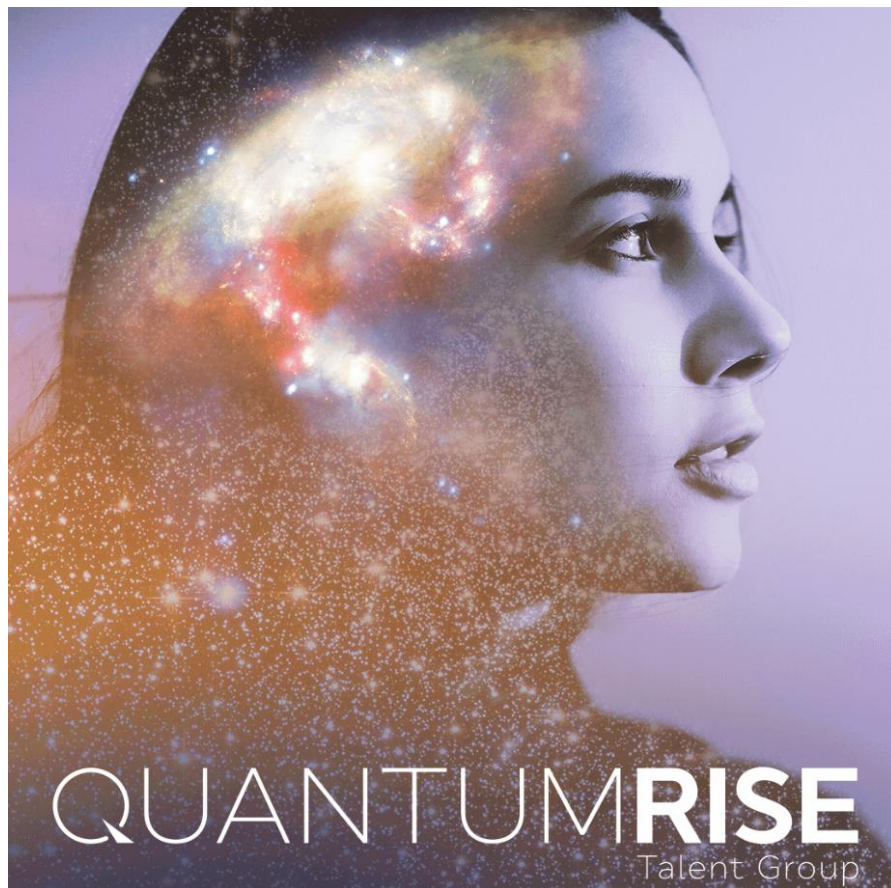


Techniques to Help You Relax and Manage How You Feel



Registered Business Address: 85 Great Portland Street, London, UK, W1W 7LT

UK Provider Registration Number: 10088345 | Companies House Registration: 13232929 | VAT Registration Number: 373686555

Positive Self Talk

Positive statements encourage us and help us cope through distressing times. We can say these encouraging words to ourselves and be our own personal coach. We have all survived some very distressing times, and we can use those experiences to encourage us through current difficulties. Examples of coping thoughts might be:

- Stop, and breathe, I can do this
- This will pass and won't last forever
- I can be anxious/angry/sad and still deal with this
- I have done this before, and I can do it again
- This feels bad, it's a normal body reaction – it will pass
- This feels bad, and feelings are very often wrong
- These are just feelings, they will go away
- Short term pain for long term gain
- I can feel bad and still choose to take a new and healthy direction
- I don't need to rush, I can take things slowly
- I have survived before, I will survive now
- It's okay to feel this way, it's a normal reaction
- Right now, I am not in danger. Right now, I'm safe
- My mind is not always my friend
- Thoughts are just thoughts – they're not necessarily true or factual
- This is difficult and uncomfortable, but it's only temporary
- Keep calm and carry on

- 5 things I can see**
- 4 things I can hear**
- 3 things I can touch**
- 2 things I can smell or like the smell of**
- 1 slow and deep breath**

The Emergency Bag or Box

When we are very distressed, it is difficult to think rationally and to decide how to help ourselves. We can therefore resort to using self-destructive behaviours which may help at that moment but can cause other problems later and in the long-term. It can be useful to keep an 'Emergency' or 'Soothe' bag or box, in a prominent and handy place, so that when you feel overwhelmingly distressed, you can go to your bag/box and find something that will help you cope and/or feel better.

You can use any bag or box or other container and decorate it as you wish. Collect items that are meaningful, or you know will be helpful. If you cannot put the item in the bag or box, then perhaps use a reminder of the item, for example, a picture. Include items that will help soothe all your senses:

- Vision: photo album, book or magazine, a picture of a beautiful safe place, reminder for funny or inspiring YouTube video, walk or sit in the park or garden, guided meditation
- Hearing: soothing or inspiring music, recordings of a friend's voice, reminder of phone numbers to ring, a talking book.
- Smell or taste: oils, sweets or chocolate (or nice healthy alternative!), favourite perfume, a sachet of coffee or ready prepared cake mix.
- Touch: soft woolly socks or blanket, teddy bear, comforter or grounding object, hand or foot lotion, massage oil, warm bubble bath, nail varnish, make-up

When you use these items, or whatever you do, pay attention to your physical senses: see, hear, smell or taste, and touch. Look around you and notice what you see (colours, shapes, light or shadow, movement), what you hear (nature sounds, sounds in the room, near and far), what you smell or taste (including from the environment around you), and what you can touch – right now, wherever you are as well as items from your emergency bag/box.

Nourishing Activities

When we start to feel depressed or low, we tend to neglect the nourishing activities which usually help us feel better and try to keep doing those which we really have to do – which further deplete and exhaust us. We then feel even worse, so do even less.

Even if we can't reduce the depleting activities, we can aim to find a healthier balance by:

- Increasing the amount of nourishing activities
- Learning to see our depleting activities in a new way

It can help to write down two lists of your normal daily activities

- A typical work / week day
- A typical day off / weekend day

Be sure to write down everything you can think of, including getting up, getting dressed, showering, eating breakfast etc. Then look back at your list, and decide which activities nourish you, and which deplete you, then indicate with an N or D next to each item on your list.

Nourishing activities:

- o Lift mood
- o Increase energy
- o Help you feel calm and centred

Depleting activities:

- o Lower mood
- o Drain energy
- o Increase stress and tension

You might find that some activities are not so clearly 'either-or', but sometimes nourishing and sometimes depleting – depending on the meaning that we give them at that time.

Upper Body Tension Release

This exercise is a very effective exercise to release tension in the upper body, neck, shoulders and let go of frustration. As you breathe out, it stimulates the circulation of oxygen throughout your body, freeing the thorax from tension. You can do it in the kitchen, bathroom or in the office if you don't mind being around people whilst doing it.

- Close your eyes, notice your body position, let go of unnecessary tension, drop your shoulders and unclench your jaw.
- Become aware of your neck, shoulders, arms and hands. Feel the shape and volume. Breathe out profoundly, breath in, and gently contract your shoulders and arms, leaving the rest of the body completely relaxed. Hold your breath, shake your shoulders up and down gently, notice the build-up of tension and breathe out slowly, relax your arms and hands, drop your shoulders.
- Repeat 3 times. If you want, you can imagine that you are throwing your stress on the floor as you breathe out. Allow yourself to cleanse your body from those unproductive feelings.
- Listen to how you are feeling, notice body sensation. Take a few deep breathes, move your body and open your eyes to come back into the room.

Waiting = Relaxing

Every time you find yourself waiting (at the bus stop, post office, boiling the kettle) take this as an opportunity to relax. Drop your shoulders, unclench your jaw. Relax your body from head to toe and let go of any unnecessary tension. Connect to your breathing, notice the movements of your chest and abdomen. Allow yourself to relax and let go a little bit more every time you breathe out.

Breathing Exercises

When freediving, national champion Tanc Sade isn't holding his breath—which he can do for more than seven minutes—he's doing the same thing we all are: breathing.

Except Sade, who recently broke a national record with a 218-meter swim on a single breath, knows just a little bit more about how the air our body takes in affects us.

"Breathing is something we do all day, every day, but few do it correctly," he says. "Most people shallow breathe—half-breaths that go no deeper than the chest. Diaphragmatic breathing is a simple way to relieve stress, lower your heart rate and blood pressure, and leave yourself revitalized to carry on with your day."

Even more: It could boost your performance. Studies have found that when your breathing muscles fatigue, so do your other muscles. The good news is that strengthening your lungs could be as easy as a few deep breaths every now and then. Here are three exercises that promise to breathe a calm strength into every aspect of your life:

Deep and Shallow Breathing

The exercise: Sit in a chair or lie on a mat. Place one hand on your chest and take a deep breath into your hand. Now place the same hand at your stomach's base and take a deep breath. Focus on getting your stomach to push your hand up while your chest remains still. Repeat for 6 to 8 breaths, then combine the chest and belly breaths together. Imagine you're pouring water into a well.

The benefits: Maximizes oxygen and opens the lungs. Tight muscles and tissue surrounding the ribs aren't a good recipe for an aerobic workout—but deep breathing can help loosen them up.

Breathe Out Stress

The exercise: Take a big, slow inhale. Hold it for three seconds, then, placing your top front teeth on your bottom lip, release a passive exhale. Your exhale should take at least twice as long as your inhale. At the bottom of the exhale, pause for a moment, then repeat.

The benefits: This slows down your heart rate, so it's helpful in stressful, anxiety-inducing situations. "I employ a similar technique before I'm about to compete," Sade says. "It settles the mind, slows down your heart rate, and relaxes you."

Release Tension

The exercise: Lie down on the floor and combine the two exercises above. Close your eyes and on every exhale focus on relaxing a part of your body, starting from your feet and working your way up to your forehead.

The benefits: It's good for "channelling where you use your energy," Sade says. When you're tense, you use more energy than you need to. "With time, you'll learn to locate where you're carrying tension and relax." That's important considering that constant tension can contribute to migraines, back pain, and chronic fatigue.

Mindful Breathing

The primary goal of mindful breathing is simply a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.

- Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
- Bring your attention to your breathing.
- Imagine that you have a balloon in your tummy. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates. Notice the sensations in your abdomen as the balloon inflates and

deflates. Your abdomen rising with the in-breath and falling with the out-breath.

- Thoughts will come into your mind, and that's okay, because that's just what the human mind does. Simply notice those thoughts, and then bring your attention back to your breathing.
- Likewise, you can notice sounds, physical feelings, and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- You don't have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don't judge yourself for having them, or analyse them in any way. It's okay for the thoughts to be there. Just notice those thoughts, and let them drift on by, bringing your attention back to your breathing.
- Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.

It's okay and natural for thoughts to enter your awareness, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.



Therapeutic Writing

Writing is often therapeutic, such as using thought record sheets and mood or activity diaries. Additional techniques that involve writing may be helpful at times. There are many benefits to writing, including 'getting it out of our head', seeing things from another perspective or externalising the problem – perhaps even just putting words on paper seems to really help.

Rainy Day Letter to Self

Some people find it helpful, when they are feeling well and able to cope with daily life, to write a letter to themselves, to read when they're not feeling so good, or are struggling to cope. The well, stable and strong you, writes a letter to the more vulnerable you.

If you don't feel you're ever in a good enough place to write a letter in this way, you could try imagining that you are feeling well, strong and able to cope, or perhaps older and wiser, and write a letter from the future to your present more vulnerable self, offering guidance and support for how to get to that better place.

You might decide that you can read this letter at certain times, when you're feeling a certain way, or when you're struggling with particularly dark thoughts.

In your letter, include:

- What helps you feel better at those times
- What you've found that helped in the past
- Guidance on what you need to do (e.g. talk to someone, do something, be with others)
- Advice on what not to do – as you know from experience that it doesn't help you in the long run
- Your personal strengths and resources
- What you need to know at that time – "I understand, I've been there, I care, others care – even though it might feel like they don't, you can get

through this, you've done it before, remind yourself to use particular techniques to help get you through, it will pass"

- Be compassionate, caring, supportive, understanding, encouraging to your vulnerable self

Writing your story

It can often be helpful to write down what's happened to you, either over your lifespan, or perhaps a particular distressing memory. Take some time, when you won't be disturbed, and write down everything you can remember about that time. Get it all on paper. Once it's there, you might choose to re-arrange it so that it reads like a chronological story, as it happened. You might choose to write it as a story, or in note form, using bullet points with a brief description. The more you write the better. You can build it up over time.

Describe the circumstances, the ages and size of people involved. Perhaps consider the bigger picture – what was going on not only for you but for others involved too. Describe what you felt, thought and did at that time.

Letters to others

Sometimes it's helpful to write a letter to others, perhaps about what you really think or feel about them or what they did that hurt you so much, or to express how much you appreciate someone, or want to say sorry, or that you want to forgive. You might want to wait a while, and perhaps discuss with your therapist or a wise friend, before deciding whether it's a good idea to actually send the letter (if the person is still alive and known to you), or you might choose to deal with it differently.

Some people find it helpful to (go outside and) burn the letter, watching the smoke rise up, particularly if the person has died. Or just imagine the letter arriving at its destination, the person reading it, and seeing the reaction you want them to have. Or maybe it's enough just to have written it, so another option may be shredding it, or watching it slowly disintegrate whilst soaking in water.

The Mind Dump

It can be helpful to just write down whatever comes into our heads, perhaps for a certain period of time – 10 minutes or half an hour. It may read as nonsense, and that's okay. That's how our minds work. Write down all the random, apparently nonsensical words and sentences, anything that comes to mind. You might include brief descriptions or sketches of any images that come to mind. Don't change or edit anything. Simply write.

Keep a notepad with you

If you have trouble sleeping, it can be useful to have a notepad and pen or pencil on your bedside table, so you can jot down any worries that come to mind and tell yourself you can deal with or pay attention to them in the morning. Carrying a notepad in your handbag or pocket means you can write down anything, anytime.

You can write, whatever you want to write, every day, or whenever you need to, your thoughts, feelings, responses. These can be intensely private, what you wouldn't share with anyone else. Write at times when you feel just okay, when you feel great, and times when you're really distressed or struggling to cope. It helps to put things in perspective, get it out of your head and onto paper (or on a computer), and means you can look back on it at another time, if that would be helpful – to see how you coped, that things can and will be better, that you can survive, that this will pass.

