

COPING STRATEGIES FOR INDIVIDUALS

It's normal to feel overwhelmed at times. These strategies can help you get through difficult moments safely and steadily. Coping strategies for distress and overwhelming experiences. For anxiety, low mood, intrusive thoughts, panic, dissociation, rumination, agitation, or unusual perceptions.

How to use this resource:

Pick one or two strategies. Try each for 60 to 90 seconds.

Notice what changes. Keep what helps and let go of what does not.

Safety first. If you feel at risk of harm, contact urgent supports listed at the end.

1) Grounding and orientation

Quick grounding exercise (2 minutes)

If you can, move to a quiet space. Sit in a chair with your feet on the floor, or lie down comfortably.

Take a slow breath in through your nose.

Exhale slowly through your mouth.

Do this again.

Notice the feeling of your feet on the ground or your body supported by the chair.

Name three things you can feel right now.

Take one more slow breath.

2) Sensory regulation

Splash cool water on your face or hold a cold pack wrapped in cloth.

Sip a hot or cold drink and notice the temperature.

Lightly stretch or use gentle self-massage for shoulders and hands.

Use calming scents such as lavender or citrus if they help you.

Listen to white noise, rain sounds, or steady instrumental music.

Dim harsh lights and reduce background noise if possible.

3) Breath and body calming

Box breathing: inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4.

Longer exhale breathing: inhale 4, exhale 6 to 8.

Hand on chest and belly, slow breaths while noticing movement.

Progressive muscle release, one body area at a time.

Yawning, sighing, or humming to relax the throat and chest.

Guided body scan starting at your toes and moving upward.

4) Movement and rhythm

Take a short walk and notice each step.

Do gentle stretches or chair yoga.

Sway side to side or rock while seated.

March in place while counting to 20.

Clap or tap a steady rhythm with your hands.

Try a few squats or wall push-ups if safe for your body.

5) Attention and thought shifting

Name the task that matters most right now and do one tiny step.

Use a 5-minute timer to start, then pause and reassess.

Say "This is a thought, not a fact," and refocus on your breath.

Picture a safe place and describe it in detail.

Write down the worry, then write one practical action.

Use a calm cue phrase such as "I can ride this wave."

6) Connection and support

Text or call a trusted person and say what you need.

Sit near someone you feel safe with, even in silence.

Visit a peer support space or online community that is safe.

Tell a supporter one concrete thing they can do right now.

Keep a short “support script” ready for tough moments.

If faith or culture helps, connect with those practices.

7) Environment and routine

Tidy one surface such as a nightstand or desk.

Open a window or step outside for fresh air.

Set a simple routine: wake time, meals, movement, wind-down.

Reduce stimulation if overwhelmed, add gentle activity if numb.

Keep a comfort corner with a blanket, tea, book, or art supplies.

Use reminders for meds, food, water, and rest.

8) Creativity and expression

Doodle, color, or knit for five minutes.

Write a few lines about what you feel right now.

Sing along to a familiar song.

Read two pages of a favorite book.

Play with clay, cards, or a puzzle.

Try a short guided imagery or journaling prompt.

9) Comfort and self-soothing

Wrap in a blanket or hold a pillow to your chest.

Make a warm drink and sit in a comfortable spot.

Take a shower or bath if that feels good.

Use lotion on your hands and notice the sensation.

Pet an animal or hold a plush item if available.

Remind yourself of three strengths you have used before.

10) Urgent support and safety

If risk of harm is present, call or text 9-8-8 for immediate support, or use local crisis services.

Go to the emergency department or call 911 for urgent medical or safety concerns.

Use your personal safety plan if you have one, or create a simple plan with warning signs and contacts.

Get Help Now

1-855-449-9949 / support@iamentalhealth.ca