

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.

