TRAUMA & RESILIENCY WORKBOOK

for families

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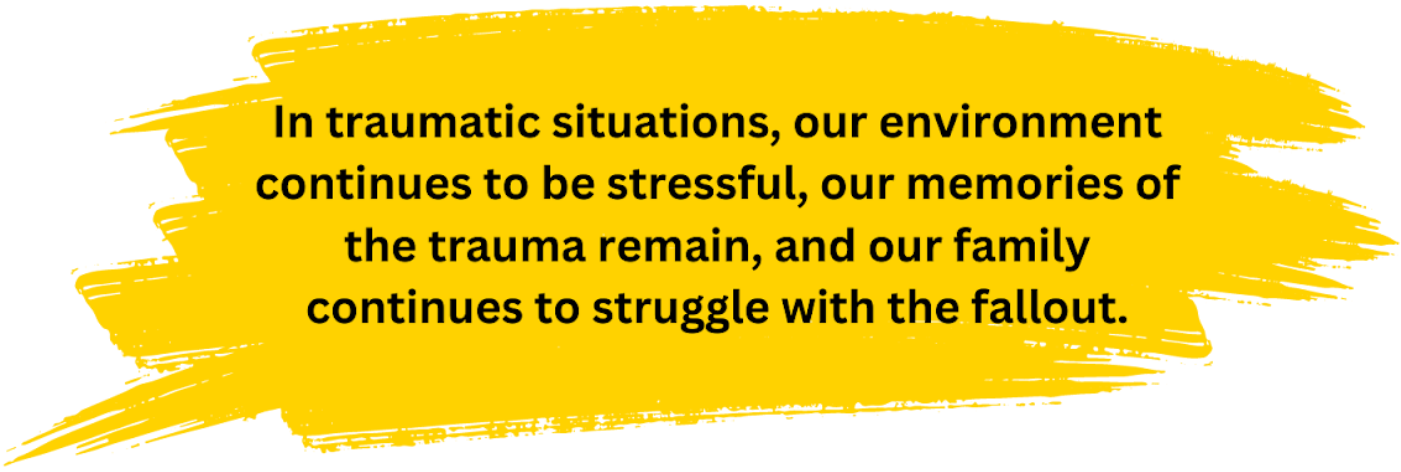
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real kids
real faith

Introduction

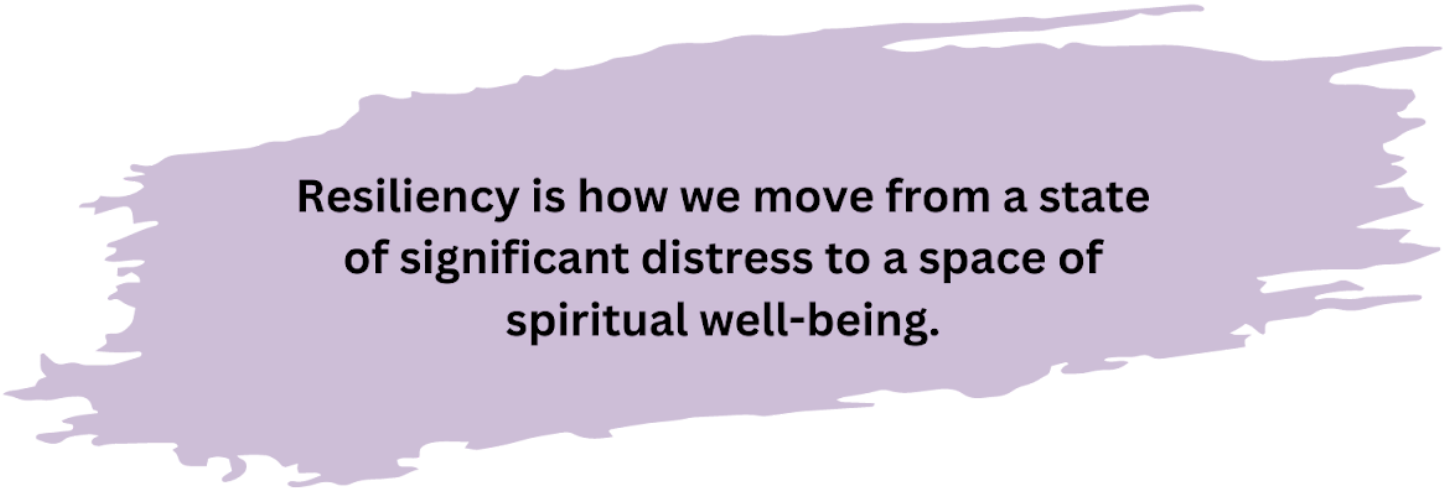
Many of us know all too well the impact of prolonged stress and trauma on ourselves and our children. As families, we are struggling with high levels of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty, which negatively affects our emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Even before living through a global pandemic, our children may have been exhibiting increased difficulty managing big emotions. Now, one of our primary tasks as parents and caregivers is to help kids find a new normal after the traumatic experiences of social isolation, extended school and daycare closures, frightening illness, and the tragic deaths of family and community members. We are looking for ways to ground and sustain our own mental health, support our children through practices that nurture resilience, and partner with faith communities and others who share our commitment to creating a social network that encourages spiritual flourishing.



Everyday stress moments, like rushing to get out the door or getting an unexpected phone call from the school in the middle of the day, happen in all families. They create some discomfort, but we typically manage them fairly well. However, what about more challenging situations, such as when we receive terrible news from the doctor or feel overwhelmed with sorrow when a relationship breaks down? These experiences hit us hard, and navigating such trauma well can feel impossible. We don't know how we will survive.

It is in the face of these hard times that we must learn to be resilient. Resiliency is how we move from a state of significant distress to a space of

spiritual well-being. Some people define resilience as ‘bouncing back’ from stress, but this begs the question: bouncing back to what? In traumatic situations, our environment continues to be stressful, our memories of the trauma remain, and our family continues to struggle with the fallout. Working our way through trauma while maintaining a sense of well-being is a precarious endeavor for most of us. It is especially difficult for children, which is why parents and faith leaders are crucial in teaching kids skills for finding and maintaining emotional and spiritual wellness.



Resiliency training provides children and adults alike with language to talk about the often unspoken impact of traumatic events and prolonged stress. Using this shared language, we can tell stories of past experiences of resilience in our own lives, recognize stories of resilience around us, and explore ways that our faith supports and encourages resiliency in individuals, families and communities. Resiliency work also provides additional skills, such as sensory awareness, grounding, resourcing, and community-building, that accompany our resiliency storytelling.

One of the significant byproducts of resilience is an increase in hope. Hope helps us to see that more positive times are coming, even when we are very discouraged or afraid. Recent neuroscience research has discovered that our brains are actually wired for hope. The synapses in our brains seek ways to make positive connections and generate positive ideas. Yet sometimes this neurological inclination to hope is not enough. Thankfully,

we also have the capacity to learn hopefulness. Hope is also something we can teach our children.

By learning wellness skills grounded in recent neuroscience research and spiritual (or faith) practices, we can help ourselves and others become emotionally and spiritually resilient people. Regularly practicing wellness skills can help adults and children recognize unhealthy patterns of behavior and make necessary changes to improve our mental health.

Resiliency training provides children and adults alike with language to talk about the often unspoken impact of traumatic events and prolonged stress.

Speaking from a Christian faith perspective, building our capacity for resiliency and helping others to do the same also builds up the Body of Christ and highlights the possibility of grace in a broken world. Exercising our resiliency skills bears witness to the power of Christ, who provides endurance and encouragement “for the race marked out for [us]” (Hebrews 12:1-3). It also builds on stories of resilience found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

Consider, for example, the resiliency demonstrated by Sarah as she and Abraham struggled through years of barrenness before having their son in old age. Their journey was so long and stressful, they began to doubt that parenthood was in their future. Abraham even conceived a child with another woman in his quest for an heir. When God finally revealed to Sarah that she was pregnant, she laughed at the ridiculousness of the notion. Yet, through her many years of disappointment and despair, Sarah had hoped to hear the voice of God with a revelation that would change her life.

She found ways to remain open to new possibilities, to live with her trauma rather than allow it to beat her down.

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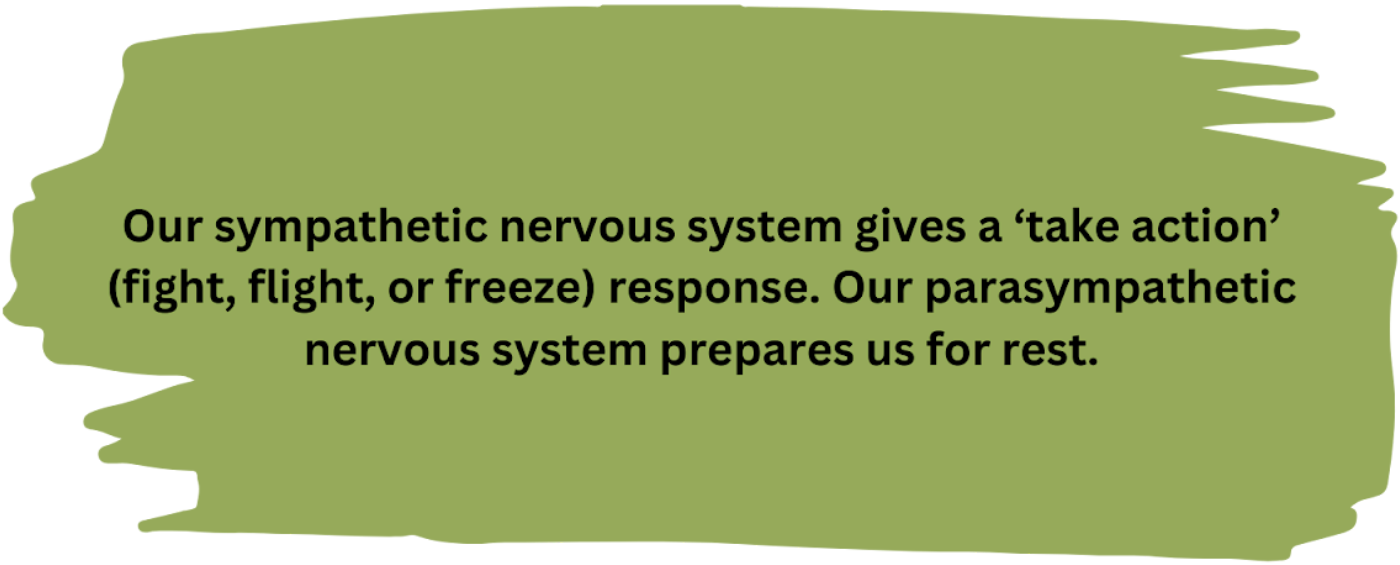
This training is for grownups and children alike to journey through trauma by learning family-oriented and theologically-grounded wellness skills. This training is for faith leaders to gather their people together and lead them towards wellness as a community. This training is for everyone looking for ways to be spiritually resilient.

Neuroscience and You

The wellness skills presented in this workbook are based on the workings of the human nervous system, which includes our brains and all the nerves in our body. When our bodies react to stress, that is our nervous system responding. Thus, we can look to our nervous system for clues as to how our bodies are reacting to different situations.

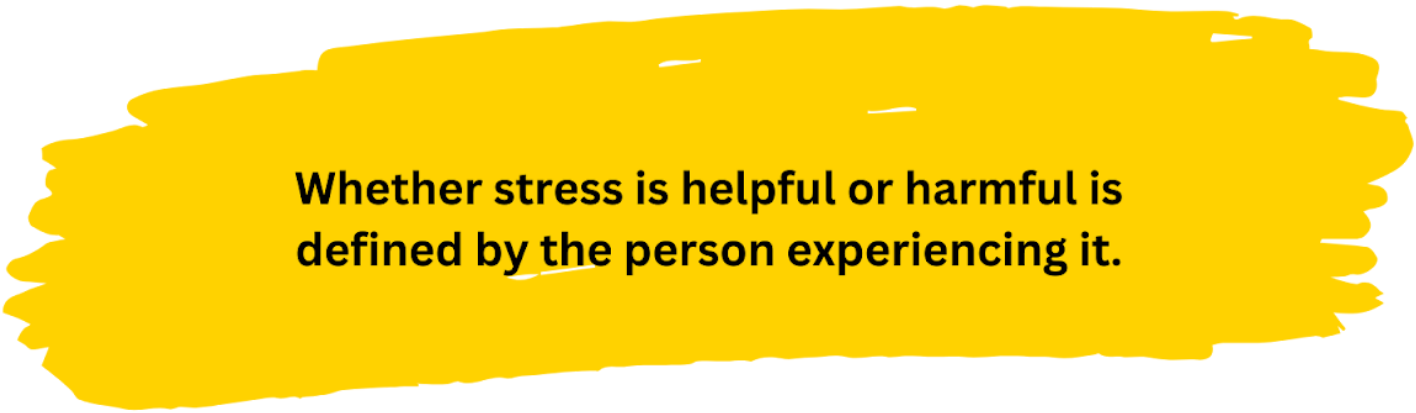
There are common biological reactions to stressful events. For instance, if we are startled by a barking dog or someone jumping out and shouting surprise, our nervous system reacts. We start to breathe faster and our heart and blood pressure rates increase. We may begin to sweat, lose (or gain) color in our face, and possibly even faint. Meanwhile, our digestive system shuts down and the saliva in our mouth decreases. We no longer feel hungry or thirsty because we are focused on the stressful event that just occurred. We may lash out, jump up as if to flee, or feel as if we can't move. This sort of 'take action' response comes from our ***sympathetic nervous system*** and is often described as 'fight, flight, or freeze'.

On the other hand, our ***parasympathetic nervous system*** prepares us for rest. Our breathing, blood pressure, and heart rates decrease. We stop sweating and we might notice that we are hungry or thirsty. We feel calm and our emotions are well-regulated, so our bodies respond by relaxing.



Of course, not all stress is bad stress. Whether stress is helpful or harmful is defined by the person experiencing it. Sometimes our sympathetic nervous system activates in ways that support healthy development by, for example, pumping us up to compete in a spelling bee or trivia contest, enjoy a surprise birthday party, or run a half-marathon. This kind of short-lived positive stress helps us accomplish something we want to do.

But any time we experience something that is too big, too fast, too soon, or too hurtful, our sympathetic nervous system races in with a response designed to move us out of harm's way. The problem is that our biological responses may narrow what we see as our options. We may react rather than weigh the pros and cons of various choices. This may serve us well if the reaction we need to to automatically jump out of the way of a speeding car. It may not serve us well if we lash out at a co-worker or playmate who teases us.



We also might see something as positive stress while another person defines it as toxic stress. Differences in past life experiences and personality affect how we perceive stress. So do the varying skills we have acquired for dealing with stress in healthy ways. The strength of our sympathetic nervous system response also varies, with some people prone to strong physical responses in the face of seemingly minor events. Listening to one another and respecting each other's perspectives on stress can make us wellness allies rather than competitors.

By paying attention to the ways our bodies respond to stress, we can learn the difference between sensations of distress and well-being. We have a choice as to what we pay attention to on the inside. What we pay attention to grows.

Body Sensations

Let's talk about some common body sensations we experience when we are stressed. Here are some sensation words to get you started:



- What sensations do you experience in your hands when stressed?
- What sensations do you experience in your belly when stressed?
- What sensations do you experience in your head when stressed?
- What emotions do you experience with these sensations?

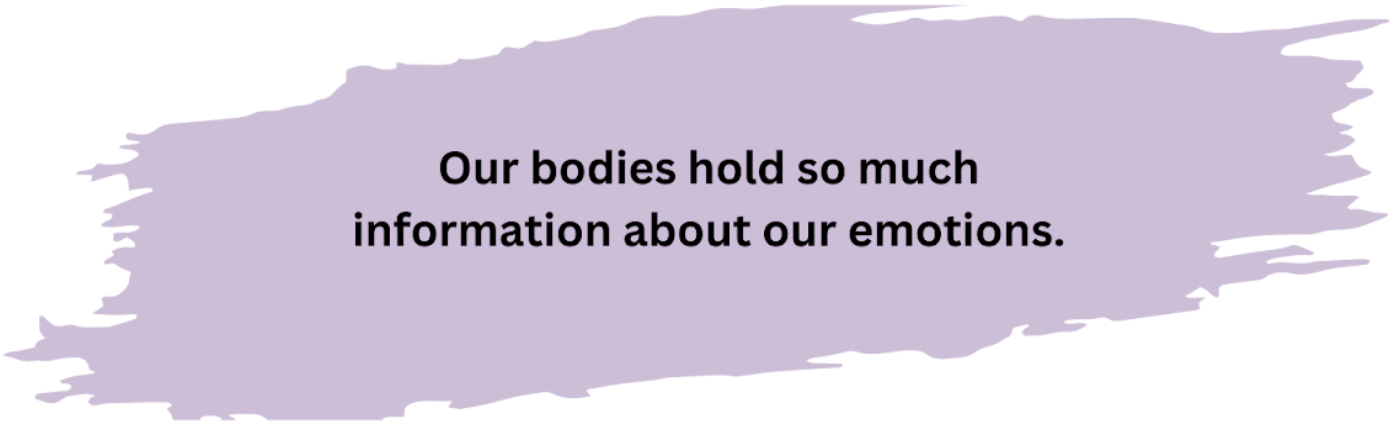
FAMILY CHAT

Even Jesus got stressed out. In the Bible when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, we read that he was “greatly distressed and troubled”. He knew that Judas had betrayed him and his arrest was forthcoming. What sensations do you think Jesus experienced in his body when he was distressed in the Garden? Jesus started to pray and asked his disciples to stay with him when he was experiencing stress. What do you do when you experience stress?

Stress is a normal part of life. Using the wellness skills presented in this workbook can help us better manage stress and learn to regulate our emotions.

Wellness Skills for the Whole Family: Tracking

One way to pay attention to our bodies is through the practice of Tracking. We start with paying attention to the sensations in our body, which can be hard to do. As parents and caregivers, our attention is pulled in multiple directions. We pride ourselves on multitasking and have little time to stop and just be. We even chastise children, telling them to "pay attention!" when they seem distracted from what we want them to be doing. Being present and aware of how we are feeling - and helping children to do the same - is difficult. Yet spiritual wellness requires being aware and engaged in our lives without being overly distracted by thoughts or worries about the past or future.

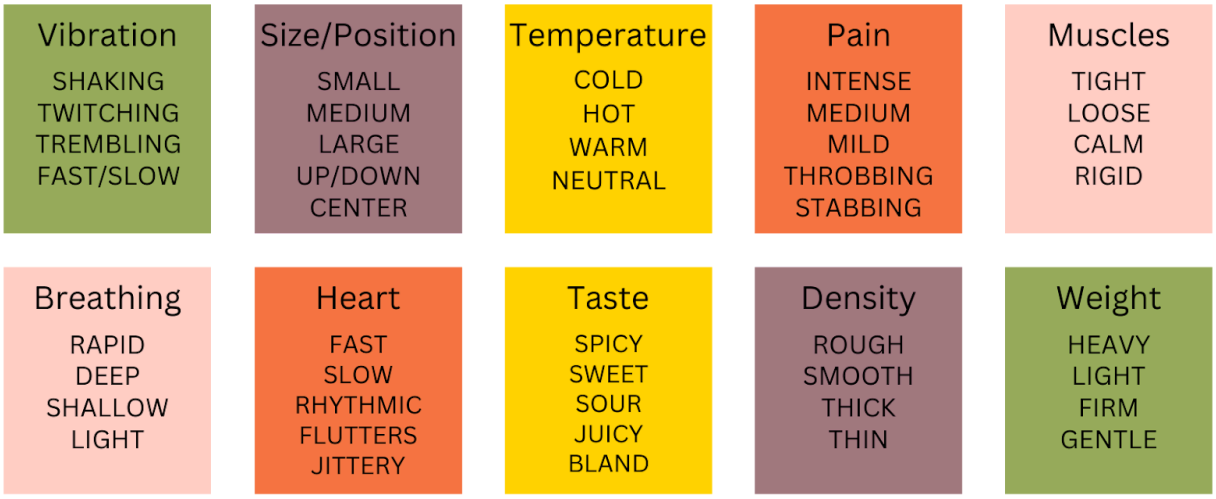


Pausing in the chaos of everyday life to notice physical sensations and experiences provides us with indicators of our feelings. Our bodies hold so much information about our emotions. A fluttery feeling in our stomach can indicate excitement or anxiety. A sore neck may signal tension. Balled fists might mean we are stressed or carrying anger. Sensations of warmth may reflect relaxation, happiness, or calm.

Noticing and naming these sensations is thus a first step toward managing our emotions. We can use words such as warm, cold, shaky, buzzy, tingly, and lightweight to describe what's happening in our bodies. Children often have an easier time than adults naming these sensations. They are used to being asked about their bodily functions and experimenting with the

different sounds that their bodies can produce. They may also recall adults telling them that a tummy ache before the first day of school, dance recital, or visit to the doctor meant they were feeling afraid or worried. Our role as parents and caregivers could mean we have a lot more practice helping our kids connect embodied experiences with feelings that we do making the same connections for ourselves.

Here's a chart that highlights different kinds of sensations we might notice:



People often notice unpleasant sensations in their bodies before picking up on pleasant ones. The goal, however, is to become better at noticing all kinds of sensations: unpleasant, neutral, and pleasant. Pleasant sensations are things you want to experience more while unpleasant sensations are things you want to experience less. Neutral sensations can be more difficult to notice but focus, for instance, on the end of your nose. The sensation that is there is usually neutral, not pleasant or unpleasant but just there. It can be helpful to develop a 'sensations vocabulary list' that we can reference as we pay attention to our bodies. Take a few minutes as an individual or family to list as many sensation words as you can think of. You might start by naming unpleasant sensations and then move to pleasant and neutral ones. If you need a few examples to prime your brainstorming, check out the sample sensation word lists provided below.

Pleasant sensations examples: warm, gentle, smooth
Unpleasant sensations examples: heavy, throbbing, rough
Neutral sensations examples: bland, mild, light

Now that you have lists of bodily sensations, it's time to match those sensations with potential feelings. Some may be easy because we remember particular emotions attached to past experiences. Others may be harder to determine, especially if we have felt multiple emotions alongside them. It's okay to assign more than one emotion to a sensation. In fact, if you are working on these lists as a family, different members may associate different feelings with sensations. Here's a list of many common emotions to help you find connections.

Anger	Guilt	Stress
Sadness	Embarassment	Anticipation
Fear	Loneliness	Empathy
Happiness	Disappointment	Aggression
Disgust	Frustration	Worry
Anxiety	Gratitude	Resentment
Shame	Compassion	Rage
Satisfaction	Annoyance	Sympathy

Another way to help you and your children link body sensations and feelings is to assign them colors. People often describe certain emotions in colorful terms: 'seeing red' when angry, 'feeling blue' when sad, being 'green with envy'. If you'd like, use the Sensations Color Key page in the Related Resources section to create your own feelings color chart.

Noticing and connecting physical sensations with our feelings helps us to be more sympathetic with ourselves and empathetic with others. Our bodies remember and guide us. They remember the anticipation and

distress of our first day of school. Every time we prepare for a new ‘first’, our bodies tighten and warm up with excitement and anxiety at what that experience might bring. They remember the sensations of sorrow at the loss of a beloved person or pet, repeating them when we are confronted with other potential or actual losses. By recognizing the sensations in our bodies, we become both emotionally intelligent and keenly aware of our bodies as gifts that help us navigate life well. We learn to ‘read’ our feelings through our bodies, which is the first step toward managing big emotions and rebalancing our nervous system when it threatens to overwhelm our coping mechanisms.

FAMILY CHAT

Some biblical stories emphasize body sensations as key details. For instance, King Saul experienced headaches. The couple in love depicted in Song of Songs talk about fluttery sensations in their stomachs. The hungry crowd waiting for Jesus to multiply five loaves and two fish and loaves had grumbling tummies. Can you name any other stories in the Bible that use body sensations to signal particular feelings?

Practice Tracking

Use one or more of the following activities to help your family build your Tracking skill.

Scanning

This tracking exercise from the Trauma Resource Institute echoes ancient faith practices of meditation by creating a mindful moment to pay attention to our bodies. Settle your body in a comfortable position and do a body scan. Mentally scan slowly from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. (If you are doing this exercise with children under 10, invite each person to raise their hands until they are at head level and - with palms facing in - slowly move their hands down their bodies to their feet.) As you scan, ask yourself: what information is my body giving me? What sensations am I experiencing? Am I feeling any unpleasant sensations, such as aches, pain, tension, or nausea? Am I experiencing pleasant sensations, such as warmth, softness, fullness, or flutterings? If, like many people, you tend to pay more attention to unpleasant sensations, it may be easier to do two separate scans, one for unpleasant sensations and a second for pleasant or neutral ones.

Sensing Objects

Practice paying attention to physical sensations with this sensory exercise. Move around a room or outdoor area and pick up or touch items that you see. These might include toys, car keys, food items, carpets, pillows, furniture, leaves, tree trunks, sidewalks, and trash bins. With each new item, identify two or three sensory words that describe how it feels, smells, sounds, looks, or (when appropriate) tastes..

Sensory Meditation (Prayer)

Write a sensory meditation or prayer together as a family. Take a minute to pay attention to your bodies and their sensations. Then, using sensory words your family has identified (or ones from the sample lists), write a ‘thank you’ statement for each person’s sensations and a ‘we need help’ (‘help us’) statement for any feelings associated with those sensations that are hard for someone to manage. With children 8 and older, you might decide to have each person write their own statements and then combine them into one meditation/prayer.

Example: *We are thankful for the rhythmic beating of our hearts, the warmth of our skin, and the rasping of our breath. We need help (Help us) to manage our anxiety about having a stuffy nose and to notice how our feelings change when our breathing speeds up and slows down.*

Write your sensory meditation (prayer) below and then repeat (pray) it together.

Sensing Hands

Rub your hands together rapidly for 10 seconds. The friction will create a physical sensation. Name this sensation aloud. Then repeat the rubbing motion and wonder aloud about any feelings that you might associate with the sensation. Try rubbing your hands together and then holding them open with palms facing upward. What sensation and feeling does this pose evoke? Try rubbing your hands together and then placing them over your heart. What sensation and feeling does this pose generate?

Marking

Use the Paying Attention to My Body page in the Related Resources section to help children mark where they are experiencing sensations and what they are. Ask them to pay attention to how their body feels and then

use crayons or markers to color that sensation on the appropriate place on the sheet. If you have created a feelings color chart together, place a copy of that chart where they can reference it. However, do not require children's color choices to conform to the chart. Instead, ask them to tell you about their color choices (and revise your family feelings chart to reflect what they have to say).

Make space weekly to practice this wellness skill with your family. Paying attention to physical sensations in the body and the emotions connected with them is a helpful first step toward increasing family well-being. It lays a foundation for other wellness skills that build spiritual resilience in individuals, families, and communities.

Wellness Skills for the Whole Family: Resourcing

When we track sensations in our body as we engage the world around us, certain sensations might remind us of previous life experiences. For instance, any time I taste chocolate covered raisins, this pleasant sensation transports me back to childhood and seeing *Snow White* in the movie theater with my family. Just as natural resources in our environment, like water or sunshine, help us live well, personal resources can support well-being. Such resources can be people, experiences, or things (real or imagined) that generate pleasant sensations when we bring them to mind. Maybe it's participating in a favorite sport, cuddling a pet, or talking with a family member. It could be listening to a song that expresses our feelings or hearing a familiar prayer spoken. It can even be an object - like a handful of chocolate covered raisins - that brings back a pleasant memory.

Reminding ourselves of pleasant life experiences is called Resourcing. Resourcing provides us with a way to comfort ourselves during times when we are experiencing stress. Using this practice encourages us to recall pleasant memories when our bodies are experiencing unpleasant sensations so that we can shift how we are feeling. The more senses we tap in our remembering, the more power the memory has to shift us from unpleasant to pleasant sensations.

Recall some people, experiences, or things that have generated pleasant sensations for you in the past. Name those resources here:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Now, notice the sensations you experience when you talk or think about these resources. Use the sensing words you learned in Tracking to describe what happens as you remember. Ask each other: What did it smell

like? How did that thing feel? What did the person look like? How did it taste? What did you hear?

My memory of watching *Snow White* brings back the sweet taste of chocolate covered raisins. I also recall how big the picture appeared on the screen. I remember feeling cold and then warming up because my mom gave me a sweatshirt. Now, when I am in a stressful moment, I can literally have a full body experience by recalling my experience of *Snow White*.

Try using this guide to help you and your family identify more resources you can use when stressed or anxious.



As you remember resources together, keep in mind that recalling past life experiences can bring up the bad alongside the good. When you experience an unpleasant sensation, try to redirect your attention to a pleasant or neutral sensation. One way is to focus on the end of your nose, which most people experience neutrally. Focusing on something that is without sensation gives your body space to reset.

FAMILY CHAT

Christians celebrate communion regularly as a way to remember the biblical story of Jesus and his disciples sharing in the Last Supper. Many experience pleasant sensations when they participate. Using your five senses, recall how you have felt during communion. What did you smell? taste? see? hear? feel?

Practice Resourcing

Use one or more of the following activities to help your family build your Resourcing skill.

Resource Drawing

While describing resources with words may come naturally to many adults, other adults and children may need prompts and/or alternative ways to identify their resources. Gather paper and crayons, markers, or colored pencils for this exercise. Ask one of the following questions and invite each person to draw an image in response.

- What is your favorite sport or game?
- Who are your closest friends?
- What is your favorite animal or stuffed animal?
- Where is your favorite place?
- What is your favorite song?
- What is your favorite TV show or movie?

Encourage each person to include in their drawing all the sensations that come to mind when they think about their resource. Suggest that they can include words in their picture if they want.

Over time, repeat this exercise, using different questions from the list to discover additional resources.

Guided Meditation

Develop a meditation script that can help transport you or your family to a resource. Use this template to get started, selecting the statements in the middle that best fit your resource.

Find a comfortable place to sit and close your eyes. *(pause)*
Take a deep breath *(pause)* and let it out. *(pause)*
Deep breath *(pause)* and let it out. *(pause)*
Once more, breathe in *(pause)* and let it out. *(pause)*

Think about your favorite _____ (animal, place, food, etc.). *(pause)*
Look at it from all sides. What do you see? *(pause)*

Listen carefully. What do you hear? *(pause)*
Reach out and touch it. What do you feel? *(pause)*
Sniff deeply. What do you smell? *(pause)*
Imagine licking it. How does it taste? *(pause)*
Focus on your body. How do you feel? *(pause)*

Take a deep breath *(pause)* and let it out. *(pause)*
Open your eyes when you are ready.

Five Things

Sometimes, when we are in stressful situations, we can be hard on ourselves or the people we care about. Create a list of 5 things you enjoy seeing or doing. Write your list on a card or save it on your phone. That way, you can carry it with you in your pocket, backpack, wallet, or purse when you are away from home. Make a second copy and place it somewhere you will see it frequently at home, such as on a bathroom mirror, the refrigerator, or over your desk.

Resource Box/Vision Board

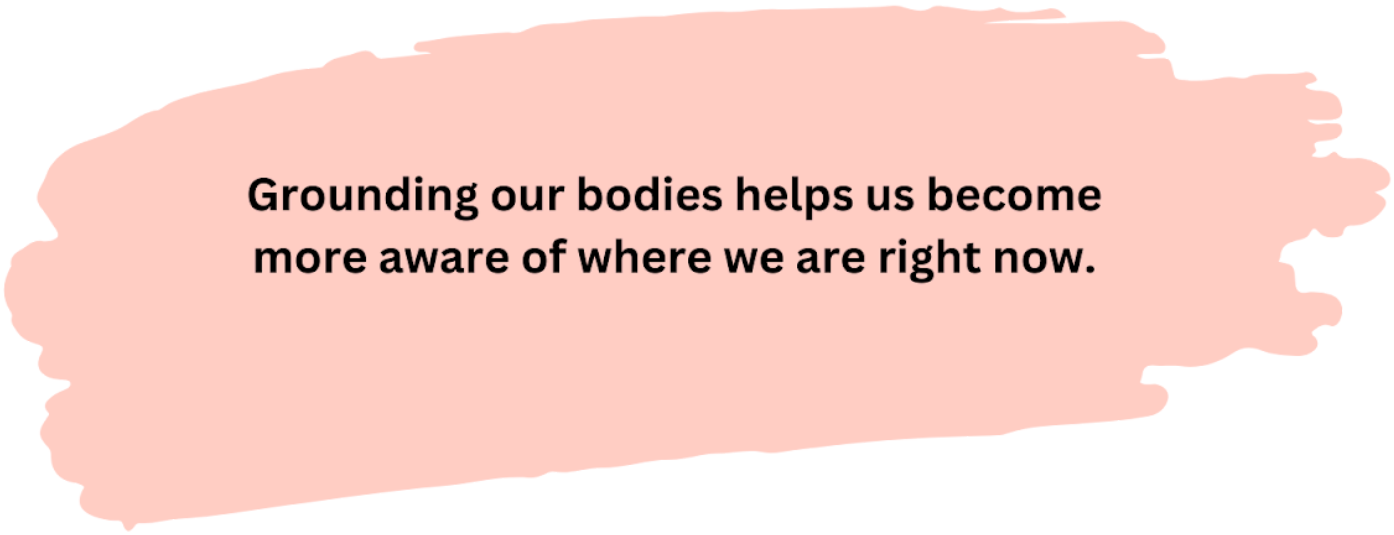
Create a family resource box or vision board (physical or digital) that contains resource objects or images of them. Objects might include a ticket stub from a concert you attended, a stuffed animal, a shell from the beach. Images could be photos of people, nature scenes, or movie posters. For a box, add candles or other objects that you can use to recall or create pleasant sensations. For either, you could also draw pictures or write descriptions of your resources. Keep your box or vision board in a convenient place so that you have access to it when you need to utilize this wellness skill.

Make space weekly to practice these wellness skills with your family. Talking about your resources helps intensify them so that they can easily be recalled in stressful or traumatic situations.

Wellness Skills for the Whole Family: Grounding

Grounding is the direct contact of our bodies, or a part of our bodies, with the ground or with something else that provides support. Grounding our bodies helps us become more aware of where we are right now. When past or current stressors flood our minds, this skill helps us find our calm in the present moment. It frees us to think more clearly and regulate our emotions better, rather than spiraling out of control.

We can ground ourselves in many ways, from laying down on a surface to sitting on a chair, standing against a wall, or walking and paying attention to our steps. By doing any of these things intentionally, we remind our bodies that they are supported and anchored, rather than floating and unmoored.



One of the ways that I ground myself each day (weather permitting) is by walking barefoot in my backyard. I pay attention to the grass crunching under my feet. I notice the warmth or coolness of the soil. I feel the solidness of the ground, even when it's a little bit squishy after a rain. By focusing on that feeling, I bring myself into the present moment and remind my body that it is supported.

Some people who have experienced trauma may have difficulty shifting from a feeling of floating to one of support. When this happens, it can be helpful to use a heavy blanket or pillow to increase the sensation of being

grounded. Placing weight on our lap, feet, or entire body helps to press us onto the surface below us, making us more aware of what supports us.

This skill helps us find our calm in the present moment.

Let's try a simple grounding exercise together. Sit in a comfortable chair. Pay close attention to your body. Notice any pleasant or neutral sensations. These might include the warmth of your feet in your shoes, the softness of the chair cushion supporting your back, and/or the firmness of the seat beneath you. Notice the support that the chair gives your body and that the floor gives your feet. As you ground yourself in the chair, what do you notice happening in your body? How are you feeling?

When I do this exercise, I notice that my shoulders drop and my body feels heavier as I sit in the chair. I relax into the chair's support. Any anxiety I am feeling seeps away. I enjoy the sensation of being cradled by the comfortable cushions. I am grounded.

FAMILY CHAT

Do you remember the story of Moses and the burning bush? Moses was instructed by God to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Feeling the ground underneath your bare feet is a powerful way to feel connected to the present moment. If you like walking around barefoot, go ahead and take off your shoes. Walk around your space. What do you notice under your feet? (If you don't like to be barefoot, try walking around with your socks on.)

Practice Grounding

Use one or more of the following activities to help your family build your Grounding skill.

Find the Ground

Three or four times a day, pause for a minute to reset your groundedness. You might do this as you get up in the morning, during lunch, during recess or a work break, coming home on the subway or bus, or as you are getting ready for bed. Use these guidelines to help you find the ground:

- Notice where and how your body is making contact with a solid surface. If sitting or lying down, pay attention to where your body makes contact with the sofa, chair, bed, etc. If standing or walking, notice your feet making contact with the ground.
- Press your body more firmly into that solid surface and hold for a count of ten.
- Release and then press your body again into the solid surface for another count of 10. Take your time and allow your breathing and heart rate to slow along with your counting.
- Repeat this process until you feel your muscles relax and your emotions settle. Then continue on with your day.

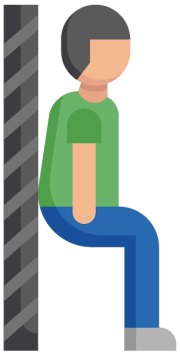
Focus on Your Feet

Our feet carry us each day, yet we often only notice them if they feel unpleasant. Spend some time now focusing on your feet. Start by noticing how they feel in your shoes. Do they feel pinched or rubbed? Is there room to wiggle your toes? How do your feet feel against the ground? Rock from heel to toe. Then move from side to side with your feet. Try taking several steps. What sensations do you notice? Are they pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant? How does changing your position affect how your feet feel? Which positions help you feel most grounded?

Wall Sit

Being grounded can involve more than our feet. Vertical surfaces can also help hold us steady. Try a wall sit where your back is supported by the wall while your feet are supported by the ground (see the image below). Where,

specifically, do you feel your body being supported? What sensations do you notice as you do the wall sit?



Lean In

We can also practice grounding by leaning on someone while sitting side by side or in a group together. You can try this practice by sitting back to back as well. What sensations do you notice in your body as you lean against someone?

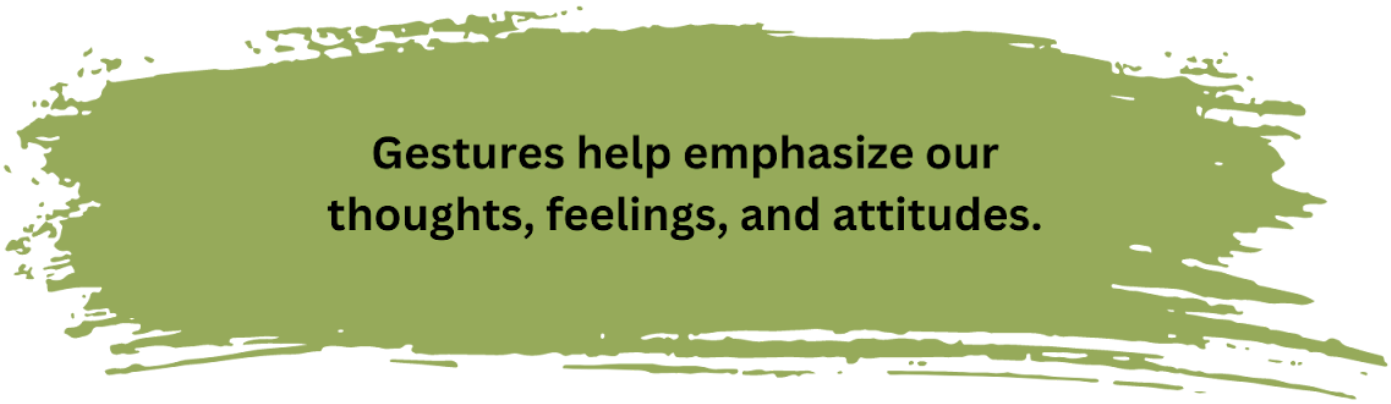
Make space weekly to practice this wellness skill with your family. You might try using it at home, sitting in the car before driving somewhere, or on a family walk. Once you have some experience with this skill, see if you can combine it with the other two skills (Tracking and Resourcing) you've learned so far.

Wellness Skills for the Whole Family: Gesturing

Do you talk with your hands? My family jokes that if someone tied my hands behind my back, I wouldn't be able to communicate! Gestures help emphasize our thoughts, feelings and attitudes. Often we don't even notice the gestures we make because they feel so natural to us. But did you know these natural movements actually have potential to increase our wellness and help us soothe our nervous systems? Let's explore the power of gesturing together by playing a game of make-believe. Act out this series of pretend scenarios, using as many gestures as you can imagine.



Our game of make-believe raises awareness of many of the different kinds of gestures that people around us use. Confident gestures are the kinds of movements that can increase our wellness. During the game you might have shown this sort of movement when you pretended you were a superhero or were strong and confident. Releasing gestures are movements that help negative sensations leave the body as we regulate our emotions, such as the ones you might have used when you pretended to get away from a bear. Relational gestures are movements used widely to represent deep personal connections or spiritual beliefs, like those you might have used when you pretended to see your favorite person. Self-calming gestures are movements that soothe us, like the ones you might have used when you pretended to be scared.



The gestures we make might be similar to those made by others, but they are also very personal to who we are. We use particular gestures to communicate our particular experiences, even if we do so unintentionally. Learning to use various kinds of gestures intentionally not only improves communication, but can also help us increase wellness.

Let’s try this idea out. Make a self-soothing gesture, a movement that comforts you. As you are gesturing, take careful notice of the pleasant or neutral sensations in your body. What sensation words would you use to describe how you feel? What do you notice about your breathing? Your heart rate? Your muscles? Your emotions?

We can intentionally use gestures as a way to increase characteristics in ourselves. As a parent, I often find myself wanting to increase my patience. By selecting a gesture (placing my hands together) that demonstrates patience for me, I can intentionally use and pay attention to this gesture when I want to cultivate more patience. Just as we can grow flowers and fruits by paying attention to them, so can we grow characteristics such as patience in ourselves. Paying attention to something makes it grow. What characteristics do you want to grow in your life? Once identified, what gestures might you use to bring them to awareness?

FAMILY CHAT

People in the Bible use all kinds of gestures to worship God: kneeling, lifting their heads, raising their hands, removing their shoes. What are the gestures you associate with worshipping God? Demonstrate these gestures to each other. What feelings and sensations do you notice when you do these gestures? For example, if you place your hands together when you pray, do you feel warmth, pressure, grounded, vulnerable? Share your experiences with one another.

Practice Gesturing

Use one or more of the following activities to help your family build your Gesturing skill.

Gesture List (Movement Vocabulary)

Each of the gestures we use in our daily lives is personal to us. We have a small number of gestures we use to communicate and we often just stick to these. Let's try expanding our movement vocabulary by trying out different gestures together. Go back to the pretend gesture game listed at the beginning of this wellness skill. Once again, make a gesture as you pretend to be a superhero (the first suggestion on the list). Now look around and see what other gestures are being made. Take turns with everyone trying out each individual's gesture. Continue to go through the list and try out a different gesture than the one you naturally make. Test new gestures throughout the week and determine if these create unpleasant or pleasant sensations in the body.

Movement Meditation

This short movement meditation uses gentle, calming gestures to release stress and tension in our bodies. Start by standing or sitting in a chair with your feet flat on the ground.

Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose *(pause)* and then breath slowly out through your mouth. *(pause)*

Imagine you are holding something heavy in your hands. *(pause)* Raise your arms up high, and notice how they feel. *(pause)* Then slowly lower your hands to the floor, as if you are putting the heavy object down. *(pause)*. Notice how your arms feel now. *(pause)*

Hold your arms and hands out in front of you and shake your hands gently. *(pause)* Feel the movement traveling up your arms and into your shoulders. *(pause)* Now lower your arms and let them hang by your sides. *(pause)* Breathe slowly in and out a few more times and open your eyes.

Confident Poses

Think about how you hold or move your body when you feel confident. Do you raise your head and pull your shoulders back? Swing your arms or swagger a bit? Relax into a chair with your feet outstretched and hands laying in your lap? With your personal images in mind, strike your confident poses together on a count of 3. Notice how your poses are similar and different from one another.

Connecting Moves

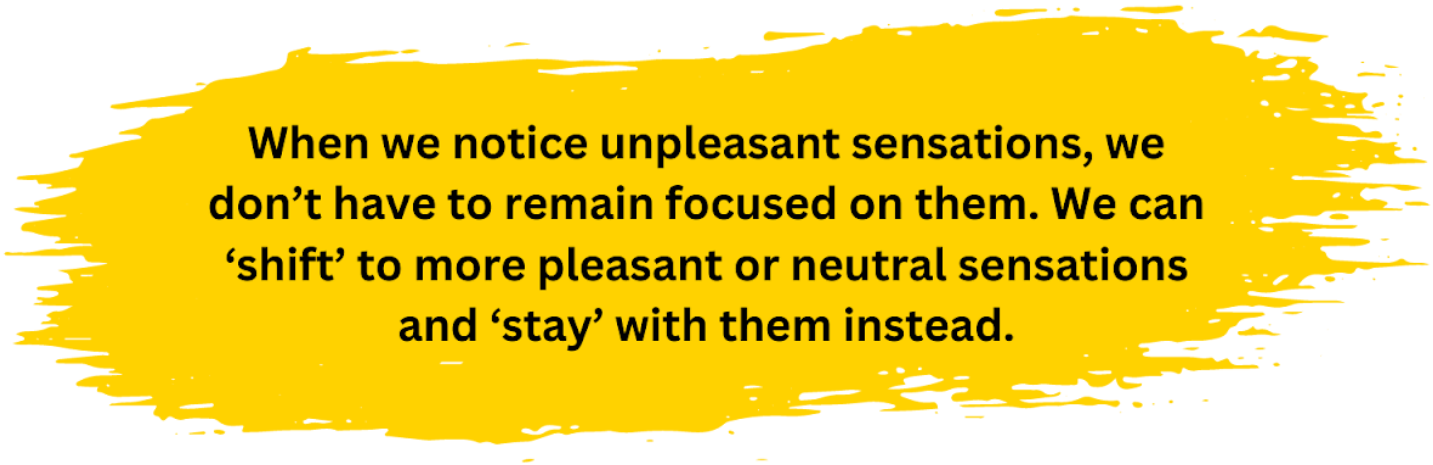
Sometimes we can feel alone in our stress. One way to counter this is through practicing gestures that help you feel connected to someone else: a friend, family member, or other person with whom you have a positive relationship. Find a partner and try out different gestures together that help you make contact with that person. For example, you might put your arm around their waist, reach to touch their cheek, blow a kiss, or engage in a ‘secret handshake’. Then stand far apart and make the same gestures while you imagine them being closer. Notice how gesturing can help us replicate feelings of closeness even when people are not right there with us.

Make space weekly to practice this wellness skill with your family. Pay attention to what gestures you naturally make. Try incorporating some intentional gestures to demonstrate characteristics, like compassion, that you might want to increase in yourself.

Wellness Skills for the Whole Family: Shift and Stay

As we practice the wellness skills we've learned so far, we might begin to notice some unpleasant sensations alongside the pleasant and neutral ones. Our bodies remember the bad as well as the good, so paying more attention to our bodies can also remind us of negative experiences. However, when we notice these unpleasant sensations, we don't have to remain focused on them. We can 'shift' to more pleasant or neutral sensations and 'stay' with them instead. We do this by using one or more of the other wellness skills: tracking, resourcing, grounding, and/or gesturing. This self care practice is called Shift and Stay.

One of the ways we can think about this is to consider the daily annoyances that bug us. We all feel aggravated by routine experiences: running late for school or work, getting stuck in traffic, arguing (or overhearing others arguing), forgetting meetings or homework, burning dinner, breaking a favorite possession. The list goes on. Maybe you've even tallied your own daily annoyances in your head as you've read this!



These kinds of experiences can cause negative sensations, even aches and pains like upset stomachs, headaches, and stiff necks. If we are stuck in traffic and feel our face getting red with anger, we can use our Resourcing skill to think of a happy memory and shift our body into the pleasant sensations associated with it. We might use our Gesturing skill to mime reducing our heart rate and settling our emotions. We could also use

our Grounding skill, pressing our feet to the floor of the car and noticing how it supports us even in our frustration.

Note that we are not ignoring the unpleasant sensations in our bodies, but choosing to pay more attention to pleasant and neutral ones. We can ask ourselves, “What else is true?” This can help us refocus our attention on things that contribute to our wellness rather than stress and anxiety.

These wellness skills are just a few of the tools we can use to promote a healthy and happy life. Other tools include therapy, medication, and exercise. If you or another family member struggles to manage unpleasant sensations and feel overwhelmed by the trauma you have experienced, please seek out other tools to add to your wellness toolbox.

FAMILY CHAT

Jesus taught his disciples to accept change as they encountered different people and situations. They often had to shift their plans right in the middle of whatever they were doing, like when a storm came up while they were crossing a lake or when 5,000+ people got hungry while listening to Jesus. Name a time you had to change something right in the middle of doing it. How did you feel when this happened? What did you do to help you manage your emotions while making the change?

Practice Shift and Stay

Use one or more of the following activities to help your family build your Shift and Stay skill.

Freeze dance

One of the ways we can practice shifting sensations in our body is through freeze dancing! Try this freeze dance exercise as a family. Put on some music and invite everyone to dance. Then pause the music. When the music stops, each player must freeze immediately and hold that position until the music begins again. Start and stop the music several times at varied intervals. As you freeze and release your body, notice the difference in sensations between dancing and freezing.

Tense & release

Find a comfortable body position to do this activity. This might be sitting down in a comfortable chair or even lying on the floor. Starting from either the top or bottom of your body, work your way down (or up) your body by tensing and releasing each body part. After each tense and release, pause to notice the change in sensations. Which sensations are more pleasant: when you tense or when you release? How does your body feel different after you tense and release several times?

Guided Meditation

This guided meditation invites you to recall an unpleasant experience and then shift it to a memory of a pleasant experience.

Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose *(pause)* and then slowly breathe out through your mouth. *(pause)* Breathe in *(pause)* and out. *(pause)*

Think about a time when you felt upset, anxious, or scared. *(pause)* Who was there? *(pause)* What was happening? *(pause)* How did you feel? *(pause)*

Imagine that you are holding a special, magic marker. This marker has the power to hide memories behind a wall of color. Use it to color over your unpleasant memory until all you can see is your favorite color. *(pause)*

Now think about a time when you felt really comfortable, content, and happy. *(pause)* Who was there? *(pause)* What were you doing? (pause) How did you feel? *(pause)* Hold this image in your mind as you slowly open your eyes.

Change

Change is often hard. As we learn new skills, we may like one particular skill and not want to explore or use others. This may work for a while but also limits our resources for wellness. Practice shifting between skills so you begin to feel more comfortable with change. Think of something that generates unpleasant sensations in your body when it occurs. Using the rotation circle below, move among the skills until you have tried using all of them to help you Shift and Stay. Start with a skill other than your preferred one so you don't get stuck in a rut.



Make space weekly to practice these wellness skills with your family. As you notice unpleasant sensations in your body, try other skills until you notice more pleasant sensations taking over.

Wellness Skills for the Whole Family: Help Now

Practicing the five wellness skills we have learned so far will help us manage many difficult situations. But sometimes, in very stressful, crisis situations, we may not remember these skills or have time to practice them. That's when we need some simple things we can do in the moment to help regulate our emotions. We might call them Help Now skills.



The first two Help Now strategies are based on nature. The natural world offers valuable resources for our wellness. Water is a soothing element to which most of us have ready access, whether it is on tap in a sink, flowing from a garden hose, or available in a nearby pond. Potted plants, gardens, and neighborhood parks can be resources when we are just too anxious or overwhelmed to practice our usual wellness skills. Even looking through a window or at a picture of nature can have a helpful effect.

Learning what works for us when we need a quick way to reduce high anxiety and stress is a critical skill for wellness. Try out some of these Help Now ideas to see which seem to help you before you actually need them.

FAMILY CHAT

Many stories about Jesus involve water. He talked with the woman at the well, calmed the sea when a storm came up, changed water into wine at a wedding, and asked John the Baptist to baptize him in the river. Name some ways that you use water in your life. How do you feel when you use water in these ways? Which uses of water might help you calm yourself?

Practice Help Now

Use one or more of the following activities to help your family build your Help Now skill.

Help Now Bingo

Print out enough copies of the Bingo card (below) for each person, plus one. Cut the extra card into mini-cards, one square for each mini-card. Place the mini-cards facedown and shuffle. Take turns drawing a mini-card and calling out that wellness skill. Try it out as a group, and then mark it on your card. (Use candy or coins as markers.) Play until either you have five squares marked in a row (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) or until the whole card is covered.

SCANNING	SENSING OBJECTS	SENSORY MEDITATION (PRAYER)	SENSING HANDS	MARKING
RESOURCE DRAWING	GUIDED MEDITATION	FIVE THINGS	RESOURCE BOX/VISION BOARD	FIND THE GROUND
FOCUS ON YOUR FEET	WALL SIT	FREE	LEAN IN	GESTURE LIST
COUNT BACKWARD FROM 10 WHILE WALKING	CONFIDENT POSES	CONNECTING MOVES	FREEZE DANCE	TENSE & RELEASE
CHANGE	TEXTURE BOOK, BALL, BLANKET	CALMING STRIPS	NAME 3 THINGS IN THE ROOM	MOVEMENT MEDITATION

Playlist

Create a resiliency playlist of music to listen to when you feel overwhelmed. This might include a variety of artists and musical genres and could be created individually or as a family. Save songs to a USB drive or set it up on a streaming service. Make sure it is easily accessible in crisis situations.

Texture Book/Ball/Blanket

Identify various textures in your surroundings that give you comfort. This might take the shape of a favorite object like a teddy bear or blanket or it might be a common object like a book, ball, or article of clothing. Keep your textured object readily available in your everyday life. Bring your favorite sweatshirt to hang on the back of your chair at work. Or have a small piece of a favorite texture such as corduroy in the pocket of your backpack.

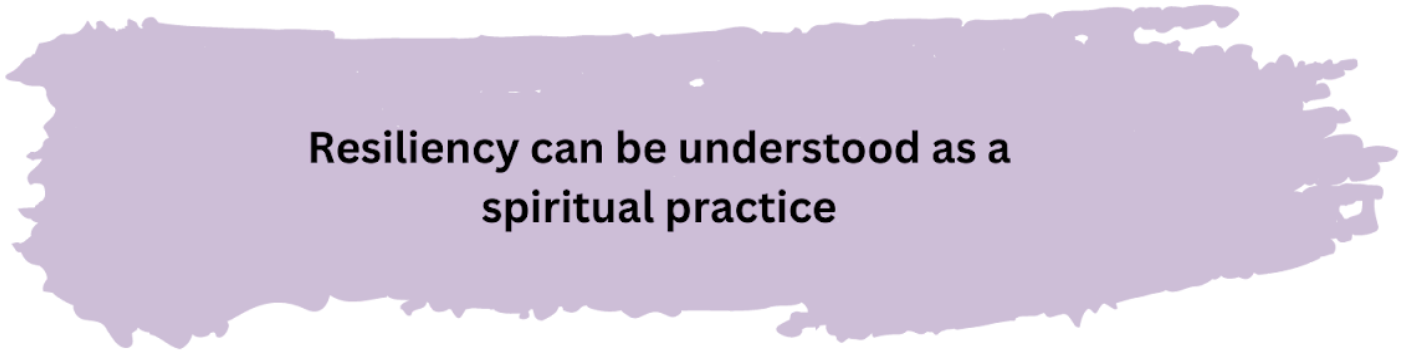
Calming Strips

Strips that have textures on them can be useful to adhere to the things we carry around with us like our phone, keys or notebook. Teachers have even used textured strips on student desks to provide an anxiety-reducing outlet during tests. These strips, commonly called calming strips, can be purchased online as stickers or you can create your own textured strip with textured cardstock and an adhesive. By having this calming strip on a nearby object and running your finger against it, you can regulate your emotions throughout the day.

Make space weekly to practice these wellness skills with your family. Try out each of the Help Now strategies and discuss which ones you like the best.

How to Train a Community

Community faith leaders can be a resource for helping families in crisis move from ‘getting by’ to ‘being resilient’. Resiliency can be understood as a spiritual practice and many families would benefit from learning about this practice. By presenting a theologically sound and scientifically based approach to building resiliency, faith leaders can meet families who are struggling with generational trauma, parenting stress, social injustices, and global crisis fatigue where they are. Instead of leaving families in a kind of ‘survival mode’ where they must deal with stress and anxiety on their own, pastors and religious educators can offer ‘real life’ support. They can begin to change the landscape of family life for the better.



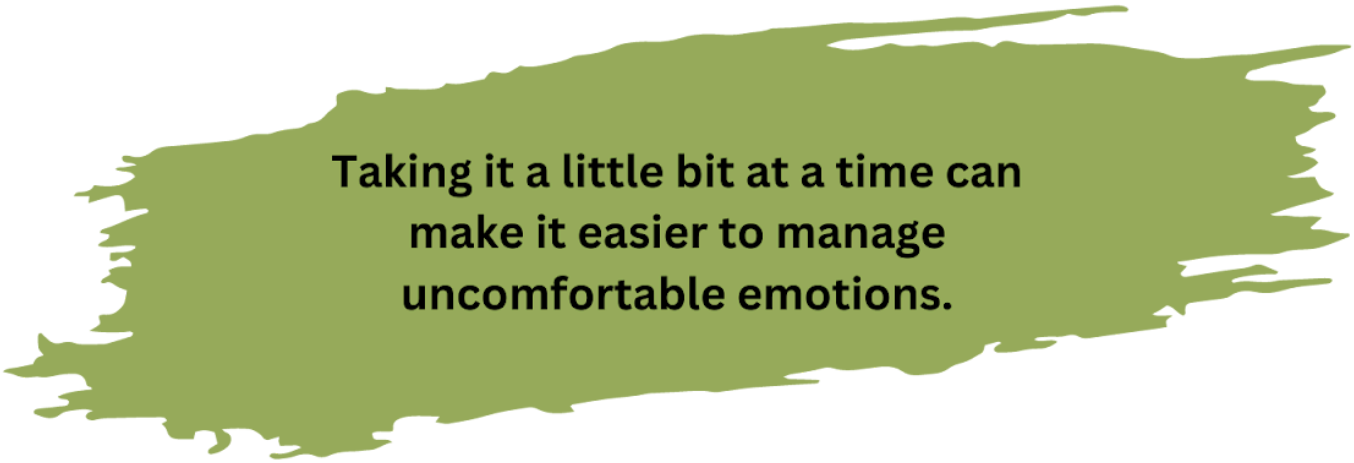
Offering a **space** that feels like a retreat from the stress of the world is helpful when inviting families to engage with trauma and explore resiliency. If faith leaders can offer a place to ‘get away from it all’ for a few hours, it creates an opportunity for families to connect with each other in a calm, distraction-free location. Think about the spaces available for gathering. Is there one that naturally offers a calming atmosphere? One that can be easily modified or set up to encourage calmness? A quiet environment decorated in neutral colors supports sharing and reflection better than a noisy, busy, brightly colored space. Incorporating some of the elements used in the wellness skills, such as natural objects or images, water features, different fabric textures, and comfortable seating, can also be helpful. Think about accessibility as well.

Incorporate some of the elements used in the wellness skills.

An **environment** that is inclusive of varying types of families and kinds of trauma also matters. Know your constituencies and plan accordingly. Will you have primarily ‘unconventional’ families, those that fit the ‘two heterosexual parents, two children’ stereotype, or a mix? Do you have grandparents parenting grandchildren in your midst? Are racial and/or gender biases a major stressor for your families? Are you offering this mostly for congregation members or hoping to attract a broader group of parents and children from the local community? Answering these kinds of questions helps faith leaders consider how to welcome participants and help them feel more comfortable. Even the most seemingly homogenous group represents some diversity of experience that means a ‘one size’ approach never fits everyone. (Even many clothing manufacturers have stopped claiming that ‘one size fits all’!)

Know your constituencies and plan accordingly.

Pace is another consideration. Wrestling with past and/or ongoing trauma can be exhausting work! Taking it a little bit at a time can make it easier to manage the uncomfortable emotions that accompany the process. For some families, a series of weekly gatherings (45-60 minutes each) may make sense. For others, whose daily calendars are already full to bursting, inviting them to come away for a weekend retreat could be a better option. It's also possible to engage these materials in a combination approach: an initial, longer, gathering - perhaps in a retreat space - followed by weekly or biweekly, shorter, sessions in-person or online. Tech savvy faith leaders might even try offering the entire series in an online format, with synchronous sessions and recorded portions that families can access whenever they have time.



Engaging in personal **preparation** is essential. Faith leaders need to work through the workbook for themselves in order to wrestle with their own traumas and understand (experientially as well as intellectually) the skills that support resiliency. Even prospective leaders who feel they have led a relatively trauma-free life will benefit from trying out the skill-building activities ahead of time. It is generally easier to teach (and affirm) a skill if practicing it is part of your own repertoire of spiritual disciplines!

Preparing and providing **materials** for participants also requires some advance decision-making. Which workbook format better fits your families' needs: an e-copy, printed copy, or both? Are there some aspects of the workbook that you might want to project on a screen for everyone to view

during a session? What supplies do you need to gather for each session's activities? In many cases, access to workbook instructions and some kind of writing tools are all that is required, but a few activities - like creating a resource box, moving to music, or exploring different textures - will require additional preparation if you want families to do it as part of the group.

Finally, cultivating a sense of **openness** to the process will help you pay attention to what is working for families and what isn't a good 'fit' for your constituency. Don't be afraid to make adjustments to your timetable, location, or pacing of activities. If families are struggling with a particular wellness skill, it might make sense to spend an extra session exploring that practice further. If a traumatic community event occurs in the midst of your program, you may need to skip ahead to the Help Now skill to help families address that event. Be grounded and also flexible in how you work with families to build spiritual and social-emotional resiliency through this resource.



real kids
real faith

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Tracking: Sensation Color Key

Write the sensations you associate with each color, starting with the words in italics below and then adding any others that you can think of:

hot, warm, cool, cold, deep, shallow, calm, tight, heavy, light, fast, slow, rough, smooth, thick, thin



Tracking: Paying Attention to My Body

