

# Self-Regulation Toolbox

## Integrating Nervous System, Brain, & Emotions with Engagement, Awareness, & Compassion



### Expansive Belly Breathing

place your hand on your belly. take a steady breath in through the nose, expanding the belly on the inhale. slowly exhale through the nose or mouth | focus on expanding the belly as large & wide as possible on the inhalation, let it fall back down & release on the exhalation | allow your out-breath to be twice as long as your in-breath | when you get distracted, gently return attention to the felt sensation of expanding & releasing the breath in the belly | repeat at least 3 times | notice if you feel any difference after the belly breath practice.

Placing your hand on the belly helps us connect to embodied presence through the many capillaries & nerve endings in our fingers & palms. Slowing the breath shifts the body's physiology, guiding us from a heightened fear or danger state into direct sensory experience. Expansive breathing increases oxygen to the heart & brain & relaxes muscles. With a longer exhale, we slow the heart rate, reduce blood pressure, & soothe the nervous system, calming our physiological stress response.



### Mindfulness of the Body

practice progressive relaxation by slowly shifting attention from head to toe. begin with your forehead, slowly moving downward, towards your jaw, then shoulders, back, hips, legs, & finally feet | intentionally tense each area, notice the tightness, then release, feel the contrast between tension & relaxation | connect with the sense experience of the body softening & grounding with each out-breath.

Directing mindful attention to bodily sensations engages the brain for calm & self-regulation, signaling the nervous system to ease muscular tension, find & settle into equilibrium. This practice strengthens interoception, our ability to sense & interpret the body's internal signals. We can then engage the parasympathetic system, reducing stress hormones, & restoring balance. As you recognize these signals, & where tension is held in the body, gently soften those areas. Nurture emotional regulation & in turn settles the mind & in turn the nervous system. This practice helps us cultivate a grounded, secure, calm presence.



### Sensory Profile

check in with your internal & external sensory experience | am I hungry or thirsty? hot or cold? do I need to use the bathroom? is my environment too loud or too bright? am I feeling overstimulated by my surroundings or my thoughts? | identify one simple, accessible change that improves your current state.

Enhancing internal body awareness, interoception, strengthens our ability to sense & interpret the body's internal signals. This awareness helps the brain accurately identify & integrate sensory information from both the body & the environment, supporting regulation, focus, & emotional stability. When sensory input becomes too intense, the nervous system can shift into a stress response, often before we realize it. Notice these cues with care & make small adjustments before overwhelm sets in. Shift temperature, sound, smell, or light: splash cold water on your face, grab a heating pad, listen to music, chant, hum, sing, connect with nature, use an essential oil, or incense, noise-canceling headphones, dim the lights, or put on sunglasses indoors.



### Mindful Movements

very slowly turn your head side to side, noticing the stretch from your ear to shoulder blade | lift your gaze toward the ceiling, then lower your chin to your chest | bring each ear toward its shoulder, sensing space along the side of the neck | open the chest, roll or stretch the shoulders, reach arms overhead or behind your back | twist your torso left, then right, feeling the gentle release as you return to center | self-massage: scalp, face or neck | shake out your hands, arms, legs | walk, dance, practice Qi Gong, Yoga, or move with awareness & intention anytime you need to reset or re-energize.

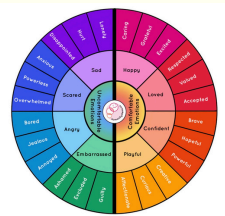
Even micro adjustments can reset the mind & body anytime throughout the day. Body-centered movement shifts awareness out of the thinking mind, back into the body. Movement increases circulation, attention, & neuro-body communication. Regular activity boosts energy, self-esteem, & sleep quality. It stimulates dopamine, serotonin & endorphin production, reducing symptoms of depression & anxiety while supporting balanced moods & emotional well-being.



### Balance & Coordination

jump straight up, feeling what it's like to recalibrate as you land in the same place | stand on one leg, then the other, notice if one side is easier. close your eyes to increase coordination & challenge | lunge forward with one foot, lowering both knees to a 90° angle, focusing on centered & stable balance | slowly walk in a straight line, like on a balance beam, heel first, then toe, close your eyes to heighten coordination & body awareness.

These balance & coordination exercises provide gentle stimulation, strengthening focus, concentration, & sensory integration. They activate the cerebellum, which supports balance, attention, & learning. When we're challenged to stabilize, the mind naturally shifts out of rumination & into embodied presence. This mindful activation supports neuroplasticity, enhancing cognitive flexibility, interoceptive awareness, & the felt sense of being present & engaged.



### Emotion Awareness

identify the specific emotion. if that feels unclear, use an emotion wheel or the How We Feel APP to find a word that best describes your experience | approach both pleasant & unpleasant emotions with openness & curiosity | notice where & how the emotion appears in the body. is it in the throat or gut? does it feel like warmth, pressure, or expansion? describe it in detail | separate the emotion itself from the story you attach to the emotions. say aloud or write the thoughts that arise with this emotion, identifying them simply as thoughts | observe what changes as you stay present | notice how emotional intensity shifts over time

Emotional awareness activates the prefrontal cortex, improving impulse control & reducing emotional reactivity. Naming emotions signals the brain to pause or slow down, helping the body down shift & the mind make sense of what's happening. It can change the perception of the situation at hand. This practice cultivates compassion & insight, allowing us to respond rather than react. It supports alignment between our values, words, & actions while fostering emotional resilience & healthier relationships. Observing emotions as transient experiences enhances self-awareness, flexibility, & the capacity to remain steady in the face of stress & difficulty.



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