

Welcome to this resource, we are glad you are here!

As a healthcare provider, you do important and meaningful work. At the same time, caring for others through advocacy and activism is effortful and takes a toll. We made this resource for you to use before, during, or after difficult moments. It is also a tool of collective care, so we can take care of each other and ourselves as we continue doing the work that is important for all of us.

This document has several parts to it. We suggest that, in advance of any difficult moments or actions, you familiarize yourself with it and decide which skills and strategies you plan to implement. Also consider which tools you might offer colleagues and other activists when you see them struggling. This way, you'll be better equipped when the time comes.

As a first step, we suggest taking your internal 'temperature' as this will guide which strategies to start with. To do so, look through the prompts below to check in with yourself or others right now – emotionally and physically.

Exercises that might be most helpful at the different levels of emotional intensity are then provided, divided by red, yellow, and green zones.

More resources are provided at the end of the document, including virtual resources.

“Caring for Myself Is Not Self-Indulgence, It’s Self-Preservation And That Is An Act of Political Warfare.”

~ Audre Lorde

Yours,
HPAP Mental Health Sub-committee

Step 1: Check in with yourself.

Physical Check-in:

1. **Body:** Are you physically injured? Do you need medical care? Do you need to attend to a particular part of your body? Have you gone to the bathroom lately?
2. **Nutrients:** Have you eaten today? Do you need to get food?
3. **Hydration:** Have you had water in the last 12 hours? Do you need to drink water?
4. **Sleep:** Are you tired? Have you slept recently? Do you need a nap or rest?

Emotion Check-in:

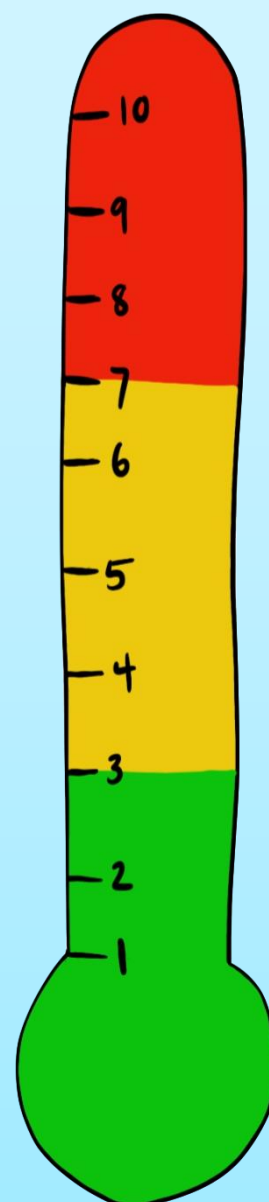
Ask yourself:

1. What can I do right now to take care of myself?
2. What can I do right now to NOT make this situation worse?

Look at the emotion thermometer on the right, which ranges from 1-10. 10 is the most intense emotion you can feel.

Rate your emotional intensity *right now*.

- ⇒ If you are at 8-10 in emotion intensity, go to grounding exercises in the red zone.
- ⇒ If you are at a 7 or lower in emotion intensity, you can use red zone exercises or try yellow & green zone skills.
- ⇒ You may also look at resources at the bottom of this document, practicing skills that may be helpful for you in the red zone.

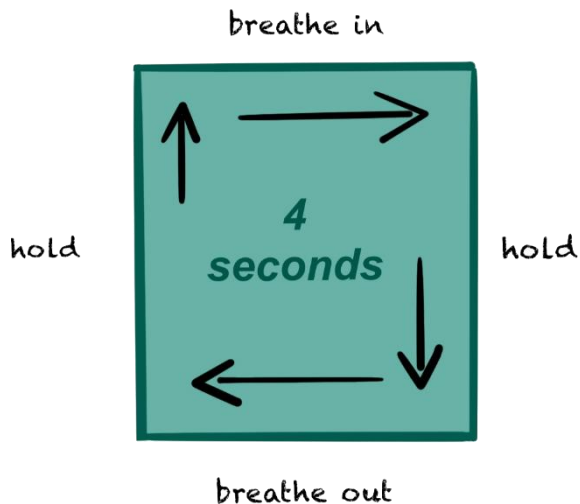


Step 2: Try a calming exercise.

RED ZONE – Grounding Activities


Box Breathing


Regulate your breathing with controlled paced breathing





Five senses Grounding


Use your senses to bring you to the present moment.

 5 things you can see

 4 things you can touch

 3 things you can hear

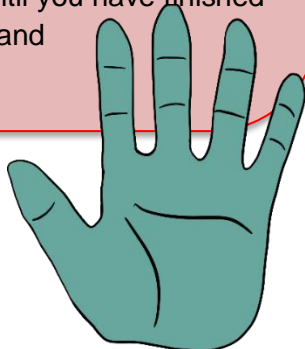
 2 things you can smell

 1 thing you can taste

Hand Breathing

Bring your attention to your hand and use your hand as a tool to regulate your breathing.

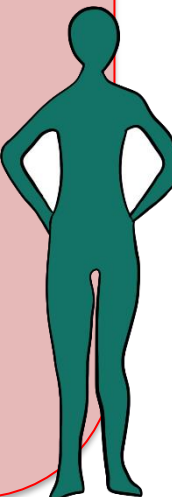
1. Stretch your hand out
2. Use your pointer finger of your other hand to trace your fingers up and down
3. Slide up each finger slowly and then down the other side
4. Breathe IN through your nose as you go up your finger & OUT through your mouth
5. Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand



Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Our anxiety levels and body tension levels affect one another. Stressful experiences contribute to feelings of tension in our bodies. The feeling of tension we carry in our bodies can feed back and enhance our feelings of anxiety. PMR is a method that helps to relieve the tension you are holding in your body, by tensing and releasing muscles, working on your muscle groups in order. Through this practice, your body can begin to shift from a tense and anxious state towards a more relaxed state.

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Take a deep breath in & out.
3. Begin with your legs – build tension in your feet and legs by pointing toes towards ceiling and squeezing knees together. Hold this & concentrate for 10 seconds. Then **release** for 20 seconds. Say “relax” as you breathe out and notice the difference after you release.
4. Complete this tense & release pattern for your **stomach** followed by your **arms** (fists, arms out), **shoulders** (raised up to chin) and **face** (eyes shut, eyebrow raised, clenched jaw) ...



Step 3: **Yellow & Green Zone** Self-Soothing

The way we talk to ourselves can be very powerful. It can help us feel more or less grounded. When we speak to ourselves in helpful ways, this can foster self-compassion, help improve our understanding of the current situation and our feelings and validate our experiences.

Validation does not mean saying what we are feeling is **right**, just that it is real.

Ask yourself

Would I talk to a friend the way I am talking to myself right now? Why or why not?

What would I tell a friend to do in my situation?

How could I be nice, kind and fair to myself right now?

Remind yourself

I am doing the best I can. I will get through this.

I've gotten through worse. I will grow from this.

This is only temporary. I can distract myself. I can cope.

I can be open with my experience and be safe.

Anyone in my shoes would be struggling right now.

I am not feeling okay right now - but I will get through this.

Just because it feels impossible now doesn't mean it is.

It's okay not to always have it together. I can only control myself, not others and the world around me.

I deserve kindness. I am valuable. I am stronger than I think.

I can be happy, I've been happy. My future is in my hands.

Tell yourself

We can validate that our emotions or thoughts make sense in the current circumstance:

Given that in this situation _____, it makes sense that I feel _____.

E.g., Given that in this situation my safety was threatened, it makes sense that I feel fear and anxiety.

We can validate our emotions or thoughts given our past experiences:

Given my previous experience with _____, it makes sense that I feel _____.

E.g., Given my history of being blamed for difficulties in my family, it makes sense that I feel shame and sadness right now.

Taking Care of Me RIGHT NOW & LATER

1. Who can I call?

- a. **Progress place:** The Warm Line - Peer support, and a friendly ear
 - i. **Between Noon - Midnight EST:** 416-960-9276
 - ii. **3pm - 7pm EST Canada-Wide:** 1-888-768-2488
 - iii. **Text** - 647-557-5882
 - iv. **Chat online** - www.warmline.ca
- b. **Gerstein 24-hour crisis line** - 416-929-5200

2. Who can I call or speak to in my life? Who is my 'go-to' or trusted support person?

3. Where can I go if I need immediate support and am not safe?

- a. Your local emergency department
- b. A close friend or family member's home

Remember self-care is ongoing.

The **PLEASE** acronym can help us remember these skills.

PL - Treating physical illness or needs

E - Healthy eating

A - Avoid substances that would worsen your mood

S - Sleep

E - Exercise

Gratitude

Practicing gratitude can have a positive impact on how we feel, both emotionally and physically. By "gratitude", we mean thinking about, and creating space to be thankful for, experiences and qualities in ourselves, others, and the world.

Take an opportunity to direct your attention towards things you are grateful for in each of these 3 areas. There is space below to capture these ideas in journal format:

Things in the world and my life that I am grateful for: _____

Things about other people that I am grateful for: _____

Things about myself that I am grateful for: _____

Resources

Mobile Applications

[Calm](#) – guided meditations

[Headspace](#) – mental health support, sleep and meditation

[Noisli](#) – soothing soundscapes

[Insight Timer](#) – guided meditations, sleep stories & options for culturally diverse leaders

Box Breathing Progressive Muscle Relaxation videos:

[Box breathing relaxation technique: how to calm feelings of stress or anxiety](#)

[Box Breathing Meditation to Lower Anxiety \[Mental Health and COVID\]](#)

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

[Progressive Muscle Relaxation For Management of Anxiety and Stress \(with Music\)](#)

Grief Support

General Support

- [Self-help, Mutual Aid, and Support groups](#)
- [A guide to looking for mental health services](#)

OPA Disaster Response Network

Public Services

- [List of mental health services in Toronto](#)
- [Free mental health services](#)