



Regulation Toolkit

2023



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Welcome to your regulation toolkit!

This is a psychoeducational booklet aimed to help you understand how to soothe (calm) yourself when you are feeling overwhelmed. This is called 'regulation'.

As an asylum seeker or refugee, your body has and may continue to be on a journey of survival. Whether you are still 'on the move' or settling into a new country, you may be carrying trauma.

This **regulation toolkit** has two aims.

1. Explain what is happening in a body carrying trauma.
2. Provide simple and effective methods of calming your body down to help your body achieve a sense of internal safety.

Chapter 1

Introduction Trauma



Introduction

What is trauma?

Trauma is both physiological (in the body) and psychological (in our mind). In Greek Trauma in Greek means 'wound' to the soul. It is the *emotional, psychological, and physiological* response left in the body, following high levels stress that accompanies experiences of danger, violence, significant loss, and life-threatening events.

Survival mechanisms for trauma

The link between your brain and your body.

Our brain is made up of many parts that have different functions. Whenever our brain senses extreme danger it goes into 'survival mode' in order to keep us safe. This is not a choice; it is an automatic response and will be different for everyone.

Three of the most common ways our body responds when it is trying to keep us safe are:

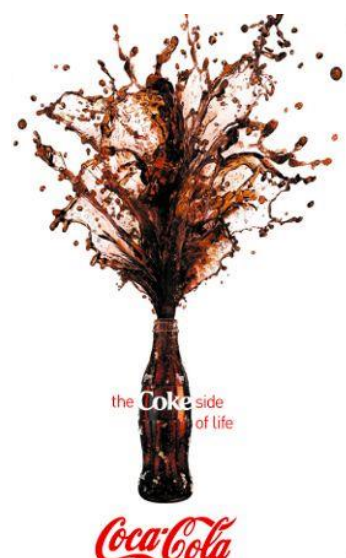
- **Flight:** a person might want to run away from the situation.
- **Fight:** a person might feel or become aggressive and try to fight off the danger.
- **Freeze:** a person might feel 'frozen', go numb and not feel anything at all.

When your body goes into survival mode and activates one of these responses, your body is doing its best to **protect** you. It is normal and healthy and could happen to anyone. Every person will respond, feel and behave in their own way.

Trauma and the Body

What is going on in our body when we experience trauma?

A very simple way of explaining how trauma affects the body is to use the below image of the cola bottles to explain how bodies can move from calm to fight/flight/freeze or from fight/flight/freeze to calm.



If you can, get a cola bottle and shake it. As you shake the cola bottle, watch the liquid move up and down the bottle, fizzing in the process. This fizzing of the liquid as you shake the bottle is like our body's reaction to a sense of potential threat or danger. Finding our way back to a sense of calm in our body helps us to think clearly and decide what we need to do to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe.

Think: What would you do with a cola bottle after it has been shaken? Would you open it immediately or wait until the liquid has calmed down?

If we open it when it is fizzed up, then the foam will spray out everywhere. This is the same response the body feels when it is carrying trauma. Fight/flight or freeze in the body is like the foam fizzling out of the cola bottle, as the body is carrying too much energy to contain in the present moment.

However, if we wait for the fizzing to reduce, before slowly opening the cap, the excess gas can be released without making a mess. This is the same as regulating our body, moving from a sense of overwhelm to bringing the body out of overwhelm to a space of calm.

Chapter 1

Healing

Making space for calm in the body



It is very common for people to feel overwhelmed, stressed and anxious.

Often, these feelings can be overwhelming, but remember they are normal responses to danger. We can learn ways of soothing and calming ourselves to feel better in these moments. If you are someone who has had to leave your home to seek refuge, this can be very challenging as your body may still be carrying memories, feelings and experiences from your home country, as well as the experience you've had on your journey to safety, and in the country where you are seeking support.

Here are some signs you might notice in your body that can help identify your response.

Fight

- Crying
- Hands in fists/desire to punch
- Flexed/tight jaw
- Grinding teeth
- Desire to stomp, kick, smash
- Feelings of anger and rage
- Knotted stomach/nausea

Freeze

- Feeling stuck
- Feeling numb
- Pale skin
- Sense of heaviness
- Holding breath
- Restricted breathing
- Sense of dread
- Heart pounding
- Decreased heart rate

Flight

- Restless legs and feet
- Numbness in legs
- Anxiety
- Shallow breathing
- Big/darting eyes
- Leg and foot movement
- Fidgeting
- Feeling trapped
- Tense

Below are a few exercises for you to use when your body is feeling specific emotions that are getting overwhelming – they take only a few minutes and can be helpful in helping you find a moment of calm for your body throughout your day.

FIGHT- If you are feeling angry:

Perhaps you feel a rising tension in your body, you want to fight, scream and shout and your heart rate is increasing.

This means your body is in **fight** mode –your body has experienced something that feels like a threat it is getting you ready to fight. This is a very common response in people who have survived traumatic experiences – the body can be overactive and prepare for danger even if there isn't any in the present moment – as a way of keeping you safe. You can help your body to find some calm by breathing when it is in fight mode. Breathing helps us regulate by letting your body know that you are currently safe where you are.

Breathing

Breathing from your tummy

Make sure you are sitting on a chair with a back rest and place your feet on the ground.

Place one hand on your belly and breathe in through your nose, following the air from your nose, down your chest and all the way into your belly. As you inhale, your belly should inflate like a balloon. Breath in for 4 seconds – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4.

After counting to four, hold your breath for another four seconds – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4.

Then breathe out, and feel your belly release the tension and come back to its natural position. Breathing out will also take four seconds – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4.

Try and think of a 'mantra' - a set of words that you find calming - that you can repeat to yourself when breathing. Examples are 'Right now I am ok, I am safe', 'This shall pass', 'With every breath, I find more peace'.

Use the same rhythm of breathing, for four seconds in, holding your breath for four seconds and exhaling for four seconds.

If you have access to music

Put on a piece of music or a playlist that you find relaxing. You could spend time preparing this playlist beforehand, and it can include your favourite songs that help you feel calm and peaceful. Sitting on a chair, with a backrest and feet on the ground, you can do the same four second breathing with your favourite calming music playing in your ears – using every exhale as a reminder to release the tension from your body and connect your feet even deeper onto the ground.

FLIGHT – If you feel like you want to run away

When you want to run away, your body has experienced something in the present moment that feels like a threat and as a result, you are feeling scared/panicky/anxious and concerned.

When our brain tells our body there is something to be scared of, our body immediately reacts to make sure that we are ready to run if faced with danger. This is a very helpful survival tool. However, at times our body can tell us to run very often, especially if our body is holding past traumatic experiences. When we have continuously been in danger (which is common when you are on the

move and living in unsafe environments) the body can go into 'watch, listen, detect danger mode'; which can be difficult to switch off.

Sometimes, you can feel like you want to run away, perhaps you feel stuck in time and have flashing images from the past coming into your mind. This can be very scary. When you feel like this, you can help your body to find calm by breathing and bringing it into the present moment. Activating all five senses helps let your body know that you are in the present and that you are currently safe where you are. The following exercise will help your body get back into feeling safe and regulated.

Welcoming the present moment

- Make sure you are sitting on a chair with a back rest with your feet on the ground.
- Breathe in through your nose and exhale through your mouth throughout this exercise – slow, deep, gentle breaths.
- Look around your space and name five things you can see.
- Using your sense of smell, notice five different scents you pick up in the present moment.
- Using your taste, notice five different subtle tastes in your mouth.
- Move your hands along your chair, clothes, hair, cushion. Notice the five different textures you feel in this present moment.
- Using your sense of sound, listen with intention and pick up five different sounds in the moment.

FREEZE – If you feel frozen in time

We can feel frozen when our body has become overwhelmed by fear.

Perhaps you are feeling numb, like you cannot connect to anything or anyone around you. Perhaps you cannot feel any emotions, and time feels like it is standing still. You may be feeling shame, hopelessness, low energy and foggy in your mind.

This is a very helpful survival tool as it is our body's way of escaping a situation in the mind in order to stay safe. It is very important to use movement when you feel frozen as movement is a gentle reminder to wake up the body, remind it that you are alive, and bring the body back into connection with others around and into the present moment.

You can help wake up your body with the tapping exercise below.

TAPPING – Using movement to wake up the body

Tap 10-15 times on the following points in your body using two fingers:

- The side of the hand
- Beginning of eyebrow/s
- Outside of the eye/s (flat area outside the outer corner of the eye)
- Under the eye/s (on the upper edge of the ocular bone, below the pupil)

- Under the nose
- Under the mouth
- Under the collarbone (Just below the bony knob of the collarbone)
- Under the arm/s
- The little finger (at the bottom corner edge of the nail, on the side closer to the midline of the body)
- The ring finger (all these finger points are at the bottom corner edge of the nail, on the side closer to the midline of the body)
- The middle finger
- The index finger
- The thumb
- Under the collarbone again.

Tapping points on the body



If you are struggling to sleep

It is very common for people who have experienced overwhelming or traumatic experiences to find it hard to sleep. Our brains can stay alert to find solutions for our pain and troubles. Trying to get an overactive mind and body to rest can be very difficult – here are a few suggestions to help you sleep:

- Get yourself a scented spray that you put on your pillowcase before sleeping. Some people use lavender, but you can use anything that is a calming smell for you.
- Thirty minutes before sleeping, remove all phone devices, lie down on your back and do the deep belly breathing – where your belly inflates like a balloon when you inhale – and as you exhale slowly – your belly goes back to its natural position.
- As you are breathing in an out – and deeply – think of a mantra that will help you feel calm and peaceful. Suggestions are:
 - I choose to feel at peace.
 - I can find calm in my body tonight.
 - I release the day and prepare for sleep.
 - Each breath is helping me feel more relaxed.
- Reclaiming the hum
 - Focus your attention on the centre of your belly, behind your navel.
 - Breathe in and out, deeply and slowly a few times. Feel your belly pull the air all the way down into it.
 - On the fourth or fifth exhalation, hum a low, even tone.
 - Inhale naturally and repeat this a few times, varying your pitch with each new exhalation.
 - Do this for 2-3 minutes.
 - Then stop and ask: What has changed from before you started humming? What has stayed the same? What does your body want to do now? Just take notice.

• Slow Rocking

Rocking your body can be a very helpful way of finding calm when trying to sleep as it is a way of bringing the body into a space of calm and peace.

- Get comfortable. Take a few deep breaths. Slowly rock your upper body from side to side or forward and back.
- If you like, play or hum a slow soothing tune and rock to its beat.

- You can stand or sit, rock side to side or forward and back at different speeds (always slow). Discover what feels best.
- When you're done, stop and notice what your body is experiencing.

If you are feeling alone

Traumatic experiences can feel very lonely and isolating, like we are the only ones experiencing this. But every person experiences overwhelm and traumatic experiences, some more than others. We can often reconnect to hope when we are with others. Finding a community of people who may share your experience, who care about you, and who talk to, or just be around can be very helpful healing.

We heal in relationships. So, a good support network is the most powerful healing tool for trauma. Relief and support can come from spending time with other people.

Think about the opportunities around for you to heal in a collective space. It could be an NGO, a faith community, volunteering, learning a new language, creative spaces where you can dance, paint, make, chant, move and heal through music. When you're ready, there is a community out there that is willing to hear, listen, connect and be with you.

We hope that you find these exercises useful. Try them to see which are best for you (maybe you already know some others too!). Remember each person is different so we will all have our own ways of regulating. Our brains learn quickly and the more often we do activities to calm ourselves, the more they will help.

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