



## 3 INTERVENTIONS

# *Using Balloons*

- Balloons are great for engaging kids in treatment. This tool offers 3 different applications using balloons for building rapport and trust in family or group settings, enhancing safety skills, and for explaining emotional intensity and regulation.
- Appropriate for 5-16 year olds.
- This 17- page document includes complete instructions, including ways to tailor for older children and 9 pages of printable resources that coordinate with the interventions.

**ASHLEY FIORE, LCSW**



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# SPECIFIC PRAISE BALLOONS FOR FAMILIES AND GROUPS

## MATERIALS

- Balloons of various colors, 1 per person
- Specific praise slips (blank slips of paper cut into approx 1 x 3 inch pieces)
- Pencils/pens

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Give each participant a balloon to keep. Pass out enough blank slips of paper so that each participant has enough to create a note for each participant, e.g., for a family of 5, you will need 25 slips.
- Ask each person to respond to the following prompt:
  - "I love the way you \_\_\_\_\_"
  - "One thing I value about you is \_\_\_\_\_"
  - "I think your best characteristic/my favorite thing about you is the way you \_\_\_\_\_."

# SPECIFIC PRAISE BALLOONS FOR FAMILIES AND GROUPS

## INSTRUCTIONS ... CONTINUED

- Each person provides one written purely positive praise for each group/family participant. Roll these up or fold them into tiny squares.
- Each participant passes out their specific praises to the intended recipient. The recipient inserts the praise slips in their balloon.
- Inflate your balloon and take home for a day in the future. Pop the balloon and read your praise when you need a lift.

NOTE: The therapist should first assess that all participants will use the activity to offer purely positive praise, not something hurtful. Beware of "compli-sults" where the praise begins positive, but ends with an insult.



# BALLOON SAFETY SKILLS

## MATERIALS

- Balloons of various colors
- Straight pin, blank paper for personal responses
- Cards of risky scenarios (versions for children and teens), response slip options
- Permanent markers to number balloons

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Review the attached risky situations (cut apart). Set aside any that are not appropriate for your client and be sure to add additional scenarios that are potential risks they might encounter in the near future.
  - \* Separately ask the client's caregiver to help you generate realistic examples in advance that fit for their child!
- Problem solve with the client what they would do if they confronted a similar situation themselves one day. You can offer the provided response slips if your client needs extra help determining options, but try to elicit original ones from the client showing their own individualized response.
- Label each balloon with the corresponding number of the risky situation.



## BALLOON SAFETY SKILLS

### INSTRUCTIONS... CONTINUED

- Ask the client to insert their preferred response into the balloon that corresponds with the risky situation.
- Have the client elaborate on why they made the choice they did, what barriers might get in the way of implementing it, and how they can have the most effective response (What supports would you need from your caregiver to make your best choice? What can you do if you make a choice you later regret so you can make a better one?)
- Be sure to separately prepare the caregiver in advance to share what some of the challenges are for them about making the hard choices and to emphasize that building them in as a resource to the child is the primary objective of this intervention. It is helpful for the caregiver to normalize the need to fit in or being tempted to make suboptimal choices, just as it is helpful to normalize how we come back from making a poor choice, too.
- Include the caregiver in the session. Have the client read the scenario aloud. Pop the balloon to reveal the client's response. Take turns sharing what the caregiver would do in a given situation vs what the client would do in a given situation and factors requiring consideration.



# BALLOON SAFETY SKILLS: RISKY SCENARIOS

## Child Version

## Teen Version

You accidentally break your mom's favorite lamp playing inside. She had told you not to play in the living room. What do you do?	You're walking home from the bus stop and a car seems to be following you slowly. What do you do?	Someone asks for help to find their lost puppy. They have a picture of it and the dog's leash. What do you do?
You get home from school and the door is already open. You're the only one there. What do you do?	Someone at school has threatened to beat you up. It's one of the popular kids and you are not. You don't think the teachers will take you seriously. What do you do?	You have a band teacher you really like. He always messes with your hair and tells you you're his favorite student. What do you do?
You and a friend find a gun in your friend's garage. Bullets are nearby and you're tempted to try some target practice. What do you do?	Your dad has been drinking a lot. He wants to go to the store and he plans to drive you both there. What do you do?	You hear your parents fighting. Something crashes into the wall. Your mom says everything is fine but her voice doesn't sound that way. What do you do?
A family member who lives with you is addicted to drugs. Your Grandma is frustrated and said she will kick them out if they do it again. You think they might have overdosed but aren't sure. What do you do?	Some older kids in the neighborhood are looking at bad stuff on their phones. They want to send you some of the pictures. You want them to like you. What do you do?	You find a vape pen in your mom's car. You want to see what all the fuss is about. She would never know you tried it. What do you do?

<b>TEEN RISKY SITUATION #1</b>  You get a new job to earn extra money. It's going well until your boss asks you to do something shady. What do you do?	<b>TEEN RISKY SITUATION #2</b>  Your friend asks for a ride home. She wants you to stop by her boyfriend's so she can pick up her laptop. You agree, but when you get there, she wants to stay and hang out. There are a lot of older guys there you don't know and they have definitely been drinking. What do you do?	<b>TEEN RISKY SITUATION #3</b>  Your friends want you to sneak out. They say they'll stop by at 2:30 a.m. to pick you up. You know your parents are heavy sleepers and you could probably get away with it. What do you do?
<b>TEEN RISKY SITUATION #4</b>  Your older girlfriend wants you to come over; her parents are out of town. She has "more experience" than you do. You really like her and don't want to look dumb. What do you do?	<b>TEEN RISKY SITUATION #5</b>  Your teacher has been giving you preferential treatment. You know it, and your friends have noticed, too. People are asking if something is "going on". What do you do?	<b>TEEN RISKY SITUATION #6</b>  You're spending the night with your best friend. The friend's mom drinks too much and yells at them. It gets pretty brutal. You can tell your friend is really embarrassed. What do you do?

\*Both sets include blank cards to individualize for your client.



## BALLOON SAFETY SKILLS: RESPONSE OPTIONS

Check the situation out with an adult you trust. Two heads are better than one.

Say, "That's okay. It doesn't work for me this time."

Let your parent know, "I have something to tell you you're not going to like, but I really need your help."

Leave the situation immediately and figure out what to do later.

Call a previously agreed upon family member or adult friend for help.

Call 911.

Run the situation by a friend you trust and see what they think.

Talk to the school counselor or a teacher you trust.

Set a boundary. You don't have to do this.



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You hear your parents fighting. Something crashes into the wall. Your mom says everything is fine but her voice doesn't sound that way. What do you do?

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Some older kids in the neighborhood are looking at bad stuff on their phones. They want to send you some of the pictures. You want them to like you. What do you do?

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SITUATION #1

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#2

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TEEN RISKY  
SITUATION #4

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Your teacher has been giving you preferential treatment. You know it, and your friends have noticed, too. People are asking if something is "going on".  
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TEEN RISKY SITUATION  
#6

You're spending the night with your best friend. The friend's mom drinks too much and yells at them. It gets pretty brutal. You can tell your friend is really embarrassed.  
What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION

#7

A guy who's known for having a bad temper is following you closely in your car. He starts tapping his car against your car's bumper.

What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION

#8

Your friend is experimenting with opiates. They say they have it under control.

You're not so sure.

What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION #9

Your friend's parent has kicked them out. They have no where to go.

They ask if they can crash in your basement but don't want you to tell your parents for fear DSS might get involved.

What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION

#10

Your partner has been getting more and more controlling. You hardly ever have time for your friends anymore. They've never been physically aggressive with you but they put you down a lot.

What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION #11

Your younger sibling tells you they have been cutting but makes you promise not to tell your parents. You know they will hate you if you tell.

What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION #12

A family member who you care about but who hasn't been the most reliable contacts you on social media. They want to see you, and probably want to borrow money.

You know your caregivers don't approve.

What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION

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What do you do?

TEEN RISKY SITUATION

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SITUATION #

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# EMOTION INTENSITY BALLOONS

## MATERIALS

- Balloons of various colors
- Permanent markers, preferably in a variety of colors
- Basic feelings list to draw from

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Develop a basic feelings vocabulary with client. You can ask them to name as many feelings as possible in 2 minutes, draw from a cup, or use the attached examples from the printed handouts. Adjust the range of feelings for the appropriate developmental level. Define each and contrast with other intensities.
- Ask client to draw each emotion on the deflated balloon (teens may prefer to draw an emoji)
- Teach the client that catching our feelings when they are still small is helpful because it is easier to regulate them that way.

# EMOTION INTENSITY BALLOONS

## INSTRUCTIONS ... CONTINUED

- One of the best ways to "catch" a feeling is to label it. When we are able to label our emotions with greater emotional granularity, we feel more regulated and calm. Emotional granularity is being able to differentiate the specificity of our feeling, e.g. irked, frustrated, angry, furious. *\*See the work of Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett, who developed this concept. She suggests the importance of differentiating between positive and negative emotions as well as between high and low arousal emotions.*
- Visually demonstrate feelings intensity by blowing up the emotion balloon, with bigger feelings having more air filling them (so they become visually bigger, too).
- When our feelings grow too big unchecked, they sometimes pop. (Can blow and blow until the balloon pops.) Sometimes they leave us feeling really out of control (release a full balloon so it flies all over the room).
- If we can notice our feelings and accurately label them, we can have a more controlled, productive response (slowly release some air a little at a time). We are even more successful when pair a coping skill with our distress, such as using deep breathing or guided visualization after labeling the feeling



Happy



Sad



Scared



Lonely



Confused



Angry



Jealous



Excited





Embarrassed



Frustrated



Terrified



Guilty



Ashamed



Disgusted



Betrayed



Elated

# Feelings List

Cut apart and place in a cup. Take turns drawing them to define and share examples of each.

Angry

Terrified

Sad

Ashamed

Scared

Jealous

Lonely

Proud

Happy

Bored

Excited

Furious

Embarrassed

Hopeless

Surprised

Exposed

Confused

Silly

Frustrated

Worried