

Learning How to Calm Down Quickly

Objective

To identify ways to calm yourself when you are experiencing heightened stress, anxiety, or overwhelm.

What to Know

When you are stressed or overwhelmed and you need to calm down, it can be difficult to do so—particularly if you have been told to “take some deep breaths” and that has not worked for you. Did you know researchers have found that sometimes taking deep breaths *increases* distress? Here are some suggestions for what you can do when you are upset and you need to calm yourself down.

Hug someone. According to research, hugging someone or cuddling a pet for 20 seconds or more is an effective way to calm down.

Mindfully sip a warm beverage. Slowly sipping a warm beverage is a simple way to engage your senses. Pay attention to the scent, taste, warmth, and how it feels as you swallow.

Give yourself a massage. Massage your hands, lower arms, and legs with lotion or oil. Add essential oils to help ease stress (try lavender, chamomile, or patchouli).

Break a sweat. Intense physical activity helps regulate the nervous system to de-escalate stress.

Take a walk. In a recent study on mindful walking, distressed participants who completed a mindful walking program displayed a reduction in stress and improved quality of life compared to those who did not complete the program.

Look for a color. Look around and find everything you can see that is a particular color.

Name characters. Choose a movie, book, or TV show and name as many characters as you can. This purposefully engages the rational part of your brain to shift out of worry and into logic.

Think of things that start with a letter of the alphabet. Like thinking of characters, access your rational mind by challenging yourself to name an object that starts with A, then one that starts with B, then C, and so on. Repeat this process as many times as you need to with different categories like animals, food, etc.

Count backward. Your brain can focus on something that is not emotion-based by counting backward by fives or tens from 100. Challenge yourself and count backward by sixes! This simple exercise can help you ease back into calmer thinking.

Take a cold or hot shower. This activity engages the body so you can get out of your head. Research shows cold therapy (“cryotherapy”) can help to reduce stress. If you are not keen about the idea of a freezing cold shower, a hot one can be soothing.

Get creative. Painting, drawing, needlework, and crafts are body-oriented processes that can help you regulate your nervous system. Nervous-system-regulating exercises and activities can effectively calm you down.

Go outside. One of the best strategies for managing stress and anxiety is spending time outside in nature. If you live in a city, visit your local park to get some fresh air, move your body, and engage your senses.

It is essential to know how to calm down quickly and using the above suggestions can help. This worksheet will help you experiment to identify a short list of soothing techniques to use when you are upset.

What to Do

What do you currently do to calm down? Does it help? Why or why not?

List four activities from the above list that you are willing to try when you need to calm down.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

What else can you do to calm down quickly?

Referring to your list, what is **one** thing you can do the next time you need to calm down? Circle it.

For the next two weeks, use the following chart to record when you are distressed, anxious, overwhelmed, or just stressed out. Use any number of the above suggestions to calm yourself down. Perhaps you will do more than one thing if you are really upset. Record the date and describe what happened. Why were you upset? Then describe the action you take or the activity you engage in to calm yourself down. Finally, write down the thoughts and feelings that came up for you.

Date	What happened?	Action/activity to calm down	Thoughts and feelings

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing this worksheet, are you better able to calm yourself down quickly? Why or why not?

What did you find difficult about this exercise? Explain why.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
