

CALMING & FOCUSING STRATEGIES

When you're caught off guard, stressed about the future, or overwhelmed by the present, it's important to calm your emotions and focus your thoughts before using real-time resilience tag lines. Read through and practice the calming and focusing strategies described below. Not every strategy will work for you, but try to find at least one or two effective strategies that you feel comfortable using on a day-to-day basis.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a relaxation strategy that involves tensing and relaxing individual muscles groups. PMR is a great way to become more aware of what your body is telling you about stress and to free yourself from pent up negative energy. To use PMR as a fast resilience skill, choose one specific area of your body, like your shoulders. As you breathe in, tense your shoulder muscles by squeezing your shoulders towards your ears. Try to isolate this tension to your shoulders and hold this position for 15 seconds. As you hold this position, control your breathing, count to 15, and focus on the sensations in your body. Then, exhale and let all the tension go. Notice what happens when you relax. Do you breathe a sigh of relief? Does your heart rate slow? Do you feel lighter? Keep your muscles relaxed for 30 seconds before repeating this process two more times.



Positive Imagery

Close your eyes, take three deep breaths, and imagine a calming, relaxing scene. Picture yourself sitting at the beach, walking through the forest, or sipping hot chocolate on a cold winter day. Activate all of your senses by imagining the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings associated with this scene. The more detailed the description, the more effective this exercise is.



Mental Games

Use mental games to "distract" yourself and to shift your attention away from negative thoughts and inaccurate beliefs. For these games to be helpful, they need to be relatively quick (about 2 minutes), and challenging enough to require focus, but not so challenging that they become frustrating. Here are some games that you can try:

- 1. Alphabet Games:** Choose a topic (ex. animal, food, country) and think of one item from that topic for each letter of the alphabet.
- 2. Counting:** Use a counting rule (ex. counting by 8's) to count backwards from one hundred. 
- 3. Add 3 Minus 7:** Pick any three-digit number. Then, add three to that number three times and subtract seven from the new number seven times.
- 4. Innovate:** Pick a basic, everyday item and think about as many different ways to use it as possible.

Press Pause

Sometimes it's enough to just press pause. Take a minute to step away from the situation, collect your thoughts, control your breathing, and use a positive self-affirmation. Then, press play, and step back into the situation.

