

Cognitive Coping Resources for Early Childhood

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Step 1: Teaching Concepts of Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions

“Our brain thinks, or tells us things. Our heart has feelings. Our body can Do things.”

Engage in a game to categorize words into a thought, feeling, or action. Print visual cues and examples in Appendix A. Activity Ideas:

- Draw a life size outline of a person on butcher paper and put on wall. Draw brain in the head, heart in chest, and highlight around the hands, explaining *“We are going to stick each on of these cards on either the brain if it is something we think, our heart if it is a feeling, or the hands if it is something our body does.”* Read examples and have child put on the brain, heart, or hands.
- Lay a brain picture, heart picture, and body outline picture on the floor in the shape of a triangle. Read an example and have child hop or walk to the head, heart, or body picture. Praise correct or give corrective feedback for learning. (e.g., *“Right! Happy is a feeling,”* OR *“Good guess, but actually ‘crying’ is something our body does”*.)
- Tell child that for a thought they will point to their head; a feeling they will put their hands over their heart; and an action (something our body does) wave their hands. Read examples and coach child on identifying as a thought, feeling, or action. Giving praise and corrective info same as above.
- Have child toss a ball into baskets labeled with images of head, heart, hands to identify thoughts, feeling, action. Same as above providing praise and corrective info.

Step 2: Teaching Connections between Thoughts, Feelings, Actions:

“When anything happens, we Think, Feel, and Do.”

Use concrete examples (Appendix B) to show how a thought leads to a feeling and action.

Activity Ideas:

- Set up a triangle with images of head, heart, hands on the floor. Read a scenario and guide child in walking through what they might think, feel, and do. For additional support, you can have premade situations with a potential thought, feeling, and action to teach the connections.
- Use the Turtle Story ([Turtle Technique](#)) to teach the think-feel-do connection. If available, use turtle puppets to act out the story. Then teach the child the Turtle Steps. Pair body movements with each step and use repetition to increase retention. Practice scenarios and guide child

through use of Turtle Steps. For very young children, the step of “Think of Something helpful to do” may be “Think of a helpful grown-up”

- Encourage caregivers to identify thoughts and feelings of characters when reading stories to kids at home.

Step 3: Teaching Thought Flexibility

“Our brains can have thoughts that are true AND have thoughts that are not true. Our brains can have thoughts that are helpful AND not helpful.”

Activity Ideas:

- Using the situations in Appendix B, guide child through 2 different think-feel-do connections to the same situation. Ask which thought is more helpful.
- Use images of social situations or scenes from books or shows to identify a character’s think-feel-do and then ask child if there is any different thinking that could help the character feel better, such as the [Hello Kitty example](#). You can also find real-life images of kids in various social situations through google search.
- Books such as, Eggbert the Slightly Cracked Egg, can be read to highlight that thinking changes how we feel. And we can change our thoughts to help us feel better.
- Teach positive statements using songs or rhymes. Also, becoming familiar with kid shows and characters can provide familiar ways to connect, as many provide positive messages. For example, SnoopDogg’s [Positive Affirmations](#) or Dora the Explorer’s [Happy Song](#).
- Utilize puppets to voice an unhelpful thought and have the child tell the puppet a more positive thought.

Step 4: Trauma Informed Application

“After trauma, kids can have thinking that is not true and not helpful.”

- Use an example supported by think-feel-do visuals, such as, “Caden was in a tornado. Now anytime it is rainy, he thinks ‘there will be a tornado’ and feels scared and hides in bed,” or “Kaylee’s Dad called her mean names. Now Kaylee thinks, ‘I’m a bad kid.’” Share that a coping skill can help kids feel better.
- Some children may be able to identify their own trauma impacted thinking. Therapists can validate and provide accurate information. For example, if a child expresses abuse is their fault, “I know other kids who think being hurt was their fault AND we know that it is always the adult’s fault because they chose to hit.”

Appendix A: Example thoughts, feelings, actions

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Happy | Laughing | My friends like me. |
| Sad | Crying | My knee hurts so bad. |
| Mad | Yelling | I don't like mushrooms. |
| Scared | Hiding | The storm is so loud. |
| Surprised | Jumping Up & Down | We get to go to the zoo today! |
| Nervous | Whispering | Am I in trouble? |
| | Singing | I miss my dad. |
| | Hitting | No one likes me. |
| | | I am smart. |
| | | Pizza is my favorite. |
| | | That dog will bite me. |
| | | No fair! |

- May change the thoughts to be more relatable to your client based on what you know about them; Perspective taking is tough for young kids so coming up with example thoughts that they might have is easier for them to learn.



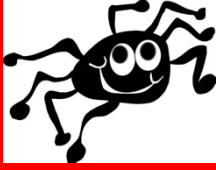
THINK



FEEL



DO



You see a spider.

Spiders can bite.



Scared

Run away from
the spider.



Cookies are on the table.

The cookies are
for me!



Happy

Eat a cookie



Your brother grabs your toy.

That's mine!



Mad

Tell a grown-up.



A favorite toy is lost.

I have nothing to play with.



Sad

Cry



A dog on a leash is walking by you at a park.

This dog will bite me!



Scared

Start crying and run away

Some dogs are friendly.



Happy.

Ask to pet the dog.



Mom says, No more TV.

She's mean.



Mad

Yell at mom.

I can do something else fun.



Happy

Say OK



Pizza is for dinner but it has olives on it.

I hate olives! The pizza is ruined.



Sad

Cry

I can pick off the olives.



Happy

Pick them off & Eat the pizza.



Going to new school

I don't know anyone. What if kids are mean?



Nervous

Look down. Not talk to anyone.

**I can make new
friends. Most
kids are nice.**



Happy

Smile & say hello