



**Lincoln Bishop
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Coping in the Moment

When we experience intense emotions such as anxiety or stress, things can quickly escalate. However, there are some simple practices that you can put in place to help manage this.

This guide will talk you through some strategies that could be used to help manage intense emotions, such as stress and anxiety, in the short term.

Remember to treat your mental fitness as you would your physical fitness. One session in the gym isn't going to make you the world's next best body builder- keep practising these strategies for optimum results.

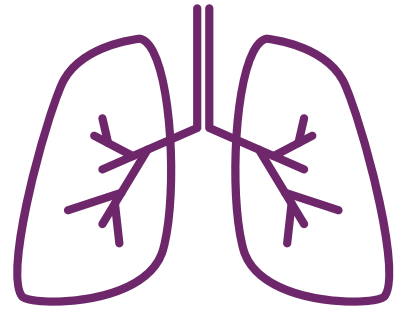


Box Breathing

Also known as 4x4 Breathing or Square Breathing.

When we experience intense emotions such as panic, anxiety, stress or anger, our breathing rate often increases. This increased rate of breathing alters the CO₂ concentration in our blood, which in turn, can cause other panicky sensations such as increased temperature, palpitations or a tight chest.

Box Breathing can be used as a strategy to manage and take back control over intense emotions and uncomfortable physical sensations. By focusing on your breathing, you are better able to manage and reduce the intensity of the emotions that you are experiencing and as a result, can engage in healthier actions and behaviours in response.



Lets talk it through step by step...



First, get into a comfortable position, this can be sat or laid down. Some people find it helpful to close their eyes and place their feet flat on the floor as this helps them to feel more grounded- but do what feels comfortable for you.

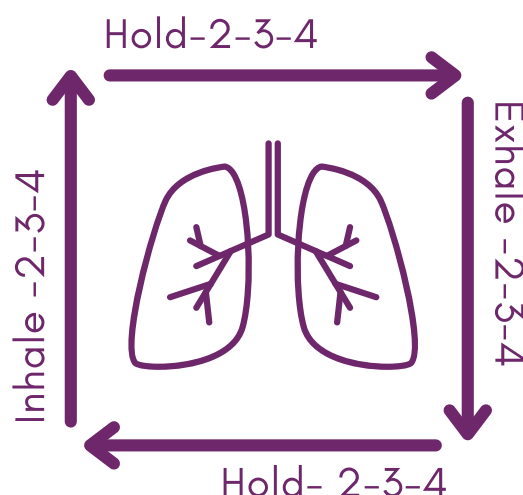


Take a few normal breathes in your comfortable position, and when you feel ready, we can start the box breathing process.



1. Take a deep breath in through your nose over the count of four.
2. Hold this breath for four.
3. Slowly exhale out of your mouth for four.
4. Hold again for four.

If it helps, try to imagine the 4 edges of a box as you complete each of the four steps. Your mind may wonder but this is ok, just take notice of this and try to bring yourself back to the present moment and your breathing.



Repeat for as long as necessary.



5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

When we are feeling overwhelmed our thoughts and emotions can often escalate quickly. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding is a great technique to use to help bring yourself back to the present moment and ease your mind.

5-4-3-2-1 technique uses the five senses to focus on the moment and de-escalate any intense emotions. For better results, some people find it helpful to focus on their breathing by taking a few long, deep breathes before following these next steps:



Acknowledge **FIVE** things that you can see around you. Whether you're in your student accommodation, sat outside on the grass, or in one of your lectures, try to focus on different things around you- no matter how big or small. It can be as simple as a mark on the desk in front of you, or a plane in the sky above you.

Acknowledge **FOUR** things that you can feel around you. This could be things like your jumper sleeve touching your arm, or the pen you have in your hand. Some people find that it helps them to feel grounded if they acknowledge the ground beneath their feet.



Acknowledge **THREE** things that you can hear around you. Try to take yourself out of your own head and instead of focusing on your thoughts, take notice of external noise around you. This could be a bird sat outside your bedroom window, the ticking of a clock, or the sound of the person next to you inhaling and exhaling.



Acknowledge **TWO** things that you can smell. Some people find this step quite challenging, so if you can't smell anything where you are, it is okay to move somewhere else- you can often identify more smells outside. You may be able to smell the wet soil beneath your feet, or the ground coffee from the on-campus café.

Acknowledge **ONE** thing that you can taste. This may be the crunchy nut cornflakes that you had for breakfast, the mint of your toothpaste or the fizzy pop you had with your lunch.



End this exercise with a few more deep breathes.

Hopefully you will find that the intensity of your emotions and thoughts have eased, but if you are still feeling panicked or anxious, repeat the process or try out another coping strategy.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

When you are feeling stressed or anxious, one way your body may respond is by tensing up. This can cause discomfort and can intensify the emotions that you are already experiencing.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation combines relaxed breathing and muscle tensing to help draw focus on the sensations that you are feeling in each separate body part. This helps to manage intense emotions by bringing your attention to the present moment.

Before starting this exercise, take note of the following tips:



If you struggle to settle at night, or have disrupted sleep, this technique may also be good to include in your sleep hygiene routine.



You may find it helpful to play some relaxation music in the background.



Be mindful of any existing injuries.

Work through the list of body parts on the next 2 pages, remembering to inhale as you tense the muscle, and exhale as you relax the muscle.



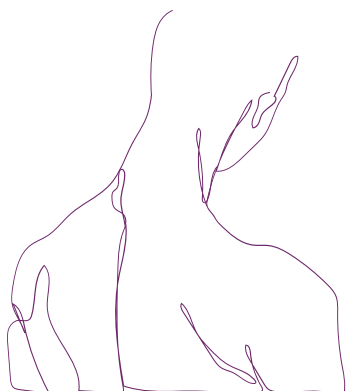
FACE -

Inhale whilst pushing your eyebrows together as if you are frowning.
Exhale as you release this tension in your face muscle.

NECK -

Inhale as you gently tilt your neck downwards, pushing your chin towards your chest.

Exhale as you slowly lift your chin up and feel the tension leave your neck and jaw area.



SHOULDERS -

Inhale as you shrug, pulling your shoulders up towards your ears.

Exhale and feel the tension leave your shoulders as you relax them back down again.

ARMS-

Inhale as you flex your biceps above your shoulders as if you are working out.

Exhale as you slowly lower them back down, with your palms facing upwards and feel the tension leaving your arms.



HANDS -

Inhale whilst keeping your thumbs on the outside and forming a fist.

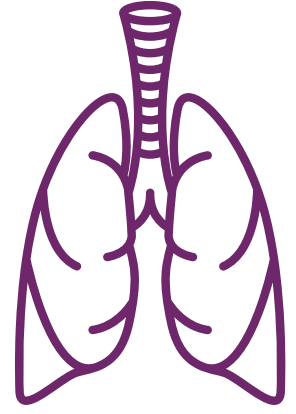
Exhale as you slowly release your fingers and feel the tension leave your forearm and fingers.



CHEST -

Inhale slowly and deeply into the bottom of your diaphragm (bottom of your ribs), feeling as though you have filled all of the space in your lungs.

Exhale slowly, allowing your tummy to deflate and feeling the tension leave your stomach.



UPPER LEGS (whilst seated)-

Inhale as you extend your legs and feel your hamstrings tighten.

Exhale as you slowly lower your legs and feel the tension leave your thighs.

LOWER LEGS (whilst seated)-

Inhale as you push your toes upwards towards the sky whilst keeping your heels firmly on the floor.

Exhale as you slowly relax your toes back down to the floor and feel the tension leave your shins.



FEET -

Inhale as you tightly curl your toes inwards.

Exhale as you slowly release your toes and feel the tension leave the soles of your feet.



Worry Time

During the day we can worry about many, many different things, but we rarely allow ourselves to fully focus on the issue, rationalise it or come up with a suitable solution. Instead, we often use up most of our energy trying to push these thoughts away, which can be very exhausting.



When we give anxious and worrying thoughts too much space to do so, they can often become exaggerated and catastrophised.



Practising 'worry time' can help you take back control over your thoughts and feelings by restricting when, and for how long you allow yourself to worry. Another benefit of 'worry time' is that once you have reached your designated time slot, the intensity of the situation and your emotions have often gradually decreased, meaning that you may find it easier to challenge and rationalise your thoughts.

A good amount of time to set aside for 'worry time' is around 15-20 minutes each day.

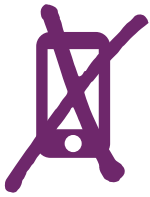
If worries crop-up outside of your worry time, give yourself permission to postpone your worrying thoughts as you will address these later during your dedicated 'worry time'.

If writing these worries down to take into worry time is helpful, do this.



When you get to your designated 'worry time', there are a number of different things that you can do to help yourself explore and challenge your worries and make this time as effective as possible.

If you don't feel like you are getting the most out of your 'worry time', try to:



Stay away from electronic devices- turn off your phone, television and laptop.

Write down your worries- put your worries on paper. Some people find it helpful to transform thoughts in their head into something physical that they can see.



Get creative- if you are a creative person, drawing, writing poetry or making something may be a good way for you to express your thoughts and concerns.



Get verbal- verbalising your worrying thoughts can be beneficial. If you can't share your worries with someone else, try speaking to yourself out loud. Verbalising thoughts can make it easier for you to challenge or rationalise your worries.

Challenge your thoughts- before you go into 'worry time', pre-prepare a small list of questions to help challenge your thoughts. For each worry, ask yourself these questions. Questions may include "am I blowing this out of proportion?", "what is the likelihood of the outcome that I'm worried about?" or "what advice would I give to a friend?".



STOPP Technique

Frequently used in CBT, DBT & Mindfulness.

Between a stimulus, such as a triggering event, and our response, there is a space.

Stimulus ○————○ **Response**

The STOPP techniques encourages us to make constructive use of this space and gain more control over our emotions and responsive behaviours.

When you have been exposed to a triggering situation or you can feel things are becoming difficult, try to visualise the space between the stimulus and your response and in this space follow the 5 steps listed on the next page: **Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Pull back/ Perspective & Practice/ Proceed.**

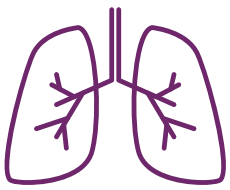
Once you are familiar with the 5 steps, you should use the STOPP techniques as follows:

- Read through the steps often to familiarise yourself with them.
- Start to practice STOPP fully by running through the procedure several times a day, even if you don't need it.
- Start to use it for the little things that upset you. Do you find it easy to follow? If you find you are struggling a bit maybe carry around a reminder of STOPP that you can use to guide you.
- Gradually, you will find that you can use it for more distressing situations. It will become automatic over time. It takes practice and patience.
- The earlier you use STOPP, the easier and more effective it will be.





Stop. Just pause for a moment.



Take a breath. Focus on the sensation of breathing- Take one big, long breath in through your nose, hold for a moment and then breath out slowly through your mouth.



Observe. What thoughts, physical sensations and emotions are you having right now? How would you like to behave?



Pull back/ perspective. Step back- Thoughts are thoughts, not statement of fact so don't believe everything you think. Ask yourself questions like: "what's the bigger picture?", "What advice would I give a friend?" and "what is another way of looking at this situation?".

At this stage, it's also important to remind yourself that these feelings will pass.



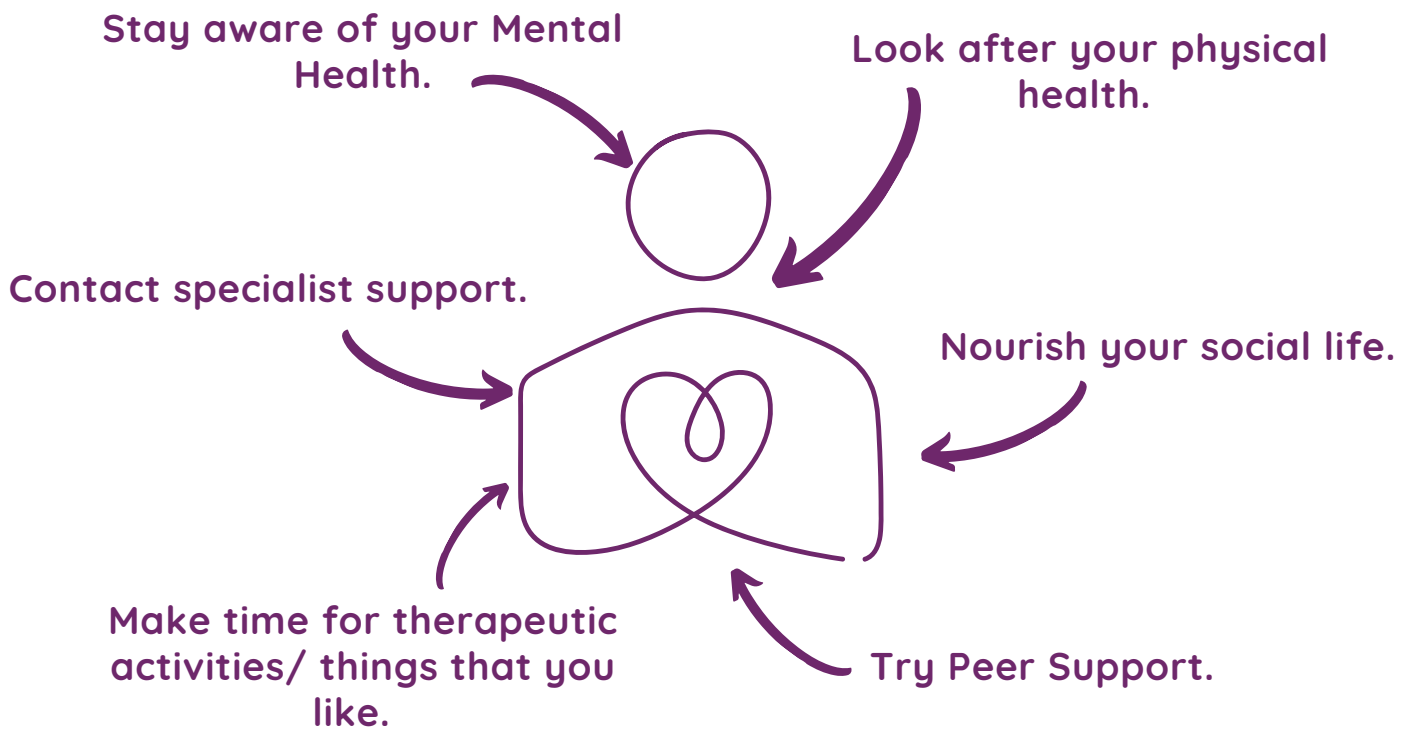
Practice what works & Proceed. The final step is all about proceeding with a constructive response. Good questions to ask yourself here include "what is the best thing to do right now?" or "what is the most helpful thing for me, others and the situation?".



Practising Self-Care

The power of self-care is often underestimated and is nearly always the first thing we start to neglect when we are becoming overwhelmed with other commitments in day-to-day life.

Looking after ourselves is vital in maintaining positive overall wellbeing, and in some cases, practicing simple self-care techniques can prevent some problems from developing or getting worse. Self-care should be practiced every day and will help to keep you feeling happy, healthy and motivated.



Using self-care to cope in the moment

Self-care should be practised every day, but it can also be used to help manage your emotions in a safe and constructive way. A self-care box is a great tool to have and utilise when you are experiencing intense emotions such as sadness, worry, stress or frustration.



What is a self-care box?

A self-care box is something that is completely personal to you, so what you may put in your self-care box is likely to differ from what others may put in theirs. To make it more personal to you, you may decide that you want to call your self-care box something different...

'Me Box'

'Safety Box'

'Wellbeing Box'

'Emergency Box'

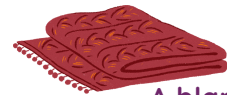
Whatever you decide to call it, this box is a place for you to store all the things that you think are going to help you manage and bring down the intensity of emotions.

Keep this box in a safe place and use it whenever you feel overwhelmed.

Items you may include:



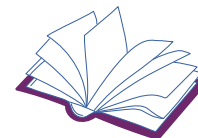
A list of emergency contacts/ personal safety plan



A blanket / comfort item



Photographs



A favourite book



A sachet of your favourite drink



Useful Links



<https://togetherall.com/en-gb/>



<https://www.mind.org.uk/>



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