

Managing Reactions Worksheet

The combination of triggers, reminders, and chronic stress can create intense physical and emotional reactions that make it hard for you to stay calm. If you learn to manage these distressing reactions, you can reduce their negative effects on decision-making, interpersonal life, daily functioning, sleep, and physical health. You can also reduce the risk of substance abuse or other maladaptive coping responses.

1. Describe the stressful situation and the distressing reaction that is bothering you most.

2. Decide what you can do to help feel better. List the skills you can use to help reduce the distressing reaction (breathing, talking with a friend, writing). Review handouts on specific reactions to help make your list.

3. Make a plan to address stressful situations and reactions. Identify specific stressful situations that are upsetting, and identify skills to help with each.

Specific Situation	What can I do before, during, or after the stressful situation?

Put it into action!

If it doesn't work out, you can always try another skill.

Breathing Exercise

You may not always notice that your breathing affects how you feel. When you are upset, you may automatically take a deep breath to calm down. When you are anxious, you may breathe in quick, shallow breaths. Very often, when people become frightened or upset, they hold their breath. If they feel as if they need more air, they may hyperventilate. Taking a deep breath or breathing quickly often does not help. In fact, hyperventilation causes anxious feelings. If you feel anxious and want to calm down, you need to slow your breathing and take in *less* air. Rather than taking a deep breath, take a normal breath and exhale slowly. *Exhaling* helps you to relax, not *inhaling*.

Learning to control your breathing takes daily practice. At first, practice when you are not anxious. Later, when you have learned breathing awareness and control, you will find it helpful in stressful situations.

This breathing exercise can help you:

- Increase awareness of your breathing patterns
- Slow down your breathing
- Practice breathing differently on a regular basis to manage tension and fear

Instructions

1. Get comfortable, and take a slow, normal breath in through your nose with your mouth closed, to the count of five. Focus on extending your abdomen while you breathe in slowly.
2. Pause for five seconds.
3. Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth to the count of seven. Say a soothing word to yourself as you breathe out, such as "C-a-a-a-a-a-l-m."
4. Practice this exercise several times a day, taking 10 to 15 breaths at each practice.