

The Color Wheel for Emotional Regulation

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Superheroes social skills training, Rethink Autism internet interventions, parent training, EBP classroom training, functional behavior assessment: An autism spectrum disorder, evidence based (EBP) training track for school psychologists

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Introduction

Overview

The purpose of the Color Wheel for Emotional Regulation is to provide a visual self-monitoring system to aid children in monitoring a specified emotion such as feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or angry. The Color Wheel for Emotional Regulation consists of a circle divided into three equal sections colored green, yellow, and red. The green section of the circle represents “I’m feeling good;” whereas, the red section of the circle represents heightened levels of the specified emotion. The yellow section of the circle represents feeling a moderate amount of the emotion.

The Color Wheel provides visual self-monitoring of the child’s emotional state by being placed on the student’s desk in such a way that the Color Wheel can be seen by the teacher (e.g., the student should sit in the front row of the classroom). The student turns the wheel as needed, and the teacher responds with previously identified coping strategies. For example, if the student turns the wheel to red, the teacher may ask the student to run an errand which gives the student an opportunity to calm down. Additional strategies may include taking a bathroom break or having some quiet time in the back of the classroom. The coping strategies are not only be individualized to the child, but also considered appropriate by the classroom teachers.

The use of coping strategies is monitored by the teacher identify if the child demonstrates additional skill deficits. For example, if the student frequently uses the Color Wheel during reading instruction, then the student may possess deficits in the area of reading. Monitoring the use of the Color Wheel ensures that the coping strategies are not being used to escape or avoid tasks. Finally, the use of the Color Wheel is slowing faded in such a way that the student is able to recognize his emotional state and request help, as needed, without a visual cue.

Practicality

Many teachers experience difficulty meeting the needs of children receiving special education services. To a general education teacher, children with high-functioning autism may present as relatively typical; however, these children often have difficulty recognizing and expressing their emotions in a conventional

manner. For example, some children manifest their emotional states using atypical techniques, such as pulling hair or rocking back-and-forth. The Color Wheel for Emotional Regulation addresses the difficulty associated with the recognition and appropriate expression of emotions by providing a visual self-monitoring strategy. The Color Wheel for Emotional Regulation alleviates the need for teachers to continuously monitor high-functioning children for indiscrete signs of emotional distress, while also teaching children to self-monitor emotions and use appropriate coping strategies.

Implementation Steps

The Color Wheel for Emotional Regulation is designed to be implemented in five steps. The first implementation step, Identification, requires a school official (e.g., school psychologist or counselor) to work with the student to identify the problem emotion and appropriate coping strategies. During the second step of implementation, the student learns how to use the Color Wheel with the teacher or other school official. During the third stage, the teacher monitors the use of break times to determine if additional skill deficits are present. Lastly, the Color Wheel is faded by first requiring the student to state his emotion and then by requiring the student to self-monitor his emotional state without a visual aid. The implementation steps are summarized below –

1. **Identification** of problematic emotion (e.g., overwhelmed, anxiety, or anger) and identification of appropriate coping strategies for feeling a moderate and severe level of the emotion
2. **Teach** the Color Wheel. Discuss how to use the color wheel. Compare the Color Wheel to a traffic light. Teach coping strategies. When experiencing a moderate level of the emotion, the child should employ a self-coping strategy; whereas, when experiencing a severe level of the emotion, the teacher should intervene with a more intrusive coping strategy (e.g., bathroom break, alone time, etc).
3. **Monitor** when the child uses the Color Wheel and address skill deficits, as appropriate. For example, if the child frequently uses the Color Wheel during group activities, social skills training may be appropriate.
4. **Fading I.** Instead of the teacher monitoring the Color Wheel, the child should raise his hand to alert the teacher. The child should be required to state what he is feeling and ask for a break. For example, a child could say, “Ms. Brown, I feel like this is too much. Can I have a break?”. The child should be able to successfully state his emotion and ask for help for a pre-

specified period of time without emotional outbursts before proceeding to Fading II.

5. **Fading II.** Complete removal of the Color Wheel. At this point, the student should be able to self-monitor emotional states without a visual cue, raise his hand, and ask for help as needed.

Identification

This section addresses the identification of the problematic emotion, the choosing of a coping strategy, and the intervention suggestions for intense emotions.

Emotions

Children may experience difficulty naming their feelings. This section reviews a couple of techniques that help children to identify their problematic emotions.

Synonyms – Have the child describe a time when his problematic emotion was too intense and notice the use of the following synonyms. Alternatively, the professional may “quiz” the child by asking “Do you ever feel confused during these times?” and “Do you ever feel embarrassed?”.

- Overwhelmed – confused, frustrated, swamped, buried, too much
- Anxious – embarrassed, uncomfortable, worried, concerned, uneasy, fearful, nervous, butterflies in your stomach
- Angry – mad, boiling, burning, fired up, frustrated, furious, hot, seething

Illustration – have the child color a blank face from Appendix B on Page 15. Discuss with the child the illustration and help the child to label his emotion.

Coping Strategies

The following coping strategies are designed to be used when the student feels a moderate amount of the specified emotion (e.g., the yellow section). While many coping strategies exist, the following strategies were specifically chosen because they can be easily adapted to be used with the emotions addressed in this manual.

A school professional should explain and coach the student in the use of some or all of these strategies. Students should be encouraged to use the strategies independently. Specific praise should be provided if the student is “caught” using the strategy. For example, a teacher may say, “Johnny, good job acting like a turtle! I saw you tuck inside your shell to calm down!”.

Each coping strategy is described below. Please refer to the appropriate Appendix for student worksheets.

“Turtling” – The Turtle Technique teaches children to recognize their feelings, take a break, and think of a solution to the problem. Children are taught the basic steps using a turtle analogy. The steps are 1) Know your feelings, 2) Think “stop,” 3) Tuck inside your shell, 4) Come out when calm, and 5) Think of a solution. Student worksheets for “Turtling” can be found in Appendix B on page 15. Alternatively, the University of South Florida has published a story, Tucker Turtle Takes Time to Tuck and Think, which is freely available online.

Use Self-Talk – Self-talk are the thoughts that we think inside of our heads. Sometimes our-self talk is helpful, and at other times our self-talk is maladaptive. The thought “I can do this!” is an example of helpful self-talk; whereas, the thought “This is too much for me!” is maladaptive. Teaching self-talk involves understanding the concept self-talk, recognizing maladaptive thoughts, and replacing maladaptive thoughts with positive self-talk. Student worksheets for using self-talk can be found in Appendix C on page 21. There are different worksheets for being overwhelmed, anxious, and angry.

Release Emotions Safely – This coping strategy reminds the child to slow down in order to release his emotions safely. Several techniques are discussed, including breathing, stretching, and squeezing exercises.

Intervention

The most intrusive Color Wheel intervention is to allow the student to take a break. The taking a break intervention is designed for the red section of the circle, or when the child is experiencing severe levels of the identified emotion. The use of taking a break must be closely monitored to ensure that the student is not using the Color Wheel to escape or avoid a task. Monitoring the use of the Color Wheel is discussed in a later section of this manual. The length of the break should be

previously determined by the teacher. It may be useful for the student to use a stop watch while taking a break, so the student is aware the time limits of the break.

While it may be helpful for the teacher to work with the student to identify appropriate ways to take a break, here are some suggestions –

- Sit in the back of the classroom
- Put your head on your desk
- Close your eyes
- Read a book
- Color a picture
- Sit in the hallway***
- Sit in the office***
- Go to the bathroom***
- Run an errand for the teacher***

Break suggestions denoted with *** should be used with some caution because of unsupervised nature of the break. These break ideas should be used on a case-by-case basis.

Teaching

Emotions

Student worksheets are provided for overwhelmed, anxious, and angry. Discuss with the student what the emotion “looks like” by having the student color in the face showing the specified emotion. Talk about other words that mean the same as the specified emotion. For example, “mad” and “furious” mean the same as anger. Also discuss ways the student can tell that they are feeling the specified emotion.

Coping Strategies

“Turtling”

Steps for teaching the Turtling technique –

- **Step 1 – Preview the Turtle Technique.**
 - Ask the student to describe a turtle. Provide help as necessary. Make the point that a turtle has a shell, and when the turtle gets scared, it “tucks” inside its shell.

- **Step 2 – Introduce the Turtle Technique.**
 - Explain that you are going to teach the student to act like a turtle. Acting like a turtle means tucking inside your shell when feeling a moderate amount of the emotion.
- **Step 3 – Complete the Student Worksheet.**
 - Know Your Feelings – quickly review what the specified emotion feels like.
 - Think “Stop” – discuss the importance of putting a stop to the problematic emotion. Consider what happens if the emotion gets out of control (e.g., getting in trouble, card change, etc).
 - Tuck Inside Your Shell – model and discuss ways that a student can go inside his shell. A student may wish to put his head on his desk or close his eyes. *The classroom teacher should be made aware of the “going inside your shell” method.*
 - Come Out When Calm – model and discuss with the student what calm feels like. For example, a student may report feeling calm when their heart stops racing and when they catch their breath.
 - Think of a Solution – work with the student to think of possible solutions to fill into the thought bubbles. Solutions may include –
 - Get a teacher
 - Ask nicely
 - Ignore
 - Play
 - Say, “Please stop”
 - Say, “Please”
 - Share
 - Wait and take turns
- **Step 4 – Practice the Technique in the Classroom.**
 - Have the student practice using the turtle technique in the classroom.
 - After, follow up with the classroom teacher to determine if the student is using the turtle technique.
 - Provide additional in vivo practice, as necessary.
- **Step 5 – Check with the Student.**
 - Intermittently after the lesson, meet with the student to discuss when the student has used the turtle technique. Provide praise and reinforcement. Review the technique and answer questions, as appropriate.

Self-Talk

Steps for teaching self-talk –

- **Step 1 – Explain Self-Talk.**
 - Ask whether the student thinks thoughts inside his head. Explain that everyone thinks thoughts inside their head. Talk about how these thoughts can be helpful and unhelpful.
- **Step 2 – Introduce Self-Talk.**
 - Explain that you are going to teach the student to use positive self-talk when the Color Wheel is turned to yellow.
- **Step 3 – Complete the Student Worksheet.**
 - The first page discusses negative self-talk. Discuss and help the student to complete the thought bubbles.
 - The second page discusses positive self-talk. Discuss and help the student to complete the thought bubbles.
 - The third page provides additional practice. Have the student generate positive self-talk for the provided scenarios. In the middle of the page, have the student write a scenario that he has experienced, and assist with generating positive self-talk, as necessary.
- **Step 4 – Check-In with the Student.**
 - Intermittently after the lesson, meet with the student to discuss when the student has used self-talk. Provide praise and reinforcement. Review the technique and answer questions, as appropriate.

Release Emotions Safely

Steps for teaching the child to release emotions safely –

- **Step 1 – Explain Releasing Emotions Safely.**
 - Using the student worksheet, discuss what happens when the child feels too much of the emotion. Preview the techniques.
- **Step 2 – Introduce Releasing Emotions Safely.**
 - Explain that you are going to teach the student to release his emotions safely.
- **Step 3 – Complete the Student Worksheet.**
 - Demonstrate the breathing, stretching, and squeezing exercises. Then, provide the child with opportunities to practice.
- **Step 4 – Check in with the Student.**

- Intermittently after the lesson, meet with the student to discuss when the student has used self-talk. Provide praise and reinforcement. Review the technique and answer questions, as appropriate.

Intervention

When the above coping strategies do not work, the child should request a break. The break is used to give the child an opportunity to calm down in order to avoid a “meltdown.” If the teacher has selected appropriate break activities (e.g., sit in back of class, put head down on desk, etc), practice these with the child.

The Color Wheel

At this point, the child should be able to identify his problematic emotion, to describe the emotion, to model a coping strategy, and to understand when it is appropriate to request a break. The professional now teaches the child how to use the Color Wheel.

Steps for teaching the Color Wheel –

- **Step 1 – Compare Color Wheel to a Traffic Light.**
 - Turn the Color Wheel to show the student the three colors. Make connections by commenting how the colors are the same as those found on a traffic light.
 - Discuss the green section. Say, “Green means keep on going because you feel fine!”. Explain that when the Color Wheel is on green, the child is expected to follow classroom rules.
 - Discuss the yellow section. Say, “Yellow means slow down and calm down!”. Explain that when the child turns the Color Wheel to the yellow section, he should use the previously taught coping strategy.
 - Discuss the red section. Say, “Red means stop and ask for a break.” Explain that the child must wait for his teacher’s permission.
- **Step 2 – Practice the Color Wheel.**
 - The professional and the student should spend time practicing the use of the Color Wheel. Model feeling the levels of the emotion, turning the Color Wheel, and using the appropriate intervention strategy.
- **Step 3 – Provide Support.**
 - The level of support needed depends on the child. Some children may require in vivo support; whereas, others may require daily check-ins

to support the use of the Color Wheel. The level of support should be more intensive after teaching the Color Wheel and fade as the child masters the use of the Color Wheel.

Monitoring

In order to ensure that the child is using the Color Wheel appropriately, it is crucial to monitor the use of the red section of the Color Wheel. The child may use the red section of the Color Wheel to escape or avoid tasks instead of using the Color Wheel to calm down.

The functions of behaviors typically fall into four categories –

- Gain Social Attention
- Gain Access to Tangibles/Activities
- Escape/Avoid an Activity
- Sensory Stimulation

Of greatest concern when implementing the Color Wheel are the Gain Access to Activities and Escape/Avoid an Activity functions. The Monitoring Use form on page 34 aids in monitoring the Color Wheel. This form should be completed by the teacher when the child turns the Color Wheel to the red section. The teacher should make note of the date, time, and activity. To make the form as easy to use as possible, various subject and instructional categories are listed at the bottom of the form to help the teacher in making quick notations of the activity.

The teacher should consult with the professional to determine if any patterns emerge. For example, if the student frequently turns the Color Wheel to the red section during math instruction, it may be that the student is avoiding math because of inadequate math skills. If a pattern emerges, the child may require additional interventions (e.g., math tutoring).

Fading I

After the emotional outbursts have stopped for a pre-specified period of time, the professional should meet with the child to discuss fading the use of the Color Wheel. The Color Wheel is faded in two steps. The first step requires the child to raise his hand, state his emotion, and request a break when the Color Wheel is turned to red. For example, a child could say, “Ms. Brown, I feel like this is too

much. Can I have a break?”. The professional model and practice appropriate ways to request a break with the child. The child should be able to successfully state his emotion and ask for help for a pre-specified period of time without emotional outbursts before proceeding to Fading II.

Fading II

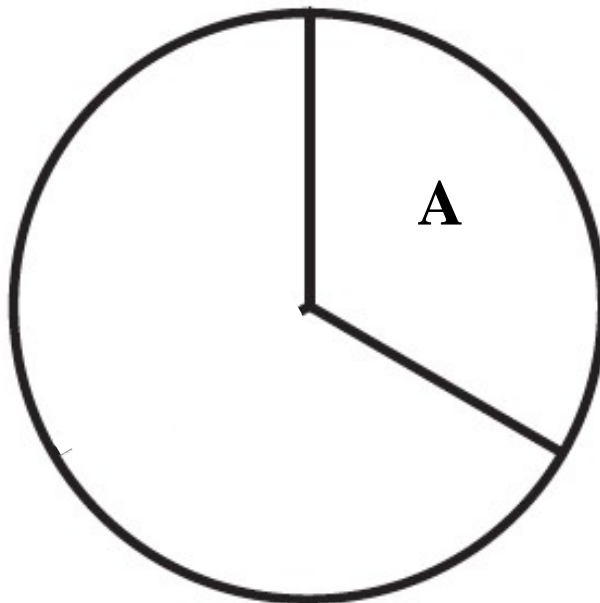
The second fading strategy involves the complete removal of the Color Wheel. At this point, the student should be able to self-monitor emotional states without a visual cue, raise his hand, and ask for help as needed.

Appendix A
Construction the Color Wheel

Step 1 – Have student color each section of the circle red, green, and yellow.



Step 2 – Carefully cut-out Section A leaving two-thirds of the circle intact.



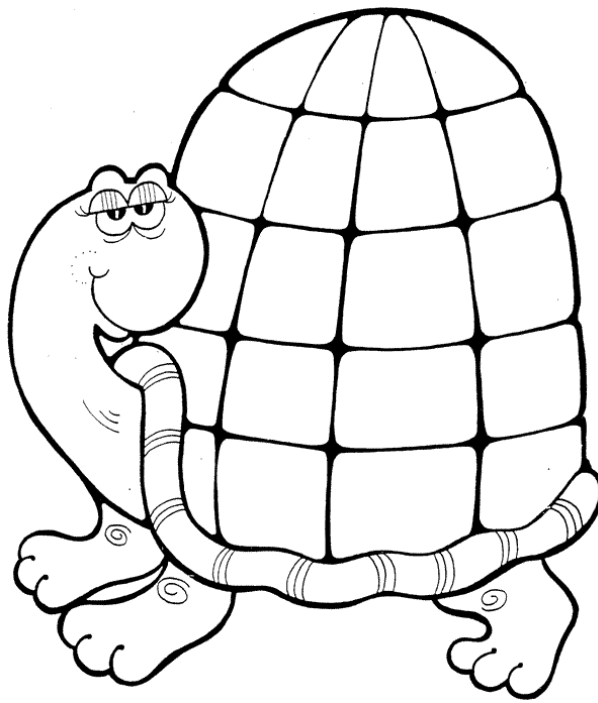
Step 3 – Construct the Color Wheel. Place the cut-out circle on top of the Color Wheel and then place on top of square. Secure with a fastener. Carefully glue the edges of the cut-out circle to the square. The Color Wheel should turn allowing one of the three colors to be visible.



Step 4 – Secure Color Wheel on desk by placing tape or other adhesive on the back side of the square and putting on the corner of the desk.

Appendix B

Act Like a TURTLE!

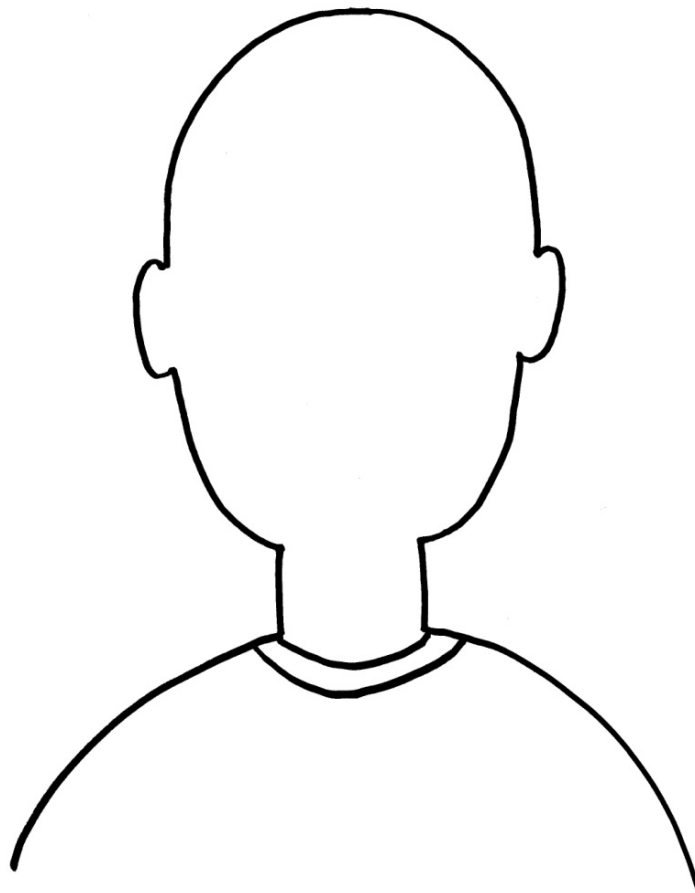


1. **KNOW** your feelings.
2. **THINK** "stop."
3. **TUCK** inside your shell.
4. **COME OUT** when calm.
5. **THINK** of a solution.

Step 1

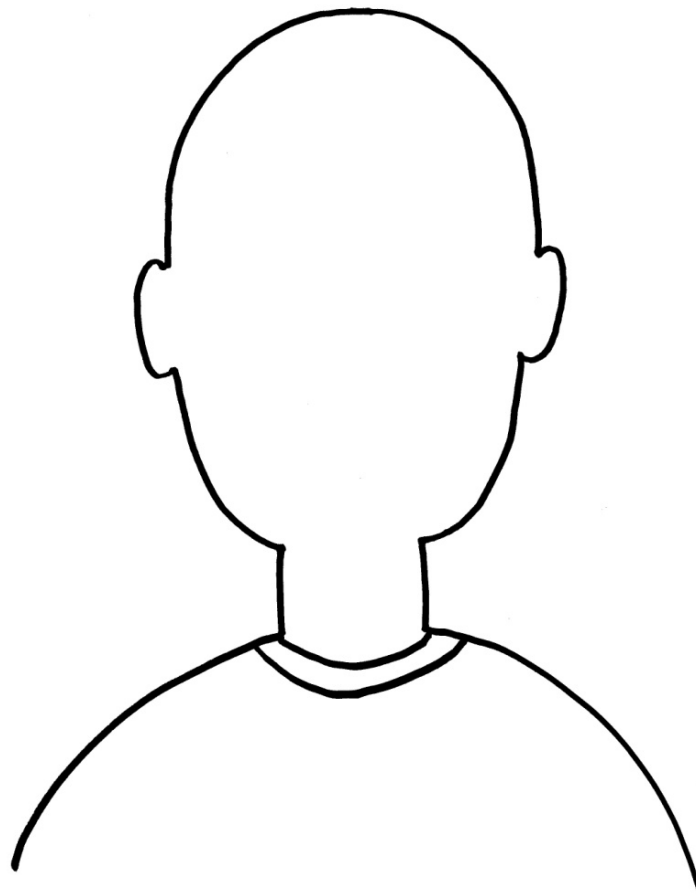
KNOW Your Feelings!

What does overwhelmed feel like?



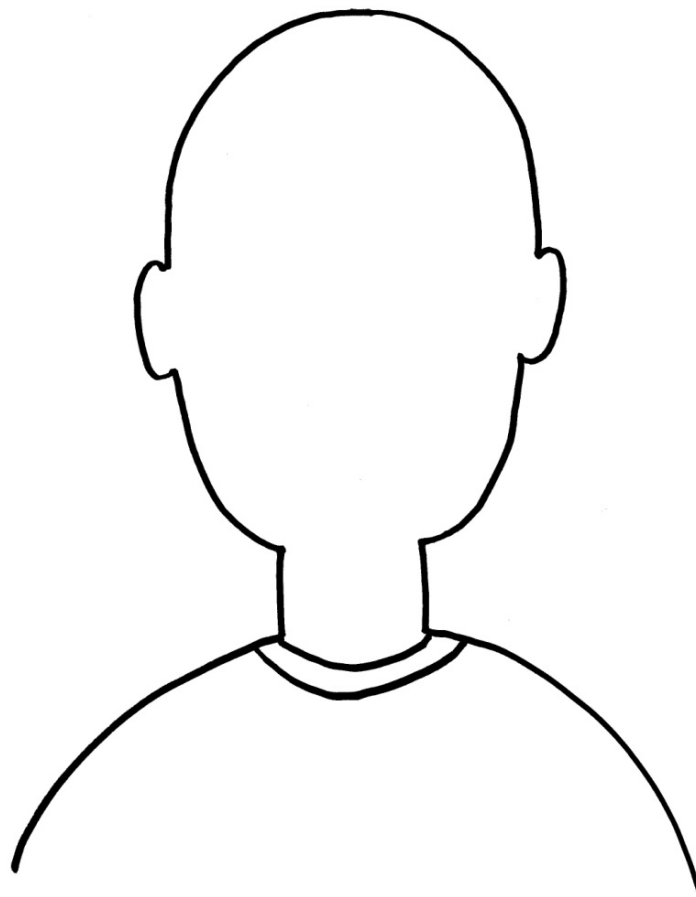
Step 1
KNOW Your Feelings!

What does anxious feel like?

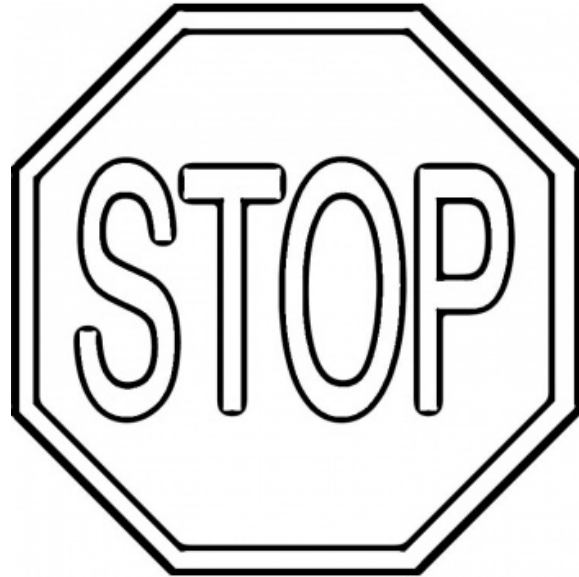


Step 1
KNOW Your Feelings!

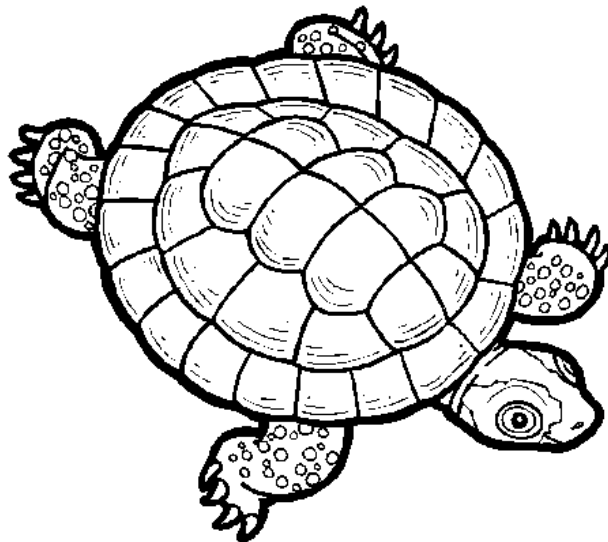
What does angry feel like?



Step 2
Think STOP!



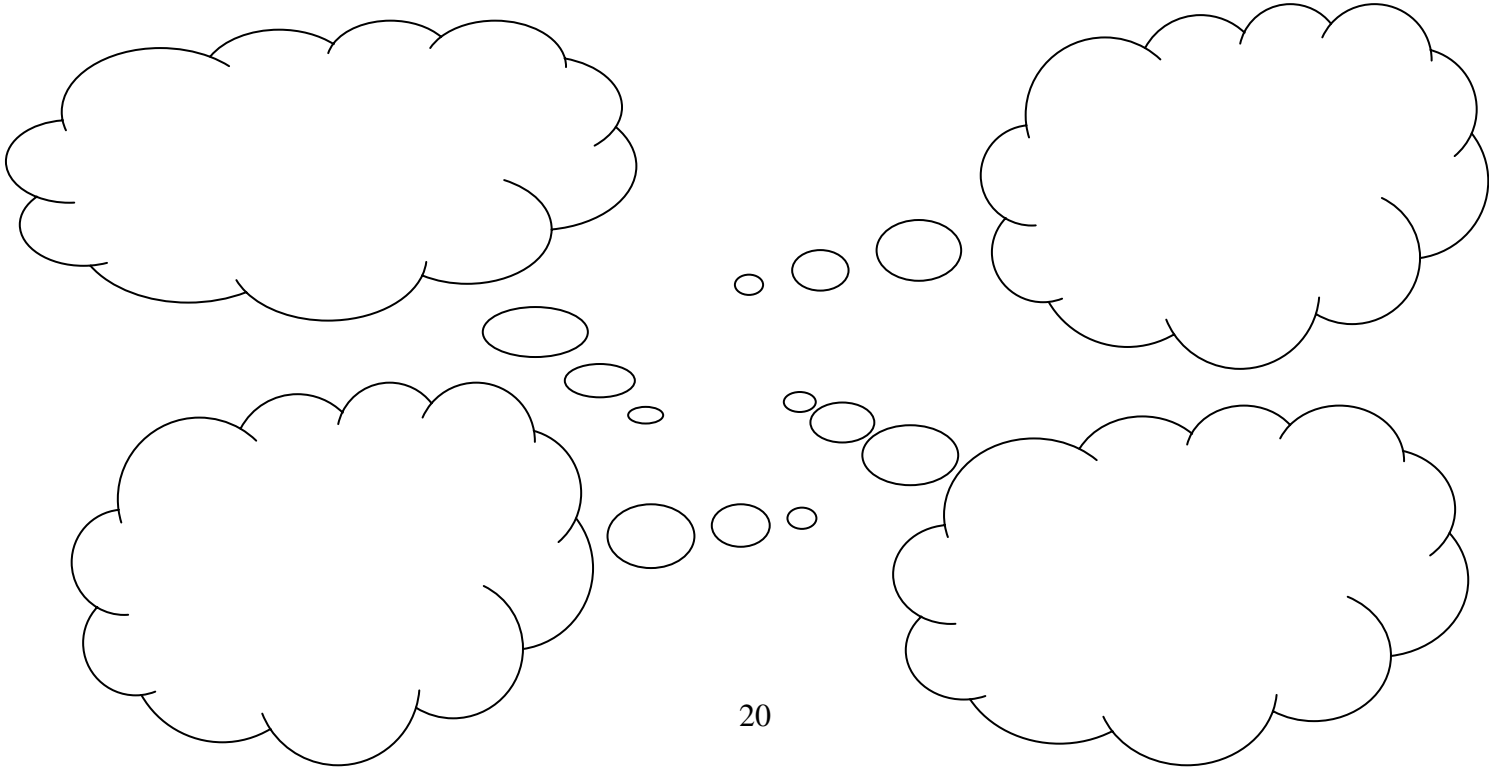
Step 3
TUCK Inside Your Shell!



Step 4
COME OUT When Calm!



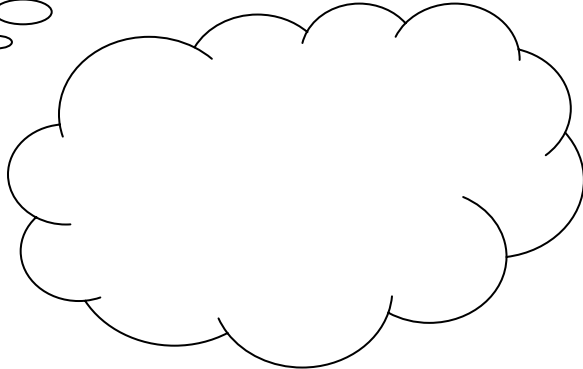
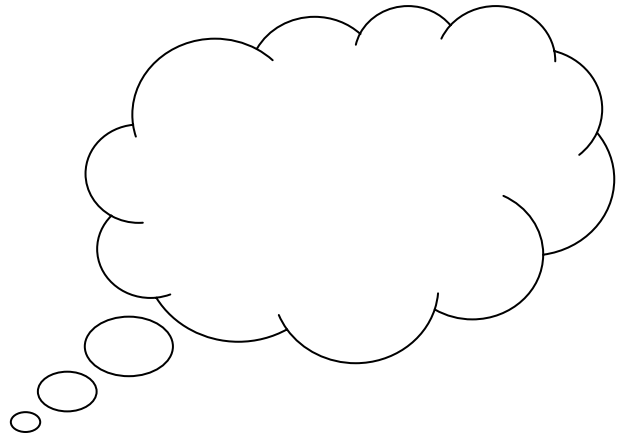
Step 5
THINK of a Solution!



Use Self-Talk!

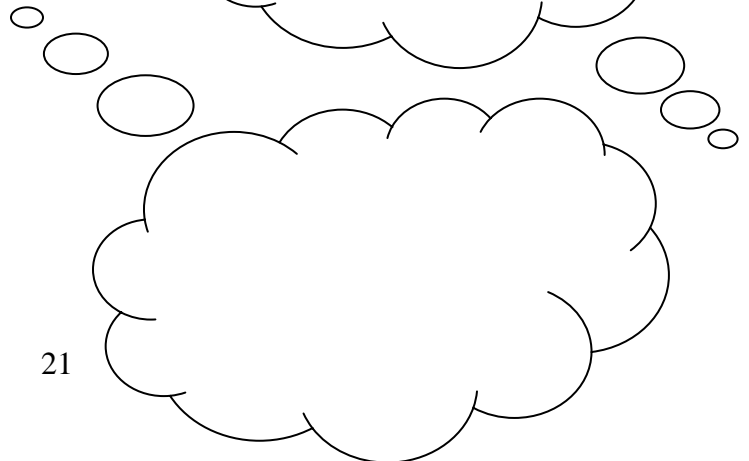
When you feel overwhelmed, you think unhelpful thoughts inside your head. Unhelpful thoughts make you feel worse!

I can't do this.



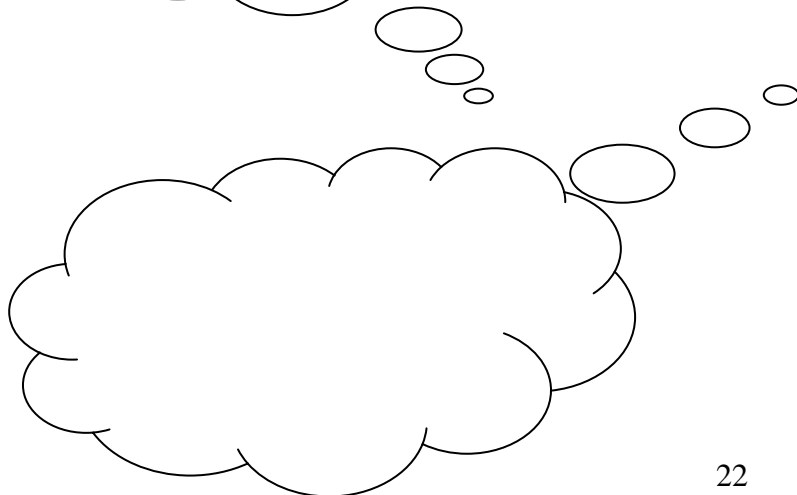
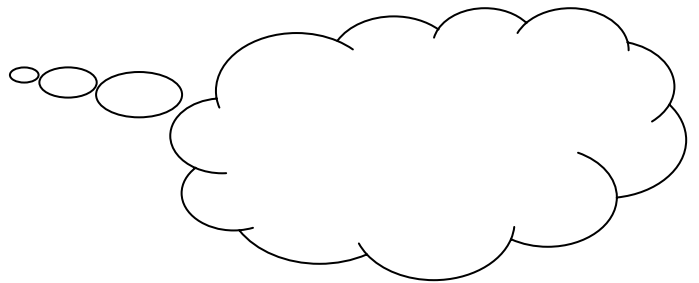
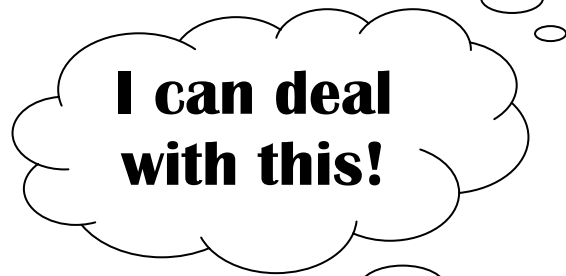
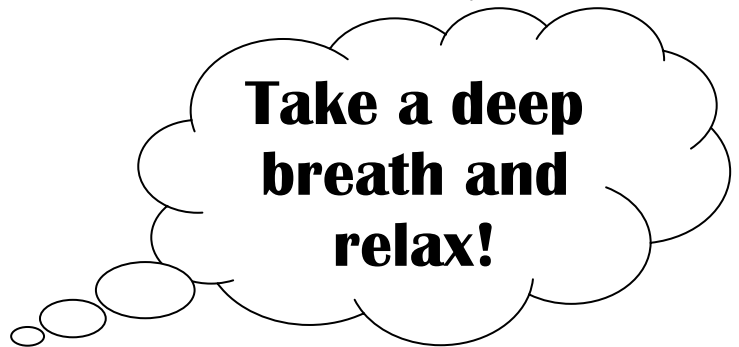
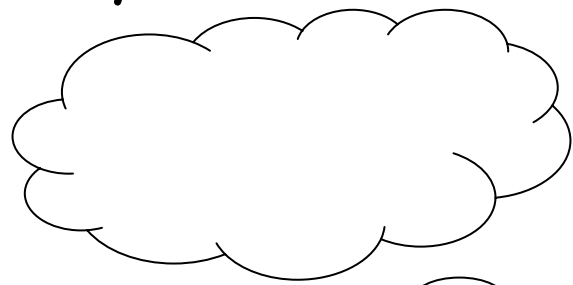
This is too much to handle.

I hate this.



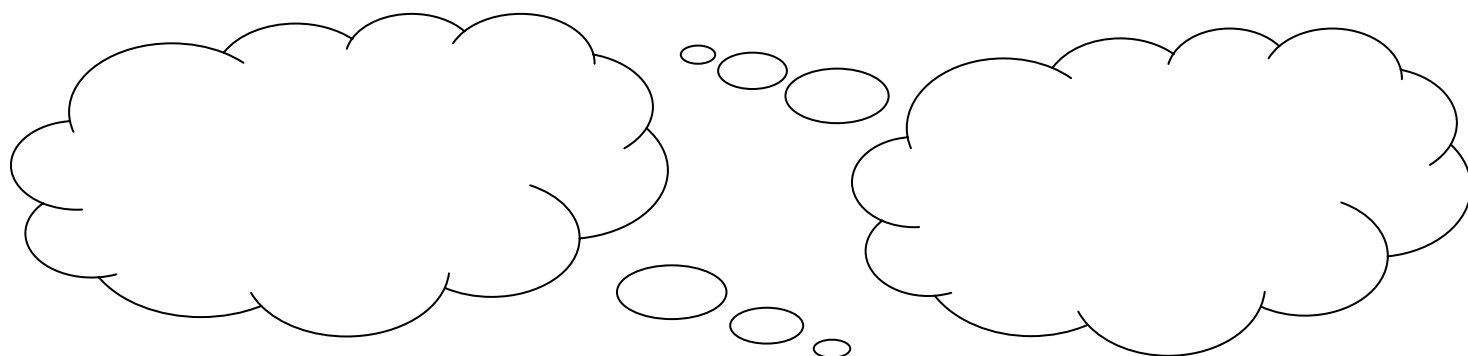
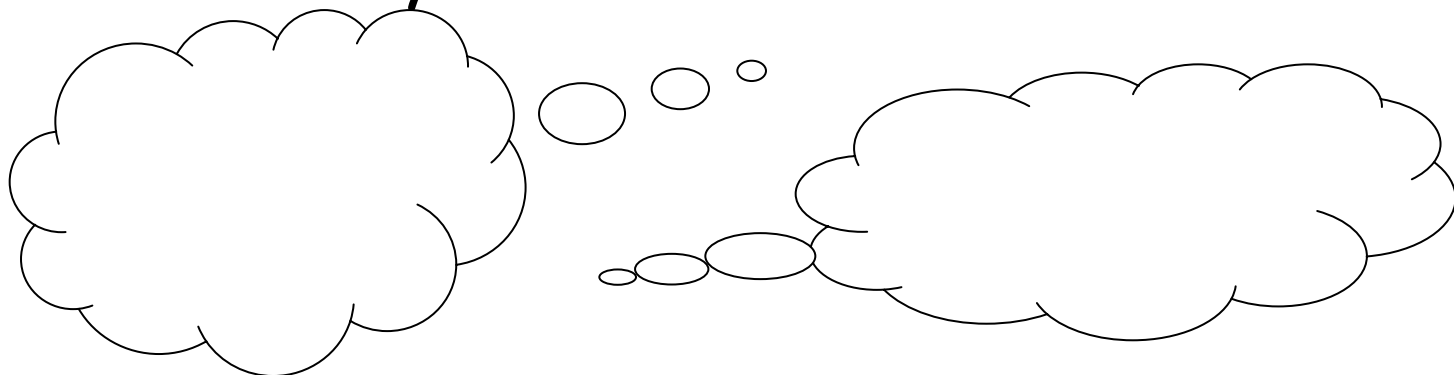
Use Self-Talk!

Instead of unhelpful thoughts, you can have thoughts that will help you feel better. Calm thoughts help you get in control. You can make yourself feel better with self-talk!



Practice with Self-Talk!

You are in your least favorite class,
and you have to take a test.



Your teacher gave you an
assignment that you don't know
how to do.




Use Self-Talk!

When you get anxious, you think **unhelpful** thoughts inside your head. **Unhelpful** thoughts make you feel worse.



**I don't know
what to do.**



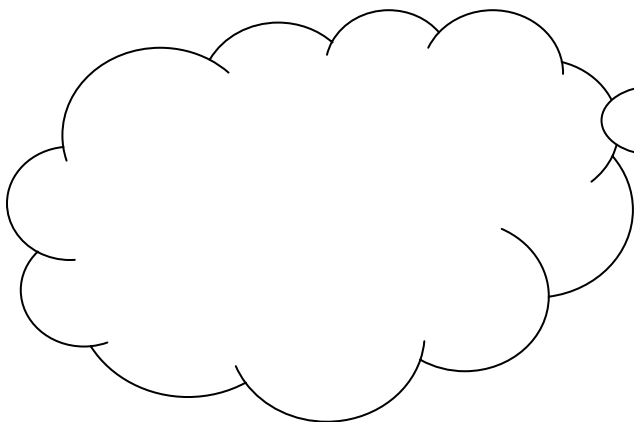
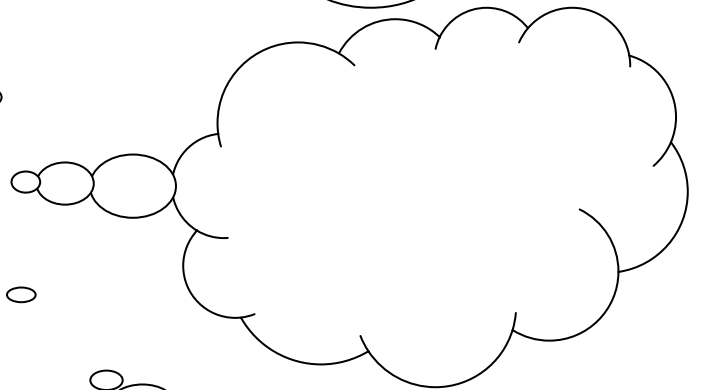
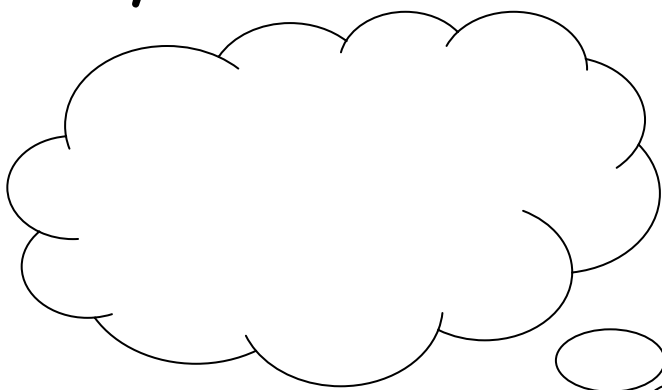
**Everyone
will laugh
at me.**



**I can't
handle
this.**

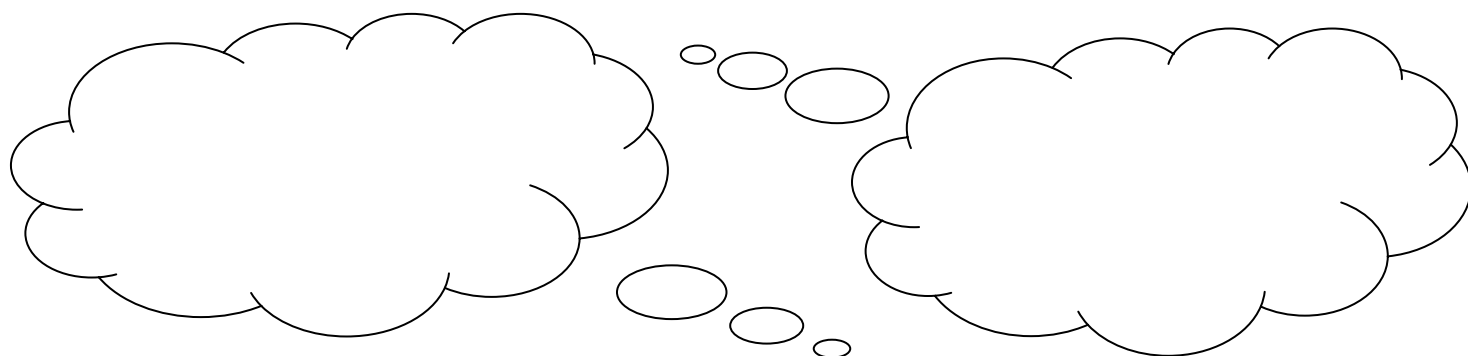
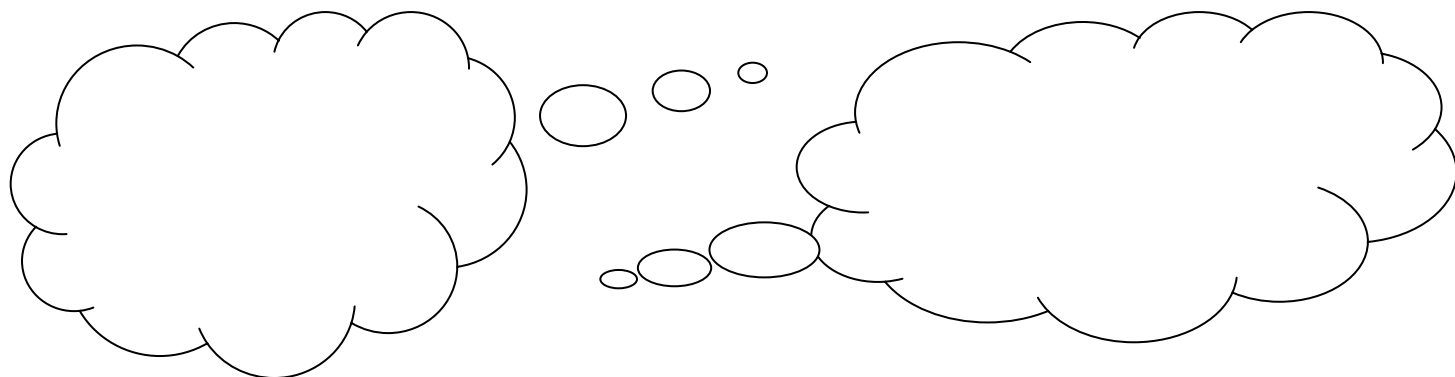
Use Self-Talk!

Instead of unhelpful thoughts, you can have thoughts that will help you to calm down. Calm thoughts help you get in control. You can make yourself feel better with self-talk!

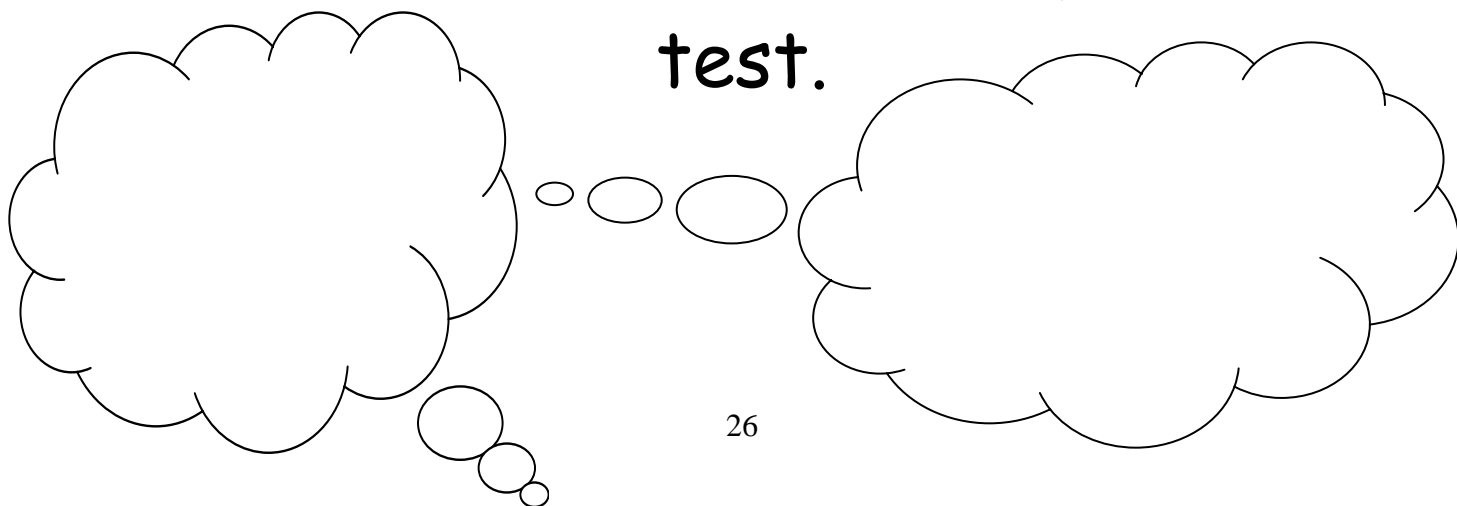


Practice with Self-Talk!

You are asked to solve a problem in front of the entire class.



You have to take a really hard test.



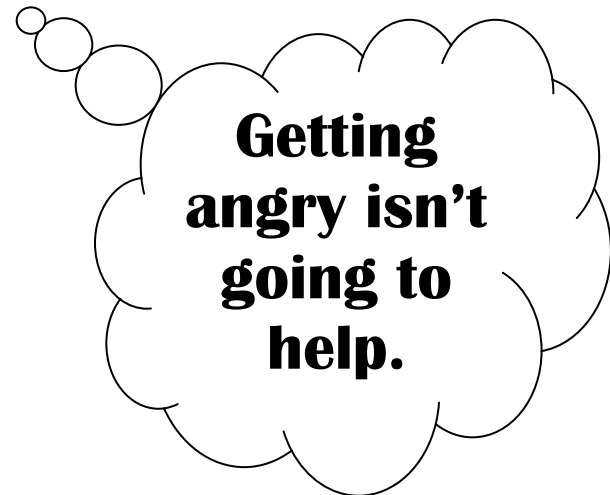
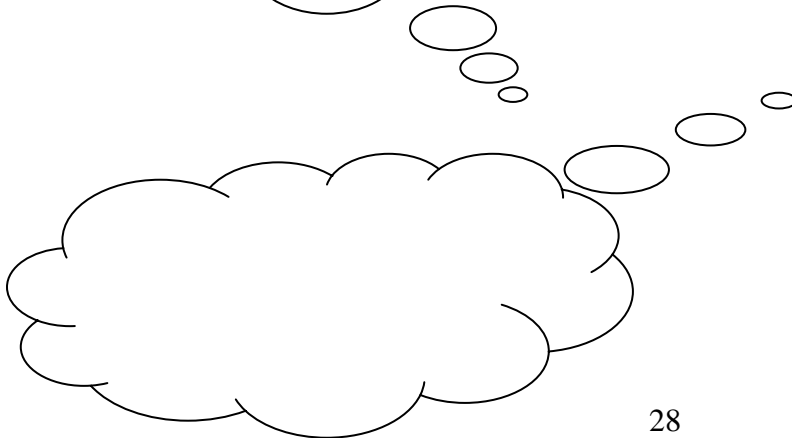
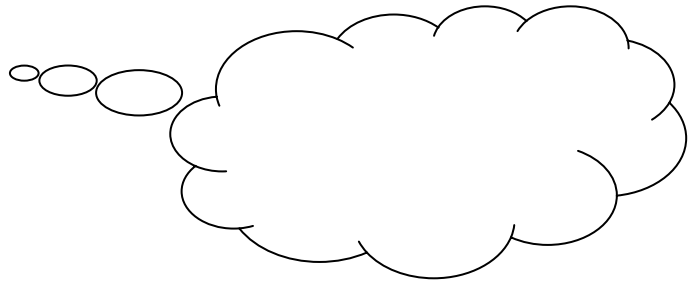
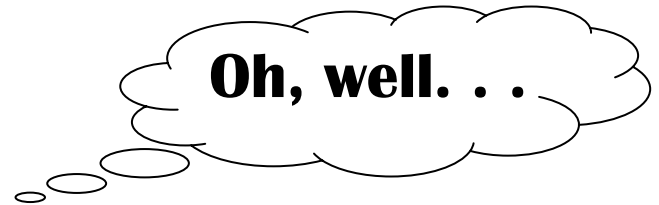
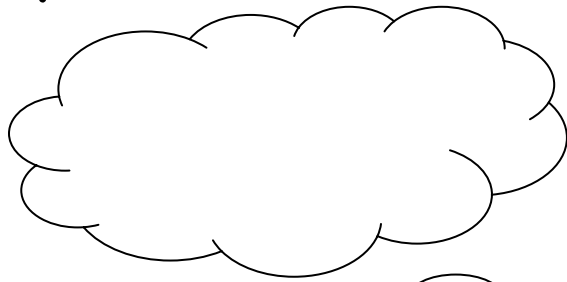
Use Self-Talk!

When you get angry, you think
angry thoughts inside your head.
ANGRY thoughts make you angrier!



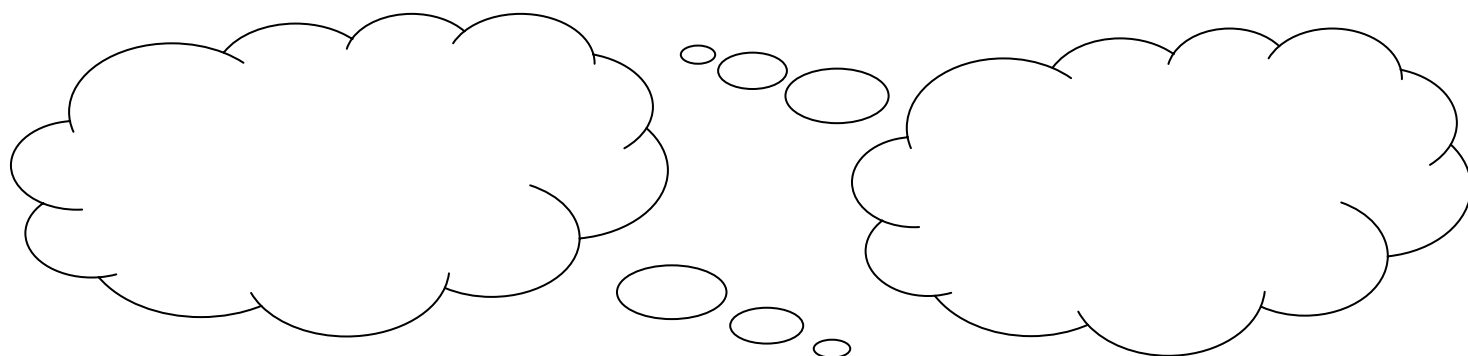
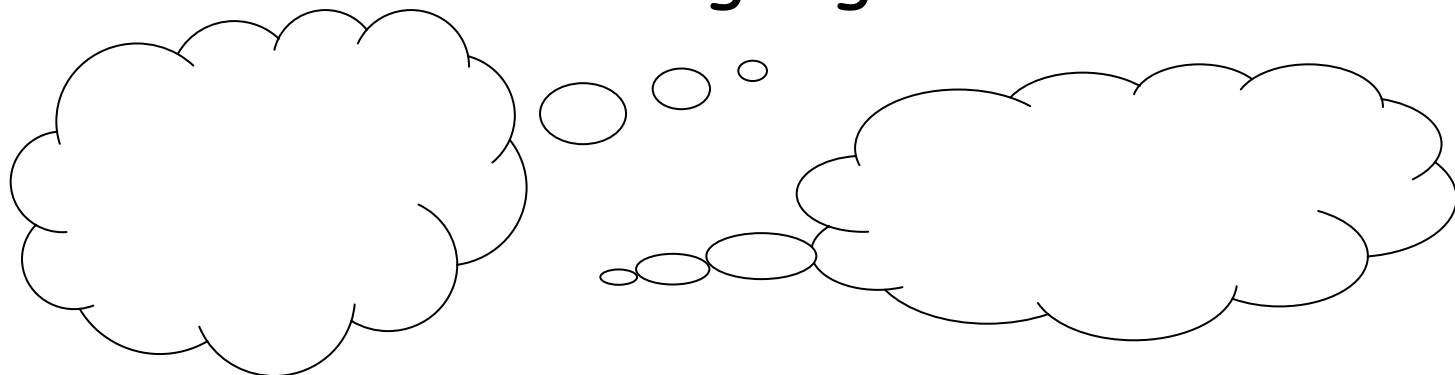
Use Self-Talk!

Instead of angry thoughts, you can have thoughts that will help you to calm down. Calm thoughts help put out your anger. You can make yourself feel better with self-talk!

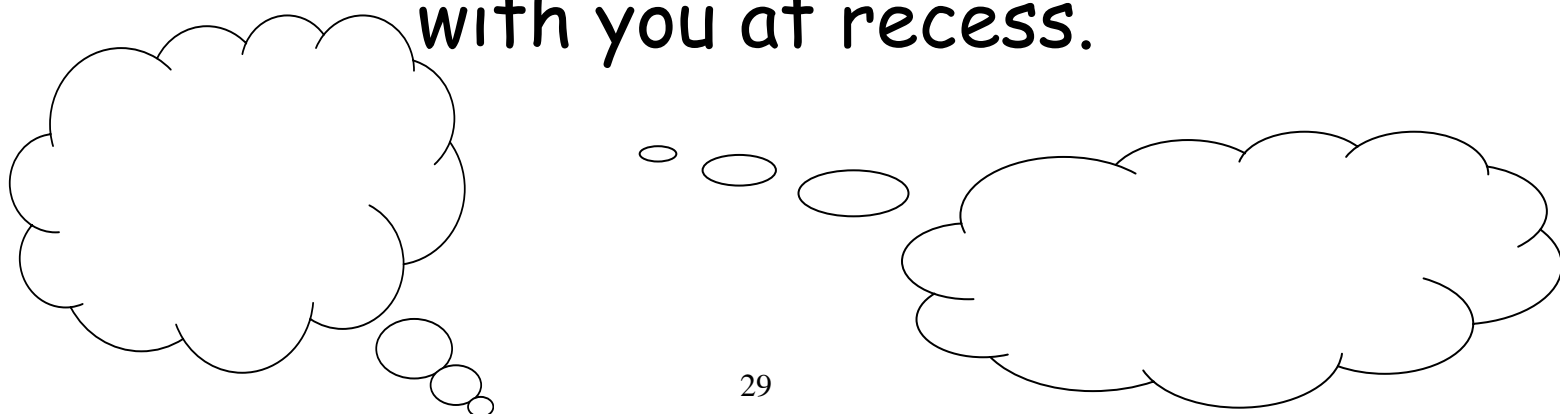


Practice with Self-Talk!

You are playing your favorite game
and losing big time.



Your best friend forgets to play
with you at recess.



Release Emotions SAFELY!

When you get overwhelmed, your entire body feels different. You feel like you have to *do* something. You need to release your emotions!

Sometimes, you release your emotions by doing something mean.



Do hurtful things.



Use mean words.

Release Emotions SAFELY!

When you get anxious, your entire body feels different. You feel like you have to *do* something. You need to release your emotions!

Sometimes, you release your emotions by doing something mean.



Do hurtful things.



Use mean words.

Release Emotions SAFELY!

When you get angry, your entire body feels different. You feel like you have to *do* something. You need to release your emotions!

Sometimes, you release your emotions by doing something mean.



Do hurtful things.



Use mean words.

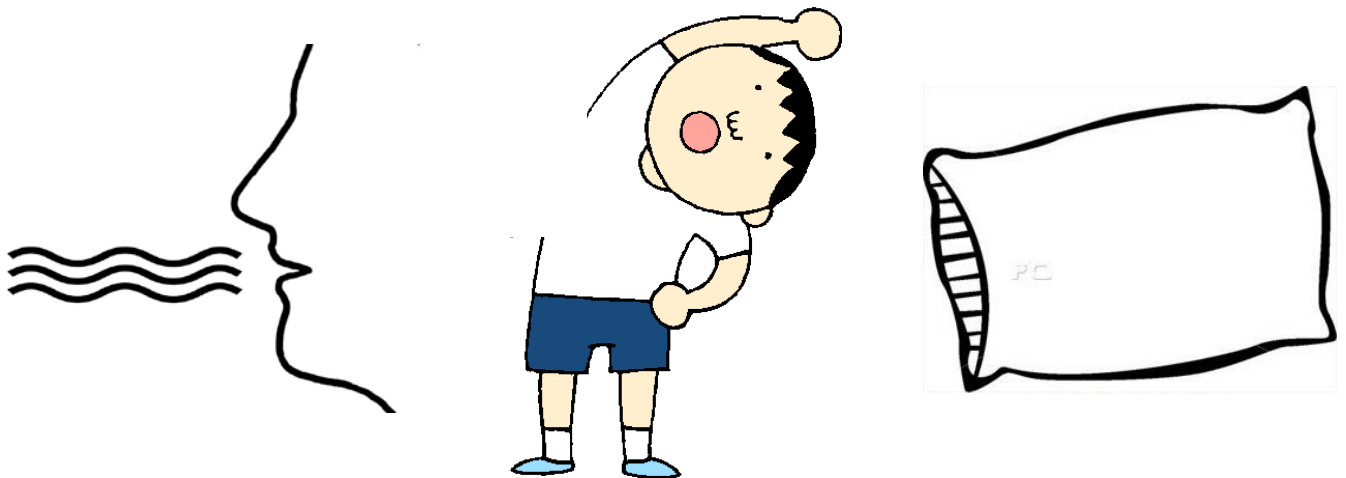
Release Emotions SAFELY!

Another way to release your emotions SAFELY is to slow down. Slowing down is relaxing.

Breathing - breathe in through your nose, count to 3, and breathe out through your nose.

Stretching - reach for the ceiling and reach for the floor.

Squeezing - grab a pillow, breathe in through your nose, and squeeze the pillow. Breathe out through your nose and relax.



Appendix E
Monitoring Use

THE COLOR WHEEL					
Date	Time	Activity			
Activity					
Lang. Arts	<u>Subject</u>	Science	Whole Grp.	<u>Instruction</u>	Indep. Wk.
History	Math	Art	Group Wk.	Small Grp.	Test/Quiz
Free Time	P.E. Elective	Library		Partners	

