

Self-Regulation Toolbox

Engaging Nervous System, Brain, & Emotions with Purpose, 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 the 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 your body feels different afterwards

Placing your hand on the belly helps connect us to embodied presence through the many nerve endings in the fingers & palms. Slowing the breath shifts the body's physiology, guiding us from a heightened state of stress or threat into direct sensory experience. Expansive belly breathing encourages fuller diaphragmatic breathing, sending signals of safety to the nervous system while relaxing muscles throughout the body. With a longer exhale, we slow the heart rate, reduce blood pressure, & engage the parasympathetic nervous system, helping calm the body's physiological stress response.



Mindfulness of the Body

practice progressive relaxation by slowly shifting attention from head to toe, one section of the body at a time. 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 & relaxing with each out-breath.

Directing mindful attention to bodily sensations engages the brain's capacity for calm & self regulation, signaling the nervous system to release muscular tension & settle into equilibrium. This practice strengthens interoception, our ability to sense & interpret the body's internal signals. In doing so, we can engage the parasympathetic nervous system, reduce stress hormones, & restore the body's biological balance. Over time, this growing familiarity with the body, along with the ability to soften & relax it, helps 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 environmental surroundings or my own internal thoughts? | identify one simple, doable change that improves your current state.

Enhancing internal body awareness brings us into the present moment while strengthening our ability to sense & interpret the body's internal signals. This awareness helps the brain accurately identify & integrate information, 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. Experiment with your personal sensory needs. What helps you feel more regulated? Try adjusting temperature, sound, smell, or light: splash cold water on your face, use a heating pad, listen to music, chant, hum, sing, connect with nature, use essential oils or incense, wear 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 & forehead toward the ceiling, then lower your chin to your chest | bring each ear toward each shoulder, sensing the space along the side of the neck | open the chest by connecting your shoulder blades, roll back the shoulders, reach arms overhead or behind your back | twist your torso left, then right, feeling the recalibration as you return to center | self-massage your 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.

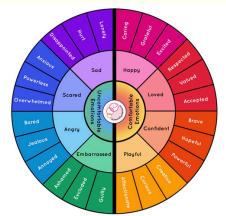
Even micro adjustments can help reset the body & brain. These practices can be done anytime throughout the day, even for just minutes. Body centered movement shifts awareness out of thinking mind & back into the body. Movement increases circulation, attention, & communication between the brain & nervous system. Regular activity boosts energy, self-esteem, & sleep quality while stimulating dopamine, serotonin, & endorphin production. This reduces symptoms of depression & anxiety while supporting balanced moods, emotion regulation, & 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 core balance | slowly walk in a very 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 while strengthening focus, concentration, & interoception. They activate the cerebellum, a brain region that supports balance, attention, coordination, & learning. When we're challenged to stabilize the body, the mind naturally shifts out of rumination, away from the Default Mode Network, & into embodied presence & engagement. This intentional, mindful activation supports neuroplasticity while enhancing cognitive flexibility, attention, & problem solving.



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 | allow the emotion to be present | notice where & how the emotion appears in the body. is it in the throat or gut? does it feel like warmth or pressure? describe it in detail to yourself | try as best as possible to separate the emotion from the story you attach to the emotion. the thoughts that you repeat to yourself | observe what changes as you stay present | notice how emotion intensity shifts over time, even seconds.

Emotional awareness helps us recognize & name what we're feeling. When emotions become conscious, the brain can pause, slow down, & make sense of the experience. This creates space for perspective, improves impulse control, reduces emotional reactivity, & supports more intentional responses. Over time, emotional awareness strengthens self-awareness, compassion, resilience, & healthier relationships. Naming emotions is often the first step toward regulating them.



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