



BOUNCE BACK

how to be a resilient kid

by Wendy L. Moss, PhD



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CHAPTER FIVE



Calming Yourself

Have you ever tried to concentrate or learn something new, while you are working from home, but you were super nervous, sad, or mad? Your emotions can get in the way, right? It can be pretty tough to deal with the challenges of taking a test or learning new material on top of being extremely emotional and stressed out. But you'll find it easier to problem-solve, cope, and face challenges if you are calm first! In this chapter, you will read about ways to calm yourself and get a handle on your emotions. Calming strategies are an important part of being resilient, and will help you get things done!

First, take a moment to think about how you calm down and what strategies you may already use:

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- c) do lots of different things and use different strategies at different times to calm down

If someone told me to use my imagination, memories, and thoughts to calm down, I would

- a) have no idea how to do this
- b) try it, but I wouldn't really know how to do it
- c) talk to myself (use self-talk), focus on pleasant memories, and use my imagination to picture a how I want things to turn out

If you answered mostly “a”: You may be struggling to find ways to calm down and problem-solve. Read on to learn about strategies you might find useful.

If you answered mostly “b”: You already have some ways to deal with stress, but it's always helpful to have many tools to help you when you want to calm down.

If you answered mostly “c”: You use a lot of calming strategies and are well on your way to being resilient. Continue reading, you might learn more!

Calming Strategies

Simply put, when you are calm, you will likely find that it is easier to figure out what is causing your stress and ways to deal with it. There are many different ways for people to calm down. Some kids calm down after playing a sport and burning off a lot

of energy, other kids might sit quietly and focus on relaxing thoughts, while still others may calm down best by talking with a parent or friend. Even when you are staying home, you can reach out to others who live with you or connect with others over social media. You have to experiment a bit to find out what works for you.

As you read about the different types of calming strategies, try each one out and make a note of the ones that work best for you. This way, when you are upset, you already know which techniques you want to try.

Remember that once you are calm, you can more easily brainstorm ways to cope with the situation! Here are some specific tips that might help you to calm down:

Breathing Exercises

Did you know that the way you breathe can either increase your feelings of being upset or calm you down? It's true!

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You can teach yourself how to breathe in a relaxed way, which relaxes your body so you are better able to deal with life's stresses. When you are feeling stressed, try this exercise:

- ❶ Slowly fill up your lungs with air by breathing in slowly through your nose. It might help to pretend that you are slowly taking in the smell of freshly-baked cookies, or your favorite meal—don't rush the breathing.
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Repeat steps 1–3 several times until you can continue breathing calmly while focusing on other strategies to deal with the stress and bounce back. Of course, in the unlikely event that you feel lightheaded, then skip this strategy—there are tons of others to use.

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Jack has recently become anxious about doing all of his schoolwork at home rather than in class with his teacher and friends. He also began worrying about the coronavirus making more people ill. Jack told his father that, "When I get scared I feel like I can't catch my breath. I feel like my breathing speeds up, like I just ran a long race. I feel jittery too."

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Jack practiced this breathing each time he was nervous and was breathing too quickly. He was surprised that it really helped him! He also knew that talking with his parents about his fears was another thing that helped him to calm down.

Have you ever felt like you were having trouble catching your breath because of anxiety?

What could you do if you notice that you are nervous and it has changed the way you are breathing?

Have you ever felt like Jack?

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Some people know that they deal with obstacles and tough times better after they exercise. There are chemicals inside the human brain that help people to feel better. Endorphins, for example, are very useful for helping us to deal with pain or stress. Have you ever gone for a run “to clear your head” and felt better afterwards? Those are your endorphins at work!

You may not be able to run outside, but there are lots of exercises you can do while indoors too. For example, you can do lots of chores, practice yoga, or put on music and dance! If you know that your body feels more relaxed and your heart rate calms down after a workout or other physical activity, then this strategy may help you to battle stress.

Take a minute to think about how you breathe when you are stressed and how you react to stress after you exercise. Knowing how your body works and what you can do to help it to relax are both important as you work to calm down.



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that there is a part of your brain that helps you to feel calm? A part of the brain called the prefrontal cortex helps us to adjust our emotions so that they aren't always super powerful and overwhelming. This is important so that we can calm down and not be overwhelmed by emotions such as anxiety. Research suggests that if we are calmer, it might be easier for us to pay attention and learn! If you are calm, it may be easier to take in new experiences, new learning, and to even be relaxed and focused on hobbies! Knowing how to use calming skills is important to use now and in the future. Now you know that there is a specific part of your brain to help you to calm down!

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Calming Imagery

Calming imagery is a fun strategy to practice. It's all about using your senses—vision, hearing, smell, touch, taste—to relax or reduce that feeling of being emotionally overwhelmed. This strategy works partly because it lets your brain focus on something other than the upsetting situation, but also because thinking of calming times can lead to calming emotions.

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- ❹ Touch: Imagine being hugged by your mom, or cuddling with your favorite pet, or even the touch of your blanket over you as you feel safe and comfortable in your bed.
- ❺ Taste: Imagine the taste of your favorite meal or dessert or imagine the taste of the salt air as you walk along the sand near the ocean.

Each of the images above can calm some people. Try to imagine your favorite time on vacation. Can you picture it, hear the sounds, and recall some of the smells, tastes, and even things you touched? The more images you can remember, and the more senses you can engage, the more realistic the memory can be.

Now it's your turn. What memories or experiences make you feel good? Maybe you have a favorite vacation spot, or maybe you like to be curled up in bed with a good book. You could even use your imagination to make up a movie that uses your senses and takes you to a wonderful place in your mind that relaxes you. For example, Michael told his aunt, “I always picture myself finding a planet, being the king, and then flying up all the people I love and starting towns and cities.”

CARLY'S story

Using your senses to calm down can even be useful when you are experiencing boulder-sized obstacles. During the recent pandemic, when Carly's school temporarily shut down, she couldn't see her friends in person, and she found out that her grandfather was diagnosed with the coronavirus, Carly was very upset. Over social media, she had contact with her friends and relatives who live outside of her home. But she remained upset about how much her daily routine changed and she worried about her grandfather's health.

Carly's grandmother called her one day and learned of Carly's anxiety. She suggested that Carly "Picture good times we always have when we are together and also good times you have with your friends." Later that day, Carly recalled the time when she and her whole family went to a carnival and her grandfather kept winning stuffed animals for her. She also remembered the cake that she and her friends tried to make a few months ago and how badly it came out. Both memories made her smile.

During their next phone call, Carly told her grandmother that her strategy "worked pretty good. I used to cry every night about what's happening with grandpa and in the world right now. I still feel upset, but thinking of fun times and knowing that I can share them with you helps me to feel less stressed!"

Carly used her senses and memories to calm herself down. Even though she couldn't change the fact that the coronavirus had affected her life, she was now able to relax more and enjoy some of her daily activities.

What do you think of Carly's grandmother's suggestion? Have you ever faced a boulder-sized obstacle? Do you think you could use your senses and your memories to help yourself feel better too?

There is no limit to your imagination! Take out a sheet of paper, and try to list a few memories or scenarios that make you laugh or smile. Then, when really upset or overwhelmed, you can remember them.

Calming Thoughts

Remember reading about self-talk in Chapter Four? One calming technique is to combine calming imagery with calming and helpful words—this is a special kind of self-talk. When life seems difficult, you can try the following thoughts (along with using your senses to focus on positive and calming imagery):

- ❑ Remember other times when you got through stress.
- ❑ Remind yourself that you can ask others for help.
- ❑ Remind yourself that you have tools now to calm yourself. Remember that it's okay to sometimes feel emotional pain and that it's just a reminder that you need to find a way to cope with the stress.
- ❑ Remember that running away from a tough time doesn't teach you how to deal with it.
- ❑ Remember that dealing with a tough time helps you to be more resilient and have more confidence that you can handle future stressful situations.
- ❑ Remember that there are consequences to your actions, so think about the consequence you want and ways to get it.

Does this sound like a lot to remember? You may want to write down these tips and put the paper in a place that you can find it easily if you are stressed. Once you get in the habit of using calming thoughts, it should get easier to do!

Distraction

Did you know that sometimes simply distracting yourself can calm you enough to deal with stress? Brooke, for example, said, “Whenever I feel panicked about not understanding my homework, I cope better if I take a break, do something relaxing, then try again. I usually figure out the assignment once I’m calmer.”

Try to de-focus—or stop focusing on the stress for a while—and see if it helps. Perhaps you can spend a short period of time drawing, singing, Skyping, listening to music. Once you are calm and refreshed, you might find that you can deal with the problem better!

Seeking out a Support Team

Remember that resilient people are comfortable handling some situations on their own, sometimes getting advice from others on how to deal with stress, and feel comfortable asking for others to help out when it's needed. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help when you are facing a large or boulder-sized problem—in fact, it is a sign of strength to get help when help is needed!

Key Points

- ❑ When you are overwhelmed, calming yourself can increase your ability to think of ways to cope!
- ❑ There are many ways to calm yourself—find the ones that work best for you.
- ❑ Self-talk and using your senses and imagery can be fun tools to help you to calm down!

Summary

In this chapter, you read about the fact that being calmer allows you to think more clearly about how to deal with tough times and be more resilient. You learned some important strategies for calming yourself: breathing exercises, physical activity, calming imagery and thoughts, distraction, and seeking help. In the next chapter, you will get a chance to read about ways to bounce back from disappointments and common sources of stress.

Think of a bouncing ball. When a bouncing ball hits the ground, it bounces back. That's what resilience means—the ability to bounce back from tough times.

Some people seem to just bounce back automatically. But the truth is that resilience is not something you are simply born with—it can be learned. *Bounce Back* will help you find your bounce using cool quizzes, lots of advice, and practical strategies that build up resiliency skills. You'll learn how to:

- ❑ **get to know yourself** better
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- ❑ **cope with or adjust to** serious sources of stress
- ❑ **ask for help** and guidance

And much more! Being motivated to learn resiliency skills is a great first step toward acquiring them! This book will help you to be more resilient and keep on bouncing back!



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