



Save the  
Children



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**HOME-BASED PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING ACTIVITIES  
FOR CHILDREN, TEENS AND PARENTS**

**AFGHANISTAN – APRIL 2020**



## Introduction:

This guide aims to increase children's resilience and wellbeing through activities that can be done in the home with a little support from parents and caregivers. The activities outlined in this book will support stress management, emotional learning, creativity, parent/caregiver – child relationships, relaxation and problem-solving techniques, allowing open discussions around difficulties while also increasing individual capacity to cope in fun and creative ways.

Stress can be caused by many things – personal challenges (e.g. conflict with a loved one; being alone; loss of income; worries about the future) or major threats in your community (e.g. disease, conflict or natural disasters).

This guide is for anyone who experiences stress. The activities included are simple and fun. Many you may already know and love without ever having considered why. This guide is meant to support children and families to take care of themselves and each other during difficult times and when access to specialized support might be limited. This guide provides ideas, skills and techniques for children and families to refer to in times of need, and as regular exercises to improve and support emotional and psychosocial wellbeing.

The resources required to implement the activities outlined in this guide are limited. Most activities require few resources, if any. Where resources are required, use your imagination! You can recycle or repurpose old or unwanted household items.

Please always respect the rules and laws of your country under Covid19- or any other emergency when trying the activities outlined in this book.

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## 1. Read and listen (All ages)

Reading and or listening to stories together – using storybooks and audiobooks – can be a great way to spend time with your child. Reading books aloud to children stimulates their imagination and expands their understanding of the world. It's a great opportunity to share and explore ideas, and helps children to develop language and listening skills, preparing them for reading on their own. You can practice problem solving skills by considering the dilemmas and challenges characters face or you or simply read for relaxation. This is an activity that can be adapted for any age or ability.

If your child has a hard time saying words or understanding others, you can read to him or her and have them point out known objects or read aloud to you to practice speaking in a safe space. Each time you read with your child, you are helping their brain to develop. For those who experience difficulties hearing, make sure they can see the pictures and use your facial expressions to reflect what's going on. You can also simplify language or use sign language as you read.

Younger children and children with intellectual disabilities have short attention spans, so it's okay if you start by reading for a few short minutes in the beginning. You can build up the time you spend reading together as you go, learning to enjoy and appreciate the activity.



## Here are some tips:

- Choose books you think your child will enjoy.
- Sit your child next to you. If your child has a visual impairment, make sure there is plenty of light and that you point to the pictures as you read.
- Books that rhyme or repeat the same sound or words aren't just fun to read but are also good for helping your child learn the sounds letters and words make.
- Talk about how the story relates to events in your child's life and experiences they might have.
- Point to pictures and use them to start a conversation. You can ask your child certain characters might be feeling based on their facial expressions.
- Ask questions about the story and make guesses about what might happen next. Encourage your child to use their imagination – there are no limits to what we can dream!
- It's okay to read the same story over and over. Repetition will help develop language skills.
- You can also do a bit of play acting and/or drawing of scenes or characters from the story.
- Creating your own storybook using newspapers, magazines, or with shadows with your fingers, drawing in the sand, or with puppets (you can use plastic bottles to make these) is another fun and creative adaptation.

You'll find that reading together is an enjoyable experience to share with your child that promotes wellbeing and learning!

## Resources & links

**My hero is you.** This story was developed to help children learn about COVID19-, how to prevent its spread, while promoting resiliency and wellbeing. You can find a copy here in a variety of different languages, including Dari and Pashto:  
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/my-hero-you-storybook-children-covid-19>.

**Hoopoe's Books for Afghanistan.** This program provides books in both Dari and Pashto for free for Afghan children and their families to build literacy and foster a love of reading:  
<https://booksforafghanistan.org/books/>. They also have six downloadable radio programs of stories for local Afghan radio which can be found here: <https://booksforafghanistan.org/audio/>.

**Wonderbooks.** This website offers stories that are suitable for most 4-8 year olds and are a brilliant opportunity to have a safe and open conversation with kids about issues they see in the news, issues that often affect other children.

As adults, we don't always know the answers to tough questions, especially those beginning with 'why' so with each book, Wonderbooks provides a few talking points that will help you have good conversations about the themes addressed in the stories. You can find a number of great reads using this site:  
<https://www.wonderbooks.org.uk/grown-ups-guides>.

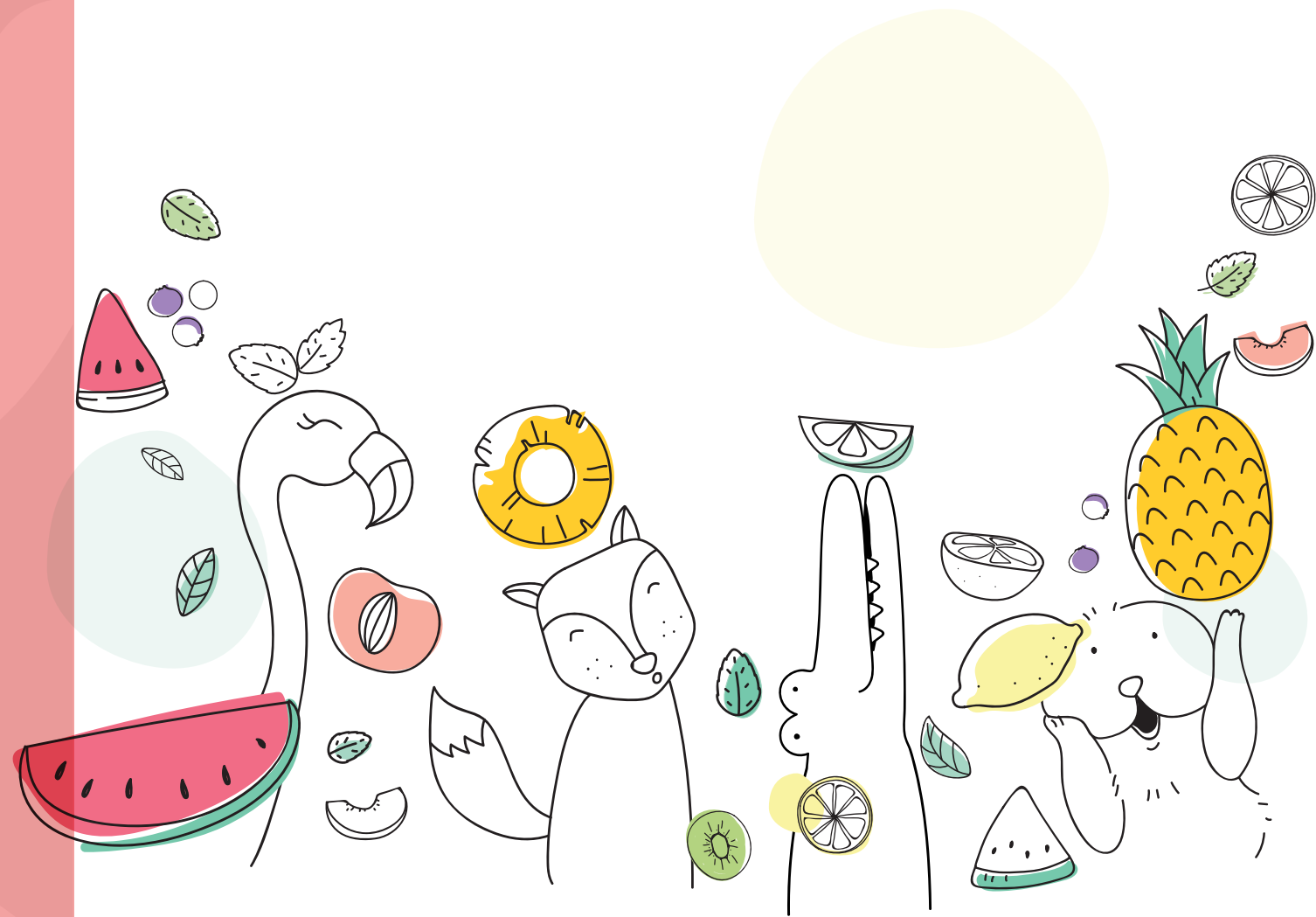
**Be Kind:** A Children's Story about Things that Matter. Written by Pat Zietlow Miller and illustrated by Jen Hill. This book explores what it means to be kind, helpful and polite, and considers how even the smallest acts can be the most powerful. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAo4-2UzgPo>.

## 2. Play & Create Colouring (Ages: 2 +)

Colouring in and of itself can be boring for children. Without a friendly companion or structure, you might find your child tire of the activity quickly, avoiding your directions and wanting to do something else. But, as soon as you sit down together, their interest might suddenly peak. Colouring with your child is a great opportunity to have a chat. You can ask them about their hopes and dreams, learn more about their favourite colours, foods and preferences. You can show them how to mix colours and to do shading. Colouring can be therapeutic for adults, too.

### Here are some ideas:

- Draw a picture (e.g. a house, a horse, or trace your hands) and have your child colour it for you.
- Use drawings to explore emotions. Different colours can represent different feelings (e.g. red for anger, black for sadness or yellow for happiness).
- Draw or trace your body and colour where you imagine you might feel emotions most (e.g. love in your heart; fear in your stomach).
- Take turns drawing portraits of each other and share what qualities and traits you love and admire most about each other.



## Games (Ages: +3)

- Play allows children to be creative, developing their imagination, dexterity and physical, cognitive and emotional abilities. Play offers children a low risk environment in which to explore the world around them. Play is important for healthy brain development. It is through play that children often learn about social interactions and respecting restrictions. Learning how to play with others helps children to practice compromise, conflict resolution and collaboration. When we allow space and time for children to play spontaneously, children can discover their independence, build confidence and form meaningful relationships. However, a little structure won't hurt – you can make an event of it regularly. Weekly family game nights are fun and exciting!

### Here are some local favourites:

- **Oqaab.** In this game, one child is chosen as the eagle or oqaab, while all remaining children play pigeons. The eagle's job is to capture all the pigeons before they make it safely back to their roost. The pigeon is considered captured if the eagle touches him or her. The last pigeon left free gets to play the eagle next!
- **Tushla baazi.** Though there are many ways to play this game, here is a simple variation. A circle is drawn on the ground with a straight line through the center. Two players line up the same number of marbles on the line. They each take turns trying to knock off the other's marble by striking it with one of their own marbles. If successful, he or she collects the other's marbles. Whoever has the most marbles at the end of the game wins. This game can also be played with sheet or goat knuckle bones instead of marbles. When bones are used, it's called buial baazi.
- **Sangchil baazi.** Players must begin with a collection of small pebbles. To begin the game, one player tosses a small pebble into the air. This player must grab a single pebble from the ground before catching the pebble tossed in the air. With each round, players must grab progressively more pebbles before re-catching the one tossed. For example, after one pebble, players must pick up 2, then 3, and so on. Usually, the game is played with 5 pebbles at a time. Whoever picks up the most pebbles wins!
- **Tonanaal.** This is a great game for children and adults alike – the larger the group the better! Players begin by standing in a circle, with one person in the middle. Players on the outside take turns trying to – gently – hit the child in the middle with a soft ball. If they miss, they must change places with the person in the middle. If the player in the middle catches the ball, he or she can throw it – gently – at any of the other players in the circle. If it hits anyone, that person must change places with the player in the middle.

### Here are some ideas for variations to consider:

- If you have old clothes and other household items, you can put them aside in a special container or space for your child to use when they'd like to pretend to be 'mom,' 'dad' or other family members, replicating the day to day activities that keep your home running smoothly.
- Ask your children questions while they play, or offer scenarios for them to play act and resolve in character. This will help build empathy as they consider the perspective of others and to solve problems.
- Use old boxes and discarded sheets or fabrics to create spaces to play act. You can also use empty food boxes and other containers as props.
- Your child can also use dolls or other toys and even pets to play act. The act of speaking to inanimate objects will also contribute to building language skills, as well as improving empathy and problem-solving skills, as your child imagines what their non-verbal friends might say or do in response.



## Bake & cook (Age: +8)

By cooking with your child you can demonstrate the importance of healthy eating and nourishing our bodies, as well as our hearts. Spending time together preparing delicious and nutritious foods for your family is a wonderful way to strengthen bonds. Cooking with your child also provides practical experiences with many essential skills such as reading, measuring and following directions. It's a great opportunity to develop fine motor skills, problem-solving skills and basic concepts of math and science. Cooking with your child fosters independence and responsibility. Sharing this time together now will contribute to positive relationships to food in the future and may bring comfort to your child during difficult or stressful times.

### Here are some local favourites:

- Teach your children how to wash their hands properly and to practice good hygiene.
- Spills and messes should be expected when cooking with your child. You can use these moments to teach your child how to clean up after themselves. Show them where you keep the broom or dish rags and the right process for disposing of food scraps or waste. Pretty soon they'll be able to do these chores on their own!
- Read recipes together to support reading comprehension and to learn about new processes such as mixing or measuring.
- If your child is younger or is living with disabilities, you can try a number of simple tasks, depending on their ability. Together you can measure out ingredients, count fruits or vegetables, or watch or listen for the pot to boil or the timer to go off.
- Be safe! Don't leave your child unattended in the kitchen, or allow them to get too close to a hot stove or dish. If you believe they are ready to take on new tasks such as chopping or slicing with a knife, be sure to watch closely and guide as needed.



## Gardening (Ages: +3)

Gardening with your children is a great way to spend time together and cultivates love and respect for nature. It can contribute to the development of a positive attitude and patience while you wait eagerly for your fruits and vegetables to grow and flourish. Gardening expands children's knowledge as they explore and learn about the world through their senses: seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling the garden grow. The changeable nature of gardening, from weather to the onset of plant disease, improves thinking and problem-solving skills. As children begin to realize the rewards of plant growth and reproduction, they will become more and more active in seeking out answers and taking control of their own learning. While taking good care of your garden ensures strong plants and a good yield, it can also contribute to increased physical activity and encourages muscle and bone growth.







## Arts & crafts (Ages: +3)

Arts and crafts activities are important for your child's development. Children develop the muscles in their hands as they use their fingers to manipulate materials and hold pencils, scissors or paintbrushes. They can build basic math concepts through counting materials, making shapes and patterns. Through arts and crafts, children can learn to value and appreciate their culture and the world around them. As they create images or objects, they can explore their feelings, practice expressing themselves and reflect critically on their work. Creating art boosts confidence, creativity and can strengthen parent/caregiver and child bonding. It's also a great way to relieve stress and work through your emotions. This is something you can do at home and with as many or as few resources as you want. You can take a look around the house to see what you have – paper, tape, colouring pencils, and paint. Old or unwanted items, such as boxes, jars, cloth or pages from magazines or newspapers can be repurposed with a little bit of creativity and imagination. Encourage your child to think outside the box and to create whatever their heart desires.

### Here are some ideas for getting started:

- Help your child learn new colours and shapes, as well as gain familiarity with different patterns and concepts by pointing them out as you go along or making requests.
- Support the development of problem-solving skills by giving your child artistic challenges. For example, you can ask them to build a forest using found objects outside, including small sticks, stones and leaves. Or you could have them create their own puzzle by drawing a picture, cutting it up and then putting it back together.
- Use the time to talk about what you are making, the process and to discuss different ideas and subjects. You can also talk to your child about their feelings and dreams, and share a little more about yourself, strengthening your relationship.
- Making cards or gifts for friends and family is a low-cost and fun way to show love and build empathy. If someone isn't feeling well, you can make a get-well card. To show a special friend how much you care, you can make them a friendship bracelet.



## Music (All ages)

Music has been found to have many therapeutic benefits for people of all ages. It helps improve social and cognitive development, increases self-expression and inspires creativity. Listening to music be relaxing or energizing, depending on the genre. Singing, dancing, and playing an instrument also build confidence. Practicing musical instruments improves hand-eye confidence and develops fine motor skills. Dancing is a great form of physical exercise that also improves coordination and balance, as well as self-expression. Singing and writing music are also excellent forms of self-expression and contribute to building brainpower. Best of all, you can do all of these activities together.

### Here are some ideas for getting started:

- Make your own musical instruments using old or discarded items such as bottles, jars or cans. You can fill them with small rocks, mismatched buttons or other small items that will make different sounds when you shake them. You can even use a pot or pan and a spoon as something of a drum.
- If you are musically-inclined, you can introduce the concept of rhythm to your child by tapping out a beat using a homemade instrument or by clapping your hands.
- Share music that is culturally important to your family and community and explain its significance. This will foster self-confidence and cultural pride, as well as an appreciation for your personal and shared histories.
- Quiet background music can be soothing for infants and toddlers, especially at sleep time. This can help them relax and go to sleep faster.
- Sing simple, short songs to infants, toddlers and children with disabilities. You can make up one or two lines about bathing, dressing, eating or hygiene to sing to them as your complete a task. This will help improve them understand tasks and it's fun!
- Make up rhymes! Young children and children with disabilities enjoy repetition. You can play or sing your child's favourite songs again and again, encouraging your child to join in as they naturally memorize the words. Once your child has learned the words, you can keep the game fresh by encouraging your child to change the words to make the song unique and funny.



### 3. Emotional control

Help your child to discover and understand their feelings. Sometimes everyday life can become too difficult, too stressful, or scary. It can be a big task to understand our emotions and use or control them in the best way. Children who know how to identify and manage the intensity of their emotions generally respond better to everyday situations, as well as in moments of distress. Emotional control is associated with strong interpersonal relationships, better conflict management skills and academic success. Once a child can recognize their emotions, they will be better equipped to acknowledge them and work through any challenges they might encounter. Understanding their own emotions will also increase your child's emotional intelligence and help them to understand how others feel and react in familiar situations.

#### Here are some ideas to consider as you help your child learn to manage their emotions:

- Having a consistent routine is essential to supporting a child to manage their emotions. Routines allow children to feel control and comfort as they often know what to expect throughout their day. It's also a good way to help your child understand what is expected of them.
- Understanding and acknowledging that many reactions are common for everyone is important. Normalizing feelings decreases anxiety and helps your child to develop a healthy acceptance of their feelings.
- Once your child is aware of their emotions they will be able become aware of what calms and soothes them, developing their own toolbox of positive coping strategies. This will be a trial and error process that you can support by observing their actions and reminding them of strategies they discovered in the past.
- By practicing self-expression, it becomes routine making it less likely that we might engage in negative coping strategies that lead to anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns. Give your child space to reflect and share how they feel throughout the day and at critical moments as they arise. This space might be shared, but it might also be private.
- Resist the urge to punish a child when they express themselves inappropriately. Instead, take a moment to discuss how you both feel and work through the problem together.
- Reinforce good behaviour with praise and other positive consequences. This is also good opportunity to remind your child that you love and care for them.
- Model healthy choices and appropriate reactions. If we do not practice emotional control, we cannot ask our children to.



Some emotions, such as anger and anxiety can be harmful if left unresolved. In some cases, unresolved feelings can even manifest physically in the form of a headache, stomach ache or something more serious, like an ulcer.

When your child expresses anxiety or worry, reassure them by saying you believe him or her, and that having those feelings is okay and normal. Show acceptance of worrying thoughts and anxious feelings. Be aware that sometimes children with anxiety also feel symptoms you can't see. Anxiety might make your child feel afraid or nervous. They might even feel jittery or shortness of breath.

There are signs you can look for if you are concerned your child is experiencing severe anxiety, including: avoidance of activities or people; withdrawal; overly clingy; difficulties sleeping; intense anger or easily agitated.

If your child's anxiety seems out of proportion, unrealistic, doesn't go away or leads to avoidance behaviours, reach out to a mental health professional or doctor for support.

**Anger** is a mood or emotion, with very clear body signs, that can lead to changes in a person's behaviour. Anger is often a response to an actual or imagined event. We might experience anger when we have a disagreement with a friend or loved one or if we are confined for an extended period (to reduce the risk of contracting a virus or otherwise). We might get angry over protracted conflict and violence in our communities. Everyone gets angry for one reason or another. It is a normal and valid reaction to injustice, but it is important to express and manage appropriately.

Signs that your child might be angry include: rapid breathing; increased heartrate; tension; feeling sick to your stomach; crying. A person who is angry might feel like yelling, running away or even hurting someone else or themselves.

Positive anger management is one of the most important skills for children, adolescent and adults to learn. Dealing with anger in a positive way enhances adolescents' self-respect and self-confidence and contributes to the readiness to become involved in the community and assume responsibilities.



## Here are some games and activities to help your child learn to manage their emotions:

- If you're happy and you know it. This familiar song helps young children learn how to express their feelings. Here are some new verses to try:

If you're happy and you know it clap your hands.

If you're surprised and you know it say, "Oh my!"

If you're excited and you know jump up and down.

If you're sad and you know it rub your eyes, "Boo hoo!"

If you're scared and you know it shiver and shake.

If you're sleepy and you know it close your eyes.

If you're angry and you know it stomp your feet.

- **Anger** management cards. Have your child select a prompt (Annex ###) and respond to gain insights into anger and how to improve anger control skills. You can keep the cards in a safe place, taking them out whenever your children experiences anger or as they wish.
- **Anxiety** management cards. As above, have your child select a prompt (Annex ###) and respond to gain insights into anxiety and positive coping strategies.
- **Make a trigger or situation tracker.** Help your child explore what situations easily cause them to become upset, angry or feel other negative emotions strongly. Use the trigger tracker (Annex ###) to develop greater self-awareness and prepare your child to face frustrating circumstances using problem-solving and preparation. You can make your own personalized trigger tracker after discussion with your child. Simply check the triggers that apply to you and discuss. This is also a great opportunity to discuss your own triggers and how everyone is different.
- **Feeling Faces.** Help your child to identify and name their emotions. Using the Feeling Faces sheet (Annex ###) begin by acknowledging that they are experiencing a lot of different emotions and ask them to choose a face that reflects how they are feeling. You can use this prompt to start a conversation about how your child is feeling and how it makes them feel to talk about it. Try this every day to demonstrate feelings change and that's okay.

## Keep a journal.

This activity is better for older children, but can be modified for younger children depending on your child's abilities. The aim of this activity is to increase control over our emotions by acknowledging them and try to problem solve where possible. By writing about feelings in a journal, children can leave behind those overwhelming thoughts and feelings and get on with their daily routines.

Younger children and children with disabilities can facilitate this process through drawn images, as well. You can encourage your child to go back to their journal later in the day to reflect. Alternatively, if your child cannot write, they might try to choose a special sign for each of their worries or emotions that they can note in their journal as they feel them. You can also draw a series of faces demonstrating different feelings – anger, sadness, happiness – and ask them to choose by telling you or pointing at the picture that reflects how they feel at the moment or how they felt sometime that day. You can ask about their day to understand how and why they feel the way they do and help them problem solve if needed.





## 4. Relaxation Techniques

School closings, sick friends and family members, isolation at home – these and other factors can cause anxiety and stress for children during a crisis, including a global health pandemic or conflict. This section outlines some activities you can do to help your child relax.

### Getting Started

- Find a quiet space away from distractions.
- If you're trying these exercises with a child or group of children, make sure your instructions are clear and engaging.
- You don't have to do them all. Keep an eye on how long the children are engaged and try again another time if they begin to lose interest.

### Flower and Candle

This is a simple exercise that encourages deep breathing – a way to relax.

Pretend you have a nice smelling flower in one hand and a slow burning candle in the other.

- Breathe in slowly through your nose as you smell the flower.
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth as you blow out the candle.
- Repeat a few times.



### Lemon

This exercise releases muscle tension. Pretend you have a lemon in your hand.

- Reach up to the tree and pick a lemon with each hand.
- Squeeze the lemons hard to get all the juice out – squeeze, squeeze, squeeze.
- Throw the lemons on the floor and relax your hands.
- Then repeat, until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade!
- After your last squeeze and throw, shake out your hands to relax!

### Lazy Cat

This exercise releases muscle tension.

Pretend you are a lazy cat that just woke up from a lovely long nap.

- Have a big yawn.
- And a meow.
- Now stretch out your arms, legs and back – slowly like a cat – and relax.



## Feather/Statue

This exercise releases muscle tension. Pretend you are a feather floating through the air for about ten seconds.

- Suddenly you freeze and transform into a statue. Don't move!
- Then slowly relax as you transform back into the floating feather again.
- Repeat, making sure to finish as a floaty feather in a relaxed state.



## Stress Balls

This exercise releases muscle tension and massages your hands. Make your own stress ball(s) by filling balloons with dry lentils or rice.

- Take the ball(s) in one or both hands and squeeze and release.
- Experiment with squeezing the ball. Find a way that is right for you, adjusting the speed, pressure, and timing of your squeezes to whatever way you like.



## Turtle

This exercise releases muscle tension. Pretend you are a turtle going for a slow, relaxed turtle walk.

- Oh no, it's starting to rain!
- Curl up tight under your shell for about ten seconds.
- The sun's out again, so come out of your shell and return to your relaxing walk.
- Repeat a few times, making sure to finish with a walk so that your body is Relaxed.



## Annex 1: Anger control prompts

Where do I feel anger in my body?

What calms me down when I am angry?

What should I know before I get angry?

What makes me very angry?

What helps me work through my anger?

Someone I admire controls anger by...

When 2 people are arguing they can...

When I am very mad I could...

Something very annoying is...

The worst thing about anger is...



## Annex 2: Coping skills prompt

I am still learning to cope with...

What is a coping skill?

I feel better when...

A healthy way to show feelings is...

What feeling may need a coping skill?

I need a good coping skill when...

Think of your favourite place...

Think of your favourite person...

I calm myself by...

A good way to release is...

## Annex 3: Worry and anxiety prompts

Imagine your favourite place.  
Close your eyes and pretend you are there.

Share a day when your worry was  
out of control...

I feel better when...

Describe a brave person...

Describe anxiety for you...

Routines help. What is your daily routine?

I worry about...

What is the first step to face your fears?

What do you avoid (hide from)?

Places I feel anxious...

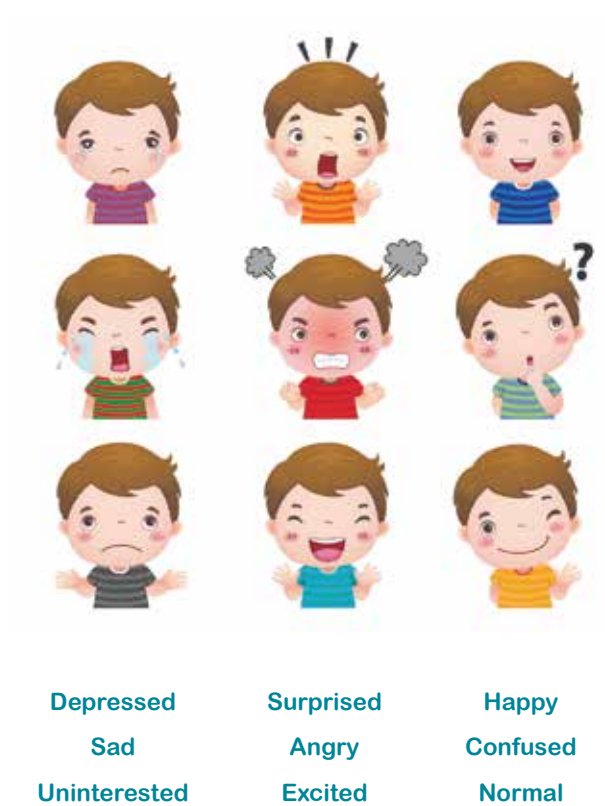
Slowly squeeze then relax your muscles

Who makes you feel calm?

### Annex 4: Coping skills prompt

- Being told 'No'
- Being teased or bullied
- Being interrupted
- Not being listened to
- Someone chewing with their mouth open
- When something is unfair
- Losing a game
- Getting stuck with homework
- Getting ready for school in the morning
- Being hungry
- Someone taking something that belongs to me
- When someone hurts me

### Annex 5: Feeling Faces



### Contacts:

Please let us know what you think about this toolkit and activities:

If you are in need of more specialized support, please contact this number:  
**+93 728 332 222**

You can use this number to access more information on COVID-19 prevention, positive parenting advice and child protection awareness:  
**+93 728 332 222**