

Strategies and Tips for Promoting Wellbeing during COVID-19

Center for Wellbeing
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Neuroscience studies support four constituents to wellbeing: cognitive, intentional, attentional and emotional balance.¹ Increased stress can negatively affect our ability to regulate emotional responses.² You might find yourself experiencing a wide range of quick changing emotions or difficulty feeling in control of your emotions during this time. “Security priming,” or focusing on stimuli designed to activate a sense of love, comfort, and safety, can positively affect emotion regulation.^{3,4,5} One method of security priming includes using the following five skills.⁶

1. **Tracking:** Awareness of the somatic signature of emotion in your body, which can include a range of sensations such as increased heart rate, sweating, nausea, and headache.
2. **Resourcing:** Naming people, places, and activities that bring a sense of peace, and noticing the somatic signature of those reflections.
3. **Grounding:** Focusing attention on breath, one of the five senses, or objects around the room in the present moment.
4. **Gesturing:** Self-calming actions such as twiddling the thumbs, petting an animal, or stroking one’s hair.
5. **Shift & Stay:** Shifting attention away from distressing thoughts, feelings, or sensations that triggers the nervous system’s fight or flight responses, and staying with a focused-attention on a resource, a grounding activity, or a gesture until calmness returns.

A 5-min, audio-guided grounding exercise can be found at: <https://peoria.medicine.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/11/meditation-grounding-using-breath-and-senses.m4a>

Here are a few additional resources for improving emotional balance:

- Online Guided Meditations: <https://www.tarabrach.com/pandemic/>
- “Managing Emotions Effectively in Uncertain Times” by Marc Brackett: <https://www.mindfulleader.org/blog/37647-managing-emotions-effectively-in>

¹ Davidson, RJ & Schuyler, B. *Neuroscience of Happiness*. Helliwell, JF, Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (Editors). World Happiness Report 2015.

² Ma, S.T., Abelson, J.L., Okada, G. *et al.* Neural circuitry of emotion regulation: Effects of appraisal, attention, and cortisol administration. *Cogn Affect Behav Neurosci* 17, 437–451 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-016-0489-1>

³ Gross, J.J. & Jazaieri, H. (2014). Emotion, emotion regulation, and psychopathology: An affective science perspective. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 2(4), 387–401.

⁴ Hudson, N.W. & Fraley, C. (2018). Moving toward greater security: The effects of repeatedly priming attachment security and anxiety. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 74, 147-157.

⁵ McGuire, A., Gillath, O., Jackson, Y. & Ingram, R. (2018). Attachment security priming as a potential intervention for depressive symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 37(1), 44-68.

⁶ Miller-Karas, E. (2015). *Building resilience to trauma: The trauma and community resiliency models*. New York, NY: Routledge.