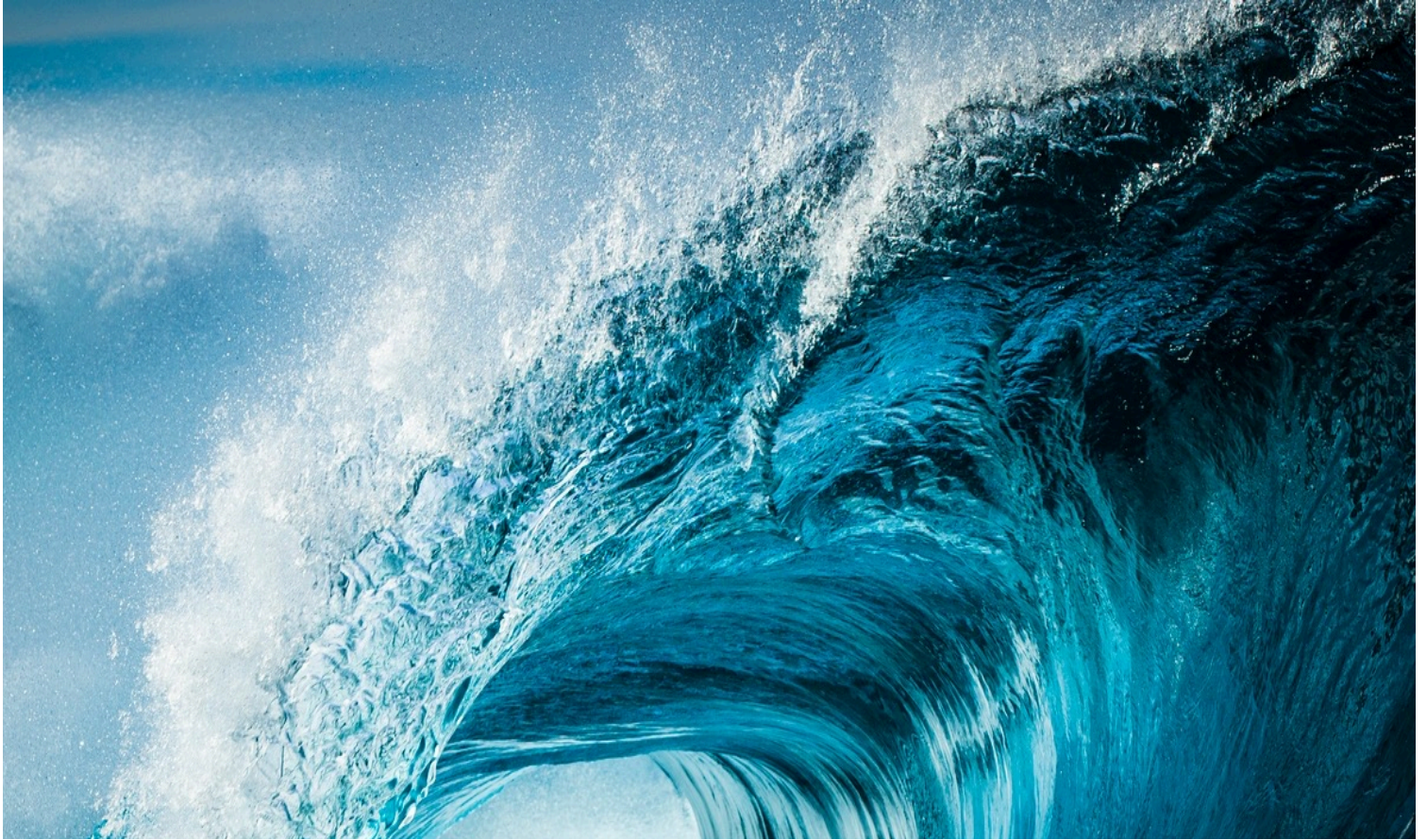
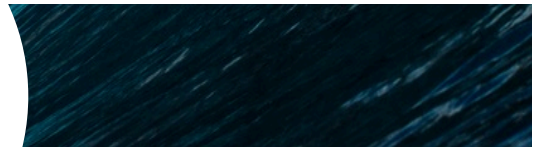


NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING



RIDING THE WAVE OF

Emotional Regulation



LORI SACREY, MC, R. PSYCH

EMOTION REGULATION

Several strategies to help navigate emotional responses are described on the following pages and include:

Tapping into Feelings Strategies
Movement Based Strategies
Breathing Strategies
Sensory Grounding
Writing Strategies
Mental Strategies
Self-Compassion Strategies



EMOTION DYSREGULATION

Emotion dysregulation is a difficulty in effectively regulating one's own emotions in response to a changing environment.

Emotional dysregulation can impact several aspects of the autistic experience, including social communication (if overwhelmed, one may miss or misinterpret cues) and repetitive behaviours (called stimming; a way in which many autistic people manage emotional dysregulation⁴).

In addition to being frequently experienced by neurodivergent individuals (including those with ADHD and autism), emotional dysregulation is also commonly related to a wide range of mental health conditions.¹⁻³

For example, emotional dysregulation is a predictor of anxiety and suicidality, and is linked to reductions in social relationships and overall quality of life in autistic individuals.⁹⁻¹¹



EMOTION DYSREGULATION

Jessica McCabe⁵ of 'How to ADHD' describes emotional dysregulation well, through a tide metaphor.

You are standing with your toes in a low tide. With each dysregulating event in your environment, you notice the tide begins to rise and rise and rise with successive hits to your system.

If you do not have a method of getting out of the rising tide (coping strategies), very soon a tidal wave comes and takes you under. You are swept away in this overwhelming feeling, like drowning, until the tsunami of emotions runs its course, and you are left standing on the beach, drained and exhausted.



EMOTION DYSREGULATION

Why is emotional dysregulation so common in neurodivergent individuals?

Many individuals with ADHD and autism experience sensory differences, including increased sensitivities to noises, smells, visual input, and others [6], thus, environmental stimuli may be more triggering.

Further, autistic individuals thrive on routines and predictability, and changes to schedules, interruptions, or unexpected events can trigger stress and dysregulation.



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Because emotional dysregulation is often triggered by environmental stimuli, the ability to cope with aversive sensory stimuli, changes to routines, and a potentially decreased understanding of one's own emotional responses may heighten the risk for emotional dysregulation in autistic (and other neurodivergent) populations.⁷⁻⁸

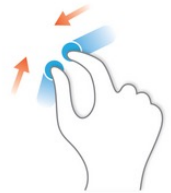
One way that neurodivergent individuals manage emotional dysregulation is through stimming. NeuroClastic author Maxfield Sparrow describes stimming as "communication, celebration, and self-regulation."¹⁶

That is, stimming taps into the sensory system (which is often different in neurodiversity) to calm or entertain the self, as well as enjoy the world. With respect to emotional dysregulation, stimming is used to calm oneself when feeling anxious, overwhelmed, scared, too cold, too hot, too sad, and so on.¹⁶

EMOTION DYSREGULATION

Neurodivergent individuals are more prone to become overwhelmed by environmental cues due to differences in their sensory systems (too loud, strong smells, too many people, overhead lights, tight work uniform) and internal cues (pain, hunger, increases in heart rate).

As such, stimming can operate like a check and balance to manage the incoming information.¹⁶



In addition to stimming, research has identified that psychological interventions are effective for treating emotional dysregulation in neurodivergent individuals, noting improvements in anxiety, depression, coping skills, and regulation strategies.¹²⁻¹⁴

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Yet, many neurodivergent individuals are more likely to be prescribed medication for their mood and behaviour rather than psychological intervention to teach and practice coping strategies.¹⁵

This is potentially problematic. Neurodivergent brains are different from neurotypical brains (who these medications were created for), and as such, medications can affect neurodivergent brains differently, with many individuals experiencing an increase in negative side effects.¹⁷

Further, medications do not provide the individual with coping skills needed to manage stress, including recognizing triggers and gaining self-awareness for when the tide starts to rise before it completely takes over (as noted previously).

EMOTION REGULATION

Before We Jump In, Let's Assess Where You Are

Read each statement and decide how strongly you agree with it²³

1 = Does not apply

3 = Applies half the time

5 = Applies all the time

Question	Level of Agreement				
I realize immediately when I lose my temper	1	2	3	4	5
I can 'reframe' bad situations quickly	1	2	3	4	5
I am always able to see things from the other person's viewpoint	1	2	3	4	5
I am an excellent listener	1	2	3	4	5
I know when I am happy	1	2	3	4	5
I do not wear my 'heart on my sleeve'	1	2	3	4	5
I am excellent at empathizing with someone else's problem	1	2	3	4	5
I never interrupt other people's conversations	1	2	3	4	5
I usually recognize when I am stressed	1	2	3	4	5
Others can rarely tell what kind of mood I am in	1	2	3	4	5
I can tell if someone is not happy with me	1	2	3	4	5
I am good at adapting and mixing with a variety of people	1	2	3	4	5
When I am being 'emotional' I am aware of this	1	2	3	4	5
I rarely 'fly off the handle' at other people	1	2	3	4	5
I can tell if a team of people are not getting along with each other	1	2	3	4	5
People are the most interesting thing in life for me	1	2	3	4	5

EMOTION REGULATION

Before We Jump In, Let's Assess Where You Are

Read each statement and decide how strongly you agree with it²³

1 = Does not apply

3 = Applies half the time

5 = Applies all the time

Question	Level of Agreement				
When I feel anxious, I can usually figure out why	1	2	3	4	5
Difficult people do not annoy me	1	2	3	4	5
I can usually understand why people are being difficult towards me	1	2	3	4	5
I love to meet new people and get to know what makes them 'tick'	1	2	3	4	5
I always know when I'm being unreasonable	1	2	3	4	5
I can consciously alter my frame of mind or mood	1	2	3	4	5
Other individuals are not 'difficult' just 'different'	1	2	3	4	5
I need a variety of work colleagues to make my job interesting	1	2	3	4	5
Awareness of my own emotions is very important to me at all times	1	2	3	4	5
I do not let stressful situations or people affect me once I have left work	1	2	3	4	5
I can understand if I am being unreasonable	1	2	3	4	5
I like to ask questions to find out what is important to people	1	2	3	4	5
I can tell if someone has upset or annoyed me	1	2	3	4	5
I rarely worry about work or life in general	1	2	3	4	5
I can understand why my actions sometimes offend others	1	2	3	4	5
Difficult people are a challenge that I can win over	1	2	3	4	5

EMOTION REGULATION

Before We Jump In, Let's Assess Where You Are

Read each statement and decide how strongly you agree with it²³

1 = Does not apply

3 = Applies half the time

5 = Applies all the time

Question	Level of Agreement				
I can let anger 'go' quickly so that it no longer affects me	1	2	3	4	5
I can suppress my emotions when I need to	1	2	3	4	5
I can sometimes see things from others' point of view	1	2	3	4	5
I am good at reconciling differences with other people	1	2	3	4	5
I know what makes me happy	1	2	3	4	5
Others often do not know how I am feeling about things	1	2	3	4	5
Reasons for disagreements are always clear to me	1	2	3	4	5
I generally build solid relationships with those I work with	1	2	3	4	5

Add up the totals of each colour:

Self-awareness	
Managing emotions	
Empathy	
Social skills	

How to interpret your totals:

35-50 = this is an area of strength

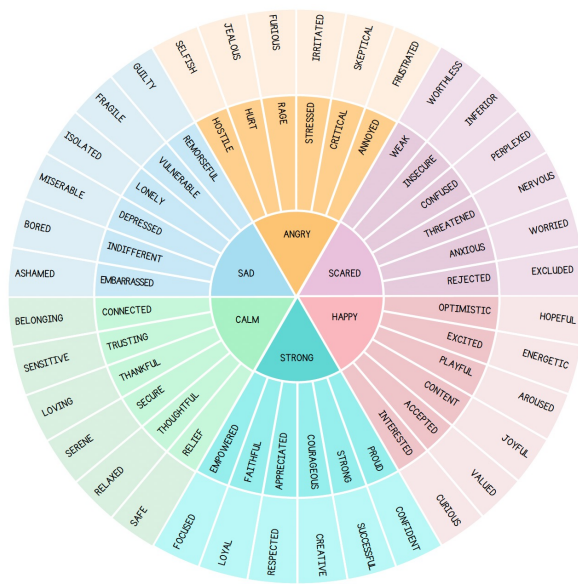
18-34 = giving attention to where you feel you are weakest will pay dividends

10-17 = this area may be a developmental priority

EMOTION REGULATION

LABEL YOUR EMOTIONS

Emotions can be complex! It is not surprising that emotions can be confusing. I mean, just look at this wheel. The feeling wheel was created by Gloria Wilcox in 1982 to help people label how they are feeling.



*See next page for
enlarged version*

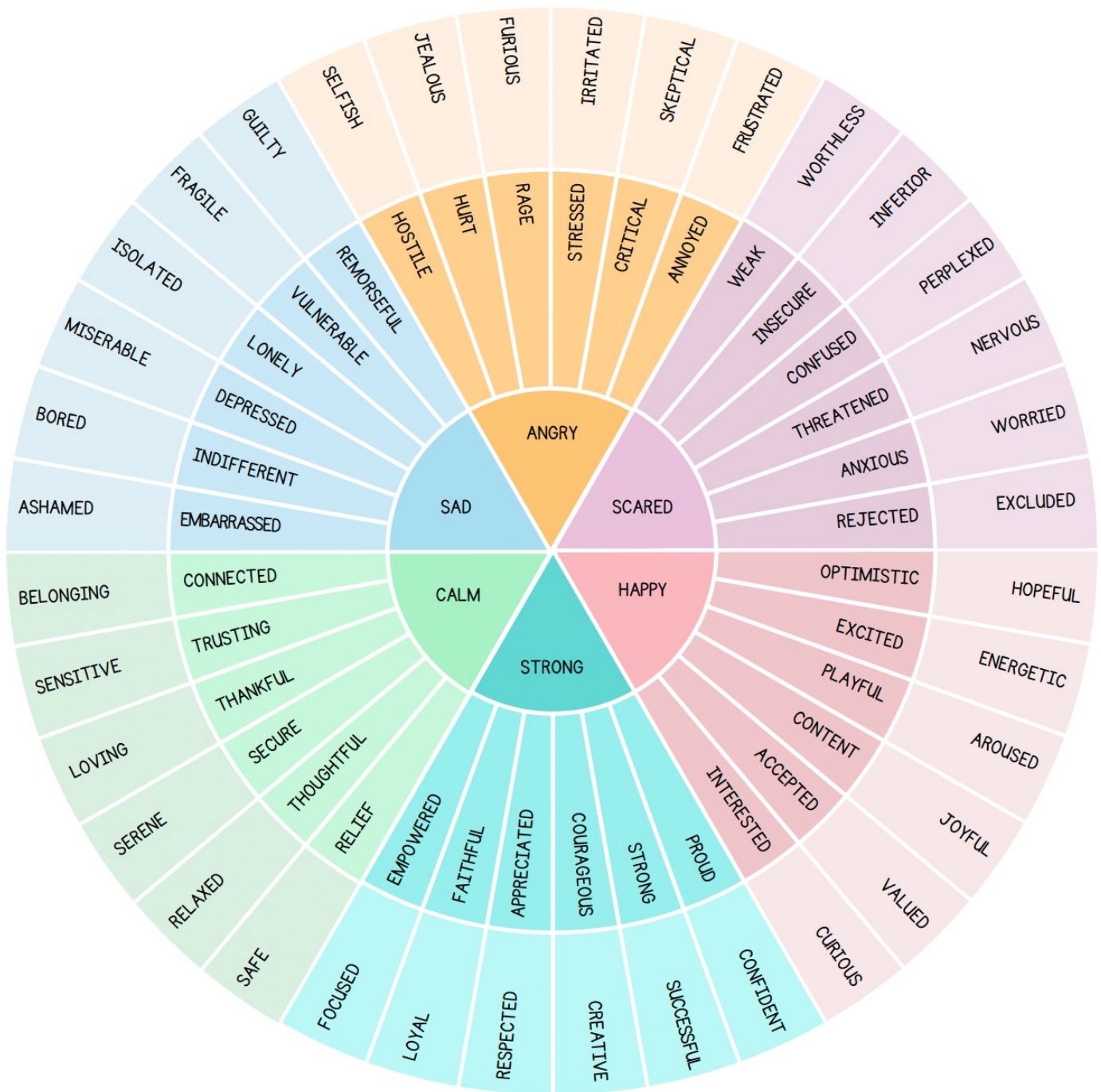
How To Use It

You can start with a big emotion (near the centre), such as **anger**, and move to the next level (the middle of the wheel) to find an explanatory emotion that best describes the purpose of the anger (e.g., I am angry because I was **hurt**).

The outer ring provides an alternative word that may better explain the second ring emotion (e.g., I was hurt because she was awarded the prize over me, I am feeling **jealous**). While this feeling wheel doesn't cover all possible feelings, it provides a strong foundation to help in identifying, labelling, and articulating your emotions.

EMOTION REGULATION

Feelings Wheel by Gloria Wilcox (1982)

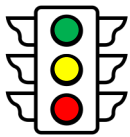


EMOTION REGULATION

Even if you cannot label your emotion, you can often tell how big it is!
When you are experiencing an emotion, develop a way to describe how intense it is.

How?

One strategy is to give it a colour

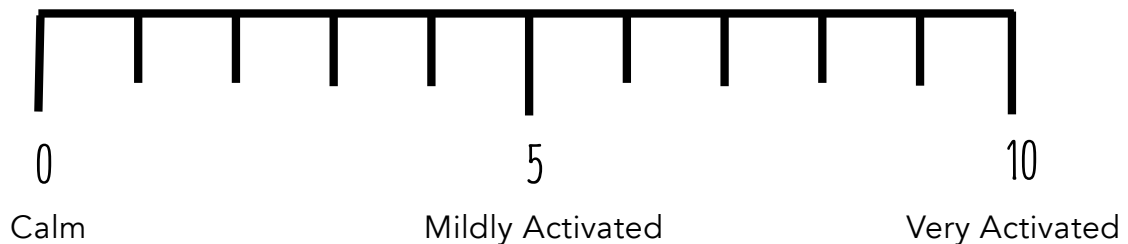


Green = calm or neutral

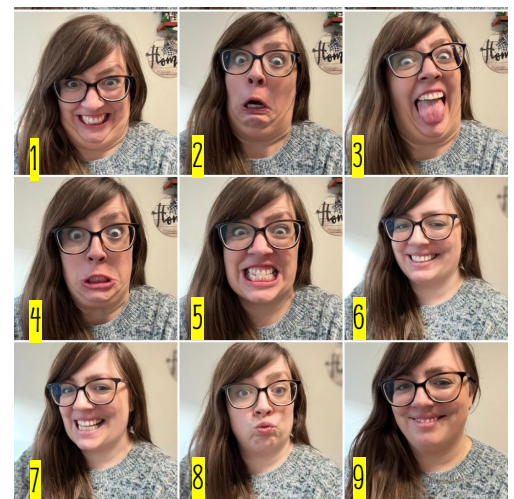
Yellow = feeling some distress

Red = feeling a lot of distress

Another strategy is to give it a number



Use a strategy that makes sense for you,
like what version of Lori are you today?



EMOTION REGULATION

STRESS CYCLE¹⁸

What is the stress cycle? The stress response was an evolutionary necessity – when we were chased by wild animals, we needed to experience a rush of stress hormones to mobilize us to escape the threat (Oh no, a bear! Must run!)



Now, we experience the same physiological response due to life stress, but do not get the release from running for our life and being relieved at escaping.

Metaphorical bears are everywhere and there is nowhere to run!

So, how can we *run* from our metaphorical bears?



EMOTION REGULATION

Below is a list of strategies that can be found on the pages that follow. Note your experience with each strategy on the table. It is important to try and practice these strategies when you are not too distressed (it is hard to learn something new when you are dysregulated)

Strategy	Try it (yes/no)	Rate (1 = not helpful; 5 = helpful)	Notes to self about strategy
Laughter			
Crying			
Positive social interactions			
Creative expression			
Pretzel			
Interlocking hands			
Yoga poses			
Physical activity			
Progressive muscle relaxation			
Body awareness			

EMOTION REGULATION

Below is a list of strategies that can be found on the pages that follow. Note your experience with each strategy on the table. It is important to try and practice these strategies when you are not too distressed (it is hard to learn something new when you are dysregulated)

Strategy	Try it (yes/no)	Rate (1 = not helpful; 5 = helpful)	Notes to self about strategy
Body awareness			
Breathing			
Square breathing			
3-5 Belly breathing			
Figure 8 breathing			
Sensory grounding			
Calm place			
Journaling			
Mental math			
Categorization			
Self-Compassion			

EMOTION REGULATION

TAPPING INTO YOUR FEELINGS¹⁸ STRATEGIES

One of the best ways to manage how you are feeling is to sit back and feel them. Tap into your emotions:



Laughter. Not social or “fake” laughter, but belly laughs — deep, impolite, helpless laughter.

Do you have a favourite comedy movie or stand-up comedian?
What reliably makes you laugh?



A Big Ol' Cry. Sometimes we cannot deal with the situation that caused stress, but we can deal with the stress.

- Have a favorite tear-jerker movie that makes you cry every time? Going through that emotion with the characters allows your body to go through it too.
- The story guides you through the complete emotional cycle.

What TV show or movie never fails to make you cry?

REVIEW



- (A) How were these exercises? Were they useful?
(B) Will you continue to use these strategies?

EMOTION REGULATION

TAPPING INTO YOUR FEELINGS¹⁸ STRATEGIES

Positive Social Interaction. Casual but friendly social interaction is the first external sign that the world is a safe place.

- Is there a person in your life that is comfortable to be around. Someone you can check-in with or engage in parallel activities with (being in the same room together but doing your own things).
- This can reassure your brain that the world is a safe, sane place, and not all people suck. It helps!
- Don't feel like being people-y, try snuggling with a beloved pet. There's nothing like kitty purrs to calm the system.
- **Want to take it one step further?**
Hug someone you care about. Not a brief hug, but a full 60 second hug. It will feel ok, then awkward, then real awkward, but then the oxytocin gets released and the awkwardness turns into comfort and it feels really good.



REVIEW



- (A) How were these exercises? Were they useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use these strategies?

EMOTION REGULATION

TAPPING INTO YOUR FEELINGS¹⁸ STRATEGIES



Creative Expression is a great way to channel your feelings. Creative activities today can lead to more energy, excitement, and enthusiasm tomorrow.

Do you enjoy painting, playing a musical instrument, getting your hands dirty in clay, putting puzzles together?



REVIEW



- (A) How were these exercises? Were they useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use these strategies?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY

Pretzel



Extend your arms out in front of you with palms facing each other

Rotate your arms so that the backs of your hands are touching, and your thumbs are pointing down

Lift your dominant hand over top of the other hand so the palms are facing each other once again (arms should be slightly twisted)

Interlock your fingers

Bend your arms down towards your belly and pull them up through so that they are resting on your chest (Your arms should make a pretzel shape)

Keep hands resting on chest and close your eyes and slow breathe (3 – 5 breathing described later)

Video demonstration: <https://www.sacreypsychology.com/news>

REVIEW



(A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?

(B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY

Interlocking Hands



Put your hands in a prayer position in front of your chest and interlock your fingers

Starting with the pinkie finger on the right hand, lift each digit one at a time in order (right pinkie, left pinkie, right ring, left ring, right middle, left middle, right index, left index, right thumb, left thumb)

Once all 10 fingers have been lifted one at a time, do it in reverse order (start with left thumb, then right thumb, left index, and so on)

Notice what you were thinking about as you did that (likely focused on doing it right!)

If you want to make it more complex, put your arms/hands in the pretzel shape first and hold it as you do this exercise

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁹

Chair Mountain

Sit on a chair with your feet flat on the floor and hip-width apart

Sit as straight as is comfortable

Use your abdominal muscles to move your belly button towards your spine

Keep your breath slow and steady (breath in through nose for a count of 4 and out through mouth for a count of 4)

Press your feet into the floor and notice if the muscles in your legs engage

Slowly lengthen through your torso

Notice the effort you are using and then soften your posture

Alternative pose: Stand up with your feet hip-width apart and follow the rest of the above instructions



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁹

Centering

Begin with Chair Mountain (previous pose)

Settle in the chair so you feel comfortable in your seat

Feel the support of your feet on the floor and the chair under your bottom

Notice your breathing

Are you using your nose? Your mouth? Are you alternating between the two? Are you breathing slowly or quickly?

Count how long you are inhaling for and how long you exhale. Don't change your breathing, just notice it

Notice your breath and be present in the moment. Place your hand over your heart

Notice how you are feeling in this moment



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁹

Neck Surrender

Begin with Chair Mountain (previous pose)

Lower your chin to your chest. Notice the stretch in the back of your neck

Inhale, and slowly move your chin towards one shoulder. Exhale, and slowly bring your chin back to the centre. Repeat for the other side

Repeat both sides twice

Return to chair mountain pose

Inhale while rotating your head to the right; exhale and return to centre. Repeat on the other side. Notice any differences between the two sides

Repeat both sides twice

Inhale, tilting your right ear towards your right shoulder; notice the stretch in the side of your neck. Exhale, slowly returning your head to centre. Repeat on the other side



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁹

Seated Pigeon

Begin with Chair Mountain (previous pose)

Using your hands, lift your right ankle and rest it on your left thigh. If you feel discomfort with this position, then simply cross the right ankle over the left

Explore your hip by putting your right hand on your knee and slowly guiding your knee towards the floor. Do not force the movement. What do you notice in your hip?

Take 5 breaths

Place your foot back on the floor

Repeat on the other side

Place the foot back on the floor. Notice any difference sensations or range of movement you felt between the left and right sides of your body



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁹

Breath of Joy!

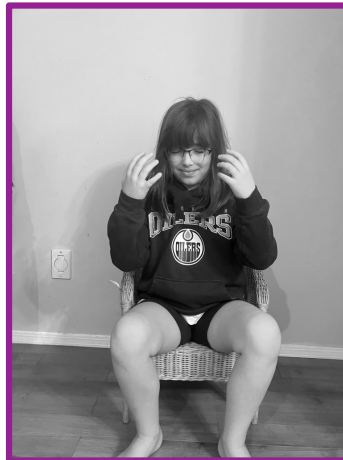
Begin with Chair Mountain or Standing Mountain (previous pose)

Inhale, lifting your arms towards the sky. Exhale, stretching them out to the side

Inhale, lifting them back up, and then exhale, bending your knees and swinging your arms down while saying a loud “ha”

Repeat two more times

Return to your natural breath. What do you notice? Has your energy changed? Do you need to catch your breath? Are you smiling?



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁸

How can we complete the stress cycle in modern times
(remember those metaphorical bears?)

The best way to complete the stress cycle (according to research) is exercise.

Exercise helps with stress and improves your health and mood AND people be saying you should definitely get some



- Physical activity tells your brain you have successfully survived the threat (yeah, got away from the bears) and now your body is a safe place to live.
- Physical activity is the single most efficient strategy for completing the stress response cycle: 20-60 mins a day.

What types of exercising do you like? Cardio? Lifting weights? Yoga? Martial Arts? Walking? Bike Riding? Kayaking? There are many choices.



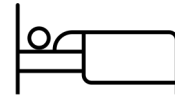
REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁸



If you aren't into exercising, try progressive muscle relaxation

Lie in bed and **progressively tense and release every muscle** in your body, starting with your feet and ending with your face.

- Tense them hard, hard, hard, for a ssloowww count of 10
- Make sure you spend extra time tensing the places where you carry your stress
- And while you do that, you visualize, really clearly and viscerally, what it feels like to beat the living daylights out of whatever stressor you've encountered
- Imagine it clearly, though - that matters a lot. You should notice your body responding, like your heart beating faster and your fists clenching, until you reach a satisfying sense of victory

For a guided audio relaxation, visit: <https://www.sacrepsychology.com/news>

REVIEW



- (A) How were these exercises? Were they useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use these strategies?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁹

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Want to try it on your own? Give the below a try:

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below, you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

Feet	Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them
Calves	Point or flex your feet, then let them relax
Thighs	Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax
Torso	Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall
Back	Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them
Shoulders	Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop
Arms	Make fists and flex your arms up to your shoulders, then let them drop
Hands	Make a fist and hold tight, then relax your fingers
Face	Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax
Full Body	Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

MOVEMENT BASED STRATEGY¹⁹

Body Awareness

The body awareness technique will bring you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step.

1. Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips
2. Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet
3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground
4. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times
5. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms
6. Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth
7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides
8. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body

REVIEW

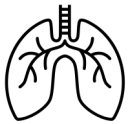


- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
(B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

BREATHING STRATEGY

Breathing. Deep, slow breaths down regulate the stress response—especially when the exhalation is long and slow and goes all the way to the end of the breath, so that your belly contracts.



- Breathing is most effective when your stress isn't too high
- A simple, practical exercise is to breathe in with a slow count of five, hold that breath for five, then exhale for a slow count of ten, and pause for another count of five
- Do that three times—just one minute and fifteen seconds of breathing—and see how you feel

A few more examples of breathwork include:

1. Square breathing
2. 3 – 5 belly breathing
3. Figure 8 breathing

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

BREATHING STRATEGY

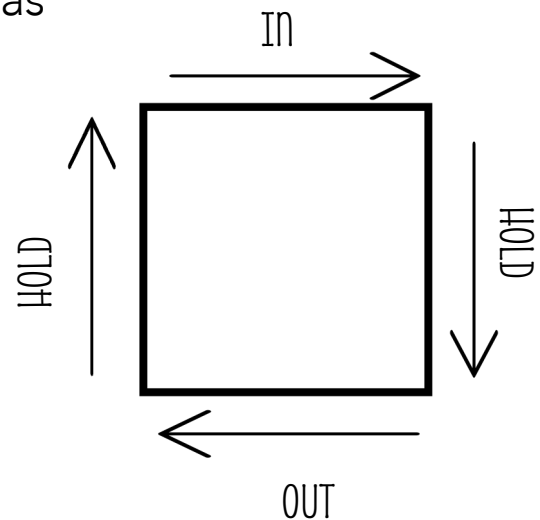
Square Breathing

1. Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4
2. Hold the air in your lungs for a count of 4
3. Breathe out of your mouth for a count of 4
4. Wait for a count of 4

Repeat at least 4 times or as many as

Alternative Method

Go between 4 seconds of breathing in and 4 seconds of breathing out (do not include "hold")



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
(B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

BREATHING STRATEGY

3 – 5 Belly Breathing

Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly button.

Inhale through your stomach to a count of 3 in your mind, letting it inflate. Allow your chest to remain still.

Exhale through your mouth to a count of 5 in your mind, feeling your stomach deflate. Again, allow your chest to remain still.

Repeat this three times.



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

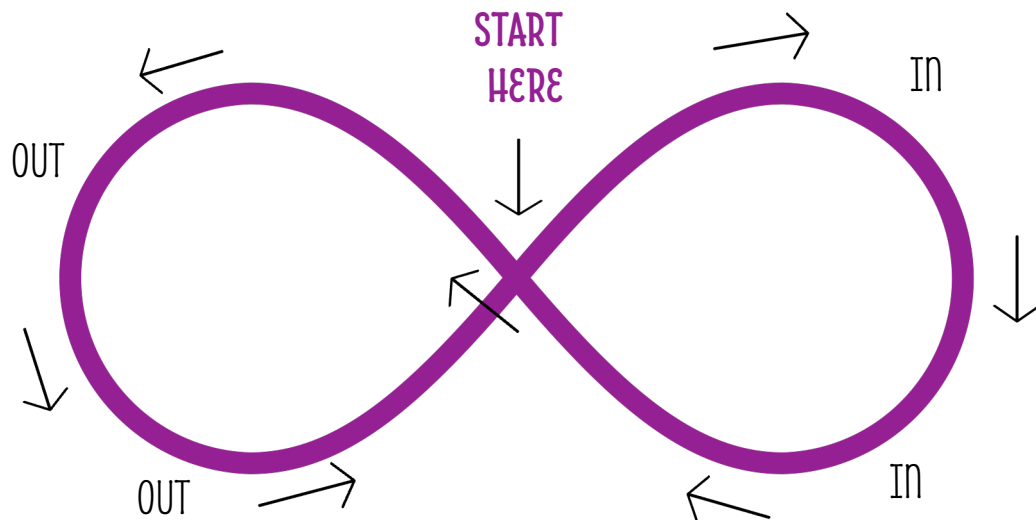
BREATHING STRATEGY

Figure 8 Breathing

Trace the loop with your finger, starting at the middle

1. Breathe in through your nose during the first loop
2. Switch at the intersection of the loop
3. Breathe out of your mouth during the second loop
4. Switch at the intersection of the loop

Repeat at least 4 times



REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
(B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

Sensory Grounding

When you are in a situation that you cannot leave or walk around to calm yourself, sensory grounding is a method that you can use to calm your anxious thoughts and feelings.

Standard sensory grounding is short and straightforward:



1. Look around the room and name 5 things you can see



2. Feel around the room and name 4 things you can touch



3. Listen to the room and name 3 things you can hear



4. Sniff the room and name 2 things you can smell



5. Focus on your tongue and name 1 thing you can taste

We can often adjust this Grounding exercise for a longer version that is more repetitive. This works well for many neurodivergent folks who find repetition soothing.

REVIEW



(A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?

(B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

Sensory Grounding

An adjustment on the previous Sensory Grounding exercise to make it longer and more repetitive.



The alternative version:

1. Notice and name 5 things you can see, followed by 5 things you can hear, then 5 things you can touch
2. Now do the same thing in groups of 4, but with new things you have not seen, heard, or touched: 4 (new) things you can see, 4 (new) things you can hear, 4 (new) things you can touch
3. Repeat with 3 (new) things you can see, 3 (new) things you can hear, 3 (new) things you can touch
4. Now 2 (new) things you can see, 2 (new) things you can hear, and 2 (new) things you can touch
5. Finish with 1 (new) thing you can see, 1 (new) thing you can hear, and 1 (new) thing you can touch

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
(B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

Sensory Grounding²⁰

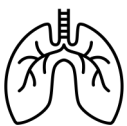
When you are in a situation that you cannot leave or walk around to calm yourself, sensory grounding is a method that you can use to calm your anxious thoughts and feelings

Earth: Take a minute or two to “land” and to be here now.



- Place both feet on the ground and feel the chair supporting you
- Look around and notice 3 new things. What do you see? What do you hear?

Air: Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly button.



- Inhale through your stomach to a count of 3 in your mind, letting it inflate. Then, allow your chest to remain still
- Exhale through your mouth to a count of 5 in your mind, feeling your stomach deflate. Again, allow your chest to remain still
- Repeat as needed
- Note: Longer exhales shift physiological response to “rest”

EMOTION REGULATION

sensory grounding²⁰

Water: Make some saliva in your mouth.



- Swallow your saliva or drink water (or other liquid)
- Note: When you start making saliva, you switch on the digestive system (parasympathetic) and trigger "rest"

Fire: Bring up an image of your calm place or another image that brings you feelings of calmness, such as a memory of when you felt good about yourself.



- What do you feel and where do you feel it in your body?
- Enhance how it feels with slow tapping

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

Sensory Grounding²⁰



Calm Place

Visualize a place that is outside. It can be real or imaginary. The only rule is that it cannot be associated with any negative emotions. Once you have a place in mind, flesh it out with the following prompts:

- What time of year is it (spring, summer, fall, winter)?
- What time of day is it? Where is the sun?
- What's the weather like? Is the sun on your skin? Is it raining? Or snowing? Can you feel a breeze?
- What can you hear? Are there animals? Bugs? Pets? Other people? Waves crashing?
- Is there a smell? Flowers? Ocean? Animals?

Now you:

- Where are you? Are you sitting? Standing? Laying down?
- What are you wearing?
- What are you doing in this place?

Close your eyes, visualize your calming place, and take a few deep or slow breaths. What will you name your calm place?

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

WRITING BASED STRATEGY²¹

Journaling so-called “negative” emotions

When you find yourself in a “negative” emotional state, write a journal entry that describes 4 things:

- 1) the trigger;
- 2) the thoughts that float around in your head;
- 3) the emotion(s) you are feeling; and
- 4) any bodily sensations you experience.

Then, walk away from your journal until you are regulated and in a calm state. Once calmed, you can reflect on your entry:

1. Is this a recurring trigger?
2. Why did those thoughts come up?
3. Is there information to support those thoughts?
4. Is there information that does not support those thoughts?
5. What does my emotion(s) mean regarding the experience (for example, if sad, why did sadness come up instead of anger, etc.)
6. What did my bodily sensations reveal about where I carry the stress of that emotion/experience/trigger?

Then write a summary of the experience: what can you learn from your entry that can help you recognize your patterns (reactions, thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations) and what do you need to help yourself with future experiences with that trigger?

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Can you see a use to do this with ‘positive emotions’ (e.g. joy)
- (C) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

Mental Strategy²¹

Mental Math

This task involves counting backwards

1. Randomly pick a number between 70 and 100
2. Pick an odd number between 3 and 9 (e.g., 3, 5, 7, or 9)
3. From the number you choose, skip count backwards using the odd number

For example, if you chose 75 as your starting point and 3 as your odd number, you would count out 75, 72, 69, 66, 63, etc.

If you want to make this **more complex**, choose an even number between 2 and 8 (e.g., 2, 4, 6, or 8) to add after each skip count backwards.

For example, if you chose 4, the example would look like:

75, 72, 76, 73, 77, 74, 78, etc.
(Start, -3, +4, -3, +4, -3, +4, etc.)

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Can you see a use to do this with 'positive emotions' (e.g. joy)
- (C) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

Mental Strategy²¹

Categorization

This task involves thinking of as many things as you can that fit into a certain category

To do this, choose a category of things and then list as many items as you can think of that fit into that category

Categorization can include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Cars | 14. Animals |
| 2. Dogs | 15. Comedies |
| 3. Insects | 16. Adam Sandler movies |
| 4. Characters from TV shows | 17. Trains |
| 5. Desserts | 18. Olympic sports |
| 6. Books by certain authors | 19. Horror movies |
| 7. Directors and their movies | 20. Colours |
| 8. Disney/Pixar movies | 21. Emotions |
| 9. Superheroes | 22. Songs by a band |
| 10. Super villains | 23. Genres of music |
| 11. Video games | 24. Genres of films |
| 12. Vegetables | And many more |
| 13. Fruits | |

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Can you see a use to do this with 'positive emotions' (e.g. joy)
- (C) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

SELF COMPASSION²²



Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment

Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or being self-critical. It means being gentle with yourself when confronted with painful experiences (*self-kindness*) rather than getting angry when life falls short of set ideals. We cannot always be or get exactly what we want. When denied, suffering increases in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism (*self-judgment*).

When accepted with sympathy and kindness, greater emotional equanimity is experienced.

Common humanity vs. Isolation

Frustration at not having things exactly as we want is often accompanied by a sense of isolation – as if “I” were the only person suffering or making mistakes. All humans suffer, however. Therefore, suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience – something that we all go through (*common humanity*) rather than being something that happens to “me” alone (*isolation*).

Mindfulness vs. Over-identification

Self-compassion employs *mindfulness*, a non-judgmental state in which one observes their thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. Yet, mindfulness requires that we not be “*over-identified*” with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.

An exercise to practice self-compassion is described on the next page

REVIEW



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
- (B) Can you see a use to do this with ‘positive emotions’ (e.g. joy)
- (C) Will you continue to use this strategy?

EMOTION REGULATION

SELF COMPASSION²²



The exercise:

Think of a situation in your life that is difficult, that is causing you stress. Call the situation to mind and see if you can actually feel the stress and emotional discomfort in your body. Now, say the following to yourself:

"This is a moment of suffering" or "This moment sucked"

That's mindfulness. Other options include: "This hurts" - "Ouch" - "This is stress" - "This bites" - "This is a lot"

Now, say the following to yourself:

"Suffering is a part of life" or "Everyone has times that suck"

That's common humanity. Other options include: "Other people feel this way" - "I'm not alone" - "We all struggle in our lives" - "Other people feel this way" - "I'm not the only one" - "We all face crap in our lives"

Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands on your chest. Or adopt the soothing touch you discovered felt right for you. Now, say the following to yourself:

"May I be kind to myself" or "I'm way too fine to be this stressed, yeah" - Lizzo

You can also ask yourself, "What do I need to hear right now to express kindness to myself?" Is there a phrase that speaks to you in your particular situation, such as: "May I give myself the compassion that I need" - "May I learn to accept myself as I am" - "May I forgive myself" - "May I be strong" - "May I be patient" - "This crap doesn't define me" - "I am more than this" - "May I check myself before I wreck myself"

This can be done any time, day or night, and will help you remember that crappy times happen. To everyone. No exceptions.

NOTES

How were these strategies? Were they useful? Will you continue to use these strategy?

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About the author

Lori Sacrey is a registered psychologist in the province of Alberta, Canada. She focuses on helping her clients manage their perceived challenges from a neurodiversity-affirming lens.



Lori also has a PhD in neuroscience and works as a research associate at the University of Alberta, where she continues to engage in research and stay up to date with the latest findings.