



Coping Skills Toolbox

A simple, body-based guide to help clients find what they need in the moment.

Best way to use this handout: Start with the question “**What do I need right now?**” Then choose one small skill from the section that fits best. When the nervous system is activated, simple and concrete usually works better than perfect.

Choose the category that fits best

Ground I feel scattered, unreal, panicky, flooded, or disconnected.	Release I feel keyed up, angry, restless, agitated, or trapped in my body.
Soothe I feel tender, sad, overwhelmed, lonely, or raw.	Connect I feel ashamed, shut down, alone, or like I need support.
Refocus My mind is racing, spiraling, looping, or stuck.	Rest I am depleted and need gentleness, quiet, and less input.

A coping skill should help you feel a little more steady, connected, or clear. If it makes you feel worse, switch strategies.

1. Quick Start: pick the kind of support you need

Ground

- Name 5 things you see
- Put both feet on the floor
- Hold ice or run cold water over hands
- Orient to the room: date, place, and safety
- Use a weighted blanket or firm pressure

Release

- Take a brisk walk
- Shake out hands, arms, or legs
- Push palms together or against a wall
- Try butterfly tapping
- Exhale longer than you inhale

Soothe

- Wrap up in a blanket
- Take a warm shower
- Light a candle
- Sip tea or cold water slowly
- Listen to calming music or nature sounds

Connect

- Text or call a safe person
- Sit near someone trustworthy
- Ask for a hug if that feels right
- Hold a pet
- Use compassionate self-talk

Refocus

- Name what is true right now
- Write one next step only
- Say: "This is a feeling, not a fact."
- Limit stimulation for 10 minutes
- Use a short prayer, mantra, or grounding phrase

Rest

- Dim lights
- Lie down with one hand on chest and one on belly
- Take a screen break
- Reduce noise
- Give yourself permission to pause

2. Sensory Tools: use the body to help the nervous system settle

Sight	Dim lights; look out a window; watch waves, trees, or moving clouds; use soft colors; look around the room and name what you see.
Sound	Calming playlist; white noise; rain sounds; humming; singing; ear plugs; silence for a few minutes.
Smell	Light a candle; essential oils; fresh air; coffee grounds; lotion; familiar clean scents.
Touch	Weighted blanket; warm bath; hot shower; cold on hands; hold a smooth stone; soft blanket; self-hug; pressure on shoulders.
Taste	Sweet or sour candy; peppermint; gum; herbal tea; ice water; a bite of something crunchy or grounding.
Movement / Body Sense	Stretching; walking; rocking; pacing slowly; shaking out tension; tapping; breathing practice; wall push; lying on the floor.

Tip: When someone is highly activated, sensory skills are often more accessible than insight skills.

3. By Emotion: match the skill to the feeling

Feeling	Helpful starting points
Anxiety / Panic	Cold on hands, slower exhale, feet on floor, orient to room, sour candy, paced walking
Anger / Agitation	Movement, wall push, shaking, fast walk, music, journaling, firm pressure, boundaries
Sadness / Grief	Blanket, warm shower, tea, music, tears, prayer, candle, connection with a safe person
Shame	Compassionate self-talk, cover with blanket, text someone safe, hand on heart, reality check, step out of isolation
Numb / Disconnected	Cold water, scent, crunchy snack, naming colors, walking outside, stronger sensory input
Overwhelm	Reduce input, choose one task, dim lights, one-minute breathing, sit down, ask for help

A simple order that often helps

1) Regulate the body 2) Reduce stimulation 3) Reach for support 4) Re-engage the mind once you are more settled

4. Build Your Personal Toolbox

Circle, highlight, or write in the tools that help you most. The goal is not to use every skill. The goal is to know what helps *you*.

When I feel anxious, I can try...	
When I feel angry or restless, I can try...	
When I feel sad or lonely, I can try...	
When I feel ashamed or shut down, I can try...	
People I can reach out to...	
Things that usually make it worse...	

Important: Coping skills can support regulation, but they are not a substitute for emergency care. If you are in immediate danger or feel unable to stay safe, call emergency services or go to the nearest emergency room.