

Resources For Feeling Isolated, Feeling Helpless, Feeling Sad/ Depressed

Online websites/specific apps:

***For Children with ASD: Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame* (free app for Android, iPhone, and iPad)**

- <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/breathe-think-do/>
- This game helps the child learn skills such as problem-solving, sustaining attention on a task, self-control, and planning ahead. The child must help the Sesame Street monster calm down so the monster can solve challenges. The monster can be guided to take deep breaths, think of a plan, and try it out.
- The child will learn emotional vocabulary, a breathing technique, and encouraging words as they play.

***For Children with ADHD or Learning Disabilities: Stop, Breathe & Think Kids* (free app for iPhone, iPad)**

- <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/stop-breathe-think-kids/id1215758068>
- This game teaches young children meditation and mindfulness, helping with sleep, being calm, learning to breathe, and conflict resolution, which are called the child's 'superpowers.'

***For Children with ADHD or Learning Disabilities (ages 8+): Quandary* (free online game)**

- <https://www.quandarygame.org/educators>
- This game is a teaching tool that helps kids think and focus, take the perspective of others, practice showing empathy, and learn how to make good decisions.

***For Older Children: Elude*, a free online game**

- <http://gambit.mit.edu/loadgame/elude.php>
- This online game provides the child with a type of obstacle course that they navigate through, representing the ups and downs in life. It is helpful for young people who may be experiencing sadness or depression. The game provides various depression metaphors and represents the many feelings associated with depression. The user moves the character using the spacebar and arrows and tries to guide the character up to the treetops, which is where the character reaches "happiness."
- Parents should be advised to supervise their child as the child plays the game and ask the child questions like, "How does the boy feel here?" or "What does this part of the character's journey mean?" Parents should allow the child to play the game for a bit to get accustomed to it and then jump in from time to time and talk to their child about the various themes in the game.
- This is an excellent way for parents to gain some psychoeducation on depression and it also provides a great communication platform for parents and children because the entire game is created with numerous depression metaphors.

At-Home Activities:

For Children with ASD: Create a “Mind Jar” or “Calm Down Jar”

- Creating a *Mind Jar* is an excellent activity for children with ASD who may have limited verbal skills or who may be verbal, but struggle with expressing sadness, fears, or worries.
- Simply take a small jar (e.g., an empty and washed plastic mayonnaise container or salad dressing bottle) or an empty water bottle. Help your child by getting glitter, sequins, small beads, and/or food coloring and placing about 1 tablespoon of one or more of these items into the plastic container. Use more for larger containers. Fill the container about halfway with warm or hot water if you’re using glitter so the glitter can dissolve. To prevent spills, use high-quality glue or hot glue to seal the top.
- The purpose of the *Mind Jar/Calm Down Jar* is for the child to shake the jar or turn it over when they are feeling worried, anxious, sad, or upset. Instruct the child to focus on the glitter/objects in the jar as they watch the particles move around and slowly settle. This serves many purposes, such as bringing the child to the ‘here and now,’ helping to calm intense emotions and to distract the child from the intense emotions.

For Children with ASD: Deep Breathing Exercises with Bubbles

- Deep breathing is beneficial to everyone’s health, including children. However, for children with ASD, teaching deep breathing and encouraging them to practice these exercises and sustain attention can be challenging at times.
- **Blowing bubbles** is an excellent way that children with ASD can learn breathing exercises. Sit with the child and model the activity first, but make sure to emphasize breathing in through the nose for a few seconds and then exhaling through the mouth for several seconds as you blow into the bubble wand and release the bubbles. If you run out of solution, simply mix soap and water.
- This exercise is not only effective in stimulating the [parasympathetic nervous system](#) through the deep breathing, but it is also a great here-and-now exercise as the child engages in a structured, simple activity and watches the bubbles float into the air. Make sure to encourage the child to pay attention to the breathing aspect of the activity. Later (or in moments where the child is anxious, sad, or upset) as the child holds an imaginary bubble wand in their hand and breathe in and out as if they were blowing bubbles. This helps the child to take some deep breaths when they become emotional, which will help in alleviating these feelings.

For Children with ADHD or Learning Disabilities: “Calm Brain,” “Scared Brain” Activity

- For this activity, take a large piece of paper (or if you don’t have large pieces of paper, take 2-4 standard size sheets and tape them together to form a large piece), a poster board, or even a flattened cardboard box as long as it doesn’t have writing printed on it. Gather coloring tools for the child (i.e., colored pencils, crayons, markers, or if using cardboard, heavy-duty or thicker tip markers).

- Divide up the large paper/drawing area into two columns. Title one column “**Calm Brain**” and the other column “**Scared Brain.**” Then, ask the child to draw a collage or pictures of things that represent each column. Don’t give the child too much instruction so that he/she can draw whatever comes to his/her mind. Encourage the child to take his/her time with the activity.
- This activity is excellent for children of all ages, but particularly for younger children who may struggle with verbalizing their feelings. It allows children to identify and differentiate between the things that help them to feel calm or that they associate with being calm versus the things that may make them fearful or anxious. This activity also helps children identify and develop positive coping skills to manage emotions as they work to draw things on the **Calm Brain** side. Even as they are drawing in the **Scared Brain** side, it is a therapeutic task because they are releasing and expressing these emotions.

For Children with ADHD or Learning Disabilities: The Butterfly Activity

- Most children can relate to the concept of having ‘butterflies’ in their stomach. Children become anxious and experience somatic symptoms just like adults. Symptoms like stomach aches and nausea can occur among children who experience anxiety and/or fears. Difficulty sleeping can also occur among children who worry often or have various fears.
- The activity involves attaching cut-out butterflies to various parts of the child’s, which the child identifies as an area where they feel ‘butterflies.’ *The butterfly is a metaphor for a feeling of worry or an area where the child can ‘feel’ worry.*
- This activity can be done in one of two ways. If you have a large piece of paper, the height and width of the child, you can trace/outline the child’s silhouette. You can also skip this step and simply attach the cut-out butterflies to the child’s actual body. The child can also take the cut-out butterflies and attach them to his/her parents’ body. The butterflies must be attached to the part of the body where anxiety, fear, sadness, worries, etc. are felt or experiences. For example, the child may attach the butterflies to the head, the heart, the stomach, etc. to represent the various areas where emotions are felt. If the child has difficulty falling asleep, the butterfly can be attached to the eyes.
- The cut-out butterflies can be made ahead of time using either plain white paper or colored construction paper. The child can draw on or color the butterflies. Alternatively, older children can write a word inside each butterfly that represents emotions.

For Older Children: Create a ‘Worry Can’

- This activity is similar to journaling about thoughts and feelings, but not all children are inclined to write extensively or use a journal.
- For this activity, take any type of jar or container (*e.g., an empty oatmeal container, a drawstring bag, an empty and dry gallon of water*) and instruct the child to write on small pieces of paper everything they are worried about. For children who enjoy writing, they can write more extensively and fold the paper up into a thin piece. For children who may not like writing or have difficulty with writing, they can jot down informal thoughts and feelings and place them into the container.

- The container can be decorated in any way the child likes. Encourage the child to personalize the container by cutting out and gluing pictures they cut from old magazines or that they print online (if feasible). They can also draw or color on the container.
- The child can either take out pieces of paper and talk to an adult about their thoughts/worries or they can use the **Worry Can** in the literal sense, similar to a trash can where they dump their worries as a form of release from those thoughts and feelings. A combination of both methods can be used, as well and the container can be emptied at certain points (e.g., at the end of the week, when the child appears to feel better after going through a difficult period).

Additional Apps:

1. **NotOK** - The app features a large, red button that can be activated to let close friends, family and their support network know help is needed. Users can add up to five trusted contacts as part of their support group so when they hit the digital panic button, a message along with their current GPS location is sent to their contacts. The message reads: *“Hey, I’m not OK! Please call, text, or come find me.”*
2. **Bouncy the People Trainer** - Bouncy is an animated and dynamic three-legged friend who can teach your young child how to use strength, humor, and resilience to overcome life’s challenges, such as feeling isolated or feeling helpless. The app uses interactive exercises, music, art and more to help children in many different ways. It’s a great app to start with when first introducing your little one to strategies to help them learn to control emotions.
3. **HappiMe for Young People** - Using a kid-friendly approach, this app walks kids through four steps: Learn, Recognize, Deal With Your Emotions, and Replace. It helps kids picture their thoughts as something separate from themselves -- the chimp, the computer, and the happitar -- a psychological method that allows people to deal with negative thoughts.
4. **Apert of Me**- This unique app uses a gentle adventure-game approach to tackle tough topics, such as depression. By exploring a beautiful world, getting guidance from its characters, and doing periodic meditations, kids can learn about some tools for handling tough times. This app also offers audio recordings from real kids that provide a model for working through difficulties.
5. **Radio** is a music streaming application for home computers and mobile devices. This application allows users to stream their favorite songs, albums, and artists using an internet connection. Music’s therapeutic qualities are well documented, and using uplifting, upbeat, and up-tempo songs can help your child improve symptoms of depression. Your child can use Radio to stream up-tempo music while getting motivated to exercise or listen to a comedy album after a particularly long day.
6. **Happify** - If you’re looking for a fun app that will keep you engaged while also boosting your mood, Happify might be your best choice. Happify is all about playing games. But every game is a science-based activity meant to build resilience and overcome negative thoughts. The activities were developed by positive psychology experts who are familiar with evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy interventions. While the ultimate goal is to make you happier, the app lets you decide which track you’d like to work on. Here are some of the track options: coping better with stress, achieving mindfulness through

meditation, and conquering negative thoughts. You can access the activities and games on your smartphone, tablet, or computer.

7. **SmilingMind** is modern meditation for young people from 7 years up. It is a free web and App-based program, designed to help bring balance to young lives. Smiling Mind was created to help young people de-stress and stay calm. There are tailored programs for different age groups.