



# 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.

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**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

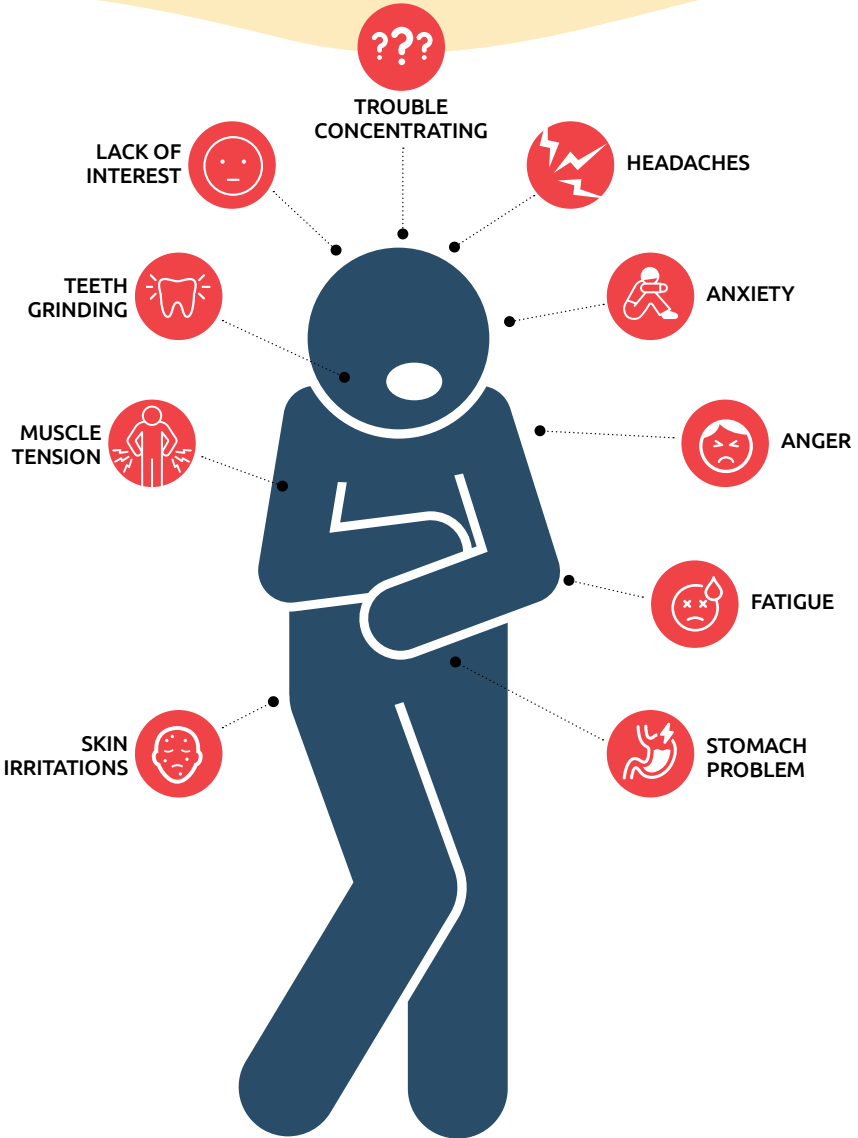
## FEELINGS CHECK-IN

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**



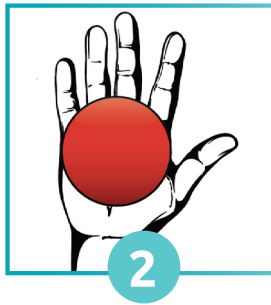
# STRESS AND YOU

## GOAL:

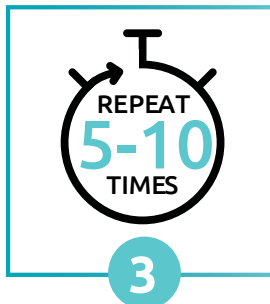
**Use a stress ball to help you feel better when you are stressed.**



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**

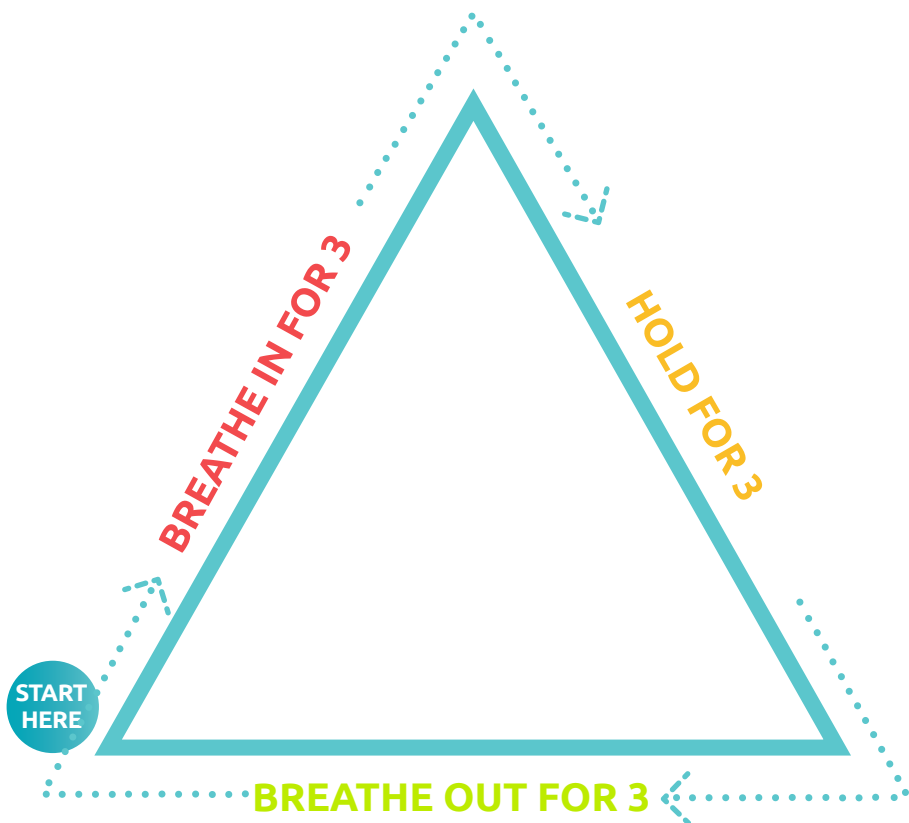


Pretend you are **blowing out a candle slowly**



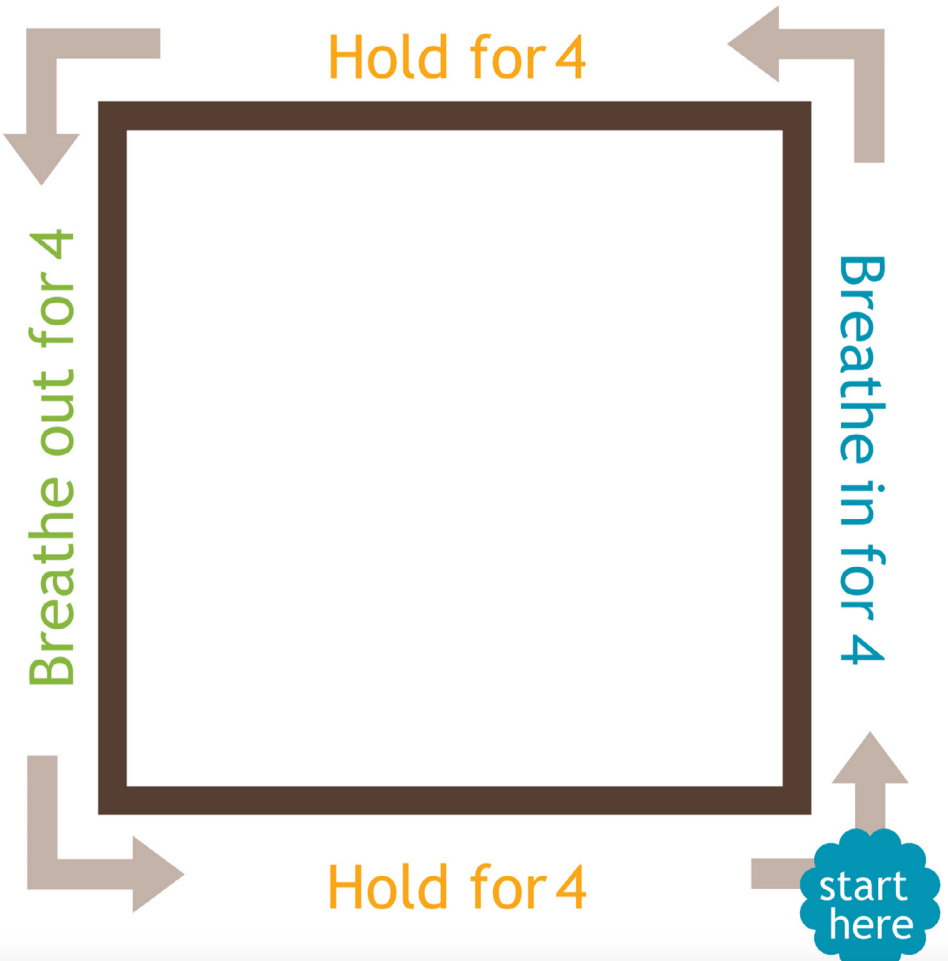
## TRIANGLE BREATHING

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.



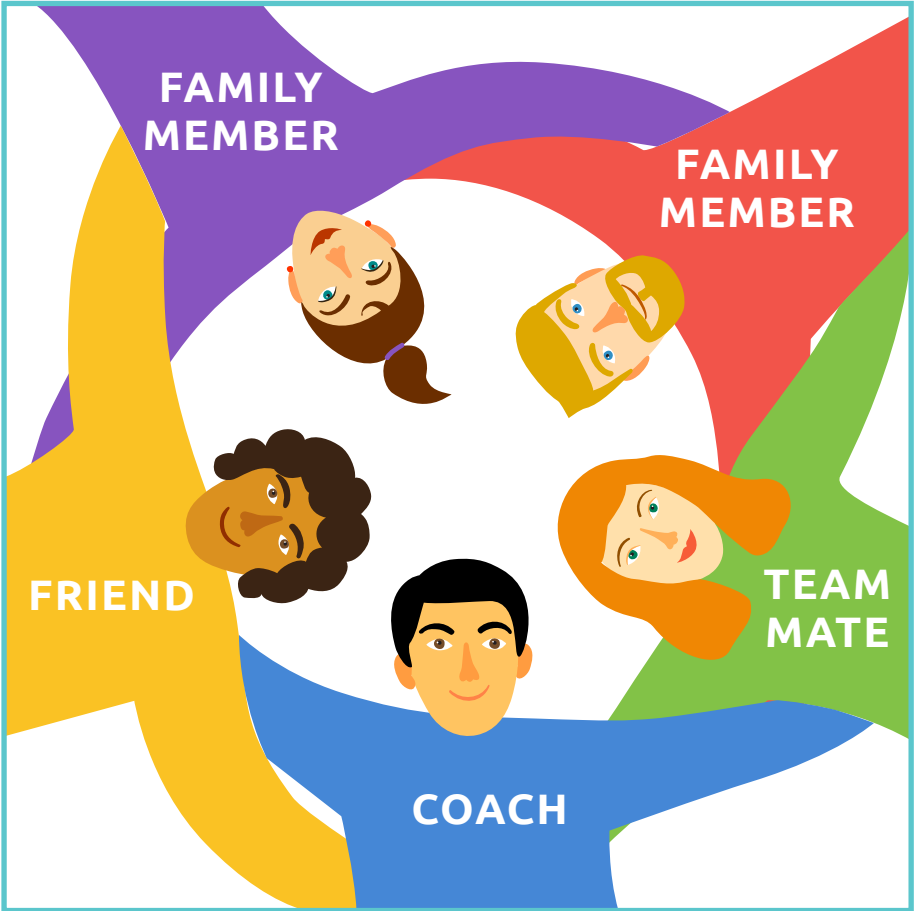
## STRONG SUPPORTING

### 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
  
- .....
  
- .....
  
- .....



# 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>

Special Olympics  
**Strong Minds**

