Finding Your Ground

Everyday Tools - Managing Stress and Overwhelm

A free practical guide

Triello Counselling Services

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A FREE PRACTICAL GUIDE

Finding Your Ground

Everyday Tools - Managing Stress and Overwhelm

When life feels heavy, you do not need to solve everything at once. This guide offers a few ways to pause, understand what is happening, and choose a manageable next step.

Use it in your own way

Read one page at a time. Choose one tool that feels workable, try it briefly, and notice your response. You can write on these pages, keep notes elsewhere, or simply reflect.

The aim is greater choice and support. You do not need to feel completely calm for a tool to be useful.

Your comfort matters

Keep your eyes open if you prefer. You can change, skip, or stop any exercise. If you become more distressed, return to an ordinary activity or contact someone supportive. There is no need to revisit traumatic memories to use this guide.

Designed mainly for adults. Younger clients can explore suitable activities with their therapist or a trusted caregiver. This is general education, not a diagnosis, treatment plan, or substitute for individualized care.

This workbook offers general education and coping tools drawn from research-supported approaches. It is not a substitute for psychotherapy, medical advice, or individualized care. Choose what feels helpful, move at your own pace, and skip or stop any exercise that increases distress. Your therapist can help you adapt the tools to your needs.

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01

/ NOTICE

Recognize your stress signals

Stress can look different from person. Your signals might include racing thoughts, irritability, tension, withdrawing, difficulty concentrating, or feeling drained. These signs can have more than one cause; persistent or unfamiliar symptoms deserve a conversation with a health professional.

A brief check-in

Think about a recent everyday moment that felt difficult. Choose something manageable rather than your most painful experience.

What was happening?

What did I notice in my thoughts, feelings, or actions?

What did I need: rest, practical help, connection, space, or something else?

If checking your body feels uncomfortable, focus on what you were doing or what was happening around you.

This reflection helps you identify patterns to discuss in therapy. It is not a diagnostic assessment or a test you need to pass.

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02 / REORIENT

Connect with the present

Grounding directs attention toward the current environment. It is one skill included in the World Health Organization's stress-management guide. Evidence for a broader approach does not mean every grounding exercise works for everyone. [1]

Try a brief external grounding exercise

1. Look around and name three neutral things you can see.
2. Notice two sounds, if that is comfortable.
3. Feel one point of contact, such as your hand on a table.
4. Say where you are and choose your next small action.

Adapt this to your senses and abilities. You might describe colours, read a sign, or hold a familiar object. Skip any sensation that feels unpleasant.

Try it during an ordinary moment

For example, before opening an email, notice the room and then decide whether to reply now or take a short break.

An anchor I could use:

_____

_____

What I noticed when I tried it:

_____

_____

If you are in an unsafe situation, prioritize getting to safety and seeking help. Grounding does not remove an actual threat.

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03 / BREATHE GENTLY

Give yourself a little space

Research suggests breathing practices may reduce self-reported stress. Studies differ, and many have limitations. Breathing is an optional coping tool, not a guaranteed way to stop anxiety. [2]

Try comfortable paced breathing

Sit or stand comfortably. Breathe gently in for about four counts and out for about six, only if this feels easy. Do not hold your breath or force a deep inhale. Try a few cycles, then return to your usual breathing.

The counts are a practical example; this exact timing is not established as best for everyone. Shorten the counts or skip counting entirely if you prefer.

Choose another tool when needed

Stop if you feel dizzy, short of breath, or more anxious. Return to normal breathing and focus on the room instead. If breathing exercises are uncomfortable or you have a condition affecting breathing, discuss options with your clinician.

What felt comfortable or uncomfortable?

An alternative I can use:

You do not have to control your breathing to cope successfully. External grounding or asking for support may be a better fit today.

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/ THINK FLEXIBLY

04 Make room for another view



Athought record is a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)tool for examining how a situation, thoughts, and feelings relate. The aim is an accurate, balanced view rather than forced positivity. This shortened practice draws on NHS guidance. [3]

Example: A friend has not replied. One interpretation is, “They do not care.” Another is: “I do not know why they have not replied. I can check in when I am ready.”

What happened, and what did I feel?

What thought showed up?

What facts support it? What facts suggest another view?

What is a more balanced thought? How do I feel now?

Avoid using this exercise to dismiss harm, discrimination, or genuine danger. If examining thoughts leads to repeated reassurance-seeking or more distress, ask your therapist how to adapt it.

Another option: briefly label a thought as "a thought," then return attention to what you want to do next. This resembles the unhooking skill in WHO guidance. [1]

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05 / TAKE ONE STEP

Choose a manageable action

Behavioural activation is a treatment approachthat helps people reconnect with activities instead of getting stuck in withdrawal. A Cochrane review supports its use for adult depression, although certainty varies across comparisons. This small exercise uses one principle; it is not a full treatment. [4]

Make the step small enough for today

Choose one activity involving connection, enjoyment, or a manageable task. For example: send one message, listen to a favourite song, or put away three items. Rest is also an option when you need it.

Decide when and where you will try it. Notice what happened afterward, even if your mood did not improve right away. Adjust the size of the step to your energy, access, and abilities.

One small activity:

When and where I will try it:

A barrier, and how I could make it easier:

Afterward: what did I notice or learn?

Coping skills cannot fix every source of stress. Practical assistance, safer conditions, accessible care, and support from others may be just as necessary.

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06 / KEEP IT CLOSE

My personal coping plan

Use this page to collect options that fit you. You can revisit it with your therapist. This is an everyday coping plan, not a suicide safety plan.

My early signs that I need support:

A grounding anchor or other tool I can try:

One manageable action:

Someone I can contact, and how to reach them:

What I could ask for: listening, company, practical help, or something else:

Something I want to discuss in my next session:

When to reach out

Contact your therapist or another health professional if distress persists, worsens, or disrupts daily life. Seek urgent help if you cannot keep yourself safe.

In Canada: If you are thinking about suicide or worried about someone else, call or text 9-8-8, available 24/7. For immediate danger or urgent medical care, call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency department. [5]

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RESEARCH / FURTHER READING

About the evidence

The tools here draw on published research and established clinical approaches. This particular guide has not been tested in a clinical trial. Brief self-help exercises do not provide the same care as a full, supported treatment.

1 **[1] World Health Organization (2020).**
Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide. Guidance for grounding and unhooking.
Read source

2 **[2] Fincham, G.W., Strauss, C., Montero-Marin, J., & Cavanagh, K. (2023).**
Effect of breathwork on stress and mental health: A meta-analysis of randomised-controlled trials. Scientific Reports, 13, 432.
Read source

3 **[3] NHS, Every Mind Matters (n.d.),**
Thought record. Practical CBT guidance; not evidence that this shortened exercise alone treats a disorder.
Read source

4 **[4] Uphoff, E., et al. (2020).**
Behavioural activation therapy for depression in adults. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 7, CD013305.
Read source

5 **[5] 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline (Canada).**
Current crisis support information.
Read source

You do not need to complete every exercise or feel better right away. If distress persists, worsens, or affects your daily life, reach out to your therapist or another qualified health professional. This workbook has not been independently evaluated as a treatment and is not intended for crisis support.

In Canada: If you are thinking about suicide or worried about someone else, call or text 988. If you are in immediate danger or need urgent medical care, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

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