

Stressful environments, difficult thoughts, and big emotions can often leave us feeling dysregulated and out of control.

Check into your body and brain and determine your current level of distress. If zero (0) is no distress at all, and ten (10) is the worst distressed you have ever experienced, where on the number scale 0-10 is your current distress level? Write this number down and then re-evaluate after trying the tools below.

The list below offers some things for you to try to regulate your body, brain, and your perceived experience of distress. Try these out and determine what works best for you, and under what circumstances.

Breathing (4-4-8)

- Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4
- Hold that breath for a count of 4
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of at least 8.

It can sometimes help to imagine blowing this breath through an imaginary straw. Repeat for at least 3-4 rounds, or until you notice your distress level decreasing.

Engage your senses

- Find 5 colours in your environment, name the colour and item
- Find 4 different textures to feel, describe them
- Identify 3 separate sounds you can hear in your environment, name and locate them
- Identify any scent/s in the room – name and locate them

Or try the following:

- Pick something strong and soothing to taste. Splash or submerge your face in cold water to bring you back to your body. A wet washcloth in the fridge/freezer, or an ice towel is a good alternative.
- Shake or stomp out excess energy/nerves
- Throw a ball at a wall or bounce it on the floor. Even better, play catch with someone else, or practice a ball sport like basketball with others).
- Heavy work (lifting, pulling, pushups, cardio/weights) to discharge the stress chemicals and boost your dopamine.
- Music / Sounds (try soothing and calming, and/or loud and energizing)
- Sitting and bouncing on therapy ball (simulating rocking motion)

Practice these strategies when you are calm and on a regular basis, this will build your capacity to access these when you start to feel overwhelmed.

A good start is 4-4-8 breathing before you get out of bed, again as you try to go to sleep at night, and then at least one of these breaths at every traffic light. Use a sticky note on your visor or car dashboard if you need to be reminded.

The more often you use your tools, the more it becomes an automatic reflex.