

Learning To Self-Soothe

Objective: To learn ways you can calm yourself down when you are feeling overwhelmed emotionally.

There are many things that can upset you to the point that you feel emotionally overwhelmed and even out of control. When you feel this way, the emotional part of your brain (called the limbic system) takes over and the rational or thinking part of your brain takes a back seat. Calming your emotions—also called self-soothing—is an important life-long skill everyone should learn. When you perform any of the activities on this list your brain will be producing serotonin, a biochemical that gives you a sense of calm.

There are three different factors that can make a particular activity more soothing:

Familiarity: Activities that are associated with pleasant memories from the past will be particularly helpful in soothing your feelings. For example one woman said that sipping hot chocolate with a marshmallow on top from a large blue mug made her think of happy afternoons from her childhood.

Multi-Sensory: Our emotional brain responds best when activities are multi-sensory and involve sound, sight, taste, touch, and smell. Typically pleasant activities that involve two or more senses are most soothing. An example of a multi-sensory activity might include walking in the woods, smelling the flowers, feeling the breeze, and hearing the wind rustling the trees.

Repetitive Motion: Studies suggest that repetitive motion, such as chewing gum, knitting, or rocking in a chair, can produce serotonin in the brain. Our bodies are naturally inclined towards repetitive motion, like pacing, when we are agitated.

Directions: Look at the list below, and check-off the things you think would soothe your emotions. Everyone is different and certain activities will seem more appealing to you than others. The list is divided into three types of activities:

- Activities you do immediately when you are starting to feel overwhelmed.
- Activities you can do if you are anticipating a situation that can make you feel overwhelmed.
- Activities you can do on a regular basis to practice emotional control. It's worth noting that when you practice self-soothing on a regular basis, preferably daily, calming yourself down when you are more upset will be much easier.

Self-Soothing Activities

Check off the activities that you think would work best at different times.

Add additional ideas of your own.

Things You Can Do Immediately When You Are Feeling Emotionally Overwhelmed

- Take five cleansing breaths
- Self-massage
- Chewing gum
- Sip a soothing warm drink (preferably not one with caffeine)
- Wear familiar perfume or cologne
- Suck on hard candy
- Stretch
- Sit in the sun
- Other things you can do:

Things You Can Do When You Are Anticipating Situations That Will Make You Upset

- Take a warm shower or bath
- Get a massage
- Wear most comfortable clothes
- Enjoy a favorite meal
- Burn scented candles
- Take a walk outdoors
- Arrange and smell flowers
- Listen to quiet music

Other things you can do:

Things You Can Do Every Day To Develop the Habit of Self-Soothing

- Take care of a pet
- Cook or bake
- Meditate or relax in a quiet place
- Read a book
- Listen to “quiet” music
- Watch a funny movie or show
- Work on a hobby _____ (write in the hobby)
- Rock in a chair for 10 minutes
- Garden

Other things you can do:

Self-Soothing Worksheet

In the space below, write down the self-soothing activities you want to try. Try each one out, and then rate how successful they were in reducing your emotional distress using the following scale: 1=Not helpful at all; 7=Very helpful.

| Name of Activity | Date Tried | Success Rating (1-7) | Thoughts About This Activity |
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