

Trauma Coping Skills Cards

Trauma Triggers

What this is. The original handout (6 pages) reproduced page for page inside the house frame, unaltered, so that every word, line, table and illustration is exactly as its author set it. It replaces the September 2026 redesign of this file, which re-set the text and chopped it.

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Shift your mindset & thoughts

Understand your trauma symptoms

Understand your triggers to distressing emotions

Notice and challenge negative or unhelpful thoughts

Encourage and coach yourself through difficult moments

Think of 3 things you are grateful for each day

Adopt a growth mindset

Trauma responses

Fight

Temper & anger outbursts
Controlling behavior
Narcissistic & Entitled behavior
Explosiveness
Temper & anger outbursts

Flight

Investing too much time in work
Overthinking
Anxiety, panic, OCD
Difficulty sitting still
Perfectionist

Freeze

Difficulty making decisions
Immobility or numbness
Shutting down or feeling stuck
Hyper-awareness of body
Sense of dread

Fawn

Disconnected from body and needs
Highly aware of others somatic cues
Difficulty setting boundaries
Avoiding conflict
People pleasing & lack of identity

Four ways to practice grounding



Observe

Describe an object in great detail, color, texture, shadow, light & shapes



Distract

Find all the squares or blue objects in the room, count in 7's, say the date



Body

Lay on the ground, press your toes into the floor, squeeze scented play dough



Self-soothe

Take a shower or bath, find a grounding object, light a scented candle

Trauma Triggers

Hearing a certain sound or music associated with your trauma or who has a certain trait - can trigger you back

Sounds

Seeing someone who is related to the trauma or who has a certain trait - can trigger you

People

Certain thoughts or memories can make your brain bring you back to a trauma, often unwillingly

Thoughts

Our smell is strongly tied to our memories. As a result, certain scents can trigger a trauma

Smell

Places

The place where the trauma took place can be a strong trigger, as well as similar places

Media

A news report, a movie or TV series can show a scene that is similar to your experience

Feelings

Sometimes a feeling or emotion can trigger your trauma, like a sad feeling or being in pain

Situations

Finding yourself in a similar situation that reminds you of your trauma can be triggering

It's absolutely okay to...

Make Mistakes

Do things at your own pace

Say "no"

Not know everything

Spend time with yourself only

Prioritize your mental health

Take as much time as you need

Not to take every chance

Have off days

Change your mind

Forgiveness letter

Some people hurt us and refuse to acknowledge the damage they have done to us. It's hard to move on without being able to have a healing dialogue with that person. You can use this activity to help you reach that closure

1 Instruction

Write a letter to the person that hurt you. This letter is only for you and you will not send it

2 Instruction

Write an answer to your original letter. Write it as if you were the person that hurt you

3 Instruction

Read both letters again. Destroy them if you want to.

1 Tips

Write how you felt, what you needed and how this person hurt you. Try to communicate all of your feelings.

2 Tips

Write everything that you would like that person to tell you. You can also include the reasons that person hurt you. For example their own problems in childhood.

3 Tips

Wait some hours or days before you read them again

DBT nightmare protocol

1 Every night before you go to bed practice relaxation techniques: breathing, listening to calm music

2 Start by choosing a recurring nightmare you would like to work on.

3 Now choose a different and happy ending for the nightmare. The changes should occur BEFORE anything traumatic or bad happens

4 Write down the full nightmare but this time with the change. The more unusual the better eg: you have a super power

5 Rehearse the changed nightmare by visualizing the entire dream with a different ending each night. Remember to also practice the relaxation techniques.

6 Rehearse the entire dream with the changes as often as possible during the day

How to stop flashbacks



Start by naming the problem: "This is a flashback"



Reassure yourself: "You aren't in danger" "you didn't do anything wrong"



This too will pass - feelings are temporary



Identify the underlying feeling - sad, scared, stuck, lonely, petrified, overwhelmed, powerless, small etc



Counteract your inner critic with powerful positive affirmations eg: "you will be okay" "you are doing a good job"



Focus on your body and feelings. Try to bring yourself back to the present



Identify what triggered the flashback



Show yourself support - "You are good" "You are allowed to make mistakes"

Calming sensory & nervous system techniques



Hum, sing or whistle



Drum tap or snap your fingers



Place a fan in front you and feel the moving air



Sit on your hands or legs



Take a walk outdoors



Take a smooth stone and roll it on your hands for a few seconds



Splash cold water on your face

Overcome your avoidance

Avoidance of people, situations or places is a common symptom you may experience if you suffer from PTSD. It may be a way to relieve stress in the short-term, but in the long-term it can keep your problems going. You can use this activity to help you overcome your avoidance.

1

Make a list with 10 things (people, places, things) that you were avoiding. When you have done your list, rate each item from your list from 0 to 10.

The rating is the amount stress that the thing produces in you.

Example: going to the street where the event happened - (8 very stressful)

2

Order your list from the most stressful to the least stressful things

3

To overcome the avoidance start with the item that you are least afraid of. Think about how you could face this thing. You may break it into smaller steps to face it. Write down a specific plan so you know how you are going to confront the specific situation.

4

When you are done with one item, go up to the next item on your list, from bottom to top. Stay in the situation in spite of the anxiety you feel at the moment

When you experience trauma you may need...



More sleep than most people and that's okay



Long term therapy, even after 'processing' the experience



A routine that values gentle movement



Space to check out of social events & recharge



To take breaks during intense emotional experiences



More time to get to know someone before trusting them

10 reminders for trauma survivors

You are allowed to struggle

What happened to you was not your fault

You deserve to take up space

All of your feelings are valid

You are allowed to ask for help

It's okay to not know what you need

You deserve to heal and feel better

You are enough

You have the right to be heard

You are loveable and worthy

Mindfulness in one day

-  Breathe in, hold for 3 counts & exhale. Count seven breaths
-  Do one activity at a time. When eating, just eat.
-  What are two things you can taste, touch, see, smell, hear right now?
-  Listen completely and contemplate your response
-  Feel your feet connecting with the ground
-  Bring your attention to your body, send the breath to any of areas of attention



Ice cube techniques

It's a technique centered around using ice cubes or an ice pack to help calm you during a panic attack or anxiety.

Place an ice-pack against your chest for as long as you can

Hold and squeeze an ice cube in your hands for 15 seconds

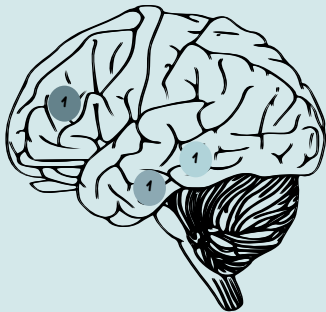
Eat ice or hold it against the roof of your mouth

Try rubbing cubes along your face or arms

Try dunking your face in a bowl of ice water to shock the system

While you're doing this try to focus on the sensation of the cold and how it feels on your body. This will calm your nervous system

How trauma affects the brain



- 1 Prefrontal cortex** Rational thinking - regulates emotions such as fear responses from the amygdala - with PTSD this has a reduced volume
- 2 Amygdala** Wired for survival - when active it is hard to think rationally. The more hyperactive the amygdala is the more signs of PTSD are present
- 3 Hippocampus** Responsible for memory and differentiating between past & present - works to remember and make sense of the trauma. With consistent exposure to trauma it shrinks

How to cope with triggered trauma memories



Move your body

Move your body to release endorphins and shift your body's response



Use grounding techniques

Bring yourself to the present by getting in touch with your senses



Let your emotions be

Allow yourself to process your emotions with patience and validation



Go outside

This is the perfect place to practice grounding techniques. Breathe in the fresh air



Try tapping

Tapping calms anxiety, builds self-acceptance and draws your awareness to your sense



Get support

Having a supportive community helps you to refrain from isolation

Relaxation skills

-  Practice deep belly breathing with long out breaths
-  Use a relaxation app
-  Tense and relax your muscles
-  Visualize a peaceful place
-  self-massage
-  Take a nap or warm bath/shower
-  Stretching, yoga, tai chi, qi gong

Six tips for grounding yourself



Close your eyes
and focus on the
sounds around you



Focus on the
earth beneath
your feet



Feel the wind
brush over
your skin



Practice deep
relaxed
breathing



Think about
your goals for
the day



Think about the
next hour; what do
you need to do?

Calming sensory & nervous system techniques

-  Create a personal calming space for yourself
-  Write a letter or draw an image of how you feel in the moment
-  Text/call a trusted friend or family member
-  Drum up and down your legs and arms to increase circulation
-  Rock or swing your body
-  Run your hands through uncooked rice, beads, marble, sand etc.
-  Wrap yourself in a textured blanket

Mindful minute

The practice requires you to count each breath, observing it as the air flows in and out. In other words, being mindful of each inhalation and exhalation. Don't change your breath. All you have to do is count each out breath over the duration of 1 minute.

