



# BLACK HOLE ANALOGY

FOR USE WITH AVOIDANCE OR DISSOCIATION,  
ESPECIALLY WHEN TALKING ABOUT TRAUMA

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- This tool provides practical strategies for addressing avoidance and dissociation, as well as strategies for normalizing and coping with these symptoms.
- Appropriate for all ages; designed for children and adolescents but is easily adapted for adults
- Includes handouts and specific words to use to facilitate processing "unspeakable" things

ASHLEY FIORE, MSW, LCSW





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## PSYCHOEDUCATION

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- Introduce client to facts about black holes.
- Black holes are places in outer space that form when a star dies or runs out of energy.
- Gravity is very strong inside a black hole. Anything around a black hole gets sucked in and this makes it bigger and stronger. Gravity is so strong around a black hole that even light gets absorbed, and light is the thing that travels fastest.
- Black holes are invisible, like some trauma symptoms. Black holes are powerful, like some trauma symptoms.



# BLACK HOLE ANALOGY

## SYMPTOM SPECIFIC PSYCHOEDUCATION/ACTIVITY

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- For Dissociation: Therapists says: "Sometimes when scary things happen or when adults are scary, we protect ourselves or keep ourselves safe by going away in our mind. Other people may have memories of these events when we don't and we know we were there and we may pressure ourselves or give ourselves a hard time for not remembering. What happened may feel like a black hole."
- For Avoidance: Therapists says: "Sometimes when scary things happen, we have big feelings that are overwhelming and we try not to think about it, talk about it or have feelings about the scary things."
- Then have the client draw a picture of a black hole or pull one up on the computer or used the attached image.
- Explain: "For you the black hole is what happened because scary things were happening. The black hole is how some kids try to keep themselves safe because scary things were happening or adults were being scary. Your black hole could have different feelings, memories or experiences in it."



# BLACK HOLE ANALOGY

## NORMALIZING THE SYMPTOMS AS BEING ADAPTIVE

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- "Now what if it's not a black hole but we think of it as being an invisibility cloak or a shield to protect us and keep us safe and hidden when scary things were happening. We sometimes try to protect ourselves, by throwing the scary thing in the black hole or hiding behind the shield, hoping the scary thing will disappear. The problem is if the scary thing is in the black hole or if it is invisible to us, we can't get help with it. Our safe people don't understand how we are feeling or thinking and don't know how to fully help us."
- Write in kids thoughts and feelings about talking about the scary things.
- Ask these questions:
- How did the black hole or invisibility cloak or shield protect you?
- How does it feel living with this scary thing but not talking about it?
- How does your body feel?
- Who could you share this with? What could they do to help?
- Write those things in the black hole.

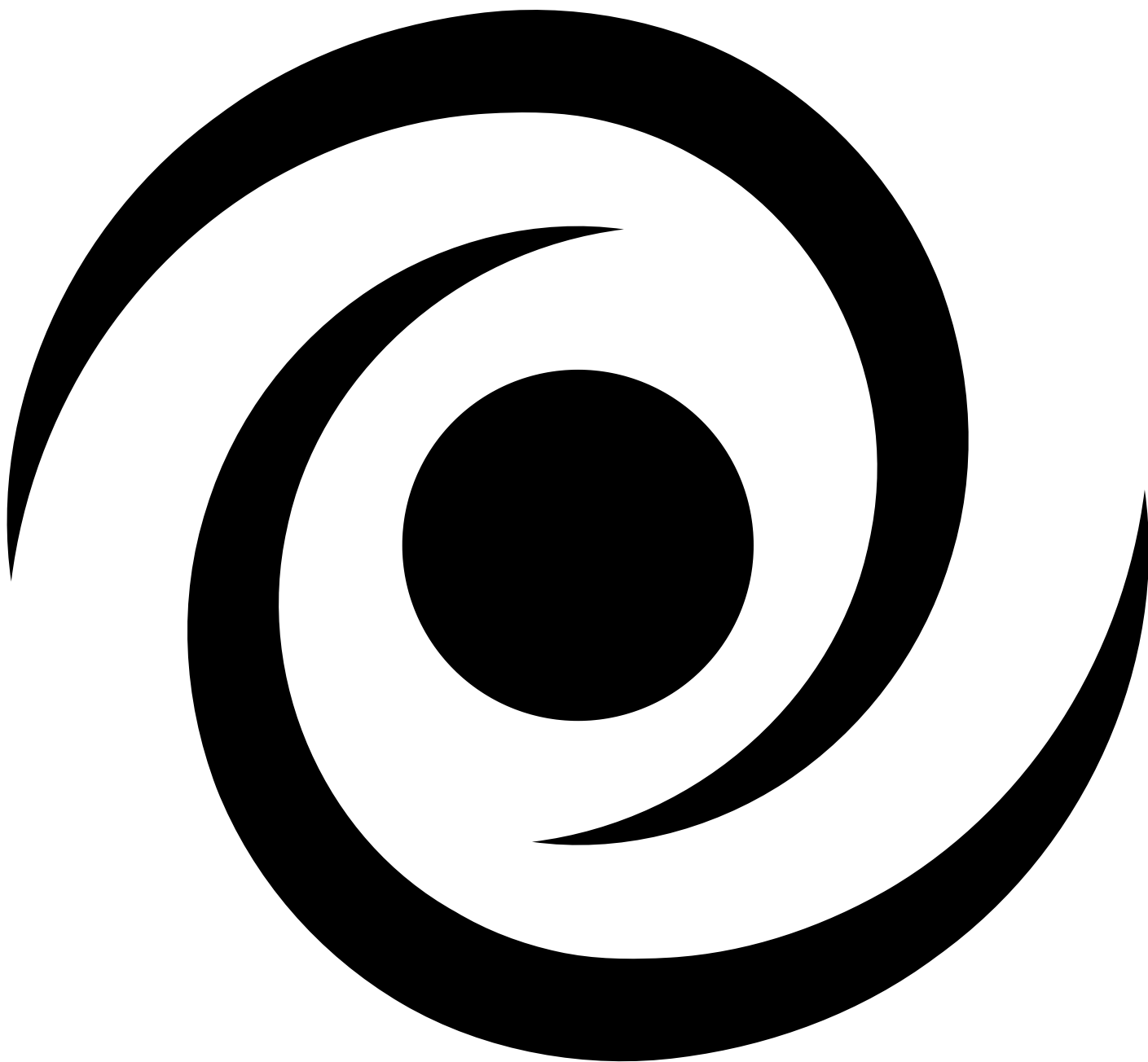


# BLACK HOLE ANALOGY

## EXPANDING COPING SKILLS FOR AVOIDANCE OR DISSOCIATION

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- Ask questions to generate ideas about dealing with the Black Hole. Adjust language according to the child's age.
- What are the risks of talking about the scary or overwhelming things?
- How could keeping these thoughts and feelings in the black hole or invisible get in your way now? Sometimes we get so good at using the black hole, cloak or shield that we use it for stuff that is not super scary and we are not present in the here and now. It keeps us from experiencing all ranges of feelings, even the ones we like.
- Now that you know so much, what else could you do besides using the black hole or the invisibility cloak if you are feeling scared or overwhelmed?
- How can talking about scary things help?
- What are your fears about talking about the scary things?
- How can we make it safe here to talk about it?
- How can your safe people help you to talk about it?
- Ask your safe people to tell about a time they used the black hole to keep themselves safe and what skill did they use instead?
- Talk about your job as a therapist and how you are one of those safe people.
- Keep this as a tool to refer back to if the kid is being avoidant in future sessions.





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## **PSYCHOEDUCATION**

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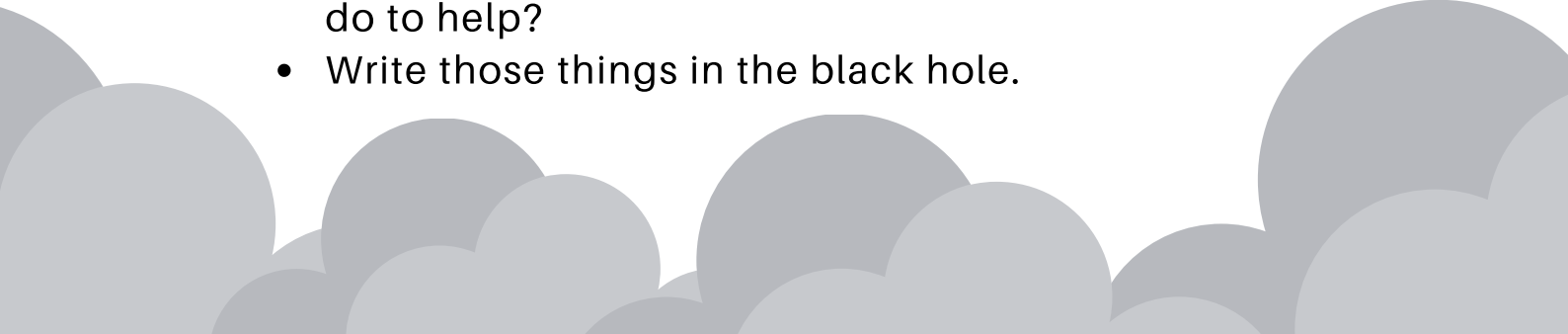
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  - Write those things in the black hole.
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- A row of gray, rounded, cloud-like shapes at the bottom of the page.



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