

### Once Upon Our Time Capsule – Parent & Caregiver 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 child tell their story 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. Parents and caregivers 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 child through the Once Upon Our Time Capsule activity.



**Creating a Safe Environment:** Help your child find a safe, comfortable space with few distractions where they can focus on answering the question prompts. Support their expression of both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings by using reflective listening. Summarize what

your child says and normalize their feelings by saying that their feelings make sense. Reassure your child that all feelings are okay to feel and express!

**Building Relationships & Connectedness:** Remind your child 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 child has lost.

**Supporting & Teaching Emotion Regulation:** Help your child label how their experiences made them feel by asking them to identify feeling words, like "scared" or "excited". Take their "temperature" using a feelings thermometer, by asking them to assign a number to the intensity of their feeling. Some younger children benefit from pointing to pictures of faces expressing different feelings, and then learning to connect them with feeling words. If your child expresses a strong feeling, acknowledge it, and teach them strategies to calm down. Take some deep breaths together, get a glass of water, or do some stretches. Sometimes taking a break from the activity and coming back to it later can help.

**Incorporating Culture & Equity:** Encourage your child to think about how your family's 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 as well. Help your child process the fact that some people and communities are treated unfairly because of their cultural or personal identities and empower your child to take a stand against injustices like these.

**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 child through this activity. If you don't feel ready to talk openly with your child 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 my child is feeling distressed, and the feelings don't seem to be going away?**

Children can have big feelings when they think about their experiences. If you become concerned about your child's level of distress, here are some things that you can do:

1. Talk to your child about what you notice. Also, acknowledge any feelings of worry or Distress of your own that you may have.

2. Assess what you think your child might need, and then ask them what might help (have some suggestions in mind). Your child may find it helpful to talk to a trusted adult or to engage in a mindfulness activity (i.e. progressive muscle relaxation or belly breathing).
3. Take necessary action. Reach out to your child's teacher or after school staff to see if they are noticing any changes in your child's behavior. If you think your child needs more intensive support, reach out to their health care provider, or the school social worker.

### **When To Seek Professional Help:**

Because the past year has been stressful for all of us, it can be challenging for parents and caregivers to recognize when their child's emotional distress rises to the level of concern. Remember, you know your child best. If your child shows the following signs, they may benefit from additional support:

- Significant changes in sleeping and 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 guidelines your family has established for safety
- Reluctance to return to typical activities once it is deemed safe to do so

If you notice significant changes in your child's behavior, it is important to remember you are not alone. Your pediatrician, child's teachers and school mental health professionals like social workers, counselors, or psychologists are all people with whom you can connect with to advocate for your child's needs.

## 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

### Books for Parents about Supporting Childrens’ Healthy Emotion Expression and Regulation:

*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

*Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting* by John Gottman, PhD

### Additional Resources for Coping During the Pandemic:

- [Center for Childhood Resilience Parent & Provider Resources for COVID-19](#)
- [NCTSN Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with COVID-19](#)
- [Supporting Families 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 you would like to contact a social worker, psychologist or child life specialist for information on community referrals or coping resources, you can call [312.227.4118](tel:312.227.4118) and leave a message. Your call 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.

### **CARES Crisis Line:**

If your child is experiencing a mental health crisis, please contact the CARES line at 1-800-345-9049. If you can safely transport your child, you may also visit the nearest emergency room.