

Self – Soothe Strategies

Massage your hands

Hands are amazing things and full of sorts of pressure points. There is something about having your hands held, massaged, rubbed or touched which for many people feels really good.

Take any kind of lotion (a nice smell will be even better) and put on your hands and really focus on the movement of your hands across each other. Rubbing the lotion between the fingers recognizing the different levels and marks on the surface, not thinking of anything else but the activity of massaging the lotion all over & into your hands. The smoothness your hands glide and weave between themselves, the smell of the lotion. Focusing on the self-care of your hands & really massaging all parts of each hand, the calmness of the process, massaging away your feelings or negative thoughts of the day.

The self-calming act of washing your hands brings a positive focus, becoming calmer, relaxed.

Hand massaging is a simple & really quick strategy to self soothe your mind. Focusing on the action and not a worry or stressful situation. It can be done anywhere and at any time and is not a visually strange action or an action linked to stress or worry. A piece of imagery is that your worries and concerns are inside you and that you are working them out to the tips of your fingers. Work the worries all the way from the mind down the arms to your hands where you massage them around the palm of your hand & out through each of the fingers. Maybe you have a worry list in your mind so focus on each one and rub the worry from the palm out through your fingers.

Close your eyes and look inwards

Another really simple thing to find a little bit of calm within a day which may have been chaotic or stressful is to just close your eyes to cut yourself off from all the sensory stimulus around us & to just look inwards.

When we close our eyes we cut out so much of the incoming information & everything instantly feels a little bit more manageable. It may sound strange but just try it, for a moment.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath, in through the nose slowly at a count of 3 & hold, then breath out slowly through the mouth. If you just do this for 30 seconds you will often find that you'll feel just that little bit calmer & able to manage. This is a good strategy to adopt if you feel your anxiety or anger is rising & you need to take a moment away from the situation. In order for you to re-enter it and manage it. Stepping outside the room & closing your eyes taking a deep breath looking inwards allowing things to just be fine, controlled. Another strategy where you need nothing to do it. Simply step away & close your eyes.

You take the strategy further by focusing in on your other senses.

So closing your eyes to get out of the visual stimulation & focusing in on what you can hear, separating the different sounds, focusing on each one. It's surprising the things you are hearing every day that you don't notice because your sense of sight is so dominant that everything else falls into the background. By closing your eyes your hearing becomes so acute, tuning into the different sounds around you. You can also focus on smell, what can you smell right now? Or even on what you can feel. Your feet weighted to the ground maybe etc.

Give yourself a hug

When we are hugged or hug ourselves it sends a message to the brain that you are safe. If you are worried or hurt or things aren't good your instinct is to pick them up and hold them. We've all nearly experienced this from a young age that when things are difficult if someone picks us up and holds us then we know it is going to be OK.

Hugging for so many people creates that kind of feeling of safety, reassurance, that idea that someone has got your back.

You can give yourself that feeling by wrapping your arms around yourself and squeezing hard and hold it for 10 seconds or more. You need to give it enough time for your body to give those messages to the brain. This can be done alongside one of the other strategies such as closing your eyes. It can also be really affective to have someone you trust hug you.

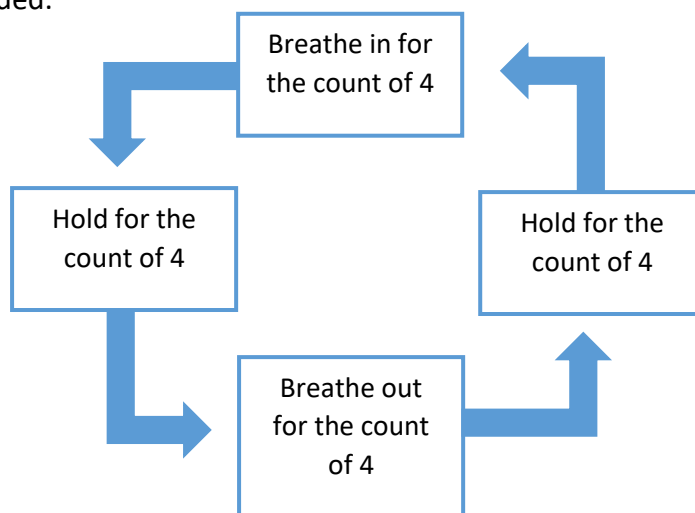
Being hugged or hugging yourself is a strategy that can very quickly make you feel better. You can also couple up this strategy with self-talk. Saying positive affirmations, e.g. It's Ok, you are safe. It's going to be alright.

Box (or Four Square) Breathing

This is a really simple breathing strategy that can help you take control, take a mindful moment & begin to soothe a little bit.

It's called box or four square as your breathing forms the shape of a square. In some versions you can worry about breathing techniques alongside but for box breathing let's try and keep it super simple.

In for the count of 4, Hold for the count of 4, Out for the count of 4, Hold for the count of 4 & repeat as many times as needed.



This is a very good strategy for you to use on another person if their anxiety or anger is rising. When we feel anxious often our breathing becomes unregulated, breathing fast/ shallow. One of the really simple things to look to take control of is our breathing. To really slow it down, focus in on it, on our breath.

Like all the strategies it can be used in response – when anxiety is rising, or specifically as a proactive calming measure. By doing a minute or two of box breathing regularly throughout the day can help re-set & find that sense of calm.

Body scan

Body scanning basically paying close attention to every single part of the body. Starting with the feet and working our way up to our head.

Really focusing in on bodily sensations, acknowledging every ache & pain, & focusing right in on our body rather than your surroundings, the external thoughts/ focus.

Some people find this technique easier with a body scan script. You can find these on the internet and there are many phone apps or YouTube videos that can support this.

The example of a script for the body scan below is the Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation

Begin by making yourself comfortable,

Sit in a chair and allow your back to be straight but not stiff with your feet on the ground

Allow your eyes to close or remain open with a soft gaze.

Take several long & slow deep breathes, breathing in fully and exhaling slowly. Breathe in through your mouth and out through your mouth.

Feeling your stomach expand on the inhale & relax & let go as you exhale

Begin to let go of noises around you,

Begin to shift your focus from outside to inside yourself.

If you are distracted by sounds in the room, simply notice this & bring your focus back to your breathing.

Now, slowly bring your attention down to your feet & begin to observe the sensations in your feet.

You may wish to move your toes a little, feeling them brush against your socks or shoes.

You might want to imagine sending your breath down your body down to your feet. Travelling through the nose down the stomach, past your hips, down your legs and to your feet and finally toes. When breathing in the breath is coming back up from your toes all the way back up

When you are ready allow your feet to dissolve in your mind's eye, moving your attention up to your ankles, calves', knees & thighs.

Focus on the feelings throughout your legs, breathing into and out of the legs.

If your mind begins to wander gently notice this without judgement & bring your mind back to the sensations in your legs.

If you notice any discomfort or pain or stiffness don't judge this. Simply acknowledge it. Notice how all the sensations rise and fall, shift and change moment to moment.

Breathe into and out of the legs.

Now allow the legs to dissolve away like sand. Moving your focus to your back & pelvis.

Softening and releasing as you breathe in & breathe out.

Slowly move your attention to the middle of your back & upper back

Become curious of the sensation here, maybe becoming aware of sensations in the muscle.

Temperature or points of contact with furniture or bed.

With each out breathe you may let go of tension you are carrying & then very gently shift your focus to your stomach and all the internal organs.

Perhaps you notice the feelings of clothing, the process of digestion, or the belly rising and falling with each breath

If you notice opinions arising about these areas, gently let these go and return to noticing sensations.

As you continue to breathe, bring your awareness to the chest and heart region and just notice your heartbeat. Observe how the chest rises during the inhale and how the chest falls during the exhale. Let go of any judgments that may arise. On the next outbreath, shift the focus to your hands and fingertips. See if you can channel your breathing into and out of this area as if you are breathing into and out from your hands. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the sensations in your hands.

And then, on the next outbreath, shift the focus and bring your awareness up into your arms.

Observe the sensations or lack of sensations that may be occurring there. You might notice some difference between the left arm and the right arm – no need to judge this. As you exhale, you may experience the arm soften and release tensions. Continue to breathe and shift focus to the neck, shoulder and throat region. This is an area where we often have tension. Be with the sensations here. It could be tightness, rigidity or holding. You may notice the shoulders moving along with the breath. Let go of any thoughts or stories you are telling about this area. As you breathe, you may feel tension rolling off your shoulders.

On the next outbreath, shift your focus and direct your attention to the scalp, head and face.

Observe all of the sensations occurring there. Notice the movement of the air as you breathe into or out of the nostrils or mouth. As you exhale, you might notice the softening of any tension you may be holding.

And now, let your attention to expand out to include the entire body as a whole. Bring into your awareness the top of your head down to the bottom of your toes. Feel the gentle rhythm of the breath as it moves through the body.

As you come to the end of this practice, take a full, deep breath, taking in all the energy of this practice. Exhale fully. And when you are ready, open your eyes and return your attention to the present moment. As you become fully alert and awake, consider setting the intention that this practice of building awareness will benefit everyone you come in contact with today

We've looked at some strategies but look at what works for you. Also consider when is the best time to use these strategies. Be it proactive, prior to times you feel or know will be stressful or do you find them more helpful to help reduce anxiety as you feel it rising. Don't feel there is a right or a wrong way to do this, the key way to do it is the way is right for you!