Five responses to stress

A letter to CYACs

This youth-created tool was designed to support children and youth in understanding the five main stress responses and learning safe, effective strategies to manage them. It reflects both clinical best practices and the lived experience of children and youth who have navigated trauma and healing.

The information is accurate, developmentally appropriate, and grounded in approaches that are safe and potentially effective for a wide range of children and youth. The strategies included can be used independently or incorporated into therapeutic work, making the tool flexible and accessible.

This tool has significant utility and may be valuable in several contexts, including:

1. Any setting where children and youth may benefit from supportive, self-guided tools in collabroation with safe adults
2. CYAC waiting rooms, reception areas, or tool stations
3. Clinical sessions with therapists, psychologists, or mental health clinicians
4. Schools, such as counselling spaces, wellness rooms, or resource centres
5. Victim support programs, Child Life services, and trauma-informed school or community staff

Our hope is that this youth-created tool not only offers practical strategies but also helps empower children and youth by normalizing their responses and providing tools they can rely on in everyday life.

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Youth Rights Advisors

The development of the *Five Responses to Stress* is the first tangible tool created and led entirely by the Youth Rights Advisors. We set a priority for our first tool to focus on mental health and coping strategies that are specifically child-and youth-centered. As a group, we all agreed that we wish we had access to information like this earlier to build awareness in how to understand our emotions and regulate ourselves. Either existing information didn't resonate, or we didn't know these resources existed.

Reflecting on our experiences with stress, we all shared the feeling that our responses felt scary or like something was wrong with us. We hope that this tool can normalize these feelings for other children and youth.

At the Youth Rights Hub, we have a strong passion for youth self-advocacy, and we also hope this tool can support other youth in advocating for themselves. We believe that part of this self-advocacy comes from understanding yourself, your reactions, and your options. This is especially important during times when things feel overwhelming or out of control. We want to highlight the power children and youth have to regulate their emotions and better understand what they are going through.

This tool is designed to be flexible. Children and youth can use it in whatever way makes sense to them. It can be used as an educational tool for self-regulation, an advocacy tool to communicate emotions to a trusted person, or a tool to explore personal coping strategies.

We envision this tool to help children and youth manage stress and trauma responses in CYACs or other challenging environments. empowering them to better understand themselves and the power they have to regulate their emotions.