

Fact Sheet

POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES FOR Children and Young People in Times of Crisis



Moments of crisis and turmoil can lead children and young people to experience intense feelings that can be emotionally overwhelming and scary.



If children and young people are not equipped to effectively deal with their feelings during such times unhealthy coping habits and strategies might develop. These may in turn make the situation worse, potentially leading to future mental health issues. Developing healthy coping strategies can help young people to reduce the intensity of what they feel as well as the trauma that might be experienced after the event.

It can be useful for kids to have a range of positive coping strategies to draw from during times of crisis and parents, carers and educators are in a prime position to assist young people in developing and practicing healthy responses to moments of crisis.

Here are some suggested coping strategies to try when supporting children and young people in a crisis situation.



Grounding Techniques

Sometimes crisis events can be so overwhelming they lead to very high levels of anxiety that can cause panic attacks, making it difficult to discuss with a child what the problem might be. A useful way of getting through such moments is to practice 'grounding' exercises. These might include:

Regulate breathing

A useful way to do this is to ask the young person to copy your breathing - in for 5 seconds and out for 5 seconds. Blowing bubbles can also help to calm breathing. The visual aspect of seeing bubbles floating in the air provides a useful distraction from whatever might be triggering the crisis.

Eyes

A simple exercise can be to hold up a pen (the more colourful the better) or finger and ask the child to follow it with their eyes as you move it around. Eye movement triggers different parts of the brain and as each part is activated the young person will start to calm down.

Senses

Helping the child to focus on their senses can bring them back to a calmer state of mind. Ask the young person to look around them and name:

- 5 things they can see
- 4 things they can feel
- 3 things they can hear
- 2 things they can smell
- 1 thing they can taste

Tune

Playing soothing music or singing a song that is a favourite of the child can help to calm them and distract from what might be triggering the crisis.

It is important to understand that every child is unique and different, so working in collaboration with them is crucial if we are to identify what works best for them.

Managing Feelings

Because feelings will often influence behavior in a time of crisis it is important for children and young people to learn how to express and manage their feelings in a healthy way. The better they can understand and manage their feelings the more capacity they will have to cope in times of crisis. Here are three simple steps to help kids do this effectively. They need to:



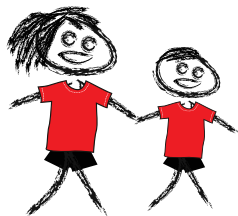
- 1. Know they are having a feeling** – Just being able to identify that a feeling is occurring can often help a child to reach out for help before it escalates into something bigger.
- 2. Name the feeling** – Knowing what the feeling is can provide a sense of relief and help the young person to articulate what is going on to those around them.
- 3. Understand the cause of the feeling** – Understanding what is triggering feelings can go a long way towards reducing anxiety. It can also help the young person work out what help and support they need and where to get it.

The best time to discuss these steps is when the young person is not experiencing a crisis moment. The Daniel Morcombe Foundation has several activity resources that can be used to support conversations about feelings – '*Naming Feelings*' and '*My Body Clues*'.

Self-Care

A significant factor contributing to a young person's capacity for coping during times of stress and crisis is their general level of emotional well-being and resilience. Self-care is crucial and it is important that opportunities are provided for children and young people to practice self-care on a daily basis. Some self-care activities can be used to form the basis of coping strategies for when the young person is in crisis – art, dance, music, exercise, etc. Check out our fact sheet on *Promoting Self-Care for Children and Young People in Times of Crisis*.

Connection



A critical component in coping during times of crisis is a young person's ability to access help and support. This means that parents, carers and other important people in that young person's life, need to remain focused on staying connected with them by making themselves available and providing opportunities to actively listen and talk about what is going on for them. Young people communicate best with people they trust and feel safe with. Most importantly they will connect most with those who listen to them. Check out our fact sheet on *Communicating with Children and Young People in Times of Crisis*.

Where to Get Help

- In an emergency, call the Police or triple zero (000)
- Keeping Kids Safe Resources – The Daniel Morcombe Foundation provides free downloadable activities to engage children and young people in learning about personal safety at <https://danielmorcombe.com.au/keeping-kids-safe-resources/>.
- Parentline - 1800 30 1300 provide free telephone counselling and advice to parents and carers. Resources are available at <https://www.parentline.com.au/> to support parents and carers to understand a wide range of issues related to raising children and young people
- Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800 provide a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 on 1800 55 1800. Resources and webchat are available at <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>.

