

Breathing Space

15 Practical Tools to Restore Inner Calm

By Laura Hughes BFRP, DipCOT



Introduction

Your mind and imagination are powerful and these techniques put them to good use. They help reduce stress by

- expressing your emotions in non-abusive ways
- shifting your awareness from internal to external or vice versa
- breaking spiralling or repetitive thought patterns
- encouraging a different perspective
- developing agency
- bringing back a little bit of enjoyment and humour

Tips:

1. Practice them before you need them.
2. Use them at the first signs of stress and emotional discomfort. It's easier to melt a snowball than an avalanche.
3. When your favourite one seems to stop working, don't worry, this is quite normal. As you change, things that once suited you don't any more, so try a different one, tweak your favourite one, or find/create new ones of your own.



For Immediate Effect

1. Cardboard

For when you are angry and want to get rid of that energy simply and safely.

Get a bit of unwanted cardboard, packaging or newspaper and rip it up. Really get into it, expend all that energy. You might just find that you end up laughing.

This exercise can be exhausting. Get your breath, drink some water and have a snack if you need to.

2. Cloud Watching

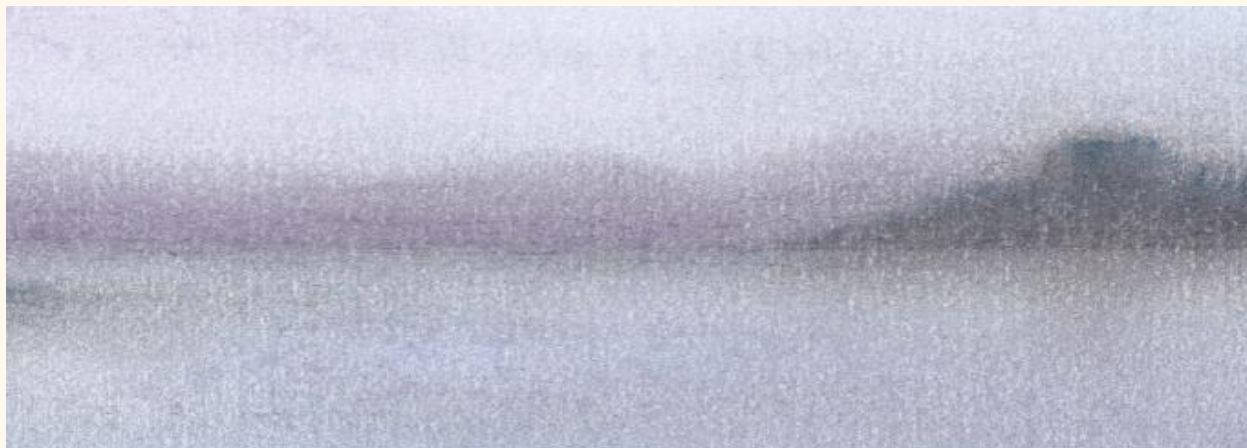
This can help you get from one moment to the next. Doing it outdoors is best but doing it indoors is fine too.

Simply remind yourself that just as the clouds are constantly changing and shifting, so does life and the situation you are currently in.

3. Earth View

For when you want to get things in perspective.

Imagine you are on the moon looking at planet Earth. See how tiny humans and their individual problems are?



4. Listen

For when you are stuck in your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations and want to shift your focus.

Listen to everything you can hear around you: sounds nearby, in the middle distance and far away. Try not to think about what's causing the sound, just hear the sound start, continue and stop. This exercise can be done on the hoof and also scaled up into a full meditation if you have the time and inclination.

5. Half Smile

Everybody knows that smiling is good for you (and others) but there are times when full-on smiling is farthest from your mind.

If your spirits need lifting and your jaw needs to relax, take a leaf out of the Mona Lisa's book or follow Buddha's example, and make a half smile. See if you can make it reach your eyes and feel a sense of peace.

6. Ragdoll

For when your muscles are tense and you want to relax.

Turn yourself momentarily into a ragdoll. By this I mean quickly relax all your muscles in your body so you feel soft and floppy. You might find that you do physically flop a bit or slouch. If you do, keep that feeling of softness in your muscles as you sit up tall again, keeping your shoulders down.



7. Silent Scream

For when you are feeling het up, frustrated or angry and can't let off steam.

Imagine you are opening your mouth wide and screaming all that emotion out. You can do this out loud too, scream into a pillow or in your car in a quiet spot but doing it silently means you can do it anywhere, exactly when you need to.

8. Song

Think of a song, not any old song but one which always cheers you up, gets your foot tapping and feeling like dancing. This is now your theme tune.

Sing it when your spirits need a lift or you want to distract yourself in the moment. Singing silently is just as effective (e.g. in the dentist's chair). It works best with a song you know really well and I encourage you to sing not just the chorus or melody but all the words, the intro, guitar solo and all the instruments too. If classical music is more your thing, it still works.

9. Change Buses

For when you want to break the circle of unwanted, repetitive thoughts.

Imagine that your thoughts are like buses. Some have pleasant destinations, others have unpleasant destinations. As with real buses, they often all come along at once and it's easy to get on a thought-bus going in the wrong direction but it's not a problem. When you realise you're on the wrong thought-bus, simply hop off and get on the thought-bus going in the right direction.



For Longer Contemplation

10. Art Brut

Art brut or “raw art” is the primitive, naive art made by untrained artists who stay away from the traditional and don’t have visual preconceptions. When the painting/drawing comes directly from your inner needs then raw art is created.

Here are two ways to get around that feeling of having to make something look like something: try using the pen/pencil/brush/crayon/lipstick(!) in your non-dominant hand or even between your toes. Draw or paint when you are most tense, angry, tired or rushed. The aim is to express yourself uncensored, not to make the perfect image.

11. Cinema Review

For when you are replaying an event over and over again, and wish you weren’t.

Imagine you are alone in a cosy cinema. Now replay the situation on the screen in front of you.

When the scene comes to an end, instead of replaying it, watch the image get smaller and further away until there is nothing but a pinprick of light on the screen and that too, just disappears. The lights come up and you leave the cinema unburdened.

12. Haiku

Write a haiku. It’s a short Japanese poem with just three lines that don’t rhyme. The first line has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables and the third line has five



syllables. Any topic... what you can see in front of you, your favourite food, anything at all.

13. Safe Haven

For when you're overwhelmed by thoughts/feelings/people/situations when you're shopping/doing errands where you live.

Find a safe haven in your town/city which you can retreat to, relax, regroup and then when you feel able, step out again.

14. Scales of Stress

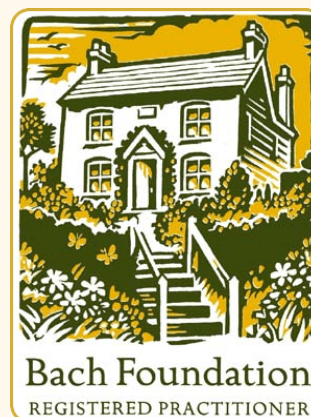
When you have something stressful to do, weigh it up on the scales of stress. The idea is that when you've done that stressful thing, you do something equal or more pleasurable and relaxing so balancing the scales of stress.

15. Sit-Com

For when you are taking something too seriously and would like to lighten the mood and even be able to laugh about it.

Try turning the situation you are mulling over into a scene from your favourite sit-com. How would the characters behave and respond if the situation was written for laughs? For me, I turn situations into Seinfeld moments but choose anything that clicks with your sense of humour.

About Laura



I show artists who are stressed and overwhelmed how to find more calm and confidence so they can keep doing the work they love.

My consultations and bespoke flower essence blends are available on a sliding scale of fees.

I'm a registered Bach flower practitioner, occupational therapist and multidisciplinary artist.

Find out more and contact me: www.flowerremedies.co.uk



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