision)
- Remind yourself that everyone has bad days now and then
- Read an inspiring book
- Curl up in a warm blanket
- Think of five things you are grateful for
- Sip some relaxing tea or warm milk
- Soak your feet in warm soapy water—close your eyes and relax
- Write in a journal
- Trace a finger labyrinth\*
- Listen to some meditation or visualization stories
- Knit
- Doodle
- Build a fort with pillows and blankets and hide inside
- Turn your situation and feelings into a comic strip
- Take five deep breaths
- Think of what has gone right today
- Blow some bubbles



- Rock in a rocking chair
- Reflect on a funny moment or funny joke
- Color a mandala\* or other picture
- Pat your dog or cat and tell them about your day
- Stretch your muscles slowly and gently
- Look at a Thinga-ma-find\*
- Run your fingers through a Box of Blops\*



## Physical and sensory input interventions

- Take a five minute brisk walk
- Do some sit-ups
- Play with play dough or clay
- Chew on some ice
- Chew bubble gum
- Suck on sour or spicy candy
- Do something you enjoy
- Play some favorite music loudly
- Sing loudly
- Hug a stuffed animal or pillow as hard as you can
- Create something
- Knead some bread or pizza dough
- Squeeze your muscles and then relax them
- Massage your feet
- Scribble on paper—see how much of the page you can cover
- Sip a hot drink (not so hot you burn yourself, of course) or a really cold drink
- Write your feelings down in a journal
- Tear and crumple up a phone book or paper (but ask an adult first if the item you want to tear is ok)
- Make a rubber band ball
- Wrap yourself up tightly in a blanket (make sure you can breathe!)
- Take a shower
- Fling rubber bands at the wall
- Scream into a pillow
- Melt an ice cube in your hands
- Do some push-ups



- Run your fingers through a Box of Blops\*
- Blow up balloons and then let all the air out by letting them go
- Make a picture by poking holes into the paper with a pencil
- Make an aluminum foil ball or sculpture
- Make silly faces—scrunch up all those face muscles