

# Kid T.I.P.S.

*Tough Issues, Proven Solutions*

*A publication for parents on the emotional, social and behavioral development of children.*



## The Basics: Helping Your Child Build a **Coping Skills Toolbox**



**C**oping skills are great tools for kids to have when the stresses and strains of life threaten to slow them down or overwhelm them.

But just as no single tool is right for every home improvement project, no single coping skill will be right for every situation your child will experience. That's why it's important to help your child continually develop a variety of coping skills, a whole toolbox he or she can go to when the need arises.

Developing coping skills is only the first step. It takes hard work and practice for children to be able to select a helpful skill, learn how to use it properly and complete the task efficiently. As a parent, the more you know about coping skills, the more you will be able to provide support and “be on the same page” with your kids when they face challenges. The following tips can help you help your child build and successfully use a well-stocked coping skills toolbox:

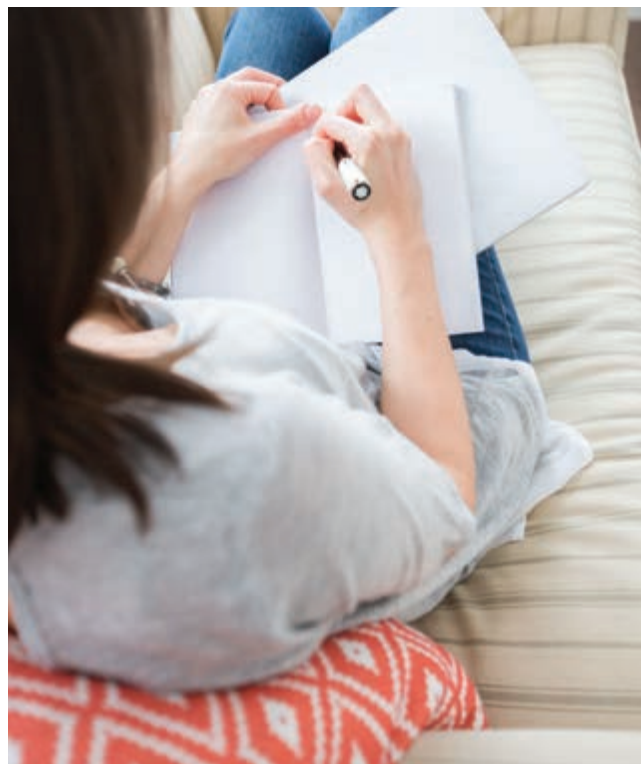
- **It takes time to develop coping tools.** Children first have to learn skills or strategies that might be helpful. Then their parents can encourage them to try these new coping skills. A good way to start is to have your child begin with a list of coping skills that have been useful in the past or that he or she would be willing to try in the future. This is just a starting point, and your child's toolbox will continue to grow over time.
- **Coping skills help us get through tough moments or situations and prevent us from engaging in behavior that may make the situation worse.** Sometimes, using a coping skill makes us feel better. But that is not always the case, nor is it always the most desirable goal. When teaching children to use coping skills, it can be more effective to have them stay focused on properly using the skill rather than immediately feeling better. The longer-term reward of improving your child's life through effectively using coping skills will come with time and effort. At times during the learning process, the goal should be to get through the situation without making it worse rather than feeling better in that moment.

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- **Patience is the key to using skills successfully.** The first time children decide to try a coping skill, they may get discouraged. They might think, “That was supposed to help?” But it takes time to learn how to use coping skills and to discover which coping skill works best for different situations. So encourage your child to stick with it and try different skills at least a few times. If a skill is not a good fit, that’s okay. Just have your child scratch it off the list and try a different one.
- **Coping skills are not a “one size fits all.”** This means a coping skill that works for one person might not work for another. Also, just because a coping skill was effective in one situation doesn’t mean it will translate to another situation. For example, sometimes when your child is feeling down, it might be helpful for him or her to watch funny videos. At other times, however, talking to friends might be a better skill for getting out of the dumps. That’s why it is important to help your child develop a comprehensive list of coping skills to practice using in various situations.
- **Your child’s coping skills won’t be effective 100% of the time.** There are no guarantees, especially when your child is dealing with an emotional situation. There will be days when your child feels like nothing will work. But encourage him or her to keep using those coping skills anyway, and to reach out to a supportive person if he or she needs a little extra help.
- **Coping skills don’t make everything better.** Occasionally, your child’s use of coping skills will lift his or her spirits and the situation or problem will get resolved. Sometimes, however, your child won’t feel better immediately or the situation won’t change. This is an opportunity to teach your child that we sometimes have to endure uncomfortable feelings in the short-term in order to achieve long-term goals. During these times, the best thing you can do is provide



your child with realistic expectations, validation and understanding.

With time, effort and practice, it is only a matter of time before your child will build a toolbox full of effective coping skills and learn how to use them to deal with many different, difficult situations.

For a printable list of common coping skills for children of all ages, visit [boystown.org/parenting/Pages/50-coping-skills.aspx](https://boystown.org/parenting/Pages/50-coping-skills.aspx).

➡ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.

