

# Coping Tools for the Here and Now

NEHA Mental Health Task Force

## Deep Breathing

If you are sitting, place your arms on the chair arms.

If you are sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you are in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in deeply. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. *You may not be able to reach 5 at first. That's okay. Keep trying!*
- Then let it flow out slowly, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.

Learn more about deep breathing by [clicking here](#).

## Box Breathing

You breathe in specific counts, while visualizing a box:

1. Inhale to the count of 4 as you visualize the top edge of a box.
2. Hold your breath for a count of 4, as you go down along the right side.
3. Exhale for a count of 4, moving from right to left along the bottom edge.
4. Hold for another count of 4, going up along the left side, back to the top.
5. Repeat for several cycles for at least 1 minute.

Watch a short video to see an example of box breathing by [clicking here](#).

## Movement

Moving your body, even in small ways can help reduce stress, improve depression symptoms and increase energy.

1. Flex/point your feet
2. Roll your shoulders
3. Squeeze playdough or a fidget toy
4. Seated or standing sway from side to side, and forward to back
5. If your body allows: Walking, yoga, or biking

Watch a free yoga session online by [clicking here](#).

## Free-Range Meditation (Shower example)

1. Pay attention to the action of turning faucets, standing under the spray, applying soap.
2. Feel the warm water, trying to feel each individual stream.
3. Switch to cooler water for a couple of seconds, then back to warm water.
4. Keep your attention on the present. If your thoughts wander, gently bring them back.
5. Keep doing this for a minute to start, and you may eventually extend it to include the entire shower and drying off as well!

“Free-range meditation” is a term and practice from [Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics](#).

## Mindfulness and Meditation

Apps and websites focused on relaxation, sleep, focus and overall well-being (from [Psych Central](#))

- Best overall: [Calm](#)
- Best for beginners: [UCLA Mindful](#)
- Best for variety: [Headspace](#)
- Best Buddhist meditation: [SF Zen Center](#)
- Best for kids: [New Horizon](#)
- Best for the skeptic: [Ten Percent Happier](#)
- Best for community: [The Honest Guys](#)
- Best podcast: [The Meditation Podcast](#)
- An excellent free app: [Insight Timer](#)

## Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques are exercises that may help you refocus on the present moment to distract yourself from anxious feelings.

### 1. Put your hands in water

- Focus on the water's temperature and how it feels on your fingertips, palms, and the backs of your hands. Does it feel the same in each part of your hand?
- Use warm water first, then cold. Next, try cold water first, then warm. Does it feel different to switch from cold to warm water versus warm to cold?

### 2. Pick up or touch items near you

- Are the things you touch soft or hard? Heavy or light? Warm or cool? Focus on the texture and color of each item. Challenge yourself to think of specific colors, such as crimson, burgundy, indigo, or turquoise, instead of simply red or blue.

### 3. Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method

- Working backward from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. For example, you might start by listing:
  - five things you hear
  - four things you see
  - three things you can touch from where you're sitting
  - two things you can smell
  - one thing you can taste

Learn more about physical grounding techniques by [clicking here](#).

## Journaling With A Focus On Gratitude

Our brains tend to focus on the negative in our lives. This was a protective mechanism for our ancestors to cope with potential saber tooth tiger attacks, etc. Try to refocus on the positive.

Write down 3 things you are thankful for. They can be small or large things. Examples:

- I am thankful for waking up, for being able to hear the birds singing, for seeing my children at breakfast before school.
- Try to make them specific ("I'm thankful that I got to attend my child's concert at school today") rather than broad ("I'm thankful for my family").

See if you can do this consistently each morning or evening for one week to start.