

# Building Coping Skills:

A Workbook  
for Teens



Common  
Thread

by  Wolfson Children's

# Welcome to your Mental Health Workbook

Life as a teen can feel like a lot. Some days are easy, while others feel overwhelming, and each day brings something new. These ups and downs can be hard but know you are not alone. This workbook is here to help you better understand yourself and learn ways to handle those moments in healthy, effective ways.

## What this workbook is about

This workbook focuses on two important skills:

- **Self-awareness:** Learning to notice and understand your thoughts, feelings and reactions
- **Coping skills:** Finding healthy ways to manage stress, strong emotions and challenges

## What you'll find inside

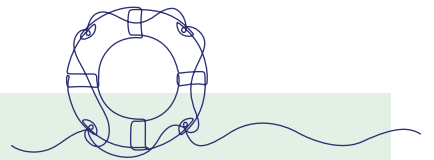
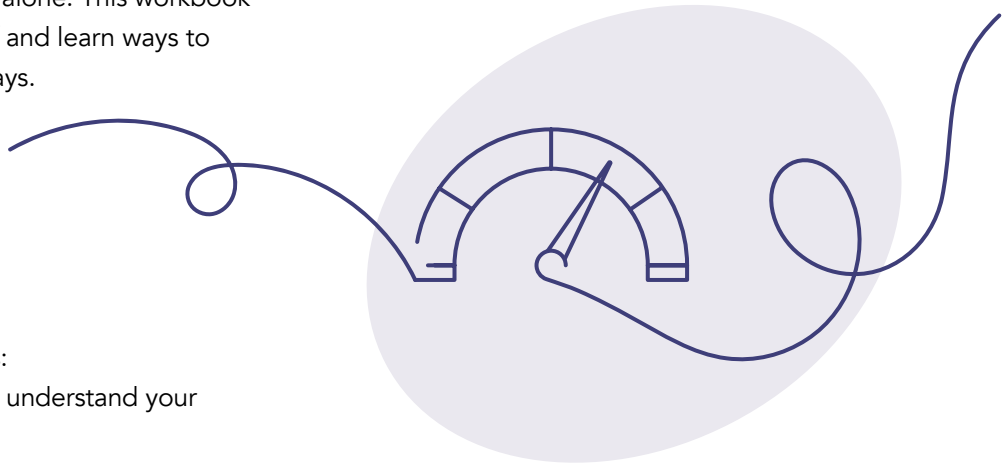
- Activities to help you explore your thoughts and emotions
- Tools to understand how your body reacts to feelings
- Simple, practical coping strategies you can use anytime

## A few things to remember

- There are no "right" or "wrong" answers here
- You can go at your own pace
- You don't have to share anything unless you want to
- It's okay to feel whatever you're feeling

## Why this matters

Getting to know yourself is one of the most powerful things you can do. When you understand your emotions and have tools to manage them, you can feel more in control, more confident and more like yourself.



## Needing more support?

The skills in this workbook will help you handle strong emotions AND it's okay to need more support. Below are a few resources that you can use in a crisis or if you need to talk with someone about how you are feeling.

### National Crisis Helpline

Call or Text 988

### Wolfson 24/7 Kids/Teens Helpline

904.202.7900

### Crisis Text Line

Text 741-741

# Mental health:

## Mind and body connection

Mental health is about more than just your thoughts and feelings. It includes your whole body. Your mind and body are connected, and what affects one can impact the other. When it comes to mental health, it's not "all in your head." It's a full-body experience.

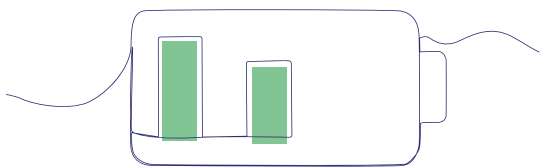
### The two-way street

Think of this connection as a two-way street. Your brain is the control center, but your body is the sensor.

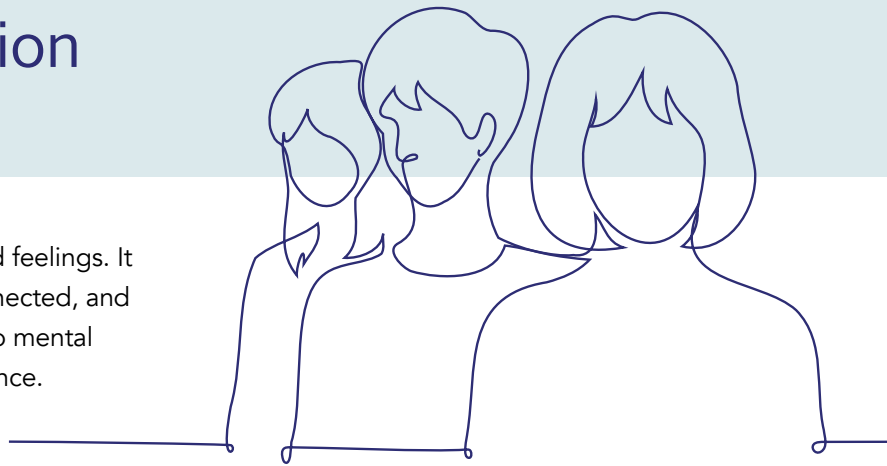
- **Mind ► Body:** When you feel anxious about a test, your brain sends a signal that you're in "danger." Your body reacts by making your heart race, your palms sweat or your stomach feel like it's doing backflips.
- **Body ► Mind:** If you haven't slept, are dehydrated or have been sitting in the same spot for five hours, your body sends "low battery" signals to your brain. This can make you feel irritable, sad or totally unmotivated.

### The "battery" balance

Good mental health isn't just about "positive thinking." It's also about managing your physical energy.

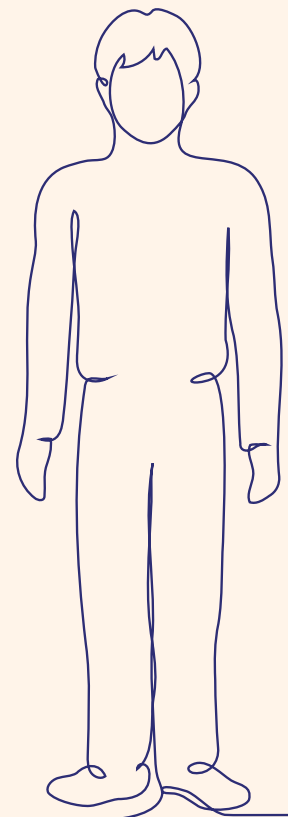


- Movement releases chemicals like endorphins (the brain's natural "feel-good" text).
- Sleep is like a software update that clears out the "glitches" from your day.
- Food is the literal fuel your brain needs to process emotions.



### Reflection drawing:

Where do you notice stress or feeling overwhelmed first? Fill in the image with words or drawings that fit your experience.



# Mental health: Mind and body connection

## What do I need?

Think about each situation. What body or mind signs show up for you? What might make you feel better?

### SITUATION

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

### WHAT MIGHT HELP

Feeling stressed

Feeling tired

Feeling nervous

Body feels sore

Finding balance

### Things that help my MIND:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Things that help my BODY:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

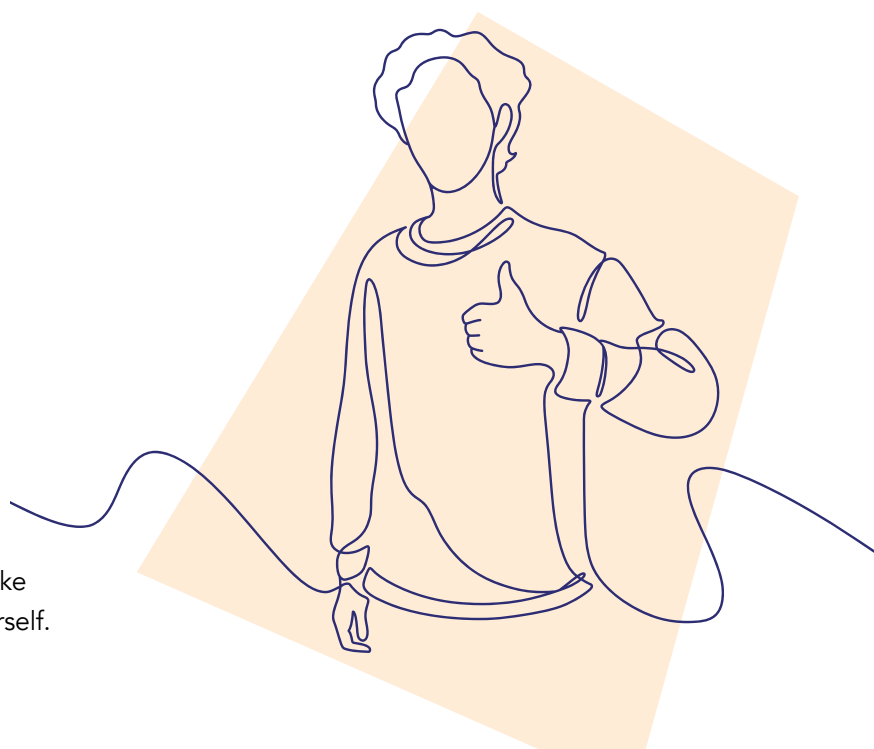
## One small step

What is one thing you can do today to take care of:

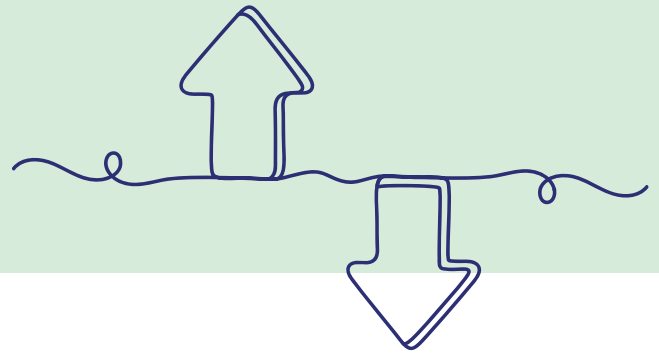
My mind:

My body:

**Reminder:** Your mind and body are a team. When you take care of both, you feel stronger, calmer and more like yourself.



# Emotions: What are they and why do they matter?



## What are emotions?

Emotions are how your mind and body respond to what is happening inside and around you. They are not “good” or “bad,” and they act as important signals. When you learn to listen to your emotions, you can better understand yourself, make healthier choices and take care of your mind and body.

### They can show up as:

**Thoughts** (what you’re thinking)    **Body sensations** (what you feel physically)    **Urges** (what you feel like doing)

Emotions are automatic, meaning that you don’t choose them, but you can choose what you do next.

## Why are emotions helpful?

Even uncomfortable ones have a purpose.

### 1. Emotions give you information

They help you understand what is going on.

**Sad:** “Something important to me feels off or missing.”

**Angry:** “Something feels unfair or not okay.”

**Happy:** “This feels good—keep going!”

### 2. Emotions help keep you safe

Some emotions are designed to protect you.

**Fear:** Helps you notice danger

**Worry:** Helps you prepare

### 3. Emotions help you connect

They help you understand yourself and others.

- Sharing feelings helps people support you
- Noticing others’ feelings helps you build friendships

### 4. Emotions motivate action

They push you to do something.

**Bored:** Try something new

**Excited:** Take action

**Frustrated:** Problem-solve

## Think about a recent emotion you had.

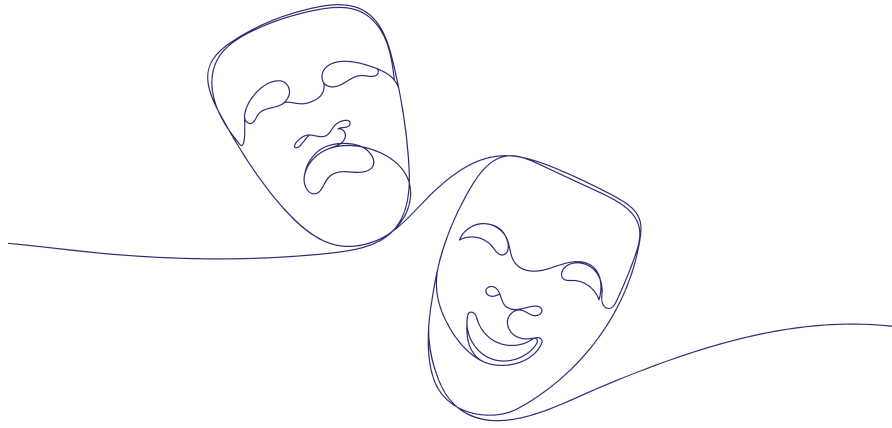
1. What emotion did you feel?
2. What was happening at the time?
3. What might that emotion have been trying to tell you?
4. What did you feel in your body?
5. What did you do next?

# Emotions: What are they and why do they matter?

## Match the emotion to its job:

Draw a line to the emotion and its job.

Emotion	Job
Angry	A. Helps you notice danger
Happy	B. Tells you something matters
Fear	C. Shows something feels good
Sad	D. Signals something feels unfair



## Build your emotional awareness

Fill in the chart:

EMOTION

WHAT IT MIGHT BE TELLING ME

WHAT COULD HELP

You don't have to ignore your emotions! Learning from them is your strength.

## There are no "bad" emotions

Sometimes people think feelings like sadness or anger are "bad," but the truth is all emotions are okay to have. Just like plants need rain to grow, we sometimes need uncomfortable feelings to help us understand what matters to us and what we need.

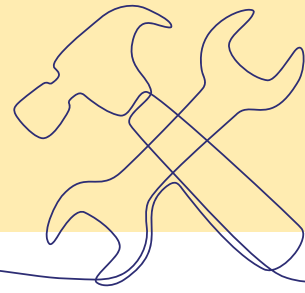
**The golden rule of emotions:** It's okay to feel whatever you're feeling. What matters most is what you do with that feeling, like taking a deep breath, talking to someone or finding a healthy way to cope.

Now, take a look at the emotion color wheel below. Think about each feeling and choose a color that matches it. Then color in that section of the wheel.



Can you think of any emotions missing from the wheel?  
List them below:

# Coping tools: What are they and why do they help?



Life can feel overwhelming sometimes. Stress, pressure, strong emotions or tough situations can show up when you least expect them. That's where coping tools come in.

## What are coping tools?

Coping tools are skills or strategies you can use to handle difficult thoughts, feelings or situations in a healthy way. Think of them like tools in a toolbox, where you can choose different ones depending on what you're going through.

They might include things like:

Taking deep breaths

Talking to someone you trust

Listening to music

Moving your body

Writing or drawing your feelings

Connecting with nature

## Why are coping tools helpful?

Coping tools can help you calm your mind and body, as well as make bigger emotions feel more manageable. Ultimately, they allow us to respond to life situations in healthy ways.

## Important to know

- Not every coping tool works for every person and that's okay
- It may take practice to find what works best for you
- You can build your own set of go-to tools over time

## What coping skills, or tools, have you used in the past to help you handle strong emotions?

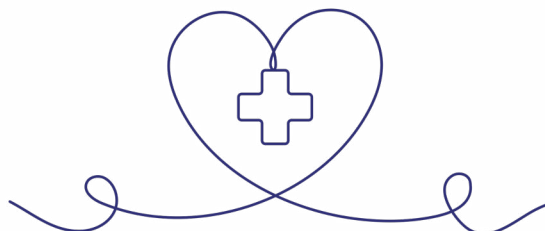
List two coping skills you've tried below. Circle whether it was helpful.

### Coping skill 1:

Was it helpful? Yes  or No

### Coping skill 2:

Was it helpful? Yes  or No



## Coping tools: What are they and why do they help?

Everyone experiences strong emotions sometimes. What matters most is how you handle them. Some choices help you feel better in the long run, and some might make things harder. Below is a list of both helpful and unhelpful ways to deal with strong emotions.

Check off the choices that you feel are more **helpful**.

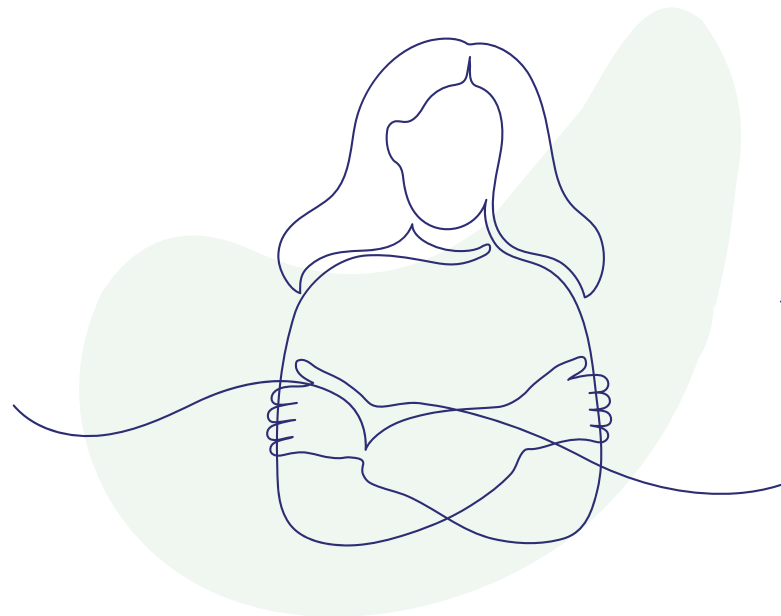
### Helpful vs. unhelpful choices:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking slow, deep breaths                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding problems completely                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping everything bottled up inside                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Being overly hard on yourself                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing or journaling your thoughts                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to music that matches or shifts your mood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breaking things  | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking emotions out on people who aren't involved   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking a break or giving yourself space                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Isolating yourself from everyone                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using grounding skills (like naming five things you can see) | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to a trusted friend, adult or counselor     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting enough sleep or rest                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Making impulsive decisions you might regret         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reminding yourself: "This feeling will pass"                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Moving your body (walking, stretching)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yelling at or hurting others                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring your basic needs (sleep, food, hydration)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing, coloring or doing something creative                |  |

Using the choices above, consider a few potential outcomes of helpful and unhelpful choices.

Helpful outcomes:

Unhelpful outcomes:



# Coping skills practice



Using coping skills takes practice. It's difficult to remember to use coping skills while emotions are intensifying. That's why it's helpful to practice these skills when you are calm and self-aware. The more you practice your skills, the stronger and better at using the skills you will become. We've provided you with some coping skills to practice and a monthly tracker (at the end of this workbook) to help you keep track of the days you practice.

Dealing with tough things can be really tiring. When you're trying to manage your stress or just get through a bad day, here are five things to keep in mind:

## 1. Your feelings aren't "too much"

It's totally normal to feel overwhelmed. All your emotions are valid, even the messy, uncomfortable ones. Coping skills aren't about "deleting" those feelings. They're there to help you handle the heat so you don't burn out.

## 2. Slow it way down

You don't have to fix everything in five seconds. Most coping strategies (like deep breathing or grounding) work way better when you actually give your body a second to catch up. No rush.

## 3. Don't give up

If a skill doesn't work the first time, it doesn't mean it's "broken." Sometimes you have to try it a few times or just try something else. It's all trial and error.

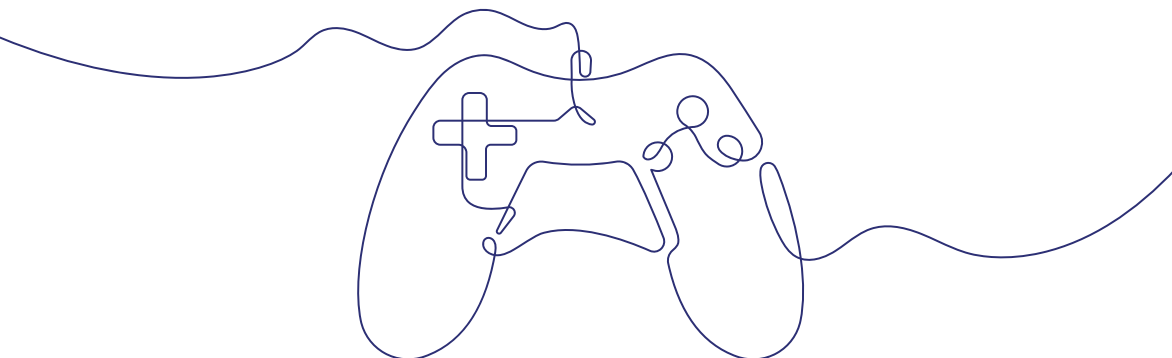
## 4. Vibe check what works

Pay attention to what actually makes you feel even 5% better. Does listening to music help, or do you need to go for a run? Everyone is different, and you decide what your go-to skills are.

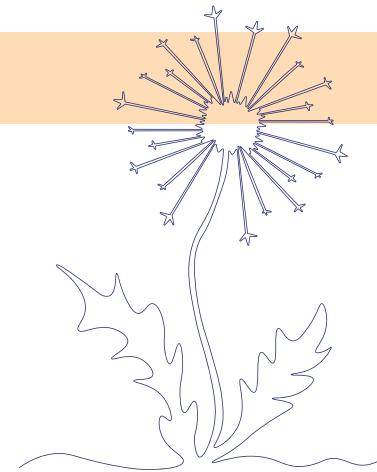
## 5. Reach out

You aren't a burden for needing a helping hand. Sometimes the best "skill" is just texting a friend or talking to an adult you actually trust. You don't have to carry the heavy stuff solo.

Think of coping skills like leveling up in a game. The more you practice using your tools, the better you'll get at picking the right one to beat the boss (aka, a really bad day).



# Coping skills practice: Breathing exercises



## Breathing exercises

Breathing exercises can help your body and brain feel calm, kind of like hitting a “reset” button when your feelings get really big. Slow, deep breathing sends a message to your brain that says, “I’m safe.” When your brain gets that message, it helps your body relax. Your heart slows down, your muscles loosen and your thoughts can feel clearer.

Is the skill working?

Before and after the breathing exercise, scan your body and observe your mind to notice levels of body tension and mental static. Use the battery scale to identify if you feel different by circling your battery level.

### 1. Box breathing

This is great because it gives your brain a specific pattern to focus on, which helps stop racing thoughts. It’s also very discreet and you can even try it at school without anyone noticing.

- Inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 4.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 4.
- Hold your lungs empty for a count of 4.
- Repeat 4 or 5 times.

Pre-breathing mind/body check:

Post-breathing mind/body check:

### 2. The 4-7-8 technique

This is one of the most popular techniques for falling asleep or calming down after an argument. The key is making the exhale twice as long as the inhale.

- Inhale quietly through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 7 seconds.
- Exhale forcefully through your mouth (making a “whoosh” sound) for 8 seconds.

Pre-breathing mind/body check:

Post-breathing mind/body check:

### 3. Five-finger breathing

If you find it hard to concentrate on just counting, this adds a physical sensation to keep you grounded in the moment.

- Hold one hand out in front of you, fingers spread.
- With the pointer finger of your other hand, start at the base of your thumb.
- Trace up your thumb while inhaling.
- Trace down the other side while exhaling.
- Move to your index finger and repeat, tracing up and down all five fingers until you’ve taken five deep, controlled breaths.

Pre-breathing mind/body check:

Post-breathing mind/body check:

### 4. Belly breathing

Most people breathe from their chest when they’re stressed, which actually keeps the body tense. Belly breathing sends a signal to your brain that you are safe.

- Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose.
- The goal: The hand on your belly should move out, while the hand on your chest stays mostly still.
- Exhale slowly through pursed lips (like you’re blowing out a candle).

Pre-breathing mind/body check:

Post-breathing mind/body check:

# Coping skills practice: Body movement (somatic exercises)

## Body movement (somatic exercises)

Think of coping skills that involve body movement or somatic exercises as a “system restart” for your body. Normally, we think of emotions as something that only happens in our heads, but your body is the first place that feelings show up. Ever get “butterflies” before a presentation, a tight chest when you’re stressed or a heavy feeling in your limbs when you’re sad? That’s your nervous system reacting to your life.

Is the skill working?

Before and after the somatic exercise, scan your body and observe your mind to notice levels of body tension and mental static. Use the battery scale to identify if you feel different by circling your battery level.

### 1. The “shake-off”

When animals get stressed, they literally shake their bodies to “reset.” Humans can do the same to release adrenaline and pent-up jitters.

- Stand up with your feet shoulder-width apart.
- Start by shaking your hands, then your arms, then your shoulders.
- Gently bounce on your heels and let the shaking move through your whole body for 30–60 seconds.
- Imagine you are shaking off water or a bad mood that’s sticking to you.

Pre-movement mind/body check:



Post-movement mind/body check:



### 2. Wall pushes

This exercise is great for when you feel frustrated, powerless or overwhelmed. It allows you to use your strength in a safe way.

- Find a sturdy wall. Place your hands flat against it and push with all your might, as if you’re trying to move the whole building. Engage your core and push for 10 seconds, then step back and let your arms hang.
- Feel the solid resistance of the wall and the strength in your own muscles.

Pre-movement mind/body check:



Post-movement mind/body check:



### 3. Shoulder elevators

We tend to carry stress in our shoulders (the “weight of the world”). This is a quick way to drop that physical burden.

- Inhale deeply and shrug your shoulders up toward your ears as high as they can go.
- Hold them there for three seconds, then exhale sharply through your mouth and let them drop instantly. Repeat three times.
- Every time you drop your shoulders, imagine you’re dropping a heavy backpack you’ve been carrying all day.

Pre-movement mind/body check:



Post-movement mind/body check:



### 4. The reach & release

This helps when you feel “small” or cramped up from sitting at a desk or looking at a phone.

- Reach your arms as high as you can toward the ceiling, stretching your fingers and lengthening your spine. Hold for a count of five. Then, exhale and fold forward at the waist, letting your head and arms hang heavily toward your toes.
- Reach for your goals, then let go of the pressure to reach them.

Pre-movement mind/body check:



Post-movement mind/body check:



# Coping skills practice: Self-expression

## Self-expression

Think of self-expression coping skills as the “pressure release valve” for your brain. Sometimes, emotions are too big to be “fixed” by breathing or stretching. You might have a feeling that doesn’t even have a name yet, it just feels like a heavy weight, a loud noise or a massive ball of energy stuck in your chest. Self-expression is how you get that internal “stuff” into the physical world, so you don’t have to carry it all inside.

The rule of self-expression: There are no grades here. It doesn’t have to be “good,” it doesn’t have to make sense to anyone else and it doesn’t have to be “aesthetic.” It just has to be out.

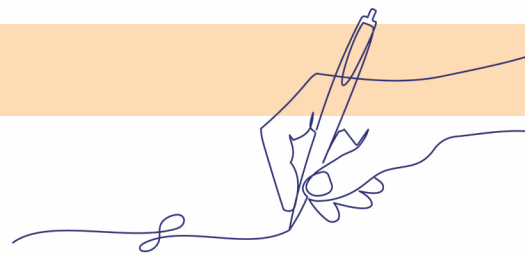
The next few pages contain a few self-expression activities. We’ve also included some additional options below:

- **The “trash” letter:** Write a letter to a person, a situation or even a feeling that’s bothering you. Say all the “unfiltered” things you’d never say out loud. When you’re done, rip it up, shred it or toss it in the trash to symbolize letting it go.
- **Lyric mapping:** Find a song that says exactly how you feel. Write out the lyrics that hit the hardest and decorate the page with doodles or colors that match the vibe of the music.
- **Visual venting (scribble art):** Grab a marker and move it across the page based on your energy level. If you’re angry, use sharp, jagged lines. If you’re sad, use heavy, slow swirls. Don’t worry about the “art.” Focus on the movement.
- **Digital mood boards:** Use an app like Pinterest or Canva to create a “vibe” collage. Pick images that represent your safe space, your goals or just your current aesthetic.
- **Curated mood playlists:** Instead of just one big library, create “Main Character” playlists for specific needs: Hype Up, Low-Fi Study, Post-Argument Reset or Rainy Day.
- **Voice memo venting:** If writing feels like too much work, open your voice memos and talk it out as if you’re leaving a message for a friend (you don’t have to send it). Sometimes hearing yourself talk helps you realize what’s actually wrong.



## Coping skills practice: Self-expression

A brain dump is like hitting the “empty trash” button on your computer when it’s running too slow. It’s a way to get all the random tabs open in your brain (deadlines, drama, “to-dos” and intrusive thoughts) out of your head and onto the page.



### How to get started:

1. Set a time between five and ten minutes. If you need more time no worries!
2. Don't worry about grammar, spelling or even making sense. If you're thinking, "I'm annoyed that I have to do this," write that down. If you're stressed about a text you sent, put it on the page.
3. Write down or draw everything currently taking up space in your mind such as tasks, feelings and thoughts.
4. Sort it out (optional): You can prioritize what you came up with by labeling items as "do it," "ditch it" or "later."

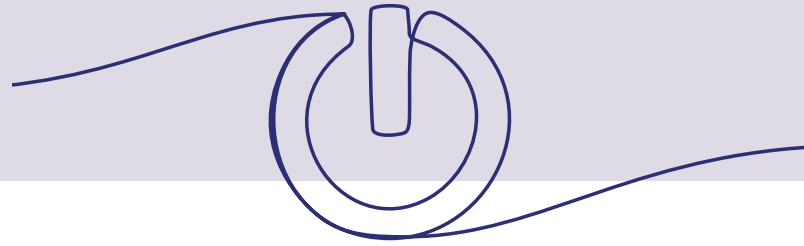
## Coping skills practice: Self-expression

### Write a comic strip about your feelings

1. Draw three to six boxes on your paper like a comic strip or use the space below.
2. Think about something that happened in your day.
3. In each box, draw a picture of what happened, step by step.
4. Add speech bubbles or words to show what people said or thought.
5. In the last box, show how you felt and what helped you feel better (if anything did).

The image shows a template for a comic strip with six panels. The panels are arranged in a staggered, overlapping fashion. The top row has two panels: a green one on the left and a yellow one on the right. The middle row has two panels: a teal one on the left and an orange one on the right. The bottom row has two panels: a pink one on the left and a purple one on the right. Each panel is empty, intended for drawing and writing.

# My personal reset plan



## Step 1: The vibe check

Where is my battery right now:

- Wired:** (Anxious, racing thoughts)
- Buffering:** (Overwhelmed, slow)
- Fried:** (Done with everything, shut down, empty)

## Step 2: Choose your tool

Pick one based on what you need right now:

### Option A: I need to calm down

- **4-7-8 Breathing:** Inhale 4 seconds, hold 7 seconds, exhale 8 seconds. Repeat four times.
- **Butterfly tapping:** Cross your arms, hook your thumbs and tap your shoulders slowly.
  
- You choose: \_\_\_\_\_

### Option B: I need to get it out

- **The brain dump:** Set a timer for three minutes. Write every annoying thought down.
- **The shake-off:** Stand up and literally shake your limbs for 30 seconds.
  
- You choose: \_\_\_\_\_

### Option C: I need a distraction

- **5-4-3-2-1 grounding:** Name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.
- **Cold water hack:** Splash ice-cold water on your face to "restart" your nervous system.
  
- You choose: \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 3: My support squad

If the tools aren't working, it's time to reach out.

Who are my "safe" people?

1. **The listener:** (Friend/sibling)
  
2. **The fixer:** (Adult/mentor)
  
3. **The pro:** (Counselor/hotline)

## Step 4: One small win

What is one tiny thing I can do in the next 10 minutes to feel 1% better? (Ex: Drink water, put on a hoodie, text one person, step outside)

My small win: \_\_\_\_\_

Remember: Feelings are like surfing waves. They might be huge right now, but they always peak and eventually wash away. You don't have to control the ocean, you just have to stay on your surfboard.



# Use this calendar to write down and keep track of your coping skills practice.

*Optional:* Rate your mood on a scale of 1-10 before practicing your skill and after practicing your skill.

## Mood scale guide:

1 = Low mood/sad/struggling

10 = Energized/happy/fulfilled

MONTH						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY