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Managing Mental Health and Wellbeing

Before, during, and after attending social engagements—particularly those involving challenging or traumatic topics—having a toolkit of resources readily accessible will be beneficial and is important to help you stay regulated and support your mental health and wellbeing.

Understanding how your Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) works can support you in emotionally regulating yourself when you find yourself distressed. The ANS helps regulate your internal organs, heart, stomach, muscles and glands, making involuntary adjustments based on signals your body receives.

The ANS contains two competing systems:

The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) prepares your body for *fight or flight*. You may notice your heart pumping, sweating, dilated pupils, and muscle tension.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) helps you *rest and digest*.

Together, these systems allow your body to experience states including stress, panic, relaxation, and sense of peace and calm. Practising noticing and tuning into what is physiologically happening in your body can help you become more adept at taking care of your nervous system in preparation for, during, and after stressful events and social engagements.

What is Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma occurs through repeated indirect exposure to others' traumatic experiences, whether through doom scrolling on social media, sharing personal traumatic stories, or attending events where conversations focus on trauma. Vicarious trauma can lead to symptoms that mirror PTSD, such as arousal, emotional numbing, avoidance, and intrusion (i.e., involuntary, unwanted, and recurrent memories, such as flashback, and triggers of traumatic event that disrupt daily life). If you experience any of these symptoms, seek support from a mental health professional or local crisis line.

Resources For Your Personal Wellbeing Toolkit

Here are some easily accessible somatic grounding exercises that can be utilised anywhere. A gentle reminder that it is not about being perfect; there is no right or wrong way to use these techniques. However, the more you practise, the easier it will become when you feel emotionally dysregulated.

If you are experiencing hyperarousal (i.e., hypervigilance, overwhelm, anxiety, or fear) or hypoarousal (i.e., immobilised, collapsed freeze state), both of which have a dissociative quality, these somatic exercises and tools will support you in emotional regulation, thus returning you to your centre. This is known as the 'Window of Tolerance' (WOT), or homeostasis—a balanced state of being. This state is vital for thinking critically and rationally, feeling emotionally safe, and being flexible in any situation or social engagement.

The following adaptive coping strategies foster positive mental health and wellbeing, bringing you to present awareness with yourself and others in the here and now.

Somatic Grounding Technique

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding Technique is a mindfulness tool supporting you in managing anxiety, stress, and panic by engaging your senses to help anchor you in the present moment. Thereby, shifting your focus from spiralling thoughts and feeling of distress and anxiety by returning your attention back to the present awareness to the immediate surrounding and bringing a sense of calm and safety. This can be done anywhere and in a few minutes time.

5 – Sight. Identify five objects you can see in the current environment (e.g., a plant, colours, tapestry on the wall, a dog or cat).

4 – Touch. Seek out four things you can touch (e.g., texture of the clothes, the chair supporting you, your feet on the floor or feel your legs).

3 – Sound. Listen to your surrounding and identify three things you can hear (e.g., the birds chirping, the clock ticking, or the sound of traffic).

2 – Smell. Identify two things you can smell (e.g., coffee, scent of flowers, or fresh air).

1 – Taste. Identify one thing you can taste (e.g., juice, tea, or mints).

Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT)

TIPP Skill

TIPP which stands for: **Temperature, Intensive Exercise, Paced Breathing** and **Pair Muscle Relaxation**, is part of DBT which was created by psychologist Dr. Marsha Linehan.

TIPP skill is useful for distress intolerance supporting in moving your body from a sympathetic (fight or flight) to parasympathetic (rest and digest) state. Encouraging agency of your own life, by reducing the intensity of emotional distress, or when struggling with thoughts or feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

The benefits are to improve focus, emotional control, physical relief from tension and accessible in stressful situations.

T - Temperature

- (splash cold water on your face or hold an ice pack helps to create a “shock” effect activating the parasympathetic response.

I - Intensive Exercise

- Engage in short bursts of exercise can release endorphins and burn off stress.

P - Paced Breathing

- Deep, intentional breathing helps lower heart rate and soothes the nervous system.

P - Pair muscle relaxation

1. Slow, deep breath, expanding your belly as you inhale. At the same time, tense particular area of your body (not so much that it causes pain or cramping). You could begin with your shoulders, neck, or hands—choose whichever feels right.
2. Truly notice the tension, the tightness within the muscle group.
3. Exhale and release, breathe out thinking of the word “relax” in your mind. Release the tension you’ve been holding, noticing how your muscles feel as they soften and let go.
4. Observe the difference between the sensations of tension and relaxation in that muscle group.
5. Repeat this process, moving through your body, for as long as feels comfortable. With each cycle, notice how your body feels progressively more relaxed.

Use this technique to get out of **Fight or Flight** and be able to regulate yourself through 5 senses (Sight, Touch, Hear, Smell, Taste) grounding technique. However, it is important to commit to the exercise and get into it within 1 minute – essentially self-soothing. Set aside any judgement. Practice regularly and observe the effects over time, noticing how your body responds. Over time, your mind and body will learn to respond more quickly to the relaxation cues.

Additional DBT concepts are **Radical Acceptance** and **Wise Mind**.

Encouraging **Radical Acceptance** of the current experience, trusting that you will come out the other side.

Wise Mind

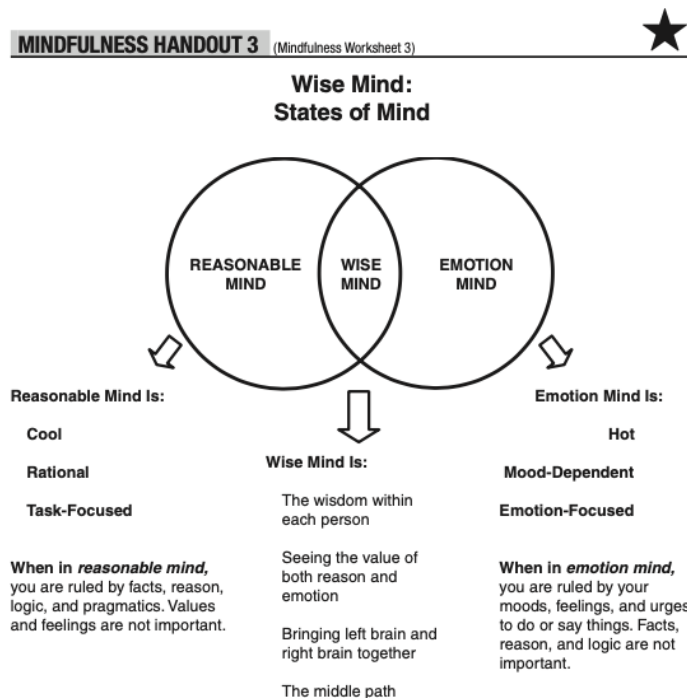
Key points:

- Utilises integration of emotional mind and rational mind.
- It's a balanced state where intuition, emotion, and logic work together.
- Combines the validity of feelings with the clarity of reason.
- The “sweet spot” for effective decision-making and self-awareness

Emotional Mind: feelings, urges, intuition, values.

Rational Mind: logic, facts, analysis, planning.

Rather than being pulled entirely by emotion or disconnected through pure logic, Wise Mind accesses both at the same time—knowing something is right both emotionally and logically. It's the internal sense of “this feels true and makes sense.” It's the target state for distress intolerance and decision-making—grounded, present, and integrating all sources of wisdom.



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By sharing these resources with you, my intention is to support you in building a mental health and wellbeing toolkit—whether adding to what you already have or creating a new one—so that you feel more equipped to make informed choices when caring for your mental health and wellbeing. These tools can help you navigate conversations, social situations, and events with greater present awareness, allowing you to move through the world more mindfully, both for yourself and in connection with others.

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