

MATCH SKILLS

Take-Home Toolbox

Woburn Memorial High School
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QUICK CALM

For this strategy, you need to do three things:

1. **R**elax your muscles
2. **S**low your breathing
3. **T**hink of a peaceful place

You can use the acronym **ReST** to remember the steps.

To help you think of a peaceful place to use during Quick Calm, fill in the following chart:

In my peaceful place...

| | |
|------------|--|
| I see... | |
| I hear... | |
| I feel... | |
| I smell... | |

BREATHING & RELAXATION

Relaxation Strategies: When? How? Why?

Being able to relax in a time of anxiety may seem to be impossible. Often people will tell you to just “relax” or “take a deep breath,” but these things may not come as easy. Finding the right strategies for you in this time will be key to controlling your anxiety. Relaxation skills can be used to help ease your anxiety. They can reduce muscle tension, slow down heavy breathing and calm the mind (DeSena, n.d.). Relaxation skills are not limited to these skills; **participating in enjoyable activities also leads to relaxation!** And we can’t forget about self-care; taking care of yourself in a positive way helps you be more relaxed!

When we are stressed and worried, our levels of anxiety and stress will start to become higher over time. The goal of relaxation skills are to slow down brain activity to reduce negative thoughts, increase your awareness of the differences between tension and relaxation, and to lower the levels of anxiety, tension, and restlessness in your body over time (DeSena, n.d.).

There are many different ways to relax, but here are a few suggestions!

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One way to relax your muscles is to employ Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). Starting at the head or toes, progressively work your way down or up, respectively, by tightening and releasing your muscles. As you tighten your muscles, breath in; as you release, breath out.

Breathing

In order to regulate your breathing, you can try some of the following techniques. These can be used to relax *and* to regulate breathing when you are experiencing physical symptoms. For each strategy, you can repeat each cycle as many times as you need.

1. Smell the flowers, blow out the candles technique
 - a. Smell the flowers - Breath in through your nose for a 5-count
 - b. Blow out the candles - Blow out through your mouth for a 5-count

2. Belly Breathing

- a. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest.
- b. Take a deep breath for a 4-count. The hand on your belly should rise, but the hand on your chest should remain still.
- c. Exhale for a 6-count. The hand on your belly should fall, but the hand on your chest should remain still.

3. Ladder Breathing

- a. Breathe in through your nose for 1 second, hold for 1 second, and breathe out through your mouth for 1 second.
- b. Breathe in through your nose for 2 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, and breathe out through your mouth for 2 seconds.
- c. Repeat each stage (breathing in, holding, breathing out) for 3 seconds, then 4 seconds, then 5 seconds.

4. Alternate Nostril Breathing

- a. Close your RIGHT nostril with your thumb and breathe IN for a 4-count through your LEFT nostril. Hold for 3 seconds.
- b. Close your LEFT nostril with your pointer finger, release your thumb from your RIGHT nostril, and breathe OUT for a 6-count.
- c. Keeping your LEFT nostril closed, breath IN for a 4-count. Hold for 3 seconds.
- d. Close your RIGHT nostril with your thumb, release your pointer finger from your LEFT nostril, and breathe OUT for a 6-count.

Mindfulness activities for relaxation

During mindfulness activities, we are able to learn how to accept our emotions rather than trying to ignore them. You can search on youtube for guided videos that take you through mindfulness activities, or use an app like *Calm*, *Stop, Breathe, & Think*, or *Headspace*.

COGNITIVE DISTRACTIONS

Cognitive distractions (sometimes called cognitive interrupters or thought blockers) are short activities that distract your brain from negative recurring thoughts. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try to replace our negative thoughts; they just stick. So in order to give our brain a break, we need to distract it.

Cognitive distractions are not a cure for negative thoughts, but they do break the cycle and keep our thoughts from recurring or escalating. They allow us to go back to doing what we need to do or calm us down enough to be in a place where we can replace the thought.

Some examples:

1. Coloring/Drawing
2. Word Search or Crossword Puzzle
3. Sudoku
4. Counting all the blue, green, red, etc. items in the room
5. Listening to music/Reciting song lyrics
6. Reading/Listening to a book
7. Watching a movie, show, or video
8. Playing a game
9. Counting/Reciting the alphabet
10. Humor

Ultimately, there is no set list of cognitive distractions because everyone is different. The only requirement for an effective cognitive distraction is that it is something that distracts you from the negative thought so that, once you have completed the distraction, you can go do what you need to do.

LOOK FOR THE SILVER LINING

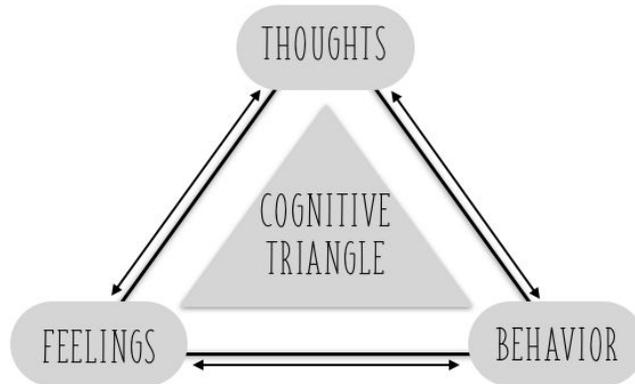
Using the chart below, write down some negative situations that have occurred recently and may be upsetting you. There are some situations that may not have a silver lining no matter how hard you try, but do your best to come up with something good that could come out of each situation. There is an example below.

| Situation | Silver Lining |
|------------------|----------------------|
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COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

Thoughts, Feelings & Behavior

There is a connection between our thoughts, our feelings, and our behavior. In fact, psychologist and researcher Aaron Beck created something called the Cognitive Triad (or Triangle) to help clients visualize the connection (Beck, 2011):



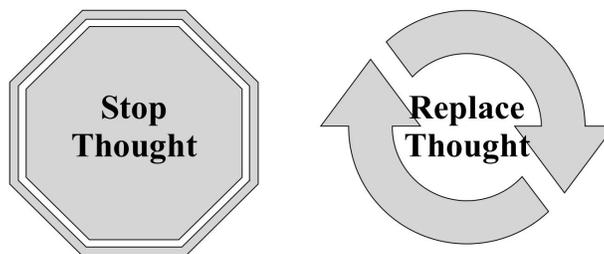
Beck's theory is that there is constant interplay between our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. For instance:

I **think** my teacher is unfair → I **feel** angry → I yell at my teacher (**behavior**).

And it can just keep going and going and going...

I trip in front of the class (**behavior**) → I **feel** embarrassed → I **think** I am a loser. → I **feel** sad. → I stop going to class and my grade goes down (**behavior**). → I **think** I am dumb. → and so on...

But Beck has a solution.



Beck argues we can stop the negative *emotion* by stopping the negative *thought* and replacing it with a positive thought. But first we need to identify the negative thoughts and think about them logically. Let's face it; some negative thoughts are accurate. BUT, we can try to look at situations in a positive light and thus interrupt our negative feelings and behaviors.

REPLACING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

Using the chart below, identify some unhelpful thoughts that you may have or have had in the past. Then follow the following steps:

1. Ask yourself: Is this true? What evidence is this thought based on?
2. If it isn't true, identify the kind of distortion. (Remember, some distortions are very similar, so try not to get bogged down in trying to identify the exact right answer.)
3. Try to consider someone else's perception of the situation. Would they perceive it in the same way?
4. If it is true, how bad is it? Is there a way to reframe the thought to reflect the severity of the problem?
5. Replace the negative thought with a healthy thought.

| Unhelpful Thought | Helpful Thought |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
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