

Teaching Behavioral Coping and Self-Regulation Skills to Learners



COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL / INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES RESOURCE SERIES

Behavioral coping and self-regulation skills fall under the evidence-based practice of Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies (CBIS). For an overview of CBIS interventions, please see the tip sheet in this series entitled ["Overview of Cognitive Behavioral / Instructional Strategies \(CBIS\)."](#)

Self-regulation is defined as the act of managing one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to both adapt to a given context and enable goal-directed behavior (Frei, et. al., 2021). Behavioral coping and self-regulation skills teach learners ways to manage feelings of stress and difficult emotions and cope with the physical aspects of stress and difficult emotions through relaxation. These skills can be explicitly taught to all students, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, to support their behavioral and adaptive functioning across contexts.

<p>HOW DO BEHAVIORAL COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS CONNECT TO TN SOCIAL & PERSONAL COMPETENCIES (SPCs)?</p>	<p>Behavioral coping and self-regulation skills are strategies learners can use to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in adaptive ways and across different situations. These skills fall directly under the Tennessee Social & Personal Competency (TN SPC) of Self-management. According to the TN SPC standards, “self-management is the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working towards achieving personal and academic goals” (TN SPC Resource Guide, 2017). Therefore, in the context of this resource, self-regulation skills and self-management skills can be understood and used interchangeably.</p>
<p>STUDENT OUTCOMES OF LEARNING BEHAVIORAL COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS</p>	<p>Through learning and practicing behavioral coping and self-regulation skills, learners will understand and use strategies for managing his/her emotions and behaviors constructively. Specifically, learners will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ learn specific behavioral coping strategies to support self-regulation, and ❑ employ behavioral coping strategies to improve self-regulation.
<p>WHEN TO TEACH COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS</p>	<p>Behavioral coping and self-regulation skills should be introduced when the student is in a ready-to-learn mindset with their baseline level of calm and cognitive engagement. Behavioral coping and self-regulation skills are not taught when a student is dysregulated and avoidant. Once learned, these skills are practiced gradually from baseline calm situations to lower levels of emotion and up to medium and high levels of in-the-moment emotion.</p>
<p>HOW TO TEACH BEHAVIORAL COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS</p>	<p>It can be helpful for learners to have a basic understanding of emotions and their adaptive purpose prior to learning behavioral coping and self-regulation strategies. However, emotion awareness is not necessarily a prerequisite for learning behavioral coping and self-regulation skills. In fact, some learners, including autistic students and students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, may struggle to label their emotions, but they can still benefit from engaging in behavioral coping and self-regulation strategies, as these strategies can regulate the physical sensations that often accompany difficult emotions, such as stress and anxiety.</p> <p>When it comes to teaching behavioral coping and self-regulation skills, we want to teach these the same way we teach academic skills, such as reading and math. It’s important to describe the skill and provide a rationale for its use, model or demonstrate the skill, provide opportunities for the student to role-play or practice the skill with feedback, and then provide ongoing, frequent opportunities for the student to practice the skill daily.</p> <p>Often, the important step of frequent and ongoing practice opportunities gets left out of the teaching process. This step is important for several reasons. First, frequent opportunities to practice are required for any student</p>

<p>HOW TO TEACH BEHAVIORAL COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS</p> <p>CONTINUED</p>	<p>to become fluent in the use of these skills and to be able to effectively employ them when needed (e.g., at times of increased stress or emotionality). Second, as noted above, students need to practice these skills when they are in a calm, well-regulated state and when they are experiencing low levels of difficult emotions. Without fluency practice when students are calm and well-regulated, prompts to practice these skills when students are at higher levels of emotion will likely escalate the student’s already dysregulated state. Instead, having students practice behavioral coping and self-regulation skills while they are calm and then having them practice during gradually heightened levels of emotionality will allow them to experience incremental success with self-regulation. Just like learning to read or play an instrument, building fluency with behavioral coping skills takes time and practice.</p>
<p>TEACHING BEHAVIORAL COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS IN ACTION</p>	<p>Please review our associated Intervention Planning Guides for specific guidance on implementing and monitoring intervention(s) associated with teaching behavioral coping and self-regulation skills to students. Intervention Planning Guides on this topic include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> progressive muscle relaxation (PMR).
<p>CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING BEHAVIORAL COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS</p>	<p>Due to some of the language, communication, and cognitive challenges for some autistic students and students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we want to be sure to describe and explain why behavioral coping and self-regulation skills are important and effective in ways that students will understand. We know that these skills are important for all students; we also know that autistic students and students with intellectual and developmental disabilities are at increased risk for developing emotional challenges and mental health concerns and can benefit from learning skills to support self-regulation. Explaining to students why and how these strategies work often helps increase student motivation to use the skills.</p> <p>Autistic students and those with intellectual and developmental disabilities also benefit from visual supports to understand abstract concepts and strategies. For certain behavioral coping and self-regulation strategies, such as progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), having a visual task analysis can be helpful to improve students’ learning of the steps and can also be used as a visual reminder or prompt for the student to use the strategy throughout their day.</p> <p>When teaching any behavioral coping or self-regulation strategy, we want to be careful to avoid abstract terms or metaphorical language. Using concrete examples or comparisons can support student understanding. For example, for progressive muscle relaxation, you might tell students to “squeeze your hands like you are squeezing juice out of lemons,” or for diaphragmatic breathing, you might say, “Your stomach should expand like a balloon filling</p>

<p>CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING BEHAVIORAL COPING AND SELF-REGULATION SKILLS</p> <p>CONTINUED</p>	<p>up with air.” You can even use props such as pinwheels, balloons, or stress balls to help make the skill even more concrete for students.</p> <p>Planning for generalization will be important for increasing students’ use of behavioral coping and self-regulation skills. Plan for frequent opportunities throughout a student’s day where they can practice behavioral coping skills when they are calm and well-regulated. This could be at the beginning of a class period, at the end of a class period, or during a class-wide brain break. Planning these practice opportunities and having them on a student’s daily schedule will support practice and normalize their use throughout the day. Consider connecting these practice opportunities with reinforcement to increase motivation while the student is building fluency.</p>
<p>ADDITIONAL RESOURCES</p>	<p>Educators may find it helpful to use the following external resources with multimedia presentation of mental health topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine’s <i>Introduction to Tools for Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Children and Youth</i> (https://youtu.be/Agy_nn54xC8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Check out additional Tools for Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Children and Youth: https://nap.nationalacademies.org/resource/other/dbasse/wellbeing-tools/interactive/ » Videos illustrating cognitive behavioral concepts and interventions ❑ The <i>Nixie and Nimbo</i> video series and resources available through the Child Mind Institute: https://childmind.org/nixieandnimbo/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Age: upper elementary school » Free downloaded resource guide for adults supporting child’s emotion learning » YouTube video links teaching emotion awareness skills and connecting to specific cognitive behavioral relaxation skills ❑ Visit <i>AnxietyCanada</i> (www.anxietycanada.com/) for information about childhood anxiety and tutorials for cognitive behavioral relaxation skills ❑ GoNoodle is a popular resource for promoting health and wellness. On GoNoodle-Flow (www.gonoodle.com/tags/Wwjzlw/flow?tab=videos) they also provide soothing video resources to teach cognitive behavioral relaxation skills.
<p>TRIAD RESOURCES</p>	<p>There are specific complexities when implementing CBIS, depending on student needs and behaviors. Consider attending a TRIAD webinar, workshop, or enrolling in a TRIAD consultation and coaching service line to support implementation. Learn more at Triad.vumc.org/schools.</p>

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