

Coping Skills & Strategies

1. SENSORY OBSERVATION

This practice only takes a few moments. Sensory Observation helps to become aware of your surroundings, which may support you in feeling more grounded, balanced, or less stressed out. You may start by finding a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, or, maybe you practice this in a public area when you feel overwhelmed or stressed. You can practice this as many times per day as you choose. Repeat once, or more, if you choose.

- What are **5** things you can **see**?
- What are **4** things you can **touch**?
- What are **3** things you can **hear**?
- What are **2** things you can **smell**?
- What is **1** thing you can **taste**?

Notice how you feel after this practice. There is no right or wrong answer. Are there certain senses that are easier or harder to work through? If so, which ones?

Feel free to increase the number of items. Make it your own, if you like!

2. BREATH REGULATION

When we feel stressed out, overwhelmed, or maybe anxious, it may help to regulate your breathing. By using this strategy, we can tell our brains that we want to slow down our thoughts, feelings, emotions, or bodies. Below is one example of breath regulation; you can change the number of seconds to what feels useful for you. However, please try to make sure that your exhale (when you breathe air out) is *longer* than your inhale (when you breathe air in).

CHOICE 1

- Breathe IN for 4 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 6 seconds

Perhaps this doesn't feel useful for you. You can make it shorter, like in this example:

CHOICE 2

- Breathe IN for 3 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 4 seconds

Maybe you choose longer counts, like this example:

CHOICE 3

- Breathe IN for 4 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 5 seconds

CHOICE 4

If none of these feel useful for you, try matching the inhale and exhale, like this:

- Breathe IN for 3 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 3 seconds

There is no wrong or right number of seconds. Breathe in and out in whatever way feels most supportive or useful for your body. Just remember to breathe out (exhale) for a longer time than you breathe in (inhale), or make them equal.

How many seconds feel most useful for you (you can fill in the blank if you like)?

Inhale: _____

Exhale: _____

Are there any choices above that you would like to try, but haven't? Are there other choices that aren't listed that may be more useful for you? Maybe you can choose to try them next time!

If you would like an App to assist you with this practice, you may choose to:

Download the FREE app "BREATH BALL":

Breath Ball is a free app that lets you choose how long to inhale and exhale for. There is a ball that shrinks then expands, so you can follow along as you breathe in and out. You can change the length of the inhale or exhale. You can also choose how long you want to practice in the Settings of the app.

3. BODY AWARENESS (BODY SCAN)

"This exercise asks you to...focus your attention on different parts of your body, from your feet to the muscles in your face. It is designed to help you develop a mindful awareness of your bodily sensations, and to relieve tension wherever it is found. Research suggests that this mindfulness practice can help reduce stress, improve well-being, and decrease aches and pains.

The body scan can be performed while lying down, sitting, or in other postures.

*The steps below are a guided meditation designed to be done **while sitting**.*

Especially for those new to the body scan, we recommend performing this practice with the audio. However, you can also use the script below for guidance for yourself or for leading this practice for others.

*(Find the **FREE audio** version of the script at <http://marc.ucla.edu/mpeg/Body-Scan-Meditation.mp3>).*

Body Awareness Practice - Script:

1. Begin by bringing your attention into your body.
2. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.
3. You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.
4. Take a few deep breaths.
5. And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.
6. You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.
7. You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.
8. Notice your back against the chair.
9. Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.
10. Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight. See if you can allow them to soften.
11. Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.
12. Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.
13. Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.
14. Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.
15. Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes."

***For a FREE 45-minute audio Body Awareness Scan, visit this website:**

<https://health.ucsd.edu/av/mindfulness/45MinBodyScan07mono.mp3>

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4. MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION (MBSR)

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is just a big name for another form of mindfulness. Mindfulness and meditation are words that are often used to refer to the same concept:

Being aware of, and accepting, the present moment without judgement.

Practicing meditation and/or mindfulness is a proven way to reduce stress. Research shows more benefits when you practice more often and over time. There are several different types of meditation and mindfulness. MBSR is one type that has been studied a lot, and there are many different ways to practice it. When practicing these, it is best to find a quiet, safe and comfortable place where you will not be disturbed. If this isn't an option, then the safest place you can go is the best option.

Here are a few of these practices you may find useful, or may be curious to try:

a. Focus Mindfulness (also known as “Single Point Awareness”)

How: Practicing mindfulness with a focus involves looking inside ourselves to watch what is happening in your mind and brain. To keep your focus, it can be helpful to use something simple to keep yourself grounded in the moment. Follow **Breath Regulation** strategy, but add a point-of-focus, such as watching your breath or as small object you can hold, to help you gently bring your awareness back to the present moment.

b. Awareness Mindfulness

How: Unlike Focus Mindfulness, when we practice Awareness Mindfulness, we focus on the outside and what is around us. In other words, we use an “outside perspective”. When trying Awareness Mindfulness, try to notice or watch your mental activity as if it belonged to someone else.

In general, Awareness Mindfulness can be described as looking at your thoughts and feelings from outside of your usual experience. Instead, you watch or observe your mind as a stream of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and sensations, without judging any of it.

Here is a sample of Awareness Mindfulness. You can follow the script by yourself at home, if you want to. Use **Breath Regulation** for this practice as well.

Awareness Mindfulness – A Sample Practice Script

Start by taking your mind inwards for a moment by focusing on the breath. Take a few gentle deep breaths, from the belly. In and out. Re—lease your muscles if you find that useful...Continue to breathe in and out for as long as you wish.

Now take your mind outwards. See your thoughts, feelings, moods, and sensations as experiences. Let your body and brain feel like a field of experience...where they come and go, or change or repeat. ...Simply watch without judgment or analysis. Just watch them pass. Take a few moments or as long as you want...

Now pick one experience (thought, feeling, mood, sensation). Let the other sensations and thoughts go by in the background. Note any new thoughts or feelings that arise from observing this experience. Sit with these thoughts and feelings and this experience for a moment.

Whenever you're ready to leave this experience behind, think again of your brain and body as a vast field of experience. Simply let this experience pass through. Take one, or a few, deep breaths...and maybe just notice how you feel.

c. Walking Mindfulness

You may practice Walking Mindfulness inside or outside. Walking mindfulness is just another tool for us to give our body some time and space. All it involves is giving your focus to your body as you walk, and noticing different sensations or feelings. You may wear shoes or not. It's your choice!

Inside: If there isn't much room, pick an area where you can walk back and forth a few times.

Outside: Pick your favorite spot. Or, maybe it's right outside your front door. Just find an area that you find beautiful or useful for this practice.

How to Practice Walking Mindfulness:

- Try to walk slowly OR walk at a normal leisurely pace for you (if you don't have much room inside, walking very slowly may be more useful).
- Try to match your breath to your steps.
- Notice the sensations you feel as your foot moves from heel to toe, when you take a step.
- What does the ground or floor feel like?
- Maybe observe *how* you walk. Do you feel movement in your hips or arms? Somewhere else?
- Is it difficult to walk slow, or it is easy?
- How do your shoulders feel (tight? Loose?)?
- Do your feet feel different when they are on the ground, versus mid-step when the foot is in the air?
- What else do you notice about your body or breath as you walk?

- Whenever you feel done, try to take one big (but gentle!) breath in, and then breathe all the air out.
- Maybe take a moment to notice how you feel now compared to before your practice. Maybe it's different, and maybe it's not! Either way is perfect.

5. MUSCLE TENSION & RELEASE*

Sometimes if we can slow down our bodies, it helps both our body and brain to slow down or maybe feel different. This coping skill involves making all the muscles in your body tense up, from your toes to the top of your head. Then, we let our muscles release all at once.

First, tense up and squeeze all of the muscles you choose for 5 seconds, or for however long you choose. After 5 seconds, fully release all of your muscles all at once. You can try another muscle group afterward, or you can do the same muscle group, or you can stop. It's your choice.

Repeat for however long you wish. Or, repeat for however many 'muscle groups' you want to tense and release.

6. OTHER COPING SKILLS/STRATEGIES

- **Aromatherapy/essential oils:** Some people find essential oils, or other comforting and strong smells, to be effective to ground yourself or come back into the present moment. *This is not a medical recommendation.*
- **Worry rocks/'squishies'/fidget cube/spinner/other:** It can feel safe or comforting to have something to hold or play with in your hands. If you don't have some small object you can think of, or any of the objects listed, it can be as simple as a pencil or hair tie. You can get creative with this one! What feels safe or useful for you?
- **Mindfulness (and yoga):** You can use the following FREE apps to practice mindful breathing, or meditation, at home.

Recommended FREE APPS:

- Insight Timer
 - HeadSpace
 - Calm
 - MindBell
 - Breath Ball: The Stress Relief Breathing Exercise
- **Breath Ball app:** Download on your phone! Shows a simple circular animation that you follow as you breath in and out. Breath Ball is a free app that lets you choose how long to inhale and exhale for. There is a ball that shrinks then expands, so you can follow along as you breathe in and out. You can change the length of the inhale or exhale. You can also choose how long you want to practice in the Settings of the app.