

Mindfulness
Moments
For
Building
Resilience
and
Well-Being



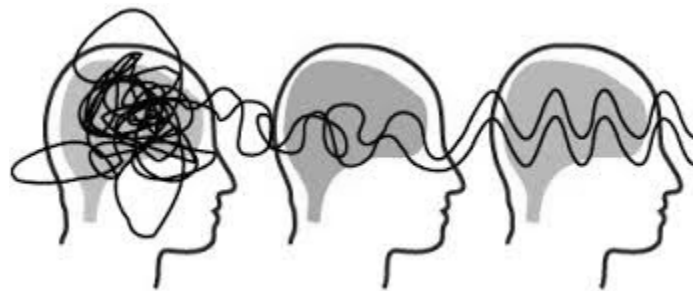
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What's Your Story?

When we experience trauma as young people, it can impact the way our brain develops, which can lead to more challenges over our life time. The effects of childhood trauma can also be passed down through generations in our DNA. Think about your own life history and what kind of tough experiences you've had. If trauma is a part of your past, acknowledging it and addressing it can help improve your health and well-being.

Childhood trauma can cause anxiety, depression, make learning or remembering stuff harder, can make you extra sensitive to stressful situations, or easily overwhelmed, and make it hard to regulate your emotions sometimes.

The good news is, no matter how old you are, your brain is adaptable and can heal from the effects of childhood trauma.



Building Resilience with Mindfulness Activities

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks in our lives. More importantly, it is the way we can prevent stress from causing serious physical, mental and emotional issues. No matter how old you are, practicing positive and often simple activities can actually retrain your brain to handle emotional and stressful situations in a new way, potentially avoiding the long-term effects of toxic stress on your body. Engaging in these activities is good for you and your brain!

The following pages contain simple tools that you can use to help retrain your brain and build resilience. Try them all and then pick a few that work best for you and practice them every day. This will help you to remember to use the tools during times of stress or intense emotions.

Take Five

Feeling frustrated? Need a time out? Try a "take five".

Close your eyes. With your right hand, gently squeeze your thumb on your left hand and take a slow deep breath, then do the same with each finger, one at a time. Taking a slow deep breath with each finger. Need an extra time out? Go on and do the same with the other hand.

This helps quiet your mind and regulate your emotions and just take a break. You can do this with your eyes open too.



Thymus Thump

When you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious, take a minute or two and do a "thymus thump".

Use your fingertips, or make a fist and use your knuckles, and gently tap just below where your collar bones meet. Take deep breaths while you tap. Do this for a couple of minutes and check in with yourself to see how you feel. Do two more minutes if you need to.

This will help you regulate your emotions and bring a sense of calm to you using rhythm and focus.



Heart Hold

Feeling anxious? Place your right hand over your heart so that the heel of your hand is at your heart and your fingertips are at your collarbone. Apply as much pressure with your hand as you need/want. You can also put your left hand over the top of your right to apply more pressure. You can also place your left hand on your abdomen so that your pinky finger is just above your belly button. Apply pressure at your belly and heart at the same time.

This activates the nerve responsible for our “resting” functions like digestion and relaxation. By activating this nerve you are sending a message to your body system that you’re safe and this allows your body to begin to relax. You can’t activate this nerve and the fight, flight or freeze response at the same time. So by activating this “resting” nerve you deactivate the system that is causing your body to feel anxious or overwhelmed.



Lip Tap

Feeling like you can't calm down? Using two fingers on your dominant hand gently tap your upper lip.

Tapping on your lip causes salivation (making spit). By making spit we are giving signals to our brain and body that we are safe (you can't make spit when you're in danger) this calms the entire nervous system



Jawbone Jive

Feeling like you're on overload? Place your fingertips from both hands on your jawbone. Tap both sides of your jaw, alternating one hand and then the other for a few minutes. You can also tap both sides at the same time.

This works to help you calm down in two ways. By tapping your jaw you're encouraging it to relax. When your jaw is relaxed it tells your brain that you are safe which calms your nerves. The tapping also causes you to make spit which tells your brain you're safe and its ok to be calm (remember you can't make spit when you're in fight, flight or freeze response).



Self Hug

Feeling a little out of it? Need to feel centered? Try a Self Hug.

Place your left hand under your opposite arm and place the other hand over the upper part of the other arm. Pay attention to your body. Allow yourself to feel contained. Take deep breaths. Sometimes it helps to rock side to side while you do a self hug too.

This helps us become aware of our container-our body, and settle into it. It also helps us feel more calm and safe.



Butterfly Tap

Feeling angry, distressed or need to calm down? Try tapping your own chest or shoulders for two minutes.

Cross your arms across your chest and gently tap your fingers on your upper chest, first one hand and then the other and repeat over and over for two minutes. Your hands will look like a butterfly flapping its wings. You can also do this on your upper arms or shoulders the same way-tap one then the other and repeat over and over.

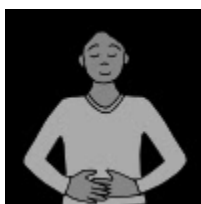
After two minutes stop and check in with yourself. Do another cycle and check in. Keep tapping until you've calmed down. This helps you keep your thinking brain engaged, allowing you to sooth your nervous system. Keeping this part of your brain engaged tells your body that you are safe.



Just Breathe

Feeling overwhelmed? Breathe in through your nose, hold for a count of three while your muscles tense, then breathe out through the mouth and relax your muscles. Sometimes it helps to put your hands on your belly while you do this to help you focus on your breath. You can stand, sit or lay down to do this. Do ten breaths then check in with yourself. Do ten more if needed.

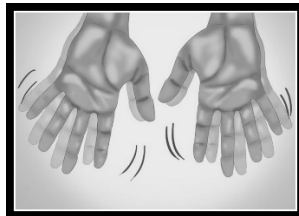
The breath work itself brings oxygen into your brain and body and on the exhale release the carbon dioxide we have stored in our bodies which will help you relax. The counting engages your thinking brain not allowing your brain to activate or stay in a fight, flight or freeze response.



Shake It Out

Feeling like you're going to blow your top? Shake your hands from the wrist, strongly. Then shake your lower arms from the elbow along with your wrists. Then shake arms from shoulder. Shake one foot from the ankle, then the other. Next shake leg from the knee, then other leg. Next from the hip, then other leg. Now shake your whole body, strongly, and in big movements. Do this until you want to stop.

Shaking out the body has been shown to help physically reset our nervous system. Big movements also help to burn up cortisol (the stress hormone) that is released when you're under stress or feeling a lot of anxiety. Finally, big and strong physical movement helps to release endorphins (feel good hormones) which help our moods to shift.



Grounding

Going to have a stressful day or just want a great way to start your day? Try grounding yourself.

Close your eyes with your feet flat on the floor (sitting or standing) and imagine there are roots coming out from the bottom of your feet sinking way down deep into the earth (you can do this inside or outside).

Imagine the earth's energy coming back up through your roots and into your body, anchoring your body to the earth. You can also imagine the energy coming out of the top of your head and surrounding you in a protective bubble.

Grounding visualizations help you calm your mind, reconnect and be present with yourself. This helps you feel more centered and focused.



I Spy

Feeling Anxious or Overwhelmed? Sit or stand and slowly move your head (so that your neck moves too) from left to right and back again, noticing and commenting on (either in your head or out loud) everything you see. Comment on colors, textures, how the light or shadows are, etc. It is important to move your head and neck and not just scan with your eyes.

By consciously moving our head slowly and naming colors and textures and objects, we are activating our thinking brain. This sends messages to our body and brain that we are in a safe space and helps to calm the nervous system.



Drink Up

Feeling anxious and about to blow your top? Drink a glass of water. A full glass. Take your time but drink it all at once (as in don't take a sip then set the glass down, drink the full glass.)

This helps on many levels. It gives you redirection and something to focus on outside of what is upsetting you. Drinking water helps to flush cortisol (stress hormone) out of your body. Drinking water also causes your mouth to salivate, which tells your brain that you are safe.



Feel the Rhythm

Having trouble regulating your emotions? Try feeling the rhythm. Activities with a steady rhythm help calm down your brain.

Here are some options:

Listen to music

Dance

Walk or run

Swing on a swing

Rock in a rocking chair

Ride a bike

Color in a coloring book

Bang on a drum

Do yoga

Swim laps



Other things that help calm down your brain and build resilience:

Make art

Write in your journal

Meditate

Hike in nature

Go to the gym

Talking to a trusted friend, parent or counselor

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Heidi believes that knowledge is power and has created many health education publications for Oregon's youth in foster care and the adults who care for them. Among those are the Health and Wellness Toolkit, Understanding Aces for Youth, Psychotropic Medication Guide for Youth in Foster Care, and Mindfulness Moments for Resiliency and Well Being.