



Building Extra Fun and Creativity into Feel Your Best Self: Steps to Puppet Building

The primary component of the Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) toolkit is the video series, which follows three puppets - CJ, Nico, and Mena - as they navigate everyday issues. CJ, Nico, and Mina teach children 12 strategies for strengthening their emotional well-being.

Children's learning and engagement with the 12 strategies can be enhanced by having their own puppet to practice with! In addition to this guide, we also have three webinars to assist you with [creating your own puppet-making kits](#), [building puppets](#), and [practicing FYBS strategies with puppets](#).



In this guide, we begin by explaining the benefits of including puppet building in your instruction. Then, we suggest materials to gather for children to make their puppets, including options that are free, inexpensive, and more resource intensive. We explain how to assemble kits ahead of time, so you are able to efficiently pass out materials to children when it is time to build their puppet. Lastly, we provide a sample building process for creating a sock puppet with children.

Why should I incorporate puppet-building activities in my teaching of the FYBS strategies?

There are many benefits to incorporating puppet-building activities, including:

- increased student attention and engagement
- improved quality and rates of peer-to-peer collaboration and communication
- reduced student concerns related to making mistakes or providing incorrect answers
- added layers of fun to the learning experience

Using puppets has also shown success with increasing access to instructional content. Puppetry meets children at their developmental level and helps create a more relaxed environment to enable learning. In some cases, children may identify and empathize with puppets in ways that they find difficult with people around them.

Not only is puppet building fun, but the puppet creations can serve as a great “friend” to prompt practice of the Feel Your Best Self strategies. Group activities might also involve creating puppet skits to apply the strategies in different scenarios.

There are additional benefits for children with special needs. For example, puppets can be used to model social stories and coping strategies. They can also be used to engage with students with communication differences (e.g., non-verbal). Lastly, puppets may support teachers in connecting with students who are more difficult to reach.



When could I add Puppet Building?

You can choose when it makes the most sense to incorporate puppet building. Puppet building is different than strategy instruction. Puppet building can take place at any time before or after you go through the steps to introduce a strategy. For example, if you introduce one strategy without puppets and later decide you would like to incorporate puppets, you can absolutely do so! If you know upfront that you'd like to include puppet building, have children create their puppets after sharing the Introduction video.

What do I need to do to add Puppet Building?

Step 1 – Gather Materials

Before having children build their own puppets, you need to gather materials they can use. The following table provides a list of materials that [UConn's Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry](#) has used to create sock puppet kits. The table is organized with low resource, moderate resource, and high resource options so you choose puppet-building materials based on your budget. Remember that puppetry is about creativity and choice – so feel free to come up with your own alternatives based on miscellaneous materials you may have at home, school, or in community settings.

Example Materials

Category	Lowest Resource Demand – Free!	Moderate Resource Demand - up to \$15 for classroom implementation	Highest Resource Demand – per child cost ranging from \$7.03 (30 students) to \$10.30 (20 students)
Body	Your own hand!	Brown Paper Lunch Bag	12 pairs Colorful Cotton Crew Socks
	Old socks		Colorful Paper Bags
Mouth Plate	Cardboard (use shipping boxes!)		
Mouth, Tongue, and Pupils	Fabric scraps	Felt (applied with Elmer's glue or a hot glue gun)	Roll of Black Self-Adhesive Felt –creates mouth interiors, can also be used for pupils
	Index cards (if readily available)	Construction paper for the mouth; have children draw on details (tongue, teeth etc.)	Roll of Red Self-Adhesive Felt –creates tongues or cheeks or freckles!
	Markers or paint		12 x 18" Individual Self-Adhesive Sheets of Black or Red Felt
	Scraps of colored paper from other classes	9 x 12" Construction Paper or Cardstock (apply with glue)	9 x 12" Basic Black or Red Felt Sheets (apply with glue)
			Foam sheets
Nose	Scraps of newspaper, paper towel, fabric, tissue, cotton balls, etc.	Plush filling for the nose, for example, Poly-Fil	
Eyes	Egg carton cut outs	Styrofoam semi-circles	Practice Ping Pong Balls (no markings!) – cut in half
	Markers	Googly eyes	
	Old buttons	White plastic spoons, cut off the handle	Colorful Foam sheets
Decorations	Markers	Buttons (buy in bulk from box store)	Self-adhesive gemstones
	Paint from the art classroom (if available)		Self-adhesive foam stickers
	Old fabric scraps		Self-adhesive pom poms
	Color paper scraps (can ask from other classrooms to save these paper pieces).		Feathers
			Glitter glue

Additional ideas for reducing cost or locating free puppet-building materials:

- Communicate with community groups (e.g., religious organization local youth groups) to inquire about any available supplies
- Reach out to families and school staff outreach to see if any available materials (many recyclables can be used in puppet building!)
- Partner with art teacher(s) – inquiring about their availability of surplus materials
- Particularly for community programs: partner with other groups to pool funds/resources
- Communicate with local businesses to check their availability of craft items or interest in sponsoring the purchase of materials

Step 2 – Assemble Your Kits

To create your kits, you will want to find materials to build a body, facial features, and decorations. We have provided recommendations of possible materials, but remember that you can be creative with what you use. Paper cutouts on a popsicle stick can be just as fun to use as more complicated sock puppets!

BODY AND MOUTH PLATE

- If you are using a sock, you can create a more structured mouth by putting a mouth plate inside. Cardboard is a great material to use!
 - We make an oval mouth plate that is 5" long by 2.75" wide. This doesn't have to be exact! You can perforate or crease it in the middle so it will bend more easily for the kids when they make the puppet talk.
 - Turn your sock inside out. Line the oval up with the seam closest to where toes would be in the sock. Glue the mouth plate to the inside of the sock. We use double-sided adhesive sheets or hot glue.



- If you are using brown paper lunch bags or you don't have the mouth plate materials, you can skip this step!

FACIAL FEATURES

- We like to create a baggie of all materials that will be used to create the mouth, nose, and eyes.
 - Mouth and tongue: You can either cut the pieces for the mouth and tongue ahead of time, or if you want the students to work on their cutting skills, give them rectangles to cut from. For the mouth, we use black self-adhesive felt that is cut to the same oval size as the mouth plate and for the tongue we use red self-adhesive felt, but you can be creative!
 - Nose: a handful of polyfil, tissue, fabric, or paper can be used to put on top of the cardboard mouth plate to create a nose shape, but this is not required!
 - Eyes: We like to attach to semi-circle Styrofoam spheres as eyes using double-sided adhesive or hot glue.
 - Pupils: You can either cut two pupils ahead of time or allow the students to cut them out. We like self-adhesive black felt.

DECORATIONS

- Create a baggie of decorations for kids to make the puppets unique! We like items that are self-adhesive to cut down on glue, but they may not hold as well. Hot glue tends to work the best but does require more time and supervision.
- We like to give the kids a variety of materials, including pom-poms, gemstones, feathers, foam stickers, and yarn, but any decorations will work!

Step 3 – Get Building!

Here we offer an example building process using a sock puppet. Use our suggested steps to design your own process based on your puppet-building kits.

In designing your puppet-building steps, make sure to consider what supports you might access to assist with puppet building. Puppet building should be as much fun for the facilitator as the students, so the steps should be "just right" in complexity. For example, if you will be building solo with a large group of younger students, you may want to pre-assemble parts such as the body and mouth plate. Other opportunities might be to co-design the activity and implement during arts education, or invite older students to come to co-build with younger students.

Example Step-by-Step Guide for Building a Sock Puppet

1. Share materials and introduce puppet-building activity.

Sample script:

Today, we are going to build our own hand puppets. We have lots of fun materials to help us - socks, felt, gems, pom-poms, and more. We will use our puppets to practice the new skills we are learning to calm ourselves, catch our feelings, and connect with others.



A sample puppet-building kit.

- Put the sock on your hand. Can you make the sock talk or breathe?



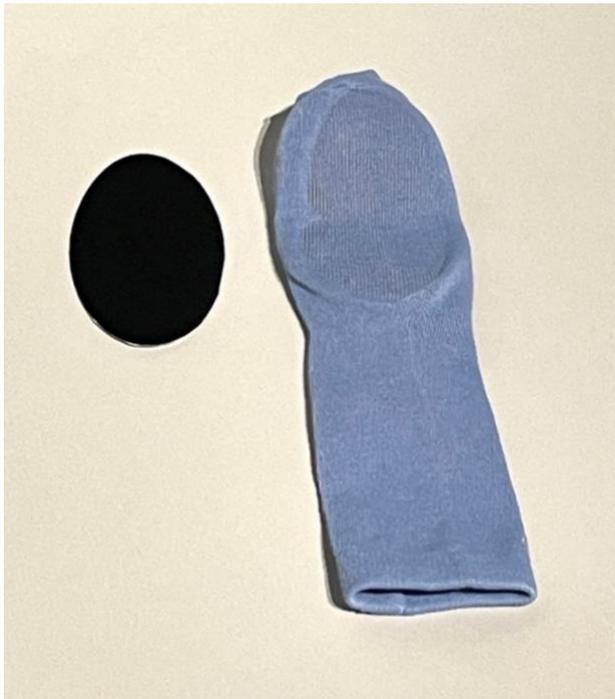
In the kits, there is a cardboard mouth plate already glued in place with double-sided adhesive. If you are making your own sock puppet, we recommend doing this in advance using hot glue or double-sided adhesive. Put your four fingers on top of the mouth plate and your thumb below the mouth plate to make your puppet talk.

2. Build the puppet.



If you have a kit, start with the bag for facial features.

- **Mouth.** Use the larger self-adhesive black felt oval to create the inside of the mouth. In your bag is also a self-adhesive red tongue. Markers can also be used to color the mouth.



- **Shaping the nose.** Take the fluff in your bag and insert it into your sock. Arrange the fluff so that it rests on top of the mouth plate. You can move it around to shape the nose and face as you want. When your hand is in the puppet it is okay to feel the fluff under your fingertips. If you do not want a nose, you can skip this step!



- **Adding your eyes.** The two Styrofoam semicircles can be used to create eyes. They have adhesive on the bottom and can be attached to the front/top of the head. It can be helpful to have the puppet on your hand looking at you. Make sure to think about placement and where you want your puppet to be looking.



- **Pupils.** Attach the small self-adhesive black felt circles as pupils on the eyes. You can

also draw on pupils with markers.



- **Decorate.** Gemstones, pom-poms, foam stickers, feathers, and yarn can all be used to decorate and add personality to your puppet.



Tips and Tricks to Puppet Building

- You can adjust the difficulty of the puppet building by choosing whether to precut pupils, mouth and tongue. Consider the developmental level and fine motor abilities of the children you are working with.
- You don't have to use all the materials! Allow puppet builders to be creative with how materials are used or not used!
- In the premade kits, some of the backings on the self-adhesive can be tricky to peel off. Try picking at the edges or the score line. Once something is put onto the sock, it is always important to apply pressure to help it stay. If something falls off, glue or tape can be used to reattach.
- Most importantly, remember to have fun!