

Understanding dysregulation: How to Support a Highly Emotional Child



Dysregulation occurs when the brain responds to sensory input in a manner that triggers the alarm state.



When a child is dysregulated, it is harder to listen, comprehend, and cope.

Remember the Three "R"s

Regulate

focus on soothing your child. Make them feel calm, safe, and loved.



Relate

Validate their feelings with your words and tone of voice. "I know you're upset right now." "This is very hard". Focus on connecting with your child.

Reason

Once your child is calm, now it is time to talk about alternatives to behaviors while reinforcing limits you set before. You can reassure them you love them but that the behavior they're exhibiting is not ok.



Until a child is regulated, they are unlikely to be related to you (feel connected & comfortable). And until a child is related, they are unlikely to have the mental capacity to reason with you.

Self-Reflection in Parenting: Help for Getting through Stressful Times



Again and again, parents have demonstrated the capacity to be caring and effective despite stressful and difficult experiences. With the help of family, friends, and community organizations, including Head Start, parents can deal with difficult stressors such as bereavement, job loss, or even depression. Some keys for coping are: recognizing that the experience is difficult, reaching out to others, not trying to go it alone, acknowledging the need for help, and working to set realistic goals. This can be easier said than done. Many people under stress find it painful to look at their choices and the circumstances that surround them. It can be too easy to forget the positive experiences in their lives, both individually and in the history of their family. But taking the time to think about your life and plan for the future, also known as self-reflection, can be a very useful tool for parenting through such tough times.

Self-reflection can help you:

- **Keep track of what happens to you and your family** and, with practice, provide a focus on what has worked out. Even remembering a past difficult time can be positive when you can pay attention to how it was resolved or how it was handled. Noting what works for you and your family helps to build successful parenting strategies and can give your spirits a lift.
- **Recognize your place in the larger picture:** Taking time to gain perspective can help you to identify the circumstances that are beyond your control in order to focus on the circumstances that you can change. Also, all of us are part of many communities: churches, neighborhoods, and, of course, families. Recognizing your place in these larger groups and participating in them are important for you and your children.
- **Plan for your future:** Being able to plan is essential, particularly if struggling with a difficult time. The plan may simply be how to make it through the day, how to get to your next appointment, or how to get help in taking care of your

children. Try to pay special attention to scheduling mealtimes and bedtimes when at all possible. Planning and then following a routine can be very comforting during times that are otherwise uncertain.

- **Start fresh:** Being able to start over is important. Don't hesitate to go back and start over in thinking about how to help your children.

What are some ways to practice productive self-reflection?

- **Find a quiet moment to take a breath:** As tough as it might be to find the place and time to simply reflect on our lives, it is one of the most important things you can do to take care of yourself as a parent.
- **Keep a journal:** Many families find it helpful to write down reflections about what has gone well and how they solve problems. This can also help in anticipating and dealing with future stresses.
- **Talk with others about positive events, and also about getting through difficult ones.** →



- **Create a drawing** or other object to remember an important event.
- **Take pictures:** Keep collections of photographs depicting the good times to help you and your family remember that such positive experiences are possible.
- **Celebrate the meaningful holidays and traditions** of your culture or religious faith and help your children learn about them.
- **Share music and other art forms with your children:** Songs, hymns, music, and art often encourage people to remember the positives and express a range of feelings.

Open communication is the foundation of good relationships, and celebrating the positives in yourself, your children, your family, and in the larger community is tremendously important. Making it through a difficult time means finding and connecting with many different resources at many times— with community, religious faith, caregivers, friends and families. Feeling down and blue or undergoing a loss can disrupt these connections, but they can be reestablished. Focusing on what children need, providing what you can, getting others to help, and remembering what works are essential resources.

For more support on this topic please see the following Family Connections materials:

Short Papers:

The Ability to Cope: Building resilience in yourself and your child

Parenting through Tough Times: Coping with depression

Additional Resources

Beardslee, William. "The Role of Self-Understanding in Resilient Individuals: The Development of a Perspective." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 59, no. 2 (1989): 266-278.

Beardslee, William. *When a Parent is Depressed: How to Protect your Children from the Effects of Depression in the Family*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2003.

Coloroso, Barbara. *Parenting Through a Crisis: Helping Kids in Times of Loss, Grief, and Change*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.



Self-Reflection in Parenting: Help for getting through stressful times was developed by the Family Connections Project at Children's Hospital Boston, under the Innovation and Improvement Project grant from the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Authors of *Self-Reflection in Parenting: Help for getting through stressful times* are William R. Beardslee, Mary Watson Avery, Catherine C. Ayoub, and Caroline L. Watts. Copyright Children's Hospital Boston, January 2008.

Reading a chapter of your book – in **daylight**, it's modelling a love of reading, right?

Going to the toilet **when you need to** and/or going to the toilet **by yourself...lock that door!**

Oh no you've run out of milk, you'll have to pop to the shops **alone** to get some more (remember to hide the milk first)

Watch a funny video on YouTube: watch more than one, **laugh as loud as you can** even if it annoys other people.

Text rageful expletives to your best friend (maybe pre-warn them it might be coming at some point)

Take the kids to the park but wear headphones so you can listen to music or a podcast at the same time. Yes you may be judged but you and I both know **you are doing the best you can with what you have right now**

Go to bed a **little bit** earlier: not enough so you feel cheated but **enough** to give you **slightly more** energy in the morning

Listening to **your** favourite music or podcast in the car: **you don't have to** listen to music you don't like every single time!

Stand outside your front door alone for 10 seconds (don't tell anyone, you could even pretend to be taking the rubbish out, no-one is following that)

Brush your teeth for longer than 30 seconds. Take 2 minutes... why not **sit down** whilst you're doing it, perhaps even **lock the bathroom door!**

Say 'no' to anything that adds to your pile of demands and depletes your resources (**or if you just don't want to**)

Wash your face: **buy yourself** a really nice face-wash and a soft towel and **hide them!**

Say 'yes' if it **makes life easier** temporarily, pick your battles.

Paying for **childcare** even if it isn't for 'paid work'.

Repeat after me "I **aim to be an imperfect parent**"

Arrange to do the food shop **by yourself** or arrange to do it online and **use the time** to go and have a solo coffee!

Giving all responsibility to someone else for a mutually agreed amount of time.

Ready meals are ok, really. If making dinner is causing you stress it's ok to take full advantage of convenience food.

Buy takeaway coffee/tea/food so you **don't have to make it for yourself** – receiving nurture from others (even paid) **keeps blocked care from the door**

Embrace screen time – a 3 hour stint is ok sometimes if the alternative is a group of wildly dysregulated people living together

Take time to do something at **your own pace**

Eat... breakfast, lunch & dinner – you don't even have to eat with anyone, on your own after everyone else has eaten is fine.

Drink a glass of your favourite soft drink and **hide it** in a tea mug so no-one asks for a sip

Having a cup of tea/coffee **before** you make breakfast for everyone.

Shower **slowly**: it is ok to **take time** to wash in a slow and regulating way.

Super **comfortable** underwear – bliss.

Survival Self-Care

Survival Care

Looking after ourselves comes in many different forms. Traditionally we can look at popular 'self-care' suggestions; having a bath, meditation, a yoga class, getting out for a pint with mates - even a weekend away if we can manage it - and these are all valid and wonderful ways to feel nourished and refreshed.

Self-care is a luxury, the ideal. It's what we can aspire to and maybe sometimes even experience. However, as parents to children with trauma, we can't wait for the ideal, we need to rest right now before the next battle. We can't wait for a night off in four days time or even until after bedtime tonight to re-charge. Sometimes we need to stop right now when the kids are with us and reach through to the next layer of 'self-care', deeper down to 'survival care'.

Survival care is different from person to person, family to family. Survival care is letting the kids watch 3 hours of TV every-day because it gives everyone some time off from fighting, from feeling their pain. It's filling lunch boxes with pre-made food so you have a valuable extra 10 minutes to negotiate getting everyone out of the door calmly. It's saying no to helping at the school fair or babysitting for a friend because they did it for you. It's paying for an extra hour of childcare so you can sit and experience your home quietly and safely and choosing not to feel guilty about it. It's taking your teenagers to the cinema or your kids to the park, plugging in your headphones and enjoying that podcast you've been waiting to listen to. It's eating dinner on the floor because the table has too much conflict, too many war stories. It's letting them sleep on the mattress by your bed as it's the only way you all sleep well, even if your mother tells you that it's not normal. It's phoning in sick and spending the day in bed watching trashy TV or buying overpriced take away coffee every day from your favourite shop because it's something someone else has made just for you.

Survival care goes deeper because it has to for us to find peace in the middle of the wars that rage on inside our child. It gives us the energy and the emotional capacity to be regulated and open when our child needs us to bear their pain and face it with them. Survival care prevents us from developing secondary trauma of our own.

This is the purpose of survival care, it leaves everyone with time to rest, releases tension, alleviates the pressure, slows the pace, gives us all some room to breathe.



EMOTION CARDS

Introduction and Ideas

A significant part of helping kids to deal with their emotions ([Jump In! Stand Strong! Rise Up!](#)) is helping them to develop a robust feelings vocabulary. That is why we are excited to present our very own set of Hope 4 Hurting Kids Emotion Cards.

What Are Emotion Cards?

Each of these 54 cards includes the name of a emotion, a face demonstrating that emotion, and a brief definition of the feeling. Definition have been taken from, or adapted from entries in the [WordNet](#)[®] lexical database of English.

Why Are These Cards Important?

These cards can be a vital tool in the [The Super Simple Feelings Management Technique](#). Specifically, they are useful for the the following components of that strategy:

- "See It" - recognizing different emotions.
- "Say It" - expanding emotional vocabulary.
- "Feel It" – recognizing how emotions affect their bodies.
- "Mimic It" – showing what emotions look like.
- "Talk About It" - talking about their own experiences.

How Do You Use These Cards?

There are numerous ways to use these cards. Here are a few ideas:

- Use the cards in conjunction with our [Scenario Cards \(I Feel\)](#) cards and have kids match the emotion to a scenario or vice versa.
- Have kids group similar emotion cards.
- Use the cards with [Super Simple Feelings Management Technique Activity Cards](#). Have the child select an emotion card and an activity card and do what it says.
- Use the cards to play [Feelings Pictionary](#).
- Print out two sets of the cards and play the matching game of go fish with younger kids.
- Have the kids sort the cards in [Emotions Sorting](#).
- Take turns selecting a card and talking about a time in your life, or a hypothetical situation, where you felt that emotion.
- Play the [Row Row Row Your Boat Emotion Game](#).
- Play a game of charades with the Emotion Cards.
- Use the Emotion Cards in conjunction with [Emotions Jenga](#).
- Play [Leave the Room](#).



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Amazed



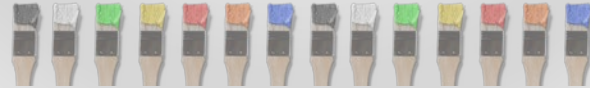
Extremely surprised by something.



Angry



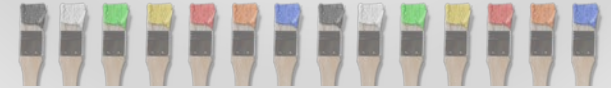
Having a strong feeling of annoyance or displeasure. Very mad.



Annoyed



Bothered, especially by small irritations.



Anxious



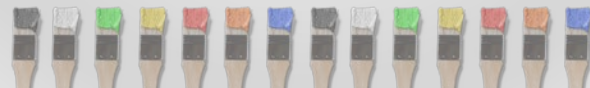
Worried that something bad is going to happen.



Ashamed



Feeling shame, guilt, embarrassment and/or remorse.



Bored



Generally uninterested and tired of the world.





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Bothered



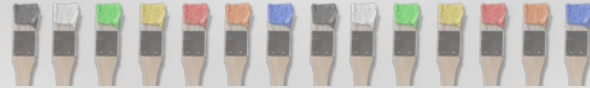
Feeling annoyed, inconvenienced, nervous or agitated.



Calm



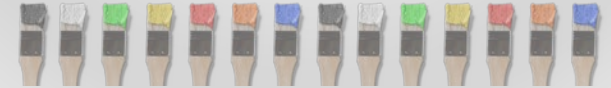
Not stressed out or worried. At rest and peaceful.



Cheerful



Happy and in a good mood without a clear reason.



Confused



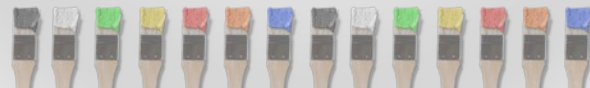
Not sure what is going on. Perplexed.



Cranky



Easily irritated or annoyed.



Curious



Wanting to understand something better or learn more about it.





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Delighted



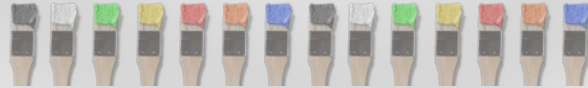
*Extremely pleased or satisfied.
Filled with wonder and delight.*



Depressed



Feeling sad, hopeless and lost.



Disappointed



*Feeling upset when you don't
get what you want or you fail
at something.*



Disgusted



Strongly disliking something.



Embarrassed



*Feeling uncomfortable as a
result of something you've
done or shame.*



Excited



*Worked up and in a heightened
state of emotion. Feeling happy
about something.*





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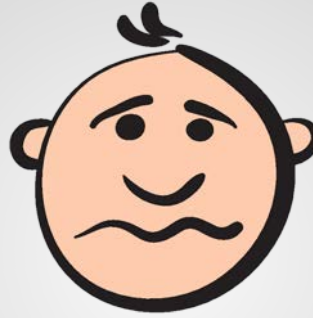
Fearful



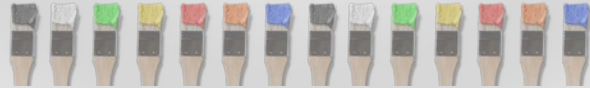
Worried or afraid about something that might or could happen.



Frustrated



Disappointed at not being able to do something or not getting something.



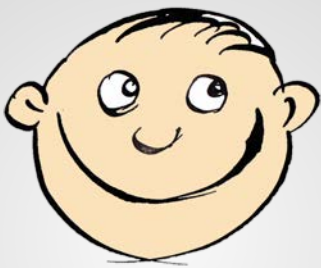
Furious



Very angry.



Glad



Showing joy, pleasure and happy appreciation.



Gloomy



Lacking cheer and joy. Not excited about the future.



Grateful



Experiencing warm feelings of satisfaction, happiness and appreciation.





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Grouchy



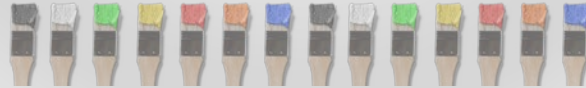
Annoyed and irritable. Having a bad temper.



Grumpy



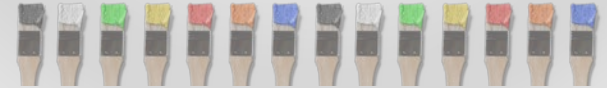
Annoyed and in a bad mood.



Happy



Feeling joy, pleasure or contentment.



Helpless



Feeling unable to manage or deal with something.



Hopeful



Positivity and optimism that good things will happen in the future.



Hurt



Unhappy and upset because of something done to you.





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Irritated



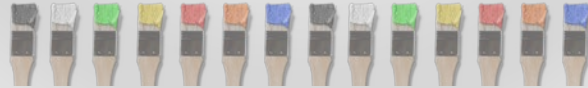
Impatient, angry or annoyed about something that has happened.



Jealous



Wanting something that someone else has.



Joyful



Feeling great happiness and delight.



Lonely



Sadness resulting from feeling abandoned or all alone.



Love



Have a great liking or affection for.



Mad



Angry or upset.





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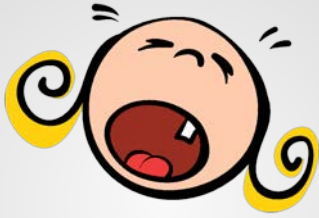
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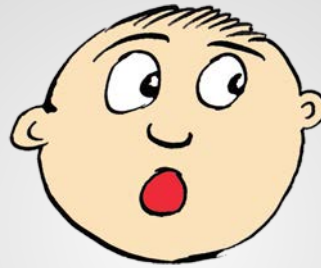
Miserable



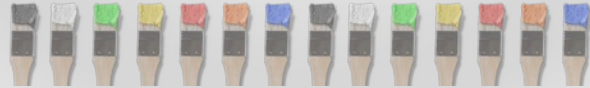
Very unhappy.



Nervous



Full of anxiety or fear about something that might happen.



Overwhelmed



Overcome by emotions. Feeling very strongly.



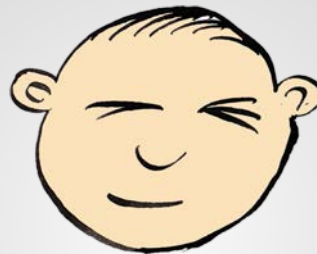
Peaceful



Feeling calm with the absence of fear, anxiety and stress.



Pleased



Experiencing pleasure. Satisfied.



Proud



Satisfied about something you've done or accomplished.





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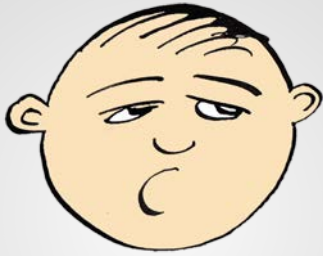
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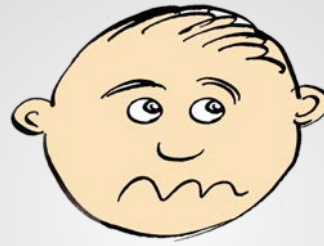
Sad



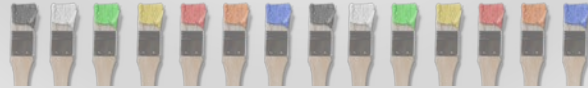
Feeling unhappy or sorrowful.



Scared



Filled with fear, worry or concern. Afraid.



Shocked



Surprised by an unpleasant or disappointing event.



Shy



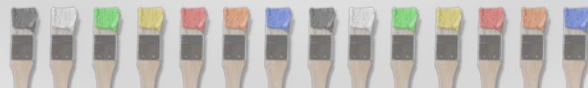
*Modest, timid or bashful.
Trying to avoid notice.*



Surprised



*Suddenly and unexpectedly
filled with wonder,
astonishment or awe.*



Terrified



Overcome by intense fear.





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Threatened



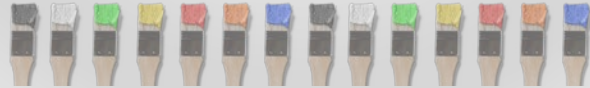
Feeling that something or someone is going to hurt you.



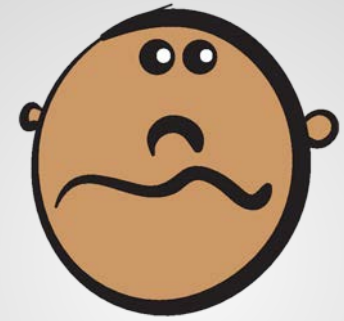
Thrilled



Experiencing intense pleasure or excitement.



Uncomfortable



Discomfort or embarrassment based on what is happening around you.



Unhappy



Sadness, sorrow or lack of contentment. A general unpleasant feeling.



Upset



Unhappy and worried by something making you feel uneasy, troubled or confused.



Worried



Upset or concerned about something that may happen.



Emotion Coaching

What is Emotion Coaching?

Emotion Coaching is a research-based tool developed by Dr. John Gottman that can help you learn to value your child's range of emotions, such as happiness about an upcoming birthday party or sadness over a lost toy. It is a five-step method for guiding your child in how to respond to her feelings. Becoming an Emotion Coach for your child will improve your relationship and teach her how to respond to emotions – valuable skills that will last a lifetime.

Why Emotion Coaching Matters

When children have parents who use Emotion Coaching, they learn about emotions in healthy ways. As a result, these children tend to do better in school, make stronger friendships, and may even get sick less often.

Good communication about emotions affects a children's behavior.

- ★ Children develop a set of skills to self-soothe, or calm down.
- ★ Children are allowed to experience the full range of emotions.
- ★ Children learn to understand how their feelings lead to their actions.

Emotion Coaching helps children develop empathy.

- ★ Empathy is the ability to identify and relate to the feelings or thoughts of another person.
- ★ The ability to show empathy is predictive of future success in relationships at home, at school and at work.



What Parents Can Do

As you prepare to use Emotion Coaching, remember these general tips:

- ★ Be a role model. Think about how you handle your own emotions.
- ★ Have empathy for your child. For example, if your child is feeling sad about breaking a favorite toy, tell her how you manage sadness when you break something. Try saying “I understand why you are sad about breaking your new toy. When I broke my new sunglasses, I was sad and wasn't sure how I would be able to enjoy being outside without them.”
- ★ Take your child's emotions seriously.
- ★ Be willing to understand your child's perspective.

The Five Steps of Emotion Coaching

STEP 1: Be Aware of Emotions

- ★ The more aware you are of your own feelings, the better you will understand how your child is feeling.
- ★ When appropriate, share your emotions with your child.
- ★ Children are learning about emotions by watching how you show yours.
- ★ Listen to your child for clues about what she is feeling.



STEP 2: Connect with your Child

- ★ Take your child's emotions seriously.
- ★ Be willing to understand your child's perspective.
- ★ Encourage your child to talk about feelings.

STEP 3: Listen to your Child

- ★ Listen to your child in a way that lets her know you are paying attention.
- ★ Try not to judge or criticize emotions that are different from what you expected.
- ★ Research shows that it is important to understand the emotion before you give advice on the behavior.

STEP 4: Name Emotions

- ★ Start identifying emotions even before a child can talk.
- ★ Talk about emotions like happy, sad, and angry and when people feel them.
- ★ Name a range of emotions. Talk about what these emotions mean and when people feel them.
- ★ Avoid telling children what they *ought* to feel – try to identify the emotions they *are* feeling.
- ★ Model identifying your own emotions – children learn by watching and copying what adults do.

STEP 5: Find Solutions

- ★ When children misbehave, explain why their behavior was inappropriate or hurtful.
- ★ Encourage emotional expression, but set limits on behavior.
- ★ Help children think through possible solutions.



The Calm Down Box: Helping Kids Self-Regulate and Capture the Quiet Moments

in Family, Parenting, Uncategorized by North Shore Family Services Therapist • 0 Comments
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Our child only wants to play on my phone. My daughter can't play by herself. Our kids say they are bored. My son can't entertain himself. I want my child to go play outside but he only wants the iPad. Do these sound familiar to you? As a therapist my inbox and voicemail are flooded with them daily. Recently I've been introducing The Calm Down Box to families and it has been very successful.

THE CALM DOWN BOX

So, what can be done you ask? Plenty! A few years back I was introduced to The Calm Down Box. In its original form, The Calm Down Box was created to help children with sensory needs learn to self-regulate. Over time, The Calm Down Box has taken on many creative names and identities such as The Quiet Time Box, Quiet Corner Kit, Solo Activities Box, Road Trip Kit, Time Out Box, etc. So, what's the point of this magical box? Self-regulation, quiet play, independent

play, sensory break and non-screen activities.

WHAT TO PUT IN A CALM DOWN BOX

Here are some of my favorite items to put into a Calm Down Box. Remember, all boxes can be modified for specific needs:

- Coloring pages and crayons- quiet and soothing activity
- Fidget cubes/stress balls/playdough/ kinetic sand- keeps hands busy
- Favorite book- quiet activity
- Race cars and other small toys – independent play
- Crunchy snacks- great for sensory needs and blood sugar regulation
- Legos- great for sensory and creative play
- Bubbles- calming activity
- Puff balls and pipe cleaners- great for creative play and sensory breaks
- Small stuffed animals/squishies- soothing and comforting
- Feeling chart- self-regulation tool

Below are additional resources, and tips for creating your own kit:

- 6 ways to make a calm down jar
- What to put in a calm down kit for kids
- Sensory cheat sheets

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE CALM DOWN BOX

Again, Calm Down Kits can be used for a variety of needs, however the main idea is to gather several calming/soothing items into one place and prompt your child to use the kit in order to learn self-regulation, engage in independent play and non-screen time activities.

Pro tip: Encourage children to use their box for 10-30 minutes each day; make it a family event by declaring quiet play and setting a timer. The more they use the box when calm, the more they will gravitate towards it in moments of dysregulation.

CREATING YOUR OWN CALM DOWN BOX

Here is what you need:

- Box- think old shoebox, treasure chest, etc.
- Markers, colored paper, stickers, etc. for decorating
- A list of items to include

Pro tip: Allow your child to decorate the box, this will encourage ownership and pride. In addition, engage your child in finding items from around the house that they would like to include. The more the child is involved, the more likely they will be to utilize the box.

Once you have all your items, it's time to get busy! Decorate your box, fill it with items, and practice family quiet time! Remember, it's never too late to teach your child self-regulation, independent play, or the importance of down time, and now you have your box full of tools to do just that!

North Shore Family Services Therapist

North Shore Family Services is a team of skilled and approachable therapists that help parents, children, teens, adults, and couples reduce anxiety and stress, learn effective problem-solving techniques, and manage emotions and behaviors that inhibit personal, school, family, and relationship success. We make therapy a productive, engaging and relaxing place for everyone to work hard and make the improvements they desire. To find the right-fit therapist for you and your family, [visit our clinician's page](#).

TAGS: anxiety, calm down box, parenting, self regulate

WHAT TO PUT IN A CALM DOWN BOX

Items that provide proprioceptive support

- Weighted lap cushion or weighted stuffed animal
- Weighted vest or pressure vest
- Stretchy resistance bands
- Sensory tunnel
- Mini massager
- Body sock
- Small blanket

Items to squeeze & keep hands busy

- Fidgets like Tangle Jr. or puffer ball
- Rubik's Cube
- Play dough or silly putty
- Pipe cleaners
- Stress balls
- Bubble wrap
- Bag of tissue paper to rip
- Scarves or fabric scraps
- Spinning top

Items to support breathing & relaxation

- Bottle of bubbles
- Pinwheels
- Straws and cotton balls or pom poms

Items for olfactory sensory support

- Calming essential oil spray
- Smelling bottles
- Scratch and sniff stickers

Items to get kids moving

- Book of yoga poses or yoga activity cards
- Skipping rope

Items for auditory sensory support

- Noise cancelling headphones
- MP3 player with music
- Audiobooks

Items for oral motor sensory support

- Chew toy or chew necklace
- Chewing gum, hard candies, or lollipops
- Snacks with a variety of textures
- Whistle, harmonica, party blowers, or similar
- Rescue Remedy Spray

Items that give kids a brain break

- Puzzle
- Books to read
- Blank notebook and writing utensils
- Coloring books
- Scratch art doodle pad
- Small chalk board, Magna-Doodle, Etch-a-Sketch, or Boogie Board
- Activity books
- Photo album

Items to visually calm

- Visual calm down cards
- Sensory bottle or calm down jar
- Light up toys
- Flashlight
- Plastic snow globe
- Kaleidoscope
- Hourglass
- Eye mask



Calm down by blowing bubbles.

Our kids have had a lot to adjust to, and we have learned they need lots of different strategies or options. Check out this list of 100 calm down techniques – there's some that you and your child might like to try.

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National Parent Partnership Council (ANPPC)

ctfalliance.org

<https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2017/07/calm-down-strategies-for-kids.html>

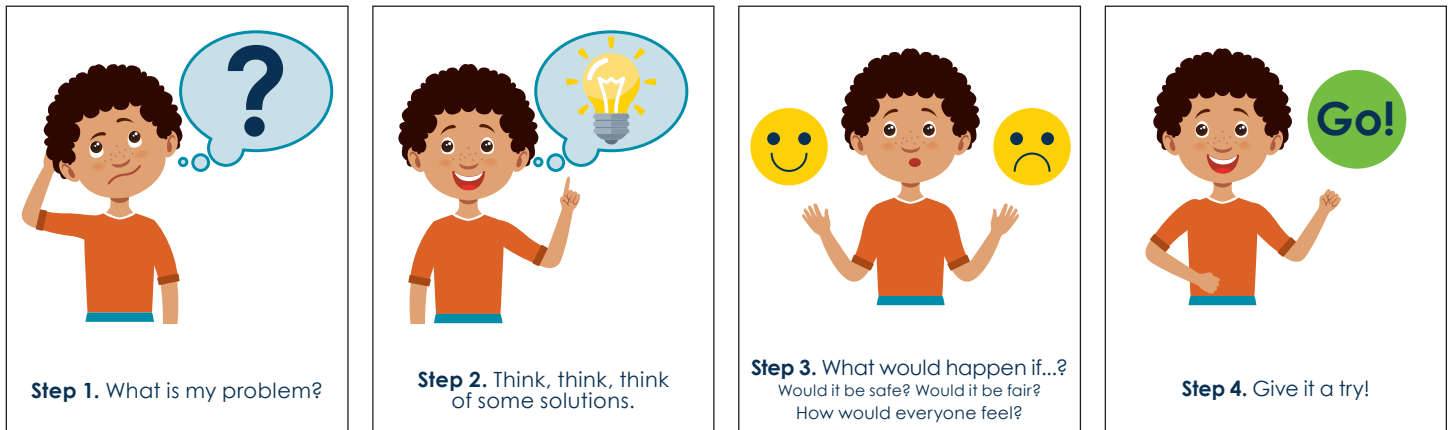
Top 10 Stress-Management Strategies for Kids and Teens

<https://unicefkidpower.org/10-strategies-for-helping-kids-manage-their-emotions/>

Consider practicing one of these exercises a day to build kids' "toolboxes" BEFORE big emotions hit. Start with...

1. **Breathing:** Show kids how to calm their minds and slow their racing emotions through simple breathing techniques. Breathe in for three seconds, hold for three seconds, breathe out for three seconds, and then repeat until calm.
2. **Getting some fresh air:** Speaking of breathing, a change of scenery and a breath of literal fresh air can help reset kids' and teens' minds, enabling them to think more clearly.
3. **Moving:** Physical exercise is a great stress reducer. When you see a child's emotions starting to build, suggest some jumping jacks or high knees...or get silly with some bird flaps, frog jumps or crab walks.
4. **Stretching:** Simple stretches can also be a great way to relax the mind as well as the body. Start with a deep breath, and then have kids reach up to the sky and slowly bring their arms back down to their sides. Repeat a few times and add some gentle neck stretches and/or arm circles.
5. **Counting:** Distraction is another effective stress management technique. Ask stressed kids to freeze in place and (silently) find 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch, 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste.
6. **Talking:** Talking about feelings is a healthy way to work through them. Encourage kids and adolescents to talk to friends, family members, or trusted teachers to share their feelings when they're upset.
7. **Drawing:** Kids and teenagers can also manage their stressful feelings through art. When they start to feel upset, encourage them to draw or paint their feelings with crayons, colored pencils, cool gel pens, watercolors, acrylics, and more.
8. **Writing:** Kids may find journaling about their emotions productive at almost any age. You might have them start a "Big Feelings" journal where they can vent about their frustrations as well as track their happy times. If kids are not able to write words yet—no worries. Encourage them to draw their journal entries instead.
9. **Getting lost in music:** Calm, quiet music can help calm and quiet kids (and adults), but letting kids and teens listen to their favorite tunes can also help bring them back to center. Consider building a stress song playlist for use at home or in the classroom!
10. **Cuddling:** Snuggling with a parent or caregiver, favorite pet or stuffed animal is a great way to relieve stressful emotions.

NCPMI Problem Solving Steps



Teaching the Problem Solving Steps

When faced with conflict many young children have difficulty coming up with rational solutions. They act out in anger or with frustration for lack of a more appropriate way to deal with the situation. Children need to be specifically taught the problem solving steps, to be able to think of multiple alternative solutions, and to understand that solutions have consequences. Teachers might use the Problem Solving Boy or Girl and The Solution Kit Cards.

Solution Kit

https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/SocialEmotionalSkills_solution-kit.pdf

Teach steps by:

- ▶ Using role play during Circle Time
- ▶ Using puppets
- ▶ Keeping visuals of problem solving steps posted around the room
- ▶ Providing access to solution kits around the room
- ▶ Intentionally planning “problems” to help children practice solving all kinds of problems



Problem Solving Steps



Step 1. What is my problem?



Step 2. Think, think, think
of some solutions.



Step 3. What would happen if...?
Would it be safe? Would it be fair?
How would everyone feel?



Step 4. Give it a try!

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10

Games That Promote Problem-Solving Skills

A note about “games”: With today’s craze for electronic toys, you might be surprised at the effectiveness of these simple, almost old-fashioned games. They are really more like educational tasks than games, but introducing them as games, either competitive or cooperative, helps kids come to love them. The games enrich the learning process, enhance understanding, and reinforce concepts taught by you.

The games featured in this chapter all have a connection to different aspects of rational problem-solving and help students to practice specific skills required to successfully solve problems, in a fun and non-threatening manner. For instance, Brain Blast explores and encourages divergent thinking, necessary for Step 2, Determining Possibilities and Choices. Similarly, by participating in Name Game, students will practice using precise words to concisely define a situation, much as they have to do in defining a problem.

The games are presented in alphabetical order. Each involves minimum preparation and equipment.

BRAIN BLAST

A competitive game of both chance and divergent thinking, Brain Blast encourages groups to cooperate to come up with as many ideas related to a specific topic as possible. Although this game works well when teaching about creative ideas for solving problems, it is also useful as a prelude to many creative writing projects.

Players:

Whole class as two teams

Materials:

- One large die, which is available from dollar stores, games stores, seniors’ stores (You can use a small one, but the large ones are better.)
- List of “umbrella topics” or general theme words (See below; it is a good idea to use concepts being studied in class already as it encourages recall of facts.)

Rules:

According to the number rolled on the die, teams provide the number of correct word or phrase choices that fit the provided theme word. (Example: Number 2 equals two words provided.) If the two words are correct, the team earns two points. If the team can come up with only one correct answer, the team earns one point. The teacher keeps track of scores in some manner visible to students, perhaps using a chalkboard, whiteboard, or overhead. Usually, the first team to reach “20” wins. Sometimes, though, determining the winner is up to the teacher. If both teams end up tied at the end of a designated playing time, the

Creative thinking is encouraged. Points may be awarded for fantasy or made-up words as long as kids can justify them. For example, “plabitat” could mean plants of the habitat.

teacher may announce that the team that obviously tried harder or had “more difficult choices” than the other is the winner.

Game at a Glance:

As you can see, the element of luck is involved (tossing a larger number on the die) as well as memory and divergent thinking.

1. Teacher writes theme word (e.g., colors) on board.
2. Team A rolls die and gets “3.” Team A provides the words “red,” “green,” and “blue” and gets three points.
3. Team B rolls “1.” The team provides the word “orange” and gets one point.
4. Team A rolls “6,” but can provide only five color words, so gets five points. (They lose a point for the one word missed.) Team A now has seven points.
5. Team B rolls “4” and provides four words, including the made-up word “Roorange” (combination of red and orange — teacher accepts the word). Team B now has five points.]

Possible Theme Words		
ANIMALS	SEASONAL ACTIVITIES	COMPUTERS
PLANTS	CAMPING	BOOKS
CITIES	VACATIONS	TELEVISION
COUNTRIES	TRAVEL	FITNESS
COLORS	FINE ARTS	NUTRITION
STORIES	MATH TERMS	PLANTS
AUTHORS	FRIENDS	FRUITS
FEELINGS	PROBLEM SOLVING	DESSERTS
BEHAVIORS	WILDERNESS	BOY (GIRL) NAMES
SPORTS	HISTORY	FUTURE
CLOTHING	FARMING	TECHNOLOGY
INUIT	CANADA	POLLUTION
PIONEERS	ASTRONOMY	CARTOONS

DISORDER

This non-competitive, cooperative game of cognitive and creative thinking invites players to consider and appreciate correct sequence.

Players:

Groups of five, whole class

Materials:

- Index cards, each giving one step in a sequence of five directions (see “Cards for Disorder” on page 85). Color-coding the card sets, perhaps with dots, so that all five cards relating to a sequence are marked with red, for example, will allow the cards to be easily returned to the correct sets following use.
- Each set of five cards is part of a larger deck, but only one set of five, not presented in sequence, is used at a time.

Rules:

No winner — the goal is to entertain.

Game at a Glance:

The activity “Posting the Letter” (below) has been used here to clarify the steps.

1. One group “performs” at a time; the rest of the class becomes an audience.

Beyond using the line master examples, teachers and students can brainstorm for common nouns that can be described in a variety of ways. For example, while “modem” is quite specific, “parent” can readily be described in five increasingly specific ways and would probably work for the game. This trial-and-error activity, by itself, can be interesting and challenging for students.

This game works well at all ages. Younger kids love the acting. Older students can take it a step further and write the action out in complete, properly sequenced form, taking note of the ambiguous wording and how it could be misinterpreted. Many kids enjoy coming up with action sequences. Disorder is an excellent creative thinking, cognitive activity.

2. The teacher holds one set of five cards like a deck of cards, blank backs facing the students. One at a time, individual group members draw a card.
3. The student conveys what is on the card either by doing charades or reading the phrase aloud. For example, if the student chose “drop it in box,” she could act this out.
4. The audience first tries to guess what the small action is. If they guess “mailing a letter,” they then try to guess where this step is in the action sequence. They are allowed a single guess only. If their answer is incorrect, the game continues with the next person drawing a card.
5. When the audience is able to identify the overall activity, allow the remaining group members to draw the other cards and present what’s on them. The audience still attempts to put all the small actions in sequence.
6. Invite students to guess the exact action title as written on the card.
Example: (assuming that cards have been drawn in this order)
Card 1: fold it carefully (the third action in sequence)
Card 2: stamp it (fourth action)
Card 3: write carefully and neatly (first action)
Card 4: drop it in the box (fifth action)
Card 5: lick and seal (second action)
ACTION TITLE: Posting the Letter

You can imagine how confusing these actions would be to students who didn’t know the correct order or the title. When the actions are presented in this “Disorder,” with the words being rather ambiguous, the game becomes both a problem-solving and an “ordering” activity. The creation of a title is a closing activity; only the teacher knows the “true” title.

NAME GAME

This game is either competitive or cooperative, depending on how the teacher wants to use it. A game of reasoning, it facilitates understanding for concise, accurate defining of words, and hence, of problem situations.

Players:

Whole class as two teams (competitive), or individuals or partners (cooperative)

Materials:

- Teacher information on vague-to-specific defining words (see “Possible Name Game Words and Clues” on page 86)
- A team counting list on overhead or board that allows players to see the accumulating points *or* the sheets of paper used by individuals or partners

Rules:

If playing in teams, the team with the highest score wins; if playing as individuals or as partners, individual scores are kept only as personal challenges.

Game at a Glance:

1. Teams determine which team starts, perhaps by playing Rock, Paper, Scissors or doing a coin flip. After the first “call,” or guess, teams alternate calling for the rest of the game.

2. The teacher provides the first “clue,” a vague, abstract, or indistinct descriptor. See “Possible Name Game Words and Clues.” Chances are players will not be able to guess, or “call,” the correct name.
3. The teacher provides the next “clue” on the list.
4. Teams alternate “calling” what they think the word is. If a team guesses correctly, that team gets the number of points listed beside the “clue.” As clues become more specific, and hence, guessing becomes easier, fewer points are awarded.

Example (based on Team A and Team B)

- Teacher provides the clue word “edible” (worth 5 points).
- Team B has won the coin toss and guesses “pizza” (0 points). (Note: If the team had guessed the word “pomegranate,” they’d have earned 5 points, and the teacher would move to the next word.)
- Team A guesses “cake” (0 points).
- Teacher provides the next clue, which is “fruit” (worth 4 points).
- Team B guesses “apple” (0 points).
- Team A guesses “orange” (0 points).
- Teacher provides the next clue, “many edible seeds” (worth 3 points).
- Team B guesses “grapes” (0 points).
- Team A guesses correctly and gets three points.

Teacher Tip

After playing this game, it is a good idea to discuss how the more succinct, concise, and accurate the clue words, the easier it is to guess the key word. Draw students’ attention to how this works when writing or stating a problem to be solved.

PRIORITIES

Priorities is a competitive game of problem-solving and of establishing priorities. To some degree, it is also a game of chance.

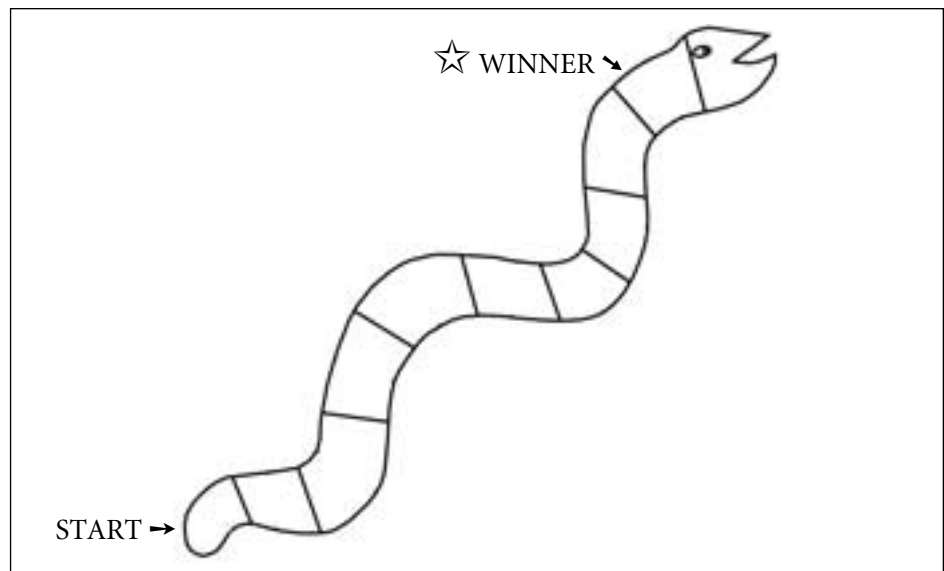
Players:

Two people or the whole class divided into two teams

Materials:

- Individual Priorities sheets or single transparency for the overhead (see graphic below)
- If using overhead, have a washable pen for reuse of transparency.
- Write problems, one per card, to create a reusable Problems Deck. (See Appendix A, Table of Possible Problems, for ideas.)

Shape of the figure is flexible, but the snake shape seems to appeal to kids. I recommend having at least 10 steps.



Rules:

First person (or team) to reach the Top Priority wins.

Game at a Glance:

1. All cards are shuffled and spread face down on a table or desk.
2. If playing in partners, each takes one card; if whole class is playing, one player from each team chooses a card in turn.
3. The two players holding cards must decide which card represents the highest priority. This card represents a single move ahead on that player's game sheet. If using an overhead for the whole class, have a different symbol (e.g., ^ or *) for each team, and mark the team's progress with their symbol.
4. If the players cannot agree on which card represents the priority, they present their cases to the teacher (or to a predetermined "judge") who must decide who has the best case and thus will move ahead. If a decision still can't be reached, either no one moves or everyone does.
5. If the players make an obvious error in judgment and choose the wrong card as the priority, the teacher or judge can intervene and have them all move backwards one step.

Example:

- First cards exposed: Team A — late for curfew; Team B — have to phone friend
Late for curfew takes priority so Team A moves ahead one space.
- Next two cards: Team A — broke my bike; Team B — forgot my homework

(Obviously, kids will have something to say about these two problems. Allow conversation between team members for up to two minutes; then, ask the players who chose the cards to explain why their problems should take priority.)

PROTO, OR PROBLEM LOTTO

This competitive game involves creative thinking and also lets students see that not only can problems have more than one solution, but that sometimes the same solution works for more than one problem. Many students think that there has to be "just one right way" to solve a problem so this game can be an eye-opener for them.

Players:

Individuals or partners

Materials:

- Individual sheets of paper, pens/pencils
- Visible lists of "problems" to copy (on transparencies or wall charts or handouts that can be collected afterward)
- Possible Solutions Deck: Keeping in mind the problems on the students' list, write possible solutions briefly, one per card. Many solutions will work for several problems. See Appendix B, Table of Possible "General" Solutions.

Rules:

The first student(s) to fill in the sheet according to teacher requirements (e.g., one solution in each quadrant *or* three solutions in three quadrants *or* two solutions in diagonal quadrants) wins the game. The design is flexible.

This game works well for any age, depending on the problems listed. For problems, you can refer to Appendix A, Table of Possible Problems, or invite students to create their own lists and print them legibly on index cards. The latter can be an ongoing project. The students are much better at identifying problems than we are; they know what problems they face.

Remember to refer to Appendix A, Table of Possible Problems, for ideas. Be sure that all problems are worded succinctly as kids tend to copy the shortest ones.

Game at a Glance:

1. Students divide pages into four quadrants by drawing two lines that intersect at right angles and extend to edges.
2. At the top of each quadrant, students write a problem, chosen from the provided list.
3. The teacher randomly draws cards or holds cards with backs facing the students and invites different students to pick a card.
4. The teacher or a student reads the possible solution. If students can fit that solution to one of their chosen problems, they print it in the appropriate quadrant.
5. If a solution fits more than one problem, they can print it in more than one quadrant.
6. The game continues until someone meets the criteria established by the teacher and shouts “Protto,” at which point the teacher (or a predetermined panel of student “judges”) confirms that the student has met the criteria. Example: One student has selected the following four problems to write in his quadrants:

told a lie	lost my homework
friend wants to shoplift	late for curfew

If the teacher’s requirements for this particular game were to “get one solution in each of any two diagonals,” this student, with a solution in both the top right and bottom left quadrants, could call “Protto.”

- The first solution presented was “do a thorough search.” He wrote this correctly in the top right quadrant.
- The next solution presented was “take on a paper route.” This idea doesn’t fit anywhere on his page, so he could not write it down.
- The third solution presented was “take a deep breath, hold for five seconds, and repeat three times.” This solution “step” is appropriate for any problem, so he wrote it in all quadrants (as all other students could have done, too, which means it works against winning).

PULLING POCKETS

This can be a game or an in-class activity. Based on the elements of chance, surprise, and quick thinking, it can be a cooperative game, with teams collaborating to come up with as lengthy a list as possible; a competitive game; or an individual challenge, where each student randomly draws or selects a different pocket — called “pulling a pocket” — and attempts to solve the problem within it.

Players:

Whole class divided into two or more teams approximately equal in size

Materials:

- “Pockets,” each filled with a different problem
A “pocket” is anything that can be closed, such as an envelope, a small tie bag (like the ones used at weddings, available in dollar stores), a small box, an aluminum foil bundle, a newspaper stapled into squares, an empty toilet-paper tube sealed at both ends, a baby food jar, or a plastic egg as found everywhere at Easter. Basically, anything small and hollow works. Each tiny container is filled with a single problem, then closed.

“Pulling a pocket” is a way to motivate kids and keep their attention since the activity has an element of surprise. It means making a random draw from a choice of “pockets” whose contents — in this case, problems — are hidden. The pockets can be prepared easily by volunteers, aides, or other students.

Rules:

The team that “pulls the pocket” answers first. Teams then alternate pocket pulling.

Teams receive points for quickly providing “good” possible solutions. There is an element of subjectivity in determining the excellence of the response, so having a panel of judges who try to be objective (with the teacher’s help) is a good idea. Teams alternate giving solutions. They can’t repeat a solution already given, and when no one can come up with any more solutions, a new pocket is opened.

Game at a Glance:

1. Students choose pockets and open. If using team approach, first one team chooses a pocket, reads the situation aloud, and then both teams are given 60 seconds to devise solutions.
2. Teams alternately give solutions, earning one point per solution.
3. The team having the most “viable” solutions — offered alternately and not repeated — will have the most points.
4. When there are no more solutions, a new pocket is opened.

Example:

- Team A chooses a pocket which contains “lost my cellphone.”
- At start signal, both teams brainstorm solutions to the problem. They stop at signal from the teacher. Signals can be anything familiar to the class, such as a hand clap, a whistle, a flicking of lights, or even just a loud “Stop!”
- Team A offers first solution. If acceptable, the team gets one point.
- Team B offers a different solution. If acceptable, the team gets one point.
- Team A has no more solutions, but Team B has one more, so gets one more point. (Team A has 1 point; Team B has 2.)
- Team B opens a pocket and continues as before.

There are many other ways to use pockets, too. You can stuff pockets with seasonal greetings, jokes, edibles, actions to perform, words of encouragement, silly fortunes, directions to “prizes,” marbles, and statements of appreciation, which students will find much more memorable than verbal comments. Pockets can be reusable or personalized with names and contents specific to each child. Kids love to open their own personal pockets.

SOLUTION BEE

Comparable to a spelling bee, this competitive game encourages students to think broadly, innovatively, and creatively. Solution Bee is a game of luck as well as of divergent thinking.

Players:

Whole class as two teams

Materials:

- Problem–Solution Deck: Use index cards to create this reusable deck; alternatively, you can use paper cut into card-size pieces. The number of cards or papers will depend on the ages of the students, but there should be at least six to begin with. If the teacher finds the game moves perhaps too quickly, more cards can be used the next time. On each card, a problem is identified on one side, with a possible solution written below it. This solution is considered to be the “winning” one, but is not necessarily the “best” one. See page 89. (See Appendixes A and B for more problem and solution ideas; of course, the teacher or students can add more situations.)

Rules:

Teams are required to brainstorm for all the possible solutions to a given problem. They say their solutions alternately, and if theirs is the one written on the card, they win a point. The team with the most points wins.

Game at a Glance:

1. One student from a team selects a card from a fanned deck. The words face the teacher so that there is no way to peek at the problem. The teacher then reads the problem on the chosen card.
2. Teams alternately suggest a possible solution.
3. When a team comes up with the solution on the card, it gets a point; the next problem card is selected randomly by a student and the same procedure is followed.
4. Point out that the solutions on the cards are *not* necessarily the best solutions. Discuss how a single problem can have many solutions, and whether or not the “winning” solution is the best one.

SOLVE-IT-TWICE

This competitive game calls on students to take both adaptive and innovative approaches to problem-solving. It enables players to see that there are at least two equally good, rational problem-solving techniques for a single problem. The assumption is that players know the difference between an adaptive solution and an innovative one.

Players:

Teams — groups, or whole class as two teams

Materials:

- Problems Deck (see page 79)
- Paper and pens/pencils, one for each team
- Overhead, whiteboard, or chalkboard for point counting

Rules:

This game can be judged either by the teacher or by a predetermined panel of student judges. The teams need to come up with two solutions for each problem — an adaptive one and an innovative one. A team receives a single point for a single response, as long as the judge or panel feels that the solution is appropriate. If the team offers a solution that the judges find particularly “amazing,” two points can be awarded for that solution. At the end of the game, the team with the most points wins.

Game at a Glance:

1. Each team chooses a player who does the writing and a player who reads aloud what has been written.
2. The teacher or one of the judges randomly draws and reads a card from the Problems Deck.
3. Teams are given 60 seconds (or more, depending on ages and abilities of players) to write down two solutions: one adaptive and one innovative. Talking is allowed between team members.
4. The teacher or a judge calls “stop.”
5. Teams present their solutions exactly as written. Judges determine points. The maximum number of points per problem is three: one for the adaptive

solution and one or two for the innovative solution. Teams alternate starting.

Example:

- Problem card shows “got caught telling a lie.”

- Team 1 writes:

ADAPTIVE: Apologize. (Judges award 1 point.)

INNOVATIVE: Apologize, but also show the person a page you’ve downloaded about how lying has terrible effects on people and say that you have learned from your mistake. (Judges award 2 points.)

Total: 3 points.

- Team 2 writes:

ADAPTIVE: Say sorry. Accept consequences without whining. (Judges award 1 point.)

INNOVATIVE: Jokingly say that the “devil made me do it.” (Judges award 0 points because this solution is not viable.)

Total: 1 point.

Cards for Disorder

These card steps are in correct sequence. You will need to reproduce them and glue them to cards yourself. The directions are vague for two reasons. If the student chooses to read aloud what's on the card, the words alone will not necessarily give away the final action. If the student chooses to act them out, it can be much more entertaining if he isn't quite sure what he is doing. A lot of guess work is purposefully involved.

ACTION TITLE: BLOWING BUBBLES

1. open the cap
2. pour mixture in a bowl
3. hold the wand carefully
4. blow gently
5. touch one with your finger and watch what happens

ACTION TITLE: WALKING THE DOG

1. attach the hook part
2. open the door, exit, walk, holding the end firmly
3. encourage sitting at the street corner
4. pick up poop and dispose of it
5. continue "controlled" walking

ACTION TITLE: MAKING THE CAKE

1. read the directions
2. gather the ingredients
3. break eggs
4. mix it, pour it, cook it
5. eat and enjoy

ACTION TITLE: MAKING A CHOCOLATE SUNDAE

1. scoop it out into a bowl
2. pour chocolate
3. sprinkle
4. eat and enjoy
5. lick bowl and fingers

Possible Name Game Words and Clues

POMEGRANATE

Edible (5)

Fruit (4)

Many edible seeds (3)

Bright red (2)

Eat seeds only (1)

FOOTBALL

Sport equipment (5)

Team sport (4)

Small and brown (3)

Pigskin (2)

Oval shaped (1)

PENCIL

School tool (5)

Long or short (4)

Filled with graphite (3)

Wooden and pointy (2)

Utensil for writing (1)

TEXTBOOK

Resource (5)

Big or small (4)

Informative, portable (3)

Can be boring (2)

Hardback manuscript (1)

GRAPEFRUIT

Edible (5)

Natural (4)

Fruit (3)

Sphere (2)

Juicy (1)

SODA

Ingestible (5)

Contained (4)

Sweet (3)

Fizzy (2)

Liquid (1)

Sample Problem/Solution Cards

P: I “borrowed” money without asking from Mom’s purse and she found out.

S: Gave her my allowance for a month

P: I got grounded on the night of the big game.

S: Try to make a deal with Mom for grounding on a different day.

P: I forgot to pick up little sister from daycare, so they called Dad to come from work to get her

S: Stuck a reminder note to my backpack.

P: When the teacher leaves the room, ___ picks on me.

S: Tell ___ I’m going to beat him up at recess.

P: Class wants to go on an expensive field trip.

S: Have a class bake sale to raise money.

P: Friend wants to cheat from my test.

S: Let her cheat but talk to her later.

P: My best friend told the teacher a big lie and I don’t know what to do.

S: Tell the teacher that she lied to her.

P: I missed the school bus and don’t have money for a city bus.

S: Call Mom at work.

P: I lost my homework on the bus.

S: Call the bus company when I get home.

P: Friend wants me to shoplift with him.

S: Talk to the school counsellor about it.

Step-by-Step Problem Solving with Children

Do you think children under the age of five are too young to solve their own problems? Try guiding them through the steps of problem solving and you'll find that they can be creative and thoughtful problem solvers.

1. **Stop the children as soon as you see a problem starting. Don't let the conflict get worse. Adult says, "You have a problem." Adult describes what you think the conflict is about. For example: "Destiny and Felicia both want the truck." If you are wrong about what is going on, the children will tell you; then state the problem simply in your own words.**

What does the teacher do to help children identify the problem?

2. **Ask each child what can be done to handle the conflict.**

Make sure the children take turns talking and don't allow one child to interrupt another. For young children, the adult may have to repeat what the child says to make sure the other child understands. Communication needs to be solution-focused and respectful. No name calling or other rude communication is permitted. Listen to each child carefully.

What does the teacher do to help children identify possible solutions?

3. **Select a positive solution that each of the children can agree on.**

You might not agree with the solution the children choose. Let them try it and figure it out. Then help them find a better solution. Remember: the solution should come from the children, not from an adult. If the children can't agree, ask other children for their ideas and keep trying until both children agree to a solution. Sometimes children will get bored with the process and decide to agree or even walk away. This is an OK way to solve a problem in preschool.

Describe the solution that the children chose on the video. What did the teacher do to help the children decide on the solution?

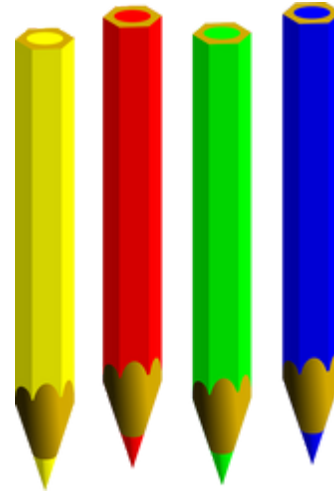
4. **Follow through.**

Sometimes the solution works but sometimes it doesn't. Problem solve again if the solution isn't successful. What can the children and teacher do for follow through?

CRITICAL-THINKING ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS



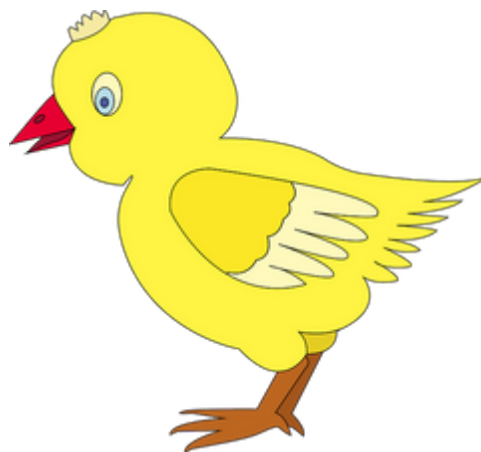
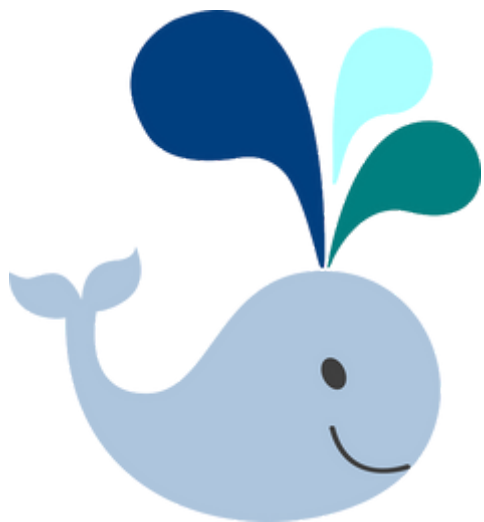
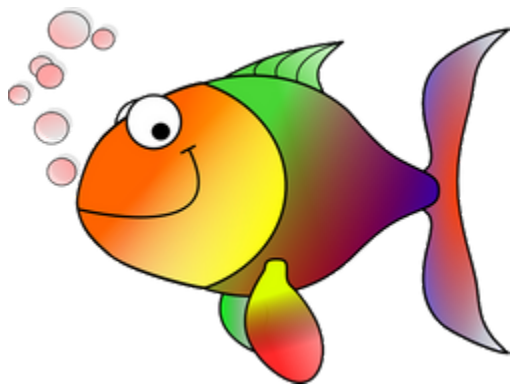
Which two items are used together?



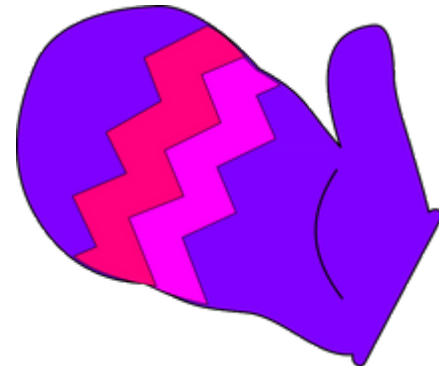
Which are fruits? Which are veggies?



Who lives on land? Who lives in the water?



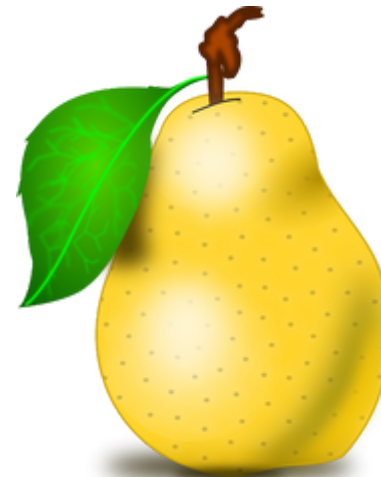
**What do you wear in summer?
What do you wear in winter?**





***Draw a line from big monkey to big bike,
small monkey to small bike.***




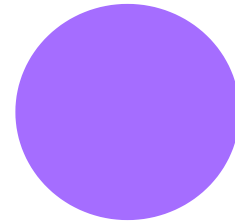
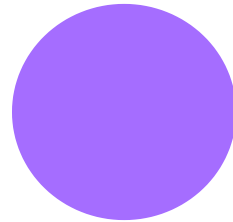
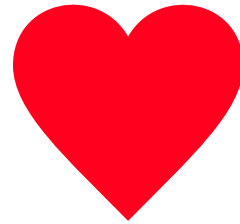
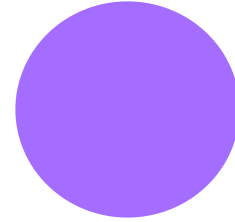
Circle the largest and the smallest fruits.



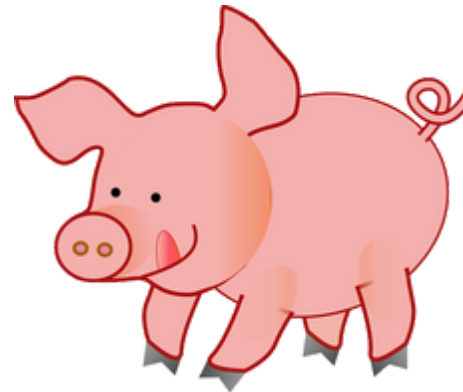
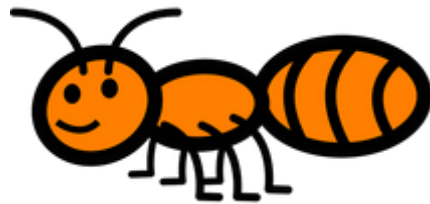
 = 2

 = 3

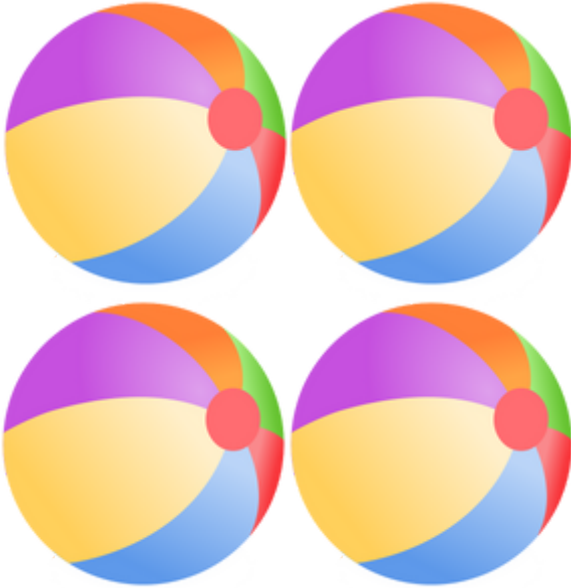
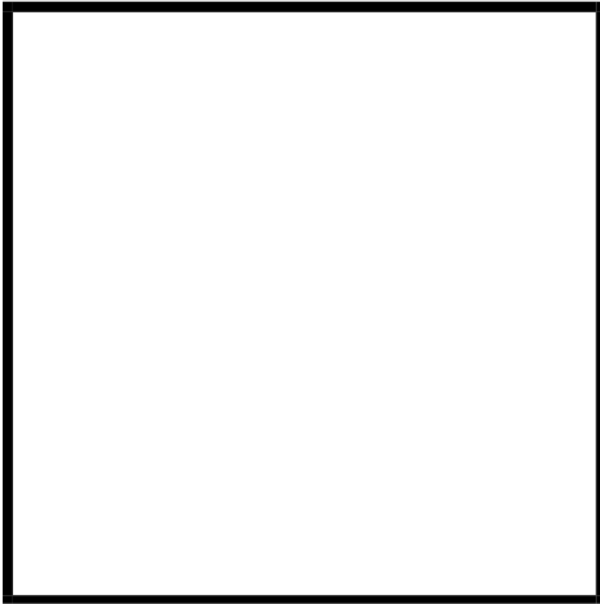
 = ___



Who runs the fastest? Who runs the slowest?



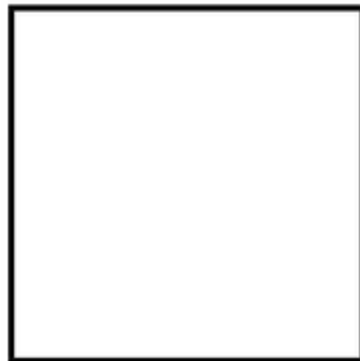
Find a pattern. Draw the missing balls.



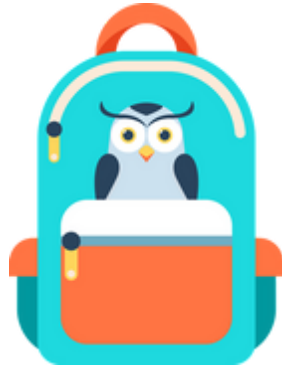
Find a pattern. Draw the two missing fruits.



Find a pattern. Draw the two missing animals.



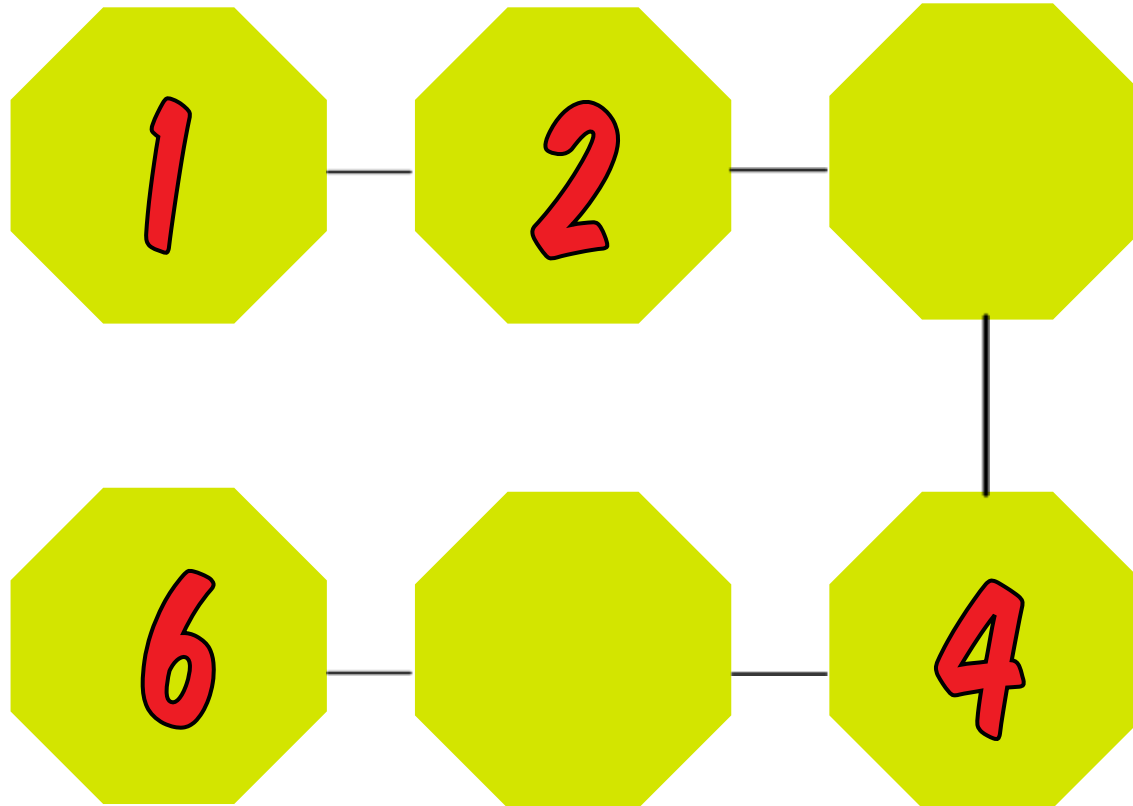
Circle the item that does not belong to the group



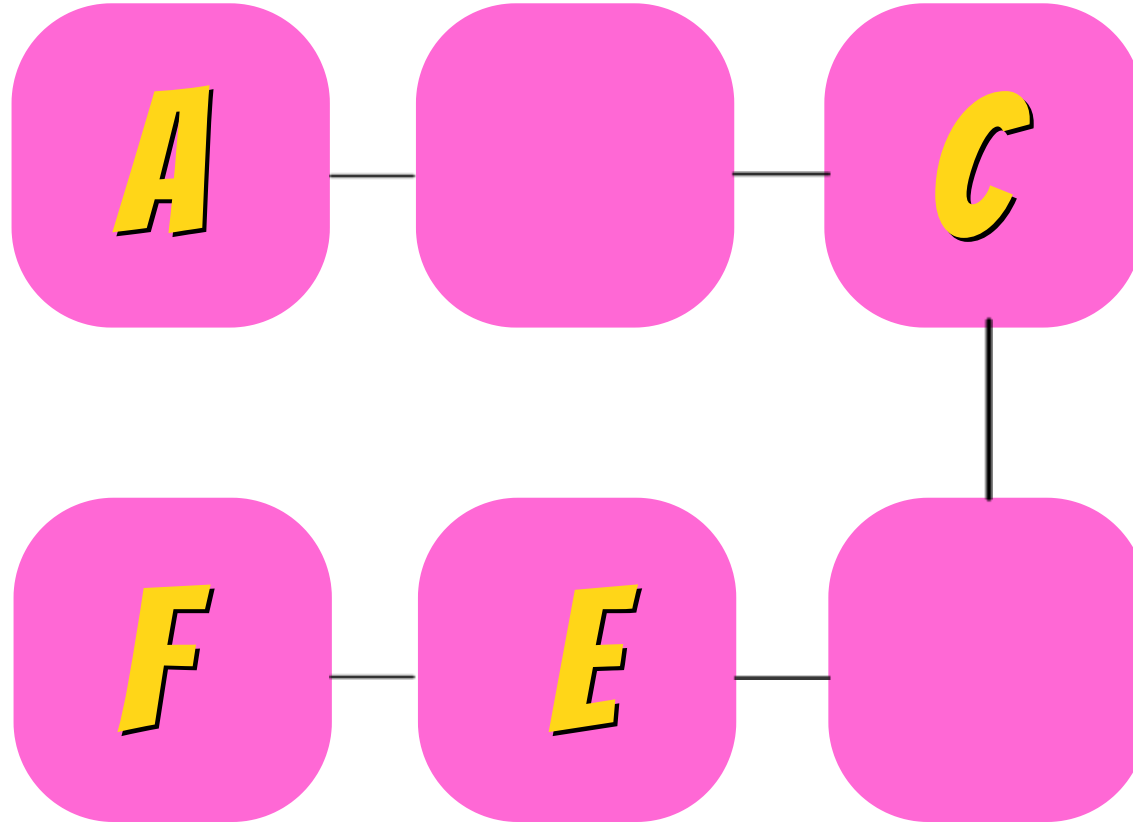
Circle the item in each row that does not belong to the group



Fill in the missing letters.



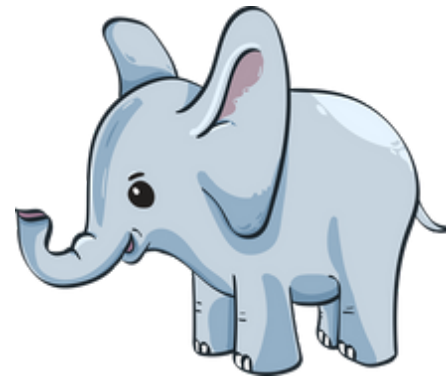
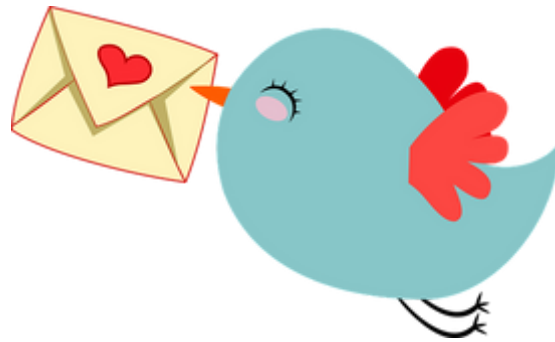
Fill in the missing numbers.



Which two items are normally used together?



Circle the animals that fly?



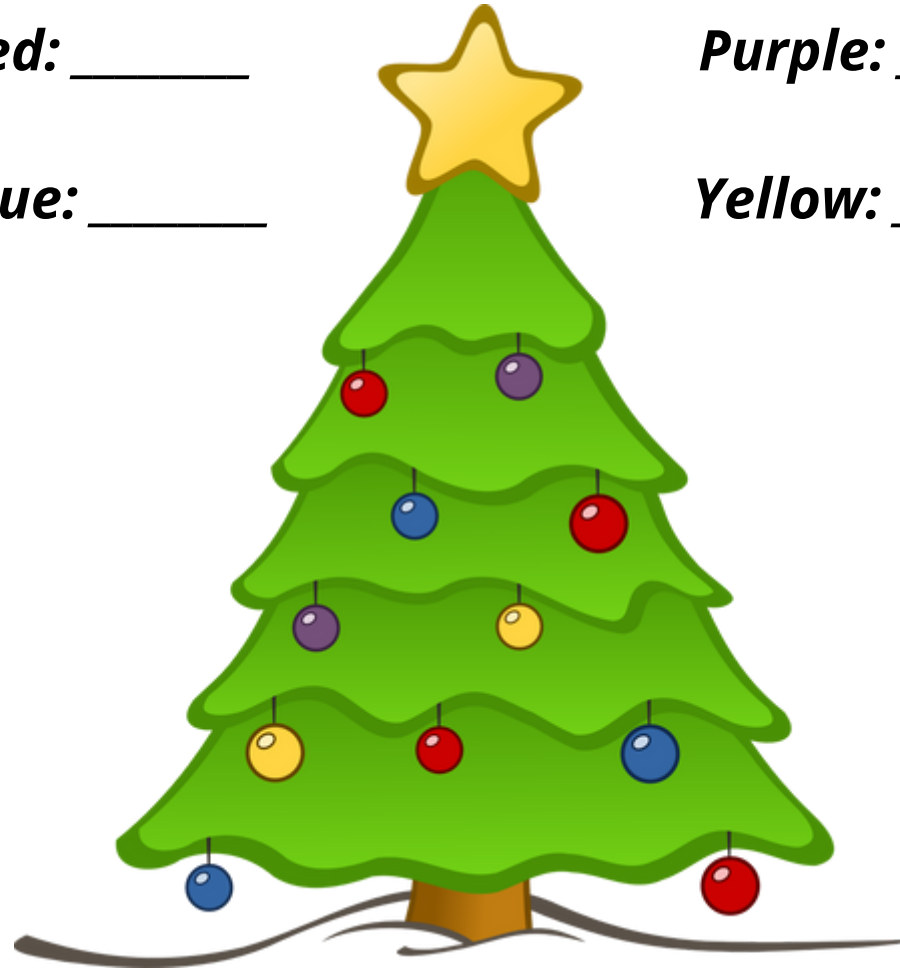
How many balls of each color on the Christmas tree?

Red: _____

Purple: _____

Blue: _____

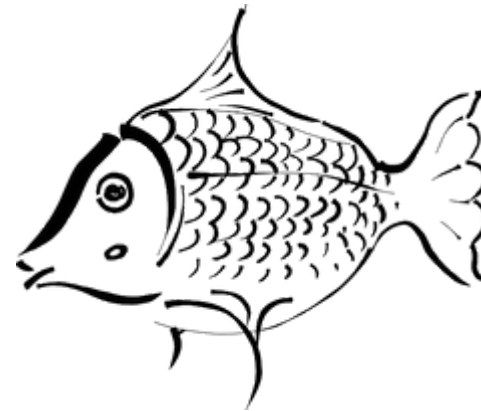
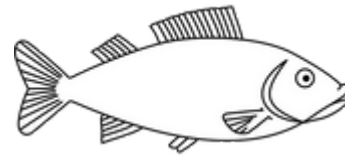
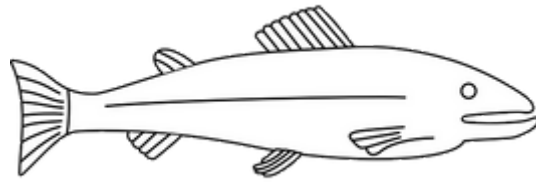
Yellow: _____



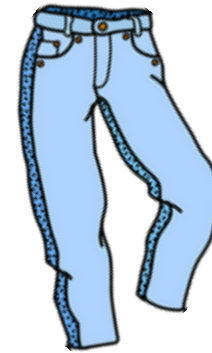
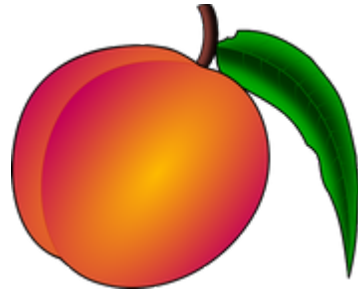
Draw a line from the animal to its feet.



Color the biggest fish red. Color the smallest green.



Circle the item in each row that does not belong to the group





Critical Thinking For Kids – 5 Powerful Ways to Teach How To Think, Not What To Think

By: Pamela Li, MS, MBA

Last updated: Aug 13, 2022 Evidence Based

| [What](#) | [Importance](#) | [Teach](#) | [5 Powerful Ways to Teach How to Think](#) |

Critical thinking for kids is one of the most important skills in life. It is also an essential 21st-century skill. Unfortunately, going to school is almost the antithesis of learning to think critically.

In school, children learn to repeat back what the teacher or textbook says. They learn to follow the correct steps in the correct order to get the correct answer. Classrooms are filled with drills, memorization, and homework rather than teaching students to think.

It is up to us, the parents, to supplement our kids' education with critical thinking examples and teaching in everyday life. Let's look at why and how we can help our kids become critical thinkers.



What Is Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a set of skills and habits of mind, including the ability to define a problem, identify assumptions, analyze ideas, and reason critically, and then systematically list different possible causes, create plausible solutions, or evaluate its correctness using logical reasoning. It also includes the ability to make creative connections between ideas from different disciplines.

American philosopher, psychologist, and educator, John Dewey (1859–1952) called this “reflective thinking”¹. Dewey defined critical thinking as active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge. It involves actively subjecting ideas to critical scrutiny, rather than passively accepting their face value.

Critical thinking for kids is about helping kids develop reasoning skills. A critical thinker will ask the right questions rather than just saying, “yes, this is the right answer”. They will analyze things and look at the reasons for them and all the alternatives.

Why Is Critical Thinking Important

Critical thinking is one of the most valuable cognitive skills because it allows us to use discipline and logical skills to solve problems. It is also important for **a child's brain and cognitive development**. These skills are necessary in getting a child ready to understand how things work in the real world and come up with creative ideas.

Besides gaining problem-solving skills, being able to think independently will allow your child to resist peer pressure, form their own opinions and trust their own thinking when they are asked to do things they don't want to do.

For the vast majority of everyday problems, it may suffice to rely on the rote, lower-order learning that our children receive from their schools.

However, prejudice, narrow-mindedness, emotion, or dogma can easily diminish its usefulness. When facing complex problems, people who are not used to critical thinking usually rely on simplistic, but often inaccurate or outdated, representations of the world propagated by mass media.

By using higher-order thinking skills, we can avoid making illogical mistakes that we would normally make if we saw the world through our emotions, prejudices, and irrational thoughts.

Why Is Critical Thinking So Hard To Teach

If critical reasoning is such an important part of learning, why doesn't school focus on teaching these vital skills?

The quick answer is, "They try, but they can't."

This is because, in order to "think critically" on a topic, one needs to have deep previous knowledge about a subject and apply formal logic.

There is no effective way to teach "general deep knowledge". The analytical reasoning skills learned in programs on certain topics don't transfer easily to other domains².



How To Teach Critical Thinking To A Child

Despite the difficulty in teaching critical reasoning in specific topics, there are things parents can do to help children **form a healthy critical thinking mindset** and **develop the desire to look for deeper domain knowledge for creative problem solving**. The main idea is to teach kids how to apply higher-order thought processes in any situation that requires **decision-making skills in their daily lives**.

While there are critical thinking activities or educational games to promote critical thinking, critical thinking goes deeper than just asking open-ended questions.

Here is what parents can do to teach children critical thinking in everyday life and help them become creative thinkers.

START EARLY AND EXPLAIN EVERYTHING

Young children often ask lots of questions and “whys” which wear parents out to the point of saying “that’s how it’s supposed to be.”

But knowing why is the crucial first step in thinking critically.

Children of all ages can learn to think critically. Do not blow them off just because they are younger children.

When children are taught from a young age how to ask different types of questions and formulate judgments by objective evidence and logical analysis, they grow up confident in their own ability to question assumptions and to reason with logic rather than emotions³.

As much as possible, explain things to them from an early age. When you can’t answer certain questions, you can say, “That’s a good question and I want to know the answer, too!”

DO NOT DEMAND BLIND OBEDIENCE

Asking kids to obey and follow orders from adults blindly is a great way to **discourage** critical thinking development⁴. Stanley Milgram’s Obedience To Authority Experiments illustrates this point perfectly⁵.

In this famous series of experiments, subjects were asked to administer electric shocks to a stranger when told to do so by an authority figure.

In some cases, the shock was actually painful enough to cause serious injury. Under the “authority’s” instructions, most participants administered increasingly high levels of voltage to lethal dosages without questioning it.

This is the danger of obeying the authority blindly without exercising critical thinking to question the authority’s decision.

While parents often demand children to obey for their own good, we need to explain why we want them to do what we ask them to. “Because I said so” will not develop logical reasoning skills in children. A child needs to know the why’s to think independently and make sound judgments.

There is another advantage when we use this parenting style. When we use reasoning and logical thinking to explain what we ask kids to do, we are **practicing inductive discipline**. Studies show that inductive discipline is the best way to discipline compared to **power assertion and punishment**. Children have fewer behavior problems, better emotional regulation, higher academic success, and more critical thinking skills.



ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS AND FOSTER CURIOSITY IN CHILDREN

Critical analysis is using an objective and critical mindset to analyze an idea as opposed to relying on emotional response or subjective understanding. To think critically is to be willing to have your views challenged by new information and different perspectives.

When safety and health are not at stake, allow children to question and discuss the legitimacy of what we say. Doing so will help our children develop intellectual curiosity⁶ and analytical skills.

TEACH OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Keeping an open mind and flexible thinking when approaching a new problem is essential in critical thinking⁷. We can teach kids to be open-

minded by suggesting different points of view, alternative explanations, or different solutions to problems.

Sometimes, there are things that have definite, repeatable answers, such as in math and science. But often, there are different answers depending on one's point of view. Encourage kids to solve problems in new and different ways, by connecting different ideas from other domains, and strengthening their analytical thinking skills.

EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CORRELATION AND CAUSATION

One of the biggest impediments of logical reasoning is the confusion of correlation and causation⁸.

When two things tend to happen together, they are correlated, but it doesn't necessarily mean one causes the other. It may be, or it may not be. We don't know unless we have more information to prove that one is a direct cause for the other.

For example: whenever a child wears a blue shirt to school, the teacher calls on him to answer a question. Does it mean wearing the blue shirt causes the teacher to do so? Maybe the teacher really likes to call on kids in blue shirts. But it's not necessarily the case. Maybe it's a coincidence or maybe whenever he wears a blue shirt, he also happens to be more alert and the teacher thinks he must know the answer. We don't know if that's the case without asking the teacher to confirm. Therefore, we cannot conclude that the blue shirt causes the teacher to ask him questions without having actual cause-and-effect proof.

Final Thoughts On Critical Thinking For Kids

Critical thinking matters not only for kids but also for adults. It's one of the most important things we must teach children through not only our words but also our actions. Model how to use this valuable skill in our daily life in parenting. Using critical reflective thinking is also what sets us apart from [bad parenting](#).

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Parenting For Brain is devoted to empowering our readers with science-based parenting information. We use only high-quality and peer-reviewed studies to support facts in our articles.

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