

Strong Minds Activity Guide

Special Olympics
Strong Minds





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INTRODUCTION

Strong Minds is an interactive learning activity focused on developing adaptive coping skills.

Competition provides a natural opportunity to develop active strategies for maintaining emotional wellness under stress, such as: thinking positive thoughts, releasing stress and connecting with others.

GOALS:

- Increase athlete awareness of **active coping strategies** that can be used in competition and in day to day life situations.
- Support athletes to **identify stress management/coping strategies** that they like and think they will use.
- **Provide resources** on good coping for athletes, coaches and caregivers.
- **Start conversations** about stress, coping and emotional wellness.



GETTING STARTED

Be sure to read the Introduction and Activities sections. These are for all athletes, Unified partners, teachers, coaches and family members. It is also important to think about where activities will take place – in a school, community or home.



SCHOOL

These activities can be used by educators during the school day.



COMMUNITY

Led by Special Olympics Programs and volunteers, these activities can be used at practices, competitions, meetings, trainings, or other Special Olympics events.



HOME

Athletes can utilize these strategies at home with their families.



USING THE STRONG MINDS ACTIVITY GUIDE

There are 5 activity topics:

- **Stress and You**
- **Strong Messaging**
- **Strong Breathing**
- **Strong Stretching**
- **Strong Supporting**

Each activity can be done individually or in group settings.

Most activity topics have multiple options that offer athletes, coaches and families choices to cater to different ability levels.

Additional Resources can be found at:

<https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/strong-minds>



Strong Minds Equipment

EQUIPMENT

Stress Ball
Art Supplies (paper, markers)
Pinwheel
Expanding Sphere
Yoga Mat
Stretching Band

ACTIVITY TOPIC

Stress and You
Strong Messages
Strong Breathing
Strong Stretching



Beginning Activities

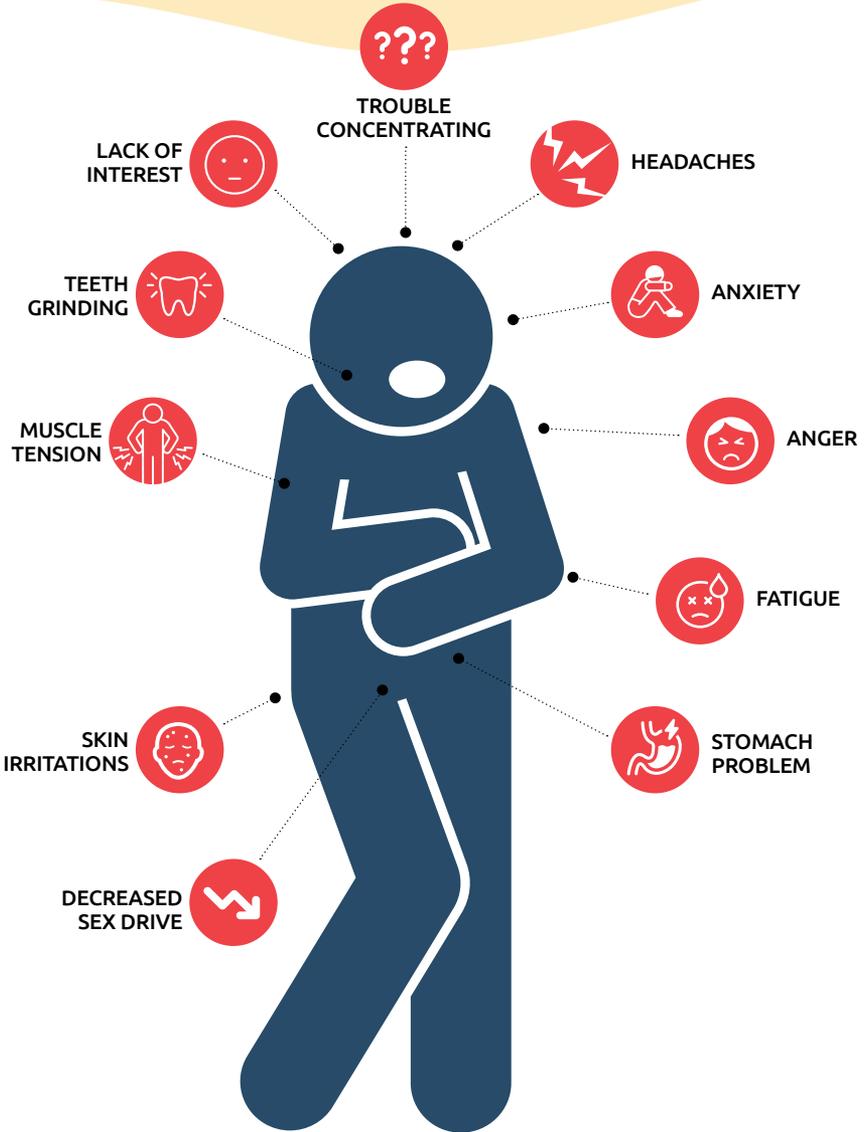
FEELINGS CHECK-IN

Before you use any of these **Strong Minds** activities cards, use the chart below to identify how you feel. After each activity, use the chart again to see if you feel any different or if your feelings have changed.



WHERE DO YOU FEEL STRESS?

When you feel stress, where do you feel it the most? **Circle the area below.**





Strong Minds Activities

STRESS AND YOU

STRONG MESSAGES

STRONG BREATHING

STRONG STRETCHING

STRONG SUPPORTING



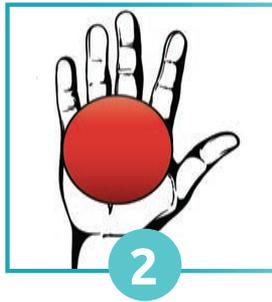
STRESS AND YOU

GOAL:

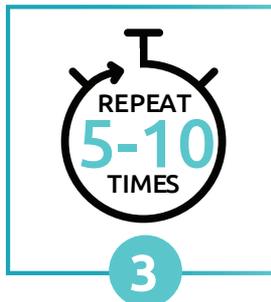
Use a stress ball to help you feel better when you are stressed.



Squeeze the ball
for **3 seconds**.



Release the ball
slowly.



Repeat
5 to 10 times
for **1 minute**.



STRONG MESSAGES

GOAL:

Use positive messages to improve our confidence and ability to handle stress.

**POSITIVE
THOUGHTS**

Read or say
POSITIVE
thoughts.

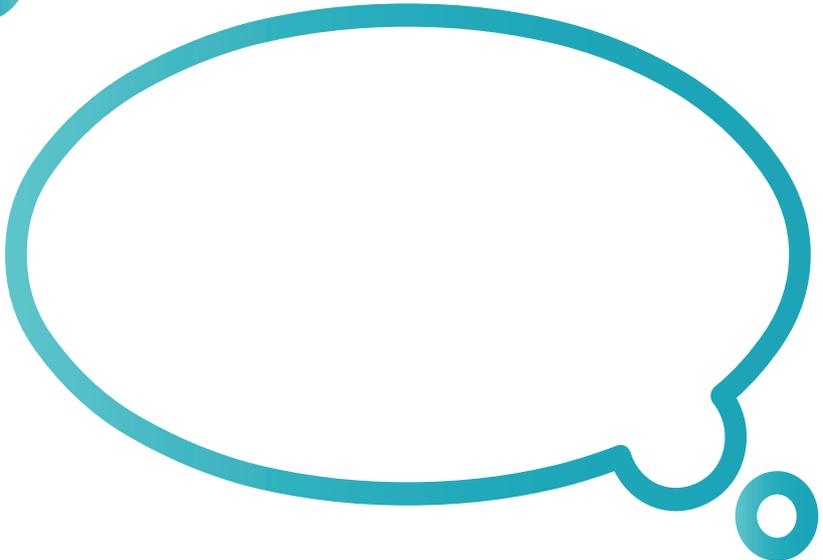
I am
STRONG.

I am **BRAVE.**

I CAN DO it.

WRITE YOUR OWN

POSITIVE THOUGHTS.





STRONG BREATHING

GOAL:

Use deep breathing as a tool anytime and anywhere to help ourselves feel better when we are nervous or stressed.

DEEP BREATHING



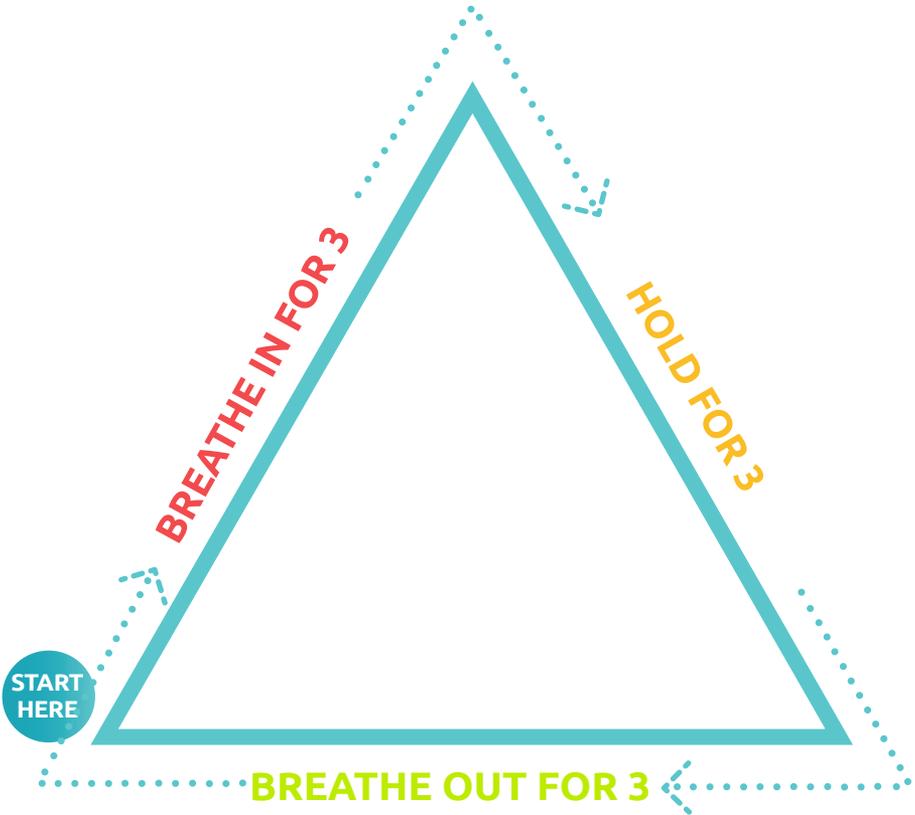
Pretend you are smelling a flower by **breathing in through your nose slowly**



Pretend you are **blowing out a candle slowly**

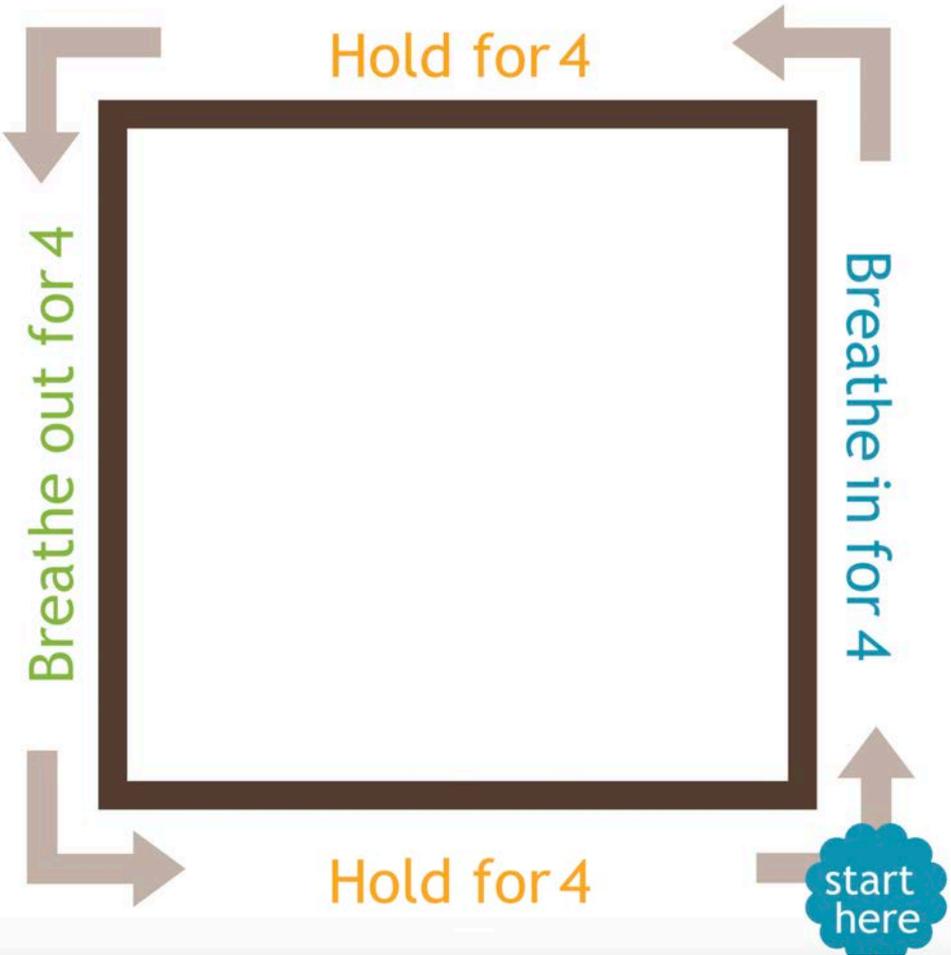
TRIANGLE BREATHING

Start at the bottom left of the triangle.
Follow the sides around the whole triangle
to complete one deep breath.



SQUARE BREATHING

Start at the bottom right of the square and follow the arrows around the whole square to complete one deep breath.





STRONG STRETCHING

GOAL:

Use stretches to help release tension from stress to make our minds and bodies feel better.

STRONG STRETCHING

TRUNK RELEASE



1. While sitting, straighten your arm and lean to the opposite side. Support yourself with the other arm.
2. Hold this stretch for 30 seconds while you breathe deeply.
3. Switch sides and stretch your other arm.

STRONG STRETCHING

SEATED ROTATION STRETCH



1. Sit tall on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you.
2. Cross your right leg over your left leg and put your right foot on the floor close to your left knee.
3. Turn your upper body towards your right side using your right arm to help you sit tall and your left arm against your right leg to help you twist. You should feel a stretch in your hip and the side of your back.

Modified stretch (chair):

Put both legs down and reach both arms to the right base of the chair. Turn your head and body to the right. Repeat on left side (as pictured).

Hold this stretch for at least 30 seconds, then switch sides.

STRONG STRETCHING

SHOULDER INTERNAL ROTATION



1. Hold onto a towel with one arm behind your neck and your other arm behind your back.
2. Pull the opposite end up on the towel with the upper arm, as pictured, to stretch the lower arm.
3. Do this stretch so that it pulls, but never hurts.

Hold this stretch for at least 30 seconds.

STRONG STRETCHING

BUTTERFLY



1. Sit tall on the floor with the soles of your feet together, knees bent out to sides.
2. Hold onto your ankles or feet, engage your abdominals, and slowly lower your body toward your feet as far as you can while pressing your knees toward the floor.
3. If you're too tight to bend over, simply press your knees down.

Hold this stretch for at least 30 seconds.

STRONG STRETCHING

SPHINX POSE



1. Lie on your stomach with your legs straight out behind you.
2. Place your elbows under your shoulders and your forearms on the floor as you lift your chest up off the floor.
3. Press your hips and thighs into the floor and think about lengthening your spine while keeping your shoulders relaxed.
4. Sit up just enough to feel a nice stretch in your lower back.

Hold this stretch for at least 30 seconds.

STRONG STRETCHING

KNEE TO CHEST STRETCH



1. Lie on your back with both legs extended.
2. Pull your right knee into your chest while keeping the left leg straight and your lower back pressed into the floor.
3. Hold for 30 seconds to 2 minutes.
4. Repeat on the other leg.

Hold this stretch for at least 30 seconds.



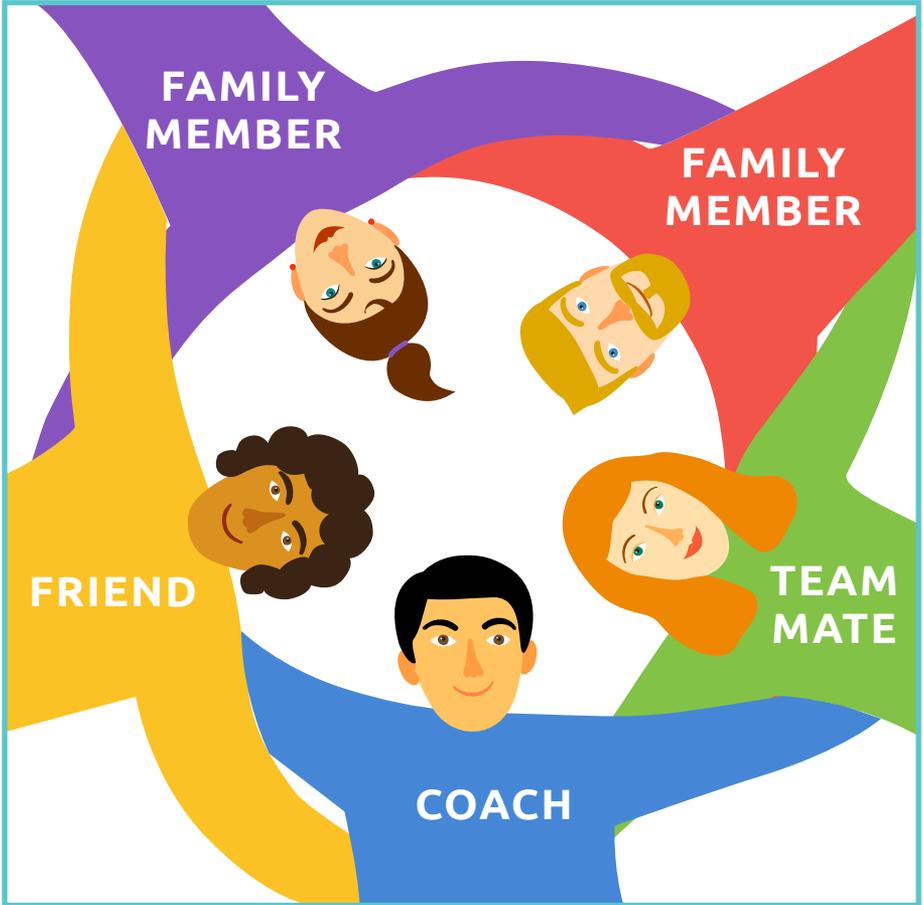
STRONG SUPPORTING

GOALS:

- **Identify people that support you or that you support. Kindness has health benefits and makes the world a less stressful place.**

WHO SUPPORTS YOU?

Who makes you feel happy and strong?



Who else?

HOW DO YOU SUPPORT OTHERS

How do you show kindness?

- Family Members:**
Help someone with a chore

- Teammate:** Cheering on your teammates

- Friend:** Write a nice note to a friend

- Coach:** Help clean up equipment after practice

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Sign the Inclusion Pledge!

I pledge to look for the lonely, the isolated, the left out,
the challenged and the bullied.

I pledge to overcome the fear of difference and replace it
with the power of inclusion.

I #ChooseToInclude.

Or sign the pledge online at:

<https://play.specialolympics.org/jointherevolution>

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