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Bite-Sized Wellness Interventions

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Easy Evidence-Based Interventions to Reduce Feelings of Being Overwhelmed, Anxious, Angry, Traumatized, and/or Sad

Create a Tactical Sensory Kit. This is one of the most evidence-based interventions in to manage intense negative emotions. Activating your senses can help ground you when experiencing trauma and can distract you from anxiety/panic by focusing your attention on a particular sense. Things to include in your tactical sensory kit:

Taste: Super sour candy. Shocks your system and directs all attention to the sour taste thereby reducing attention to anxious or stressful thoughts. Pair this activity with 2-3 minutes of mindful breathing and you've got a winner. Toxic Waste is the most extreme sour followed by Warheads. Super minty candy also works well.

Smell: Essential oils, cologne, perfume, lotion, etc. Some smells have been show to reduce stress and induce a calming effect or create a more energized feeling. This is also a nice addition if you wants to smell something calming while doing a brief mindfulness exercise.

Hearing: Create a ready-to-deploy playlist with high preference songs to help decrease feelings of distress, frustration, anger, or stress.

Sight: Create a photo album on your phone with your favorite photos and videos of your loved ones, images from your adventures, nature, baby animals, etc.. Scroll through the photos and videos to help redirect your attention to things in your life that bring you joy or a sense of peace (and produce dopamine, your feel-good neurotransmitter).

Chewing gum or a tough chewy candy can reduce stress by activating the autonomic nervous system and decreasing frustration/anger/stress. This can mimic the jaw clench that people do when angry and can reduce strong negative emotions such as anger, irritability, annoyance, etc. Hi Chew candy does the trick nicely.

Ingestion of capsaicin (i.e., cayenne pepper) may decrease feelings anxiety and panic. Capsaicin can help to temporarily relieve symptoms of anxiety or distress by increasing the number of endorphins being produced, blocking pain signals, and creating a calming, euphoric sensation. It can increase blood flow and act as a natural painkiller. It may also help reduce stress-induced alcohol cravings in individuals in recovery by mimicking the warm feeling of alcohol passing through the esophagus and into the stomach. Keep some single serving packets of hot cause around at your desk or throw them in you tactical sensory kit.



The mammalian dive reflex is a primitive reflex designed to prevent us from drowning. When our face is submerged in cold water, our bodies immediately kick in a part of our nervous system that slows everything down. This is the reflex that is activated by penguins and seals (and free divers) when they are in very cold water that slows their heart rate down (and does a bunch of other awesome things to the central nervous system).

Submerging your face (until just past your ears) for 15 seconds in a bowl of ice water activates this reflex and decreases heart rate, slows breathing, and decreases both physical and cognitive symptoms of anxiety and panic. It also helps decrease feelings of being intensely overwhelmed. Taking a cold shower or cold-plunging is excellent, as well.

We bend so we don't break.

Play a visually stimulating game that promotes problem solving and creativity after viewing disturbing content- on scene or digitally. Why is this an evidence-based intervention for PTSD? New research is showing that playing a game that is visual, engaging, and requires non-verbal strategy/problem solving and imagination can disrupt the neurological pathways associated with PTSD, depression, and anxiety if played within several hours (ideally two less) of exposure to a traumatic event.

An intrusive memory is a visual memory of a traumatic event. Visually engaging games require use of the same parts of the brain that are used to form visual memories, and as our brains can't do two things at once, this interrupts the process of PTSD development. Having access to a fun video games (more Mario and less Grand Theft Auto/Call of Duty) is a great way to take a quick break and reset your brain after a particularly bad callout or viewing disturbing material (i.e., CSAM, etc.).