

# PROJECT YOUTH WELLNESS

**WEEK 9: COPING SKILLS**

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## IDENTIFYING YOUR STRESSORS

# BEHAVIOR BREAKDOWN PRACTICE

Stressors that we experience in life can also be called "triggers." Triggers are external or internal stressors that lead to someone engaging in health risk behaviors. Knowing your triggers can help you identify external situations (people, places, things) or internal feelings and thoughts so that you are better prepared to manage these stressors. Using the list below, circle some things that are triggers for you. Specifically, think about which of these feelings or situations are triggers that lead you to want to engage in substance use or other health-damaging behaviors.

Being home alone

Spending time with friends

Going to parties

Going to an event (sporting event, festival)

Before or after school/work

Before or after sexual activities

Hearing a song that reminds you of something

Being in a place that reminds you of something bad

Before or after doing something you feel is wrong

When you feel sad

When you feel bad about yourself

While doing homework

When you feel stressed

When you can't sleep

After driving past a certain spot

Conflict with family

Conflict with friends or peers

When you are bored

What are some other triggers you can think of that weren't listed above?

Now, think of some triggers for the health risk behavior that you identified on the previous page. Let's plug it into our Behavior Breakdown model to analyze! (Note: You may have identified multiple triggers, which is very common! However, try to choose just one external and one internal trigger for this exercise).

### External Trigger

An event that creates an emotional reaction or causes stress

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### Internal Trigger

A thought or feeling (sometimes on its own or as a result of an external trigger)

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### Behavior

A behavior that you do in response to that event or feeling

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### Short-term Effects

Short-term effects or consequences of your behavior

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### Long-term Effects

Longer-term effects or consequences of your behavior

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## IDENTIFYING YOUR STRESSORS

# TEMPERATURE CHECK

Remember: Stressors (or triggers) include feelings, so being able to identify your feelings is an important part of self-regulation! An important skill related to using the Behavior Breakdown is called taking a Temperature Check—to do this, you can try using the acronym HALT BE. This acronym stands for multiple situations that can trigger you or make you act a certain way, including being hungry, angry, lonely, tired, bored, or excited. The name "HALT BE" is also a reminder to HALT (stop), and BE (be present and mindful about what you are feeling) before you act. Next to each feeling, write some of the external triggers that lead you to feel this way and how you can tell when you're feeling it. Then, think about how you feel under the surface when engaging in your identified health risk behavior using HALT BE:

**H**

Hungry

**A**

Angry

**L**

Lonely

**T**

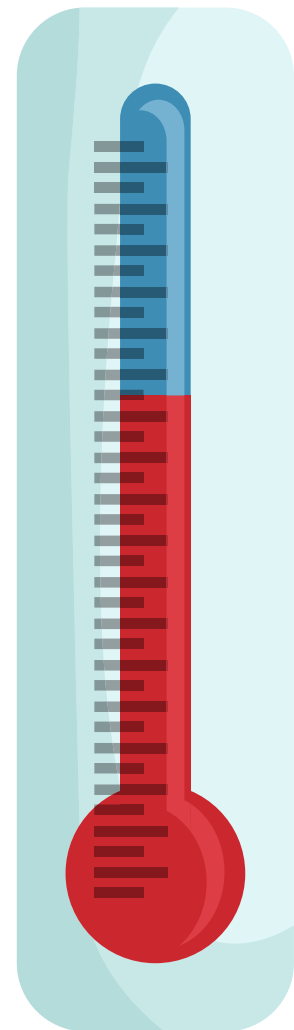
Tired

**B**

Bored

**E**

Excited



HALT BE is a way to identify some sneaky feelings that can be hard to recognize and manage. Before we move on to the second step of self-regulation, positive coping, let's learn some additional strategies for identifying feelings.

# SELF-REGULATION PRACTICE

Think about a stressor you have experienced in the last month.

Fill in the Behavior Breakdown chart below based on what you went through with that stressor, how you coped (the behavior you used in response), and the consequences that you experienced as a result.

External Trigger	Internal Trigger	Behavior	Short-term Effects	Long-term Effects
An event that creates an emotional reaction or causes stress	A thought or feeling that causes stress (sometimes on its own or as a result of an external trigger)	A behavior that you do in response to that event or feeling	Short-term effects or consequences of your behavior	Longer-term effects or consequences of your behavior
What happened?:	How did you feel?:	What did you do?:	What happened short term?:	What happened (or could happen) long term?:
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Now that you have learned self-regulation skills (processing feelings and healthy coping behaviors), fill in the boxes below using the same external and internal triggers. First, come up with an alternative behavior that could replace the unhealthy behavior you wrote in above (you can use the ideas you learned from the healthy coping and behavior replacement worksheets before)! Then, fill in how the short- and long-term effects would look different:

External Trigger	Internal Trigger	Behavior	Short-term Effects	Long-term Effects
An event that creates an emotional reaction or causes stress	A thought or feeling that causes stress (sometimes on its own or as a result of an external trigger)	A behavior that you do in response to that event or feeling	Short-term effects or consequences of your behavior	Longer-term effects or consequences of your behavior
What happened?:	How did you feel?:	What could you have done instead (or do next time)?:	What would the short-term effects be?:	What would the long-term effects be?:
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**NOTE:** A key part of self-regulation is replacing unhealthy behaviors that we do when we are stressed or angry with healthy alternative behaviors to help us cope with the stress or strong emotions like anger! You can practice thinking through many different situations using this Behavior Breakdown model.



# MINDFULNESS: HANDLING STRONG FEELINGS

Have you heard of mindfulness? What does it mean to you?

Our mind is constantly working, with thoughts and feelings popping in and out. We are always thinking, speaking, seeing, or hearing things. Sometimes being very aware of our thoughts and feelings can also be uncomfortable or upsetting. But, we can learn skills to cope with strong feelings in a healthy way—including the mindfulness activities below.

You may think that mindfulness always means meditation. Really, **mindfulness simply means being aware**. Mindfulness is the intentional or focused practice of “quieting your mind” to relax and focus on your inner self using breathing techniques and bodily awareness. Have you ever done that?

It can be difficult to do. Let’s try some popular (and effective) mindfulness activities below. These are positive coping tools to use when facing a stressor. You may be surprised by how much they can help! Put a star by the ones you are willing to try out.

## PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION:

Progressive muscle relaxation is a mindfulness technique that can help a lot when we are feeling strong emotions in our bodies (like tension, fast heart rate, or shakiness). Begin by breathing deeply, in through your nose and out through your mouth. In this exercise, you will tense the muscles in a certain area of your body while you breathe in, hold the tension for a few seconds, then as you breathe out, completely relax that area and notice the relief. Start from head to toe:

- **Forehead:** Breathe in and wrinkle your forehead by raising your eyebrows. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out, relaxing your forehead.
- **Mouth:** Breathe in, clenching your jaw and face muscles. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out, letting your face relax completely.
- **Shoulders:** Breathe in, raising your shoulders up toward your ears. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out, letting your shoulders fall down.
- **Biceps and upper arms:** Breathe in, bending your elbows to flex your upper arms. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out and let your arms hang down.
- **Wrists:** Breathe in and flex your wrists, so your palms and fingers are outstretched. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out and let your hands relax completely.
- **Hips and thighs:** Breathe in, clenching your upper legs tightly. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out, letting them relax and feel soft and floppy.
- **Calves:** Breathe in, pressing up onto your toes or just flexing your calves. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out, letting your legs feel heavy on the floor.
- **Toes:** Breathe in, clenching your feet and toes. Hold for a few seconds, then breathe out, relaxing your feet completely and letting them feel grounded on the floor.

Take a few more deep breaths, feeling your body sinking into your seat or bed and letting all of your muscles stay relaxed. If you need to repeat a muscle area, go for it!

Source: <https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2225>



# MINDFULNESS: HANDLING STRONG FEELINGS



## THOUGHT ON A CLOUD:

Have you ever found yourself lying awake at night thinking the same thoughts over and over? If you are feeling anxious or replaying a situation in your head, this activity may help you clear your mind, because a key part of mindfulness is acknowledging those intrusive thoughts and letting them pass.

Identify the thought that is taking up your brain space. As you breathe deeply, imagine the sky, full of fluffy clouds. Then, picture that thought or image sitting on one of the clouds. As you breathe deeply, imagine your breath creating a wind that starts blowing the clouds away. Continue to breathe in and out until the clouds have blown away, including the one with your thought on it!

## BOX BREATHING:

Another helpful mindful breathing technique is called "box breathing." In this activity, you use the image of a box to help you slow and focus on your breathing. Here's how:

To start, get into a comfortable seated position with your feet flat on the floor.

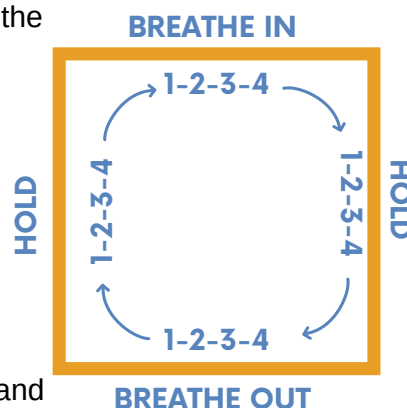
**Breathe In** while counting to 4 and focusing on your breath.

**Hold Your Breath** in your lungs while counting to 4.

**Breathe Out** while counting to 4, feeling your body relax.

**Pause** with your lungs empty while counting to 4.

**Repeat** as many times as needed.



If this is challenging, that's ok! As you practice, you'll become more and more able to slow your breathing in this way.

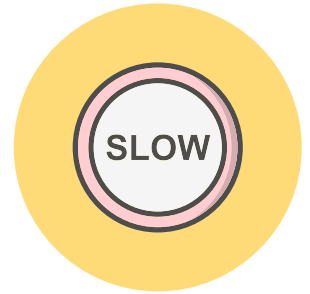
How did you feel after trying these activities? What parts felt good? Weird? Anything you want to try again?



**TIP:** There are many apps, YouTube videos, podcasts, and other free online resources for guided mindfulness activities. Try out a few until you find one that you like best!

# MINDFULNESS: SLOWING DOWN

Sometimes the best thing we can do to manage stress and feel better is just **slow down**. Especially in a time where things can move so fast and we are always being bombarded by new information via social media and technology, we can easily find ourselves feeling hurried/rushed, or like we're falling behind.



Why do you think we tend to feel so rushed?

An important skill we learn from mindfulness or meditation is the intentional act of slowing down. What does "slowing down" mean to you?

You can challenge yourself to slow down in many ways. Try some of the ideas below, or add your own!

- **Slow down on the road** (if you have your driver's license). Drive the speed limit, drive in the slow lane, and come to a complete stop at stop signs.
- **Show up 10 minutes early** for appointments, events, or school and spend the extra time to collect your thoughts, prepare for the day, etc.
- **Set time limits** with social media, TV, or gaming (or get off of it altogether for the day).
- **Focus on one thing at a time**. For example, if you normally scroll on your phone while brushing your teeth or watch TV while you eat dinner, try to stop the distractions and focus on just one thing.
- **When eating**, chew slowly and focus on the taste or texture of your food.
- **When walking**, walk slower, listen to the sounds around you, or just avoid looking at your phone while you walk.
- **Cut something out of your schedule** that isn't urgent.

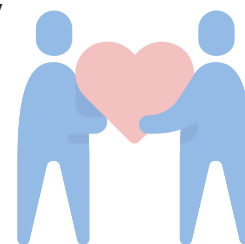
Add your own ideas for slowing down below!





# KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

In order to achieve your wellness goals, it is important not only to know your own tools and healthy coping skills, but also to **know your resources** and seek help when needed! Remember our definition of toxic stress: "Extreme, frequent, unpredictable, or prolonged stress, **without additional supports**." No matter what level of stress you are experiencing, it's always helpful to know your resources and seek support from others, but especially when you experience toxic stress or trauma. The resource list below is just a start—ask your counselor or another trusted adult to help you find the best resources to fit your needs!



### MENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

- **988 Lifeline:** Call or text 988 to speak to a counselor, or chat online at <https://988lifeline.org> (Available 24/7)
- **The Trevor Project:** (Suicide Hotline for LGBTQ+ young people) 1-866-488-7386, chat online at [www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now/), or text START to 678-678.
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline:** 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- **California Youth Crisis Line:** 1-800-843-5200
- **LA County Substance Abuse Service Helpline:** 1-844-804-7500
- **School Counseling Offices** or **Local Community Counseling Centers**

### HOUSING

- Use the [LA County Homeless Services Authority site](https://www.lahsa.org) to find contact information for Crisis Housing Centers, Youth Drop-In Centers, and Domestic Violence Shelters ([www.lahsa.org](http://www.lahsa.org)). You can also google "crisis housing services near me" or ask a counselor to help you locate resources.
- **Call 211** to be connected with resources throughout LA county

### PHYSICAL HEALTH

- **Planned Parenthood:** Free sexual health resources and healthcare for all genders. Make an appointment at [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org), call 1-800-230-PLAN, or text PPNOW to 774636
- **Los Angeles LGBT Center:** Assistance with STD/STI testing, mental health and housing support. <https://lalgbtcenter.org/>
- **Locate your nearest food pantry** through Los Angeles Food Bank: <https://www.lafoodbank.org/find-food/pantry-locator/>

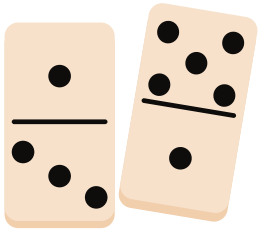
### WORK/FINANCIAL

- **Homeboy Industries:** Formerly gang-affiliated and previously incarcerated individuals can get help in many areas including finishing the GED and finding work. <https://homeboyindustries.org/get-help/>
- **Youth Employment Opportunity Program:** Work and education services for at risk youth ages 15-25: <https://www.lafoodbank.org/find-food/pantry-locator/>

# OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING WELLNESS GOALS

## SCREEN TIME, SLEEP, AND SUBSTANCE USE

### DID YOU KNOW?



Sometimes, in order to promote one healthy behavior, you need to work on other healthy behaviors! This is because a lot of health behaviors influence your ability to think clearly, process emotions, and make thoughtful decisions—like getting enough sleep or keeping your body healthy through eating and exercise. Remember the feelings in HALT BE? Feelings like hunger, boredom, and being tired can be triggers for substance use, but they are also directly related to other health behaviors. Think of it like a **domino effect**—if you're not getting enough sleep, not only could being tired be a trigger for substance use, it could also prevent you from being alert and able to think through your behavior and choose a healthy coping behavior.

### SCREEN TIME AND SLEEP:

Studies have shown that screen time, specifically blue light that comes from devices, suppresses the brain's production of *melatonin*, the hormone that regulates sleep cycles. This leads to a reduction of REM sleep, which is the part of the sleep cycle that allows the brain to restore, refresh, and process and store memories. So, not only can excessive screen time leave you feeling tired, but the brain effects are much more far-reaching when it comes to being able to self-regulate.



Source: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/blue-light-has-a-dark-side>

The impacts of screen time are not just physical; spending too much time gaming or on social media can cause some emotional responses too. Think about some recent times that you scrolled through someone's social media feed and compared your life to theirs, or a time that you were so close to winning a game but lost at the last second. What emotional feelings can come up as a response to these experiences?

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Now, think about the triggers for substance use you identified earlier in this module. Do any of those feelings overlap with what you wrote above? If so, which ones?

If they do, consider trying an experiment: limit or self-regulate screen time and see if you find yourself less likely to end up using substances too!

# OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING WELLNESS GOALS

Another barrier to achieving wellness goals can be our own confidence in our ability to manage feelings and self-regulate. If you find yourself struggling with this, some of the strategies below may help!

## SELF-TALK:

Self-talk is just what it sounds like—talking to yourself in your head! We all have self-talk or running comments and beliefs about ourselves that run through our thoughts daily. Self-talk is automatic, and often we aren't even aware that it's happening! But, what you say to yourself has a big impact on the way you think, feel, and behave. Especially when you are engaging in health-damaging behaviors (like substance use), negative self-talk can make it feel impossible to make a change.

**Here are some examples of negative self-talk:** *I'm no good. I'm a loser. I'm bad. I'm a failure. I don't care. It's not one's business. I can do what I want, when I want. It's too late to make a difference.*

## NEGATIVE NARRATIVES:

Labels or stereotypes others (like teachers or peers) might impose on youth, influencing their self-image (e.g., "I am a bad kid").

**Here are some examples of negative narratives:** People always say I'm a bad kid. I'll never change. I always mess up.

## SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES:

Sometimes, when you keep hearing or telling yourself negative things like "I'm a bad kid" or "I'll never do better," you might start to act in ways that prove those statements true. This is called a "self-fulfilling prophecy"—but it doesn't have to stay that way! The good news is you can change those thoughts and create new, positive beliefs about yourself.



**Have you ever said these things to yourself or believed what others have said about you? What kinds of negative self-talk or labels do you repeat to yourself? Write some examples below:**

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There are simple steps to addressing negative self-talk:

**1) THINK.** The first step to changing negative self-talk is being aware that it is happening! Notice what thoughts are going through your head and what stories you tell yourself. As you catch yourself doing self-talk, **notice** if it is positive or negative. Ask yourself, am I saying something kind about myself or something hurtful?

**2) STOP.** If you notice that your self-talk is negative, think of it like a giant red light. STOP! Catch the negative self-talk in its tracks.

**3) SWAP.** Time to swap that negative thought out and replace it with a positive one. You can even say the positive one out loud to cancel out your negative self-talk.

**Here are some examples of positive self-talk:** *I am loved. I can do it. I will win the battle. I am smart. I am proud of myself. I am better than that. I care about my health and well-being.*



**What are some positive self-talk phrases you can tell yourself?**

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The goal is to replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk, becoming your own "internal coach." Positive self-talk boosts confidence and silences the inner critic. Treat it like a battle—don't let the negative voice win!