

Healthy Strategies for Coping:

Belly Breathing: Otherwise known as diaphragm breathing, this is an instant way to bring down your heart rate. The trick is to begin by blowing out all of the air in your lungs. When you breathe back in gradually fill your belly (actually pushing it out). Briefly hold your breath and release slowly. Many people count or use numbers to ensure they are taking in full breaths. My students prefer the 4-7-8 count. You breathe in for four counts, hold for a count of seven, and then breathe out for 8 counts.

Visualization: This strategy can be used in a couple of ways. One way is to visualize calming images such as preferred places, people, or experiences. I have had students bring in pictures from home to assist if they initially have difficulty selecting an image. When a student feels upset they can pair this process with breathing to help calm down. Another way to use visualizing is to picture yourself achieving a goal or overcoming an obstacle. If a student is feeling anxious about an action or upcoming event, they close their eyes and repeatedly envision themselves completing the desired action. This can also be paired with positive self talk and breathing.

Positive Self Talk: Self talk comes naturally to some students and to others it is less comfortable. Students who naturally talk themselves through situations may just require someone to bring attention to this as a useful strategy then reinforce its impact. For students who have fallen into the habit of using negative or self deprecating comments when upset, we must attempt to shape those negative words into positive or encouraging phrases. Their natural inclination to talk when upset can support the likelihood of them using self talk regularly once they master and see the benefit of word substitution. For those students who are less verbal you can try writing a phrase down. They can either hold on to a physical copy of this phrase or they can pair this with visualization by closing their eyes to picture the statement. Again the selected phrase should be generated or chosen by the student to increase the likelihood of it being used.

[Sensory Grounding:](#) Sometimes when we are upset we need to pull ourselves out of the emotion and into the moment. Our students use a hand as a visual for this strategy. Each finger on the hand represents the amount of times the student should engage in a grounding action.

Students are instructed to take 5 deep breaths, name 4 things they hear, 3 things they see, 2 things they physically feel, and 1 person who can help them at this time.

Writing: This is as simple as it sounds. Students can write down their emotions or frustrations to release feelings. Some students prefer to read it aloud or have a staff member read it before throwing the paper away. The disposal of the paper signifies the release of the emotion.

Drawing: Drawing or coloring can have very calming effects for students when they are upset. This can be a difficult strategy to complete in a timely fashion if they become consumed by the activity. Pre-teaching expectations and the use of timers is important to implement along with this strategy.

Request Space: This is a strategy that must be monitored closely if a student is requesting to leave the learning environment completely. It should be paired with a professional and space that the student trusts. While some students require space outside of the room, others benefit from simply sitting in a location off to the side of their classmates. If a student is very upset he or she may also prefer to be left alone at their desk. Preferences can often correlate with a student's fight or flight response. In my experience, students who tend to engage in "flight" when upset prefer to leave the learning environment completely. Students who prefer to engage with staff or students often prefer to remain in the classroom till they can overcome their emotions. Space alone may be enough to help a student regain a healthy state of mind; however it most frequently is paired with other strategies such as breathing, visualization, self talk, and sensory grounding.

HEALTHY STRATEGIES MENU + REFLECTION

- BELLY BREATHING (4-7-8)
 - VISUALIZATION
 - WRITING
 - DRAWING
 - REQUEST SPACE
 - POSITIVE SELF TALK
 - SENSORY GROUNDING
 - OTHER _____
-

REFLECTION:

TODAY I ATTEMPTED THE STRATEGY/STRATEGIES MARKED ABOVE.

I FELT LIKE...

→ THE STRATEGY (DID / DID NOT) WORK.

NEXT TIME...

→ I WILL ATTEMPT THE FOLLOWING STRATEGY/STRATEGIES:
