Deeper Dive into Emotional Development for School-Aged Youth

Middle and High

STRONG4LIFE℠

Children's℠ Healthcare of Atlanta

Objectives

- Increase awareness of resilience and it's benefit to emotional development.
- Increase knowledge of developmentally-appropriate strategies to support emotional development and build resilience in students.
- Increase confidence in ability to help students identify, express and manage feelings.
- Increase confidence to utilize training strategies in your classroom once a week to multiple times per week.

Resilience is the long-term goal

Resilience

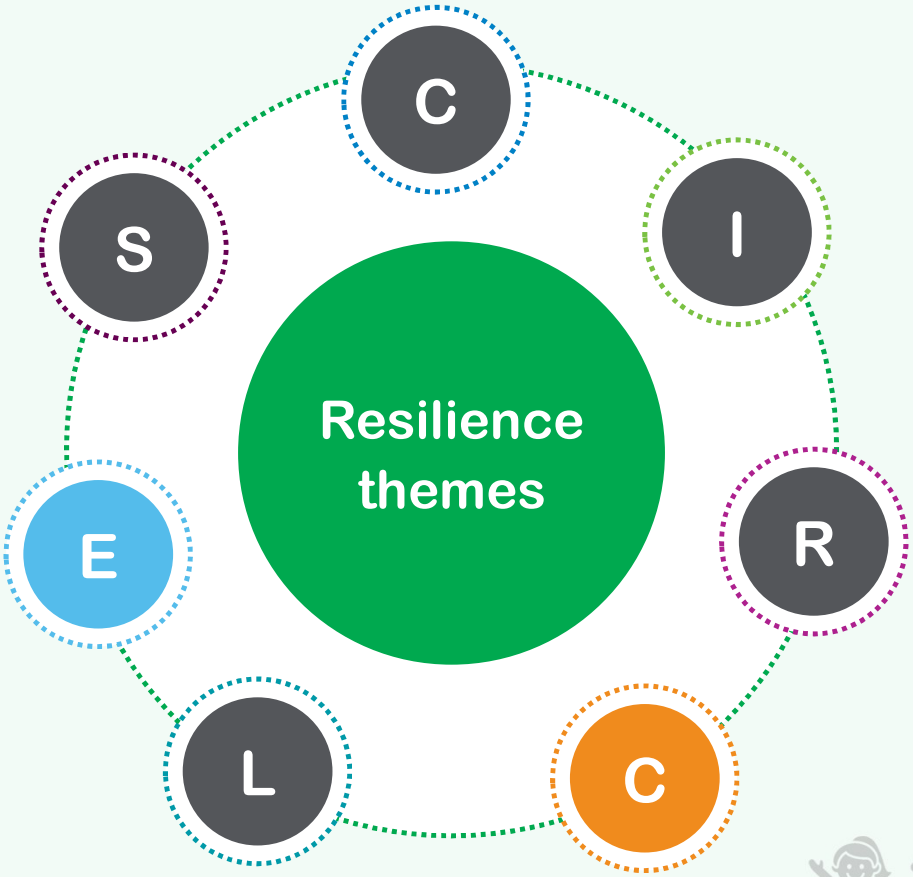
The ability to handle life's ups and downs.

Resilient students are better able to:

- Cope with challenges.
- Manage stress.
- Make healthy choices.

Supporting emotional development

1. Awareness
2. Identification and expression
3. Management



Tools for identifying and expressing feelings

- Using daily communication
- Using a feelings chart
- Using on-the-go feelings cards
- Using prompts
- Making intentional connections
- Encouraging expression of feelings

Reminders for identifying and expressing feelings

All feelings are temporary.	It's normal to have more than one feeling at a time.	All feelings are OK and normal.
Focus on identifying any feeling word vs. "wrong" responses.	Focus on identification vs. probing feelings.	Focus on **actively** helping students identify and express feelings.

Message makeover

Instead of:		Try:
"You're doing OK, right?	"I wonder" statement	"I wonder how you've been feeling?"
"Don't be mad. They didn't mean to run into you."	Normalizing	"It's OK and normal to feel frustrated."
"There's nothing to worry about. It's just a practice test."	Validating	"I understand you feel worried."

Daily communication tips

"I'm curious if you feel …"

"It makes sense that you feel …"

"I understand why you feel …"

"Many teens feel …"

"It's normal to …"

"I've felt that way before …"

Communication tip sheet

Tips for Communicating
with Kids and Teens

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Resilient kids and teens are better able to handle life's ups and downs. One way to build resilience in kids of all ages is by teaching them how to communicate their feelings and needs. Having regular, open conversations helps everyone understand that it's normal and OK to have any (and all) feelings and to share them with others.

Practice active listening

Active listening means giving someone your full attention when they're talking to you. It communicates that you're engaged and listening, and that you care about what they're saying.

Instead of ...	Try ...
Looking at your phone or the TV.	**Putting away all screens, and any other distractions, and making eye contact.**
Interrupting with advice.	**Listening to understand, rather than waiting to respond or give advice.**
Thinking about what you'll say next.	**Being patient, present and listening to everything they say. Let them know you're listening with your body language, such as leaning in or nodding.**

Ask open-ended questions

Sometimes kids need help opening up and sharing how they're feeling. Asking open-ended questions encourages them to answer with more than just "yes" or "no."

Instead of ...	Try ...
"Did you have a good day?"	**"What was the best part of your day?" "What was the hardest part of your day?"**
"You doing OK?"	**"How are you feeling?"**
"Can I help you?"	**"What can I do to help?"**

Label feelings with "I wonder" statements

It can be hard for kids to express how they feel when they don't have the words. Using "I wonder" statements can help kids of all ages think about and label their feelings without telling them how they feel.

Instead of ...	Try ...
"You seem really upset."	**"When you say you're 'upset,' I don't know exactly what you mean. I wonder if you're feeling sad or embarrassed. Are either of those right?"**
"Did that hurt your feelings?"	**"I think I would feel hurt if that happened to me. I wonder, how did you feel about that?"**
"You always say 'I'm fine.' I need you to tell me more if I'm going to help you."	**"I hear you when you say you're 'fine.' I wonder what 'fine' means to you?"**

Normalize and validate feelings

Normalizing feelings communicates that what the person is feeling makes sense and is normal. Validating feelings lets them know you understand and that their feelings matter. Normalizing and validating someone's feelings doesn't mean you agree with them.

Instead of ...	Try ...
"Don't cry. It breaks my heart to see you cry!"	**"It's OK and normal to cry when you're sad."**
"I think you'll have fun if you just give it a try!"	**"I understand why you're feeling nervous. A lot of people feel nervous when they try new things."**
"Don't worry. Everything will be fine!"	**"It makes sense that you're feeling worried."**

Reflect back

When you repeat back what someone says, it communicates that you're listening and that what they're saying matters to you. It also allows them to hear what they said and reflect further, share more or clarify, if needed.

Instead of ...	Try ...
"That's really interesting."	**"It sounds like your favorite part of the day was eating lunch with your friends. What did you enjoy about it?"**
"That's not very nice."	**"I hear you saying you don't like your math teacher. Is that right?"**
"Don't be nervous—I'm sure you did great!"	**"You're worried you didn't do well on your test."**

What to say when you're not sure

Nobody has all the answers or knows how to respond during every conversation. When you aren't sure what to say, remember that you don't need to have the "right" answer, and you don't have to fix what the other person is feeling. They just need you to listen and be honest.

Instead of ...	Try ...
"That's a lot. You should definitely _____."	To avoid giving advice if you're unsure, try saying, **"That sounds really hard. How can I help?"**
"I'm not sure how to answer that, but it will all work out!"	To avoid minimizing or dismissing their concerns, try saying, **"That question is really important. I need a minute to think about that. I will get back to you as soon as I have the answer."**
"I'm not sure what to do with that."	To avoid making the child feel that what's going on is too big for you to hear, try saying, **"I'm not sure I have the right words to say, but I am here for you."**

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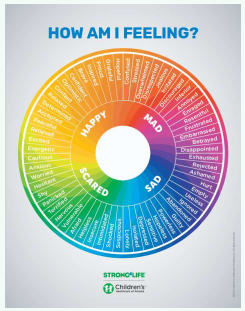
For more expert advice on raising resilient kids, visit **Strong4Life.com/resilience**.

Using a feelings chart



Instead of:

Forcing students to share how they feel.

Making students share their feelings in front of the class.

Dismissing a student's feeling or telling them they shouldn't feel that way.

Try:

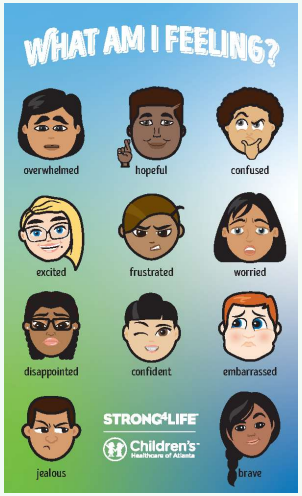
Asking students to notice and reflect on their feelings throughout the day.

Reminding students of the variety and nuance of feeling words.

Using "I wonder" statements to help students identify their feelings.

On-the-go feelings cards

- Give students cards to carry with them.
- Have students take pictures of the cards.
- Keep some cards in key offices (e.g., counselor, social worker, nurse) for students to take.



Using prompts in the classroom

Building awareness of feelings

Feelings prompts
(middle and high school)

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Use these prompts and questions with your middle and high school-age students. You know your students' developmental levels, so use your best judgment to determine what's most appropriate for them, and make modifications as needed.

The purpose of these activities is to help your students build awareness about feelings, and the primary goal is for them to explore and reflect on their own. **Never force a student to share their feelings. Sharing personal feelings should always be voluntary.**

Books and literature

Use the following questions to guide a conversation about a character in a book your class is reading. You can substitute the character for a historical figure, athlete, artist, STEM pioneer or anyone your students might be familiar with.

Question 1: How might this character be feeling?

Follow-up question: How would we know what this character may be feeling by looking at them on the outside (e.g., smile on their face and laughing, clenched fist and jaw, etc.)?

Follow-up question: What might this character be experiencing on the inside because of their current feeling (e.g., racing heartbeat, sweaty palms, etc.)?

Question 2: What are two conflicting feelings this character might be dealing with?

Go deeper: Ask your students to write a few sentences about how they might deal with the character's conflicting feelings if they were in the character's shoes.

Question 3: Who might this character confide in about their feelings and why?

Check-in/morning meeting questions

Activity 1: Ask your students, "What color(s) best represents how you're feeling today?" They can write down their response or choose to share it with their classmates (if they feel comfortable).
Modification: Collect small items of various colors (e.g., felt, paint samples, etc.) and ask your students to pick an item that represents one of their feelings today.

Activity 2: Encourage your students to notice how they feel when they transition between classes, and ask them to write a few sentences about it.
Go deeper: Ask your students to notice the connection between how they felt during the class transition and then how they felt during the class they were heading to.

Activity 3: Ask your students to notice, write down or share (only if they're comfortable) a feeling they want to bring with them throughout the day, and one they might want to leave at the door.

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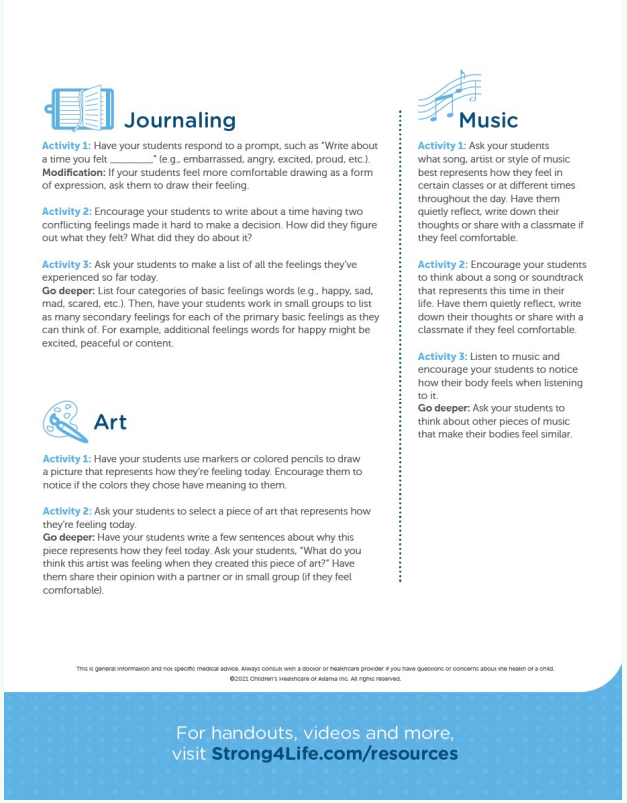

Journaling

Activity 1: Have your students respond to a prompt, such as "Write about a time you felt _____" (e.g., embarrassed, angry, excited, proud, etc.).
Modification: If your students feel more comfortable drawing as a form of expression, ask them to draw their feeling.

Activity 2: Encourage your students to write about a time having two conflicting feelings made it hard to make a decision. How did they figure out what they felt? What did they do about it?

Activity 3: Ask your students to make a list of all the feelings they've experienced so far today.
Go deeper: List four categories of basic feelings words (e.g., happy, sad, mad, scared, etc.). Then, have your students work in small groups to list as many secondary feelings for each of the primary basic feelings as they can think of. For example, additional feelings words for happy might be excited, peaceful or content.

Art

Activity 1: Have your students use markers or colored pencils to draw a picture that represents how they're feeling today. Encourage them to notice if the colors they chose have meaning to them.

Activity 2: Ask your students to select a piece of art that represents how they're feeling today.
Go deeper: Have your students write a few sentences about why this piece represents how they feel today. Ask your students, "What do you think this artist was feeling when they created this piece of art?" Have them share their opinion with a partner or in small group (if they feel comfortable).

Music

Activity 1: Ask your students what song, artist or style of music best represents how they feel in certain classes or at different times throughout the day. Have them quietly reflect, write down their thoughts or share with a classmate if they feel comfortable.

Activity 2: Encourage your students to think about a song or soundtrack that represents this time in their life. Have them quietly reflect, write down their thoughts or share with a classmate if they feel comfortable.

Activity 3: Listen to music and encourage your students to notice how their body feels when listening to it.
Go deeper: Ask your students to think about other pieces of music that make their bodies feel similar.

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For handouts, videos and more, visit **Strong4Life.com/resources**

Using prompts in the classroom

How do you feel when you're working on that project?

What color represents how you're feeling today?

What are two conflicting feelings that this person might be dealing with?

Write about a time you felt _____.

Notice how you feel when you're transitioning between classes.

How might this character be feeling?

If you had to describe your morning as a song, what would it be?

What do you think this artist was feeling when they created this piece?

Making intentional connections

Helping students understand the why

Intentional connections

Using a feelings chart and/or coping skills may already be part of your regular classroom routine, and you may even be using a social emotional learning (SEL) program or curriculum. Sometimes, students need help making connections to understand why they are engaging in these activities. For example, if you explain to students that practicing a coping skill helps them learn to manage their feelings, it helps them understand the purpose and makes them more likely to use it on their own later. Similarly, it can be helpful to remind students that building their feelings vocabulary can help them better identify and express their own emotions.

Tips for helping to make intentional connections:

Repetition is key. You might feel like a broken record, but, as we know, repetition is an important part of learning. Students may not make the connection the first few times, and that's OK. The goal is for students to understand (in time) that building awareness of feelings and practicing coping skills throughout the school day has a positive impact on their emotional wellness.

Keep it simple. Don't feel like you have to say too much. Here are some ideas:

Now that we just practiced deep breathing, notice how it may have shifted how you feel. You may notice that you feel more relaxed or focused. As a reminder, it's important to practice lots of coping skills to help you learn which ones work best for you.

We just talked about how the character in the book feels. Identifying the emotions of others can help us develop empathy and better understand our own emotions, too.

I'm going to put on this brain break video for us to get our energy out and dance. Dancing is a great coping skill because it's something that can help us better manage our emotions, handle stress and feel better!

Before we start the exam, we are all going to do a quick relaxation exercise. Coping skills like this can calm our bodies and minds, helping us slow down our breathing and think more clearly.

For more tips and expert advice, visit Strong4Life.com

Making intentional connections

Helping students understand the why

"We are talking about the characters' feelings in this book today as a reminder that everyone has feelings. It's normal and important to notice them."

"The reason we talked about how this historical figure may have been feeling is because Identifying others' feelings can help us better understand our own."

Repetition is crucial to learn these connections.

Encourage expression of feelings

- Creating art
- Journaling
- Listening to, or making, music
- Dancing
- Connecting with friends and family

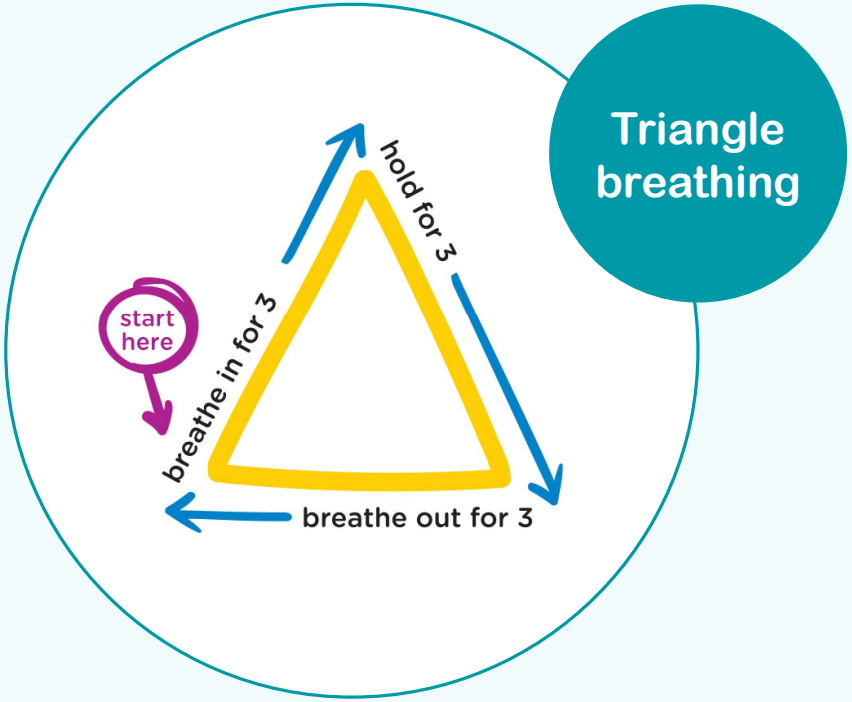
Tips for helping students manage feelings

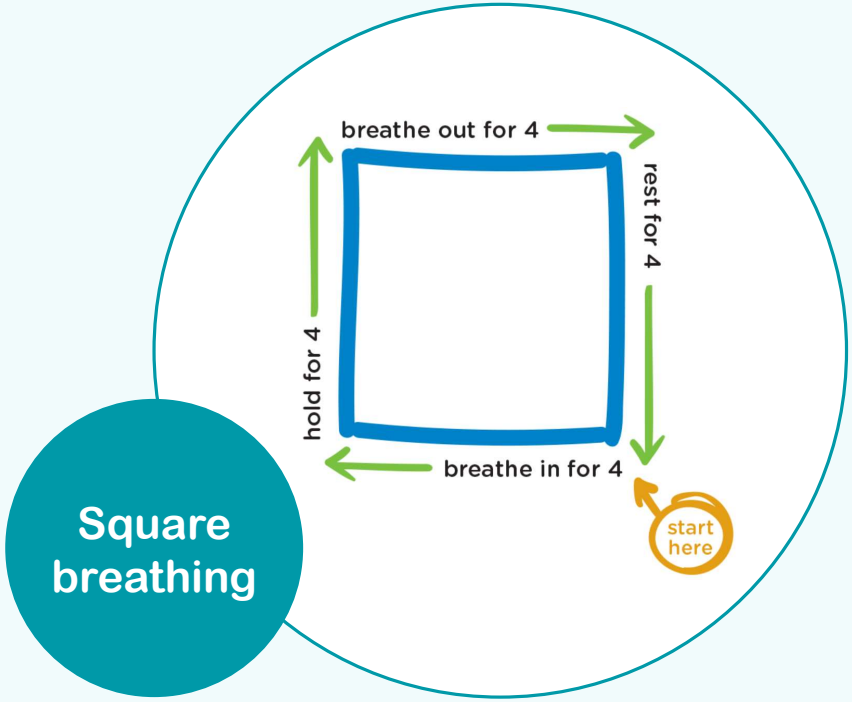
- Proactively teach coping skills
- Teach various coping strategies
- Utilize on-the-go coping cards
- Teach and practice coping skills when everyone is calm
- Make intentional connections
- Use coping skills toolbox handout

Deep breathing

- Deep, diaphragmatic breathing
- Prolonged inhale followed by prolonged exhale
- Slowed heart rate
- Relaxed muscles
- Regulating breathing leads to regulated emotional response

Deep breathing visual

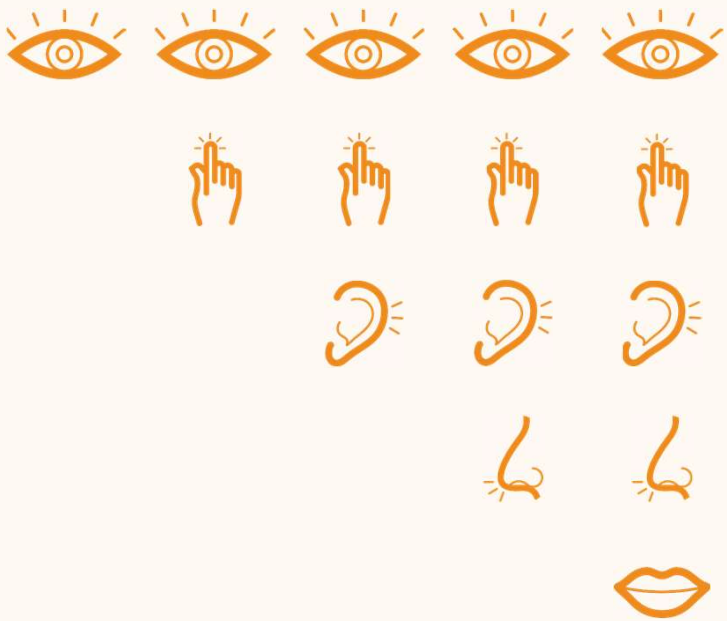




Grounding

- Reduces stress and releases tension
- Encourages focusing on the “here and now”
- Utilizes the 5 senses
- Adaptable depending on the need or environment

Grounding visual



5 things you can **see**.

4 things you can **feel**.

3 things you can **hear**.

2 things you can **smell**.

1 thing you can **taste**.

Coping skills ideas

Be active	Find your calm	Get creative	Connect with others	Shift your mindset
Put on music and **dance**	Take some **deep breaths**	**Color, draw** or **paint**	Cuddle or play with your **pet**	Think of something **positive**
Build with Legos or blocks	Listen to music or **sing a song**	Play with **Play-Doh or sand**	**Read a book** with someone	Focus on one thing you're **grateful** for
Do 10 **jumping jacks**	Close your eyes and **count to 10** or backward from 100	Play an **instrument**	**Play a game** with a friend or family member	Identify your top three **strengths**
Run in place for 20 seconds	Take a **quiet break** or rest	Make up a **song**	Work with someone on a **puzzle**	Think about something you're **looking forward to**
Bounce a ball or play catch	Have a drink of **cold water**	Write about your **thoughts or feelings**	Write someone **a letter**	Focus on the **present moment**
Go for a **walk, run or hike**	Blow **bubbles**	Create a **dance**	**Share your feelings** with someone you trust	Think about something that **makes you laugh**
Squeeze a stress ball	Think of a calm, **happy place**	Write a **poem**	**Ask** for help	**Practice reframes** ("I didn't fail; I learned")
Do **yoga** or stretch	Look at pictures of a **favorite memory**	Make up a **new game**	**Call a friend** to catch up	**Focus on** what is in your control

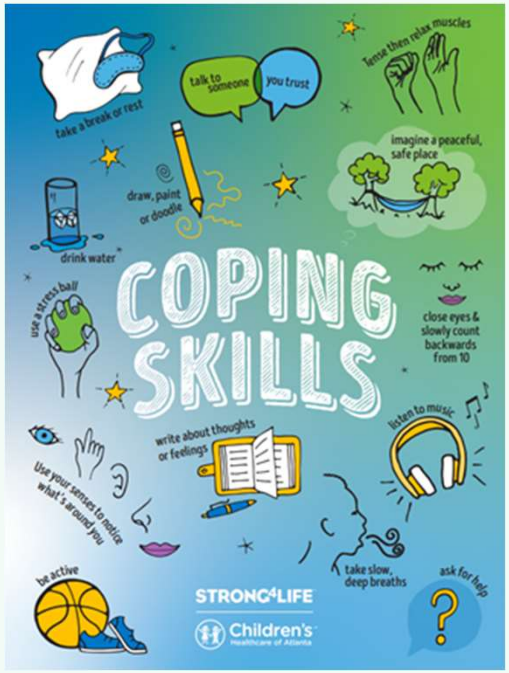
Proactively teaching and practicing coping skills

Teach coping skills

- When students first arrive in class
- After a focused/quiet assignment
- When the class is (mostly) calm

Practice coping skills

- At the beginning or end of a period
- Before a test or challenging assignment
- Anytime



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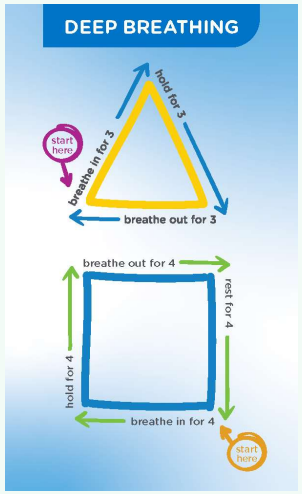

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Making intentional connections

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"Remember, coping skills are things we can use to help us feel better—whenever we need, wherever we are,."

"Now that the test has ended, let's all get up and stretch. Did you know stretching can be a coping skill? Coping skills are things we can do to help us feel better."

Repetition is crucial to learn these connections.

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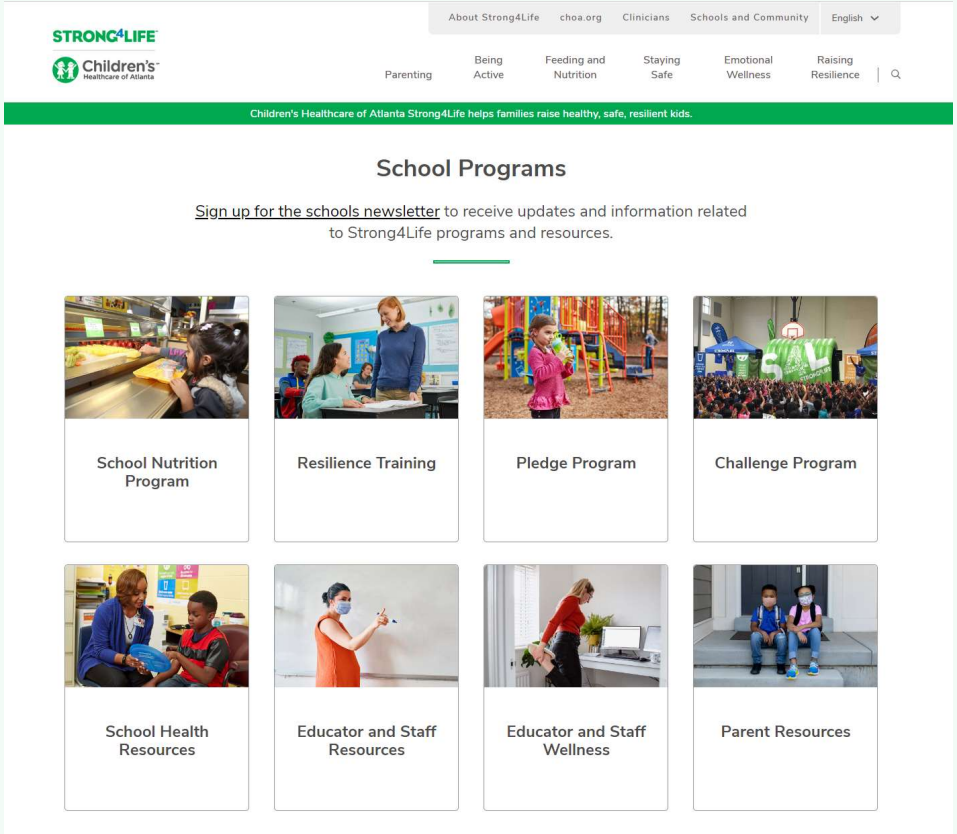

Resilience training series overview

Training	Post-Training Focus	Evaluation
Building Resilience in School-Aged Youth	Talking About Feelings	During Training: Post-Training Survey
Deeper Dive into Emotional Development	Identifying and Expression Feelings	During Training: Post-Training Survey
Building Resilience in School Staff	Coping Skills	During Training: Post-Training Survey

Post-training focus area

Identifying and expressing feelings

Classroom activities

School-wide opportunities

At home

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