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CLIENT HANDOUT



FIVE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Coping, Breathing & Mindfulness Strategies

Five practical tools for settling your body and clearing your mind.

Stress switches your nervous system on fast and keeps it on. That response is useful in the moment. It becomes a problem when it doesn't switch off afterward: tight shoulders, a racing mind at 2 a.m., a short fuse at home.

The five strategies in this handout are simple ways to tell your body the moment has passed. None of them need equipment or an app, and most take only a few minutes. Pick one or two that feel natural, practice them when you're already calm, and they'll be there when you need them.

QUICK REFERENCE

Which one, and when

SKILL	TIME	BEST FOR
4-7-8 Breathing	1–2 min	After a stressful moment. Falling asleep.
Tracing Hand Breathing	2–3 min	A discreet reset in public or at a desk.
5-4-3-2-1 Method	2–5 min	Racing thoughts. Feeling detached or "not here."
Peaceful Place	5–10 min	Winding down at home. Before sleep.
Progressive Muscle Relaxation	10–20 min	Physical tension. Trouble sleeping.

Each skill has a QR code that links to a short guided video. Point your phone's camera at the code, or tap it if you're reading this on a screen.

SECTION ONE

Breathing

Breath is the one part of the stress response you can steer directly. A slow exhale tells the rest of the body to follow.

4-7-8 Breathing

Slow, extended exhales shift the body out of alert mode. The long out-breath is the part that does the work.

GUIDED VIDEO
Dr. Andrew Weil

4	7	8
BREATHE IN	**HOLD**	**RELEASE**
through the nose	stay still and steady	through the mouth

Repeat for three or four cycles. If 7 and 8 feel too long at first, shorten every count and keep the same ratio. The pattern matters more than the numbers.

WHEN TO USE IT

Coming down after a stressful moment. Before a hard conversation. Lying in bed when sleep won't come.

Tracing Hand Breathing

Pairing breath with slow movement gives a restless mind one simple thing to follow. Nobody around you will notice you're doing it.

GUIDED VIDEO
The Everett Clinic

1. Stretch out the fingers of one hand.
2. With the index finger of your other hand, trace slowly up the outside of your thumb as you breathe in.
3. Trace down the other side as you breathe out.
4. Continue across all five fingers: up and in, down and out. Trace back the other way if you want more time.

WHEN TO USE IT

Waiting rooms and meetings. Before a presentation or a tough phone call. Anywhere you need a discreet reset.

SECTION TWO

Grounding

When your mind is somewhere else, your senses are the fastest route back to the present.

5-4-3-2-1 Mindfulness Method

When thoughts are running ahead of you, or you feel disconnected from where you are, this brings you back one sense at a time. Find your breath first, then work through the list slowly.

5
THINGS YOU SEE
Name them. A light switch, a crack in the sidewalk, your own hands.

4
THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH
Notice texture and temperature. Your sleeve, the seat, the floor under your feet.

3
THINGS YOU HEAR
Near and far. Traffic outside, a fan, your own breathing.

2
THINGS YOU CAN SMELL
Coffee, rain, soap. If nothing is there, recall two you like.

1
THING YOU CAN TASTE
Gum, water, the last thing you ate. Or simply notice your mouth.

WHEN TO USE IT
Racing thoughts. Feeling numb, detached, or "not quite here." The first minutes after something you didn't expect.

MAKE IT VISIBLE
Write the five steps on a card for your wallet, a note on the dash, or your bathroom mirror. Plain or colorful, whatever works. Seeing it daily makes it easier to reach for.

GUIDED VIDEO
The Partnership in Education

Peaceful Place

Close your eyes and picture the most peaceful, calming place you've ever been. Take your time getting there. Then walk through each of your senses and describe the place in as much detail as you can.

The more detail you build in, the more your body responds as if you were there. Return to the same place each time so it becomes familiar and easy to reach.

WHEN TO USE IT
Winding down at home. Before sleep. Any quiet moment when you have five to ten minutes to yourself.

ASK YOURSELF

- What do you see?
- What do you hear?
- What do you smell?
- What do you feel?
- What do you taste?

GUIDED VIDEO
Green Mountain at Fox Run

SECTION THREE

The Body

Stress lives in the muscles long after the mind has moved on. This releases it on purpose.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

The fight-or-flight response exists to keep you alive when something is actually wrong. When it fires over and over without a real threat, it wears on the body. Muscle pain, tension, and stiffness are some of the most common ways stress and anxiety show up, often without you noticing.

PMR works by tightening and then releasing each muscle group in turn. The contrast teaches you what tension feels like and how to let it go. It lowers heart rate, calms the mind, and reduces bodily tension. Over time it also helps you notice how physical stress feeds your emotional state, and release the anxious thoughts that ride along with it.

1. **Get comfortable.** Sitting in a chair works as well as lying down. Choose a spot free of distraction and close your eyes if that feels right.
2. **Breathe.** Inhale deeply through your nose and feel your abdomen rise. Exhale slowly through your mouth, drawing your navel toward your spine. Repeat three to five times.
3. **Start with your feet.** Clench your toes and press your heels toward the ground. Squeeze tightly for a few breaths, then release. Now flex your feet, pointing your toes up toward your head. Hold a few seconds, then release.
4. **Work your way up.** Tighten and release each group in order: legs, glutes, abdomen, back, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, and face. Hold each for a few breaths and release slowly. Repeat any area that feels especially stiff.
5. **Finish with breath.** Take a few more deep breaths and notice how much calmer and more relaxed your body feels.

WHEN TO USE IT

Physical tension after a long day. Trouble falling or staying asleep. Any time you have ten to twenty quiet minutes.

GUIDED VIDEO

Hospital for Special Surgery

Scan to follow along. Once you know the order, you can do it on your own anywhere.

A NOTE BEFORE YOU GO

These tools work best when they're already familiar. Practice one for a few minutes on an ordinary day, and it'll be there on the day that isn't. If any of these raise questions, or you want help fitting them into your routine, bring it to our next session. I'm glad to work through it with you.

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If you're in crisis, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, available 24/7) or call **911**.