

Day 2 Emergency Practices for the Nervous System

Mindfulness does not mean we blindly go along with whatever is happening in our nervous system. We are aware of our thoughts and internal sensations and energy. We use the higher level of our mind to reassure our primitive brain and survival system that triggers fight/flight/freeze.

As children we often felt alone and powerless. Adults have more options. We can be present with ourselves. We can challenge worst-case scenario thinking. We might notice we hold our breath. We learn to down-regulate emotionally through continuous, diaphragmatic breathing or extended exhalations of at least six seconds.

Today's practices are useful when you experience fear or are perhaps beginning to panic, and they can help break the trance of catastrophic thinking. They can be used as resilience building practices. On my website LynnFraserStillpoint.com there is a tab [Emergency Practices](#) that contains all of these and more. The idea is to pick one or two and try them. You don't have to do them all.

These are simple and easy to remember. We use our body to help us calm down. When we know these practices, we no longer feel so helpless because we know what to do when we're anxious or activated. We develop emotional self-regulation.

Hold your own hand: comfort yourself with the warmth. No one will notice if you do this, even in a meeting. If you're alone, you could rub your hands together and place one or both on your heart area.

Hug yourself: Another simple gesture of comfort is to bring one hand under your armpit and the other hand on your opposite shoulder.

[Breathe out at least six seconds:](#) to activate the relaxation response. You could sing, talk in longer sentences, or play a wind instrument. You can also do a practice of extended exhalation breathing. You begin with an even length of inhalation and exhalation. After that is smooth and effortless, let yourself breathe out longer. This is a practice to calm the sympathetic nervous system.

[Voooo:](#) Pioneer trauma expert Dr Peter Levine recommends exhalation with the sound voooo. Breathe in normally and try it six or eight times on a long outbreath. See how it feels.

Box Breathing: There are four sides to a box. Breathe in four seconds, hold four seconds, breathe out four seconds, hold four seconds, and repeat several times for a quick reset.



Shake the Tree: Stand relaxed with your knees a bit bent, and release anxious energy out of your body by gently but vigorously shaking your arms, hands, shoulders and hips. Flick tension off the ends of your fingers.

Throw It Into the Ground: Stand with your arms above your head, fists lightly clenched, then exhale forcefully while you throw your arms down. Open your fingers and throw the energy out of your body and into the ground. Do this three or more times.

5 4 3 2 1 Senses Grounding Practice: Notice each of the five senses and say each observation out loud. Five things you can see, four textures you can feel, three sounds you can hear, two things you can smell (or favourite scents), and one thing you can taste (or recall a favorite taste).

Connection: Hug a safe person or animal. Call a friend. Look into someone's eyes. Look out a window or go out into nature.

Build resilience: Longer term practices of breathing and relaxation build resilience in our whole system.

Extended Exhalation Breathing Guided Practice: Relax and breathe diaphragmatically, through the nose, continuous and smooth, and about the same length on the exhale as the inhale. Notice as you breathe in that your stomach rises, and it settles back toward the spine on the exhale. Let your belly soften. This is easier to do lying down or leaning back in a chair.

If you are breathing in to a count of three, match your out breath to about the same length. Keep your stomach relaxed. Gradually let your exhalation extend up to twice as long as your inhalation. Keep an easy, comfortable pace and over time you will find you can effortlessly breathe out to a count of six seconds. Keep your attention focused on your breath.

This is a practice to use when you're feeling anxious or upset, as it calms your whole nervous system by inducing the Relaxation Response. Our regular 24/7 breathing pattern should be equal length of exhalation and inhalation.



Orient by Looking Behind You

Sit in a chair and slowly look to your right, let your head come around, your shoulders and down to your hips. Look behind you and let your eyes move from floor to ceiling. Is there anything that could hurt you? Slow look to your front again and repeat to the other side. Even when we know there is no threat in the room, this is a non-verbal or somatic way to let your nervous system “see for itself”.



Stand and let yourself be aware of your feet on the ground. Begin to shake your body from your lower legs, upper legs, through your hips, chest, shoulders, arms and hands. You can shake gently or more vigorously for several seconds or two or three minutes. Breathe.

Flick the excess tension off your fingertips.



Hug a safe person or an animal. Call a friend. Read something out loud.

Go out into nature or a garden where you feel safe.