

Holiday

TEAM
KENTUCKY[®]

CABINET FOR HEALTH
AND FAMILY SERVICES

Survival Kit

for kids

A resource guide for when “the most wonderful time of the year” feels like the most stressful time of the year.



TEAM KENTUCKY[®]

CABINET FOR HEALTH
AND FAMILY SERVICES

HOW TO USE



This resource kit includes tips for managing common holiday stressors. Taking time to reflect on the things you know may be difficult and develop a plan early can help to reduce stress and improve overall emotional wellness during the holidays.

QUESTIONS

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To access more mental health resources visit <https://dbhdid.ky.gov/mh/mhp>



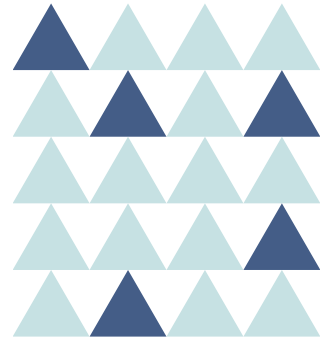


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If you are feeling overwhelmed or
having thoughts of suicide, reach out
for help right away.



Call-Text-Chat 988





RESPECTING YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS

during the holidays

There is often pressure to be cheerful or in the “holiday spirit.” Here are strategies to help your child manage their emotions during the holidays.

Identify Feelings: Help your child to identify what they are feeling. The Feel Wheel and Emotion Thermometers included in this guide can be helpful tools for identifying emotions.



Encourage Open Communication: Create a safe space for kids to express their feelings. Ask them how they're feeling about the holidays and listen without judgment.

Create a Feelings Check-In: Establish a routine for checking in on feelings, such as a daily family meeting where everyone shares their emotions.



RESPECTING YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS

during the holidays



Introduce Mindfulness: Try simple mindfulness exercises like deep breathing or grounding exercises to help your child manage strong feelings. See pages 18-19 for ideas.

Encourage Breaks: If festivities become too much, remind kids that it's okay to take a break. Create a cozy space where they can relax and recharge.



Seek Professional Help: If feelings of pressure or sadness are overwhelming, consider talking to a therapist or counselor for additional coping strategies.



SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

during the holidays

Kids often have high expectations for the holidays to influences from media portrayals of idealized celebrations, peer comparisons, or established family traditions. **Setting realistic expectations ahead of the holidays can help to avoid emotional distress and disappointment.**

Have Discussions Early:

Talk about holiday plans ahead of time. Talk about what they can realistically expect, including any changes or limitations.



Involve Them in Planning:

Allowing kids to participate in planning activities or traditions gives them a sense of ownership and can lead to more realistic expectations.



Focus on the Meaning: Shift the emphasis from gifts to the values of togetherness and gratitude.



SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

during the holidays

Be Present: Spend quality time together, focusing on experiences rather than gifts. Simple traditions, like baking or crafting, can be meaningful.



Practice Gratitude: Gratitude activities like keeping a gratitude journal or sharing what they're thankful for each day can shift the focus away from what they wish they had, and instead highlight the things they appreciate.

Validate Their Feelings: Acknowledge any feelings of disappointment. Let them know it's normal to feel that way and that they can talk about it openly.

Create a "Disappointment Plan": Discuss how to handle disappointment if things don't go as they hoped. Encourage them to express their feelings and help them brainstorm ways to cope.



EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

during the holidays

Feelings of grief and loss can be especially pronounced during the holidays. Any situation that results in changes to traditions, can evoke feelings of loss, grief, and sadness. Examples include:



Loss of a Loved One: The absence of family or friends who have passed away can feel particularly intense during holiday gatherings or traditions.

Loss of a Pet: Pets are often considered family members and their loss may be deeply felt when their absence is noticed in familiar holiday routines.



Relocation: Moving away or being unable to return home for the holidays can result in feelings of loss and isolation.



EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

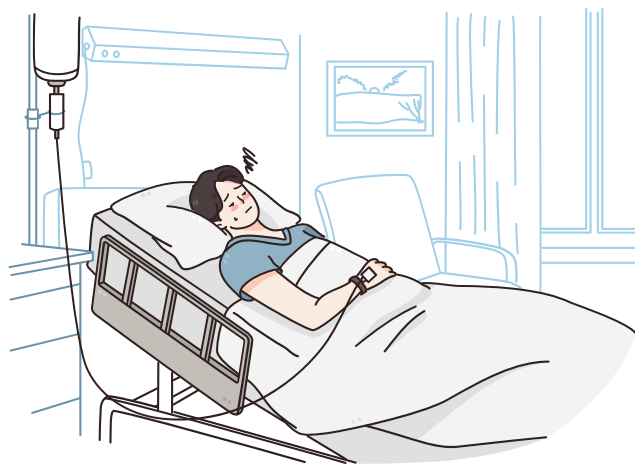
during the holidays



Separation or Divorce: Changes in family dynamics can cause feelings of loss related to familiar holiday routines or traditions.

End of Relationship: Breakups or estrangement from friends or family can lead to feelings of loneliness and grief, especially during time typically associated with togetherness.

Health Issues: Your own health issues or those of your loved ones can lead to an inability to fully participate in familiar traditions.



Financial Strain: Financial difficulties that prevent individuals from celebrating the way they wish or are used to can result in feelings of sadness or loss.

COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

During the holidays

Managing grief can be particularly difficult during the holidays. Here are some strategies that may help:

Acknowledge Their Feelings: Let kids know it's okay to feel a whole range of emotions, including sadness and joy.

Maintain Open Communication: Create a safe space for them to talk about their feelings and memories. Listen actively and validate their experiences.



Keep Routines Consistent: Maintaining familiar routines can provide a sense of stability and comfort during a time of change.

Create New Traditions: Starting new traditions can be a great way to honor your old traditions helping you to rediscover and experience joy.



COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

During the holidays



Use Remembrance Rituals: Light a candle, create a memory ornament, or share stories about your loved one. These rituals can help keep their memory alive.



Plan for Breaks: Allow for moments of quiet or solitude when they need time to themselves. It's okay to step away from holiday festivities if they feel overwhelmed.

Limit Social Obligations: It's okay to say no to events that feel overwhelming.

Seek Professional Help: If grief feels unmanageable, consider talking to a therapist who specializes in grief counseling.



seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

WINTER BLUES



Symptoms of winter depression (fall-onset SAD) begin in the late fall or early winter months.

Symptoms begin to ease in mid-spring and summer months.

Children can experience seasonal depression just like adults.

Common symptoms of winter depression in children:

- Increased sleep and daytime drowsiness
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities formerly enjoyed
- Social withdrawal and increased sensitivity to rejection
- Grouchiness and anxiety
- Excessive tiredness (fatigue)
- Decreased ability to focus
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Increased appetite, especially for sweets and carbohydrates
- Weight gain
- Physical problems, such as headaches

What causes winter depression?

Seasonal depression is linked to changes in weather, light exposure, and social and environmental influences.

In the winter months, kids often experience:

- **Shorter days** which can result in oversleeping
- **Less light** which can impact the sleep cycle
- **Temperatures and weather** that reduce social activities and increase indoor activities
- **Holiday-related stress** including
 - Changes in routines due to school breaks and travel
 - Over-scheduling



seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

WHAT CAN I DO TO EASE MY CHILD'S SYMPTOMS?

If your child is experiencing symptoms of depression, it is always a good idea to talk to your doctor or a mental health provider.

Treatment options for seasonal depression might include talk therapy, medication, and light therapy.

If your child is feeling overwhelmed or having thoughts of suicide, reach out for help right away. Call-Text-Chat 988



Visit [Psychology Today](https://www.psychologytoday.com) to learn more about mental health treatment or to find a provider near you.

Here are some other things you can try to improve your child's seasonal symptoms.

- Try to spend time outside or near windows
- Connect with others
If your child can't visit friends or loved ones in person, use technology to stay connected.
- Find enjoyable indoor hobbies or activities
- Get the right amount of sleep
- Eat healthy meals
- Exercise regularly
- Stay Hydrated



MANAGING PICKY EATERS

During the holidays



Talk Ahead of Time: Let the host know that your kids are picky eaters. They can let you know the menu and help you to problem-solve.



Bring Familiar Foods: Choose some easy to pack snacks to have on hand just in case.



Get Them Involved: If you are bringing a dish to share, let your kids help choose the dish and prepare it together. This gives them something they feel comfortable eating and may help them feel excited about trying new foods others have prepared.



Encourage Small Portions: Encourage kids to try a small, bite-sized portion of various dishes. They may find something new they like and want to go back for more.



MANAGING PICKY EATERS

During the holidays



Offer Choices: Give your kids a sense of control by allowing them to choose what goes on their plate. This can make them more willing to try something new.

Set Up a Buddy System: If your child has a friend or family member they look up to at the gathering, try pairing them together. They may be more willing to try new foods if they see someone they trust eating them.



Focus on the Experience: Highlight the fun and social aspects of the event like playing games and spending time with family to take the focus off eating.

Be Patient: Remind your kids that it is okay to not like everything while encouraging them to try new things without pressure.





SENSORY OVERLOAD

During the holidays

SENSORY OVERLOAD occurs when one or more of the senses become overwhelmed by sensory experiences.

Signs that your child may be overwhelmed include:

- Increased moodiness or frustration over minor issues
- Excessive energy or fidgety behavior
- Trouble concentration on conversations or tasks
- Withdrawal from social interactions or play
- Tantrums or outbursts of tears or anger
- Trouble falling asleep or frequent waking
- Complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or general discomfort
- Avoidance of certain activities, people, or places they typically enjoy.
- Heightened reactions to noise, light, or touch
- Aggressive responses or conflict with peers or siblings.

How can the holidays contribute to sensory overload?



- Crowded environments such as holiday gatherings or large crowds at malls and grocery stores
- Loud noises including increased volume from music, conversations, and festivities, especially in enclosed spaces
- Holiday decorations that include flashing lights or bright displays
- Strong smells from cooking, holiday candles, or perfumes
- Juggling multiple tasks at once during the busy season
- Visual clutter including the combination of decorations, gift wrapping, and displays



COPING WITH SENSORY OVERLOAD



During the holidays

Here are some strategies to help your child deal with the increased sensory experiences of the holidays.

Offer Choices: Allow kids to choose activities or events they want to participate in. This gives them a sense of control and can reduce anxiety.

Plan Ahead: If you know that certain situations will be challenging, plan strategies in advance. This may include timing your activities to minimize exposure or limiting the length of time you stay at a particular event or gathering.

Be Attentive: Check in regularly with kids to see how they're feeling. Encourage open communication so they feel comfortable expressing when they need a break.

Engage in Physical Activity: Encourage outdoor play or physical activities to help them release energy and reduce stress.

Mind Sensory Input: Pay attention to the sensory environment. Reduce loud noises, bright lights, or overwhelming decorations to create a calmer space.

Create a Safe Space: Designate a quiet area where your child can retreat if things become overwhelming. This may be a room in your home, a quiet corner at an event, or even stepping outside.

Use Noise-Canceling Headphones: These can help to block out loud noises while also allowing your child to listen to music or sounds that they find soothing.

Set Realistic Expectations: Understand that it is okay not to participate in every event. Focus on what feels manageable and enjoyable to you and your family.

the Feel Wheel

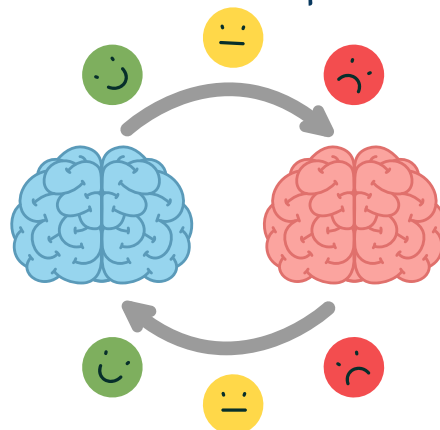
ages 5-12

How to use the Feel Wheel:

A feelings wheel can be used to help you identify and communicate your emotions. You can use the wheel to identify a core emotion, then follow the color of the emotion to see options for more specific feelings and figure out which one best fits your current mood.

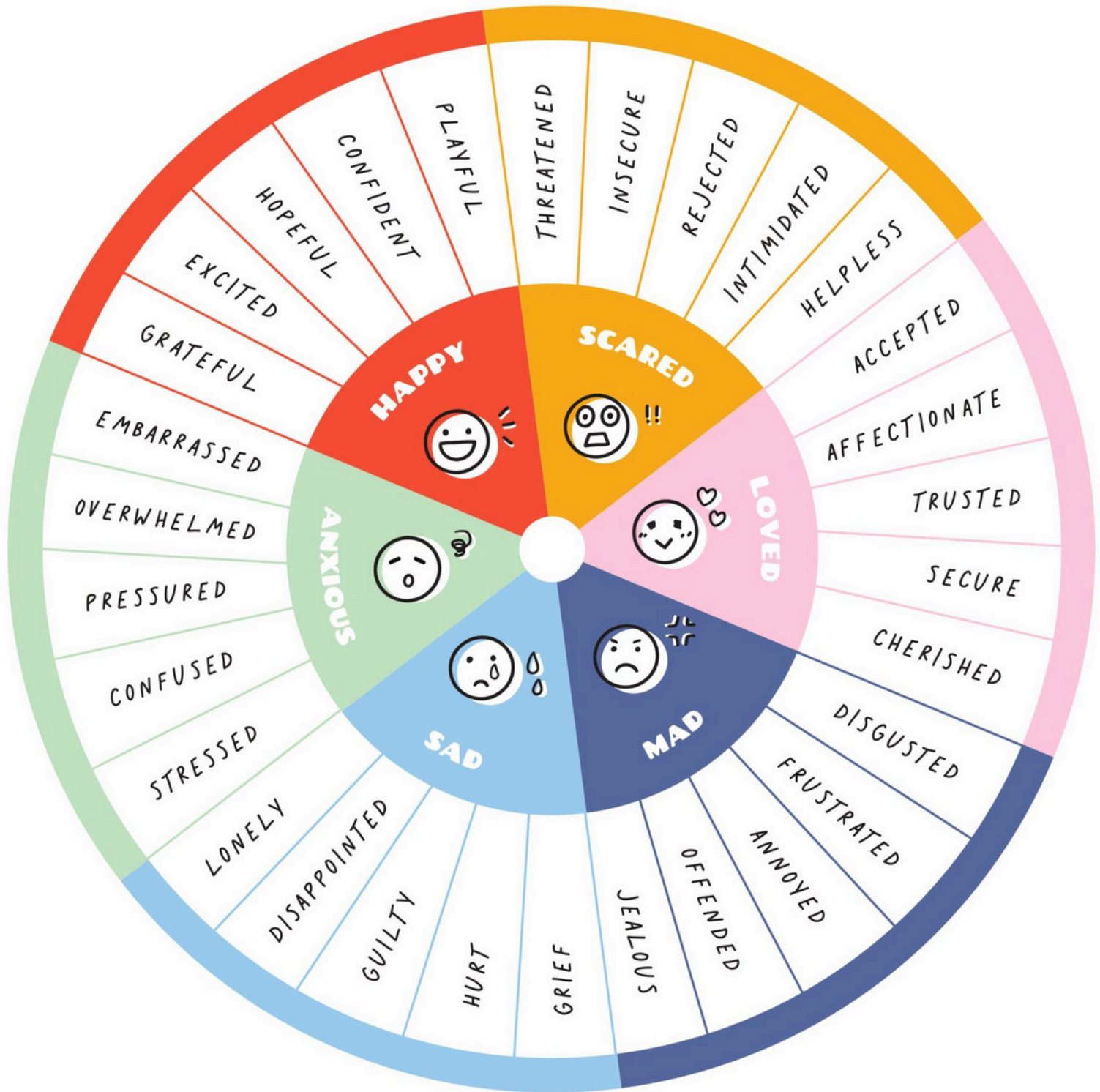
The core emotions are in the center -happy, scared, loved, mad, sad, and anxious. After choosing the core emotion that best fits your feelings, you can use your finger to identify more specific emotions with which you connect on the outer edges of the wheel.

These more specific emotions help you explain to others how you are feeling and can help you and others learn how to best respond to your emotions.



the Feel Wheel

ages 5-12



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Feelings Thermometer

Kids need to understand what they are feeling, and those feelings can be small or big. Identifying how big their feelings are can also help them recognize when they are getting more and more activated. If they know when activated feelings are escalating, they can intervene and use a coping skill to manage those feelings.

How to Use A Feelings Thermometer

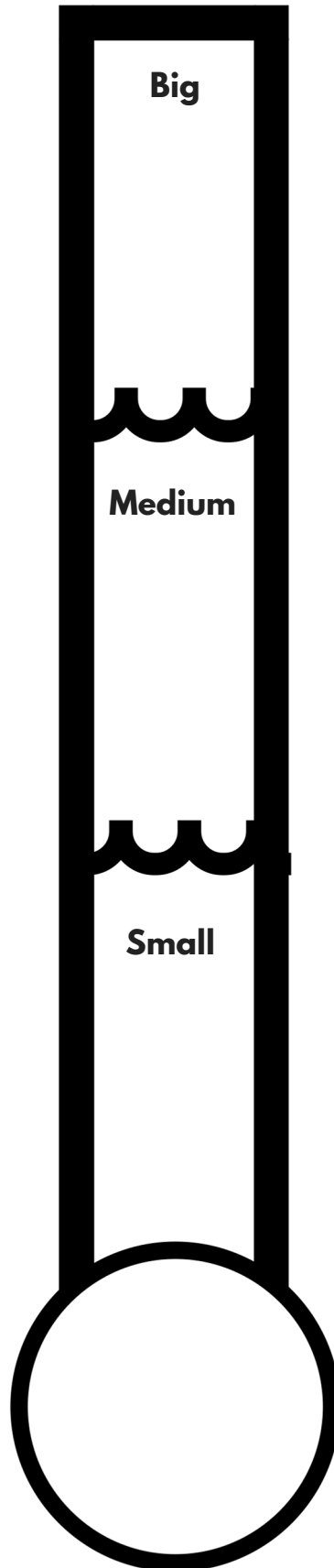
1. **PICK A FEELING:** When creating a thermometer, focus on one feeling at a time.
2. **COLOR IT IN:** Have the child pick out three colors, one for each section of the thermometer, and color it in. You can laminate it to make it sturdier!
3. **CUT OUT THE ARROW:** Laminate it to make it more durable, and place a piece of Velcro on the back. Then, place Velcro on each section of the thermometer.
4. **TALK ABOUT IT:** Let's say you are making an anger thermometer. Ask what their anger looks like when they are at the bottom of the thermometer. Do they stomp their feet, sigh loudly, growl, etc.? Then move on to the next section - if they are really angry, what does that look like? Does their voice get louder? Do they start invading other people's space? Then we talk about very angry - what does that look like? Is it yelling, throwing things, running away?
5. **IDENTIFY COPING:** Once we identify behaviors on the thermometer, we work on identifying coping skills they can use to calm down. Some examples include drinking water, taking deep breaths, counting to a certain number, or taking a walk. Make sure they have coping skills that will help them at each level. It's important to have a variety of coping skills for each level because not all coping skills will work all the time.

The next time they experience that feeling, have them move the arrow to show the size of their feeling and pick a way to cope.

My _____ Thermometer

What I look like

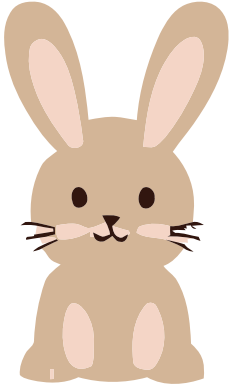
What I can do





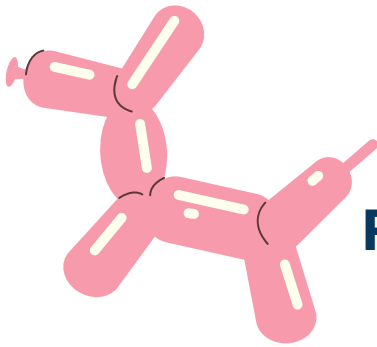
JUST BREATHE

Try these breathing exercises to relax when you are feeling overwhelmed.



BUNNY BREATHING

Sniff in 3 times like a bunny.
Hold your breath for 3 seconds.
Breathe out through your mouth slowly.



BALLOON BREATHING

Take a **BIG DEEP** breath in.
Pretend you are blowing up a big balloon by exhaling slowly.



BUMBLE BEE BREATHING

Take a **BIG DEEP** breath in.
Exhale slowly while making a buzzing sound.



BELLY BREATHING

Place one hand on your belly.
Place one hand on your chest.
Slowly take a deep breath in through your nose.
Slowly breathe out through your mouth.

5-4-3-2-1 CALM

Grounding is a self-soothing skill to use when you are having a bad day or feeling strong emotions.


Try this:





mental health check-in

Ask yourself these questions periodically and take action to resolve any issues you find.



when did I last **CELEBRATE** myself?




have I been **KIND** to myself?

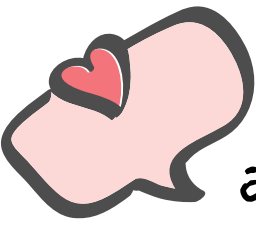
how am I feeling?



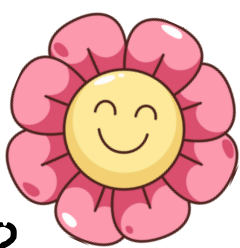
am I well rested?



when was the last time I **WASHED UP**?



do I need to **TALK** about my **FEELINGS**?



what can I do to make myself **SMILE** today?



when was the last time I went **OUTSIDE**?

have I had enough **WATER** today?



how long have I spent on my **PHONE** today?



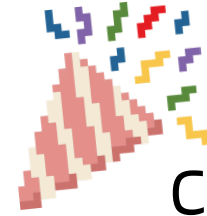
when was the last time I **ATE** something?

MENTAL HEALTH check-in

Ask yourself these questions periodically and take action to resolve any issues you find.



have I been
KIND to myself?



when did
I last
CELEBRATE
myself?

how am I feeling?



am I well rested?



do I need
to TALK
about my
FEELINGS?



when was the last
time I WASHED UP?

when was the last
time I went OUTSIDE?

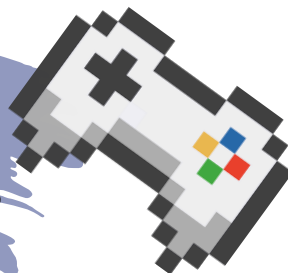


what can I do to make
myself SMILE today?

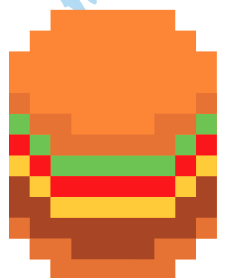


have I had
enough
WATER
today?

how long have
I spent using
SCREENS today?



when was the
last time I ATE
something?



100+ INDOOR ACTIVITIES

CRAFTS

MAKE PAPER AIRPLANES
SALT PAINTING
MAKE SUNCATCHERS
MAKE SALT DOUGH
MAKE SPONGE STAMPS
MAKE A CEREAL BOX AQUARIUM
MAKE SCRATCH ART
MAKE YOUR OWN BOOKMARKS
PAINT PET ROCKS
MAKE RECYCLED CRAYONS
MAKE PAPER BOATS
FINGER PAINT
MAKE FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS
MAKE A BIRD FEEDER
MAKE PAPER BAG PUPPETS
MAKE HANDPRINT ART
MAKE A SCRAPBOOK
DECORATE T-SHIRTS
MAKE A THANKFUL JAR
PAINT LEAVES
MAKE A TIME CAPSULE
MAKE BUTTON ART
PAINT WITH WATERCOLORS
COLOR IN A COLORING BOOK
MAKE PAPER CRAFTS
BUILD A CARDBOARD CASTLE
MAKE TISSUE BOX MONSTERS
MAKE A TOILET PAPER ROLL
BUTTERFLY
STAMP WITH CELERY
MAKE CHALK ICE
MAKE PUFFY SIDEWALK PAINT
DRAW A SELF PORTRAIT
USE RUBBER STAMPS
DO SCRAPE PAINTING
PAINT A RECYCLED JAR
MAKE SUPERHERO COSTUMES

ACTIVITIES

MAKE PLAYDOUGH
MAKE SLIME
MAKE PLAY MUD
MAKE RAINBOW RICE
MAKE FAKE SNOW
MAKE A SENSORY BIN
MAKE A SENSORY BAG
BUILD A FORT
HAVE A PILLOW FIGHT
WRITE A STORY
MAKE ICE CREAM IN A BAG
MAKE GUMMY BEARS
MAKE FRUIT ROLL-UPS
HAVE A MOVIE DAY
PUT ON A FASHION SHOW
BAKE CUPCAKES OR MUFFINS
DO YOGA
BUILD AN OBSTACLE COURSE
MAKE DINNER TOGETHER
PLAY WITH MAGNETIC TILES
BUILD SOMETHING WITH LEGO
USE DOT MARKERS
BUILD A STACK OF CARDS
PUT ON A PUPPET SHOW
MAKE A TREASURE HUNT
INDOOR BOWLING
LEARN TO DRAW
PUT ON A PLAY
MAKE INDOOR HOPSCOTCH
DO A FAMILY CHORE TOGETHER
HAVE A DANCE PARTY
HAVE A TEA PARTY
PLAY WITH WATER IN A BIN
SET UP A PLAY STORE
MAKE A SOCK TOSS GAME
MAKE PERLER BEAD ART
WRITE IN A JOURNAL

GAMES

PLAY WOULD YOU RATHER
PLAY I SPY
PLAY SIMON SAYS
PLAY BOARD GAMES
PLAY HIDE AND SEEK
INDOOR SCAVENGER HUNT
PLAY BINGO
PLAY CARD GAMES
DO A PUZZLE
PLAY CHARADES
BUILD YOUR OWN GAME
PLAY FREEZE DANCE
PLAY HOT POTATO
PLAY MARBLES
KEEP THE BALLOON UP
PLAY DOMINOES
PLAY HANGMAN
PLAY TIC-TAC-TOE

EDUCATIONAL

READ BOOKS
DO A SCIENCE PROJECT
LEARN ORIGAMI
LEARN ABOUT A NEW ANIMAL
LEARN A NEW CARD GAME
LEARN TO SEW
LEARN TO KNIT
DO BRAIN TEASERS
LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE
LEARN ABOUT A COUNTRY

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Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities

Division of Mental Health

Promotion, Prevention, and Preparedness Branch

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