

Relax & Sooth Yourself

Included here are some simple relaxation and soothing activities that use your five senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste and touch. These activities are meant to bring you a small amount of peace in your life. So if one of these activities doesn't feel helpful, or makes you feel worse, don't do it. Try something else. As you explore the list, think about what works best for you. and consider trying something new if it interests you.

Self-Soothing Using Your Sense of Smell

Smell is a very powerful sense that can often trigger memories and make you feel a certain way. Therefore, it's very important that you identify smells that make you feel good, not bad.

___ Burn scented candles or incense in your room or house. Find a scent that's pleasing to you.

___ Wear scented oils, perfume, or cologne that makes you feel happy, confident, or sexy.

___ Cut out perfumed cards from magazines and carry them with you in your handbag or wallet.

___ Go someplace where the scent is pleasing to you, like a bakery or restaurant.

___ Bake your own food that has a pleasing smell, like chocolate chip cookies.

___ Lie down in your local park and smell the grass and outdoor smells.

___ Buy fresh-cut flowers or seek out flowers in your neighborhood.

___ Other ideas: _____

Self-Soothing Using Your Sense of Vision

Vision is very important to humans. In fact a large portion of our brain is devoted solely to our sense of sight. The thing you look at can often have very powerful effects on you, for better or for worse. That's why it's important to find images that have a very soothing effect on you. And again, for each person, it comes down to individual taste and preference.

___ Go through magazines and books to cut out pictures that you like. Make a collage of them to hang on your wall or keep some of them with you in your handbag or wallet to look at when you're away from home.

___ Find a place that's soothing for you to look at, like a park or a museum. Or find a picture of a place that's soothing for you to look at, like a rainforest.

___ Go to the library and find a collection of photographs or paintings that you find relaxing, such as nature photos.

___ Draw or paint your own picture that's pleasing to you.

___ Carry a picture or photograph of someone you love, someone you find attractive, or someone you admire.

___ Other ideas: _____

Self-Soothing Using Your Sense of Hearing

Certain sounds can soothe us. Listening to gentle music, for example, may be relaxing. However, each one of us has our own tastes. You have to find what works best for you. Use these examples to identify the sounds that help you relax.

___ Listen to soothing music. This can be classical, opera, oldies, new age, Motown, jazz, Celtic, African, or anything else that works for you. It might be music with singing or without. If you have a portable radio or MP3 player, carry it with you to listen to music when you're away from home.

___ Listen to 'talking books'. Many public libraries will let you borrow them. Take some out to see if it helps you relax. You don't even have to pay attention to the story line. Sometimes just listening to the sound of someone talking can be very relaxing.

___ Turn on the television and just listen. Find a show that's boring or sedate, not something like Jerry Springer that's just going to get you angry. Sit in a comfortable chair or lie down, and then close your eyes and just listen. Make sure you turn the volume down to a level that's not too loud.

___ Open your window and listen to the peaceful sounds outside. Or, if you live in a place without relaxing sounds outside, go visit a place with relaxing sounds, such as a park.

___ Listen to a recording of nature sounds, such as birds and other wildlife.

___ Listen to a white-noise machine. *White noise* is a sound that blocks out other distracting sounds. You can buy a machine that makes white noise with circulating air, or you can turn on a fan to block out distracting sounds. Other white-noise machines have recorded on them, such as the sounds of birds, waterfalls, and rain forests. Many people find these machines very relaxing.

___ Listen to the sound of a personal water fountain. Many people find the sound of the trickling water in their homes to be very soothing.

___ Listen to a recording of a relaxation exercise.

___ Listen to the sound of rushing or trickling water. Maybe your local park has a waterfall, or nearby mall has a fountain.

___ Other ideas: _____

Self-Soothing Using Your Sense of Taste

Taste is also a very powerful sense. Our tongue has distinct regions of taste buds on it to differentiate flavors and tastes of food. These sensations can also trigger memories and feelings, so again, it's important that you find the tastes that are pleasing to you. However, if eating is a problem for you, such as eating too much, bingeing, purging, or restricting what you eat, talk to a professional counselor about getting help for yourself. If the process of eating can make you upset or nervous, use your other senses to calm yourself. But if food soothes you, use some of these suggestions.

___ Enjoy your favorite meal, whatever it is. Eat it slowly so you can enjoy the way it tastes.

___ Carry lollipops, gum, or other candy with you to eat when you're feeling upset.

___ Eat a soothing food, like ice cream, chocolate, pudding, or something else that makes you feel good.

___ Drink something soothing, such as tea, coffee, or hot chocolate. Practice drinking it slowly so you can enjoy the way it tastes.

___ Suck on an ice cube or an icy-pole, especially if you're feeling warm, and enjoy the taste it melts in your mouth.

___ Buy a piece of ripe and juice fresh fruit and then eat it slowly.

___ Other ideas: _____

Self-Soothing Using Your Sense of Touch

We often forget about our sense of touch, and yet we're always touching something, such as the clothes we're wearing or the chair we're sitting in. Our skin is our largest organ, and it's completely covered with nerves that carry feelings to our brain. Certain tactile sensations can be pleasing, like patting a cat. Again, each of us prefers different sensations. You have to find the ones that are most pleasing for you.

___ Carry something soft or velvety in your pocket to touch when you need to, like a piece of cloth.

___ Take a hot or cold shower and enjoy the feelings of the water falling on your skin.

___ Take a warm bubble bath or a bath with scented oils and enjoy the soothing sensations on your skin.

___ Get a massage. Many people who have survived physical and sexual abuse do not want to be touched by anyone. This is understandable. But not all types of massage require you to take off your clothes. Some techniques, such as traditional Japanese shiatsu massage, simply require you to wear loose-fitting clothes. A shoulder and neck massage, received while seated in a massage chair, can also be done without removing any clothes. If this is a concern for you, just asks the massage therapist what kind of massage would be best to have while wearing your clothes.

___ Play with your pet. Owning a pet can have many health benefits. If you don't have a pet, consider getting one. Or if you can't afford one, visit a friend who has a pet or volunteer at your local animal shelter where you can play with the rescued animals.

___ Wear your most comfortable clothes, like your favorite worn-in- T-shirt, baggy tracky pants, or old jeans.

CREATE A RELAXATION PLAN

Now that you've read the suggestions to help you relax and soothe yourself using your five senses, construct a list of techniques you're willing to use. For ideas, review the activities that you checked. Be specific about what you're going to do. Make a list of ideas to try at home and a list of ideas you can take with you when you're away from home.

RELAXATION AND SOOTHING SKILLS TO USE AT HOME

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Keep this list in a convenient place that's easy to remember. You might even want to copy this list and put it in places where you see it all the time, such as on your refrigerator, above your desk, on the mirror in your bathroom, or next to your bed. This way you'll remind yourself to relax and soothe yourself as often as possible. It will also make it easier to soothe yourself when your painful emotions overwhelm you and prevent you from thinking clearly.

Now create a similar list to use when you're away from home. Again, review the soothing skills you checked in the last few pages to give you ideas. But make sure that it's possible to use these skills when you're away from home. For example, don't list "take a hot bath" because, most likely, there won't be a hot bath to you when you're not at home.

RELAXATION AND SOOTHING SKILLS TO USE AWAY FROM HOME

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Now copy these last ten ideas on a small piece of paper to remind you what to do when you're away from home. Keep this list with you, in your car, in your wallet, or in your handbag. This way you can practice relaxing when you're not at home, specifically when your painful emotions overwhelm you and prevent you from thinking clearly.
