



## Deeper Dive into Emotional Development for School-Aged Youth Elementary

**STRONG<sup>4</sup>LIFE<sup>SM</sup>**



**Children's<sup>SM</sup>**  
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.

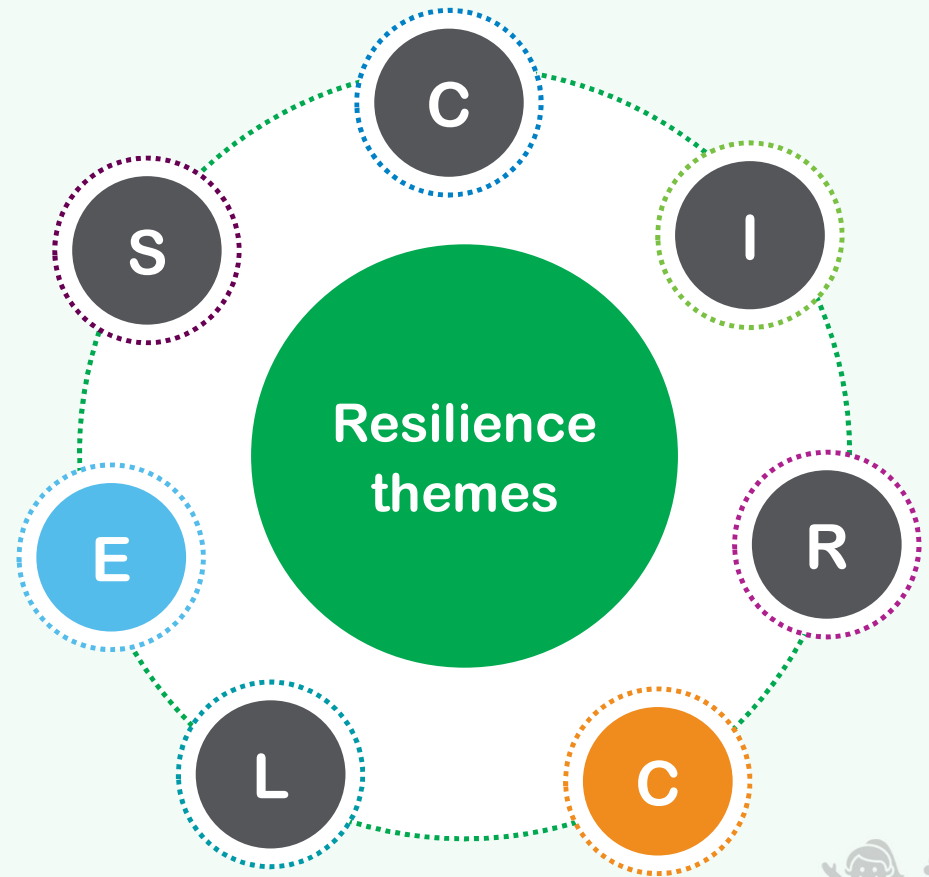
Resilient students are better able to:

- 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:

“You’re doing OK,  
right?”



**“I wonder”  
statement**

Try:

“I wonder how you’ve  
been feeling?”

“Don’t cry! There’s  
nothing to cry about.”



**Normalizing**

“It’s OK and normal to  
cry when we’re sad.”

“There’s nothing to be  
afraid of! It’s totally safe!”



**Validating**

“I understand you feel  
scared.”



# Daily communication tips

“I’m curious if you feel ...”

“It makes sense that you feel ...”

“I understand why you feel ...”

“Many kids 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."

For more expert advice on raising resilient kids, visit [Strong4Life.com/resilience](https://Strong4Life.com/resilience).



# Using a feelings chart

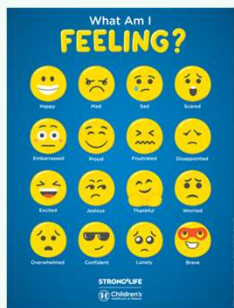
## Instead of:



Forcing students to share how they feel.



Making students share their feelings in front of the class.



Correcting a student for choosing a face that does not match the feeling listed.

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

## Try:

Asking students to reflect on their feelings.

Teaching feelings words and a variety of ways to share their feelings.

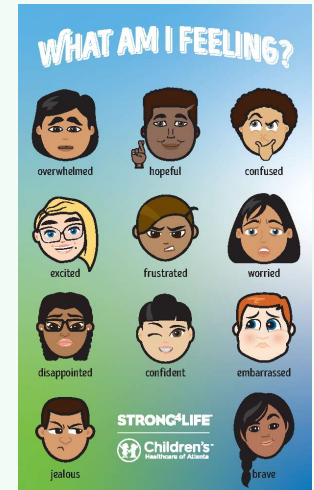
Using "I wonder" statements to help students identify their feelings.

Referring to a feelings chart when talking about feelings to help connect feelings words with faces.



# On-the-go feelings cards ideas

- Place a card on every student's desk and encourage students to look at the cards throughout the day.
- Give students cards to take home.
- Keep some cards in a calming corner.
- 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 (elementary school)

Use these prompts and questions with your elementary 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, STEAM pioneer or anyone your students may be familiar with.

**Question 1:** How might this character be feeling?

**Question 2:** How would we know what this character may be feeling by looking at them (e.g., clenched fists or jaw, tensed muscles, smiling, laughing, crying, etc.)?

**Modification:** Ask your students to act out the feeling using sounds, facial expressions and body language.

**Question 3:** How might this character describe this feeling inside their bodies?

**Modification:** Ask your students to point to and describe where they feel the emotion in their bodies (e.g., butterflies in their stomachs, sweaty hands, racing heartbeats, etc.).

#### Check-in/morning meeting questions

**Activity 1:** Ask your students, "What type of weather represents how you're feeling today?" Are they sunny and happy? Mad and stormy? Tired and foggy? Ask them to share their responses aloud, but only if they feel comfortable.

**Go deeper:** Have a follow-up group discussion about how everyone has different feelings, and that they can change day to day—and that's OK! Help your students understand that some days they might feel the same because it waters their plants, but other days they might not because it keeps them from playing outside.

**Activity 2:** Encourage your students to think about how they might feel in different situations. They can use a feelings chart for quiet reflection or turn to a partner to share. Ask them to share if they feel comfortable.

- How would you feel if you saw someone get pushed and fall in the hallway?
- How would you feel if you made a new friend?
- How would you feel if your favorite toy or game went missing?
- How would you feel if you forgot to study for a test?

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### Journaling

**Activity 1:** Ask your students to respond to a prompt, such as "Write about a time you felt \_\_\_\_\_" (e.g., embarrassed, angry, excited, proud, etc.).  
**Modification:** Ask them to draw their feeling.

**Activity 2:** Ask your students to write down two different feelings they've felt today and to think about if their feelings are very similar or very different. Then, have them write two to three sentences about their feelings.

**Modification:** Have your students use a feelings chart to identify different feelings they've experienced today.

**Activity 3:** Encourage your students to write about a feeling they hope to have today and to explain why.

**Modification:** Ask your students to write three to five feelings words. Then, have them circle the feelings they've felt before in one color and the feelings they feel today in another color.



### Art

**Activity 1:** Show your students a piece of art, and ask them how it makes them feel and why.

**Go deeper:** Ask your students to notice if their feelings are connected to specific parts of the art. For example, "How do you feel about the colors?" or "How do you feel about the shapes you see?"

**Activity 2:** Ask your students to make a list of three to five feelings using colors they think best represent each feeling (e.g., red for mad, blue for calm, yellow for happy, etc.).

**Modification:** List three to five feelings, and ask your students to draw a small picture that represents each feeling.

**Activity 3:** Ask your students to draw a picture that shows how they feel today.

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For handouts, videos and more, visit [Strong4Life.com/resources](https://www.strong4life.com/resources)



### Music

**Activity 1:** Ask your students, "What song makes you feel \_\_\_\_\_?"  
**Modification:** Play a song that includes feelings words, and ask your students to list or say the feelings words they heard in the song.

**Activity 2:** Allow your students to take turns choosing appropriate songs to listen to throughout the day. Ask your students to reflect on which song(s) helped them feel motivated, awake, focused, determined, etc.

**Modification:** Using a feelings chart, ask your students to notice and point to what they feel after hearing a song.

**Activity 3:** Allow your students to use small instruments (if you have them) or safely use classroom items (e.g., pencils to tap, hands to clap, books to open/close, etc.) to create music that represents various feelings. Encourage them to notice which sounds represent certain emotions. For example, "Which sounds feel happy? Which feel sad? Which feel scary or intense?" Remind them that each person's experience is different, so they should try to pay attention to what the sounds feel like for themselves.



# Using prompts in the classroom

How might this character be feeling?

What color represents how you're feeling today?

What are two different feelings this historical figure might have had?

Write or draw about a time you felt \_\_\_\_\_.

Notice how you feel when you first get to school.

How do you feel when it's raining, and we can't go outside?

Play a song and ask students how it makes them feel.

What is something you feel proud about?



# 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](https://www.Strong4Life.com)





# Making intentional connections

Helping students understand the why

“Why are we talking about feelings in this book today? Because **everyone** has feelings. It’s normal and important to notice them.”

“We just talked about how we thought this historical figure may have been feeling. Identifying others’ feelings can help us better understand our own feelings.”

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



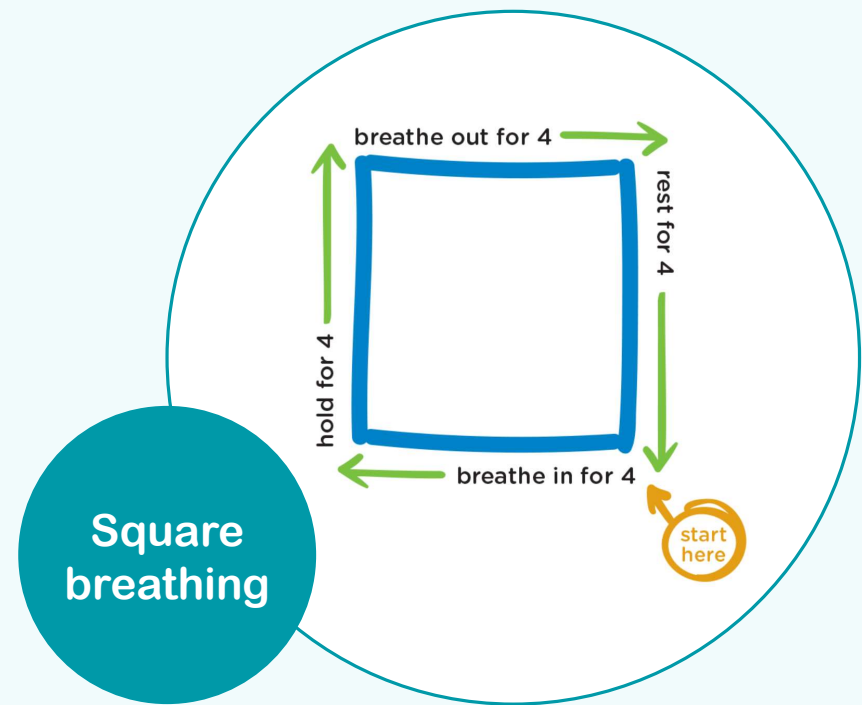
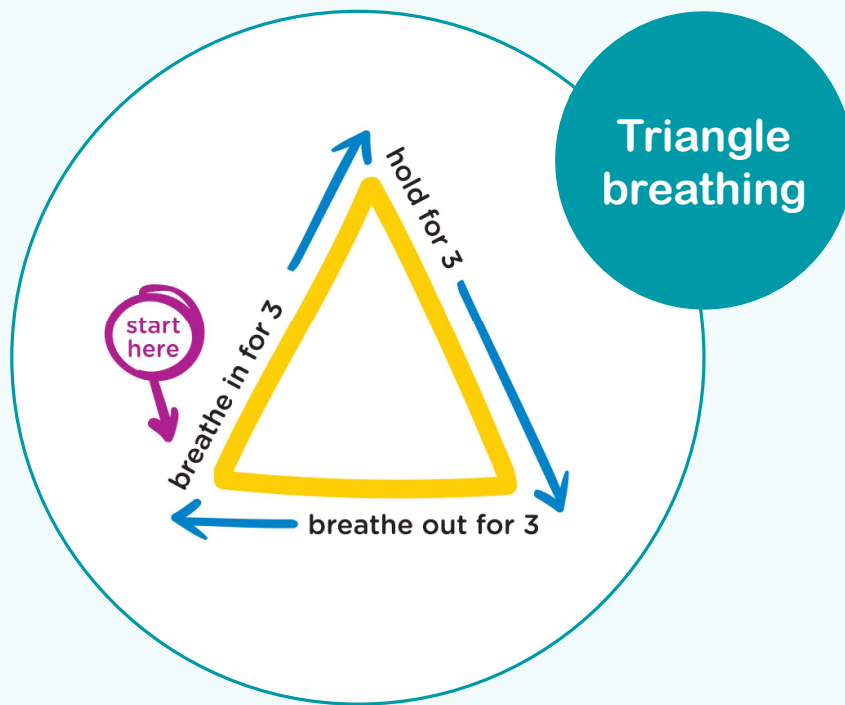
Relaxed muscles



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 toolbox

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



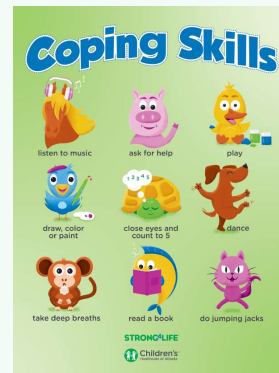
# Proactively teaching and practicing coping skills

## Teach coping skills

- After morning announcements
- After a quiet/focused period
- When the class is (mostly) calm

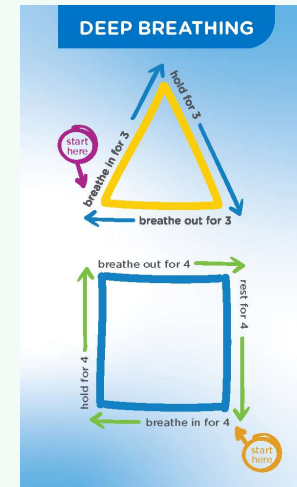
## Practice coping skills

- At the beginning of the day
- Before/after transitions (class, recess, lunch, etc.)
- At the end of the day
- Anytime



# On-the-go coping cards

- Place a card on every student's desk.
- Encourage them to look at the cards as needed throughout the day.
- Give students cards to take home.
- Keep some cards in a calming corner.
- Keep some cards in key offices (e.g., counselor, social worker, nurse) for students to take.





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## Helping students understand the why

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# Making intentional connections

Helping students understand the why

“Today we’re going to learn about a coping skill called grounding. Grounding is a coping skill that helps us refocus.

And remember, coping skills are things we can use to help us feel better—whenever we need, wherever we are.”


Repetition is  
crucial to  
learn these  
connections.


“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.”




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School Health Resources



Educator and Staff Resources



Educator and Staff Wellness



Parent Resources



# 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



## Contact information



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