



User's Guide to CosmoKidz

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WELCOME

Welcome to the User's Guide for CosmoKidz. We'd like to begin with this question: If you could give the children in your life a "gift that keeps on giving" what would it be? The developers of CosmoKidz are answering the question in this way: We want to give children the gift of compassion. We want them to learn skills and abilities that help develop care for self and others...that last for the rest of their lives. This is a gift that parents, and caregivers alike know is essential for growth, development, and a happy life. The term "CosmoKidz" grows out of "Cosmopolitan Communication." Among other things, this is a form of communication that suggests that everyday differences between people can be a starting place for deeper understanding, trust, and respect. The CosmoKidz activities are one way to help our children learn how to understand diversity, make meaning of their role in shaping relationships, and develop valuable skills that help them explore their own personal and social worlds.

The User's Guide is organized in two sections:

- **Read Section 1 to understand the purpose and goals of CosmoKidz;**
- **Read Section 2 to learn about potential uses of the CosmoKidz scenarios**

SECTION 1: UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE AND GOALS OF COSMOKIDZ

Purpose of CosmoKidz' Activities

CosmoKidz is a set of conversational activities created for adults who interact with and care for children ages 4-8, including parents and grandparents, teachers, pre-school and day-care professionals, mentors, and anyone else meaningfully connected with children. If you work closely with children, either as a caregiver or educator, you know how important their social/emotional development is in their overall well-being and their capacity to meet the demands of life.

Effective social/emotional development is important because it:

- Increases and integrates children's thinking, feeling, and bodily sensations;
- Enables children to learn how to empathize with others;
- Helps children handle interpersonal conflicts in productive ways;
- Fosters the ability of children to connect with diverse others; and

- Furthers their ability to manage their strong emotions productively, and to name their own feelings and emotions as they encounter various situations and contexts.

These skills are the building blocks for healthier expressions of:

- Empathy;
- Respect;
- Self-regulation;
- Positive self-expression;
- Creativity;
- Increased awareness of self and others;
- Expanding the child's ability to act mindfully into situations instead of reacting; and
- Communicating in ways that help make better relationships and better social worlds.

In addition to social/emotional issues that children of all eras and cultures encounter, the 21st Century marks new and more complex challenges and opportunities. These new challenges and opportunities include, among other things, the reality that the planet is now interconnected in ways that it has never been. Information technologies and social media now make it possible for people to know what is happening anywhere and to connect with people everywhere. Learning and information sharing have been transformed through the internet so that anyone, including children, can know what is happening in far-flung places. They are exposed to ways of life that are not only different, but diametrically opposed to their own way of life. Social technologies and their accompanying “gadgets” have also made us, including children, much more dependent on them.

But knowing about and using technology is not the same as “being with others.” We use technology to learn and to connect with others. In the process, we, including children, are spending less time learning the very important face-to-face skills of “being with others” that enable us to work well with them, to empathize, and to develop interpersonal competencies. It is these competencies, however, that enable children to feel comfortable and confident in their social environments - especially school - to manage their own impulses in productive ways, to work with others not like them, and to become sensitive to the role they play in the creation of their social

worlds. These skills are essential, and perhaps in the 21st Century even more so, for the health and well-being of individuals, groups, and societies. And more than ever, children need to learn to thoughtfully manage their impulses and to develop skills and habits of empathy and respect.

GOALS OF COSMOKIDZ

The goals of CosmoKidz involve three related aspects:

1. Helping kids to notice and name their own thoughts and feelings;
2. Increasing their awareness of their social worlds (i.e. their experience navigating challenges like sharing, bullying, joyful times, and confusing times, etc.); and,
3. Helping them more successfully navigate those social worlds in ways that increase their own social/ emotional development and on-going capacity to be healthy throughout the diverse circumstances they encounter.

Connecting with Children's Social Worlds

One of the building blocks of learning new skills and abilities involves meeting learners where they currently are in their development and then helping them increase their skills and abilities. If we want children to learn how to get along, empathize with others, productively work through conflict, and proactively manage their fears, we need to know something about the social worlds that they inhabit and the issues that matter to them.

With that knowledge and wisdom in mind, the developers of CosmoKidz began with kids themselves. We asked a variety of children ages 5-7 to tell us what they face in their lives that they find difficult and challenging. The original 31 scenarios in this set represent the topics that these children expressed to us. We also tested the topics with a variety of children and in different learning contexts to help ensure that the **scenarios** are useful in helping children name feelings, emotions, and thoughts, as well as ways that they can act with more awareness into difficult situations to help make a better outcome.

These scenarios are meant to equip and empower the next generation of kids to become more adept at interpersonal relationships in ways that social technologies are not able to achieve.

Developing Interpersonal Communication Skills to Increase Social/Emotional Development

CosmoKidz is based on a tested theory and view of communication called the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). This view of communication asserts that one of the most important sets of skills that all of us, children included, must develop in the 21st Century is our awareness of how the stories we believe and tell, the ways that we communicate, and the patterns of communication that emerge in our interactions shape us and our social worlds in fundamental ways. For example, if a child has a story of hating school, that story will cloud everything the child does and experiences in a school environment. Current research is pointing to the pernicious effects bullying can have on self-esteem and the child's experience of school. Bullying behavior is not only harmful to relationships but also to academic achievement.

The story of hating school shapes what the child sees and, consequently, what he or she will come to experience and to expect. This will also have an effect on the ways that the child interacts with others in the school environment. She may not be as involved in classroom activities, or care as much about doing well in school, or become as engaged with the teacher and other children as she might if she really liked being at school. These ways of acting and being can then create "patterns" of detachment with others that can reinforce the experience of not liking school.

One way of describing social/emotional development is becoming more aware of the stories we have that shape our perceptions and our actions. In other words, developing "mindfulness" and awareness, or self-reflection skills. The questions contained for each of the scenarios in CosmoKidz are designed to help children name some of their stories and feelings about situations that children their age find difficult. Once these stories are named and explored, children, with the help of a mentor, are better able to think about alternative and better ways of acting.

It is the "acting" piece that is an especially important skill for children to learn. How can kids respond effectively to bullying behavior? How can a child treat someone with respect who says or does things differently? The ways that children act into these complex and difficult situations matter! Their response will elicit a response from others, which will elicit another response from them...and before you know it a new way of being together has emerged. If enough of these situations occur over time, a pattern of relating develops.

For example, if a child has become more aware of how hurtful it can be to tease someone with an unfamiliar name or accent, she can then begin to think about what she can do differently to help someone who “sounds funny” feel more accepted. With the help of an adult, children can begin to think with more awareness about how their actions affect other people, just as what others say and do affects them. The greater the child’s self-awareness along with his or her ability to know how to act, the more a child will develop his or her social/emotional skills.

The development of social/emotional skills also requires repetition and practice. While there are many different situations in CosmoKidz, many of the questions throughout the scenarios are similar. For example, several cards ask questions like these:

- What does (the specific topic) sharing look like?
- What does (the specific topic) sharing sound like?
- When you aren’t sharing how does that feel inside?
- When someone else is not sharing with you, how does that feel inside?
- When you share, how does that affect your relationship with others?

The first two bulleted questions are ones that are asking the children to think about the topic as something that can be positively observed. Sharing (and most of the scenarios that children identified for CosmoKidz) looks and sounds a certain way. In order to develop the children’s creativity as well as awareness of their senses, we pose “sense questions” that may be feel unfamiliar but that encourage them to touch, smell, and taste their worlds. To the extent that children can identify what people are doing when they are sharing, they can act with better awareness into a different situation involving sharing. We want kids to name and talk about the positive actions that lead to a more effective way of being with others.

The next two bulleted points ask children to reflect on their own thoughts and emotions. What is happening inside their bodies as they experience the actions of sharing or not sharing with someone else? The emotional states and bodily responses are different, and these questions are helping children to become more aware of those differences. The last bulleted point asks children to reflect on how sharing affects their relationships. Once the experiences begin to be named, the mentor is able to help children think of ways to respond that will, for example, help redirect the sadness that a child might feel at being left out to ways that this child can share with others to help others to not feel left out. The social/ emotional skill of empathy requires, among other things, that a child think about how something affects him or

her and then make the leap to how others might feel. The CosmoKidz scenarios are meant to do both things: to encourage children to reflect on how a situation affects them and how the situation may be affecting others as well. The scenarios are designed to support the child in acting with awareness rather than purely reacting to the external environment. The questions become the prompts that enable adults to help kids think about effective and compassionate ways to act in difficult situations.

We believe this repetition and practice will help children begin to see the importance of asking similar questions across situations. Our hope is that if children are exposed to questions like these over the course of a year (or several years) they will begin to ask these types of questions on their own as new situations arise for them.

The questions we have included are not meant to be exhaustive, however: We encourage you to ask additional questions that you believe will help the children in your life to think and act mindfully and compassionately. Another way to build repetition into your use of CosmoKidz is to remind children to SOAR, an acronym that is contained here, in the User's Guide, and on every worksheet in the last section of this guide. You can continually remind children about the importance of SOARing. You can also use the SOAR song and simple choreography to finish off each session.

The song can be found at <https://cosmokidz.org/soaring>

SOAR stands for the following:

- S: Sense what's around you
- O: Open your hands to help others
- A: Act with kindness
- R: Respect other people

Note that this acronym is encouraging children to be aware of what is occurring around them and to act with kindness by helping others and showing respect. These are the building blocks for more compassionate human beings.

The development of social/emotional skills also occurs in activities designed to put children in role- playing or imaginary situations. Many of the activities in CosmoKidz invite children to imagine a better way of handling a difficult situation, and to express themselves through drawing or painting. Some of the activities also invite children to act out a preferred way of handling the situation to get a "feel" for how to do it. This is a "performance" aspect of CosmoKidz that helps children learn, with

the coaching of an adult, better and more mindful ways of acting. It also supports their creativity and the integration of thoughts, feelings, and actions.

SECTION 2: WAYS OF USING THE COSMOKIDZ SCENARIOS

Each **scenario** contains:

An illustration that depicts a specific scenario that children regularly encounter; and
Content that leads children through a process of exploring the situation and ways of productively acting into it.

The content includes the following:

THEME: The theme will contain a few words or a phrase that describes the focus of the activity. For example: Saying I'm Sorry - **IMAGINE:** A scenario about the theme is presented that relates to the child's world with an accompanying illustration.

ASK: The ask section contains a series of questions to help the children explore the topic. The questions focus on the child's feelings and experience, on the child imagining how other children might be feeling and experiencing the situation, and on ways of acting more compassionately into the situation.

ACT: Activities designed to help children about better and more productive ways of acting into the scenario. The acts attempt to draw on the child's creativity and role taking abilities to make similar real-life situations easier to act into in a positive way.

Using the bold font for the word scenarios Scenarios in 10-15 Minute Segments Over a Period of 1 Week

To focus attention and minimize distractions, begin each session by asking the children to close their eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths.

Monday: Choose a scenario. Spend the first day looking at the illustration and the scenario and asking the children to talk about their own experience with the topic. End with the song SOAR.

Tuesday: Remind the children of the topic. Begin working through the questions. Use the questions as a way of helping the children name and explore their own experience with the topic. End with the song SOAR.

Wednesday: Remind the children of the topic. Continue working through the questions. Use the questions as a way of helping the children explore how the topic may be affecting other people. End with the song SOAR.

Thursday: Choose one of the activities in the “Act” section. Help the children visualize positive ways of acting into the situation. End with the song SOAR.

Friday: Continue with the activity from Thursday or choose the second “Act.” End with the song SOAR.

Using the Cards During Extended Time

If you are not stretched for time, you can work through an entire scenario in one sitting. If you choose to do this, it’s important to follow the energy of the children. For example, don’t spend time on a question if the children don’t seem interested...or ask follow-up questions to the questions that seem to captivate the children’s interests and curiosities. Make the “act” activities especially fun by encouraging creativity, making costumes, drawing pictures, etc. There is no need to limit yourself to the activities that we have provided if you have sufficient time to develop activities of your own. At the very least, the worksheets in the next section can help get you started.

The Use of CosmoKidz in Less Frequent Teaching

CosmoKidz was successfully tested in school classrooms around the world. However, we recognize that many people outside of the classroom can use CosmoKidz in environments like after-school programs, pre-k, boys and girls clubs and more. Here is some guidance for less frequent teaching!

- As long as the children are interested, 30 minutes to an hour-long session can add great value to a child’s social world.
- Mentors modeling empathy and awareness of others can be one of the greatest supplements to CosmoKidz lessons.
- Remember, any conversation about a child’s social world can be a good one. CosmoKidz is all about changing the patterns and increasing awareness.

Supplemental Activities for CosmoKidz

CosmoKidz is proud to offer supplemental activities for the original 31 scenarios. These can be downloaded via a button labeled “printable activity sheet” located in the space immediately below the “Act” section on each of the scenario pages. These activities all contain a specific theme and corresponding directions to navigate the activity.



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