

Coping Skills Toolkit

Tools to help you ground, regulate, process, and reconnect

You don't need to use every skill here. Think of this as a menu, not a checklist. Notice what you're experiencing right now, choose whatever sounds like it fits, and see what your body and mind respond to.

1 When Your Thoughts Feel Overwhelming *(overthinking, rumination, intrusive thoughts, self-criticism)*

"I'm having the thought that..."

Add this phrase before a hard thought to create distance.

"I'm having the thought that I'm going to fail."

Name the Story

Give a recurring thought pattern a name to create distance from the thought, like "the not-good-enough story."

Thoughts on Clouds

Picture each thought resting on a cloud, drifting by. You don't have to hold on to it.

Use a Silly Voice

Repeat the thought in a cartoon or robot voice. It's harder to take that thought too seriously that way.

2 When You Need to Ground in the Present *(feeling scattered, disconnected, stuck in what happened or what might)*

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

Notice 5 things you see, 4 you touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.

Anchor Object

Hold something small and notice its texture, shape, weight, and temperature.

Body Scan

Slowly move your attention through your body, noticing sensations without needing to change them.

Nature Connection

Step outside and intentionally notice the sights, sounds, and air around you.

3 When Your Body Feels Activated *(anxiety, physical tension, racing thoughts)*

Deep Belly Breath

Breathe slowly and let your belly gently expand, not just your chest.

Box Breathing

Inhale for 4 counts, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4. Repeat for a few rounds.

4-7-8 Breathing

Inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8. Shorten the hold if it feels uncomfortable.

Humming

Hum softly and notice the vibration. It gently signals safety to your nervous system.

4 When You Need to Move or Release Energy *(restlessness, agitation, excess energy in the body)*

Shake It Off

Gently shake your hands, arms, legs, or whole body. Let the movement be loose and unpolished.

Freeform Dance

Put on a song and move however feels good. No choreography required.

Push the Wall

Press your hands into a sturdy wall and notice the effort through your arms and legs.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Gently tense one muscle group, then slowly release it. Notice the contrast.

5 When You Need Comfort or a Sense of Safety *(feeling vulnerable, emotionally flooded, lonely)*

Butterfly Hug

Cross your arms over your chest and gently tap, alternating sides, while you breathe.

Give Yourself a Hug

Wrap your arms around yourself and notice the warmth and pressure.

Visualize a Safe, Calm Place

Imagine somewhere you feel peaceful or supported. Bring in as many senses as you can.

List Your Safe People

Write down who you trust and feel comfortable reaching out to. Keep it somewhere close by.

6 When You Need to Process an Emotion *(emotions that need acknowledgment or space, not distraction)*

Name It

Put words to what you're feeling: "I'm anxious." "I'm angry." "I'm overwhelmed."

Describe It in Your Body

Where do you feel it? Hot or cold? Heavy or light? Moving or still?

"It's Okay to Feel This"

Let the feeling be there without judging yourself for having it.

Journal or Create

Write, draw, or make something freely. The point isn't the outcome.

7 When You Need Perspective or Meaning *(feeling stuck, discouraged, hopeless, or caught in a narrow view)*

Write a Thankful List

Note a few things you appreciate, even small ones.

Find Meaning & Purpose

Ask: What am I learning here? What matters to me in this?

Positive Affirmations

Choose a statement that feels believable, like "I can take this one step at a time."

Look at Positive Memories

Spend a few minutes with photos or memories that feel warm or connected.

8 When You Need to Reconnect With Yourself

(feeling disconnected from your needs, values, or sense of self)

Ask Your Inner Child

"What do you need right now?" "What would feel comforting or fun?"

Do the Opposite Action

If an urge pulls you toward isolating or avoiding, try one small step the other way.

9 When You Need Deep Relaxation *(intentionally slowing down and letting your body rest)*

Guided Imagery

Picture a calm scene and bring in as many senses as you can.

Legs Up the Wall

Lie back with your legs resting up against a wall for a few comfortable minutes.

Aromatherapy

Use a familiar, comforting scent (follow safety guidance for any oils).