

# 8 great ways to soothe yourself

**Relevant to:** Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

**From time to time we get distressed, and occasionally we get VERY distressed, so one of the best things we can do is to learn how to soothe ourselves. Here we summarise eight of the best ways. Choose your favourite, or the one that suits you best at the moment.**

## 'Doing' methods.

1. Go outside and concentrate on the three S's of your senses: Sight, Sound, and Smell. Focus on all three simultaneously: What can you see? What sounds can you hear – birds singing, traffic going past, aeroplanes overhead? What can you smell – grass, flowers, the smell of burnt petrol? Focus fully on all three senses and just observe and accept what you see, what you hear, and what you smell.
2. Truly immerse yourself in something you like doing. Whether it is watching television, walking, taking exercise, playing computer games. Whatever it is, really focus on it, truly immerse yourself in it, and let it fully occupy your mind for a good long time.



## Biological methods.

3. Deep breathing. Breathe in as far as you can, right in until you can inhale no more. As though you're breathing deep down into the stomach. Pause momentarily and then breathe right out until you can breathe out no more. Pause momentarily and then repeat. And repeat as many times as you like – it's a good process.
4. Take some definite exercise. If you like walking go for a good walk. If you like a session on an exercise bike then have a good session on your exercise bike. If you like lifting weights, then have a good weight-lifting session. Whatever exercise you enjoy, have a definite session of it. Take care not to over-tax yourself, this is probably a time when you need to be careful not to overdo it. Exercise is great, overdoing it is not great.



## Methods that work directly with the emotions.

5. Clearly label your emotions. The evidence is that simply labelling a negative emotion reduces its impact. So choose carefully the label. Some negative emotions are: angry, feeling disrespected, disappointed, grieving, hopeless, sad, worried, frightened, jealous, and a lot more. Interestingly, at another time, this works well for your positive emotions too: clearly labelling them enhances them.
6. Listen to your favourite mindfulness recording or mindfulness app, or relaxation recording or relaxation app. Having someone else join in Mindfulness or Relaxation this way can be very reassuring.

## Methods involving other people.

7. Contact a friend or relative who you know is likely to help. Either by phone or text. This can be good, but be sure not to say anything that you may later regret, for example telling them something that you will later regret having told them.
8. Contact a 'crisis contact' that you have in your mind: a crisis team, or a professional or volunteer agency you have the number of or which you could easily find the number of.



### Helpful tip 1: Choose your favourite for right now.

Sometimes we become close to being 'out of control' when we are distressed. Some of the above methods work best for us when we are least in control, for example, deep breathing works well then (as well as at other times).

Other methods, for example contacting friends or relatives, may work best when we've got a reasonable control of ourselves. It's important to note though that you can be just as distressed when you have a good control of yourself, so all of the methods have their time and place.

Just choose your favourite for right now. You can use more than one if you want but remember that nothing works unless you really do it, so use one fully and in a committed way before deciding whether you want to move onto another.

### Helpful tip 2: Persist.

Soothe yourself for a long time. When we are in distress, parts of the brain light up that also result in 'distressed' chemicals coursing through the body.

So when we light up a different part of the brain, by soothing ourselves, that is a great thing to do but we have to give the chemicals causing our distress plenty of time to dissipate and become replaced by 'soothing' chemicals. So give it plenty of time, you'll know when you have done it sufficiently – you will be calmer again.

### Helpful tip 3: Work with your therapist or group leader.

Your therapist or group leader will discuss the eight techniques with you during a session where you can discuss them objectively. They will also probably help you to imagine using your preferred choices, and might even help you practice together (this is a great thing to do).

Then it's up to you to practice at home and get better at your preferred methods until you are really good at them and can use them when you really need to! Being able to soothe yourself is a wonderful skill to have.