

EMOTIONAL FIRST AID BASICS: WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

Remind yourself that your reactions are normal and it's okay to reach out for support. Take your time, be patient with yourself and try not to judge yourself for feeling the way you do. Emotional wounds take time and rest to heal, just like physical wounds. This is a difficult time but it will pass.

After a challenging experience: Try to get to a space where you can feel safe and comfortable. Try to relax and allow others to take care of you.

Physical exercise helps your body to get rid of stress. Walking, running, dancing can be more relaxing than sitting down.

Try not to isolate yourself. Reach out to friends you trust for support.

A very common reaction is to feel hurt if others seem to have a much easier time dealing with what happened while you are struggling. Keep in mind that everyone reacts differently and the ways that they are healing or hurting might not be visible to you.

How strongly you react can be connected to previous trauma. It is not a sign of weakness to experience pain after an injury.

Blaming yourself for what happened is a common reaction to trauma. Remind yourself that it is not your fault that you were attacked. The perpetrators, and the systems that created them, are the ones to blame.

Family and friends may not know how to support you. If their behavior is not helpful, speak to them and ask for what you need if you can.



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EXERCISES

BODY SCAN to orient yourself in stressful environments

Try to notice and pay attention to the neutral or positive sensations as you scan down your body, from your head to your toes, or visa versa. If you tend to hold stress in your shoulders, see if your legs or your hands might feel more neutral. If you hold stress in your chest, try placing a hand there to help give it some support. As you scan, try to notice any physical sensations such as warm or calm. Maybe a color arises in your imagination when you think of the neutral or positive area. [You can try to give any openness a size or shape with descriptive words. This can help us notice places in our body where we have space in order to access these places when we feel stressed or trapped. Awareness to space in our body gives us options of how to respond under stress.] The goal is to build the ability to move back and forth between chronic stress and neutrality to create the foundation of the nervous system to be able to break the chronic stress pattern and return to a more resilient and varied response pattern – not just in times of stress.

VISUALIZATIONS for when you might be in danger

Using imagery can help you orient and recognize the separation between your body and danger. Use an imagine of a string on the ground in a circle that you can stand within or a neon yellow cloud encircling your body to help create a boundary for yourself. Bring shape and colors to help form your boundary. You can access it at any time when stressors arise. Your imagination can be an incredible resource. You can imagine an animal present with you within your boundary when you need it or beside you at all times as you move through the world.

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING for stress and anxiety

1. Sit up straight, if you can, and close your eyes.
2. Bring one hand to the left or right nostril and close off nostril with finger tip.
3. Breathe in deeply.
4. Alternate nostrils, covering the other nostril with an adjacent finger.
5. Exhale slowly.
6. Breathe in deeply.
7. Alternate nostrils again.
8. Repeat steps 3-7 as many times as desired, try for at least 5 deep breathes for each nostril.

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