

### Once Upon Our Time Capsule – Educator & Group Leader Guide

The past year has been incredibly challenging for kids and adults alike. There are many things that have happened that we might prefer to leave behind. At the same time, children, families, and communities have shown enormous strength and resilience in the face of great difficulty. The Once Upon Our Time Capsule is an opportunity for you to help your students tell their stories and process their feelings, both comfortable and uncomfortable, about the past year.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified the presence of safe, stable, and nurturing adults as the most important protective factor for children and young people facing stress and adversity. Educators play a unique role in helping children make sense of frightening, upsetting, or overwhelming experiences. Center for Childhood Resilience believes that focusing on five key principles can help children cope with a range of stressors, including those of the past year. Please see below for tips on how to use these principles to guide your students through the Once Upon Our Time Capsule activity.



**Creating a Safe Environment:** Introduce the activity by reassuring your students that this is a safe space to express any feelings they may have. Part of creating safety is helping students understand that different people may experience and express feelings differently, and that

these differences are important to respect. Some children may be interested in working with or alongside peers to complete the activity, while others may prefer to work independently or with a higher level of guidance from an adult. Be flexible with students about where they complete the exercise in your classroom, allowing them to choose a location that feels safe for them. Support students' expression of both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings by using reflective listening. Summarize what your students say and normalize their feelings by saying that their feelings make sense. Reassure students that all feelings are okay to feel and express!

**Building Relationships & Connectedness:** Remind your students of the people they have connected with over the past year. How have their relationships grown with parents, siblings, neighbors, extended family, and their larger community? How did they stay connected with people they couldn't safely see in person? Acknowledge feelings of regret, sadness, or grief over relationships that have been difficult to sustain or loved ones your students have lost.

**Supporting & Teaching Emotion Regulation:** Help your students label how their experiences made them feel by asking them to identify feeling words, like "scared" or "excited". Some younger children benefit from pointing to pictures of faces expressing different feelings, and then learning to connect them with feeling words. With older children, you can take their "temperature" using a feelings thermometer, by asking them to assign a number to the intensity of their feeling. If a student expresses a strong feeling, acknowledge it, and offer them strategies to help them calm down. Take some deep breaths together, get a glass of water, squeeze a stress ball, or take a short walk. Sometimes taking a break from the activity and inviting your student to come back to it later (or take it home to complete with another trusted adult) can help.

**Incorporating Culture & Equity:** Invite your students to think about how each of their families' cultural strengths, traditions, and connections helped them through a tough year. Recognize and celebrate the ways in which people from different cultural backgrounds showed resilience in the face of great challenge. Help your students process the fact that some people and communities are treated unfairly because of their cultural or personal identities and empower them to take a stand against injustices like these. Your students may have a lot of questions about race and racism, especially related to recent events that have led to civil unrest. When these topics come up, listen nonjudgmentally and provide a safe space for students to respectfully talk and share their thoughts and feelings with each other.

**Engaging in Self-Care:** It is important to process your own feelings about the challenges of the past year before you are prepared to guide your students through this activity. If you don't feel ready to talk openly with your students about their feelings and experiences, consider seeking

support from a trusted friend or engaging in self-care activities that will help you cope with stress.

### **What can I do if a student becomes extremely distressed?**

Children can have intense feelings when they think about their experiences. If you become concerned because a student is extremely distressed, is unable to calm down, or has difficulty participating in the remainder of the day's activities, here are some things that you can do to support them:

1. Periodically check in with the student, acknowledge their feelings, and offer an emotion regulation strategy (see above). Spend a bit of extra time with the student, sitting next to them quietly or inviting them to be a helper.
2. Make a plan to communicate with the student's parent or caregiver at the end of the day (or sooner, if needed). Describe how the student responded to the activity so that the caregiver may continue to support their child at home.
3. If your school or program has support staff like a social worker, reach out to that person for additional guidance.

### **When a Child Needs Professional Help:**

If you notice significant changes in behavior in one of your students, communicate your concerns to their parent or caregiver so that they may follow up with a healthcare provider accordingly. The student may benefit from additional support if they are showing some of the following signs:

- Significant changes in sleeping or eating
- Persistent physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches without known physical cause
- Increased tearfulness or emotional outbursts
- Increased irritability or grumpiness
- Emergence of new fears
- Withdrawal from activities that are still available
- Isolation from family and friends
- Resistance to following health and safety guidelines
- Reluctance to return to typical activities once it is deemed safe to do so

## Once Upon Our Time Capsule – Resource List

### Children’s Books about Emotion Express & Regulation

#### Grades K-2

*The Way I Feel* by Janan S. Cain

*The Boy with the Big, Big Feelings* by Brittney Winn Lee

*Visiting Feelings* by Lauren Rubenstein

*The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld

*Sometimes I’m Bambaloo* Rachel Vail

*Breathe Like a Bear* by Kira Willey

#### Grades 3-5

*Yesterday I Had the Blues* by Jeron Ashford Frame

*Mean Soup* by Betsy Everitt

*Even Superheroes Have Bad Days* by Shelly Becker

*Moody Cow Meditates* by Kerry Maclean

*My and My Feelings* by Vanessa Green Allen

### Additional Resources for Coping During the Pandemic:

- [Center for Childhood Resilience Parent & Provider Resources for COVID-19](#)
- [NCTSN Trauma-informed School Strategies During COVID-19](#)
- [Supporting Students' Mental Health During COVID-19 from Child Mind Institute](#)
- [COVID Resources that Take Race Seriously from Embrace Race](#)

### [Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital COVID-19 Family Information & Support Line](#)

If families would like to contact a social worker, psychologist or child life specialist for information on community referrals or coping resources, they may call [312.227.4118](tel:312.227.4118) and leave a message. Calls will be returned within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.

### [Call4Calm Emotional Support Line](#)

The Illinois Department of Human Services Mental Health Division offers a free-of-charge emotional support line for Illinois residents experiencing stress and mental health issues related to COVID-19. Individuals who would like to speak with a mental health professional can text “TALK” to 5-5-2-0-2-0, or for Spanish, “HABLAR” to the same number: 5-5-2-0-2-0.