Video 5: Coping skills for children

Leaders Guide
This KidsMatter resource was written and produced by the Australian Psychological Society on behalf of KidsMatter.

Acknowledgement

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Video 5: Coping skills for children

This document aims to provide Session Leaders with information to assist in the presentation of Video 5: Coping skills for children to parents and carers as part of the KidsMatter Starting School information sessions.

Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions contains more detailed tips and hints for planning and facilitating information sessions. Session Leaders may find it helpful to read this document before delivering the sessions as it offers valuable information that may assist in efficient facilitation. It contains four warm-up activities designed to provide parents and carers with the opportunity to meet without placing too much pressure on them to introduce themselves to a larger group. The four warm-up activities (Meet and greet, Your child’s highlights, Carousel introductions and Discovering what we have in common) can be found at the end of Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions and can be used at the start of any Starting School session.

For more background information and ideas for how your setting can support children to make a positive transition, see Transition matters: A resource about starting school for early childhood educators and school staff.

Video 5: Learning objectives

- To increase parent and carer awareness of strategies to help children cope in difficult and challenging situations.
Outline

The following table provides an outline of Leaders Guide for Video 5: Coping skills for children. Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions contains warm-up activities that Session Leaders can use at the beginning of any session to provide parents and carers with the opportunity to meet each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Review Video 4: Problem solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Introduce Video 5 Show Video 5: Coping skills for children Summarise Video 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Activity: Step-by-step plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Questions, comments and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Checklist

- Step-by-step plan activity sheet
- Starting School Coping skills for children information sheet
- Blank paper, pens, whiteboard markers
- Additional KidsMatter information sheets

Further resources

You might like to have additional KidsMatter information sheets available for families. See the Starting School Coping skills for children information sheet that lists other KidsMatter resources you might find helpful.

Review Video 4

Provide a brief overview of what was covered in Video 4 to provide parents and carers with the opportunity to ask questions before presenting Video 5. For example:

*In the last video we had a look at the three key problem solving steps and identified some of the ways we can model and practise problem solving at home. We also had a look at some problem solving scenarios. Does anyone have any questions or comments before we move on to Video 5?*

Introduce Video 5

Start with a brief introduction before presenting the video. For example:

*We are now going to show a video that looks at some helpful ways to encourage children to learn positive coping skills. Coping skills are what we think and do to get us through situations we find difficult or stressful. Children can learn coping skills with help from you. Practising new coping skills is a good way to help your child learn how to approach, adapt and handle new and existing challenges. This video provides some useful ideas that you may like to try with your child.*
Show Video 5

Summarise Video 5

After the video you may like to summarise the key points. If you have access to a whiteboard you can reinforce some of the points raised in the video by writing them on the whiteboard. For example:

Throughout primary school (and life) it is likely that children will encounter some bumps in the road. As you have just seen, teaching your child about coping skills will help them to manage strong emotions when they are faced with challenges. Three helpful techniques are:

1. Teaching strategies to calm down. For example, counting to 10 or taking five deep breaths.
2. Understanding that our thoughts affect how we feel and behave, and that sometimes we can have helpful thoughts while at other times we can have unhelpful thoughts. Recognising the times when we have unhelpful thoughts and replacing them with helpful thoughts can be a very useful way to manage feelings.
3. Devising a step-by-step plan where the problem is broken down into smaller and more manageable steps. Praise your child as they successfully complete each step.

Helping your child to learn coping skills as they start school will enable them to develop and practise skills that will help them to cope with future changes and challenges. Perhaps we can start to think about the ways we can apply the coping strategies that were shown in the video.

Questions, comments and discussion

Invite parents and carers to comment on the activity. This can give parents and carers an opportunity to relate the content of the activity to their situation and to clarify and elaborate on points made in the video. Prompts might include:

Did you find that breaking the problem down into smaller steps made the problem seem more manageable? Which steps in Diego’s scenario were easier and which were more difficult? What are some practical ways you can practise and model a step-by-step plan at home?

Summary

Conclude the discussion. For example:

There are many different ways children can learn to cope. Together we have identified some helpful techniques that you can use to encourage your child to learn positive coping skills. We also had a closer look at the step-by-step approach, and practised breaking down a difficulty into smaller, more manageable steps. Helping children build skills to cope with the ups and downs of starting school will help to promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

If you plan to show Video 6 after Video 5, link to the next video and accompanying activities. For example:

Now that we have looked at coping skills for children, we will have a closer look at some of the changes that happen for the whole family during the transition to school.

Activity: Step-by-step plan

Go to page 6 for instructions to facilitate this activity.
Background information for Session Leaders

This section contains background information for Video 5 and the accompanying resources. It is not necessary to present this information to parents and carers; however, it may assist you to answer questions and provide some additional information during discussions. For more information on transition to school, see Transition matters and Transition to Primary School: A Review of the Literature. Parents and carers who are interested in the research behind the video and resources can also access these documents online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au

Coping skills

What does the literature say about the relationship between coping skills, starting school and mental health?

A successful transition to school is influenced by the way children, parents and carers, schools and communities interact and support each other, how prepared they are for the transition and how successfully they cope with and adjust to the changes. These changes include new routines, situations and rules, which some children will find exciting while others will find overwhelming or difficult. Supporting children through this time of change will assist them to learn skills that can be utilised throughout transitions later in life. Specifically, the literature suggests that positive home environments and secure and supportive family relationships are associated with resilience and the ability to cope with adversity1,2,3,4.

Children who cope better with life’s ups and downs develop good mental health and wellbeing. According to the literature, coping includes social and emotional skills for self-awareness and self-management. In particular, children need to learn to recognise and manage physical symptoms, anxious thinking and fearful behaviours. There is also substantial evidence that parental and social support acts as a stress-buffering mechanism by providing children with the resources to cope with demands, which in turn lowers psychological distress5,6. Helping children manage their emotions with positive coping skills is important for developing self-regulation skills, resilience and a sense of self, and nurtures their mental health and wellbeing.
References


Activity: Step-by-step plan

**Aims**

- To increase awareness of strategies that help children cope in difficult and challenging situations.
- For parents and carers to practise developing a plan to help their child learn to cope with a worrying or difficult situation.

**Preparation**

- Photocopy the required number of activity sheets and information sheets.

**Materials**

- Activity sheet: Step-by-step plan
- Information sheet: Coping skills for children
- Pens

**Instructions**

Estimated time: 15 minutes

1. **Introduce the activity.** For example: 
   
   As discussed in the video, your child might be experiencing fears or facing situations that may seem overwhelming or too difficult for them to cope with all at once. You can help them to break the worry or challenge into small steps, and allow them to slowly face their fears. Sit down with your child to work through each small step until they reach their goal. Children will benefit from support people, such as their early childhood educator, teacher, a relative and of course parents and carers, to help them along the way. In this activity, you will have the opportunity to practise putting a step-by-step plan together to use with your child at home.

2. **Explain to parents and carers that in a moment you will ask them to work through a scenario in small groups.** Instruct them to use the example in the information sheet as a guide. Read through the practice scenario and show parents and carers the activity sheet. Explain that they will be asked to help Diego by breaking his fear into three to five small steps. If parents and carers have difficulty brainstorming ideas, the Session Leader may like to provide some help. For example:
   
   **Step 1** A parent or carer takes a picture of the playground to put into a short activity book they have created (eg ‘This is my playground’).
   
   **Step 2** A teacher or parent or carer models the different activities that can be done on the play equipment while Diego watches (eg swing on the monkey bars, go down the slide).
   
   **Step 3** Diego uses the play equipment with a parent when no other children are around (ie before or after school with school staff permission).
   
   **Step 4** Diego uses the playground equipment with a small group of children.

3. **Allocate parents and carers into groups of three or four** (see Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions p.8 for ideas on how to form groups) and give everyone an activity sheet. Each group will need to complete one activity sheet; however, parents and carers are welcome to complete one activity sheet each. Session Leaders may like to walk around to each group to provide prompts that may help generate ideas. Example prompts include:
   
   What could be the next achievable step? How could you break that down into one or two smaller steps? Could a teacher help out with this step?

4. **After 10 minutes, invite each group to read some of their suggestions to help Diego overcome his fear aloud.**

**Conclusion**

Conclude the activity. For example: 

In this activity we thought about devising a step-by-step plan that can be used to help your child face a challenging situation. This plan involves breaking down a fear or challenging situation into small, achievable steps. You have practised putting a plan together so that you can devise a similar plan with your child if a worrying or overwhelming situation arises.
Diego is afraid to use the playground equipment at his new school because he is overwhelmed by the number of children using the equipment at play times. Help Diego to gradually overcome his fear in three to five steps.

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