DOING FUN ACTIVITIES
This is the story of Drew, who is learning about doing fun activities to help improve how they’re feeling. When we’re feeling down, we often stop doing activities that we normally enjoy doing. But doing more of the activities we like can actually help make us feel better and give us more energy! Listen to Drew’s story to learn more.
It's summer break! While many kids are jumping for joy, Drew isn't feeling very happy about it.

In fact, Drew is feeling lonely and bored. Drew's uncle notices Drew moping around.

Hmm. This isn't like Drew. Drew is usually so talkative and active.

Drew, you seem down. What's wrong?

Hey, why don't we go for a walk?

I'm bored! My sister has a summer job, so she's never home, and my best friend is sick, so he can't play either.

Nah, I don't feel like it.
Have you ever felt this way? Not wanting to do anything when you feel down, sad, or bored?

This happens to a lot of kids. They tend to pull away from things they enjoy and from people who care about them, like family, friends, and community.

It might not seem like it, but doing something fun, even when you're sad, can help you feel better!

The problem is when you do this, it often leads to more sadness, loneliness, and feeling down. You may feel more tired too, causing you to feel even worse.

Yep. And sometimes even a short 5-minute activity, like getting outside or talking to someone, can help too. In fact, doing several fun activities during the day works even better!
COME ON, DREW. LET'S GO PLAN SOME FUN ACTIVITIES!

FIRST, THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU FEEL THE HAPPIEST. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

HMM, I FEEL HAPPY WHEN I'M DRAWING!

LET'S WALK THROUGH THE STEPS OF BUILDING FUN ACTIVITIES INTO YOUR DAY.

HOW ABOUT WHEN YOU FEEL THE WORST? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I DON'T LIKE WHEN MY SISTER GOES TO WORK OR WHEN MY BEST FRIEND, RORY, CAN'T PLAY BECAUSE I WIND UP SITTING AROUND AND DOING NOTHING. THEN, I FEEL LONELY AND SAD.
Activities that Drew Likes to Do

Next, list those activities you like that make you feel happy. Include activities that are free and easy to do any time.

It might be hard to come up with activities, but don’t give up. Keep trying. Think back to something that made you smile or laugh.

Activities That Drew Likes to Do
1. Fun
2. With Someone
3. Busy
4. Helping

There are certain activities that tend to make you feel better. They usually fit into the following four types...

Activities that are fun! These activities make you happy while you’re doing them.

I’m happy when I draw!
ACTIVITIES THAT YOU DO WITH SOMEONE.

I LIKE PLAYING BOARD GAMES WITH MY UNCLE.

ACTIVITIES THAT KEEP YOU BUSY, LIKE PHYSICAL EXERCISE AND PRACTICING NEW SKILLS.

I STAY BUSY PLAYING SOCCER.

ACTIVITIES THAT INVOLVE HELPING OTHERS CAN MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD TOO.

I LIKE HELPING MY UNCLE IN THE GARDEN.
Activities that Drew Likes to Do

1. Fun Drawing
2. With Someone Board games with Uncle James
3. So Helping
   Helping Uncle James in the garden

Now that you have your list of fun activities, pick one to try.

Uncle James, would you help me draw a picture to give my sister when she gets home?

Sure! I'm happy to help. I'll get the supplies.

That's great. This is an activity that is fun, you're doing with someone, and is a way to keep busy!

Ugh, I just messed up and used blue instead of green.

It's okay, Drew. We can use green down here, see?
Finally, plan ahead with a grown-up and schedule activities on a calendar. That way, you have something to look forward to and can prepare for them.

What a colorful house!

I want to draw a picture to help Rory feel better too!

After doing a fun activity, think about how you feel. Do you notice any difference?

That was more fun than I thought it would be. It helped pass the time quickly. My sister will be home soon.

Remember, we all have the ability to affect how we feel. Sprinkling in fun activities every day, even when you feel sad, can help make you feel better.

Now that you’ve learned about doing fun activities to help improve how you feel when you’re feeling down, explore other skills in this series that can be helpful to you.
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 (NASEM) made this project possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). NASEM 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-and-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.