Session 8 Agenda

Session Objectives
- Understand the cycle of avoidance
- Understand the rationale for facing your fears

Topics Covered
- Introduction to exposure

Manual Information
Grades 3-5
CBT and Mindfulness
Depression and Anxiety
10 Sessions

What You’ll Need
Access Session Agenda, accompanying Google Slide Deck and Resource PDFs under What You’ll Need on our website.

Review:
- Winston’s and Cleo’s Feeling Thermometers
- Cycle of Avoidance

Print:
- Feelings Thermometer
- Situations I Avoid

Print or prepare to display:
- Winston’s and Cleo’s Feeling Thermometers
- Group Rewards Tracker
- How Am I Feeling?
- CBT Model

Prepare to bring:
- Coping Skills Toolbox (to add to)
- Group folders

Session Overview
1. Check-In
2. Review and Session Preview
3. Avoidance
4. Facing Fears
5. Coping Skill Practice
6. Coping Skills Toolbox, Group Rewards Tracker, and Wrap-Up
7. Suggestions for Virtual Adaptation
Check-In  
(10 minutes)

Do: Display How Am I Feeling?

• Hand out markers and Feelings Thermometers to group members as they arrive and ask them to fill their thermometers out as they wait for the group to start. Ask how they are feeling right now, and how big or small their feelings are.

• Remind group members that there are different intensities of our feelings. Sometimes we feel a little sad and sometimes we feel a big amount of sadness. There are no right or wrong feelings. Everyone can have different feelings and different sizes of feelings.

• Share how Winston and Cleo are feeling today by posting up or displaying a filled-in Winston’s and Cleo’s Feelings Thermometers worksheet for the group.

Say: “In our last group sessions we learned how to identify and challenge our automatic negative thoughts (ANTs). We learned how our ANTs can cause us to have negative feelings like worry, anger, and sadness. We learned that we can use a few questions to help us come up with more kind or helpful coping thoughts, and that these coping thoughts can help improve our moods.”

Do: For review, display Winston and Cleo Practice Coping Thoughts and discuss ANTs and coping thoughts for each scenario.

Leader tip: Use Winston’s and Cleo’s thermometers to help group members learn new feeling words and understand how the intensity of a feeling can vary. You can use current school and community situations for examples to help students connect with their feelings.

Review and Session Preview  
(5 minutes)

Do: Project the CBT Model (think-feel-do cycle), or draw it on the board.

Say: “Last week, we learned that what we do is based on what we feel and what we think. When we feel sad and angry, we sometimes don’t want to do anything. We learned that getting up and doing physical activities, even when we don’t feel like it, can help improve our mood.”

Do: Check in to see if anyone completed their Get Moving Calendar.

Do: Preview agenda for the day.

Say: “Today we will continue talking about behaviors and how they impact the way we think and feel. Specifically, we are going to talk about our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when we are feeling nervous and anxious. We all do different behaviors when we are trying to cope with high levels of nervousness. Some of us may act out and yell (fight), some of us
may become very quiet and try not to be noticed (freeze), and some of us may purposely leave the situation or run away (flight). These behaviors are helpful when we really need to protect ourselves – but we are going to talk about situations when these avoidance behaviors are not helpful and when facing what is causing our fear can actually help us.”

Cycle of Avoidance

(10 minutes)

**Explain:** Today we are going to talk about a behavior called avoidance. What does it mean to avoid? Avoidance is the act of staying away from, or not doing, something.

- We especially avoid situations that cause us fear. When we are scared, we experience all those uncomfortable feelings of anxiety we learned about: our heart races, our stomach or head hurts, and we might sweat or start to shake. When we avoid, those feelings go away, and we feel better.
- For example, when someone is afraid of the dark, they might avoid the dark by always keeping the light on. Or, if someone is scared to sleep alone in their bedroom, they might avoid being alone by sleeping with their parents or siblings.
- When something is actually dangerous, avoidance can be helpful, like when we turn down a stranger who offers us a ride, avoid walking by ourselves down the street at night, or move away from a wild animal we see in the woods.
- When we avoid situations that are not dangerous, avoidance actually makes our fears stronger and makes life harder than it needs to be. For example, what happens if we avoid going to the dentist, doing our schoolwork, or making new friends?

**Ask:** “What are some situations that make you feel nervous, stressed, worried, or scared?”

**Do:** Distribute the **Situations I Avoid** handout. Group leader will read examples out loud, normalize them as common fears, and ask group members to think about whether they avoid any of those situations.

**Ask:** “What happens if we keep avoiding these situations we want to do or need to do?”

**Explain:** The problem doesn’t go away, and often gets worse. This teaches us that we have to avoid things in order to handle things, and our lives get more restricted over time. For example:

- What happens if we continue avoiding talking to people, but we want to make friends?
- What happens if we avoid going to the dentist, but we know we need to go to avoid cavities?
- What happens if we never try a new sport because we are nervous we won’t be good at it and people will make fun of us?
Facing Fears

(20 minutes)

**Ask:** “When and why should we face our fears?”

**Say:**

- “We should face our fears when the thing we are afraid of is something we need to do or want to do. Examples of these situations include: needing to get a shot but being afraid to go to the doctor, wanting to make new friends but being too afraid to talk to anyone, or wanting to stay the night at someone’s house but feeling too nervous because we don’t know what it will be like.”

- “The best way to stop our fears from getting worse and controlling us is to face them and stop avoiding these situations we want to be able to encounter. The fear may not go away completely, but we can learn to do the things we want to do and need to do safely even when feeling afraid. It is ok to feel nervous and afraid. These feelings will not harm us. And when we face what makes us nervous, it becomes less and less scary each time we try it.”

**Ask:** So how can we practice doing the things that make us feel nervous?

**Explain:** To face our fears, we can take our biggest fear and break it into smaller, more manageable challenges.

- For example, Cleo is afraid to swim. She avoids going into the water or even getting wet in the rain. She wants to hang out with her friends this summer, but they spend most of their time at the beach swimming.

**Ask:** What are some things she can do to start getting more familiar with the water? (e.g., dip her paws in water, wade out with a life jacket, etc.)

**Do:** On a white board or piece of poster paper, write down group members’ ideas to help Cleo get used to being in the water.

**Say:** “These are all great suggestions. We are now going to help Cleo make a list of the steps she can practice to help her feel more comfortable with the water and learn to swim.”

**Explain:** A great way to do this is to build a list of steps she can practice to reach her goal. We can do this by illustrating the steps to look like a ladder. We will call it a fear ladder. The first step is the easiest, and then Cleo will work her way up each step to accomplish her goal of learning to swim.

- Fear ladders help us practice small versions of our fears over and over. Then, we gradually move up the ladder practicing bigger versions of our fear until we reach our goal.

- Fear ladders are not easy! We need to—and will—feel nervous and scared at first. But the more we practice facing our fears, the less scary the situation becomes, the more confident we feel, and the better our lives can be.

**Do:** Hand out [Cleo’s Fear Ladder](#). Take a look at the fear Cleo wants to overcome—going swimming with her friends—and the fear ladder she created to help her reach her goal.
Explain that the easiest challenge is at the bottom of the ladder, and the hardest is at the top. Help Cleo by brainstorming as a group additional steps she could take to face her fear. If the group questions the true danger in this situation, you can clarify that there is a lifeguard on duty. If the group gets stuck, try asking them, “What would make it easier for her? What would make it harder?” Some example steps the group might add could include:

- Wade into the lake up to her waist without a life jacket
- Practice swimming in the shallow end of a pool while wearing a life jacket
- Practice swimming in the shallow end of a pool without a life jacket
- Practice swimming in the deep end of a pool wearing a life jacket
- Practice swimming in the deep end of a pool without a life jacket
- Wade into the lake wearing a life jacket and pick up her legs so she can’t feel the sand
- Wade into the lake until she can’t touch the ground while wearing a life jacket

Coping Skill Practice

(5 minutes)

**Say:** “We did a lot of talking today, so we are going to end our lesson with learning a coping skill that gets us moving and helps us to think and feel in the present moment.”

**Do:** **Mindful Heartbeat Activity:** Direct students to place fingers or hands where they can find their pulse (e.g., side of neck, over heart, inside wrist).

**Say:**

- You may not find your pulse at first
- Think about how you are feeling inside. Take 3 deep breaths
- Spread out at an arms’ width apart
- Jump up and down ten times or run in place.
- Find your pulse again and notice any changes.
- Focus on breath until your pulse slows again.

**Leader tip:** Modify as needed for all levels of physical ability. For example, to help students increase heart rate while seated, consider only doing the overhead arm raises.

Coping Skill Toolbox, Group Rewards Tracker, and Wrap-Up

(2 minutes)

**Do:** **Coping Skill Toolbox** and **Group Rewards Tracker**
• Ask students to circle “Notice your body” or write “Find heartbeat” in their Coping Skill Toolboxes. Let the group know they have earned a pawprint for this mindful coping skill practice! They can also write down a specific activity they want to try to do but have been too nervous to try in the past.

• Add the pawprints to the Group Rewards Tracker. Add a bonus pawprint if everyone followed the group rules.

Say: “A fear ladder is a list of safe but hard steps we can take to reach a goal that is scary. Climbing our ladder and accomplishing our goal, even when we’re afraid, helps us build confidence and do things we never thought we could do. Next week we will look closer at what makes us nervous and fearful; and learn how to build our own fear ladder so we can face our fears like Cleo!”
Suggestions for Virtual Adaptation

Use the suggestions below to modify this lesson for virtual formats.

- Consider using the accompanying TRAILS slide deck to move through the session with more graphics and interactivity.
- Use the screen share function to share the following handouts and worksheets: How Am I Feeling?, Feelings Thermometer, Winston’s and Cleo’s Feelings Thermometers (with fillable form completed prior to sharing), CBT Model, Coping Skills Toolbox, Situations I Avoid, Cleo’s Fear Ladder, and Group Rewards Tracker (fill in points students earned).
- To complete the mindful heartbeat activity, ask students to find a place where there is enough space to get active according to their ability.
Session 8:
Leader Reflection

Topics Covered
- Introduction to exposure

Manual Information
Grades 3-5
CBT and Mindfulness
Depression and Anxiety
10 Sessions

Cycle of Avoidance
- Discussed avoidant behaviors and how avoiding our fears makes us feel better in the short term but does not make the fears go away

Facing Fears
- Reviewed how facing our fears (exposure) can help overcome avoidance
- Helped group members understand how to build a fear ladder

Group Skills
- Spent 20-30 minutes preparing for the group, reviewing activities, becoming familiar with content, resources to share, videos, activities, etc.
- Set an agenda at the beginning of the session
- Used materials from the TRAILS website, including videos or worksheets, while working with group members
- Protected time for group and stayed focused throughout did not multi-task
- Actively participated in skill practice (e.g., activities, coping skills, sharing of feelings, etc.)
- Encouraged group member participation, particularly among those who are generally quiet
- Created a warm, inviting, respectful space for the group
- Kept the group on task related to content and did not go into unrelated topics
- Provided examples that were relevant to the group