

Emotional First Aid Kits

Information Sheet

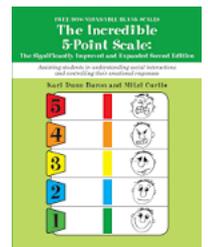


Managing big emotions

Emotions can be overwhelming. Anxiety, anger, worry, excitement, fear, embarrassment can all be hard to manage, even as adults. For children – and especially autistic children - it is harder still, because the emotions may be tricky to recognise or identify (is this 'excitement' or 'anxiety'?), and they may also be much bigger (especially during puberty).

We teach both autistic and non-autistic children all sorts of things but we often forget to teach them how to handle **big emotions**. We forget that children may not realise that all emotions pass in time, and that there are many things they can do to make big emotions easier to manage. This can leave children very vulnerable.

5 point scales are a really key way to help children learn to identify those big emotions ('how' they are feeling) and learn about some great activities that help manage those feelings. Emotional first aid kits can be a wonderful way of gathering together the personalised tools needed for these activities all in one place so your child – and you – can find as soon as they need them. They act as great prompts too!



What are Emotional First Aid Kits?

Emotional first aid kits can go by many names – you may also hear them called 'calm kits' or 'wellbeing boxes'. The name is unimportant, but the support they offer can be very important indeed.

The beauty of emotional first aid boxes is that they remove the need to think. When we are engulfed by strong emotions it is very hard and sometimes impossible to think, or remember what we might do to help ourselves. Thoughts can spiral and get out of control very fast. This is especially true for autistic children nearing meltdown. The experience can be very frightening.

We can help this situation by collecting together soothing items and prompts for activities into a special emotional first aid kit for each child. We can individualise these, adding items relating to a child's intense interests, to the sensory toys *they* find comforting etc. Creativity is key!



Emotional First Aid Kits *(continued)*



Think about...

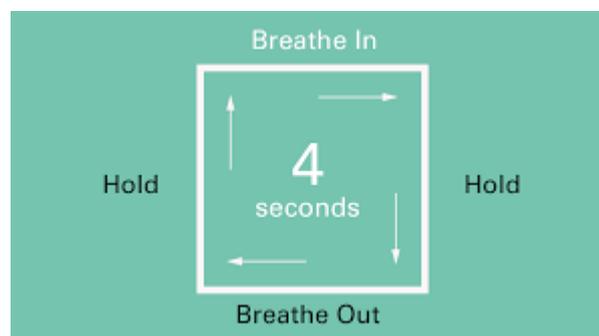
- *Special interests (object, or book)
- *All 5 senses (something to watch, something to hear, something to smell, something to touch, something to taste...)
- *A favourite book
- *A MP3 player with playlist
- *Lego
- *Sandtimer to watch
- *Safe aromatherapy oils
- *Pokemon or other collector cards
- *A blanket
- *Prompt cards for activities (e.g. breathing exercise, walk outside)
- *Mindful colouring
- *A soft toy
- *Chewy fruit snack
- *Dot to dots
- *Ear defenders
- *A note from Mum/Dad
- ***Be creative!**

How to use

Once you have made them you need to use them. Make sure they are freely available and prompt a child to use the kit whenever they feel a strong emotion. It will take a good deal of prompting over time to make the use of kits automatic, so don't give up. Try adding new items on a regular basis to keep it interesting. Praise a child for using it. Let it evolve over time.

Most of all, do not give up. Help the child take ownership of the kit, keep it age appropriate (teens may prefer to keep it in a plan bag in their rucksack) and encourage new ideas. If a child prefers to have an emotional first aid in their pocket go for it. A second pencil case can work too. The important factor is that a child feels able to use it, so that when those big emotions strike, they are ready to deal with them.

Prompt Card: Box Breathing



Emotional First Aid Kits *(continued)*

Resources

'Cards Against Anxiety' by Pooky Goldsmith (2020). Quarto Publishing.

'The huge bag of worries' by Victoria Ironside (2011). Hodders Children's Books.

'Starving the Anxiety Gremlin for Children Aged 5-9: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook on Anxiety Management: 11 (Gremlin and Thief CBT Workbooks)' by Kate Collins-Donnelly (2014). Jessica Kingsley Press

