

Techniques and Strategies for Deescalation or Emotional Stabilization

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The following is a list of simple techniques, interventions, and strategies that can be employed to help clients, loved-ones, or yourself when overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety, panic, depression, anger, guilt, shame, fear, or when feeling like past trauma has been activated by a present event. This is by no means a comprehensive list, but instead a simple list of strategies that I have found helpful or my clients and colleagues have found helpful.

Breathing Exercises - breath is one of the simplest and most effective ways to help someone regulate their nervous system and calm their body/emotions down

- 4-7-8 technique - simple long exhales - breathing with client

Relational interventions - as humans, we are social animals and we are hardwired to regulate our emotions and bodies through relationships with others

- Offering compassion, empathy, and listening
- Use of self and sharing with client about what you feel and what has helped you in similar situations
- Physical touch - offering a hand on the shoulder or hug if appropriate
- Cultivate peer support with other clients or suggesting client can help someone else

Physical exercises - moving one's body can help regulate emotions, release pent up energy, and reground within one's body and the present moment

- Walking around inside/outside - walk and talk
- Exercise - sports - dance - movement - yoga
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Shake it out

Cognitive exercises - overwhelming emotions will result in cognitive parts of the brain going off-line; reactivating these parts of the brain can help regulate emotions

- Spelling name backwards - count backwards
- Listing counties or towns in your state - listing other things from another category
- Recite a song or poem or affirmation

Humor and play - use humor or playfulness to balance emotion; play is the opposite of traumatic stress in many ways

- Engage client in playfulness or a game
- Use laughter or humor

Sensory exercises for here and now orientation - this can help if someone is experiencing a flashback or dissociation and has lost their connection to the here and now

- Awareness of senses 1 at a time - focus on one sense (smell, touch, sound, etc)
- Music - food - ice cube in hand - butterfly tapping - water/shower - essential oils - stress ball or fidget toy
- Ask client to find 5 'red' objects in the room - 5 objects that start with a specific letter

Imaginal or creative exercises - just like painful memories can impact us today, so can positive memories or imaginal experiences

- Use a safe place resource - remember a positive memory - visualize the face of a loved-one - visualize a future goal or getting past the difficult experience or feelings
- Art making - drawing/painting - poetry - coloring
- Reframing experience using parts work - "a part of you is feeling angry right now, let's validate this part and see if there are other parts of you to explore too"

Healthier distractions - when we are actively engaged in something, we are less likely to be focused or obsessing about something else. Offering healthy distractions can help regulate an overwhelmed client

- Watching a movie, TV show, or sports event; listening to a podcast or radio
- Engaging in a hobby or another activity
- Read a book, magazine, or newspaper
- Taking a nap or going to sleep early

Writing exercises - writing can be a contained way of expressing feelings or thoughts while moving towards meaning-making

- List positive things or make a gratitude list - affirmations list - list of supportive people
- Journal about feelings or experiences or goals or the future
- Psychodramatic letter writing

Spiritual or Cultural exercises

- Prayer
- Mindfulness practices - meditation - guided imagery
- Read spiritual books, articles, or reflections
- Engaging in other practices related to clients' culture, religion, or family background

Other Important Considerations

- ❖ Consider your voice tone and non-verbal communication during interventions
- ❖ Consider your identity as it may impact the client - gender, race, religion, age, etc
- ❖ How your role at the agency might impact the client's experience of you
- ❖ How the current environment might impact the client (sound, space, privacy, etc)
- ❖ How other people in the environment might impact the client