

COPING & GROUNDING SKILLS

These skills can help you manage, regulate, and tolerate everyday feelings – as well as harder-to-handle feelings that arise in times of crisis:

1. **Anchor Your Body:** Grabbing onto your chair, pressing your feet into the ground, deep breathing. *Helps to ground and keep one anchored to present-day reality that can also help mitigate some intensity of feelings. (M. Eckberg)*
2. **Hug Your Thumbs:** Hold the thumb of your right hand with your left four fingers and the thumb of your left hand with your right four fingers simultaneously. *This exercise is said to help produce synapses that “rewire” the right and left brain hemispheres, and can produce a calming effect on the nervous system.*
3. **Make a Human Pretzel:** Cross your arms at the wrist and interlace the fingers of both hands, cross your legs at the ankles. *Facilitates bi-lateral stimulation, which helps to regulate the nervous system and promotes integration of trauma.*
4. **Touch Thumbs to Other Fingers:** One at a time, touch your thumb to your pointer finger, then middle finger, then ring finger, then pinky finger. *Facilitates bi-lateral stimulation, which helps to regulate the nervous system and promotes integration of trauma.*
5. **Create a Self-Hug:** Put your right hand and arm across your chest with your right hand under your left armpit, put your left hand and arm across your chest and squeeze your right upper arm. *This exercise acts as a container and helps to create an internal state of calm while reducing overwhelm. “When the person can feel the container, then the emotions and sensations do not feel as overwhelming because they are contained.” (P. Levine)*
6. **Play Patty Cake with Yourself:** Clap, right hand tap left thigh, clap, left hand tap right thigh, repeat. *This exercise acts as a container producing a sense of boundary with the outside world, and helps to manage “flooding”. Additionally, facilitates bi-lateral stimulation, which helps to regulate the nervous system.*
7. **Rub or Tap Your Arms or Legs:** Make rhythmic contact with your limbs. *This exercise acts as a container producing a sense of boundary with the outside world, and helps to manage “flooding”.*

8. **Make the “Vu” Sound:** When you exhale, make the sound “vu,” trying to vibrate the sound all the way down to your stomach. *The vagus nerve connects to your gastrointestinal system/viscera and is 80-90% sensory, meaning there are sensory neurons in your stomach that feed information back to your brainstem. Vibrating the abdominal cavity can send calming sensory information from the stomach to the brainstem and help to break a cycle of shut-down emotional response and gastrointestinal distress and shift the nervous system to a more parasympathetic-dominant or relaxed state. (S. Porges, P. Levine)*
9. **Connect Your Head and Heart:** Place your hand on your forehead and your heart (can be done with skill number 12 in a 2- step process). *The goal of this exercise is to calm the nervous system, bring the awareness back into the body, and train one’s own nervous system to remember what “normal” feels like. (P. Levine)*
10. **Notice Your Torso:** Put your hand on your chest and/or belly. *This is one of many exercises that forces one to focus on the body; this change of attention and awareness acts as a container-building exercise that strengthens and builds a sense of “Self.” It also is self-soothing and calming to the nervous system. (P. Levine)*
11. **Breathe Deeply from Your Abdomen:** Breathe in a slow, rhythmic manner. *A vital coping skill that helps to regulate the nervous system by decreasing sympathetic nervous system arousal, reducing the “fight or flight” symptoms of trauma.*
12. **Make a Half Smile:** Gently make a serene half-smile. *Originating from a Buddhist technique and applied to CBT, sensory neurons in the face detect a half-smile and send the information to the brain, creating a cascade of hormonal and physiological consequences that can positively impact mood, alter negative states and make you want to smile more.*
13. **Change your Posture:** Hold your body up with greater awareness and intention. *Posture impacts hormones (cortisol and testosterone) and subconsciously influences thinking and decision-making. A collapsed, slouched position contributes to depressed feelings and decreased energy levels while walking or sitting up straight increases feelings of confidence and energy levels. Posture also helps to realign the body allowing for better energy flow throughout and supports in relieving feeling stuck.*
14. **Recline Expansively:** Reclining with your hands behind your head and with your feet up. *Assuming an “expansive” posture (spreading out your limbs and opening up your body) expresses power through body language, which impacts hormone levels (decreasing cortisol and increasing testosterone) and subconsciously influences thinking and decision-making.*

15. **Feel the Floor:** Grounding yourself into the floor- press your feet into the ground. *Can help alleviate intense activation of the nervous system that is present such as distress, fear, panic, and terror. Also brings awareness to the present.*
16. **Relax Muscles Progressively:** Choosing three or four parts of your body, direct your relaxing attention to those zones and then notice the effects. *Helpful to relieve stress and tension. It involves tensing and relaxing the muscles in your body, one muscle group at a time. It also has been shown to reduce other reactions to stress, such as rapid breathing and heartbeat, stomach problems, and headache.*
17. **Notice Objects:** Identify five objects in the room. *This helps to bring one into present moment and is helpful in reducing dissociative symptoms.*
18. **Meet Your Knees:** Rub (or pat) sides of hips to around the knees and go back around the sides of your legs. *This points out to yourself where your edges are. Sense into the feeling of having edges, the place where you end and the rest of the world begins. (P. Levine)*
19. **Give Yourself a Mini-Massage:** Pat or squeeze various parts of your body, noticing the effect of your own touch. *Provides a stimulating effect, brings awareness to the body and shows you where "you" end and the rest of the world begins.*
20. **Contain Your Brain:** Place your hands on each side of your head, so they are holding and soothing each hemisphere of the brain. Then place one hand on your forehead and one hand on the back of your head. Feel how your hands create a container for your thoughts. *This acts as a container for mental thinking and has a calming effect on the mind. (P. Levine)*
21. **Find Your Gratitude:** Think of things, people and experiences you are grateful for. *Those who record things that make them grateful have an improved sense of well-being, sleep better, have higher levels of broad positive emotions, experience social benefits such as being more forgiving, outgoing, feeling less lonely and isolated, and feel a greater sense of optimism and connectedness to others. Physical benefits associated with a regular practice of gratitude include a stronger immune system and increased long-lasting neural effects in the brain. (R. Emmons, P. Kini)*
22. **Count:** Count to 10, count colors, count shapes, count anything around you. *This brings awareness into the present and helps to counteract dissociative symptoms.*
23. **Notice Sound:** Pay attention to sound. *This brings awareness into the present and helps to counteract dissociative symptoms.*

24. **Hum.** Hum a soothing tune. *Humming or chanting can help to generate positive nerve sensations that support the capacity to stay present even in the event of experiencing extreme fear. The result can help shift the nervous system out of a shut-down or frozen state to a more parasympathetic-dominant or relaxed state.* P. Levine
25. **Notice Smell:** Notice the various smells in your environment. *This brings awareness into the present and helps to counteract dissociative symptoms.*
26. **Imagine Peaceful Scenes:** Imagine a relaxing scene. *Brain imaging studies have shown that the nervous system responds to positive memories as though one were experiencing them in the present. This exercise acts to calm and soothe the body and mind.*
27. **Picture Blue Skies:** Imagine everything going well. *Sport psychology research has shown that athletes who first imagined a positive outcome had a higher rate of success. This idea can be applied to everyday life.*
28. **Drain Away Pain:** Imagine hurtful emotions draining out of you like water from a pipe. *By employing techniques of the active imagination, one can begin to clear away negative thoughts and emotions through practices such as this. It also acts as a way of redirecting thoughts to a more positive experience lifting one's mood.*
29. **Do the "Huh" Movement:** Bounce your knees and ankles while swinging your arms forward and backward, making a 'huh' sound with each swing forward. *This is energizing and facilitates re-establishment of rhythmicity in the body.*
30. **Soften Your Tongue:** Soften your tongue in your mouth. Notice physical sensations in the body. *This is calming to the body, "down-regulating" the entire alimentary canal and opening airways.*