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CLIENT HANDOUT



WAKE-UP SKILLS

When You Shut Down or Go Numb

Gentle ways to wake your body and mind back up.

Most coping skills are built to calm you down. But stress doesn't always rev you up. Sometimes it does the opposite: you go numb, foggy, flat, or far away. That's your nervous system hitting the brakes to protect you. It isn't a sign that something is wrong with you.

When you're shut down, calming skills often aren't enough, and slow, eyes-closed exercises can leave you feeling more checked out. What helps is the opposite: gentle input that wakes your body up and brings you back into the room.

YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Where are you right now?

TOO HIGH
Anxious, panicky, angry, on edge, can't sit still.
Use calming skills.

YOUR WINDOW
Present. You can think, feel, and respond.

TOO LOW
Numb, foggy, flat, far away, shut down.
Use the skills in this handout.

SIGNS YOU'VE DROPPED BELOW YOUR WINDOW

- Numb or empty
- Foggy, can't think straight
- Spacey or far away
- Heavy, flat, or exhausted
- Things feel unreal
- Can't find your words
- Disconnected from your body

The window of tolerance is a concept developed by psychiatrist Dr. Dan Siegel.

Keep your eyes open.
Look around. Seeing where you are is part of coming back.

Start small and go slow.
The goal is to come back gently, not to shock your system.

Notice what changes.
Rate how present you feel from 0 to 10, before and after. Even a small rise counts.

TRY ONE, THEN ANOTHER

Wake-Up Skills

Most take a minute or two. Try one, notice what changes, then add another if you need it.

MOVE

Stand and Stomp

Stand up and press your feet into the floor. Stomp or march in place for 30 seconds and feel the floor push back.

MOVE

Push the Wall

Put both palms on a wall and push hard for 10 seconds, like you're trying to move it. Release, then repeat three times.

MOVE

Wake-Up Pat-Down

Firmly pat or squeeze your arms, shoulders, and legs, top to bottom. Say it as you go: "These are my arms. These are my legs."

MOVE

Get Moving

Jumping jacks, a brisk walk, stairs, or dancing to a fast song. One or two minutes is enough to get your system going.

SENSES

Cool Water

Splash cool water on your face or run it over your wrists. Sip a cold drink and notice the temperature. With a heart condition, skip the face and use your wrists.

SENSES

Strong Taste or Smell

A strong mint, cinnamon gum, citrus, coffee, or a scent you like. Keep one in your bag or car so it's there when you need it.

SENSES

Color Hunt

Look around and name five blue things out loud. Then five red ones. Keep your head moving and your eyes open.

SENSES

Light and Air

Turn on the lights, open the blinds or a window, or step outside. Notice the air on your skin.

MIND & VOICE

Say Where You Are

Out loud: "My name is ___. Today is ___. I'm in ___." If an old memory is pulling you under, add: "That was then. This is now."

MIND & VOICE

Play Categories

Pick a category, like dog breeds, cities, or foods, and name one for every letter of the alphabet. Or count backward from 100 by 7s.

MIND & VOICE

Use Your Voice

Sing along to a song you know, read something out loud, or hum loudly. Hearing your own voice helps bring you back into the room.

CONNECT

Reach Out

Call, text, or video chat with someone you trust, or spend time with a pet. Connecting with someone familiar is one of the fastest ways back.

If you have health or mobility limits, choose the skills that fit your body.

My Wake-Up Plan

MY FIRST SIGN I'M SHUTTING DOWN

SKILLS THAT WORK FOR ME

WHAT I'LL KEEP WITH ME (MINT, GUM, A COLD DRINK)

TELL ME ABOUT IT

If you shut down often, lose track of time, or can't remember parts of your day, bring it up in session. That's important information, and it's something we can work on together.

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