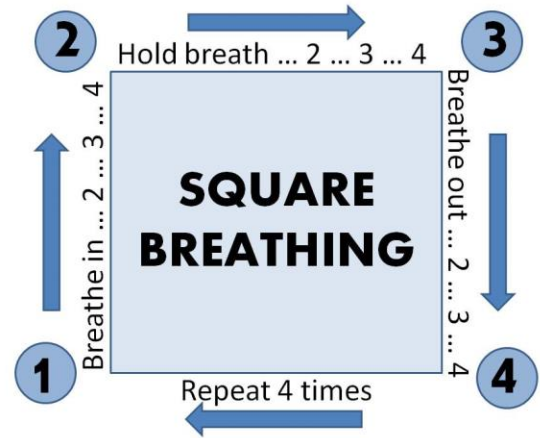


STRESS RELIEF / SELF-SOOTHING TOOLS

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- 1. Square Breathing.** When you're feeling stressed/triggered close your eyes and think of a box while you go up the left side of it inhaling and counting to 4; then go across the top while holding your breath and counting to 4; then go down the right side while exhaling counting to 4; then do it 4 times.
- 2. Nurturing Touch.** Another helpful way to slow down and relax is to tune into physical touch. This can be done by gently stroking the palm or back of your hand and caressing each finger, or caressing your arm, face or neck while breathing deeply and focusing on the pleasurable sensations it provides. Like the gentle touch you often receive from those you love, nurturing touch can help provide some of the soothing touch we all need. It's a way to connect with your physical self and feel more grounded as well.
- 3. 5-Minute Meditation.** Even non-meditators can find a simple meditation practice that slows the mind and transports it into a relaxed state. See my "5 Minute Meditation" as a guide to creating your own ideal meditation practice. Meditation is a powerful spiritual medicine for the mind.
- 4. Daily Time Out.** Give yourself a daily 10-minute time out by setting a timer then give yourself permission to watch YouTube videos, walk up and down the stairs a few times, go get a tall drink of fresh, cool water, text a friend to say hello, do stretching exercises, or sit and close your eyes to relax and quiet your mind.
- 5. Process Writing / Journal Therapy.** Anytime you're feeling stressed, uptight, anxious, overwhelmed or any other negative emotion sit down and write out what you are feeling. The process of writing helps you be more tuned into your own thoughts and aware of what you are really feeling. It can be even more effective than talking with someone. It's free therapy and available 24/7! Some of the benefits of process writing are that: 1) it utilizes both the right and left hemisphere's of your brain; 2) it helps you identify and sort through what you're thinking and feeling helping you connect more fully with your inner experience and increase your own self-awareness; 3) it often helps reduce or melt away worry and stress; and 4) it helps you to "read" your own mind and figure out what you are actually stressed about in a more thorough, unrushed and less threatening way.
 - a. Letters to God /Conversations with God.** A variation of "Process Writing" is to write a letter to God about what's going on in your life as if you were having a conversation with Him. You could also write a letter to yourself or a specific person you might be angry or frustrated with even though you may not actually send the letter. These letters allow yourself to be heard and in essence affirm your right to think and feel as you do without judgment.
 - b. Stress List.** Another variation of "Process Writing" is to write out a numbered or bulleted list identifying everything you are feeling stressed, frustrated, angry or annoyed about. The sentence stem for these statements might be: "I feel stressed/frustrated/angry/annoyed about..." or "I am stressing over..." or "It's stressing me out that ..."
 - c. Guilt List.** Another variation of "Process Writing" is to write out a numbered or bulleted list of everything you are feeling bad about. The sentence stem for these statements might be: "I feel bad about..." or "I can't believe I..."



- d. **Accomplishments List.** As a positive counter to a stress list, sometimes it can be helpful to write out a list of the things you've accomplished that day or week to counter all the things you may have written on your "things that are stressing you out" list.
- e. **Gratitude List.** Another variation of "Process Writing" is to write out a numbered or bulleted list of everything you can think of that you are grateful for. This also works great as an ongoing or daily exercise to add another few things to your list every day. It's helps your mind to look for and focus on the things that are good in your life to counter the stress-list and guilt-list items, etc. The sentence stem for these statements might be: "I'm grateful for..." or "I appreciate..."
6. **Help or Hinder?** Perception is everything! Ask yourself, "Is this a helpful thought or a hindering thought?" Find ways to see things differently. "I'm sure they were doing the best they could," or "Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. How you see or perceive something determines it's stress level to you, so learn to identify and reframe negative/ unproductive thoughts to more positive and productive ones.
7. **Q-TIP. Quit - Taking - It - Personally!** This mnemonic device is a great way to remember to not take things so personally or read into things especially since a lot of the time someone else's negative behavior is NOT about you but is actually about them, so Quit Taking It Personally!
- You could also practice checking in with others on any assumptions you may be making. This might sound like, "So, I'm thinking you're mad at me about something?"
8. **Mirror Exercises.** This tool helps you develop more self-compassion by affirming yourself in important ways. Every time you look in a mirror say any of the following statements to yourself to make your inner, self-talk more positive and production. (This tool comes from the work of Louise Hay).
- a. *"I approve of myself."* (This is also a great thing to say to yourself as you are falling asleep or waking up. Try saying this to yourself 100 times a day if you can.
 - b. *"I'm doing the best I can and my best is good enough."*
 - c. *"I am willing to change."*
 - d. *"I love you, (your name)."*
 - e. *"I let go and let God."*
9. **Get Physical.** Since stress is a mental/emotional function it can be very helpful to do something physical instead to get out of your mind and in to your physical body. Some ideas include: going for a walk, doing jumping jacks, exercising, playing a card game, etc.
10. **Get Balanced.** To help get your mind and body in better balance, stand on one foot for 1 minute then stand on the other foot for 1 minute.
11. **Music.** Play some of your favorite soothing music, which is one of the quickest way to shift your energy and mood, and release stress.

