

Stress Management in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Building Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty



**Created by Heather Scott, MCP, RCC
&
Nina Sheere, MCP, RCC**

Workshop Outline & Objectives

Outline:

- Introductions
- Reviewing Confidentiality & Informed Consent
- Defining Mental Health
- Brain & Nervous System Psychoeducation
- The Polyvagal Theory & Internal/External Resourcing
- Exploring Boundaries
- Grounding & Mindfulness Strategies

Objectives:

- Learn about the neuroscience of stress and anxiety related to living & working in the COVID-19 pandemic
- Build a toolkit of coping strategies & skills to manage stress, anxiety & depression
- Connect with your community
- Leave with a resource handbook for continued exploration and support

About Us



Nina Sheere, MCP, Registered Clinical Counsellor

Nina currently works in private practice supporting men, women and teens, as well as working in crisis counselling as a Victim Service worker for the past 4 years. Nina brings experience from a range of roles in organizations and the health authority over the past 10 years, as well as certifications in both yoga and meditation teacher trainings. Nina is also the founder of the non-profit organization, The Street Feet Society, focused on educating youth about the impacts of homelessness.



Heather Scott, MCP, Registered Clinical Counsellor

Heather has worked in mental health for over a decade and holds a masters degree in counselling psychology. Heather has worked across a variety of non-profits and organizations and currently focuses her clinical work in private practice, supporting survivors of complex trauma. Heather previously worked 10 years in the hospitality industry and brings lived experience to workshop facilitation.

Confidentiality & Disclaimer

Our intention for the workshop is to provide participants with knowledge about mental health and wellness, as well as to practice skills to manage stress, anxiety and depression. This is what is known as a “psycho educational workshop”. It is NOT a workshop in which we will be processing your personal experiences in depth (like we would in a therapy session). We ask everyone to remember the following...



Take Care of Yourself Today

Participate as much or as little as you like. We encourage you to leave your video on during the workshop to promote community, but you don't have to. Do what you need to take care of yourself today!



What happens in the group, stays in the Group!

With your participation in this workshop, you are agreeing to the rule of “what happens in the group stays in the group”. This means that what is shared by other participants remains private and you are agreeing to respect the privacy and confidentiality of other participants.



Have Fun & Ask Questions

There are no silly questions! This is complex stuff and we are all affected by the pandemic. If you have a question I can guarantee someone else has the same one. Take the risk and ASK! Let's chat about the answer in real-time with the other participants. If you prefer to hold questions until the end and still need them answered, please email Nina or Heather and they will answer them as best they can.

Participant Poll

Answer **YES**, **NO** or **MAYBE** to the following statements...



I have experienced stress during the pandemic.



I know what stress is and feels like.



I have ways of coping with stress.

Defining Mental Health

Stress “Stress is a normal response to situational pressures or demands, especially if they are perceived as threatening or dangerous” (CAMH)

- Our body’s way of responding to environmental stimulus (stressors) by activating our sympathetic nervous system.
- A reasonable level of stress and nervous system activation is useful, supporting us in feeling motivated to meet deadlines, be productive and engage with important experiences or events in our lives.
- Long-term stress increases the risk of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, substance use problems, sleep problems, pain and bodily complaints such as muscle tension. It also increases the risk of medical problems such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems, a weakened immune system, difficulty conceiving, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and stroke. (CAMH)

Anxiety “Stress is related to the same ‘fight, flight, or freeze’ response as anxiety, and the physical sensations of anxiety and stress may be very similar” (HereToHelpBC)

- Stress is typically related to an identifiable, external stressor, while anxiety is our internal response to stress. Causes or triggers for anxiety can feel more difficult to identify and create a perceived feeling of threat or fear.

Depression “Clinical depression, sometimes called major depression, is a complex mood disorder caused by various factors, including genetic predisposition, personality, stress and brain chemistry.” (CAMH)

The main symptom of depression is a sad, despairing mood that:

- is present most days and lasts most of the day
- lasts for more than two weeks
- impairs the person’s performance at work, at school or in social relationships.

(CAMH)

Definitions Cont'd

Complex Trauma

Complex traumatic events and experiences as stressors that are:

1. Repetitive, prolonged, or cumulative
 2. Most often interpersonal, involving direct harm, exploitation, and maltreatment including neglect, abandonment, or antipathy by primary caregivers or other ostensibly responsible adults
 3. Often occur at developmentally vulnerable times in the victim's life, especially in early childhood or adolescence, but can also occur later in life and in conditions of vulnerability associated with disability, disempowerment, dependency, age, infirmity, and others. (Dr. C. Courtois).
- Complex trauma requires our body to initiate a chronic, cumulative stress response in reaction to real or perceived threats.
 - Experiencing complex trauma can cause a range of mental health symptoms, including those associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression & Anxiety.

The Brain & Neuroscience of Stress

Prefrontal Cortex

Planning, Problem Solving, Reasoning & Judgement



PERCEIVED STRESSOR



Limbic System

Emotions & Memory

Amygdala

Emotions & Fear Centre

Brain Stem

Breathing, Temperature, Digestion, Heart Rate

SYMPATHETIC N.S.

Fight, Flight, Freeze



PARASYMPATHETIC N.S.

Rest & Digest

"Every response is in service of an action of survival"

Poly Vagal Theory

FREEZE

Body Collapse
Immobility

Dissociation

Depression



Numbness Helplessness

Conservation of energy

Hopelessness
Shut-down
Shame Trapped
Preparation for death



Dorsal Vagal

DORSAL VAGAL - Emergency State

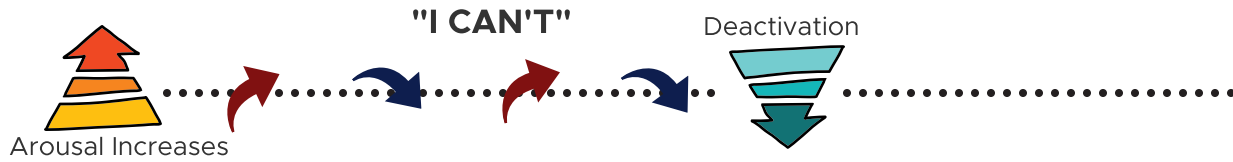
Parasympathetic Nervous System

Increases

Fuel storage & insulin activity,
Endorphins that help numb & raise the
pain threshold

Decreases

Heart rate, Blood Pressure,
Temperature, Muscle Tone, So
Facial Expression, Eye contact,
Intonations, Awareness of Human
Voice, Social behaviour Sexual
Response, Immune Response



"I CAN"

Flight

Movement Away

Fight

Movement towards

Anger



Irritation

Frustration

Rage

Sympathetic

Fear



Panic

Worry & Concern

Anxiety

SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

Increases

Blood pressure, heart rate, fuel
availability, Adrenaline, Oxygen
circulating to vital organs, blood
clotting, pupil size

Decreases

Fuel storage, Insulin activity, Digestion,
Salvation, Relational Ability, Immune
Response



Social Engagement

In the Present

Groundedness

Connected

Joy

Connected
Oriented to the Environment
Safe & Without Fear



Mindful

Compassionate

Curious

Openness

Ventral Vagal

VENTRA: VAGAL - Connection

Parasympathetic Nervous System

Increases

Digestion, Intestina Motility,
Resistance to infection, Immune
Response, Rest & Recuperration,
Circulation to non-vital organs (skin,
extremities), Oxytocin (social
bonding, immobility without fear),
Ability to relate & connect

Decreases

Defensive Responses

Poly Vagal Mapping

What do you notice when in each state of arousal?

- What are you thinking?
 - Feeling? What body sensations do you notice?
 - Doing? Behaviour?
-

Dorsal Vagal

Collapsed

Immobilized

Sympathetic

Mobilized

Fight - Flight

Ventral Vagal

Social

Safe

Poly Vagal Resourcing

Things I can do on my own:

Things I can do with others:

What helps me move out of here?

Dorsal Vagal

Immobilized
Collapsed

What helps me move out of here?

Sympathetic

Mobilized
Fight - Flight

What helps me stay here?

Ventral Vagal

Social
Safe

Boundaries Issues Associated with Trauma

As we all navigate what it means to live in a pandemic, we are continually having to negotiate and re-negotiate where our boundaries lie within our personal and professional relationships.

Having a trauma history or living with high stress & anxiety can exacerbate these issues below:

- *Extremes: trusting too much or too little; isolation or enmeshment.*
- *Relationships that are brittle (easily damaged, fragile).*
- *Tolerating others' flaws too much; doing anything to preserve the relationship.*
- *Use of substances as an attempt to connect with others.*
- *Avoiding relationships because they are too painful.*
- *Overcompliance at times; too much resistance at other times.*
- *Always being the one to give.*
- *Spending time with unsafe people.*
- *Not seeing the hostility in others' words or actions.*
- *Being overly angry, with a hair-trigger temper; often ready to "blow up."*
- *Difficulty expressing feelings; expressing them in actions rather than words (acting out).*
- *Living for someone else rather than yourself.*
- *Manipulation: guilt, threats, or lying.*
- *Reenactments: getting involved in repeated destructive relationship patterns (e.g., recreating the trauma roles of abuser, bystander, victim, rescuer, accomplice).*
- *"Stockholm Syndrome": feeling attachment and love for the abuser.*
- *Wanting to be rescued; wanting others to take responsibility for the relationship.*
- *Confusion about what is appropriate in relationships: What can one rightly expect of others? When should a relationship end? How much should one give in a relationship? Is it okay to say "no" to others?*
- *"Identification with the aggressor": believing the abuser is right.*
- *Relationships with people who use substances.*
- *Confusion between fear and attraction (i.e., feeling excited when it is really fear).*
- *Difficulty getting out of bad relationships*



Boundaries & The Workplace

As we continue to navigate new workplace norms and expectations in the COVID-19 Pandemic, the hospitality industry has stepped into the role of front-line worker. This has come with many stressors and pressures.

What are your personal boundaries related to working during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Have there been instances when you feel your boundaries have been ignored or violated at work?

What reaction does this invoke for you? – Physically, mentally, & emotionally, what do you notice?

How have you responded to a boundary violation at work?

Are boundary violations typically associated with a power dynamic? Does this make these situations more difficult to navigate?

Small Acts of Living



When people experience an absence of power and limited options for change (hello?! Pandemic, anyone?) human beings go into **SURVIVAL MODE** (remember the poly vagal theory?)

What do you **THINK, FEEL, DO** in survival mode?

Does being in SURVIVAL MODE make it easy or hard to advocate for change? Stand up for yourself? Set boundaries? Take care of yourself?



When people are subjected to an inequity of power, they often face the threat of retaliation or further subjugation for any attempt to stand up for themselves

HOWEVER



Humans also have an innate instinct to "keep on keeping on" & maintain a sense of self in the face of oppression, subjugation and trauma.

Humans "keep on keeping on" with small acts that may not appear significant on the surface, but they act as RESISTANCE to whatever barriers we are facing

Resistance:

"Any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance." - Allan Wade

What **SMALL ACTS OF LIVING** are you engaging in to "keep on keeping on" while working through the pandemic?

Mental Health Resources

Crisis Resources

Vancouver Crisis Centre 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433) or online chat

Youth Chat (Noon-1am): www.YouthInBC.com

Adult Chat (Noon-1am): www.CrisisCentreChat.ca

Mental Health Support Line 604-310-6789

Seniors Distress Line 604-872-1234

Hope for Wellness 1-855-242-3310 (*offers immediate phone/online mental health support & crisis intervention for all Indigenous peoples across Canada*)

KUU-US Crisis Line Society 250-723-4050

(*KUU-US Crisis Line Society provides support to callers living in the Port Alberni area, as well as Aboriginals throughout the Province of British Columbia*)

Nurse's Line Dial 811

(*Provides non-emergency health education and advice from a Registered Nurse, 24/7, in over 130 languages.*)

BC Bereavement Line 604-738-9950 *Free phone support for grief and bereavement*

General Counselling Services

Family Services of Greater Vancouver

604-874-2938 or intake@fsgv.ca

(*Masters' level therapists offering individual, couples, and family counselling in multiple languages*)

Family Services of Greater Victoria

250-386-4331 or www.fsgv.org

(*Individual, couple, family & child counselling offered on a sliding scale (minimum \$30/session)*)

**Reduced-Fee Counselling - MANY AVAILABLE!
Victoria**

<https://drcvictoria.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/VDRCFreeandAffordable-1.pdf>

Vancouver search: <https://redbookonline.bc211.ca>

Mental Health Services

Mood Disorders Clinic of BC 604-873-0103

BC Schizophrenia Society 1-888-888-0029

Access & Assessment Centre (604) 675-3700

Victoria Mental Health Centre 1-888-494-3888.

LGBTQ2S+ Services

QmunityVancouver 604-684-5307, ex. 107 or jennie.mw@qmunity.ca

Health Initiative for Men (HiM) Vancouver 604-488-1001, ex. 235 or counselling@checkhimout.ca

Vancouver Island Queer Resource Collective

Mental Health Resource List:

<https://viqueercollective.com/health-services/>

Three Bridges Community Health Centre (Vancouver)

*Addictions Services - (604) 331-8900

FREE Virtual Mental Health Programs

Kelty's Key <https://www.keltyskey.com>

FREE Online cognitive behavioural therapy programs for a range of mental health concerns developed by experienced clinicians.

BounceBackBC <https://bouncebackbc.ca>

FREE online skills-based program and optional telephone coaching, for anxiety and/or depression

ChangePainBC <https://www.changepain.ca>

FREE in-person and online education programs which focus on pain management and improving quality of life for people in chronic pain.

YMCA Mental Health Wellness Programs

<https://www.gv.ymca.ca/mental-wellness>

FREE 7-week virtual skills-based program for children, youth & adults experiencing stress & mild-moderate anxiety.

Foundry Virtual Service <https://foundrybc.ca/virtual/>

Virtual drop-in counselling sessions, peer support check-ins and group offerings to young people ages 12-24 and their caregivers. Online primary care clinics coming soon.

Addiction Services

Victoria Addictions Outpatient Treatment

250-519-3544

***Multiple locations across Vancouver Island*

<https://www.viha.ca/mhas/locations>

Vancouver Mental Health & Substances Use Services

***multiple locations across Lower Mainland*

<http://www.vch.ca/your-care/mental-health-substance-use>

Drug & Alcohol Information Line (604) 660-9382

Free, confidential information and referral services to British Columbians in need of support with any kind of substance use issue (alcohol or other drugs)

Trauma Services

VISAC 604-874-2938

Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) 604-687-1868 or information@bwss.org

WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre 604-255-6344

BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse 1-888-682-6482

Mosaic BC - Stopping the Violence Program 604-254-9626

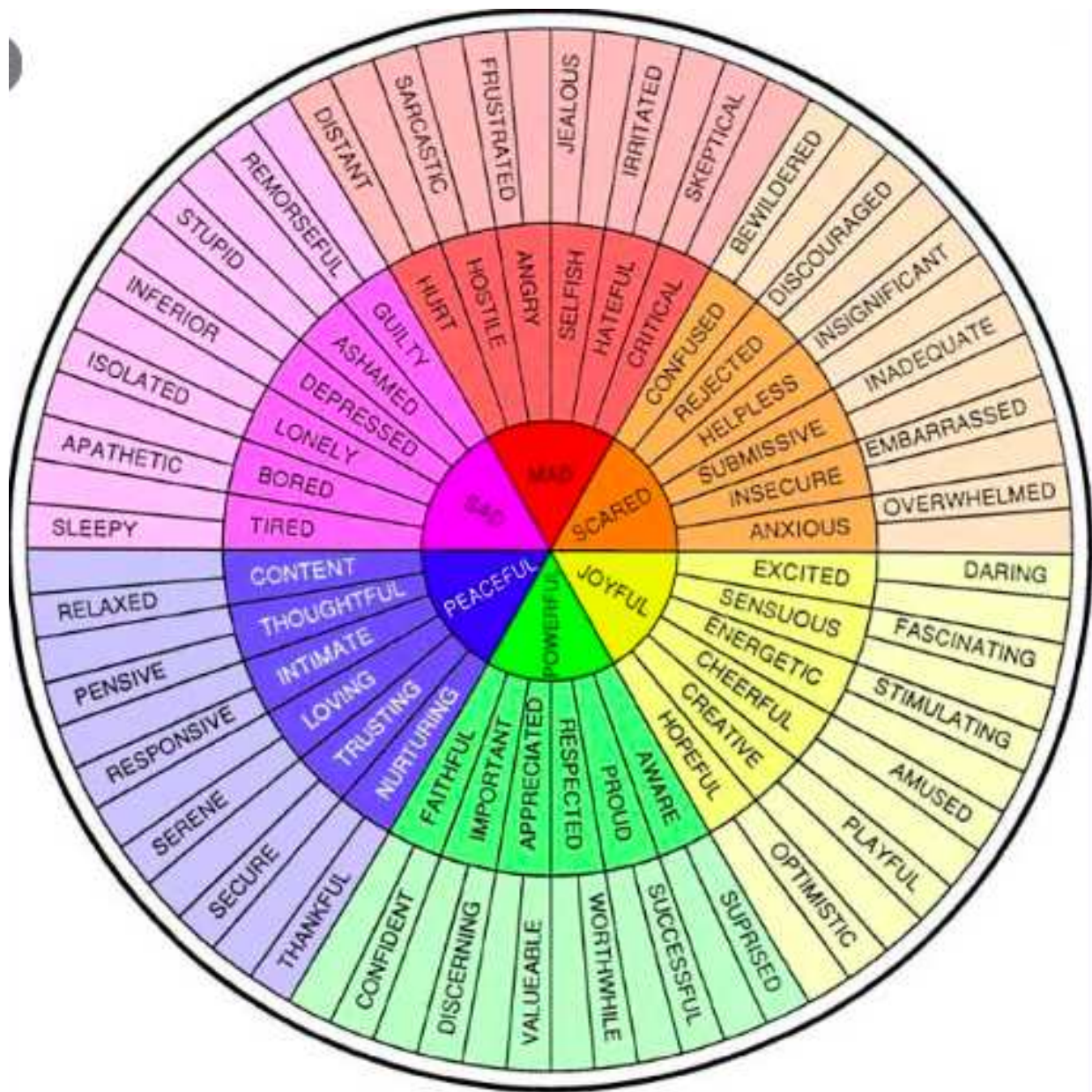
Victoria Sexual Assault Centre 250-383-3232

Men's Trauma Centre (Victoria) 250-381-6367

VictimLinkBC - 1-800-563-0808



Feelings Wheel



Creative Selfishness

Creative Selfishness



The art of caring for yourself so you can care for others

*Let go of housework
Say "no" when you need to
Sit down when you're tired
Ask for help
Walk outside and get fresh air
Put your phone away
Ask if this will matter tomorrow, next week, a
year from now, at the end of your life?
Turn off the news
Stop scrolling
Give yourself a mini-break; close your eyes &
breath deeply
Drink a cup of tea
Wear comfy clothes
Let your thoughts drift
Wiggle your face & toes
Light candles & burn incense in your bedroom
Say goodbye to people who pull you down
Form a 'Creative Selfishness' peer group
Simplify where you can
Give stuff away
Celebrate Tuesdays
Create nurturing rituals
Forgive yourself and others
Give yourself time
Say YES YES YES to your life!*

*Stare into space
Curl up with a blanket
Find out what makes you laugh & add
laughter to your daily routine
Take a bath in candlelight
Wear your slippers
Accept yourself
Reconnect with someone special
Keep a flower on your desk or in your kitchen
Do something unexpected
Do one thing at a time
Call a friend
Spend a day in silence
Stay in bed all day
Sit by the water
Listen to music with headphones
Get a manicure, pedicure or foot massage
Hang twinkle lights in your kitchen
Allow yourself to be needy (we all have
needs!!
Eat lunch on your best dishes
Hold hands with a loved on
Plant a window garden
Get to know some fascinating people
Stop taking blame for things that aren't your
fault*



Grounding Skills

WHAT IS GROUNDING?

- *Grounding is a set of simple strategies used to detach from emotional pain & puts a healthy distance between you & negative emotion.*

WHY DO GROUNDING?

- *When you are overwhelmed with emotional pain, you need a way to detach so that you can gain control over your feelings and physiological trauma-related reactions.*

Guidelines

- *Grounding can be done any time, any place, anywhere, and no one has to know.*
- *Use grounding when you are faced with a trigger, enraged, dissociating, having a craving for compulsive behaviour, or whenever your emotional pain goes above 6 (on a 0-10 scale).*
- *Keep your eyes open, scan the room, and turn the light on to stay in touch with the present.*
- *Rate your mood before and after grounding, to see if it works. Before grounding, rate your level of emotional pain (0-10, where 10 means “extreme pain”). Then re-rate it afterward. Has it shifted?*
- *Stay neutral - avoid judgments of “good” and “bad.”*
- *Focus on the present, not the past or future.*
- ***Note - Grounding is much more active than relaxation training & focuses on distraction strategies, and is intended to help extreme negative feelings.*



THERE ARE 3 TYPES OF GROUNDING...



Grounding Skills

Adapted from: Seeking Safety by Lisa M Najavits (2002) Copyright by Guilford Press

Mental Grounding

- **Describe your environment** in detail, using all your senses. Describe objects, sounds, textures, colours, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere. For example, on the skytrain: "I'm on the skytrain. I'll see the water False Creek soon. Those are the windows. This is the bench. The metal bar is silver. The train map has four colours."
- **Play a "categories" game with yourself.** Try to think of "types of dogs," "jazz musicians," "words that begin with 'C'," "cars," "TV shows," "writers," "sports," "songs," or "cities."
- **Describe an everyday activity in great detail.** For example, describe a meal that you cook, step-by-step
- **Imagine.** Use an image: Glide along on skates away from your pain; change the TV channel to get to a better show; think of a wall as a buffer between you and your pain.
- **Read something**, saying each word to yourself. Or read each letter backward so that you focus on the letters and not on the meaning of words.
- Use **humor**. Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
- Count to 10 or say the alphabet, very **s... l... o... w... l... y**.

Physical Grounding

- **Run cool or warm water over your hands or Splash cold water on your face.**
- **Touch various objects around you:** *a pen, keys, your clothing, the table, the walls; Notice textures, colours, materials, weight, temperature. Compare objects you touch: Is one colder? Lighter?*
- **Dig your heels into the floor** - literally "grounding" them! Notice the tension centred in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself that you are connected to the ground.
- **Carry a grounding object in your pocket** - a small object (a small rock, clay, a ring, a piece of cloth or yarn) that you can touch whenever you feel triggered.
- **Jump up and down.**
- **Notice your body:** *the weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair. You are connected to the world.*
- **Stretch.** *Extend your fingers, arms, or legs as far as you can; roll your head around.*
- **Clench and release your fists.**
- **Walk slowly noticing each footstep**, saying "left" or "right" with each step.
- **Eat something**, describe the flavours in detail to yourself.
- **Focus on your breathing**, noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each inhale (e.g., favourite colour, or a soothing word like "calm" or "easy")

Soothing Grounding

- **Say kind statements to yourself**, as if you were talking to a small child - for example, "You are a good person going through a hard time. You'll get through this."
- **Think of favourites.** Think of your favourite colour, animals, season, food, time of day, TV show.
- **Picture people you care about** (e.g., your kids, your friends, a superhero), and **look at photographs** (if you have them)
- **Remember the words to an inspiring song**, quotation, or poem that makes you feel better
- **Remember a "calm place"**. Describe a place that you find very soothing (perhaps the beach or mountains, or a favourite room); focus on everything about this place - the sounds, colours, shapes, objects, textures.
- **Say a coping statement:** "I can handle this," "This feeling will pass."
- **Plan a treat for yourself**, such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, a warm bath, a cup of tea
- **Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week** - perhaps time with a friend, going to a movie, or going on a hike.



3 Part Breath Exercise

Get Comfortable...

- *Come to a comfortable seated or lying down position*
- *Rest one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly/abdomen*
- *Bring your awareness to your breath and notice the natural rise and fall with each inhale and exhale*

Begin to Cue Your Breath...

- *Begin to lengthen your inhale and exhale*
- *Inhale your breath all the way down to your belly, feeling the rise of your hand on your abdomen*
- *Inhale into your torso, expanding between your ribs and around to your back*
- *Inhale breath into your chest, feeling the rise of your second hand and lift of your collar bones*
- *Hold for a moment at the peak of fullness*
- *Exhale, releasing your breath from your chest, your ribcage and down into your belly*
- *Notice both hands lowering on your body as your torso compresses air out*
- *Pause for a moment at the bottom of your breath*

Repeat 5-10 times through...

- *Bring your attention back to your breath and body when your mind begins to wander*
- *Take a moment after completing your rounds of breath to notice the impact on your body and mind*
- *What has changed? What do you notice?*

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