



MENTAL HEALTH SURVIVAL GUIDE



EHN CANADA

INTRODUCTION

Times are particularly stressful right now for everyone. Many new and unusual challenges are wreaking havoc on Canadians' mental health.

At EHN Canada, we're mental health and addiction recovery experts. Our private treatment facilities help thousands of people across the country recover from **substance use disorders**, **behavioural addictions**, **trauma disorders**, and other mental health disorders such as **depression and anxiety**. We have amazing staff who are subject matter experts in all things mental health.

We've taken some of their favourite tools and techniques, and created a guide that we hope can be a mental health "life raft" for whoever needs it. In this guide, you'll find helpful exercises, tips, and even some potential trauma symptoms to watch out for. While it doesn't replace advice from a medical professional, we hope you find it useful in increasing your mental and emotional resilience during difficult times.

If you think this guide may help someone you know, who's currently facing mental health or addiction challenges, please share it with them. We want this guide to help as many people as possible.

Edgewood, Bellwood, Sandstone, Nouveau Départ, and our outpatient clinics extend across the country and make up EHN Canada. Our teams have expertise in treating addiction and mental health disorders. With decades of success helping thousands of people achieve recovery, we can help you, too.

If you need professional help with mental health or addiction, we're always here for you. You can reach one of our admissions counsellors at **1 866-690-0429**.

We're all in this together, and we're here for you.

Sincerely,

The Team at EHN Canada

MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder are psychiatric disorders that occur in people who experience events that are too overwhelming for them to manage and, as a result, feel symptoms that negatively affect their well-being. It can affect people in different ways, regardless of age or ethnicity.

Exposure to trauma is very common. [A study published by the American Psychological Association](#) predicts that approximately 60–70% of the general population will be exposed to trauma. Most of these individuals develop symptoms that resolve on their own, and move on with their lives. Yet, according to [a research study conducted by McMaster University](#) published in the Journal CNS Neuroscience and Therapeutics, 9% of the Canadian population suffer persistent trauma symptoms.

EXAMPLES OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS

- Workplace accidents or incidents
- Vehicle accidents such as cars, boats, airplane and train crashes
- Childhood physical, verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse
- Childhood neglect and abandonment
- Natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, fires, etc.
- Military combat
- Sexual assault
- Physical assault
- Witnessing violence



SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA



When a person experiences a traumatic event, they don't have time during the event to feel fear or anger. These emotions can come out over time after the event has occurred. It's as if the brain and the body are experiencing a delayed reaction which can manifest as anger or extreme fear. Very often, family members or co-workers will feel the person's reactions are disproportionate to a situation.

The following is a list of the most common symptoms of psychological trauma:

1. Intrusive memories of the traumatic event, including flashbacks
2. Emotional and physical reactivity in response to triggers that are reminders of the traumatic event
3. Negative beliefs about oneself or others
4. Inability to feel close to others
5. Being easily startled
6. Emotional numbness
7. Inability to remember aspects of, or all of the traumatic event
8. Avoidance of anything that's a reminder of the traumatic event
9. Hypervigilance: Always being alert, scanning and assessing for threat
10. Difficulty concentrating and focusing on reality
11. Chronic sleep disturbances: inability to fall asleep or to remain asleep; frequent nightmares

Note: the above is not a comprehensive list of all trauma symptoms.

If you experience a number of these symptoms, we strongly suggest you speak to a mental health professional for an accurate diagnosis.

A MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUE FOR HIGHLY STRESSFUL SITUATIONS



Distress tolerance skills are essential for healthy, stable functioning in a stressful and unpredictable world. They're especially important now, since our world is even more stressful and unpredictable than usual.

Distress tolerance skills are designed to help you in highly stressful situations where you feel intense emotional distress. They can help you maintain control when powerful negative emotions threaten to overwhelm you. They can also help you soften powerful negative emotions so that you can focus on problem solving.

FIVE THINGS MINDFULNESS SKILL

“Five Things” is a distress tolerance skill based on **mindfulness**, within the dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) framework. The aim of Five Things is to make you feel more grounded. This means that, in addition to highly stressful situations, it can also help you when you feel detached, dissociated, or foggy.

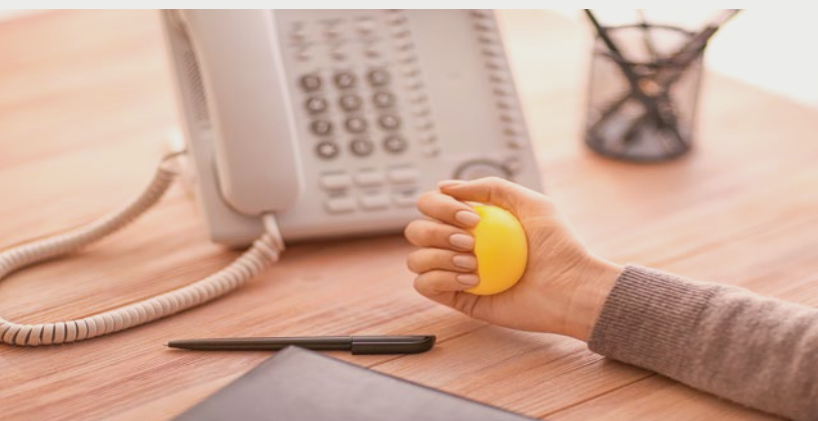
The instructions below are from **Colleen Lamond, Transitional Case Manager at Bellwood Health Services**. She’s found Five Things very beneficial for both her patients and for herself. It can be used effectively by anyone, including children.

GROUND YOURSELF BY NOTICING THE THINGS AROUND YOU

Start by finding your breath. Breathe deeply in through your nose and out through your nose. Once your breathing has settled into a comfortable rhythm, observe your environment using all of your senses. Go through the following steps to ground yourself:

- Notice 5 things you can see
- Notice 4 things you can touch
- Notice 3 things you can hear
- Notice 2 things you can smell
- Notice 1 thing you can taste

An important part of managing an internal crisis is maintaining a firm grasp on reality. Reaching out and anchoring ourselves to our concrete sensory experiences can prevent us from being swept out to sea by the powerful riptide of anxiety or other negative emotions. Once the intensity of our emotions starts to wane, we can begin work on problem solving. First, we analyze the situation and try to understand how our thoughts led to the emotional crisis. Then, we can figure out what self-improvement work would be the most useful for reducing the likelihood of similar crises.



SOOTHE YOURSELF THROUGH YOUR SENSES

Start by finding your breath. Breathe deeply in through your nose and out through your nose. Once your breathing has settled into a comfortable rhythm, soothe yourself using each of your senses. Soothing stimuli are sensory experiences that you find calming, relaxing, pleasant, or that make you feel happy (they should also be healthy and safe).

- Soothe yourself with something that you can see
- Soothe yourself with something that you can touch
- Soothe yourself with something that you can hear
- Soothe yourself with something that you can smell
- Soothe yourself with something that you can taste

The following are some examples of soothing stimuli:

Seeing: a beautiful flower; stars at night; a dance performance

Touching: a hot bath; sitting in a comfy chair; running your hand along smooth wood or leather

Hearing: sounds of nature (waves, birds, rain, etc.); your favourite song; humming a soothing tune

Smelling: a scented candle; your favourite scented bath or body product; walking in nature and inhaling deeply

Tasting: your favourite food; a calming beverage; a food that you feel is a special treat



After soothing yourself through each of your senses, the storm of emotions you were feeling will likely feel less severe and chaotic. Hopefully, the intensity of your emotions will have decreased to a manageable level.

BOX BREATHING, A QUICK GUIDE TO CALM



You may be thinking, how do I find calm when I am in anxiety overload?

The answer: just breathe.

However, not just any old breathing—try a technique called “box breathing,” also called “square breathing.” One of our counsellors shared this valuable technique. You can use this tried-and-tested method to bring your nervous system to a more relaxed state.

HOW IT WORKS

Visualize your breath traveling along the sides of a square. Try it now. Remember, if you feel panic or a lack of control, you can always return to normal breathing.

Inhale up the first side of the square. Slowly count one, two, three while breathing in.

Now, hold your breath across the top. One, two, three.

Exhale down the other side of the square. One, two, three. Then hold your breath across the bottom, counting one, two, three.

After a few minutes of this, you will often feel calmer and more grounded.

6 CONCEPTS FOR COPING WITH CHALLENGING EMOTIONS



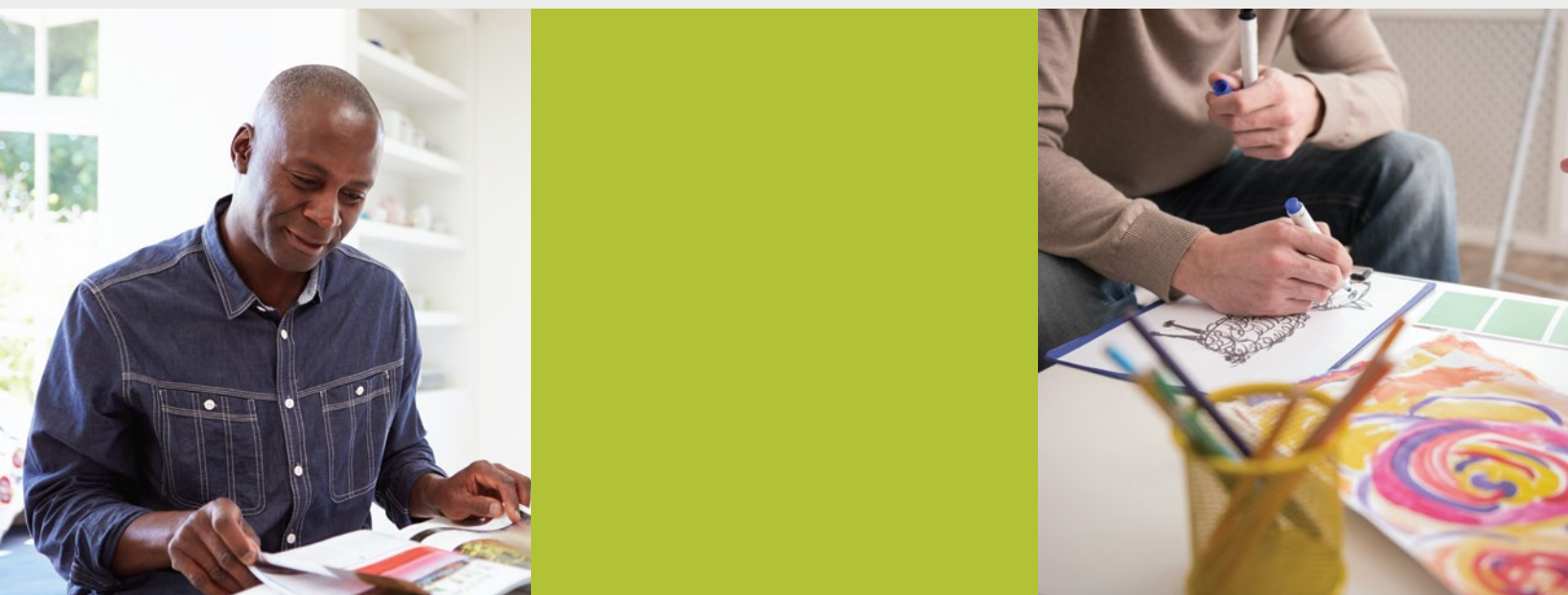
Addiction and mental health disorders ultimately lay waste to our emotional, spiritual, physical, and financial lives. People who complete treatment and get better must learn how to live in completely new ways compared to how they lived before. Many people will face other big changes in their lives that force them to adapt to new circumstances. **Carlee Campbell, Patient Care Specialist at Edgewood Treatment Centre**, suggests using the following six concepts to help you adapt more comfortably to big changes in your life.

(1) EMBRACE YOUR POWERLESSNESS

There is only so much any of us can control. In a recent podcast, Dr. Gabor Mate reflected that in Western Society our response to powerlessness is, “panic! Everything is out of control.” In Eastern philosophies, however, the response to powerlessness is, “relax. Everything is out of control.” In both instances, there is no power to control the situation, but the perspective taken results in a completely different emotional reaction.

(2) ACCEPTANCE

In another East-meets-West moment, try repeating the metta meditation phrase, “things are as they are,” to accept the reality of a situation. We can find no serenity until we accept a person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is at this moment. Unless we accept life completely on life’s terms, we cannot be happy. Happiness is available despite circumstances. If happiness seems too far away right now, then reach for the peace found in acceptance.





(3) GRATITUDE

You may have heard the old adage, “you will find what you are looking for.” Hunt the good. Start with small lists, even just ten things. If ten is too many, do five, or even three. The list can be anything, from having a roll of toilet paper to your morning cup of coffee. Then, repeat. Do these lists whenever you find yourself spinning in gloom and doom. Read more about using gratitude to rewire your brain in this [Forbes article](#).

(4) STAY PRESENT

Many of us may find we are using too much mental energy trying to prevent the wreckage of our future, which is completely understandable. However, each day has enough troubles of its own. One of my favourite expressions right now is, “that is a tomorrow me problem.” For example, “today you” has the rent or mortgage paid. “Tomorrow you” may have a rent or mortgage problem, or “tomorrow you” may have the government funding you are waiting for come through. “Today you” is actually okay! However, worrying about what “tomorrow you” may or may not have to deal with, can definitely make “today you” miserable.

(5) MEDITATION

Is just sitting and listening to yourself breathe not your thing? You don't have to do **meditation** all on your own—many meditation apps, such as “Headspace” and “Calm,” offer free guided meditations. Take a moment to check out the **Headspace** and **Calm**. You just may end up with a new habit for which to be grateful!

(6) HOPE

Lastly, realize the only constant in life is change. The emotions eventually soften, and we survive. We dug in, we learned, and we grew, eventually into very different and much better people. We can and we will do this again.

WE'RE HERE WHEN YOU NEED US.

GIVE US A CALL WHEN YOU'RE READY TO HEAL:

1 866-690-0429

6 STEPS FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT MORE CONSTRUCTIVELY



Conflict with friends and loved ones is often unavoidable. Tempers can rise especially high when someone is going through a mental health challenge—whether trauma, addiction, health anxiety, or anything else. We can do or say things we regret. Fortunately, **Carlee Campbell, Patient Care Specialist at Edgewood Treatment Centre**, has outlined six effective steps for dealing with conflict, below.

(1) AWARENESS

Once we have awareness, we can then discern what our part is in the problem. You cannot change that of which you are not aware. In more good news, once you increase your self-awareness, you usually get to spend a lot less time spinning on choices, finding courage, and making amends.

(2) CHOICE

Once we have identified what has gone wrong, we get to do something about it. I like to call this part “acceptance, now what?” We get to confront the choice of whether we will do something about our wrongdoing or not.

(3) COURAGE

Do not get me wrong—admitting when we are wrong is not an easy thing to do. That said, it also feels incredible when it is done. When we have stepped out of alignment with those values, we have the opportunity to do something to course correct.



(4) AMENDS



A proper amends should actually lay the foundation for behaviour change. One helpful way to break it down is by using the "Three A's," which are as follows:

Acknowledgement

This is where you lay out the facts of what happened. It is super helpful to have talked this one through with a friend, otherwise chances are you may be only seeing the facts from one point of view—namely, yours.

Apology

When we acknowledge the why, it brings our values back into alignment with our own integrity, and often the beliefs of the person we have wounded. This opens the possibility of healing for both parties.

Atonement

Atonement requires action to make things right, not just once, but at every opportunity.

(5) GRACE



Very often, conflict has two sides. People may not respond to our amends in kind. They may carry on unwilling to even acknowledge their part, let alone consider changing it. However, we still get to choose our response to their behaviour. Choose grace. Choose to extend unmerited favour and love. Now is the perfect time to reciprocate the grace we were once shown.

(6) COMPASSION



Compassion, by definition, is consciousness of distress together with the desire to alleviate it. We need to show the same concern for our own distress that we extend to everyone else. If we have done our best to do the above tasks, we need to let the conflict go.

This list may seem daunting. It certainly is not easy. That said, it may also be very necessary if we want a little more peace and connection during difficult times. In fact, it just might be the right thing to do.

A MINDFUL EATING EXERCISE



Many people aren't very conscious about their eating patterns and the foods they eat. This lack of awareness increases the risk of making unhealthy eating choices when a person is distressed or when they feel a need for gratification. The following exercise will help you improve your awareness of what you are eating. This will help you avoid dysfunctional eating patterns such as eating to regulate your mood or eating to alleviate boredom. This is also an excellent way to practice mindfulness without sitting down and trying to clear your mind and not think, which is intimidating to some people on a regular day.

For this exercise you will need two bite-sized pieces of food.

(1) Start in a standing position, holding one of the pieces of food in your hand. Connect to your breath and your body. Feel your feet on the ground and notice your experience in the moment. Keeping your awareness in this moment, notice your thoughts, sensations, and emotions.

(2) Tune in to how you feel about eating and drinking. Do you feel hungry, thirsty, satisfied, or full? If you feel hungry, what is your body hungry for? If you feel thirsty, what is your body thirsty for? How do you know the answers to the previous two questions? Focus your attention on the sensations that are giving you this information. (Pause)

(3) Bring your attention to the food in your hand and imagine that it is something you have never seen before. Inspect it with curiosity and notice its color, shape, texture, and size. What else do you see or feel?

(4) Imagine the entire process that the food went through to get into your hand: for example, planting a seed, sunshine, water, time, harvesting, processing, packaging, shipping, grocery shopping. You may choose to feel gratitude for everything involved in the cultivation, preparation, and transport of the food. You can choose your own way of practicing gratitude or spiritual blessing.

(5) Now place the item between your fingers and feel the texture, temperature, and other particular features of its surface. Is it smooth, rough, sticky, oily? Notice if any thoughts, sensations, or emotions come up. Continue to breathe and be fully present in the moment.



(6) Hold the piece of food under your nose and inhale deeply, focusing on the scent with your full awareness. Does the scent bring up any memories, sensations, or reactions in your body? Even before you put any food in your mouth, you may notice yourself starting to have a digestive response in your body just from seeing and smelling it.

(7) Slowly and deliberately move the food towards your mouth and place it inside your mouth. Don't chew or swallow it yet. First, let it sit in your mouth for a few seconds. Then, roll it around to different parts of your mouth and tongue. Notice the flavour and texture. Notice the physical sensations within your body, especially in your mouth and your stomach. Continue to breathe as you explore the sensation of having the food in your mouth.

(8) Bite down on the food just once and notice the change in texture, and maybe also in taste. Then, very slowly, start chewing the food. Notice which parts of your mouth are involved in chewing. Notice the sounds and movements of chewing while continuing to notice the sensations and flavor.

(9) When you are done chewing, swallow the food and notice the sensations as it travels from your mouth, down your throat, through your esophagus, and into your stomach. Notice the sensations and tastes that may linger in your mouth. Connect again to your body and your breath and notice your experience in the moment.

(10) Pick up the second piece of food and eat it however you feel like eating it. But maintain focus and awareness of your experience and notice your choices, thoughts, sensations, and reactions. Notice the ways in which eating this second piece of food was similar or different from eating the first piece of food.

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