



How to Create a Coping Zone

A Tool for Managing Family Stress During the
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Crisis

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While practicing social distancing during the Covid-19 crisis, family members may experience more stress than usual. One mechanism to combat stressful situations for families inside their homes would be to create a coping zone. A coping zone is an area inside a home where a family member can retreat to in times of high stress (i.e. their sibling with autism is having a hard time). It also acts as a private area where the individual can practice coping techniques and self-care when a stressful situation arises. Together with your family, use the 6 steps below to individualize a coping zone inside your home, and decide together how and when they could best utilize this space as a coping skill in stressful situations.

Step #1

Begin a discussion with your family in order to understand how each member of your family views their stress and how they are currently responding to stressful situations inside your home. Brainstorm what kind of coping strategies do not work, and which ones have worked well in the past. Explain the purpose of a coping zone.

Step #2

Next, hold a brainstorming discussion to determine an area within the home that can be labeled as a coping zone. This area should be a safe space, in a spot that is ideally free from high traffic/activity.

Step #3

With the help of each family member in the household, start to fill the space with things that can be used to help cope high intensity feelings. Some items you may consider including:

- Soft pillow or blanket for resting
- Bottle of water and a snack
- Stress ball, fidget spinner, or puzzle to keep their hands busy
- Journal to write down thoughts or emotions in the moment
- Book, stickers, or coloring
- Headphones or an instrument to make music
- Slime/smelling box



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Step #4

Create a list of coping strategies that should be used when inside the coping zone. Think about posting this list inside the coping zone as a reminder to use in a stressful moment.

- Count back form 10
- STAR Breathing
- Listening to music
- Reading
- Playing a game
- Journaling
- Drawing out your feelings
- Yoga
- Positive self-talk

Step #5

Name your coping zone! Have this process be a fun, creative, and collective family activity. Examples: Zen Den, Safe Space, Comfy Corner or Hot Spot.

Step #6

Lastly, have a family discussion regarding example situations when the coping zone should be used. How will your family determine when it is time to exit the coping zone? Decide together how many minutes should go by before a parent checks in on them to offer support. Talk about how exactly the person utilizing the coping zone will communicate to their parent that their stress level has been lowered.

