

## **E-BOOK - Mindfulness guide content from The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma" by Bessel van der Kolk.**

*Disclaimer:* These exercises are inspired by the principles in Bessel van der Kolk's The Body Keeps the Score and are designed to help you build awareness and find moments of calm. They are not a replacement for professional therapy or medical advice. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please seek immediate professional help.

### *Core Principle: Befriending Your Body*

Mental health issues often involve a disconnect from your body. The goal is to move from ignoring or being at war with your body to a place of curiosity and observation. This is a foundational step for all levels of distress.

### *Notice and Describe, Don't Judge:*

Instead of saying "I feel anxious," try to describe the physical sensations of anxiety. "My heart is racing," "My stomach is in knots," or "There's a tightness in my chest." This simple act of observation creates distance and helps you understand what is happening.

### *Mindfulness Practices for Mental Health Issues:*

These practices can be used at various levels of distress. The key is to start with "Low-Level" practices and move to others as you build comfort and awareness.

### *Low-Level Distress (Feeling Overwhelmed, Stressed, or Anxious):*

The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique:

5: Name five things you can see right now.

4: Name four things you can feel (e.g., the chair against your back, your feet on the floor, the texture of your clothes).

3: Name three things you can hear (e.g., the hum of a computer, traffic outside, your own breathing).

2: Name two things you can smell.

1: Name one thing you can taste.

**Purpose: This exercise immediately pulls your awareness out of your thoughts and into the present moment, anchoring you in your physical senses.**

The "Notice That" Breath:

Sit comfortably and close your eyes or soften your gaze.

Place a hand on your stomach and a hand on your chest.

Simply "notice that" you are breathing. Don't try to change it. Just feel the air entering and leaving your body. Notice the rise and fall of your hands.

Repeat "Notice that I am breathing in," and "Notice that I am breathing out."

**Purpose: This practice reconnects you with your body's natural rhythm, which can be a source of calm and regulation.**

Medium-Level Distress (Feeling Stuck in a Loop of Negative Thoughts, Panic, or Dissociation):

Mindful Movement:

Stand up and gently stretch your arms and legs.

As you move, pay close attention to the sensations in your muscles and joints.

Notice any tension or discomfort without judgment. If you find a tight spot, breathe into it, but don't force it to release.

You can also try a simple walking meditation: pay full attention to the feeling of your feet touching the ground.

**Purpose: Traumatic memories are often "frozen" in the body. Mindful movement can help unfreeze this energy and restore a sense of aliveness and control.**

Creating a "Safe Place" in Your Mind:

Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes.

Imagine a place where you feel completely safe and at peace. This can be a real or imagined location (a beach, a forest clearing, your childhood bedroom).

Use all your senses to build this place in your mind. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel on your skin? What do you smell?

Spend a few minutes just being in this safe place.

**Purpose: This mental exercise helps create a temporary psychological retreat from overwhelming feelings, and can train your brain to associate a sense of calm with an internal anchor.**

Extreme Distress (Crisis, Flashbacks, or Severe Disconnection):

The TIPP Skill (from DBT):

T - Temperature: Splash cold water on your face or hold an ice cube in your hand.

I - Intense Exercise: Do a burst of intense physical activity, like jumping jacks or running up and down the stairs.

P - Paced Breathing: Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 2, and exhale for 6.

P - Paired Muscle Relaxation: Tense a part of your body (like your fist) for 5 seconds and then completely relax it. Move to the next muscle group.

**Purpose: This is a crisis management skill. It interrupts the nervous system's fight/flight/freeze response and forces your brain to focus on the immediate physical sensations, helping to bring you back to the present.**

Orienting:

In a moment of intense feeling or a flashback, consciously look around the room.

Notice the objects in your environment and say their names out loud. "I see a blue chair. I see a wooden table. I see a white wall."

Pay attention to the sounds, the light, and the temperature of the room.

**Purpose: This simple act brings your prefrontal cortex (the rational part of your brain) back online and reconnects you with your current, safe reality.**