

4-ELEMENTS TOOL

Developed by Elan Shapiro

1. EARTH - Grounding for Safety in the Present

Take a minute to ground - to notice that you are here in this place, in this time. Place your feet on the ground and notice the connection of your feet to the ground. Notice the chair supporting you. Now use your senses to notice the different sights and sounds in the room. Notice three new things ... What do you see... What do you hear....

2. AIR - Breathing for Centering

Now that you are feeling grounded, draw your attention to your breath. When we are feeling stressed our breath is rapid and shallow. Simply noticing the breath helps us feel centered and supported. Notice your breath. You can imagine making a rectangle with your breath - breath in for the count of 4, hold for 2, out for 4, hold for 2. Alternately, you can imagine breathing in through one foot, all the way up your body. Hesitating slightly as you cross from one shoulder to the other and breathing all the way down the other side of your body. Hesitating slightly as you switch from one foot to the other. Breathing in through your foot and all the way up one side of your body. Continue breathing slowly, gently, and deeply for an additional ten breaths.

3. WATER - Making Saliva to feel Calm and in Control

Notice if there is saliva in your mouth. When we are anxious or stressed, our mouth becomes dry. Part of the emergency/survival response is to shut off the digestive system. When we make saliva, we switch on the relaxation and nurturing response. When we make saliva, we can optimally manage our body and our thoughts. Make saliva to help manage breathing, heart rate, muscle tone, and warmth. You can chew gum or drink water. You can imagine eating your favourite meal, or something sour. You can use a tool from yoga and run your tongue around the inside and outside of your teeth. Draw your attention now to making more and more saliva, becoming calmer, relaxed, focused, and in control

4. FIRE - Light up the path to your imagination

Use your imagination to take yourself to a calm, peaceful place...perhaps a place in nature or to a memory when you felt good. Notice with your senses what it is like to be there. Notice what you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. Notice your thoughts, emotions, and the sensations in your body when you are there. Really soak in the sense of this place. Give yourself a butterfly hug. Tap briefly and slowly back and forth as you notice how everything about this place feels in your body.

Tips: The sequence of the 4-Elements (Earth-Air-Water-Fire) is designed to follow the body up from 1) the feet to 2) the stomach and chest, 3) to the throat and mouth and 4) to the head. Practice using the 4-Elements technique often and at times when your stress is lower. The more you practice, the more calming the effect. With practice, it will be easier for you to use

this intervention in times that are more difficult. Each of the four element tools is helpful and can be done individually. Return to Grounding to complete this exercise.

Whenever you notice stress building, take a quick reading of your stress level from 0 to 10. Perform some brief self-calming /self-control exercises by using the 4 Elements tools. Then take a second stress level reading from 0-10. The (modest) goal is to reduce your stress level by 1 or 2 units each time. Do this calming exercise at random times and at various initial stress levels. Practice will help prevent your stress responses from accumulating and enable you to better manage stress.

Reference

Shapiro, E. (2012). 4 elements exercises for stress reduction. (earth-air-water-fire).
<http://emdrresearchfoundation.org/toolkit/four-elements.pdf>