

STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUTH HANDLE TOUGH EMOTIONS: 4 Steps for Staying Calm

It is easier to think clearly, communicate with others in a healthy way, and make healthy and safe decisions when we're calm. Below are the *4 Steps for Staying Calm*. As an educator, it is important to both model these steps for staying calm, as well as teach youth how to use these steps in everyday life.

1.

Notice what your body is telling you. Then, **PAUSE!**

When you experience a strong feeling, your body sends you clues. You might feel your muscles tense up, your heart beat faster, or your hands shake. You might feel other changes, too. When you start to feel these physical clues, say to yourself: **PAUSE!** Just like when you pause a movie, you need to pause the action and words in your own life.

2.

Name what you are feeling.

Healthy communication requires that you put your feelings, or emotions, into words. Are you sad, frustrated, disappointed, nervous, jealous, angry, afraid, or something else? **Building an emotional vocabulary** helps you identify your feelings, better understand yourself, and make yourself better understood by others.

Labeling your emotions has also been shown to reduce reactivity with negative emotions in particular. This is part of the reason you tend to feel better when you talk to a friend or trusted adult about something that is upsetting you.

Know that all emotions are important. Some may be less comfortable than others, but sometimes these uncomfortable feelings (e.g., fear) help us recognize when we are in danger and need help.

3.

Choose the strategy that suits you best.

- **Take deep breaths.**
(For step-by-step instructions, click or download "Deep Breathing" in Module 4.)

- **Use positive self-talk.**
(For more information, click or download "Positive Self-Talk" in Module 4.)

- **Do something physically active or relaxing.**

- **Talk to someone you trust.**

4.

Check in with yourself.

Do you feel calmer and are you thinking more clearly? If not, you may need to try a different calming strategy. It also may be time to talk to someone you trust.