

EMDR Care Package

Information, Tips, and Supportive Resources for
Your EMDR Journey



We understand that starting EMDR Therapy can feel nerve-wracking for many people, and the process can feel emotionally challenging at times. That's why we've put together this care pack for clients beginning their EMDR journey. It is designed to support you through the process and help you get the most out of it. Please don't hesitate to talk to your therapist if you would like to know more about anything mentioned in this pack or if you have any questions at any time throughout the process.

You might also find it helpful to check out more information about EMDR Therapy (including Attachment-Informed EMDR, Polyvagal Informed EMDR and using Parts-Work with EMDR) @ www.heartoftherapy.com.au/emdr-therapy.

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Introduction

Practising good self-care throughout your course of EMDR Therapy can maximise the benefits of this powerful therapeutic process and further support your recovery and well-being. Even when you feel ready and prepared, it's natural to feel a bit nervous about starting your EMDR journey. Remember, you're not alone on this journey— we will be there for you every step of the way.

Tips for Self-Care and Coping Between EMDR Sessions

Engaging in pastimes, hobbies and other self-care activities that bring comfort, relaxation, fun, and joy is not just a luxury but a necessity for maintaining long-term well-being for everyone. It is a powerful tool for relieving the inevitable stress of daily life and nurturing emotional and mental health.

It is also a vital component of trauma recovery and can help you get the most out of your EMDR Therapy journey. It can help you to maintain stability in your mental health and continue to make progress between sessions. The following pages have a bunch of self-care options If you are stuck for ideas.

When your nervous system is out of balance, it can be hard to relax, get restful sleep, or even experience feelings of joy, pleasure, and excitement. These are signs your nervous system needs some extra specialised support. Read about ways to support and balance the nervous system by toning the vagus nerve from pages 10 -11.

- **Give yourself permission to rest.** Your body and mind have done a lot of work. Pay attention to what your body needs. If you feel tired, allow yourself to nap or go to bed early if possible. Eat nourishing foods and drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- **Create a cozy space with soft blankets and pillows,** wear comfortable clothing and surround yourself with things that help you to feel more safe and relaxed.
- **Manage strong emotions by labelling them first**—Research shows that simply identifying and naming our emotions (without trying to change them) can make them easier to tolerate. Labelling can positively impact your brain and reduce distress. Pausing to recognise our feelings engages our observing mind, bringing our prefrontal cortex function online and supporting our nervous system into a calmer state. Many people find an emotion wheel very useful to assist with this.
- **Journal your thoughts and emotions** or any other type of journalling process you prefer. This can be a private space for you to process your experience.



- **Reach out to a trusted friend or family member.** Let someone who makes you feel cared for and understood know how you're feeling, and allow them to offer support. If you don't feel like talking about it, you can also spend time doing something that makes you feel good.
- **Spend time outside if you can.** Get some fresh air and sunshine. Nature can be incredibly soothing. Engaging your five senses while in nature can be nourishing and restorative for your nervous system. Notice what you can see, touch, hear, smell, and taste.
- **A comforting warm cup of tea.** You could take the time to notice your five senses to bring awareness into the present moment (and away from the past or future) and support your nervous system. Take a moment to feel the warmth and texture of the cup in your hands, the warmth and taste of the liquid in your mouth, and smell the aroma of the tea.
- **Spend a few minutes meditating or doing a guided relaxation** exercise such as a light stream meditation, calm place visualisation, container exercise, progressive muscle relaxation, or breathing exercise that you have already practised. You can also try something new from the many available free online. It doesn't matter if you don't have a spare hour or even ten minutes; try two minutes. Every minute can be supportive of your healing.

- **Gratitude practices** can help you appreciate the positive aspects of your life or situation that might be overlooked. They can offer a broader perspective to counteract the brain's tendency to scan for risks, threats or problems. At the end of each day, list three good things that happened and replay them in your mind. You can also try placing visual reminders around your home, such as sticky notes, to prompt you to reflect on what you are grateful for.
- **Rhythm and connection with friends and community** – group classes in rhythmic activity such as drumming, martial arts, dancing, yoga and tai chi are believed to activate the body's innate capacity for regulation and support the healing process. If being in a class situation feels too much for you right now, your nervous system can still benefit from you practising alone.
- **Draw, paint, write or engage in another creative activity.** This can be excellent self-care by allowing emotional release, reducing stress, and supporting mindfulness. It offers a nonverbal outlet for processing feelings and can boost your mood by engaging your creativity.
- **Move your body** in a way that feels good and safe. Do some light stretching, go for a walk, or dance gently or wildly, allowing your body to move how it wants. Include your favourite music or podcast. Or try yoga, which can offer tremendous benefits for anyone recovering from trauma.

- **.Rituals:** For tens of thousands of years, humans have used rituals to help honour significant people, events, losses and transitions. Rituals offer comfort and a safe space for emotions like sadness or anger. They can set a particular experience apart from the ordinary, enhancing its emotional impact, fostering mindfulness, and providing a connection to deeper meanings or traditions. Many cultures and religions have established rituals that can provide an added sense of belonging, but you can also create your own. (See the following page for some ideas)

Some simple ritual ideas include:

- Ritualise self-care exercises, e.g., lighting a candle and playing a special track before writing in your gratitude journal or bathing with essential oils.
- Planting a tree, flower, or garden in memory of your loss as a living tribute that grows and flourishes over time.
- Gather friends or family to share stories and memories. Speaking aloud what a person or experience has meant to you can be cathartic and affirming.
- Write your feelings on paper or in a letter detailing the pain or negative thoughts you want to release. Spend a moment acknowledging these feelings without judgment and then burn or bury it as a symbolic gesture of release or transformation.





Havening: Developed by neuroscientist Dr Ronald Ruden, the Havening technique that uses a comforting touch to create a sense of safety. This touch can be performed by a trusted other or yourself. It is thought to help increase serotonin production, which has a calming effect, but stop the technique if you feel uncomfortable or distressed at any time.

Techniques include:

- Cupping your hands on the cheeks,
- Place a hand across your chest or cross your arms (as if hugging yourself) while gently but noticeably stroking from elbows to shoulder.
- Stroking the palms of your hands and around your eyes to create a sense of well-being and safety.

The Vagus Nerve

and Why Improving Vagal Tone is Important

The importance of the vagus nerve in mental health and trauma recovery is emphasised in Polyvagal Theory, a theory developed by neuroscientist and psychologist Stephen Porges.

The vagus nerve is a cranial nerve and a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system, that helps you return to a state of calm.

Vagal tone refers to how well your vagus nerve is functioning, and can be measured by Heart-Rate Variability. Think of it like the volume on a radio: it can be turned up (high vagal tone) or down (low vagal tone).

High vagal tone – High vagal tone means your vagus nerve is able to keep your body calm, your heart rate steady, and your digestion smooth. People with high vagal tone tend to manage stress better, recover more quickly from stressful situations, and even have stronger social connections.

Low vagal tone – When the vagus nerve is less active, our body's "fight-or-flight" system, the sympathetic nervous system, takes charge. It can make us more anxious, fearful, angry, or irritated. With low vagal tone, we find it harder to handle stress, adapt to changes, and bounce back from challenges. It also becomes more challenging to rest and recharge. The lower our vagal tone, the easier it is to feel overwhelmed. But the good news is that there are ways you can improve your vagal tone over time.

Improving your vagal tone takes time and effort. It won't happen overnight, but consistent practice over time is believed to be very beneficial. It involves gentle stimulation of the vagus nerve pathway through breath, sound, eye movements, self-applied touch, and gentle movements that help you come into balance.

An Easy 2-Minute Exercise to improve vagal tone

THE 5 STEPS

We have found that the more you practice this exercise, the easier it is to self-regulate when faced with stress.

- 1. Start by moving your head as far as you can to the left and then all the way to the right.** You can do this before and after the exercise to measure the impact of it. Most people notice an increased range of movement due to the release of tension in your neck and shoulders. This is one easy way to measure if the exercise is working! Another is if you are activating a relaxation response (yawn, sigh or more swallowing than usual).
- 2. Link your fingers together and place your hands behind your head,** with the weight of your head resting comfortably on your fingers. Lean back in a comfortable position in your seat or lie down.
- 3. Keeping your head in place, look to the right, moving only your eyes as far as you can.** Be sure not to turn your head. After half a minute or a minute, you'll notice yourself swallowing, yawning, or sighing. This is a sign of relaxation. If this doesn't happen automatically, fake a big, long, noisy yawn.
- 4. Keeping your head in place, bring your eyes back to the centre and then move your eyes as far as you can to the left.** Hold your eyes in place until you notice the same signal of relaxation (yawn, sigh or swallowing), this time taking as long as needed for it to happen naturally. If it isn't happening naturally, fake a big, long, noisy yawn until it does. Keep moving your eyes back and forth as described above to continue triggering this calming response.
- 5. Congrats you have completed the exercise! Now see whether it reduced any tension by checking how far to the right and how far to the left you can move your head now.** If there is more mobility, the exercise has effectively relieved tension in your neck and shoulder, and you might experience benefits by practising it regularly. We recommend it at least once per day.

Other Ways to Help Improve Vagal Tone

Don't overwhelm yourself by trying to change too much at once. Perhaps instead, choose one exercise from our suggestions and practice it consistently for 30-60 days before adding another.

- **Breathwork:** Our lungs and diaphragm are connected to the vagus nerve. Focusing on slow, deep breaths massages the vagus nerve and sends a message to our brain that we're safe and it's okay to relax. See further along in this care package for a calming breathing exercise described step-by-step to help with anxiety and sleep.
- **Laughter** stimulates the vagus nerve, and just ten minutes of laughter each day can provide significant benefits for mental health. Try incorporating more comedy into your life, taking a laughing yoga class, or practising laughing meditation.
- **Cold exposure:** Research shows that cold exposure can activate the vagus nerve and improve vagal tone. Some people use ice baths, but it isn't necessary. Applying ice, icepack or cold water to the back of the neck or under the eye area can be especially helpful. Add 30 seconds of cold water to your shower, or dip your face in a bowl of ice water. It is essential to consult your doctor before trying cold exposure if you have any medical conditions.
- **Humming, chanting, and singing.** The vagus nerve connects with our vocal cords and throat muscles. One research study found that chanting "om" can reduce activity in the brain's limbic centre, which handles emotions and threats.

- Mindfulness and meditation can improve vagal tone. Structured relaxation exercises like Progressive Muscle Relaxation can also train your body to recognise and respond to stress by relaxing.
- Massage can be a great way to boost vagal tone. When done mindfully, it stimulates the vagus nerve and increases oxytocin, the bonding hormone.
- Movement and exercise: Activities like vigorous walking, running, weightlifting, yoga, tai-chi and somatic movement are also ways to improve vagal tone.
- Other Calming Touch: We love these guided touch exercises by Kyle Pool that are believed to engage the vagus nerve directly. [.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Sec_i-QxB4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Sec_i-QxB4).



Silencing the Alarm: The "alarm" in this context refers to the body's automatic fight, flight, or freeze reactions that are triggered by perceived threats or reminders of past trauma. The gentle, repetitive motion of "Silencing the Alarm" helps to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the body's "rest and digest" state. This can help reduce the fight, flight, or freeze response that often accompanies anxiety or trauma. By engaging in this self-soothing touch, you signal to your body that it is safe, helping to quiet the internal "alarm" that might be triggered by stress or reminders of past trauma.

You can watch a demonstration at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZEBsLkvtBo>

How to Perform the Technique:

1. Begin by using one hand to stroke across your forehead gently.
2. Slowly move your hand behind your ear, along the side of your neck.
3. Continue the motion down over the shoulder on the same side of your body.
4. Repeat on the Other Side

Focus on the sensations under your hand as you perform these soothing strokes. Notice the feeling of your skin, the warmth of your touch, and the gentle pressure. Continue this back-and-forth motion until you feel your nervous system calming down.



Why Breathwork, and How to Do It.

Our lungs and diaphragm are directly connected to the vagus nerve. When we breathe deeply and consciously, we massage the vagus nerve, which sends signals to the brain that we are safe and allowed to relax. Slow, deep breathing helps to soothe anxiety, re-focus the mind, and ground the body. Similarly, if you're feeling low energy or shut down, breathing exercises that use quick and shallow breathing are thought to be a great way to create the activation you need.

- There are many different types of breathing exercises available online through various apps and platforms. What is most helpful is dependent on a number of factors. Experiment with a few types at different times and notice what you prefer.

To centre yourself and help activate a relaxation response:

- **Breathe in for a count of 4,**
- **Hold your breath for a count of 2**
- **Breathe out for a count of 6, extending the length of the breaths as much as you can comfortably while keeping the exhale longer than the inhale. Pause for a count of 2 before starting again.**

Or try the step-by-step guide to a breathing exercise on the following page. *It includes tips for when staying focused on the exercise is difficult.*

A Guided Breathing Exercise for Helping With Stress, Anxiety, and Sleep.

On the following page is a step-by-step guide for a breathing exercise proven to release brain chemicals that reduce anxiety and promote deep relaxation and sleep



- Find a comfy sitting position, and feel free to have something like a pillow or weighted blanket on your lap if pressure helps you to feel calmer. Take a few breaths, and for these first few breaths, make no attempt to control or count them; allow yourself to settle into the exercise.
- If you can't stop thinking about a problem or worry you'll forget an idea, write it down to address later or use the container visualisation to help put it aside for now. This will help you refocus your mind.
- Next, breathe through your nose in long, slow, deep inhalations followed by extended, controlled, and even exhalations. Take the first few breaths to adjust, and then start counting with each out-breath. Aim for forty long breaths, but even a few can help you relax.
- As you breathe, notice your diaphragm's movement and your belly rising and falling. Emphasise these movements and stretch your diaphragm.
- Identify where you're holding tension. If visuals help, imagine a colour for these areas and see the stress melting away as you focus on your breath.

If you get distracted during the breathing exercise, try making it more engaging. As you inhale, imagine drawing the number of each breath on a whiteboard and then circling it. As you exhale, imagine erasing the number. This helps to keep your mind more focused, but if your mind does wander, please don't be hard on yourself—it's natural (that is what minds do!). With consistent practice, it becomes easier. Focus is like a muscle you can build by simply practising, bringing your attention back to the exercise again and again (the last number you remember).

- With each out-breath, consciously relax your neck, shoulders, or back a bit more. You can move your neck to the right and left, rotate your shoulders to loosen them, or move any other way your body seems to want to.

Reaching Out For Support

When navigating the journey of trauma healing, it's important to remember that you don't have to go it alone. Reaching out for support—whether from a trusted friend, family, a support group, or a helpline—can provide guidance, comfort, and perspective.

If anything arises between EMDR Therapy appointments that feels unmanageable for you, it is important to let your therapist know. Your therapist will give you instructions for contacting them between sessions if the need arises during an EMDR course of treatment.

For immediate emotional or mental health support, the following services are available (most are available 24 hrs, 7 days, and via phone and web chat)

- Beyond Blue – 1300 224 636
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467
- 1800 Respect – 1800 737 732
- Blue Knot Helpline – 1300 657 380
- Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800
- Mensline – 1300 789 978
- Qlife – 1800 184 527
- Emergency – 000, or contact your local mental health crisis support team by calling your local hospital.

An Important Word on Grief and Loss for EMDR Clients

*“Healing involves discomfort.
But so is refusing to heal.
And over time, refusing to heal is more painful.”
~Resmaa Menakem*

As traumatic memories are processed through the EMDR process, you may experience a deep sense of loss for what you endured, missed, or had to give up. Emotional pain, including deep sadness and anger associated with grief and loss, is possible.

This grief is a natural part of the healing process, and although it can feel deeply painful, experiencing it during EMDR Therapy can be a positive sign that you are making progress.

Allowing yourself to experience and express grief, whether through talking, crying, journaling, movement, or ritual, is crucial for emotional healing and overall well-being.

Suppressed grief can cause many issues down the track. It may manifest as anxiety, depression, or chronic stress and contribute to physical ailments such as headaches, fatigue, or digestive problems. Unaddressed grief can resurface later in more intense or disruptive ways, making it even harder to manage.

Childhood trauma – Grief and Loss

People who have endured childhood trauma often experience grief and loss. Children deal with many losses through death, divorce, and separation through abandonment or illness. Grief can also stem from various other sources, such as the loss of a safe and secure childhood, unmet emotional needs, or the loss of trust in caregivers or the world around them. You may grieve the innocence and sense of safety that were taken from you, the relationships that were damaged, or the opportunities for healthy development that were disrupted.

This grief can be complex as it often intertwines with feelings of anger, fear, and confusion. Processing these feelings is a crucial part of healing from childhood trauma, and you don't have to do it alone. This is something your therapist can support you with.

Coping With Grief During EMDR Therapy Treatment

- Be patient with yourself; healing takes time, and there's no right or wrong way to grieve or an acceptable timeline for the grief process. Everyone grieves differently; allow your grief process to unfold naturally, and be as kind to yourself as you can through it.
- Practice self-compassion and accept your grief as a natural response to loss. It's okay to feel sadness, anger, confusion, or even numbness (.Learn some tips on self-compassion (pg. 24) in this self-care package if being kind to yourself doesn't come easily).
- Denying, avoiding, minimising or invalidating grief doesn't help it. If it isn't accepted and processed, it may manifest as anxiety, depression, chronic stress or contribute to various physical health conditions.



- Establish a gentle daily routine of activities that comfort and ground you, like taking walks, journaling, or engaging in a favourite hobby. If you are stuck for ideas, read the self-care tips (pg. 15) in this care package and pick whatever most resonate. More vigorous exercise or movement can be helpful for strong anger. Listen to your body and move in a way that it wants to.
- Reach out to friends or family who are good at making you feel heard and understood. Sharing your feelings can feel supportive. It can also be grounding and comforting to spend time with someone who makes you feel cared about.
- Grieving can be exhausting, so give yourself permission to rest and take breaks.
- Find ways to remember and honour what you've lost, whether through rituals, creating a memorial, or simply reflecting. You can read more about creating your own rituals on pg. 19.



Self-Compassion For Trauma Recovery – An Essential Component of Healing

- When you've not had your emotional needs met as a child or experienced trauma, it's common to internalise harsh or critical messages about yourself, which can lead to negative self-beliefs. You might think you're unworthy, unlovable, weak, or broken. These beliefs can make it difficult to recognise that you deserve love, support, and respect. Reclaiming a compassionate inner voice allows you to identify and challenge these unhelpful narratives, encouraging you to speak to yourself with kindness and understanding.
- At the most basic level, self-compassion requires us to be good friends with ourselves. Self-compassion allows us to navigate life's challenges with greater emotional resilience and well-being. Studies have shown that self-compassion is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms.

Why is Self-Compassion So Difficult?

- Many people are not aware of the concept of self-compassion or how to practice it because no one has modelled it, taught it or encouraged it.
- Many cultures and societies emphasise self-reliance, perfectionism, and the pursuit of success in an unbalanced way. This encourages self-criticism and discourages self-compassion. Some people fear self-compassion will lead to complacency or self-indulgence, mistakenly believing that self-criticism is necessary for motivation and improvement.
- Individuals who have experienced trauma or adverse events internalise negative messages about themselves, making self-compassion feel unnatural or difficult.

Understanding Shame and Self-Loathing

The Survival Mechanism That Can Be the Biggest Block to Self-Compassion.

- Some people have an entrenched shame response that makes practicing self-compassion very difficult. This pattern is often accompanied by self-blame and self-loathing. It can originate as a survival strategy adopted by the brain during childhood to prevent you from doing or saying something that others might punish, attack, reject, or abandon you for. The brain designed it to protect you from these repercussions because, at some point in time, your safety and survival depended on it. This process operates subconsciously, and most people are unaware that their brain is doing it to protect and keep them safe.
- For example, you might hear a thought or voice in your head that says, “Shut up, stupid; you have nothing useful to say.” This harsh and untrue internal message is your brain’s strategy to silence you, reducing the risk of punishment, rejection, or abandonment. In loving, safe, and skilled families, speaking up doesn’t endanger your safety or risk abandonment or rejection. However, in some families, it can, and for victims of domestic or family violence and abuse, this strategy can be essential for survival. Understandably, it can be frightening to consider giving up this strategy when it has played a crucial role in keeping you safe.
- Unfortunately, these protective messages from your brain become encoded in your body and mind, eventually feeling deeply true. This survival strategy can continue to influence your self-esteem and assertiveness long after it has outlived its usefulness, persisting many years after the traumatic experiences are over.
- As a result, shame, as an entrenched protective mechanism, can block self-compassion and is difficult to overcome without specialized therapeutic support. Please try not to be even harder on yourself if you struggle to break this pattern. It’s entirely understandable that it’s challenging! Over time, your therapist can help you change it.

Tips for Practising Self-Compassion

- Notice when your inner critic is active. Instead of identifying with it, observe what it has to say and replace the harsh self-talk with kind and supportive phrases that are more accurate than the ones you are currently saying to yourself. Treat yourself as you would treat a friend in a similar situation. Or observe the self-critical thoughts as if they were leaves on a stream, letting them go as they pass by.
- If kindness towards yourself feels too difficult due to shame or self-hatred, a small but powerful step in practising self-compassion is tuning into yourself during painful moments and simply acknowledging the difficulty. “This is difficult”.
- You can also try accepting your thoughts and feelings without making them wrong, suppressing them, or over-identifying with them.



- Write a letter to yourself or your younger self, expressing understanding and compassion for your struggles. Offer yourself empathy, validation, encouragement and support.
- Understand that nobody is perfect. Allow yourself to make mistakes and recognise them as opportunities for growth. Instead of focusing on what you may have done wrong, think about what you can learn from the experience or what you did well.
- Remember that others struggle and experience pain similar to you. Reflect on this shared human experience to reduce feelings of isolation and shame, or join groups or communities where people share their similar struggles to reinforce the idea that you are not alone.



Compassionate Statements to Repeat to Yourself During Hard Times .

- “It’s natural to feel overwhelmed sometimes. I’ll take a break and give myself the care I need.”
- “It’s okay to feel hurt. This is a difficult situation, and having these emotions is normal.”
- “I can take small steps towards creating a healthy and meaningful life.”
- “I am free to disregard other people’s judgements of me.”
- “I am deserving of kindness and compassion.”
- “I am human, and it is okay to feel the way I do.”
- “I am doing the best I can with what I have right now, and that’s enough.”
- “I made a mistake, but that’s okay. Everyone makes mistakes. What can I learn from this?”
- “I am not alone in this. Others have felt this way before, too.”
- “This setback is tough, but it doesn’t define me. I’m capable of learning and improving.”
- “Criticism is hard to hear, but it doesn’t diminish my worth. I’ll consider the feedback and continue to grow.”
- “I’m feeling doubtful, but I’ve overcome challenges before. I’ll take it one step at a time.”
- “My body deserves kindness and respect. I’ll focus on what my body can do and take care of it.”
- “I’m struggling with motivation right now. I’ll break tasks into smaller steps and be patient with myself.”
- “This is a tough time for me. I’ll do my best to take care of myself and seek the help I need.”
- “Conflicts are a part of relationships. I’ll communicate openly and learn from this experience.”

Following are examples of negative self-talk to look out for and self talk to replace it with

SELF-CRITICAL

SELF-COMPASSIONATE

Mistakes and Failures

I'm such a failure; I can't do anything right.

Everyone makes mistakes, and that's okay. I'm learning and growing from this experience, and I'm doing the best I can.

I'm so stupid for making that mistake

It's okay to make mistakes; they are opportunities to learn. I'm not stupid—I'm human, and I'm growing with every experience.

I always mess things up; nothing I do is right.

It's okay to have setbacks; it doesn't mean I'm a failure. I will focus on the things I've done well and learn from the things I want to improve.

I should have known better; I'm so irresponsible

It's okay that I didn't know then what I know now. I'm learning and growing, and I will make better choices in the future

Self-Worth and Value

"I'll never be good enough; I don't deserve success.

I am enough just as I am, and I deserve to pursue my goals. Success is a journey, and I'm on the right path

No one likes me; I'm not worth anyone's time

My worth isn't determined by others' opinions. I am valuable and deserving of love and connection, just like everyone else

I'm too flawed to be loved

Everyone has flaws; they make us human. I am worthy of love and acceptance just as I am.

SELF-CRITICAL

SELF-COMPASSIONATE

Emotions and Struggles

It shouldn't feel this way; I am weak for struggling

It's normal to have difficult emotions, and they don't make me weak. It's okay to feel this way, and I will be kind to myself as I work through them.

I'm a terrible person for feeling this way

It's natural to feel overwhelmed sometimes. I'll take a break and give myself the care I need.

This is a tough time for me. I'll do my best to take care of myself and seek the help I need

I'll never get better; I'm stuck like this

Feelings are a natural part of being human, and they don't make me a bad person. I will treat myself with kindness and understanding.

Healing takes time, and it's okay to move at my own pace. I've overcome challenges before, and I can keep going

I'm such a burden to others; they would be better off without me

My struggles don't define my value. I deserve support, and the people who care about me want to help. I'm not a burden

Productivity and Responsibility

I'm so lazy; I should be doing more

It's okay to need rest. My worth isn't measured by how much I do. I'm taking care of myself, and that's important

I'm such a failure; I can't do anything right

Everyone makes mistakes, and that's okay. I'm learning and growing from this experience, and I'm doing the best I can

I'm so stupid for making that mistake

It's okay to make mistakes; they are opportunities to learn. I'm not stupid—I'm human, and I'm growing with every experience

Self-Compassion as a Body-Centred Practice

Practising self-compassion as an embodiment practice can be incredibly powerful.

One way to do this is by placing your hands on your head, throat, chest, or belly. Simply touching these areas can help reduce stress hormones, lower your heart rate and blood pressure, and boost feel-good chemicals like oxytocin, GABA, and serotonin. These are the same chemicals that make babies feel safe and loved when they're with their caregivers.

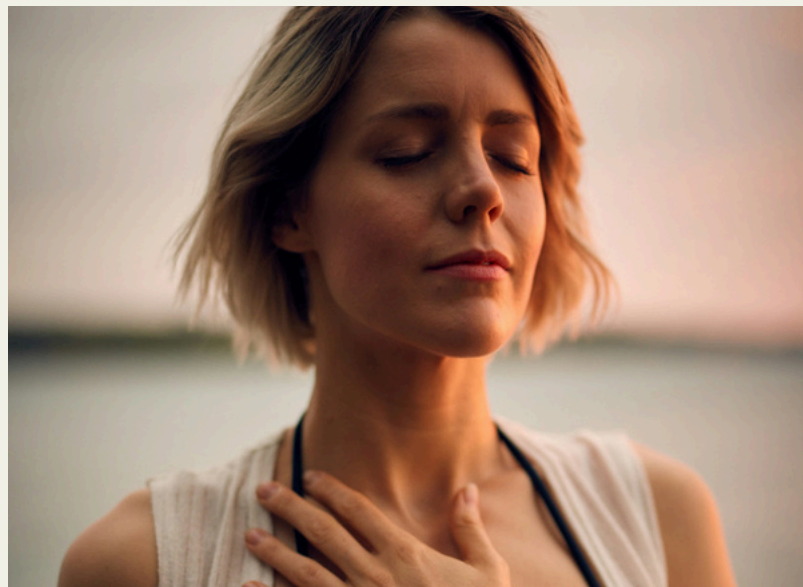
On the following page are some exercises that provide an opportunity to try strengthening positive and affirming beliefs about yourself while practising embodied self-compassion.

These simple yet powerful practices can help you connect with yourself on a deeper level, anchoring feelings of self-acceptance, loving-kindness, and compassion.

If these exercises activate distress that doesn't feel manageable, please pause the exercise and focus on grounding and comforting exercises. You can choose any or all of these practices and adapt them in a way that feels right.

They can be a beautiful way to start your day, offering yourself a little extra care first thing in the morning. You might find it helpful to explore these practices during moments of calm, and they can also be a comforting tool to return to during times of emotional distress. Over time, you may notice that self-applied touch and affirming thoughts become a natural part of your daily routine.

- **Practice 1:** Place your hands around your cheeks as you allow your face to rest in your palms. While holding your head in your hands, quietly say to yourself, “Even though I sometimes have negative or self-critical thoughts, I am willing to generate loving and kind thoughts toward myself.” Repeat these words two more times while resting your head in your hands.
- **Practice 2:** Place your hands gently along the sides of your neck so that the heels of your palms come together in front of your chin. With your hands lightly placed over your throat, quietly say to yourself, “Even though I feel hurt, I can acknowledge these feelings while being gentle with myself.” Repeat these words two more times while gently supporting your neck and throat with your hands.
- **Practice 3:** Place your hands over your heart in the center of your chest. With your hands over your heart, quietly say to yourself, “Even though I sometimes feel unworthy or unlovable, I recognize that all people including myself deserve compassion, love, and support.” Repeat these words two more times while holding your heart.



The following tips draw upon principles from neuroscience literature, polyvagal theory, yoga theory, and somatic psychology (and our client reports!) to support the nervous system, and trauma recovery by aiding the mind-body connection.

Hold Your Head:

Place one hand at the base of your skull and the other on your forehead. As you breathe, focus on the space between your hands.

Hold Your Feet and Lower Legs:

Gently hold both feet and massage your toes, arches, ankles, and lower legs with care.

Rhythmic Rocking:

Find a comfortable space to gently rock your body forward and backward or side to side. Using a rocking chair, swing, or hammock can be a soothing way to support this practice.

Bounce and Rebound:

Engage in gentle rocking movements by sitting on a physioball or standing with bent knees as you rhythmically bounce. You can also explore the rebound effect on a mini-trampoline.

These exercises are adapted from the work of clinical psychologist,
Dr. Arielle Schwartz.