

Date: _____

Basic self-care is a priority

Pay attention to healthily attending to your basic self-care needs: eating, sleep hygiene, hydration, exercise, personal hygiene, medication management, stress management, spiritual connectedness, fun, and social interaction.

When you are feeling stressed ask yourself which of these self-care activities you could do at that moment to help you become more centered. Talk in therapy about any difficulties with consistently maintaining your basic self-care.

Emotional & physical grounding strategies

This handout includes ideas, strategies, and questions for you to consider trying and incorporating into your self-care regime. If you are going to pick just one idea, I suggest it relate to deep breathing. If you are going to try two ideas, I recommend combining any of the deep breathing exercises with the reassuring self-talk phrases. Incorporate one or two of these strategies into your daily routine or at least practice them to get your body and mind familiar with how it feels to do them. Practicing them will help you to more easily implement them when you are feeling emotionally overwhelmed. Modify any of them as you see fit. Most of these ideas can be modified or combined to use at anytime. Discuss this handout with your therapist. Practice the breathing exercises in your therapy sessions.

1. “Simple Dragon Breaths”

- Make it part of your daily routine to take deep slow breaths – when you are getting dressed, driving, biking, walking, looking at your phone or laptop, reading, starting to feel stress, before walking into a meeting...anytime.
- Do a quick arm and neck stretch.
- Breathe very deeply three times calmly and slowly. Do three sets of three.
- On your inhale, hold your breath for 3 seconds. Then, release it slowly for 5 seconds. (Exhale takes longer than the inhale.)
- Breathe slowly. Repeat as needed.

Why do breathing strategies? Taking consistent deep breaths slows our body and mind down. It eases the physical sensations caused by anxiety and big feelings. Our bodies cannot simultaneously physiologically be in an anxious state, while we are also engaging in deep breathing. Also, breathing helps focus us on something productive in the here and now. It helps us to mindfully and intentionally bring ourselves to be present in the moment. Feeling grounded can help us feel less scattered, less out of control, less chaotic. Feeling grounded helps us to feel more empowered. Adding in positive, comforting self-talk can be reassuring, empowering and orienting.

2. The “Whoosh” Breathing Exercise

- In this exercise you will slowly inhale, hold your breath, and release your breath. While doing so, place your tongue on the roof of your mouth, as if you were going to say the letter “N.”
- Stretch.
- Slowly cleanse the air from your lungs by deeply exhaling as you say the word ‘whoosh.’
- Breathe in deeply for 4 seconds.
- Hold the breath in for 7 seconds.
- Breathe out for 8 seconds. Repeat four times.

3. Wise & Comforting Reassurance: “I am willing to believe that I have the capability to calm and ground myself.”

Do this self-talk exercise when you are having intense feelings (i.e., scared, anxious, overwhelmed) or feeling activated. Recite these phrases when you need to ground yourself. Modify the phrases as you see fit. You may also incorporate these grounding words into any other relaxation or grounding exercise:

Take a deep and slow breath. As you breathe, repeat these (or similar) words: *“I will take one deep breath at a time. I am willing to believe that I have the capability to calm myself down. I can do this. I am willing to believe that I am actually okay. Even if I am having a hard time, I am physically and emotionally safe right now. I may be feeling unsafe, however I actually am safe. Right now, I am here in _____ place and _____ time. I have resources, choices and options available to help me. I am willing to believe that I can get through this. I have done that many times before. I am worth the time and effort to calm down and to feel better. I am really okay. I am actually safe right now. I am having some big feelings and that is okay. My big feelings are information for me to take care of myself. I am having a difficult time or a difficult day and that is okay. This hard time will pass. I am having some body memories and that is okay. I am having some scary thoughts or memories and that is okay. I am okay. I will take another breath. I am willing to calm myself down. I will take another deep and slow breath.”*

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- Use therapy to build self-acceptance of these reassuring self-talk concepts.

Modifications and additions to these phrases:

4. Move around and hydrate

- Stretch. Change body positions and change locations: get up, stretch your arms and neck; shake your hands, arms and legs; move to a different place in the room; go to a different room; go for a walk around the apartment or the block; go for a bike ride.
- Drink a glass of water. Do so with mindful intention.

Why do this strategy? Somatically, physically moving our bodies to a new and fresh perspective activates different energy in our brains and our bodies. Drinking water intentionally helps us focus on something else and counters dehydration, which interferes with physical and emotional functioning.

5. Becoming grounded / Regaining grounded-ness: Look around yourself. Intentionally notice your actual surroundings. Note items or structures that are solid, heavy and steadfast to the earth or the floor (i.e., couch in your home, trees on the lawn).

- Put your feet on the floor. Feel your feet as they solidly support your whole body solidly on the floor.
- Think about how the couch sits solidly on the floor or how the tree is anchored solidly into the earth. Use the anchor image as a guide to help bring yourself solidly down to the earth or to the floor under you. Use the image to help ground you, to slow you down, to help center yourself.

6. Mind Your Senses: Check in with yourself by mindfully using your senses. Answer these questions in as detailed ways as you can:

- What do I hear? I hear the cars passing and the cardinal outside my window.*
- What do I smell? I smell my morning coffee and the orange peels.*
- What do I see? I see the three green plants and the blue walls.*
- What do I feel? I feel the chair underneath my bottom and my warm cheeks.*
- What do I taste? I taste toothpaste on my lips.*

Why do this strategy? There is much research that supports the helpfulness of focusing on our five main senses when we are trying to get grounded: sight, taste, touch, sound, and smell. This focusing helps to get us back into ourselves in a more solid way and to get oriented to the present. It slows us down.

7. My Feel Goods: Make a list of specific tangible sensory objects that you have (or will get or make) that you know help you to relax, feel comforted, grounded, soothed or safe. Make them easily available to yourself. Ideas: What specific singer/songwriter or relaxation tape do you enjoy? What specific essential oils, spices or herbs do you like to smell? Do you have a specific rock or beads or a stuffed animal that you like to hold? Do you like to see flowers in a vase or look through a particular coffee table art book? Does the taste of peppermint gum or chamomile tea ground you? Does sitting in the warm sun relax and comfort you?

Sense of Sound	
Sense of Sight	
Sense of Touch	
Sense of Taste	
Sense of Smell	

8. Eye Relax: Rub your hands together. Gently place them over your eyes. Hold them there for a few seconds. Relax your forehead and your eyes and your face and your mouth. Feel the warmth of your hands on your eyes. Take three deep breaths. Repeat.

9. Hug Yourself: Provide yourself comfort and reassurance by giving yourself a long intentional hug. Repeat as needed.

10. “My Pleasant Alternatives Lists”

Proactively create lists of positive and healthy activities for you to do when you are in need of a distraction from overwhelming feelings or to just have fun or to relax. Make these lists when you are feeling good and remember to refer to this sheet when you aren't feeling so good.

Identify activities in these four categories:

1. Quiet activities to do alone (i.e., color, yoga, meditation, read, journal, play music)
2. Quiet activities to do with others (i.e., watch a movie, read, get a massage, acupuncture)
3. Lively activities to do alone (i.e., bike ride, gardening, cleaning, getting groceries, doing laundry)
4. Lively activities to do with others (i.e., dance, cook, go a 12-step meeting)

Why do this strategy? You will have a pre-made list of healthy options to access when you are in need of some constructive ideas of what to do to help you feel better.

	Quiet Activities to do alone	Quiet Activities to do with others
	Lively Activities to do alone	Lively Activities to do with others

11. Support people: Make a list of people to call for support (i.e., friend, family member, sponsor). Support could include: just being able to leave them a check-in message, for them to listen to you, to chat or to do something together, for them to remind you of your self-care plan ideas. They can't "fix" you or your pain or stress or "make" you feel better. They can, though, support you in helping you help yourself feel better. Be proactive with your support people; give them a head's up that you would like to contact them if you are having an emotionally difficult time; tell them what you might like from them if you were to call; ask them what they might be willing to offer/provide. This pre-planning with them will make it easier for you to call them when you are feeling bad. It will also give your helpers specific ideas of what support and help you may find useful.

My support person or people	Their contact info	What specific help would I like from them?

12. Professional resources for self-care, information, and support: Names and numbers of persons or places to contact to schedule an appointment or to call: (body worker, massage person, acupuncturist, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, nurse practitioner, doctor, chiropractor, crisis line, etc.)

Crisis Line Numbers: _____

Crisis Connection – for anywhere in MN: 612.379.6363 or 911

Professional resource	Their contact info	What specific help can they provide me?

13. There are many apps for your phone or other technological device(s) that will assist you in attending to emotions, self-care and relaxation.

One option: *Pacifica* is an anxiety-regulating app for iOS and Android. It is free to download and has additional in-app options available for purchase. You can record and track your mood over time using a series of present descriptors, practice a meditation exercise, and it helps you set and track goals for your emotional health. It has reminders to help you check-in and track how you are feeling throughout the day. There's also a physical health tab (with categories like sleeping, eating, and drinking) where you can record how well you're taking care of yourself.

14. Remembering these ideas

It is one thing to have this worksheet of ideas and to even make yourself a plan about which ones work best for you. It is another thing to actually remember this worksheet and to put the ideas into action.

Where are you going to keep this worksheet? _____

Identify a few constructive and reasonable strategies that you will use to help remind yourself to actually do the specific strategies from this worksheet that you believe would be helpful to you (i.e., set alarms on your phone; keep a post note on your laptop screen or by your bed; put a note in your car; ask yourself to help you remember; hang a list on the refrigerator).

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14. Other ideas and strategies that I know help me or that I will try:

Selected resources from: *Recommended Readings by Irene* (found at www.irenegreene.com An extensive list of books and resources related to many issues including self-care, anxiety, trauma and depression.)

Depression & Anxiety:

101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks & Other Outlaws by Kate Bornstein

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund J. Bourne

The Chemistry of Calm: A Powerful, Drug-Free Plan to Quiet Your Fears and Overcome Your Anxiety by Henry Emmons

The Chemistry of Joy: A Three-Step Program for Overcoming Depression Through Western Science and Eastern Wisdom by Rachel Kranz and Henry Emmons

The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety by J. Forsyth & G. Eifert

The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Depression by K. Strosahl & P. Robinson

The Mindfulness Toolbox: 50 Practical Tips, Tools & Handouts for Anxiety, Depression, Stress & Pain by Donald Altman

Overcoming Anxiety, Worry, and Fear: Practical Ways to Find Peace by Gregory Jantz

Peace is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh

Taming the Tiger Within: Meditations on Transforming Difficult Emotions by Thich Nhat Hanh

Anger:

Healing Rage: Women Making Inner Peace Possible by Ruth King

Mindfulness, Acceptance & Compassion:

The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom by Don Miguel Ruiz

Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life: The New Acceptance & Commitment Therapy by Steven Hayes

How to Meditate: A Practical Guide to Making Friends with Your Mind by Pema Chodron

Mindfulness Meditation by Tara Brach (CD set)

The Mindfulness Toolbox: 50 Practical Tips, Tools & Handouts for Anxiety, Depression, Stress & Pain by Donald Altman

Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha by Tara Brach

Taming the Tiger Within: Meditations on Transforming Difficult Emotions by Thich Nhat Hanh

True Refuge: Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart by Tara Brach

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