

BACK POCKET COPING ACTIVITIES FOR CAMPERS AND STAFF

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SUMMARY:	This resource about back pocket coping activities is for use by campers and staff to help them support each other with their Mental, Emotional, and Social Health (MESH).
AUDIENCE:	These coping activities can be used with campers and staff and can be adapted for all age ranges.
TIMING:	Can be used at any time of the day to help with dealing with any emotions

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

This is a perfect resource that can be printed and put on a ring in cabins or prominent areas for both campers and staff. We would encourage this resource to be signposted to counselors at the beginning of the summer so they can make themselves familiar with it.

INTRODUCTION

Everybody has mental health, but sometimes others have more challenges with their mental health. However, there are many things we can do to help and support our young people with their Mental, Emotional, and Social Health (MESH). Remember that everyone is different, and they need something different. What is helpful for one person might not be helpful for another. The activities and resources included here are just the beginning. They can be adapted and changed based on the needs of the person/group.

These activities can be used to support campers and staff who are feeling many different emotions, and the activities can be adapted individually for different emotions. Some of these activities can include, but are not limited to:

- Homesickness/Moments of Sadness/Missing Home
- Stress
- Situations that are frustrating
- Getting angry or mad
- Anxiety or feeling anxious
- Stage fiving at the end of camp

GENERAL ACTIVITIES

- There are also some other simple actions that can be used to help campers and staff when they are feeling some of the above emotions. This can include, but is not limited to:
- Asking permission, thus modeling consent across all activities. For example, can I sit on your bed

- ❑ Asking not telling, instead of telling each other to do things, asking them instead. For example, would you like to go for a walk to talk about things?
- ❑ Giving options
- ❑ One-to-one conversations
- ❑ Speaking calmly. Talking lightly and softly will help to calm the situation and the person you are talking to
- ❑ Drink enough water
- ❑ Breathing out twice as long as you breath in will help your heartbeat calm down
- ❑ When your shoulders are up your body is feeling tense, help your body by letting your shoulders relax and release some of the tension.
- ❑ No one should spend too much time alone or sad with staff/friends - don't brush off the issues, but help them through it efficiently so you can get them immersed in camp and then check in with them later.
- ❑ Fidgets (friendship bracelets, putty, stress balls, tangles, etc)

LAYOUT

Below are a handful of activities that can be used to help in a variety of situations. Each one describes a few situations when the activity could be helpful, the time needed, any materials necessary, and the instructions. It also describes the specific skills used in completing it, the non-specific skill transfer (which is the beliefs and attitudes used), and metaphorical skill transfer (which are the connected ideas to the activity).

BREATHING ACTIVITIES

There are so many breathing activities you can do with your campers that can help them when they are feeling the emotions mentioned previously. This can range from simply spending a couple of minutes taking some deep breaths, or blowing some bubbles to help them breath while focusing their attention on one thing. This is good for helping them calm down and get their breathing under control if they are feeling anxious or overwhelmed. It is also good to relieve tension, reduce stress, and help them feel relaxed.

Another great breathing exercise is breathing from 1 to 5, where the first set of 5 breaths last for the count of 1 - breathe in for 1, hold for 1, and breath out for 1. You can continue this to go up to 5 - breathe in for 5, hold for 5, and breathe out for 5. You can do this up to 5 and then work your way back down to 1.

MEDITATION

- ❑ Great for: anxiety, stress, frustrating, or angry situations
- ❑ Time needed: 10-15 minutes, but can be as long/short as you want
- ❑ Instructions: find a quiet spot in camp with your cabin/group, and get them to either sit in a circle or in a place they feel comfortable around this area (this can either be sitting up or lying down). Play some calming music (there are lots of great mediation playlists on Spotify or Apple Music). You can either leave them to think about things on their own or you can guide them through it. If you are guiding them through you can ask questions/statements like this:
 - Relax your muscles and shoulders, focus on your breathing
 - What is something you are grateful for at this moment?
 - What have you done today that you are proud of?
 - If there are trees, get them to focus on one point or they can close their eyes
 - Other questions or statements you are making should be positive affirmations
 - You can end by getting them to slowly awaken, and stretch out their bodies
- ❑ Specific skills: thinking about their emotions, reflection
- ❑ Non-specific skills: appreciation of their surroundings

5 SENSES GROUNDING EXERCISE

- Great for: anxiety, thought spirals, feeling more connected to and conscious of the space you're in
- Time needed: 2 minutes
- Instructions: name out loud **5** things you can **see**, **4** things you can **feel**, **3** things you can **hear**, **2** things you can **smell**, **1** thing you can **taste**
- Specific skills: recognizing the space around you
- Non-specific skills: appreciation of your surroundings

MUSCLE TO MINDFULNESS

- Great for: relieving stress/tension, bedtime, mindfulness
- Time needed: 5 minutes
- Instructions: starting with your toes, focus on one major muscle area at a time and squeeze all of the muscles there for 10 seconds, and then relax them. Then move through the other major muscle areas (i.e. legs, butt, abs, hands, arms, neck, face). You can choose to do fewer or more areas depending on the amount of time you have
- Specific skills: relieving tension in the body, being mindful of physical sensations
- Non-specific skills: appreciation of your body, recognizing discomfort
- Metaphorical: releasing stress and worries that are causing discomfort, letting go of tension

SPIDER WEB

- Great for: homesickness/moments of sadness, anxiety, stress, tension in the cabin group, before leaving camp
- Time needed: 30 minutes
- Materials needed: 1 ball of string, 1 pair of scissors
- Instructions: Everyone will need to sit in a circle. One person will begin by holding the ball of string and telling their group one thing they are grateful for/a moment they have enjoyed the most at camp. This person will then hold the end of the piece of string and will pass it on to someone else in the circle, but it cannot be the person next to them on either side. This person will then tell the group what they are grateful for/a moment they have enjoyed the most at camp, and then pass it off to someone else in the circle while still holding the string. You will go around the group until everyone has said something. At the end, you will use the scissors to cut everyone a string bracelet which represents everyone's gratitude and favorite moments at camp.
- Specific skills: recognizing their emotions, preparing to say goodbye, listening to others
- Non-specific skills: appreciation of their memories and emotions.

RIDDLES

- Great for: boredom, filling time, fun
- Time needed: can be done in however much time you have. If campers/staff don't figure them out, you can always come back to it later
- Instructions: for all of these games, participants should guess what the rule is by trying out examples until they are confident they are correct (they should be discouraged from telling anyone before they figure it out on their own)
 - **This is a pen:** hold up a pen and point it at a variety of things while saying "this is a pen" and then asking "is this a pen?" The rule is that the answer is yes only if the person holding the pen said "okay" before they began.

- **Green Glass Door:** list two things, one which can go through the green glass door and one which can't (i.e. feet can go through but toes can't). The rule is that only words that have double letters can go through the green glass doors.
- **Bobby likes coffee, not tea:** List two things, one that "Bobby" likes and one that he doesn't (i.e. Bobby likes chairs but not tables). The rule is that Bobby doesn't like any words that have the letter T in them. If campers ask for a hint, just tell them again that Bobby likes coffee but not tea.
- **Counting Elephants:** Name random places and how many elephants there are there (i.e. there's 5 elephants on my pillow, 7 on my bed, 1 on my head, and 10 on my toes). Then ask a variation of the question "how many elephants are there?" (i.e. How many elephants? How many are there? How many elephants are in the building?). The number of words in the question you asked determines the answer.

- Specific skills: recognizing patterns
- Non-specific skills: communication, active listening

HOMESICKNESS BRACELETS

- Great for: homesickness/moments of sadness, anxiety, stress
- Time needed: 10-15 minutes, could do with the whole cabin
- Instructions: each string/bead of a different color can represent someone or something they're missing. As they chose each color/string, have them say a memory of that person/thing.
- Specific skills: recognizing their emotions, recalling memories/stories
- Non-specific skills: decision-making, relationship building
- Metaphorical: carrying that person/thing and their memories around with them

SCREAM, RUN, FLAIL!

- Great for: anger, frustration, stress
- Time needed: 2 minutes
- Instructions: get everyone to line up, all run as far as you can scream in one breath while flailing
- Specific skills: cardio, multi-tasking
- Non-specific skills: friendly competition, energy building, personal space
- Metaphorical: running out of breath = running out of frustration/anger

WAH!

- Great for: cabin bonding, feeling more connected, stress
- Time & people: 5 minutes, need at least 4 people
- Instructions: in a circle all facing each other, you pass the 'wah' on by pointing at someone with your hands together. The person who it is aimed at must put their arms up while yelling 'wah' while the two players either side of them 'chop them in half' while also yelling 'wah'. If you hesitate, do the wrong action, or forget to yell 'wah' then you're out!
- Specific skills: concentration, communication
- Non-specific skills: friendship building, awareness of your surroundings
- Metaphor: passing your energy on to other people (be enthusiastic and energetic!)

These are just a small selection of activities that can be used to help young people with their emotions, and they might be known differently across our camp communities, but we hope this back pocket resource has been useful.

Other organizations who are doing great things for Mental, Emotional, Social Health for young people:

JED Foundation: The Jed Foundation is a non-profit organization that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults. <https://www.jedfoundation.org/>

Here. Now.: A teen-driven mental health conversation, in partnership with the Jewish Board. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/here-now/>

Blue Dove Foundation: <https://thebluedovefoundation.org/>