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What Strategies are Included?



This toolkit includes several different strategies to help with emotional regulation.

Emotions - A Introduction

- Label Your Emotions
- Emotional Intensity
- Stress Cycle

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Tapping into Feelings Strategies

- Laughter
- Crying
- Social Connection
- Creative Expression

Movement Based Strategies

- Pretzel
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- Seated Yoga
- Exercise
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Body Awareness

Mindfulness Based Strategies

- Explore a Fruit
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- Take a Walk
- Blow Bubbles

Breathing Strategies

- Square Breathing
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Sensory Grounding

- 5 Senses
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Writing Strategies

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Mental Strategies

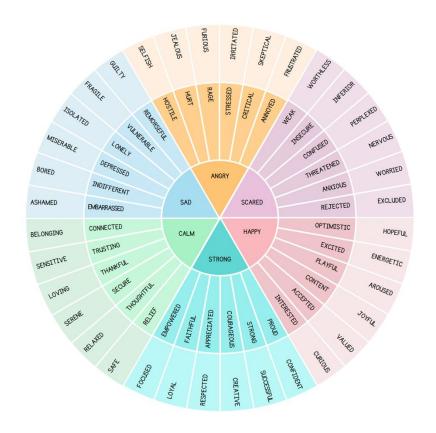
- Mental Math
- Categorization

Self-Compassion Strategies

- Self-Kindness
- Common Humanity
- Mindfulness

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.



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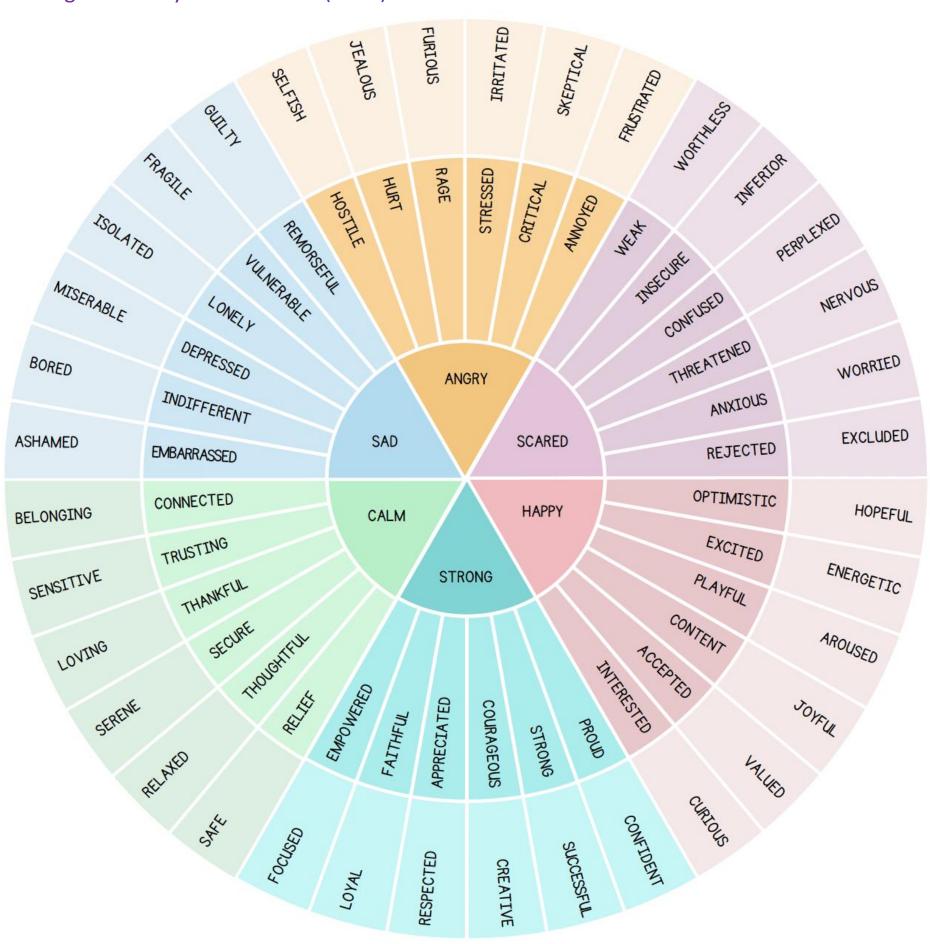
How To Use It

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 encompass all possible feelings, it provides a strong foundation to identify, label, and articulate your emotions.

Label Your Emotions

Feelings Wheel by Gloria Wilcox (1982)



EMOTION INTENSITY

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.

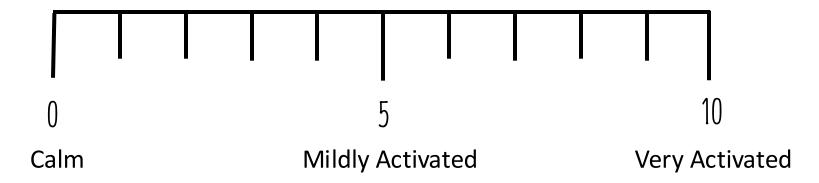
How?

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 Michael Scott* are you today?



^{*}Michael Scott is the Manager from The Office (the American version)

STress cycle

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!

We cannot bring wild bears into society, so how can we *run* from our metaphorical bears?



Tapping Into Your Feelings

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?



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

Tapping Into Your Feelings

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.



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

Tapping Into Your Feelings



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?



- (A) How were these exercises? Were they useful?
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Pretzel



- 1. Extend your arms out in front of you with palms facing each other
- 2. Rotate your arms so that the backs of your hands are touching, and your thumbs are pointing down
- 3. Lift your dominant hand over top of the other hand so the palms are facing each other once again (arms should be slightly twisted)
- 4. Interlock your fingers
- 5. 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)
- 6. Keep hands resting on chest and close your eyes and slow breath (3 5) breathing described below)
- 7. Video demonstration: https://www.sacreypsychology.com/news



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

Interlocking Hands



- 1. Put your hands in a prayer position in front of your chest and interlock your fingers
- 2. 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)
- 3. 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)
- 4. Notice what you were thinking about as you did that (likely focused on doing it right!)
- 5. 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



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

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



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

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.



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

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 you 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.



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

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.



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

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 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?









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

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.















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

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.sacreypsychology.com/news



- (A) How were these exercises? Were they useful?
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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.

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

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?

Mindfulness Based Strategies

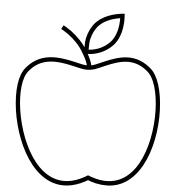
Explore a Fruit

Observe and describe an apple:

What are the visual features?

What does it feel like?

What does it smell like?



Then, slowly start to bite into the apple and tune in to each sense. Are there any emotions, thoughts, or other experiences that occur during that first bite? Does your experience change as you chew the apple? As you take another bite? How are you feeling as you take the final bite?

Other fruits to try:

- 1. Orange
- 2. Peach
- 3. Strawberry
- 4. Pineapple
- 5. Banana



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

Mindfulness Based Strategies

Attend to a Song



Put on your preferred song.

Choose a song based on the mood you would like to feel. You could also choose nature sounds if you prefer.

Sit comfortably in your chair or lay down on your couch or bed. Close your eyes attend to the sound. Listen to the melody, the beat, or they lyrics. Stay with it and return to it if a distraction occurs.

Attend to your breathing. Does it match the rhythm of the song? Attend to your body. Does it want to move to the sound?

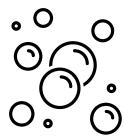
How does your mood change from the beginning to the end of the song? Do you notice any changes in your body?



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
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Mindfulness Based Strategies

Blow some Bubbles



Grab a bubble wand and some bubble juice. Sit outside and dip the wand in the juice and blow some bubbles.

How does your breath affect the bubbles? If you blow gently versus harder? Does your breath change as you blow the bubbles?

How long do the bubbles stay in the air? Do you watch them until each bubble pops? Do they glisten? Do you pop the bubbles?

Notice how your mood changes from the beginning to the end of blowing bubbles? Do you notice any changes in your body? Do you notice any changes in your thoughts?



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



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

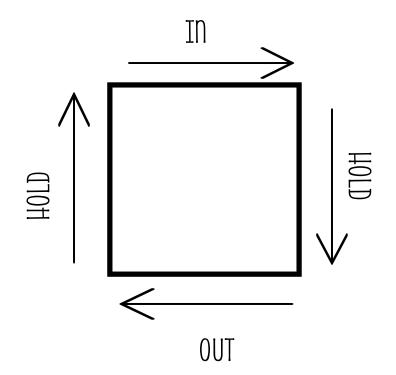
Square Breathing

- 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

Alterative Method

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





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





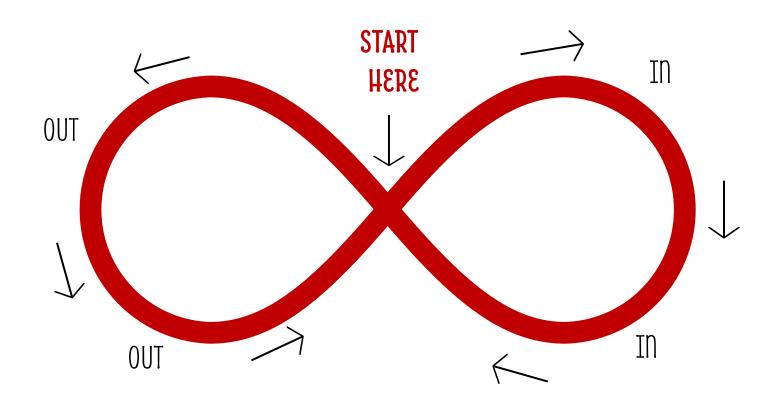
- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
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Figure 8 Breathing

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 or as many as





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

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 fairly 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.



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

An adjustment on the previous Sensory Grounding exercise to make it longer and more repetitive. This works well for many neurodivergent folks who find repetition soothing.



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.



- (A) How was this exercise? Was it useful?
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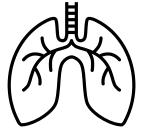
When you are in a situation that you cannot leave or walk around to calm yourself, sensory grounding is a method that you can use to calm your anxious thoughts and feelings

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"

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 triggers "rest."

Fire: Bring up an image of your calm place or some 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.



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



Calm Place

Visualize a place that is outside. It can be real or imaginary. The only rule is that it cannot be associate 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?



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

Writing Based Strategy

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 thought 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?

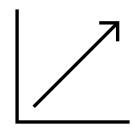
Then write a summary of the experience: what can you learn from your entry that can help you recognize your patterns (reactions, thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations) and what do you need to help yourself with future experiences with that trigger?



- (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?

Mental Based Strategies

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:



- (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?

Mental Based Strategies

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
- 2. Dogs
- 3. Insects
- 4. Characters from TV shows
- 5. Desserts
- 6. Books by certain authors
- 7. Directors and their movies
- 8. Disney/Pixar movies
- 9. Superheroes
- 10. Super villains
- 11. Video games
- 12. Vegetables
- 13. Fruits

- 14. Animals
- 15. Comedies
- 16. Adam Sandler movies
- 17. Trains
- 18. Olympic sports
- 19. Horror movies
- 20. Colours
- 21. Emotions
- 22. Songs by a band
- 23. Genres of music
- 24. Genres of films

And many more

------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?

Self-Compassion Strategy

Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment



Self-compassion (SC) 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 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. 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 rather than being something that happens to "me" alone.

Self-Compassion Strategy

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 "overidentified" with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.

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"

Self-Compassion Strategy

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"

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 "May I be strong"

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, 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 patient" - "This crap doesn't define me" - "I am more than this"





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

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