



THE MINISTRY OF PARENTING

Self-Soothe Box

A self-soothe box, also known as a self-harm coping box, emergency box, or safety box, (among myriad other names), is exactly what it sounds like: a box in which a young person keeps items that will help them cope with self-harm urges or impulses and potential self-harm relapses. The box contains things that ground them, makes them feel more relaxed and reduce symptoms of panic, anxiety, emotional distress, or low mood. Things that matter to them.

Not every individual is the same and the contents of the boxes should all be very different.

When should someone use a self-soothe box?

When a young person is starting to feel anxious, angry, sad, or distressed they can reach for their self-soothe box and find something to distract themselves. It helps someone to be mindful in the moment and focus themselves on something other than the emotion that is overwhelming them.

What goes into a self-soothe box?

It's good to create a self-soothe box when the young person is feeling in a positive space and calm. For some added creativity, the young person can decorate their box for the self-soothe kit.

It is recommended when thinking about what to include in the box, to start with items that stimulate the five senses: vision, smell, sound, taste and touch.

Vision

Ideas could include family photos, pictures of favourite landscape, postcards, anything that stimulates good positive memory. If the young person doesn't have favourite pictures, they could keep a nostalgic item that encourages a similar thought process such as an old blanket or favourite teddy bear.

They can include a colouring book and pack of colouring pencils; this is a low stimulus activity that requires the young person to concentrate. An alternative way to use this item is to colour with their non-dominant hand, this is an excellent strategy for focussing their mind and bringing someone into a mindful space.

Smell

This can be an essential oil, candle, diffuser, perfume, or something that the young person might associate with positive memories. Typically, the sense of smell is closely linked with memory, more so than any of our other senses.

Note: For young people who use burning as a self-harm strategy – don't include the candle!

Sound

This can be personalised depending on what kind of music the young person prefers. Some people found white sound quite relaxing to have in the background. Others enjoy including relaxation or meditation CD/app, animal songs or audio books. It's a good idea to create a positive song playlist or to download positive songs on their phone so that they do not have to go and search for it when they are struggling.

Taste

Can include strong mints, chocolate, chewing gum and sour sweets. Herbal teas and calming teas also help people to relax. They could also keep a small bottle of water in a self-soothe box, which works as a gentle reminder to stay hydrated. Drinking water is an effective way of reducing symptoms of panic as the regular sipping is a good way to keep a steady rhythm to your breathing.

Touch

Include something that the young person can touch as this encourages muscles to relax. Therapy putty, stress balls, spiky balls, and squishy balls are great for this. When we are experiencing a high level of emotions, our bodies automatically prepare reflective responses. Therefore, you need to override the automatic responses by doing exercises to relax your muscles. Others might enjoy including different hand creams, feather, or soft and fluffy fabrics to hold.

What else could help when we add?

- A booklet of positive quotes from films, books, or a favourite poem.
- A bath bomb or a favourite bubble bath, this can act as a reminder to take some time for themselves and enjoy a soothing bath.
- Word searches, word games or sudoku
- Knitting or crocheting.
- Collaging
- A supportive and encouraging letter to themselves, which includes advice or tips for getting through a crisis. Seal it in an envelope and put it in the sensory box. They can then read this when they are feeling low or distressed and it can serve as a reminder for the things that help them in a crisis.

Self-soothe boxes can be versatile, you can make smaller boxes for a young person to take with them to school, on holiday, in the car or when on a sleepover.