CALMING YOUR MIND
IN THIS STORY, YOU'LL MEET MEI. MEI IS LEARNING A NEW TECHNIQUE CALLED MINDFULNESS 5-4-3-2-1. THIS TECHNIQUE HELPS TO EASE YOUR STATE OF MIND SO YOU CAN GET THROUGH STRESSFUL TIMES. ALL OF US, AT SOME POINT, HAVE EXPERIENCED OVERWHELMING FEELINGS OF ANXIETY THAT ARE HARD TO CONTROL. IF LEFT ALONE, THAT ANXIETY CAN CAUSE YOUR MOOD TO SPIRAL DOWNWARD. FOLLOW ALONG WITH MEI SO YOU TOO CAN LEARN HOW TO PERFORM AND PRACTICE MINDFULNESS 5-4-3-2-1.
WHEN MEI GETS HOME, MEI IS GREETED BY THEIR FAMILY! MEI LIVES WITH THEIR PARENTS, THREE SIBLINGS, AND THEIR GRANDMOTHER.

THE SCHOOL BELL RINGS. SCHOOL IS DISMISSED, AND MEI IS HEADED HOME. THERE'S A BIG ASSIGNMENT DUE TOMORROW, AND MEI IS FEELING ANXIOUS ABOUT GETTING IT FINISHED TONIGHT.

HELLO MEI!

MEI, DID YOU HAVE A GOOD DAY AT SCHOOL?

HI MEI!

HI! IT WAS ALRIGHT, GRANDMA. BUT I HAVE A REALLY BIG ASSIGNMENT DUE TOMORROW AND NEED TO GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY.

OF COURSE, YOU'D BETTER GET STARTED.
MEI SITS DOWN AT THE KITCHEN TABLE AND BEGINS WORKING. BUT THEN IT BECOMES HARD FOR MEI TO FOCUS ON THE ASSIGNMENT.

I LOVE MY FAMILY, BUT IT'S REALLY HARD TO FOCUS WHEN THEY'RE AROUND.

MEI'S SISTER LOOKS FOR A SNACK IN THE CUPBOARD.

MEI TRIES TO TUNE OUT THE NOISE, BUT THEN MEI'S MOM AND GRANDMA START MAKING DINNER.

JUST OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN, MEI HEARS THE OTHER SIBLINGS LAUGHING AND PLAYING WITH TOYS.
UGH! ALL THIS NOISE! I CAN'T DO THIS! I'LL NEVER GET MY WORK DONE!

I SHOULD'VE STARTED THIS ASSIGNMENT SOONER! I'M NEVER GOING TO GET IT DONE IN TIME!

HAVE YOU EVER FELT FRUSTRAED LIKE ME? SOMETIMES OUR STRESS OR ANXIETY MAKES US FEEL LIKE WE'RE SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL.

WHEN YOU'RE EXPERIENCING A LOT OF STRESS, THERE'S A TECHNIQUE CALLED MINDFULNESS 5-4-3-2-1 THAT CAN HELP YOU CALM YOUR MIND AND EASE YOUR STRESS AND/OR ANXIETY.

HOW DOES IT DO THAT?

THAT'S EXACTLY HOW I FEEL!

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS EVERY DAY CAN HELP YOU FEEL HAPPIER AND LESS STRESSED OVER TIME.

YOU'LL USE YOUR FIVE SENSES TO FOCUS ON THE PRESENT MOMENT. DOING SO CAN HELP YOU CALM DOWN AND DISTRACT YOUR MIND FROM THOSE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS.
FIRST, SIT COMFORTABLY IN A CHAIR WITH YOUR FEET FLAT ON THE GROUND. LAY YOUR HANDS GENTLY ON YOUR LAP, ON THE ARMS OF THE CHAIR, OR BY YOUR SIDE.

LET'S GIVE IT A TRY. FOLLOW ALONG WITH MEI AS WE WALK THROUGH THE STEPS TOGETHER.

NOW, PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BREATHING. NOTICE HOW IT FEELS AS YOU TAKE A SLOW BREATH IN. THEN, EXHALE SLOWLY AND NOTICE HOW IT FEELS AS THE AIR LEAVES YOUR BODY.

TAKE A MOMENT TO LOOK AROUND YOU. IDENTIFY FIVE THINGS YOU SEE.

MY WATER BOTTLE IS GREEN, TALL, AND HAS A BLACK CAP. OH, AND MY NAME IS ON IT.

I SEE MY WATER BOTTLE, A BOWL OF GUMMY BEARS, A PEN, MY PHONE, AND A PAD OF PAPER.

PICK ONE OBJECT TO FOCUS ON AND PAY ATTENTION TO ITS DETAILS.
Now find four things you can touch.

I can touch the chair, this highlighter over here, my notebook, and my pants.

Choose one of those items. Use only your sense of touch to describe what it feels like.

My jeans feel rough. They feel a little stiff too.

I hear the fan, soup boiling on the stove, and traffic outside.

Next, identify three things you can hear.

Pick one of those sounds to focus on. How does it sound?

The traffic sounds like cars whizzing by. There are car horn beeping and tires screeching.

Now, let's move on to two things you can smell.

Mmm... I smell my grandma's soup and these flowers in the vase.
Focus on one smell and describe it.

Finally, identify one thing you can taste.

My grandmother's soup has a flavorful aroma. I can smell the spices too. It smells so delicious it's making me hungry!

These gummy bears.

Put one in your mouth and notice how it feels. Then, take a bite and describe how it tastes.

How do you feel? The goal is to help you focus less on your worries and more on the here and now.

The gummy bear is soft, and it tastes sweet and sour!

I can focus better now. Let me figure out which part of the assignment to work on first.

It's good to practice this a couple of minutes every day. Just as you practice a sport, an instrument, or another hobby, it takes practice to become comfortable with mindfulness 5-4-3-2-1.

Mindfulness 5-4-3-2-1
IT MIGHT NOT WORK IMMEDIATELY, BUT AS YOU GET BETTER AT IT, YOU’LL FIND YOU CAN DO IT MORE QUICKLY, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, YOU CAN DO IT ANYTIME, ANYWHERE!

THE NEXT TIME YOU FEEL WORRIED, STRESSED, OR ANXIOUS, BRING YOURSELF BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT AND FOCUS ON YOUR FIVE SENSES.

SIGHT  HEARING  TASTE

TOUCH  SMELL

NOW THAT YOU’VE LEARNED HOW TO USE MINDFULNESS 5-4-3-2-1 TO CALM YOUR MIND DURING A STRESSFUL SITUATION, EXPLORE OTHER SKILLS IN THIS SERIES THAT CAN BE HELPFUL TO YOU.
THIS RESOURCE WAS DEVELOPED BY ICF, AN INDEPENDENT THIRD-PARTY CONTRACTOR, WITH OVERSIGHT FROM A GROUP OF EXPERTS* ACTING IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL CAPACITIES CONVENED BY THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE AND WITH FUNDING FROM THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC, 200-2011-38807/75D30120F00087). ANY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, OR CONCLUSIONS IN THIS RESOURCE ARE NOT NECESSARILY ENDORSED OR ADOPTED BY THE EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS, THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES, THE CDC, OR ICF.

THESE TOOLS ARE NOT INTENDED TO BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL ADVICE, DIAGNOSIS, OR TREATMENT. ALWAYS SEEK THE ADVICE OF YOUR PHYSICIAN OR OTHER QUALIFIED HEALTH PROVIDER WITH ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE REGARDING A MEDICAL CONDITION. NEVER DISREGARD PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL ADVICE OR DELAY IN SEEKING IT BECAUSE OF SOMETHING YOU HAVE READ ON THIS WEBSITE.

*FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE GROUP OF EXPERTS, GO TO HTTPS://WWW.NATIONALACADEMIES.ORG/OUR-WORK/PROMOTING-EMOTIONAL-WELL-BEING-AND-RESILIENCE
PROMOTING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS
FAQS

1. WHY AND HOW WERE THESE TOOLS DEVELOPED?

WHY? MANY CHILDREN AND TEENS STRUGGLE WITH FEELINGS OF STRESS, ANXIETY, AND
DEPRESSION, PARTICULARLY DURING THE PANDEMIC. THESE TOOLS WERE CREATED TO
PROMOTE THE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH – DURING
THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND BEYOND.

HOW? THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE (NASM) MADE
THIS PROJECT POSSIBLE WITH FUNDING FROM THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND
PREVENTION (CDC). NASM BROUGHT TOGETHER A GROUP OF EXPERTS TO DEVELOP WAYS
TO HELP CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DIFFICULTIES THEY FACE EVERY DAY. TOGETHER WITH
EXPERTS AT ICF, THEY CREATED TOOLS, BASED ON COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT),
TO HELP REDUCE STRESS, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION. THE TOOLS ARE MEANT FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH DIRECTLY, AND FOR PARENTS TO HELP CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH
STRESS, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION. TEACHERS AND OTHER CAREGIVERS MAY ALSO BE ABLE
TO USE THESE RESOURCES.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROJECT AND THE GROUP OF EXPERTS IS AVAILABLE ON
THE PROJECT WEBPAGE:
HTTPS://WWW.NATIONALACADEMIES.ORG/OUR-WORK/PROMOTING-EMOTIONAL-WELL-BEING-A
ND-RESILIENCE.

2. WHAT IS COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)?

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT) WORKS BY HELPING A PERSON NOTICE HOW THEIR
THOUGHTS AFFECT HOW THEY FEEL AND BEHAVE. CBT HELPS THEM TURN UNHELPFUL
THOUGHTS AROUND TO MORE HELPFUL THOUGHTS SO THEY FEEL BETTER. EXPERTS TELL
US THAT CBT IS THE GOLD STANDARD OF THERAPY FOR CHILDREN, TEENS, AND ADULTS WHO
ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION.

THE WORD “COGNITIVE” REFERS TO WHAT WE THINK, AND THE WORD “BEHAVIORAL” TO
WHAT WE DO. CBT CAN HELP CHILDREN AND TEENS…

• “CATCH” THOUGHTS THAT ARE NOT HELPFUL, “CHECK” THEM, AND “CHANGE” THEM TO
FEEL BETTER.

• LEARN TO NOTICE AND DO THE THINGS THAT HELP THEM FEEL BETTER.

• LEARN HELPFUL SKILLS LIKE DEEP BELLY BREATHING AND MINDFULNESS.

CBT WON’T BE ABLE TO FIX ALL THE THINGS THAT MAKE SOMEONE FEEL STRESSED,
ANXIOUS, OR DEPRESSED, BUT IT CAN HELP THEM COPE WITH THOSE FEELINGS AND FEEL
BETTER.

THESE TOOLS DON’T TEACH EVERY PART OF CBT, ONLY SOME OF THE MOST TESTED AND
EASY-TO-USE SKILLS. ALTHOUGH THESE TOOLS CAN’T TAKE THE PLACE OF A MENTAL HEALTH
PROVIDER, THEY CAN HELP CHILDREN AND TEENS LEARN HOW TO BETTER COPE WITH
EVERYDAY STRESS AND ANXIETY.

NOTE: IT TAKES TIME TO LEARN A NEW HABIT, USUALLY 30 TO 60 DAYS, SO IT’S IMPORTANT
FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS TO KEEP PRACTICING THESE SKILLS REGULARLY. THEY WILL NOT
ONLY BENEFIT TODAY, BUT WILL BUILD RESILIENCE AND HELP MANAGE FUTURE STRESS
THROUGHOUT LIFE’S JOURNEY.
3. Why are the pronouns “they,” “them,” or “theirs” used to refer to a single person in these tools?

The language we use to describe people and experiences is important. It signifies how we express ourselves and how other people see us. Many times, in English or Spanish, we use different forms of nouns, pronouns, or adjectives that are based on assumptions about a person’s gender. Many people may not view this as a problem, but, for some people, assumptions about gender are not accurate, and can be harmful. Gender inclusive language is used throughout the modules to ensure that all children and teens can connect to our scenarios. They, them, and theirs are pronouns frequently used to refer to a single person when we are not aware of the person’s gender, and/or when a person does not identify as a boy/man or a girl/woman. For example, if a person notices that someone left an item in a classroom but the person does not know who it belongs to, the person might say “Oh no, someone left their water bottle” using “their” as a gender neutral pronoun. In Spanish, gender inclusive language is sometimes created using an -e, rather than a feminine -a or a masculine -o.

4. Where should I go if I need additional resources or help?

If you or your child or teen are in need of immediate support, the Lifeline Network is available 24/7 across the United States. You can call (800) 273-8255 or text 741741.

If you are looking to find a provider who can support you or your child’s mental health, you can call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Helpline at (800) 662-HELP (4357) or visit their website: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment.


For additional help, visit our resources page.