BRAIN-BODY-BREATH

ACTION STRATEGIES

TO

ACHIEVE:

RELAXATION,

INNER PEACE

AND

PERSONAL GOALS

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INTRODUCTION

The goal is to learn techniques and strategies to give you control over yourself and help you make choices for your own wellbeing. It is not simply "positive thinking" that everything will be wonderful; nor is it indulgence in fantasy. It is a way of using the mind - your imagination - to create, plan, problem solve and develop your inner strength.

Albert Einstein, a great scientist, once said: "Knowledge is limited. With imagination, you can encircle the world."

What we hold in mind has a powerful effect on how we feel and act. Based on personal trauma and negative expectations, many of us have learned to live anticipating the worst and imagining we will fail. We worry, we fear, we are anxious. With the right support systems, we get through the worst. Using this manual, you can **learn** to use your mind in new ways to influence how you feel about yourself and learn to take actions that give you a sense of your own agency.

The following relaxation exercises and strategies are presented as practical techniques to use day to day to control your imagination and autonomic nervous system in high demand situations, to de-activate old patterns of fear and anxiety and create a new relationship to yourself. This will be a personal journey to develop personal control and inner peace.

This isn't an easy journey. It will be filled with trial and error; there will be times you'll feel inspired and in control and other times when nothing seems to work. You will learn what it means to create and adjust. Control and the ability to act from inner strength in the context of living takes practice.

Small moments of being able to create comfort for yourself will nurture your inner strength. Personal strength builds overtime.

Overtime, even in the bad moments, you'll remember that bad moments don't mean you're a bad person.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

There are three major categories of relaxation techniques presented: breathing exercises; imagined activity (visual, kinesthetic or audio); and tension-release muscle exercises. Many of the exercises combine mental and physical activity - putting techniques together in ways that enhance their effectiveness.

There is no "right" way to do any of the exercises. All that's important is your comfort, so however you respond will be right for you. Ruling out what doesn't work is just as important as finding your personal preferences.

Because preferences are idiosyncratic and because the same exercise will not work in every situation or equally well each time you use it, a variety of techniques are presented. Most of the exercises can be done in 60 seconds to a few minutes; some of them can be done in public situations without anyone noticing; and some of the exercises are best done lying down when you are alone.

It helps to think of these exercises as fitness or athletic training - repeated regular practice will determine the degree of your skill in altering physical and mental states.

To become more deeply relaxed, it can be best to:

*Find a quiet, protected environment in which you will not be disturbed or observed;

*repeat an exercise;

*increase physical comfort by lying down;

*combine a breathing exercise with something that engages your imagination or requires more physical activity.

When you are relaxed, you can think more clearly and act more effectively. As you become familiar with relaxation techniques, you can more easily protect your mind and your body from old triggers.

A warning: Sometimes becoming relaxed is scary. While it actually will give you more control, it may feel like a loss of self. With anger, fear and anxiety, we automatically tense up. Tension becomes our ‘go to” pattern. You always have the option of holding on to any tension you feel you need.

Conscious Breathing

Breathing techniques have been used for thousands of years to alter physical and mental states.

The emphasis in the techniques presented is to pair the activity of breathing with thoughts, images or feelings that fit the energy level, mood or physiological alteration you want to achieve. You can generate healthy attitudes, relieve tension, improve your concentration and stay connected to your goals. Practice of these exercises increases self-control and self-confidence. With more personal control, you can think more clearly and act more effectively.

The goal is to reverse a negative spiral of energy and nurture the creative life force which is in each of us.

- Inhalations are best associated with the word-thoughts alert, invigorate, strong, confident, awake, clear, cool, or thinking "I am."
- Holding the breath is a technique to control how much tension is released. The longer the breath is held, the deeper the release.
- Exhalations are best associated with the word-thoughts calm, float, relax, quiet, sooth, concentrate, focus, secure and warm.
- Depending on your preference, you may hear these word-thoughts with an inner voice (like talking to yourself), see a visual image (mental pictures may be clear or vague) or have a particular set of feelings (how something once felt or how you want to feel in the moment).
- When distracting thoughts occur: ignore them and refocus on the word you have chosen; imagine the distractions being breathed away; or simply arouse yourself and go on to other activities. You may need to write something down or attend to another task before you can relax. If you can't let go of unpleasant thoughts or feelings in the moment, observe them rather than criticize yourself. Self-criticism makes everything worse.

THE BASIC BREATHING EXERCISE

Take a deep breath, any way that is natural for you.

Hold your breath and count silently to 3 or 5 or longer.

The longer you hold your breath, the more tension will be released on the exhalation. But be comfortable - this is for relaxation and comfort, not the Olympics!

Let your breath out in an easy, soothing exhalation...like a big sigh...taking all the time you need.

You may feel muscles in your stomach letting go... a comfortable heaviness...a pleasant lassitude...or an enjoyable feeling of floating... as you let the weight of your body go with gravity and into the chair you're sitting on.

Repeat three times, or until you feel calm, quiet and relaxed.

This is not medication...you can't overdose on this!

WELLNESS BREATHING

Combine thoughts and images with your breathing:

As you inhale, choose one thought which fits the energy of breathing in: "I am" or "Alert" or "Confident."

As you exhale, choose one thought which fits the energy of breathing out: "Calm" or "Focus" or "Float."

"Calm" & "Focus "are mind words. "Float" is body language. Imagined floating can help release you from your thoughts.

It's easiest to choose <u>one</u> word on the inhale and <u>one</u> word on the exhale. The word may become an instruction, an image or a feeling.

<u>*Yet one does not have to feel confident or calm to have the thought impact our behavior.*</u> For example, teaching images for dancers to stand straight corrected their posture before they *felt* straight.

There are a variety of ways to increase the effectiveness of the breath-work and be selective depending on your needs, preferences, or the demands of the situation. You can:

- Hold one or both hands on your chest for warmth or comfort.
- Count quietly to yourself to 4 on each inhalation and to 8 on the exhalation until you feel comfortably relaxed. Don't be concerned if it takes a while before you can manage counting to 8 on the exhale.
- Imagine tension being breathed out through the soles of your feet.
- Close your eyes on the first exhalation.
- Change your thoughts & images in way that maximize the physiological energy of the breath rhythm:

UTILIZING CONSCIOUS BREATHING EXERCISES

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position. Close your eyes.
2. Begin to relax your muscles, using your breathing to become more quiet and calm.
3. As you breathe in, imagine the energy you need coming in with each inhalation as an inspiration.
4. As you breathe out, imagine uncomfortable thoughts and feelings being breathed out through the soles of your feet.
5. Continue to breathe in an easy, natural rhythm. Allow relaxation to come at its own pace; stay with the mental activity that seems most comfortable to you.
6. This may be a time to imagine yourself successfully integrating a new behavior to break an old pattern.
7. You may prefer to use the time for reflection, rest or refuge.
8. You may open your eyes to check the time or use an alarm if this will relieve stress in regard to time.
9. When you finish, sit quietly, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.

IMAGINED ACTIVITY

Thoughts held in mind have an effect on the body. If you're remembering an exciting event, you may notice your heart beating faster, your stomach tightening or an increased sense of arousal. If you are worried about something, you may realize the muscles in your face have tightened, your sleep pattern may be disturbed or you may get a headache. Some people see mental pictures; some have feelings; some describe things with an inner voice.

After abuse or trauma, many of us become harsh critics of ourselves. We get used to thinking of ourselves as too fast or too slow; doing too much or not enough; having displeased or been too eager. Many negative feelings grow into guilt, blame or anger which, if not able to move through us, can have a negative impact on our bodies, our minds and our spirit.

The following exercises allow you to choose imagined activity to create specific mental and physical states. Your goals may be to increase of confidence or concentration. You may want to decrease discomfort, fatigue or other symptoms of stress. You may need a time out or a rest. Begin imagined activity with Wellness Breathing to quietly align your mind and body.

You will be learning the power of paradox – two things can be true at the same time. A person can be badly treated and undervalued by others yet at the same time have a self which deserves respect and a life of value.

"The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may be another profound truth." (Niels Bohr, 1922 winner of a Nobel Prize in atomic structure and quantum theory)

A profound truth: abuse leads to feeling devalued, helpless, guilty and ashamed. At the same time, it is profoundly true you have great value and can learn to experience yourself in new ways. One can be violated yet still be entitled to personal space and the right to respect one's own needs; to pursue one's own wants; and, to discover the inner core of oneself which needs to be protected.

MENTAL REHEARSAL

Begin with Wellness Breathing.

Bring to mind a specific situation or a future interaction. Use the speed of thought to imagine yourself as you want to be, to act and to feel.

Stay focused on your part, there is no way to control the actions of others; imagine the full utilization of your skills, knowledge and experience.

Be realistic in terms of who you are. The goal is to peel away fear and worry to allow the best of you to emerge.

CREATING MEMORIES

Bring to mind a thought, feeling or visual scene of:

* a safe place where you would like to be

* a list of your good personal qualities or achievements

* a calm scene

* something that makes you smile

* a situation in which you would like to feel confident

THE WINDOW SHADE

Look up - first to your eyebrows, then to the top of your head.

Keep looking up, let your eyes close and take a deep breath.

Exhale and relax your eyes.

Imagine you are ‘floating’ down or comfortably ‘heavy’ in the chair or bed. Let the weight of your body go with gravity.

Imagine a WINDOW SHADE of comfort being drawn from the top of your head to the soles of your feet.

When you're ready, let the shade lift up, so you can feel alert and refreshed.

A PROTECTIVE BUFFER ZONE

With your eyes open or closed, imagine that you are completely surrounded in every direction by a soothing atmosphere of luminous serenity and calm energy.

Imagine this as your special buffer zone.

Imagine you are safely bathing and comfortably breathing in the luminous serenity and calm energy.

As you sit quietly, imagine calm energy and peaceful serenity moving more and more deeply through all your muscles and all your cells.

Think to yourself: “It’s as though a special buffer zone safely surrounds me, acting like a special filter system. I can take in what is good for me and keep out the rest.”

Bring to mind those thoughts and only those thoughts that you choose to maximize your goals or provide a time out. Perhaps imagine yourself floating someplace safe and secure – perhaps like floating on a fluffy cloud high above the world.

THIN STREAM OF CALM ENERGY

With your eyes closed, think "calm, float” on three exhalations.

Imagine a THIN STREAM OF CALM ENERGY coming in through your finger tips, moving up your arm and all around your body...picking up tension as it moves along and leaving behind calm, soothed and relaxed muscles...all through you. Right now, there is nothing for you to try and feel; nothing for you to have to do.

You may prefer to allow this THIN STREAM OF CALM ENERGY to move on its own...without your having to direct it in any particular direction.

Variation: Imagine the THIN STREAM OF CALM ENERGY moving all around your body – a calm, soothing energy covering you like a soft blanket or bringing in calm energy which permits your breath to move gently in and out, in and out…. in your own rhythm.

YOUR TV

With you eyes closed, imagine your mind is like a TV.

You can choose the channel you want to relax, enjoy, cleanse soothe or calm yourself.

Select what you want to see and hear.

You free your mind and body from the effects of difficult or trying circumstances by using images which are the opposite of the issue or problem at hand. For example, patients who have been badly burned are taught to imagine themselves in cold snow making snow angels or standing under a cold waterfall to ease their pain and heal more quickly.

Change the channel to meet your needs. Your mind may require a lot of variation to keep out negative and uncomfortable thoughts.

Tell yourself what feelings and thoughts you would like to stay with you before you open your eyes. Open your eyes!

PLACE OF REFUGE

Imagine you are walking down a path, a flight of stairs or a corridor to a special place that is quiet, serene and comfortable. This is your PLACE OF REFUGE so you can make it up any way you want...with all your favorite things, restful or active, inside or outside...real or imaginary.

With your eyes closed, count down to arrive where you want to be:
5...beginning the journey
4...closer
3...closer
2...closer
1...let yourself be there

You can change your PLACE OF REFUGE to meet your needs for rest, a time out or a way to separate yourself from difficulties or demands around you. You can create a wonderful, safe place in the quiet of your mind. If your mind won't quiet, move on to another activity. Remember: self-criticism and pressure make everything worse.

RAG DOLL

Imagine a favorite old rag doll toy lying in a safe and protected place, loved and cared for.

Lying down or sitting (well supported) in a chair, close your eyes and think of that RAG DOLL... arms and legs limp and floppy, soft and relaxed. Allow these feelings...limp and floppy, soft and relaxed...into your arms and then into your legs. Let the feeling of letting go move into your shoulders, chest, stomach and hips. You can begin to feel comfortably heavy, letting the weight of your whole body go with gravity...focusing on the feeling of support of being held from underneath by the chair or the bed...under your head, neck and shoulders, back, hips, upper legs, lower legs, ankles and feet. Everything limp and loose, released and floppy.

Imagine sunshine warmth relaxing you even more. Imagine a perfect day - not too hot and not too cold. A cool gentle breeze soothes the muscles of your mind; your body can relax even more.

When you are ready, look forward to feeling rested and refreshed, open your eyes and stretch gently to alert yourself fully.

THE RAINBOW

Imagine a rainbow, with all its different colors. Choose a color that suits you...a warm, happy yellow; a cool, clear green, a soothing pink; a soft, white light; an ethereal purple.

Imagine the color in the shape of a ball of light about four inches above your head. Let the color move through your body - relaxing and soothing, calming and quieting. Imagine the colored light energy coming in to make a connection between you and the universe and going out through the soles of your feet to make a connection between you and the center of the earth.

Let it be a flow of energy - the color can come, change or go.

RELEASING A PROBLEM

Take in a deep breath and hold while you make fists with one or both hands. Imagine your problem or difficult feeling clenched in your fist(s). Think of letting the problem or bad feeling go when you breathe out and open your hand to imagine releasing the negative issue out through your finger tips.

SCREEN TECHNIQUE

First practice this with your eyes open, using pen and paper. Once you get used to it, it's an extremely powerful form of controlled imagination. But this is not analytic therapy! There is no need to dig for negatives and no need to analyze. It's a way to organize, direct, balance and explore thoughts and feelings so your body isn't a battle ground of old memories, fears and anger. Instead, you can learn to focus your mind on how you would like to be, feel and behave on your own behalf.

Take in a deep breath, then exhale, close your eyes, let your body float.

While you continue to float, imagine a large screen in front of you - like a huge movie theater screen or a large TV screen.

Mentally divide it into three separate but over-lapping screens. The central screen is the receiving area for all your thoughts and feelings, the left screen is for worries, fears and anxieties and the right screen is for creative thoughts.

Place all your thoughts and feelings on the central screen.
As you identify worries, fears or anxiety, lift these thoughts and feelings off the central screen and place them on the worry screen on the left. By placing them there and reserving the right to return to them any time you wish, you are free to pay attention to other thoughts and feelings. This avoids the mistake of fighting against your worries and fears. You are, after all, more than worries and fears.

Now you can be more sensitive to other thoughts and feelings. Those which you associate with creative and desirable goals, place on the screen to the right. Turn your attention to goals and visions; imagine solutions to problems; design a special place of refuge.

Use the screen to author, organize, direct, balance and explore your life. You can write your own script and practice delivering the lines, feel your way through or visualize yourself in your mind's eye.

TENSION-RELEASE EXERCISES

The following exercises are designed to build-up tension in order to create a relaxation response when you release. It's something of a rubber band effect - the more you stretch the rubber band, the more rapidly it comes back to its resting state.

The original tense-release technique is called Jacobson's progressive relaxation. Jacobson's technique requires tightening and releasing muscles in hands, feet, shoulders, face, etc. in a specific pattern which moves through the whole body with specific repetitions. It takes approximately 20 minutes to perform.

In my work, I have observed that I could teach individuals to relax and alter their state of consciousness to help control blood pressure, heart rate, anxiety, concentration, stress, pain and other problems using techniques which might take seconds to a few minutes to perform.

It is helpful to tighten and release a few muscle groups and then allow feelings of muscle relaxation and comfort to move through the body. How much tension-release you require is unpredictable. Experiment! It will depend on the amount of time you have, the amount of tension you start with; and, ultimately, what feels good to you. If you are angry, irritable or very anxious, it helps to exaggerate tension-release activity.

The exercises which follow can be used by themselves or as a way to prepare the mind and body for imagery and visualizations.

TENSE-RELEASE

Make fists with both hands...let go.

Make fists with both hands and let the tension go up your arms to your shoulders and into your chest...let go.

Tighten the muscles in your chest and stomach and buttocks...let go.

Tighten the muscles in your feet...let go.

Tighten the muscles in your feet and all the way up your legs...let go.

Tighten the muscles in your face...let go.

Tighten all your muscles at the same time...let go.

THE FIST

Make fists with both hands...so tight the tension goes into your forearms, shoulders and chest.

Take a deep breath and hold it, counting to three.

Exhale, open your hands and let the tension flow out from your shoulders, chest, forearms and hands.

Repeat two times.

Variation: Imagine your problem or a difficult feeling clenched in your fist(s). Think of letting it go to be harmlessly dissipated into the air or imagine throwing it away when you open your hands.

Variation: Use only one hand for the fist so that no one is likely to know you are doing this exercise.

STRESS REDUCING STRATEGIES

- Write down thoughts, ideas and feelings that are upsetting, occupying your thoughts or just things you need to remember. Get them down on paper and clear them out of your mind. You may need to put a special notebook in your bag or keep a pad near the side of your bed. Throw away anything written that you wouldn't want anyone else to read.

- Make lists of what you need to get done. Itemize in as much detail as possible for better organization and more satisfaction as you cross things off the list that you have accomplished.

- Notice if you are doing things, responding to others or making promises you later regret. Ask yourself, "How else could I have acted?" Begin to plan different things you can say or do in a similar future situation that will be better for you and simultaneously respects the other's feelings. This may mean refusing to do something or disagreeing with someone in a loving and understanding way. This is different from agreeing "to be nice" and then resenting it later. This is also different from being defensive or attacking someone to protect yourself from outside pressure.

- No matter what you may have said or done, remind yourself that it was the best you could do at that moment. Example: "At that moment, I knew I was irritable and that was the best I could do." You will feel better and be less likely to make the same mistake again when you let go of something that can no longer be changed. This will help you feel a release from the burden of trying to be perfect. To date, no human being has been perfect or always in control. In fact, great lessons have been learned from making mistakes, letting go and moving on.

- If you feel your schedule is overloaded or perhaps your expectations are too much, find a few things to eliminate. This may mean more realistic standards or doing less on any given day. Let your family and friends know what you can and cannot do. (Complaining rarely works.) As obvious as your issues or needs are to you, those around you are more likely to be interested in themselves than your relieving you of pressure.

- Add some personal time to your day. This may mean taking a hot bath, an exercise class, watching TV, listening to music or reading something light. It is important that you choose something you like and find pleasing at that particular time. Think of "refuge."

- Notice if you have family or friends who drain your energy or you feel less good about yourself after being with them. Figure out how to spend less time with them and put limits on your interactions.

- Notice if your sleeping or eating habits are hurting you. You may need more or less sleep. You may need to add or subtract foods from your diet. Think of yourself as an individual with your own special needs.

- Notice if the actions of others are costing you peace of mind. Tell yourself, "That is the best they can do at this time." Ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do to correct this situation? Can I make sure this is unlikely to happen again? Is this someone I can trust to make mistakes and let me down? Is this a person I can avoid? Would I be less upset if my expectations of this person were different?"

- Notice if the situation is one in which you can make changes. If it is, begin to focus on what is important to you and what action you can take.

- Notice if the situation is one in which no changes are possible. If nothing can be done to change the external situation, look inside yourself for solutions.

- Plan strategies for yourself which are realistic according to the people involved and the situation at hand.

- Develop a habit of finding something good about yourself in as many situations and interactions as possible. Notice <u>hourly</u> and <u>daily</u> achievements, no matter how small.

- Words matter but thoughts and feelings influence the way you feel and behave. Directing your thoughts with images, ideas, breathing, tension-release exercises will help you create what you want.

- Give yourself permission to feel distress when it is real for you. Self-criticism or wishing you were different will only make you feel worse. You are entitled to your feelings but you don't have to act them out. Learn to use your thoughts and feelings as private signal systems to respect and understand yourself. When you can, make changes in difficult situations.

- Chill first, then communicate, act or make decisions. 'Letting it all out' rarely works - it can victimize the listener or reveal things that you cannot take back.

- Negative emotions create 'static' in the nervous system which interferes with clarity of thought and strength of presentation. Chill first so you don't give away your power.

- When nothing can be done to alter difficult circumstances, look for small pockets of comfort: take a shower, make a cup of tea, look at the sky, walk, nap, talk to a friend, listen to music, read something inspiring *or escapist.* Make choices to replete yourself.

- When your schedule feels overloaded, put something you care about at the top of the list. Be guided by *your* goals and *your* vision; *your* interests and *your* strengths.

- Forgive yourself and others for small transgressions. You'll know you're advanced when you can forgive the big ones. Forgiveness does not mean accepting something bad as OK. In its simplest form, forgiveness is letting go of the emotional charge and power we've attached to our past errors, the bad things which have been done to us or bad people who have done us harm. We rarely achieve this on a permanent basis. It's best to accept we may need to "forgive' ourselves and others over and over again.

- Accept that our life journey is a creative process which follows an unpredictable unfolding. Many of the techniques you've been learning help you manage a normal learning curve which demands we create and then adjust as we go along. Making adjustments increases our personal power.

- **Remember: Powerful beginnings are made with small steps. Giving thanks and being grateful for the little things nurtures us to go on.**

PERSONAL NOTES:

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