Orientation Session

Calm Moments Cards

Empowering School Personnel to Reduce Student Stress and Enhance Emotional Well-Being During Situational Stressors and Throughout the Day

• **Recognize stress reactions** and the situations that might increase stress

• **Embed simple evidence-based strategies** to reduce stress and increase feelings of emotional well-being so that students can be more positive, productive, and happy!

An Every Moment Counts model program
Developed by:

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Citation:
Developed by OTs ...
...but implemented by all!

Calm Moments Cards program was developed by 2 OTs and one OTA in order to help school personnel and families be able to recognize and respond effectively to students’ stress throughout the day.

Occupational therapy practitioners, with professional education in mental health practice, can play an important role in mental health promotion, prevention and intervention with students and school personnel.

A mental health promotion initiative focusing on embedding strategies throughout the day to help all students become mentally healthy in order to succeed in school, at home and in the community for Every Moment Counts.

Project Director: Susan Bazyk, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA
Funded by the Ohio Department of Education

www.everymomentcounts.org
Being mentally healthy is a positive state of functioning

Goal: Help promote positive mental health

1. Positive affect or emotional state. Feeling good emotionally – happy, content, positive about life. Observe children’s affect; note significant changes
2. Positive psychological and social function attending skills? enjoying fulfilling relationships?
3. Doing well functionally – engaging in productive activities – academically, socially, physically. Tune into children’s schoolwork, friendships, interactions during lunch & recess
4. Coping with life stressors and challenges
   Observe how the child copes with a poor test grade, losing a game, not making the team, being teased, etc.

Every Moment Counts Guiding Philosophy

*Every moment does count!* Small moments make big differences in how children feel and function in school, home, & community.

- All children and youth have a right to participate in and enjoy their day – from start to finish.
- Enjoyable experiences throughout the day promote feelings of emotional well-being.
- Everyone can be a mental health promoter.
- Addressing the mental health needs of all students does not involve doing more, but doing differently - namely through embedded strategies.

Why is this program needed?

Feeling stressed and anxious during the school day can lead to challenges in academic and social participation. Plus ....

.... Students don’t feel emotionally well or happy when they’re stressed.

What is the connection between stress and anxiety?

• **Stress** is the experience of emotional tension resulting from a situation that is too demanding.

• **Examples of possible situational stressors:** starting a difficult assignment, taking a test, speaking in front of the class.

• **Anxiety** is stress that is experienced after the stressor is gone. Daily stressors can lead to ongoing feelings of anxiety and minimize feelings of emotional well-being in students.

[www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)
Stress causes stress hormones to be released by the nervous system resulting in muscle tightness, increased heartbeat and blood pressure.

A little stress may enhance performance in the moment.

Too much stress can cause us to freeze up and may limit functioning. Examples:

• Poor concentration
• Limited memory
• Racing thoughts

www.helpguide.org
Chronic Stress can lead to mental and physical illness and behavioral challenges:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression, general unhappiness
- Sleep problems
- Nausea
- Aches and pains
- Social withdrawal
- Procrastination
- Academic challenges

www.helpguide.org
Anxiety Disorders

One of the most prevalent mental health disorders in children/youth

Signs and symptoms:

- Dry mouth
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle tension, twitches
- Excessive sweating
- Racing heart
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, headache
- Flushed face, flushed skin
- Numbness, tingling (pins and needles, jelly legs)
- Nausea, butterflies
- Difficulty thinking, speaking, forming thoughts
- Feeling like you are going to faint or pass out

Reference: Melemis (23)

Chronic stress may lead to the development of an anxiety disorder.
Purpose of the CMC Program

To help ALL personnel learn how to help reduce stress and promote mental well-being throughout the day by:

• **Fostering awareness of signs of stress and triggers that may cause stress.** *The program does not allow one to ‘diagnose’ anxiety*

• **Providing simple embedded strategies aimed at reducing stress and anxiety** in response to everyday situational stressors (e.g. taking a test, completing an assignment)

• **Promoting a positive classroom culture** that encompasses positive thinking, relaxation, focusing skills, and **enjoyable activities to promote positive mental health and happiness**!

• **Assisting students in identifying stress & anxiety and applying calming techniques.**
What are the Calm Moments Cards?

Easy to implement evidence-based strategies aimed at reducing stress and anxiety and enhancing mental well-being in order to enhance school function.

17 Cards that provide:

- Thinking strategies
- Focusing & calming strategies
- Sensory strategies
- Triggers that may cause stress
- Teaching Moments – explanations supporting use of the strategies
- Enjoyable activities to promote positive mental health
Calm Moment Cards (CMC)
Based On Evidence

A review of **best available evidence** on interventions for reducing anxiety supports the use of strategies in the following 3 areas:

• **Thinking** (cognitive behavioral)
• **Focusing and calming** (mindfulness, yoga)
• **Sensory** (sensory input used strategically for self-regulation)

**Summary of Research Outcomes:** See EMC website. A mixed methods study of CMC implementation in 2015-16 with 93 school personnel found statistically significant improvements in knowledge, beliefs and actions. [www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org)
WHO can benefit from the CMCs?

**Tier 3 (Intensive)** Students with identified anxiety disorders.

**Tier 2 (At-Risk)** Students at-risk of anxiety due to chronic situational stressors (e.g. poverty, bullying) or co-morbidity (ASD, ADHD)

**Tier 1 (Universal): ALL students** can benefit from learning about stress reactions and engaging in activities that help reduce stress & promote positive mental health
17 Situational Stressors

- Participating in Art
- Participating in Assemblies
- Eating in the Cafeteria
- Emergency Situations
- End of the Day Routine
- Completing Homework
- Participating in Music
- Participating in Physical Education
- Playing at Recess
- Using the Restroom
- Returning from Recess
- Participating in School Parties of Special Events
- Start of the Day
- Test Taking
- Transitioning between Classes
- Transitioning between Subjects
- Writing/Completing work
Stress Triggers

- Cognitive demands
- Sensory component of the environment
- Associated negative feelings
- Motor and visual demands
- Changes in routines
- Social stressors
- Organizational difficulties
- Perfectionism, fear of failure
Situational Stress Triggers

Participating in Art
Situational Stressor

Triggers:
- Student is unable to keep up with instruction.
- Student has difficulty with visual perceptual or fine motor skills.
- Student has difficulty with noise or less structured environment.
- Student has aversion to smell or the feel of art materials.

Thinking Strategies:

Student Positive Affirmations
- My hands are strong.
- I can create anything.

Positive Adult Praise
- Anything is possible. One stroke at a time. (Appendix E, Reference 22)
- If you can imagine it, you can create it.
- The thoughts we choose to think are the tools we use to paint the canvas of our lives. (4)

Activities
- Mold Your Thoughts - Teacher passes out play dough or clay to each student. Teacher states, “Each one of us has the ability to control our thoughts. We can program our thoughts to influence how we think. Shape the dough or clay into the image of a brain. As you work, mold in feel good, calming and relaxing thoughts.” Explore with students descriptions of positive thoughts as they mold.
Thinking Strategies: Positive Affirmations

Cognitive Behavioral Activities

Start of the Day
Situational Stressor

Triggers:
• Student is nervous about being at school.
• Student does not come to school on time.
• Student carries over issues from home.
• Student has difficulty gathering and organizing materials.
• Student has overwhelming feelings regarding upcoming events.

Thinking Strategies:

Student Positive Affirmations:
• Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.
• I believe in my abilities and myself.
• I have all that I need to make this a great day.
• I have all the information that I need to solve any challenges that come up today.
• I am patient and calm and greet the day with ease.

Positive Adult Responses:
• One small positive thought in the morning can change your whole day.
• Do something amazing today.
• I’m so glad you came to school today.
• Prior to students coming into the classroom, spend a few moments grounding yourself and set your own intention for the day.

Activities:
• Worry Monster/box: “Keeper of the worries.” Teacher can decorate a box as complex or as simple as you want. Write or draw a picture of your worries on a piece of paper and feed the worry or fear to the monster. The monster eats the worries. (The teacher can read through the worries and implement adaptations to class or problem scenarios to ease the anxiety.) See Activity Template L
• Grow a thought: Teacher draws a seedling and states, “Today we are going to grow a positive thought. Think of something positive about our classroom.” Teacher writes on board “We are good helpers, we are worthy, we are likable, we can ____.” The class selects one. Teacher states, “Each day we will water our thoughts by listing anything we hear or see that would make our plant grow. We also will look for weeds, any thoughts we have seen or heard that would hurt our thought making it difficult to grow.” Each day review and show pictures of the plant growing from a seed to a full plant. (7)
AFFIRMATION WEAVER

This is a 10 minute video. Only show 2-3 minutes.
ACTIVITY-BASED COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES

- Use of **positive thought lessons** on the effects of stress
- Effective strategies include learning that **what we do (activities) & how we think (cognitive) can influence how we feel** (e.g. stressed or calm). Activities and affirmations are used to promote feeling focused and calm.
- **Activity suggestions** to be embedded throughout the school day are located on the front of each card with an entire list of activities located in **Appendix A**.
Focusing and Calming Strategies

- These strategies (mindfulness, yoga, movement and guided visualization) allow the mind to relax and release thoughts and emotions, to prevent a stress reaction to a challenging situation.
- **Stress** affects ability to breath, there is a connection between clear and logical thinking and breathing.
- **Yoga**: impacts the nervous systems related to muscle tension, breathing and lowers heart rate.
Movement Poses & Breathing Strategies

Focusing & Calming Strategies:
- Mooloos Test Day Dance on YouTube - A fun song with hand motions that students can sing and dance to prior to a test.
- 4-7-8 Breathing teaches student how to deep breath. This video uses visuals and simple instructions for diaphragmatic breathing. It is a great resource for learning how to breathe for anyone! Check it out! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Urbdz SeOQo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Urbdz SeOQo)
- **Movement Poses & Breathing** (See Appendix C)
  - A OK
  - Believers Bridge
  - Shine Bright
  - Soar High

Sensory Strategies:
- Pass out candy (soothes emotions, calms), Play relaxing music
- Lip Balm - Draw heart with scented lip balm on back of hand prior to test (try lavender, orange, lemon or grapefruit scents)

Teaching Moment
Link to Brain Research - The amygdala is a structure in the brain that acts as a "security guard" protecting us from threats. When a child is in an emotional state (stressed/anxious) the amygdala prevents information from going to the part of the brain responsible for higher level thinking and reasoned judgment. (17)
GO ZEN! 4-7-8 BREATHING
Place your hands and knees on the floor. Bend your toes forward. Spread fingers wide. Press your hands and heels down while lifting your hips toward the ceiling. Stretch your arms and legs as long as possible. Let your head hang down. Take 3 to 5 slow deep breaths. Return to standing by either walking your hands to your feet or feet to hands.
Other CALMING strategies:

**Mindfulness:** Deepening awareness of one’s environment and what's going on in the brain and body. Shifts attention from thoughts and emotions to the breath. Letting go of one’s thoughts by focusing on the present. Not the past or future.

**Guided Visualization:** Allows the imagination to prepare for events in a positive way. The body relaxes in response to what is being imagined through the use of all senses.

**3 Components on the cards - Activities, Movement Poses and Breathing.**

**Located** on the back of each card and also compiled for easy reference in Appendix C.
Sensory Based Strategies

• Sensory processing is the brain's ability to receive, organize and interpret sensory information so that one can respond and interact appropriately with one’s environment.

• Too much sensory input received at one time can lead to feeding overwhelmed leading to a stress reaction.

• Sensory strategies are recommended on the back of each card to ‘calm’ the nervous system and promote focusing. Examples include:
  – Touch: Fidgeting with a small item (stress ball)
  – Movement: Rhythmical movements like walking, sucking on a peppermint
  – Pressure/touch: Weighted lap pad
  – Sounds: Classical or soothing music
Other suggestions:

• Look for ways to bring the outdoors to your classroom. **Nature is a powerful stimulator** of all the senses. Green spaces (being around plants and trees) is calming.

• Also, consider the importance of **interoception**—helping students recognize their body signals (e.g. tense muscles, sweating, nausea)

Focusing & Calming Strategies

- **Count Down** - “Close your eyes. With palms facing up, tap each finger to your thumb while counting. Begin by taking your left thumb and touch your index finger, then middle finger, ring finger and little finger. Do this slowly. Repeat with the right hand. Now reverse the sequence beginning with touching the left thumb to the little finger. Now, make a fist with both hands and as we slowly open and close the hands, we will count to 10. Open the fist, count 1, close, count 2 and so on.” Quietly count out loud with your students so that they progress at a slow pace.
- **Adaptation** - Tap fingers on table or rest hands on thighs and just lift each finger individually while counting. Tap out C-A-L-M. (6)
- **Moment of Time** - Set a timer on the smart board or using a sand timer. Turn over and remind students to be silent and mindful while the timer is counting down. Adoptions listen to calming music and complete slow breathing to regain full concentration and focus.
- **Movement Poses & Breathing (See Appendix C)**
  - Wring Out the Worries
  - Reboot
  - Hang Loose
  - Contented Cat

-Kid’s Tai Chi (YouTube)- Short video to learn stances and few simple movements

Sensory Strategies

**Activities:**
- Apply “concentration cream” and allow the students to work the lotion into their hands. (5)

**Tools:**
- Tuck legs up by placing feet on the chair. Wrap your arms around your legs and squeeze.

Teaching Moment

Many people believe that a person is born smart, average, or dumb – and stays that way for life. But, new research shows the brain is like a muscle. It changes and gets stronger when you use it. (5)
Teaching Moments

Designed as quick references for evidence to support strategies

Provide additional learning tips for users to implement strategies

Use to help others understand stress and helpful strategies to use

These are located on the back of each card and also compiled in Appendix D
Teaching Moments

Focusing & Calming Strategies

- Puzzles: Have a jigsaw puzzle out for the kids to work on during free time.
- Tangrams: Place several tangrams in a cup for each student to be creative and make their own design.
- Go to GoZen! Anxiety Relief for Children on YouTube! Provides simple introduction on why children worry, 4-7-8 Breathing Exercises and loving kindness reflection. Learn ways to calm with young teen looking characters.
- Movement Poses & Breathing (See Appendix C)
  - Recharger
  - Refresher
  - Tranquil Turtle

Sensory Strategies

Activities

- Play or project www.calm.com or Calm.com App. This site provides relaxing music with nature sounds and visual imagery. Allow student to doodle.
- Sensory Detectives - Allow the students a few minutes to scan their environment observing both positive and negative sensations. Vision (is the room too dark too light, sunny, flickering), smell (perfumes, foods, yucky smells), ears (loud, humming, soothing), touch (clothing, glue, supplies). Teacher asks the students to be aware of their environment, anything they like dislike, or just an awareness of their surroundings. (24)

Teaching Moment

Whatever we practice grows stronger. For example, if we practice anger and allow it to be a habit it can become our character. If we practice kindness, we can become a compassionate person. By being aware of these thoughts, we have the choice to choose to allow the thought to take over our mind and the way we react. (24)
Appendix A-E

The appendices include a compilation of all activities, reproducible templates, yoga positions, breathing strategies, teaching moments and references.

**Appendix A** - A complete list of activities referred to in the Calm Moments Cards. Many activities can be interchangeable and used with situational stressors throughout the day. The activities are listed in categories for easy selection of specific tasks.

**Appendix B** - Templates are included for many activities throughout the cards, labelled A → N

**Appendix C** - A complete list of all movement poses and breathing strategies, along with diagrams of each position.

**Appendix D** - All the teaching moments for quick reference to evidence supporting the use of the strategies.

**Appendix E** - An extensive list of references and resources including websites, apps, and books to further enhance your program.
All of the Calm Moments Cards and Appendices are located …

In the ‘Embedded Programs’ tab of the Every Moment Counts website → www.everymomentcounts.org