

ABC123 PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID TOOL



BC COLLEGE OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS
The home of family medicine

For acute emotional distress related to the COVID-19 pandemic

This memory aid and tool provides techniques to reduce symptoms of acute anxiety and other emotional distress. Family physicians are encouraged to become familiar with using these techniques to help with their own stress and to be able to teach patients how and when to use the techniques appropriately. These tools do not replace the need for specialized mental health care in cases where there is prolonged or severe distress.

If you or a loved one is struggling, contact the Physician Health Program 24-hour help line: 1-800-663-6729

A

AWARENESS

Notice your body, hands, legs, feet. Orient to self, place, date, time.

This brings your attention to the present and helps you become oriented.

1. Look at and notice your hands, arms, legs and feet.
2. What is your full name? Say it out loud if appropriate.
3. Where are you right now? Be specific at first, e.g. "in this chair", then "in the ___ hospital", "in (city)".
4. What day is it? What time is it?

B

BREATHE

Take three long, slow, comfortable deep breaths with prolonged exhale.

Breathing helps to calm the nervous system, focus your attention and reduce panic features.

1. Breathe in for five seconds, then breathe out for five seconds. Repeat three times.
- OR**
2. Try box breathing to reduce panic: Breathe in for a count of four, hold for four, out for four.
- OR**
3. Slightly prolonging the exhale can help slow the heart rate. Try:
 - a. Breathe in for four seconds, out for six.
 - b. Breathe in for four seconds, hold for seven, purse lips.
 - c. When exhaling, let out a sigh or the sound "mmm".

STOP if you feel lightheaded.

C

COUNT

Note three things you can see, hear, feel, smell, taste.

Noticing makes you more mindful and aware of your surroundings and experience. Pause for a moment and notice any details.

1. Name three things you can see. List them out loud if appropriate.
2. Name three things you can hear close, far, and from each ear.
3. Name three things you can feel, like your feet on the floor, air on your face, or clothing on your skin.
4. Name one thing you can smell and/or taste (e.g. gum, a mint).

1

ONE THING

What is the one next thing for you to do right now?

Focus on what must/could be done right now to regain a sense of control and agency.

Be practical. What is the next thing for you to do right now?

Common examples are self care (I need to eat, sleep, shower), a task (I need to phone ___), or something meaningful (I need to give (name) my full attention).

2

TWO STRENGTHS

What are two strengths you can draw on? (internal and external resources)

Remind yourself of your strengths, qualities and abilities to help you feel capable. Choose an internal and external strength:

1. What are my strengths? What do other people tell me I'm good at?
2. Who could help me right now? e.g. friend, family, colleague, etc.
3. What things in my environment are here to help me? e.g. books, phone, internet.
4. What have I learned from past experiences that could help me now?

3

THREE THANKS

What are three things you are grateful for? (large or small)

Thinking about what you are grateful for shifts and broadens your attention, promotes positive feelings and can make you feel more connected.

1. What am I thankful for today?
2. Who am I thankful for right now?
3. What simple things do I enjoy and appreciate? (e.g. warm drink, sunset, bath, music).
4. Be grateful to yourself for doing this calming practice.