

Trauma-Informed Care

Strategies for self regulation

Everyone's body has an alert system. Sometimes it gets "stuck ON" (wired, angry, panicky). Sometimes it gets "stuck OFF" (flat, numb, spaced out). Try the ideas below and see what helps you.

Tip: Try one idea for 1–2 minutes. If it helps, keep it. If not, switch to another. Talk to a trusted person or worker about what works best for you. Only use what feels safe for you.

When you feel stuck ON and feeling revved up and agitated

MOVE YOUR BODY

- Rhythmic movement can be very calming for the nervous system – this could be walking, dancing, rocking, or bouncing on a trampoline.
- Short exercise helps your body use up stress energy.



SHAKE IT OUT

- Gently shake your hands, arms, shoulders, then legs.
- Big moves and increasing your heart rate can help release stress and tension.



GROUNDING: 5-4-3-2-1

Identify and notice:

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



PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGH

- Breathe in through your nose.
- Take a second small breath in, filling your lungs a little more.
- Breathe out slowly with a soft sigh "ahh."
- Repeat a few times.



ORIENTING (LOOK AROUND)

- Slowly turn your head side to side.
- Notice close-up and far-away sights and sounds.
- Tell yourself, "Right now, I am here. I am safe."
- By noticing that no threat is detected, it helps the nervous system to feel safer.
- When you look around and don't notice any danger, your nervous system gets the message that it's safe and can settle.



HEART-CENTRED BREATHING¹



- Put a hand on your chest and over your heart.
- Breathe a little deeper than normal.
- As you breathe in, imagine you are doing so through your heart, and, as you breathe out, imagine it is also through your heart.

SAFE HAVENING (SELF SOOTHING)

- Cross arms; hands on opposite shoulders.
- Stroke down from shoulders to elbows, slowly.
- Rub palms together or gently stroke your face.



VAGUS-NERVE HELPERS

- The vagus nerve runs from your brain to your body and helps switch on the "rest and digest" (calm) system.
- Hum or sing, splash cool water on your face, do some gentle yoga, cuddle a pet, or get support from someone you trust.



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When you feel stuck OFF (flat / shut down)

MOVE TO WAKE UP



- Stand up, stretch, stamp feet, or rock from heel to toe.
- Open your posture.
- Uncurl shoulders and lift your chest.
- Try a brisk walk, stairs, or throw a soft cushion back and forth.
- "Legs up the wall": lie down and rest your legs up a wall for a minute or two.
- If lying down, sit or stand to bring in more energy.

BREATHING



- Breathe in through your nose, out through your mouth.
- Try longer, slower out-breaths to calm.
- Notice where you feel the breath (nostrils, chest, belly).

ORIENTING (COME BACK TO NOW)



- Look around, name the room, the day, and three things you can see and hear.
- Notice the temperature. Do you feel cold or warm?
- Hold an ice cube or wash your face with cool water.
- Get fresh air or brighter light.

MUSIC



- Upbeat music can lift energy; slow music can calm.
- Make playlists for different moods.

GLIMMERS



- Look for tiny good moments: a sunrise, a kind smile, a bird, a joke.
- Pause, notice, and remember them. Small joys help your body feel safe.

¹ HeartMath Institute. Heart-focused breathing [cited 2025 17 Oct]. Available from: <https://www.heartmath.org/articles-of-the-heart/the-math-of-heartmath/heart-focused-breathing/>.