

Stress balls activity

Key Learning

To develop emotional literacy and promote self regulation.

What You Need

Deflated Balloons

Spoon

Scissors

Permanent Markers

Filling (cornstarch, sand, rice, icing sugar, etc.)

No. of children

1 or more

Preparation Activities

Discuss how grief can sometimes cause us to feel more physical and emotional stress, and difficult feelings such as anger, that can be intense or hard to manage. Having a physical outlet to release these feelings can be helpful to encourage relaxation and relieve tension. Invite the child(ren) to make balloon stress balls. Balloon stress balls are small and can be kept in your pocket, in your desk at school or anywhere else and used as a way to help you to feel more relaxed and more focused.

Instructions

How to Play

1. Have each child choose a buddy in the group to work with on their stress ball. If you are conducting a one on one support session, take turns helping each other instead.
2. Ask each child to choose two balloons in colours that match their mood. Invite them to share their mood and the colour(s) they chose if they are comfortable doing so.
3. Instruct the child(ren) to stretch out their balloons – they can do this with their hands or by blowing them up a little. To make the stress balls the balloons need to be deflated so be sure to let all of the air out.
4. Ask the child(ren) to cut the 'neck' (long part) off of the first balloon – discard the 'neck'. Repeat this step for the second balloon as well. Provide assistance where necessary.
5. Instruct the child(ren) to have their helping buddy (which may be you) stretch and hold open the hole of the balloon with both hands while the child spoons in the filling. Fill it as full as possible for the best stress ball - the balloon will continue to stretch as it is filled.
6. Explain that they will now use the second balloon to keep the sand (or whatever filling you are using) from spilling out. Stretch the second balloon over the top of the filled

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balloon to cover the cut hole, almost like a swimming cap or hat. The child(ren) might need help from their buddy for this part.

7. Provide the child(ren) with permanent markers to decorate their stress ball with words, facial expressions, or other designs. Emphasize that they need to let the marker dry before playing with it, or else they will get marker all over their hands.
8. Share stress ball creations and discuss other ways of working with difficult feelings like anger or stress. (Stress balls can be used for juggling!)

Discussion and Variations

Discussion

Reflect

What makes you feel stressed, worried or upset?

Connect

What do you feel like doing when you get upset? Some people yell, hit or break things when they are mad – do you ever feel like doing these things when you are upset?

Apply

It is okay to feel how ever you are feeling, but it is not okay to act on those feelings in ways that hurt yourself or others. Sometimes it helps to get your stressed or angry energy out by doing something physical, like squeezing or pounding a stress ball. What are some other safe and healthy things you can do to release anger and calm down when you are really upset? (Make a list together) If it is too difficult for kids to put the second balloon over the first when it is filled with the neck cut off, you can modify the activity by leaving the neck of the first balloon intact. Use a funnel to fill the balloon and tie it off once it is filled. Then cut down the neck close to the knot before covering it with the second balloon. This will ensure that there is no spillage when putting the second balloon over the first.

This activity was provided by **Lysa Toye for *A Handbook for Volunteers: Supporting Children Grieving the Dying and Death of a Loved One*** by *The Children and Grief Network* and was reproduced here with permission. Lysa is a Psychotherapist, Social Worker and Expressive Arts Therapist employed at the Hospital for Sick Children and the Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre, with a private psychotherapy practice working with adults and youth living with grief and trauma.

*This activity has been adapted to the Reflect Connect Apply methodology used by **Right to Play**.*

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***Right To Play** is an international organization that uses the transformative power of sport and play to educate and empower children and youth living in adversity to overcome the effects of poverty, conflict and disease. Partnering with more than 85 First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and urban organizations across four provinces, the PLAY program is led by locally-hired Community Mentors who are trained and supported by Right To Play staff to implement regular weekly play-based programs that build and enhance essential life-skills. We would like to thank **Right To Play** for sharing the organization's experiential learning methodology (Reflect – Connect – Apply) for the activities included in this resource to support youth through their grief. To learn more, visit **Right To Play's** website or email canada@righttoplay.com.*

