

THE GROUNDING KIT

For The Moments That Feel Like Too Much



TRAUMA CARE
Psychology

Tools to Calm Your Nervous System

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This resource was developed by the clinical team at Trauma Care Psychology for informational and educational purposes. It is intended to support individuals who are experiencing stress-related distress and are seeking practical, evidence-informed strategies for nervous system regulation.

The techniques in this resource are drawn from approaches used in our practice, including Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, Cognitive Processing Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Emotion-Focused Therapy, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

Please note: This document is for informational purposes only. It does not constitute professional services, establish a professional relationship, or replace individualized clinical care. The information provided is general in nature and may not be appropriate for all individuals or circumstances. If you are unsure whether these techniques are suitable for you, please consult a qualified clinician before using them.

You do not need to read this in order or all at once. Begin with whichever section feels most relevant to you right now.

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS

The tools in this resource are for managing everyday distress, not acute crisis. If you are in immediate danger or feel unable to keep yourself safe, please contact one of the following:

988 Suicide Crisis Helpline

Call or text 988, Canada, 24/7

Crisis Services Canada

1-833-456-4566, 24/7

Emergency Services

Call 911

Do not rely on this resource during a mental health emergency.

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01

"I feel like I'm crawling out of my skin and I don't know why."

What may be happening:

The sympathetic nervous system is in a heightened state of arousal, sometimes referred to as hyperarousal. Your body is responding to a perceived signal of danger, even if your current environment is safe.

One approach to try:

Start with a temperature change. Hold something cold, such as a cold pack, a glass of ice water, or cold water run over your wrists and forearms. Cold exposure activates the mammalian dive response, which can help slow the heart rate and reduce physiological activation. This technique is used in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy as a distress tolerance strategy.

Then try the 5-4-3-2-1 technique:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can physically touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Each step brings attention to the present moment, which can help interrupt the activation cycle.

02

"I'm stuck. I can't get off the couch or out of bed."

What may be happening:

This can reflect a nervous system response which is associated with a "shut-down" or "freeze" response - a state of immobility that sometimes follows prolonged stress or a sense of helplessness. It is not laziness or a personal failing.

One approach to try:

Begin with the smallest possible movement. Sit up. Place both feet flat on the floor and notice the contact with the ground.

Then try box breathing: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4. Repeat three times.

After that, move one part of your body. Your hands, your feet, your shoulders. Small, deliberate movement can begin to shift the nervous system out of a shutdown state.

Next try to activate the senses, look around you and see if you can remind yourself that you are safe in this moment.

That is a reasonable starting point.

03

"I've been doom scrolling and I can't stop."

What may be happening:

The brain may be in a threat-monitoring loop, scanning for information that might resolve a felt sense of unease. Doomscrolling can be used to distract from painful emotions and as a way to self-soothe. However, news feeds and social media are designed to sustain engagement rather than provide resolution.

One approach to try:

Put the screen down and do one thing that involves the physical world or activates your senses.

- Go outside, even briefly
- Drink a glass of water slowly and deliberately
- Send a message to someone you trust
- Hold an object and notice its texture, weight, and temperature

The goal is to interrupt the loop with something present and tangible.

04

"I've been anxious about everything."

What may be happening:

The brain's threat-detection system is chronically activated, which is exhausting and can make it difficult to settle or concentrate. This is a physiological response to sustained stress and a common response following a traumatic event.

One approach to try:

Progressive muscle relaxation is a well-researched technique for reducing physiological tension. Starting from your feet and moving upward, clench each muscle group firmly, including legs, abdomen, arms, hands, shoulders, and face. Hold for five seconds, then release fully. Repeat the sequence three times. Or look up a guided meditation on Youtube.

The deliberate tension followed by release teaches the nervous system what letting go feels like in the body.

Vigorous physical movement, such as a brisk walk, stretching, or any activity that uses large muscle groups, can also help discharge accumulated stress energy.

05

"I'm afraid to go outside."

What may be happening:

The nervous system may be generalising threat beyond its original source, a common consequence of trauma and chronic stress. Avoidance provides short-term relief but tends to reinforce the fear response over time.

One approach to try:

Gradual, repeated exposure is one of the most well-supported approaches for reducing fear responses to specific situations. You do not need to take a large step.

Open a window and let natural light in. Step outside your door for thirty seconds. Walk to the end of your street and return. Each small exposure, repeated over time, provides new information to the nervous system: the environment is manageable; returning is safe.

There is no set timeline. Small, consistent steps are generally more effective than large ones that feel overwhelming. Therapy is needed if this is a response to trauma.

06

"I feel dissociated."

What may be happening:

The nervous system has shifted into a disconnected state to limit the impact of overwhelm. It usually happens when our emotions are very high and our brain is trying to cope with them. Dissociation is a protective response, not a sign of fragility. Strong sensory input is often needed to help reorient.

One approach to try:

Hold ice or run very cold water over your hands and wrists. The strong physical sensation activates the mammalian dive response, which draws attention back into the present moment. Describe the sensation out loud, noting the temperature, the pressure, and the feeling in your hands.

Then state your full name, where you are, and today's date.

Other options include sucking on a sour candy (or lemon), smelling something sharp or pungent, or playing music at a volume that demands your attention. The aim is to give the nervous system something immediate and real to orient toward.

07

"I feel like I can't get anything done."

What may be happening:

Chronic stress can impair executive functioning, the cognitive processes responsible for planning and follow-through. This is a physiological response, not a reflection of capability or effort.

One approach to try:

Reduce the size of the task until it no longer triggers resistance.

Write down one thing. Then identify the smallest possible next step. Not 'do laundry,' but 'put clothes in the hamper.' Complete that one step. Rest. Then identify the next smallest step.

Recovery from stress is not linear, and progress made under these conditions is still progress, even when it looks smaller than expected. Make sure to give yourself grace and compassion. This website has some great resources: [Self-compassion.org](https://www.self-compassion.org)

Final Note

Your nervous system is not broken, these are ways in which it copes with difficult experiences and emotions.

The tools in this resource are intended for use during difficult moments and do not address the underlying experiences that may have produced them. For that, ongoing work with a trained clinician is the most effective path supported by current research.

If you are ready to take that step, we would be glad to hear from you.

Book a free intake call

cal.com/traumacarepsychology/call

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traumacarepsychology.ca

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Trauma Care Psychology. Clinicians are registered with CPBAO, OCSWSSW, and/or CRPO.