**Exercises for Relaxation or Slowing the Mind Down**

**General Notes:**

* Trying something new is stressful. Practice relaxation exercises proactively so that they become second nature. Then you can start using them you are already stressed or upset.
* These are outlines and not complete experiences. Add any imagery that suits you.
* You should deliberately try to move at a slightly slower pace than what seems natural to your mind or breathing

**Square Breathing**

* Find a square or rectangle in your environment. With your eyes, focus on its outline
* Pick a corner. Count to 4 (4 seconds) while breathing in and moving your eyes up the side
* Count to 4 while holding your breath and moving your eyes along the top
* Count to 4 while breathing out and moving your eyes from the top to the bottom corner
* Count to 4 while holding your breath. Move your eyes along the bottom to the starting corner
* Repeat for a total of 4 or more rounds

**4-7-8 Breathing**

1. Reduce the length of the below numbers if having breathing difficulties (e.g., asthma, cold, or smoking)
2. When first getting used to it this exercise you may experience dizziness/lightheadedness. Until you know its effect on you, do not do it while driving, operating heavy machinery, while on a ladder or otherwise doing anything where dizziness may pose a danger.
   * Slowly breathe in for 4 seconds
   * Hold your breath for 7 seconds
   * Slowly breathe out for 8 seconds
   * Repeat at least 5 times, or as many times as desired

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

1. Skip any individual parts if they cause you pain or the situation you are in makes it difficult to do.
2. Make sure to breathe throughout the exercise.

* Scrunch in toes 2 times 5 seconds
* Push heals into the ground 2 times 5 seconds
* Push legs into the chair 2 times 5 seconds
* (remember to breathe)
* Push belly-button in toward your back 2 times 5 seconds
* Elbows at your side, push the elbows in toward your body 2 times 5 seconds
* Stretch out your arms and fingers as much as you can for 2 times 5 seconds
* Push shoulders up toward the ears for 2 times 5 seconds

**Deep Breathing with Relaxation Word**

* Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
* If you are new to this, closing your eyes may make it easier
* Take deep breaths far down into the stomach, feeling the stomach muscles expand.
* After a few breaths, each time you breathe out add a word that for your symbolizes being relaxed (for example “stream,” “field,” “summer,” “waves,” “beach,” “mountain-top”)
* Keep breathing with the relaxation word for a few minutes
* If you do this exercise frequently, and stick to the same relaxation word, then eventually the relaxation word and a couple of deep breaths will likely relax you quickly in a situation you need to calm down fast

**Self-hug/Corpus Callosum Activation**

1. Do not do this exercise if having wrist/elbow problems

* Stretch your arms and fingers out in front of you
* Turn your hands so the thumbs are down
* Cross your arms
* Fold your hands together (your thumbs will be on the down side of the folded hands)
* Bend your elbows and move the folded hands downwards, inwards, and up between your arms
* Rest your arms and folded hands up against your body
* Squeeze your arms and/or hands against your body if this is comfortable
* Close your eyes
* Take deep breaths

**Leaves Down the River**

* Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
* Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open).
* In your mind, picture yourself comfortably seated by a river-bank
* Picture a stream in front of you with leaves sailing past you down-river
* Start noticing the thoughts popping into your mind
* For each thought, mentally grab it, and put it on a leaf. Watch it sail downstream.
* For each new thought, continue to gently put it on a leaf and picture letting is sail.
* Take your time.
* You don’t have to catch every thought.
* If you have thoughts about this exercise, or about your thoughts, put those thoughts on the leaves as well.
* Continue this exercise until you notice that the thoughts popping up seem more distant
* When you notice that, put that thought on a leaf as well and let it sail.
* Continue for a while, placing each further thought on a drifting leaf

**Letting the Stress Seep Away**

* Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor
* Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open)
* Pay attention to how your body feels – notice muscles that may be tense
* Notice your own tiredness and focus on it for a moment
* Notice that tired feeling as it sits throughout your body
* Start feeling that tiredness pull downwards – starting to seep out of your body and into the chair and the ground
* Slowly notice it seeping away from your scalp and face, your neck, arms, body, seat, and legs.
* Let yourself sit with your new feeling for a few moments before moving out of the exercise

**Boxing Up**

* Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
* Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open).
* In your mind, start picturing a calm place (for example a field or in front of a fire)
* Start noticing that thoughts and ideas are moving through your mind
* Picture a large box
* Start noticing individual thoughts as they are moving through your mind
* Slowly, and unhurried, mentally gently grab each thought and in turn put each into the box
* There might be a lot of thoughts at first, but take your time and grab one at the time – if some fly by while you take your time putting others in, then that is okay as well
* When the thoughts have slowed down and most of the thoughts have already been put in the box, gently close it and tie it up with a bow
* Imagine putting this box somewhere out of the way – somewhere that you don’t see it, but where you can get to it if you need it, but for now it is out of the way so that it does not clutter up your calm space (for example behind a bush or in the garage)
* Let yourself stay in this calm space for a while before leaving it, taking some the calm with you

**Racing Track**

* This exercise is meant for racing thoughts - thoughts that appear to be moving too fast and creating discomfort because of it
* Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor
* Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open)
* Imagine and notice your thoughts racing – racing past you on a track – running and running
* As you watch the racing thoughts race past for a while, notice that you are actually watching them from your seat in the audience
* The speed of your thoughts may or may not remain dizzying, but you are sitting still watching them
* As the racing continues, although perhaps at some distance, picture yourself leaving the seating area to go behind the seat and get a nice warm hot-dog from a vendor or a big soda
* You may notice some remaining awareness of the thoughts racing back at the track – and perhaps some noise of it coming through to you, but that is okay
* Notice what might be a presence of two speeds of thought at once – the thoughts racing on the track that you can let pass in the background – and the calmer more deliberate thoughts that now may go on in the foreground as you let these focus on something you enjoy