

Coping Strategies for Stress and Trauma

For kids (and adults)

GROUNDING

This is a distraction method that works great with tantrums and panic attacks. It moves the thought processes to the logic parts of the brain. It's extremely simple to use. Ask them a logical question "what color is the wall?" For self regulation you could look for a series of things until they've calmed down.

Examples: Go through the alphabet for animals A-Z OR 5 blue item, 4 red items, 3 green items, 2 yellow, and than 1 purple. For children they need to know their colors and shapes or alphabets. For little guys asking "where's my nose?" Or feet, mouth, hands would work too.

JUMPING

This is fantastic sensory information and works in many different ways. The exercise releases endorphins and gets the blood pumping. The motion assists the lymphatic system. Jumping requires and forces a lot of balance work along with crossing the midline increasing the cross connections in the brain and exercises the self sensing mechanism in the brain that's weakened by trauma.

Examples: Jumping rope- easy to put in an emergency kit, can be used for lots of different jumping games. There are a lot of jump rope songs that will help with creating a rhythm, which is also supportive to recovering the natural rhythms of the body and life. So type a few songs and rhymes up to put in your kit as well. Hopscotch is another great jumping game and only requires chalk. Trampolines and great if available

HUGS

Hugs are underrated! Hugs with a good squeeze acts like a weighted blanket. The pressure has a calming effect on overactive nerves and leveling them. It also releases endorphins which everyone can use more of, stress or no stress. We have a "bear hug" ritual. Big squeeze (little kids grunt with the right pressure and think the involuntary sound is fun) and then I have them return the squeeze back (I fake the sound so they feel strong).

MEDITATION

There are a variety of meditation techniques that you can choose from. Consistent practice makes this a more familiar strategy and will be extremely effective at helping rewire the brain towards healthier processes and functioning and other benefits.

Examples: Start with a breathing meditation- just sitting and focusing on your breathing. This is a good one for beginners and kids. Focus on feeling the breath in your belly and feeling it go out your nostrils and in through the back of your throat. Start with 5 minutes and then increase to what feels best as you get comfortable.

JOURNALING

This addresses emotional expression and the processing of those thoughts and feelings that make up our perception. Psychologists have found journaling to be just as effective or more so than talking to a person or therapist. Consistency is the big key. Writing can often come much easier than talking when emotions are involved. All you need is pen and notebook, so be sure you have them in your Emergency kit as well. For small children drawing is an effective journaling technique and may help them find words to have a conversation based off of those drawings with you. You can write what they tell you or just talk with them. Any topic is fine.

BREATHING

This technique connects the mind and body together and addresses the physical effects of the stress response.

Examples: 5 finger breathing- trace the fingers on your hand, as you go up you breath in and you go down the finger breath out. Keep a slow steady pace. If needed trace it backwards until calm. Another option is breath in for three counts, hold for three, breath out for 3, and hold for three. Do this at least three times or until you feel calm. In teaching kids, doing it together is very helpful.