

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Calming Toolbox

These activities provide children with the tools they can utilize, and eventually get them to a point where they can regulate their own emotions in challenging moments. A great way to support and empower your child to self-soothe is to help them make a calm down “toolbox” with many of the items that have been included. Have a realistic conversation with them about what helps them calm down when they are feeling anxious and place those items in the box. Aside from their worry stone, journal, calm down jar, positive mantra bracelet, stress ball, and slime, you may include bubbles for breathing, a photo album filled with happy memories, a stuffed animal, gum, an iPod for music, or coloring books and crayons.

Calming and Mind Jars

Typical Mind Jars or “Calm Down Bottles” include glitter and liquid. When shaken or overturned, the glitter swirls around—not dissimilar from crazy or uncontrollable thoughts. When angry, anxious or upset, a child can be taught to sit and watch the glitter settle. As a parent, you can incorporate with deep breathing for an even greater effect. For this activity, you’ll need:

- Small Jars or Plastic Water Bottles
- Glitter Glue
- Food Coloring
- Hot Water
- Glitter and/or sequins (optional)

Mix about 1 tablespoon of glitter glue with 1 cup of warm water. Use a bit more if your jars are larger. If you’d like, add food coloring and extra glitter to make it even more colorful and sparkly. Fill the bottle the rest of the way with warm (or even hot water). The warmer the water, the better the glitter will dissolve without clumps. Don’t forget to hot glue the tops on the bottles to prevent spills.

Worry Cans

Worry Cans can help children identify and discuss their worries by providing a safe place to write and store anxious thoughts. Receptacles with lids are best—think oatmeal containers or other types of jars. You can cover the outside with construction paper and have kids personalize their Worry Jars. On the jar, they might want to write “Fears,” “Worries,” “Scary Things” or whatever best fits their situation. Kids can then write or draw what concerns them and drop the slips of paper into the jar. Depending on preference, children may want to talk with an adult about the thoughts in the can, or they may simply choose to use the Worry Can as a dumping ground for thoughts they would rather get out of their heads.

Paint for Relaxation

Creating artwork can be both relaxing, and therapeutic. Invite children to paint/draw designs or pictures of things that makes them happy or calm. Children who are engrossed in an art project may be more open to sharing their innermost feelings and struggles.

Start a Journal

For some, keeping a journal can be very therapeutic. Reflecting on events through writing can help an individual view their feelings and anxieties in an objective way. Even young children can engage in this form of self-exploration—whether through words or pictures. There’s no right or wrong way to journal. Kids shouldn’t feel like they need to write every day. What’s important is that children trust and understand that their journal is a safe place to reveal anything – including their deepest secrets, fears or desires.

Create a Gratitude Box

What you'll need:

- An empty tissue box
- Paper
- Decorating items (e.g. stickers, white labels, colorful markers, patterned duct tape)

Have the children affix a label saying "Gratitude Box," "Why I'm Grateful" or similar label. They can decorate the label with colored markers and/or place and decorate other plain white labels on the box. Stickers and patterned duct tape (there are even variations at craft stores with penguins!) are a nice touch that will help each child personalize his or her box. The idea is for the child to write on a small piece of paper something for which they are grateful. This can be whatever is relevant or important to the child.

Positive mantra bracelet

Making positive mantra bracelets is a simple but fun way to get kids talking about positive thinking and, more specifically, which mantras best apply to them and their worries. Start by opening up a discussion about the things they worry about most, and help them come up with three or four mantras they can repeat to themselves in an anxious moment, such as "I am safe", "Mom will always come back," or "My best is good enough". Assign each mantra to a different color bead, and have them string them onto a pipe cleaner or lanyard to be worn on their wrist as a daily reminder to think positive thoughts and breathe. The soft pipe cleaner and smooth, sliding beads also function as an awesome yet discreet fidget for our tactile seeking little ones.

Worry box

Very often kids can feel as though they are controlled by their anxious thoughts and feel helpless in stopping them. A great activity for kids struggling is creating a "worry box". This activity can be as simple or as elaborate as you would like. Children decorate a box however they like--with modge podge, glitter, markers, stickers, etc. As they are crafting their box, parent can explain that the box will be a spot in which they keep their worries when they don't have the time to think about them. They write their worry on a piece of paper and place it in a box to be addressed at a later time. It gives kids a sense of control over their anxiety, and parents can set aside a certain time of day to talk to kids about their fears. When they no longer feel as though they need to address a certain worry that is in the box, the piece of paper can be ripped up and thrown in the garbage, which is a therapeutic activity in itself.

Stress balls

Stress balls are a true fan favorite, and you'll be hard pressed to find a child who does not enjoy this activity. Fill a balloon with flour, rice, sugar or play dough using a small funnel, tie the end, and make sure to double wrap it into another balloon for extra security. Stress balls make for a great fidget for our nervous kids and serve as a great distraction.

Slime

Slime is all the rage lately and a quick google search will produce hundreds of recipe variations. The cool part about making slime is that kids find the process super fun, but it is also an awesome therapeutic tool for our sensory seeking kids. Add some lavender oil into the slime as an additional bonus to calm them as they play. Just a few minutes of running the slime through their fingers can bring a child's baseline level of anxiety down a few notches.