

Resilient Living

STRENGTHENING THE MIND AND SPIRIT



FOP Community Educational Series

The Ability to Self-Calm

Adapted from

TURNING POINT

 THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS HEALTH SYSTEM

The 10 Facets of Highly Resilient People©



Global Genes[®]

Allies in Rare Disease

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Recap:

Best Practices for Emotional Acknowledgement

1. Notice when you start to feel overwhelmed.
2. Take a few deep breaths.
3. Name the emotions that are under the surface of your anxiety.
4. Focus on the emotion itself and where it shows up in your body.
5. Take a deep breath and give yourself permission to feel it on the inside without judgement.
6. Tell yourself something supportive like “It’s ok to have this feeling.” “I am not my emotions and have the power to feel them and let them go.”
7. Take another deep breath and picture the emotion lifting and letting go of its hold on you.

What is the Ability to Self-Calm?

Effectively managing your response to stress by being aware of your nervous system and then actively recovering in the moment with relaxation methods like:

- ✓ **deep breathing**
- ✓ **grounding**
- ✓ **mindfulness**
- ✓ **sensory engagement**
- ✓ **“Just this”**
- ✓ **calming images or quotes**
- ✓ **and reassuring self-talk.**

Training our Brain to Self-Calm

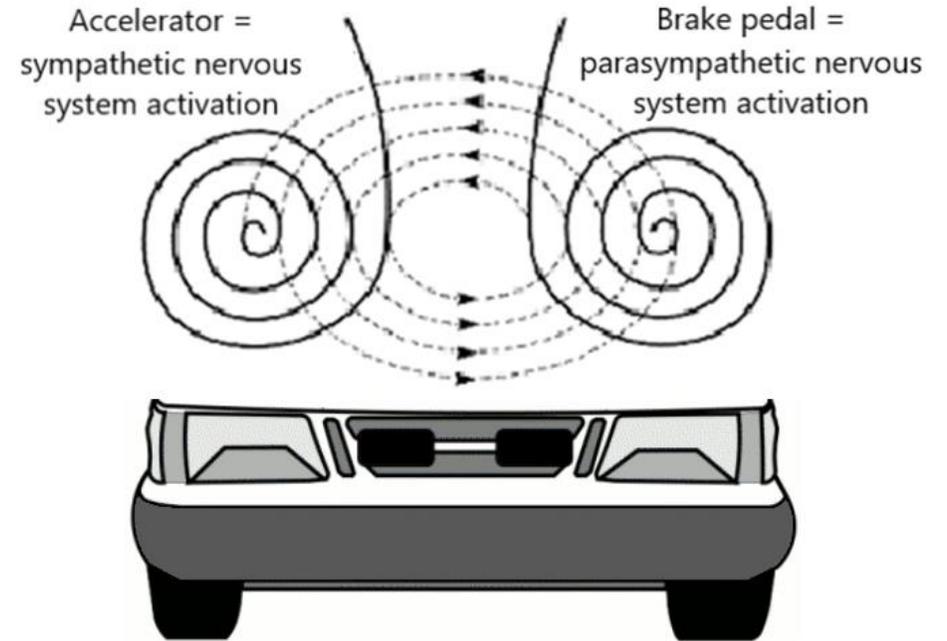
- **Our brain reflects the life we lead.**
- **Repetitive behavior shapes our brain and mental training changes our brain.**
 - How does someone become an anxious adult?
 - Environment and repetition of patterns
- **Effectively managing our body's response to stress and trauma**

For every outside event we experience our brain responds in two ways—first emotionally, then intellectually.

The Autonomic Nervous System

- Controls your stress response
- Sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems
- A healthy ANS does not over-engage either system. It uses both, as needed, like the accelerator and brake pedals of a car.

If Our Autonomic Nervous System Was a Car



Source: Image adapted from Dr. Peter Levine's trauma vortex in Waking the Tiger: Healing trauma

Fight, Flight or Freeze (FFF)

When you feel stressed, you can be easily triggered into a fight, flight or freeze response.

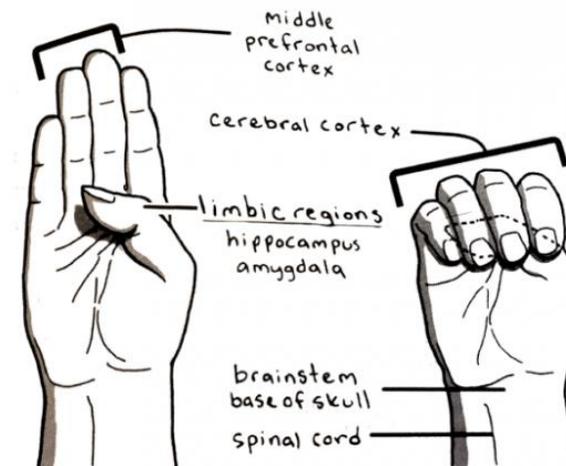
- The body releases stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline
- When you are in FFF mode, you are out of touch with all of the resources you have to handle the situation (Flip the Lid analogy)
- Our brain thinks more clearly and is better at problem solving when we are not in the FFF state.

Hypothalamus receives the alarm and activates a stress response

Amygdala sounds the alarm



Stress hormones are released into the bloodstream



Recognizing the Physiological Signs of FFF

Symptoms of Fight or Flight Response (over-engagement of the sympathetic system)	Symptoms of Freeze Response (over-engagement of the parasympathetic system)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart beats faster and blood pressure rises (if this happens often enough, it can lead to permanent issues with blood pressure)• Breathing becomes quicker and shallower• Pupils dilate to let more light in• Mouth feels dry or sticky- Saliva becomes sticky so it doesn't flow into the lungs• Cold hands and feet- Blood vessels in the extremities constrict• Clenched jaw or fists• Grinding teeth• Feel hot all over• Knotted stomach• Palms become sweaty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart rate slows and heart feels as if it is pounding in your chest• Holding your breath, restricting your breathing• Feeling frozen in space and time• Feeling stuck or trapped in some part of your body• Feeling numb, stiff, or heavy• Overall sense of dread• Cannot logically think of what to do next• Mind goes blank

Why it's important to regulate!

The FFF was very useful in earlier times when our ancestors had to fight or flee from predators or enemies on a daily basis. In modern times, however, it can be a health hazard. This is especially the case if you are constantly being swept into the FFF from everyday stressors.

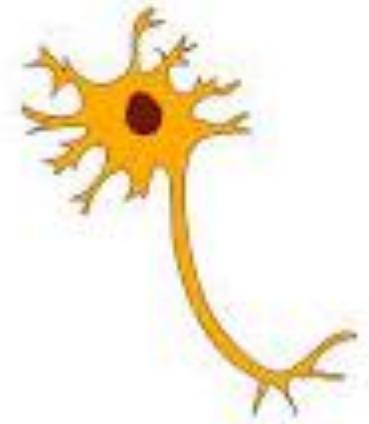


"Most of the time, the threats we imagine aren't as likely as we think they are, and their consequences won't be so bad. We are more able to cope than we give ourselves credit for."

-Dr. Rick Hanson

Self-calming for Caregivers

You must be able to regulate your own nervous system before you can help others regulate theirs. *Model the calm you hope to see in others.* Additionally, try to mirror the calm energy of people who are good at self-regulation.



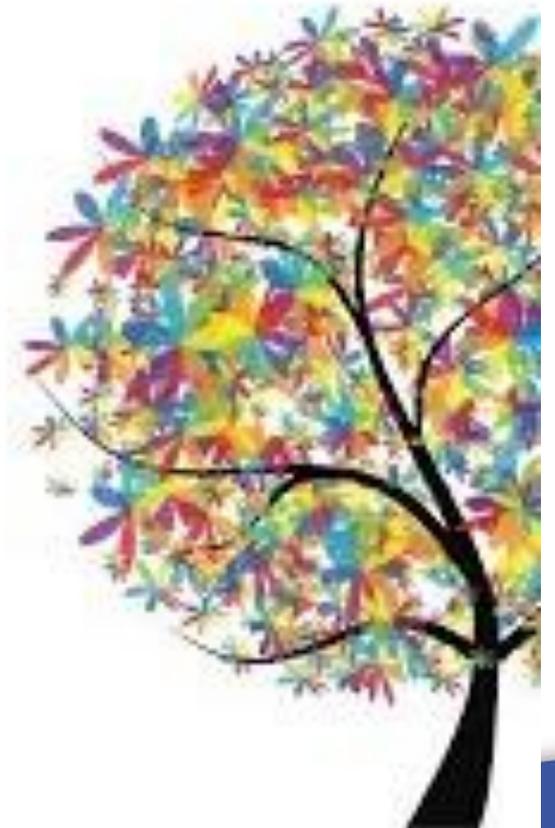
Resilience Snapshot

Staying Calm for Others

Annie Seal, MS, CCLS

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzedUg5Flws&t=45s>

What can I do to practice self-calming?

- **It is not about floating through life and ignoring your stressors.**

It is realizing that we have the power to ramp up quiet regions and damp down excessively active ones when we need to help our emotional brain calm down.

Examples include:

- ✓ Doing regular breathing exercises
- ✓ Practicing meditation or guided imagery
- ✓ Practicing positive self-talk
- ✓ Listening to calming music
- ✓ Calming images or quotes
- ✓ Connecting with the energy of calming people
- ✓ Grounding
- ✓ Mindfulness
- ✓ Sensory engagement
- ✓ ["Just this"](#)
- ✓ A combination of several of these!

Sample Self-Calming Strategy

Relaxation Mantra: paired with slower, deeper breaths

1.) Think of a word or phrase that brings you feelings of safety, peace, or relaxation.

Examples: “I am safe”, “I am completely calm”, “I can handle this”, “It is going to be OK”, “I am supported” or “I am strong”

2.) Tell yourself this word or phrase while you take some slower, deeper breaths.

With practice, your brain will become conditioned to start easing the stress response as soon as you start to say these words to yourself.

Muscular Tension

- The largest source of information processed by the brain comes from our muscles.
- Muscular tension goes hand in hand with stress
- Stress and tension clog our brain channels and capacity to think and process information.
- Learning to relax our muscles helps us think more clearly and concentrate more easily.

Scheduling Self-Calming into Your Day

- Use predictable calming routines
- Be aware of the situations that normally trigger a stress reaction for you. If you are having trouble knowing when you feel the most overwhelmed, ask for input from a caring friend, coworker, family member or professional counselor.
- Install a smartphone apps for self-calming such as calming music, focused breathing and guided meditations for easy access on the go:
Calm, Insight Timer (free), Headspace, The Mindfulness App.
- Self-calming is all about returning to yourself in times of stress to create feelings of calm and confidence. Find the self-calming strategies that work for you and practice.

4 Times To Practice Self-Calming During the Day

In the morning: start your day in a relaxed, focused state

Throughout the day: prepare and manage stressful situations

At the end of the day: transition back to home life

At night: fall asleep in a relaxed state

The End Goal!

It is about being aware of our stress response and then actively working towards recovery.

To be effective skills must be practiced often and in a comfortable environment, so they kick in automatically when the pressure is on.

Exercise 1

Imagine a relaxing place or space:

1.) Think about a favorite place from your day to day life, your memories, or your trips. This place should make you feel calm, peaceful, loved, and safe.

-What works best for you may not be obvious. Try different memories or special places.

2.) Really let yourself be transported to that place by remembering small details, especially things that engage your senses like sights, smells, temperatures, sensations, etc.

3.) Go back to noticing your breath while remembering that place and how it makes you feel. Continue taking in those happy, peaceful feelings as you slowly breathe in and out.





How did that go?

1. Do you notice a difference between how you feel now and how you felt before?
 2. Which areas of the body felt tense or tight? Were you able to relax them?
 3. Did you notice any physical sensations as you began to relax?
 4. How did you treat the distractions that came to your mind?
 5. Did you notice any emotions or feelings coming up to the surface?
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Exercise 2

Looking at your typical day, what are your biggest sources of stress (i.e. what situations, interactions or activities make you feel the most overwhelmed?)

How do you currently manage the stress and anxiety from these sources?

What methods or strategies help you relax?

The worksheet consists of three rounded rectangular boxes arranged horizontally, connected by a grey bar. The first box is light grey and contains the text 'Situations I feel the most overwhelmed:' followed by two bullet points. The second box is light grey and contains the text 'My new self-calming strategies:' followed by two bullet points. The third box is white and contains the text 'END GOAL: Recovery on the go' followed by a description of the goal: 'feeling regulated; returning to the self and regaining a sense of calm and confidence'. The entire form is set against a background with green and blue geometric shapes.

<p>Situations I feel the most overwhelmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">--	<p>My new self-calming strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">--	<p>END GOAL: Recovery on the go</p> <p>feeling regulated; returning to the self and regaining a sense of calm and confidence</p>
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Exercise 3

Resilience Snapshot

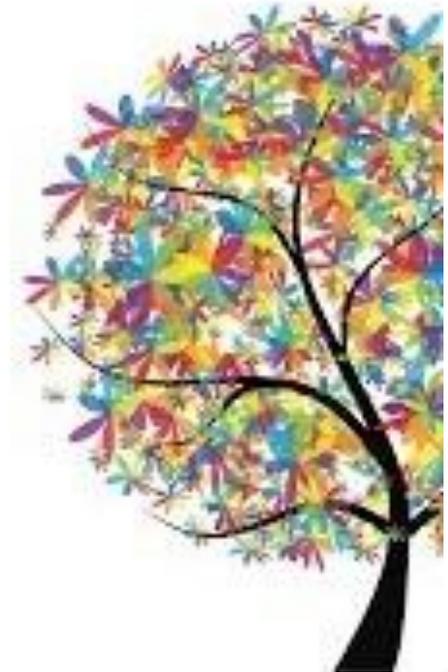
Letting Go of Muscle Tension

Hayley Stolzle, MPH

Resilience Program Director, Turning Point

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dH7gObXx0rU>