

#10



Coping Skills—Part 1

Coping skills are go-to behaviors we employ to manage challenging moments. While some coping behaviors may have been helpful in the past, they may no longer be needed in the present and may even lead to additional stressors.



Each Saprea Support Group meeting begins with 'Group Leader A' reading the script while participants follow along. The script will be the same for every group meeting. **To find the script, visit saprea.org/support-groups.** Below are the additional meeting materials for this course.



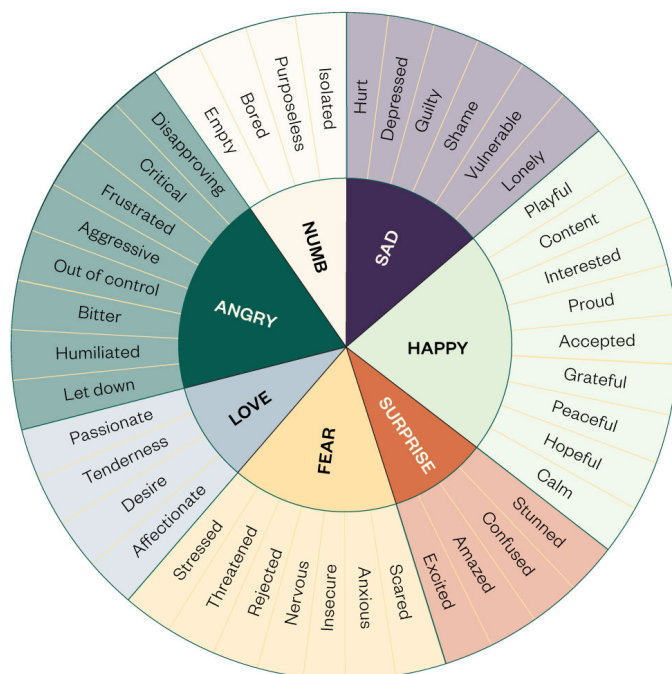
To watch the intro video for this lesson, scan the QR code or go to <https://vimeo.com/showcase/10293739>.

Group Activity

EMOTION WHEEL

Oftentimes, the coping skills we use are driven by our emotions. **Every emotion provides insight on how we feel, as well as what we need.** But how can we be more aware of what emotions we are experiencing in any given moment?

A tool that many survivors find helpful is an Emotion Wheel. **This wheel helps you to identify and better understand the emotion (or emotions) you're experiencing.** Identifying our emotions is an important step in recognizing what our needs are and what behaviors we can employ to fulfill those needs. Once you understand the emotions that arise for you in certain situations—such as when you feel pushed toward the edge of your window of tolerance—you can take steps to tend to your emotional needs with helpful coping skills.



Note: The Emotion Wheel doesn't only have to be used for understanding triggers and emotional needs. You can also use this wheel to identify whatever you may be feeling in any given moment—pleasant or unpleasant, painful or enjoyable.

ACTIVITY STEPS

01 Using the emotion wheel, **identify a difficult emotion that you've experienced recently.** Start by looking at the middle of the wheel to identify the core emotion you felt during that experience. Were you angry? Afraid? Sad? Numb? What did you experience physically? Trembling hands? A rush of heat to your face? A heavy weight in your stomach?.

02 From there, move to the outer part of the wheel and **observe the feelings associated with that emotion. Don't necessarily look for an emotion.** Rather, take note of which emotions resonate with you. You aren't trying to "fix" or change your emotions, only become more aware of them.

03 Now, based on the emotion(s) you've identified, **what was your need in that moment or situation?** For instance, if you were experiencing feelings of rejection, then perhaps what you needed most was acceptance and belonging. Or, if you were feeling shame, your emotional need may have been self-compassion and curiosity.

For more examples, to the side is a list of common emotional needs that survivors of child sexual abuse may experience. If one of these examples resonates with you, we encourage you to write it down, along with a suggested activity you could try to help tend to that need in the future.

04 **Reflect and consider repeating these steps in the future.** As you return to the emotion wheel again and again, it will become easier for you to:

- Identify the emotions you commonly experience.
- Assess what need(s) you have in response to those emotions.
- Choose an activity that will help you tend to that emotional need.

Over time and with consistent practice, these intentional choices can become go-to coping skills you employ again and again.

Emotional Needs and Suggested Activities

Self-Compassion and Curiosity

- Challenge a shameful/unhelpful thought with a Mindfulness exercise.
- Imagine a friend in your situation and write a compassionate note to them.

Safety and Support

- Practice the butterfly hug or another grounding exercise.
- Set or brainstorm a boundary.

Hope

- Recite positive affirmations.
- Write a message from your future self.

Physical Movement

- Try progressive muscle relaxation or stretching.
- Go for a short walk outside while observing all your body has allowed you to accomplish today.

Acceptance and Belonging

- Attend a support group.
- Express your thoughts and feelings to a person you trust.

Emotion(s) I Experienced Recently

Fear. My stomach knotted up and I couldn't catch my breath.

Other Feelings

I felt threatened and anxious

Emotional Need

I needed to feel safe and supported

Coping Activity

Practice paced breathing as I snuggle with my dog

Grounding Exercise

BUTTERFLY HUG

The butterfly hug—sometimes referred to as the “self-love hug”—is an example of sensory grounding involving touch. It is also a self-soothing technique you can use any time you’re feeling stressed, anxious, or triggered.

Activity Steps

- 01** Get into a comfortable position, either sitting up or lying down.
- 02** Cross your arms over your chest and rest the tips of your fingers on your collarbone, shoulders, or arms.
- 03** Next, gently tap your arms, alternating sides. As you do so, breathe in and out.
- 04** Continue this exercise for 2–5 minutes or as long as you need to.
- 05** When you are done, rest your hands on your lap and let your attention come back to the present moment.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

If you are interested in learning more, we invite you to explore the following articles in the Online Healing Resources section of our website at saprea.org.

- **EMOTION WHEEL**
- **UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS**
- **ADDICTIONS**

NEXT TOPIC:

#11



HEALTHY CONNECTIONS

Building healthy relationships and connections with others is central to healing from the trauma of child sexual abuse. These connections make it easier to give and receive emotional support, trust, and compassion.