

Wellness Tools for Everyday

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Mental Health & Faith: A Closer Look
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IMPORTANT NOTE: This resource is intended to offer guidance and encouragement and should not replace the specialized training and professional judgment of a healthcare or mental healthcare professional. The content of this workbook is based on knowledge acquired through the certified peer specialist training for mental health (Missouri Department of Mental Health), wellness plan training, personal research, and the author’s experience with trauma and mental illness. It is recommended that this workbook be completed in a group setting or with a therapist.

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Introduction

Wellness Tools

Wellness tools are activities that bring an individual peace, comfort, joy, and relaxation. Because everyone is unique, each person will most likely have a unique list of the wellness tools they use. It is also fun to try new activities or hobbies in hopes of adding additional tools to your list. Here are a few examples of activities that could be calming and inspirational. These items demonstrate the difference between mindfulness (which is a wellness tool included in this booklet) and wellness: they are enjoyable activities but do not meet the mindfulness goal of keeping one's mind on the present.

1. Genealogy can be fun and rewarding as you explore your family's history.
2. Scrapbooking is a popular hobby that includes going through pictures and reflecting on past relationships and events.
3. Walking through a park or garden.

Wellness tools are behaviors or activities that allow you to take a break from the stresses in life that can cause depression, anxiety or other emotional or mental distress. Acting on your own behalf is empowering and leads to greater stability in many areas of life. Using your wellness tools should bring you joy, give you a sense of peace, and provide relief from pain. As you find activities that bring about these feelings of well-being, add them to your list!

When you create your list of wellness tools, select a format that works best for you. You may prefer using a simple list. Or, you may find it beneficial to categorize wellness tools by mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Other detailed categories could be used for a more extensive, detailed list. Below is a sample list of categories to help get you started.

Sample categories or types of tools

- Hobbies
- Games
- Sports (watch or participate)
- Social clubs or organizations
- Relationships
- Quiet time activities

A graphic with specific wellness activities is provided on the next page. You may want to post it on your refrigerator, bathroom door, or someplace else in your home for easy reference.

Creating a wellness tools list is a personal endeavor and not intended to be overwhelming or cause additional stress. However, you will benefit even from recognizing a small number of wellness tools.



Sit by water



Breath in & out

Play with pets

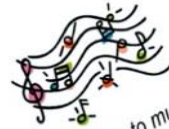


Take a nap



Journal

Unplug devices



Listen to music



Laugh with a friend

Activities for Wellness



Color

Do a puzzle



Call a friend



Take a walk

Get a massage



Take a bath

Do something nice



Dance



Have lunch with a friend



Smell the flowers



Read a good book

Go to the park



Do a craft project



Eat healthy



Schedule time for self-care!

Affirmations

The practice of stating affirmations allows you to reverse negative thoughts. In this workbook, the focus is on affirmations regarding self-perception. Have you grown accustomed to putting yourself down? It is time to reverse that unhealthy habit. Affirmations are statements of truth to combat the lies you have been told by others or yourself, and to open your eyes to Satan's deceptions.

The affirmations below include accompanying Bible verses for improved spiritual health. (Author Note: Special thanks to Kim Shirk, a therapist in Colorado, for sharing a set of affirmation cards and scriptures with me many years ago when I was undergoing intensive therapy for PTSD and depression. The following examples are taken directly from her affirmation cards.)

In the space provided, record your thoughts for each affirmation.

- I am a precious and unique individual.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. (Psalm 139:13, NIV)

- I like myself without comparing myself to others.

Be sure to do what you should, for then you will enjoy the personal satisfaction of having done your work well, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else.
(Galatians 6:4)

- Erasers are on the ends of pencils for a reason. It's o.k. to make mistakes.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV)

- God created me to be a happy, healthy, beautiful, positive, prosperous person.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV)

- I know that when I reach my quitting point, I can draw on His strength and trust that He will help me through.

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
(Psalm 62:5-6, NIV)

Sample Affirmation Cards

Sample affirmation cards to cut out or use as a reference for creating your own.

I am a beloved child of God.	I choose to be happy.
I will not blame myself or feel ashamed for situations outside of my control.	The God of the universe loves me more than I can imagine.
I will make the next best decision.	I can make a difference in this world through my words and actions.
I choose to have hope for my future.	I can encourage someone who experiences pain in the same way I experienced pain.
I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.	I am beautiful just the way I am.

Breathing

Getting oxygen to the body and brain has many physical and mental health benefits.

Practice 1: Mindful Breathing

Used with permission from MindfulnessExercises.com. Materials by Sean Fargo.
<https://mindfulnessexercises.com/6-mindful-breathing-exercises/#tab-con-6>.

Breathing Into Tension Mindfulness Worksheet

1. Come to a lying down position, comfortably resting on your back. Use any cushions and blankets you need for support.
2. Close your eyes and begin to take a few slow and steady breaths to ground yourself. Then, notice if there are any areas within the body that feel tense or tight. Hold these areas in your awareness for just a few more breaths.
3. Now, breathe into these areas, focus your attention on one particular part of the body that yearns for release or support. Let your next inhalation be long – and as you breathe in, imagine that a radiant white light enters your body through your nostrils and moves towards the place that calls for your attention.
4. Hold this nourishing light on your tension for a brief second, and as you exhale, envision some of that tension being released. Repeat this with the body part in question until the tightness or discomfort is lessened or has disappeared altogether.
5. If there is another area of tightness, repeat this exercise in the same way. Envision a pure white light filling your lungs as you inhale and then moving towards the area of tension. Imagine it carrying that tension away as you exhale. Repeat until, once again, the tension observed is softened or absent.
6. When you are finished, hold the entire body in your awareness. Make note of what is present for you and what has shifted.

Practice 2: Deep Breathing

Used with permission from PositivePsychology.com. Materials by Daniela Ramirez-Duran.
<https://positivepsychology.com/deep-breathing-techniques-exercises/>

“A wide range of empirical evidence compiled in scientific reviews supports the notion that deep-breathing techniques can improve symptoms and aid in illness treatment within clinical populations and are also beneficial in enhancing wellbeing and health in healthy people.” –Daniela Ramirez-Duran

(1) *Anchor Breathing*

Step	Sounds
1	Imagine being on a boat, feeling calm, and safe
2	Attached to the boat is an anchor. It keeps you there, where you want, and happy
3	Our bodies, like the boat, also have anchors, and they can help us focus. Our belly, our nose and mouth, and our chest and lungs can help us feel grounded.
4	With your hands on your chest, breathe in deeply.
5	Breathe out slowly.
6	Feel your ribs rise and fall.
7	As your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the anchor point.

(2) Deep Breathing

Three Steps to Deep Breathing

In order to experience deep breathing, first you will have to identify and experience the three types of breathing that comprise it. For this exercise it is better to lay down on your back if possible. Place the right hand on top of your navel and the left hand on top of your chest. Start by observing the natural flow of your breath for a few cycles.

1. Abdominal breathing.
 - With the next inhalation, think of intentionally sending the air towards the navel by letting your abdomen expand and rise freely.
 - Feel the right hand rising while the left hand remains almost still on top of the chest.
 - Feel the right hand coming down as you exhale while keeping the abdomen relaxed.
 - Continue to repeat this for a few minutes without straining the abdomen, but rather allowing it to expand and relax freely.
 - After some repetitions, return to your natural breathing.
2. Thoracic breathing.
 - Without changing your position, you will now shift your attention to your ribcage.
 - With the next inhalation, think of intentionally sending the air towards your rib cage instead of the abdomen.
 - Let the thorax expand and rise freely, allowing your left hand to move up and down as you keep breathing.
 - Breathe through the chest without engaging your diaphragm, slowly and deeply.
 - Your right hand should remain almost still.
 - Continue to repeat this breathing pattern for a few minutes.
 - After some repetitions, return to your natural breathing.
3. Clavicular breathing.
 - With the next inhalation, repeat the thoracic breathing pattern.
 - When the ribcage is completely expanded, inhale a bit more thinking of allowing the air to fill the upper section of your lungs at the base of your neck.
 - Feel the shoulders and collar bone rise up gently to find some space for the extra air to come in.
 - Exhale slowly letting the collarbone and shoulders drop first and then continue to relax the ribcage.
 - Continue to repeat this for a few minutes.
 - After some repetitions, return to your natural breathing.

Coloring

1. When you take time for coloring, put a limit on the time you will spend in a particular setting. Any activity can become addictive and keep you from fulfilling your responsibilities or engaging in social interaction.
2. There are multiple formats for coloring.
 - a. When using a coloring book:
 - i. You don't have to work through the book from front to back unless that's your preferred approach. Simply select a picture you would enjoy coloring in that moment.
 - ii. Be creative in selecting colors. Don't feel bound to traditional colors for objects. If you want to make a tree purple, do so! This is your creation.
 - iii. Enjoy the experience without expecting perfection. Yes, it's nice to color within the lines, but the point is to enjoy the activity and experience peace.
 - b. When using an app:
 - i. Take extra caution that your phone or device for coloring does not get stuck in your hand. This can lead to avoiding responsibilities or isolating from others.
 - ii. Even if you are limited on color selection, enjoy how the image blooms before your eyes as you color.
3. Take joy in your creation. When it's completed, share it, frame it, and take pleasure in what you've accomplished.

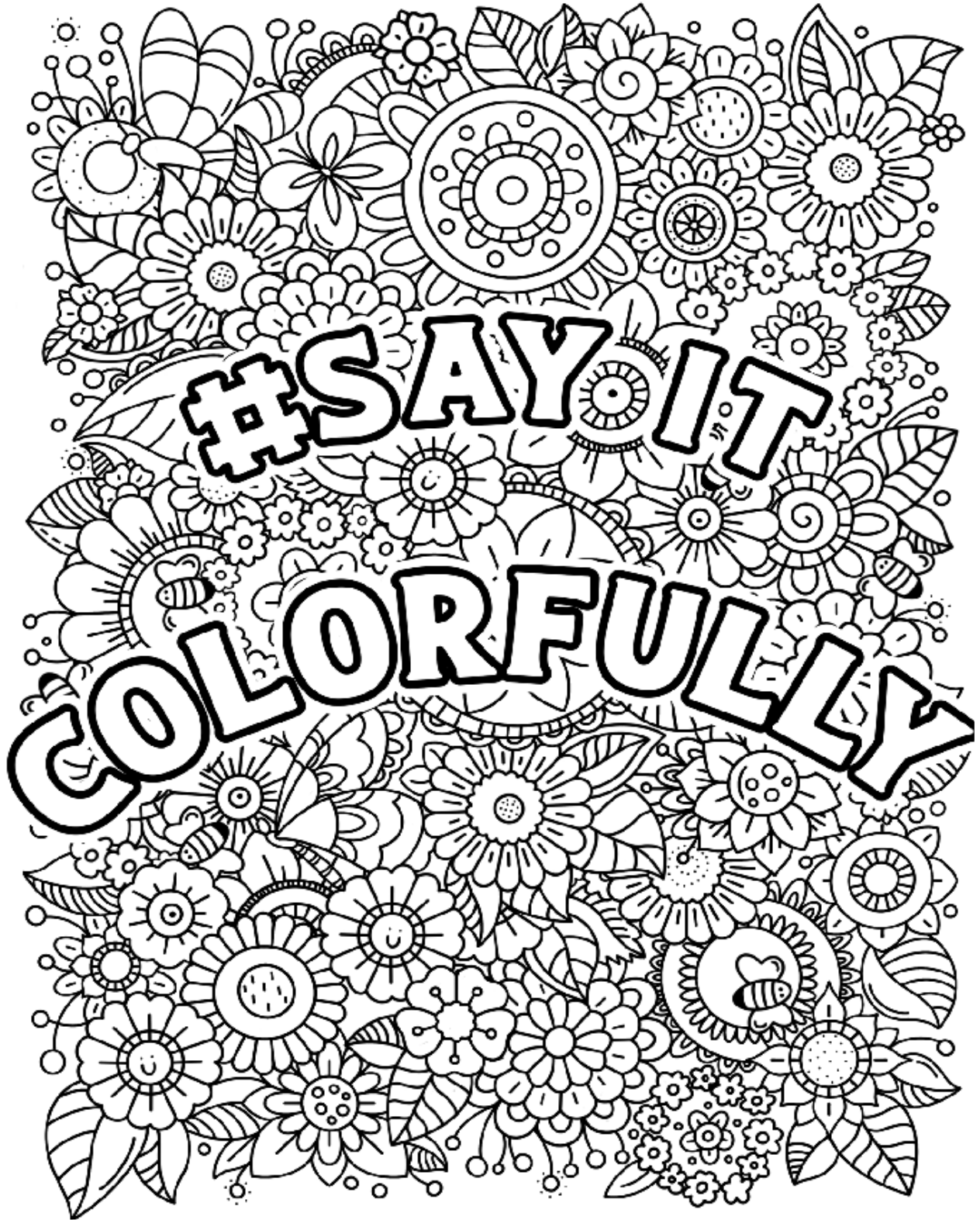
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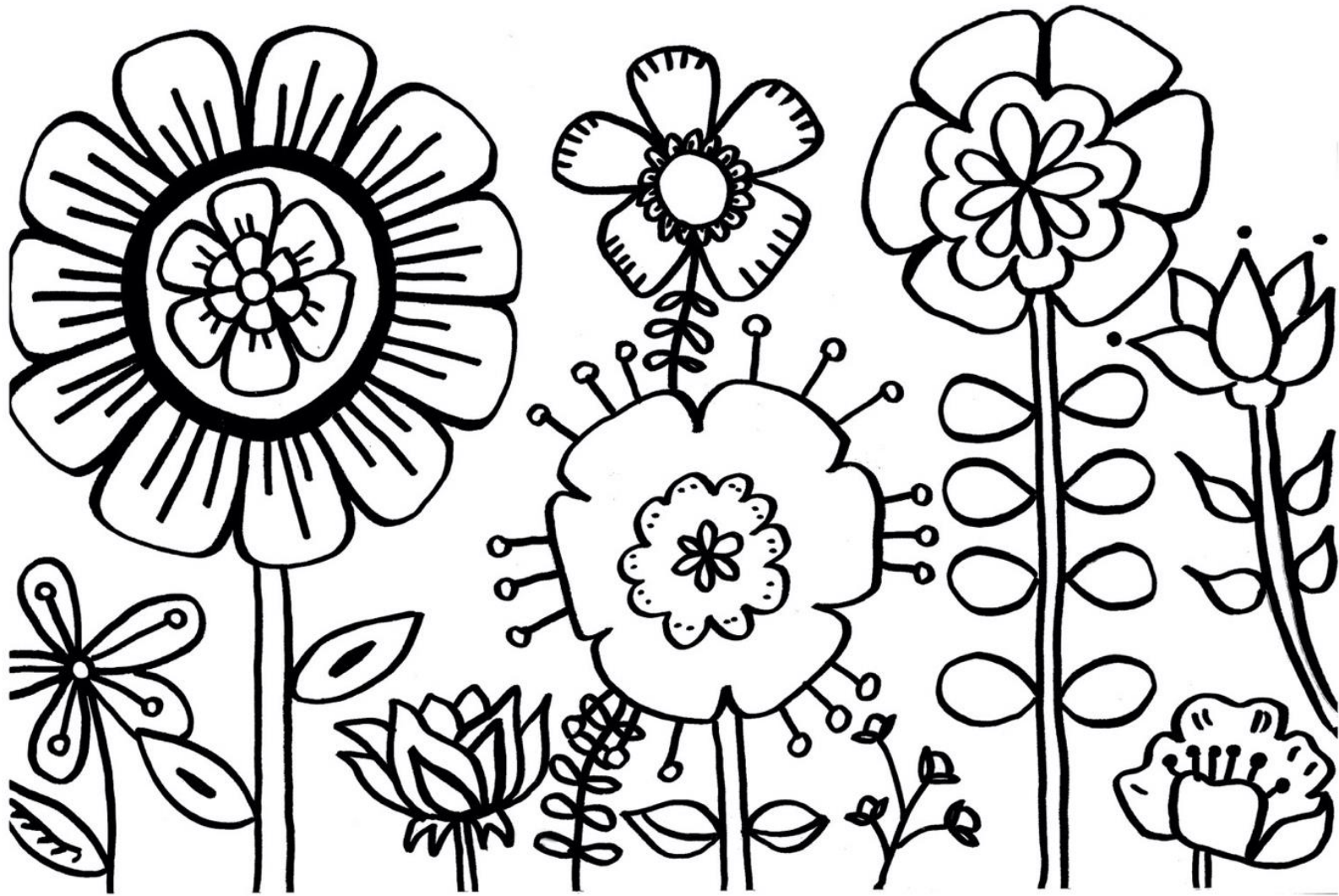
crayola.com/featured/free-coloring-pages/

<https://www.free-coloring-pages.com/>

Two coloring images are provided on the following pages.



A free download from bestcoloringpagesforkids.com



Gratitude List

Creating a list of things for which you are grateful can lift your spirit as you realize you have many things to celebrate. This may seem like a difficult exercise when you are encountering challenges, but as you reflect on your relationships, basic needs, places and events in life, you will undoubtedly realize you have many things to be thankful for.

Use the lines below to begin creating your list. Consider completing one of these sentences: “I am grateful for. . .” *or* “I am grateful because. . .” There are some examples to get you started.

Grateful for:

My pets.

The beautiful creation.

Grateful because:

I am alive!

God loves me unconditionally.

Grounding

Grounding is the practice of focusing on an object or activity to help you stay in the present moment. Many wellness tools can be used for grounding, which is also a mindfulness activity. Using a grounding medium (see below) can help relieve everyday stress and anxiety as you take a break from the chaos around you to regroup. If it is difficult to remove yourself from a stressful situation, some grounding activities can be undertaken even in the midst of a stressful meeting or event.

A grounding technique can also be used during counselling sessions. When working through abuse, trauma, or tragedy, accept them as part of your unchangeable *past* and maintain focus on the *present* in order to experience hope for the *future*.

Using the Ground Technique

Each individual is different in what they will select as their grounding medium and when they choose to use it. Some examples are below:

Ideas to Facilitate Grounding

*This list of suggested grounding activities includes author content as well as excerpts from the Christian Survivors Forums website (“Grounding Techniques.” Christian Survivors Forums, December 15, 2008. <http://christiansurvivors.com/forums/forum/fragile-hearts/resources/31073-grounding-techniques>)

- Concentrate and become absorbed in an activity
- Breathing exercises
- Hold a safe and familiar object (smooth stone, fidget toy, stuffed animal, watch, ring, cup or mug, etc.)
- Crochet, embroider, or do other crafts specifically occupying your hands
- Change sensory experience/input
 - Sight: see through your eyes, look at a picture, read a book
 - Touch: feel the chair you are sitting on, touch ice, hold a smooth stone
 - Sound: talk to someone, listen to music, TV
 - Taste: eat something that brings enjoyment
 - Smell: smell perfume or a favorite scent

- Transfer your feelings/memories into a safe “container” either through visualization or by creating an actual box. If using a box, write the feeling/memory on a piece of paper and slip it into the box for working through with your therapist.
- Dance or engage in other movement activities
- Repeat a grounding phrase such as “I’m here right now” or “God is with me”.
- Give yourself permission to address one thing at a time
- Identify in writing all problems you’re facing. Then divide them into two groups: (a) those you have control over, and (b) those you cannot control. Concentrate on one issue at a time from list (a).
- Decide what is important and what is not.
- Pray (Your own prayer or a well-known prayer such as the Serenity Prayer, Lord’s prayer, etc.)
- Exercise
- Draw
- Find a safe person

Goals When Using Grounding Techniques

The following information is taken directly from the Christian Survivors website. (<http://christiansurvivors.com/forums/forum/fragile-hearts/resources/31073-grounding-techniques>)

- To keep myself safe and free from injury
- To reorient myself to reality and the here and now
- To identify skills that I can use in the future to help myself remain grounded
- To identify what I can do to prevent a dissociative* experience

*A dissociative episode occurs when an individual blacks out and cannot recall events from a period of time. This is usually a result of trauma, exhaustion, some types of mental illness, or extreme stress. For more information, check out the article on the NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) website. “Dissociative Disorders.” NAMI, n.d. <https://nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions/Dissociative-Disorders>.

Sensory Awareness Grounding Skills

- Keep your eyes open, look around the room, notice your surroundings, notice details
- Hold a pillow, stuffed animal or a ball
- Place a cool cloth on your face, or hold something cool such as a can of soda
- Listen to soothing music
- Put your feet firmly on the ground
- Focus on someone's voice or a neutral conversation

Journaling

Journaling can be a rewarding practice for holistic health. If you're new at journaling, it may take practice. And you won't know if it is beneficial unless you try it. The experience is unique for each individual.

You may discover that journaling on a daily basis gives you an extra boost of emotional energy. Or, making a weekly appointment with your journal could become a part of your wellness routine. Even if you journal only when events move you to pull out paper and pen, you will receive the benefit of expressing yourself and your emotions in this way.

Regardless of what you're writing, approach journaling in an attitude of prayer for a deeper spiritual connection with the one and only God who loves you.

Ways to Journal

1. Write out prayers of praise, heartache, joy, or pain to help you process emotions while at the same time recognizing that God is present in all circumstances. *Note:* Your feelings are not 'wrong' but can lead to unhealthy behaviors if not addressed in a healthy way.
2. Pour out feelings about situations or encounters with others when it would be inappropriate or detrimental to verbally express those feelings.
3. Create a gratitude journal to record blessings in life regardless of situations. For example, every day is a new opportunity to see good in the world.
4. Express forgiveness for someone who does not ask for it or who may not deserve it.
5. Record daily activities including positive experiences.

See the following page for a guided journaling exercise.

Guided Journaling Exercise

Respond to any or all of the following questions as practice for journaling. These are not listed in any particular order. Use a special journal, notebook, or paper so space for writing is not limited.

1. How are you feeling in this moment and why?
2. What feelings have you experienced throughout today and why?
3. What were some of the highlights of your day OR what are you looking forward to today?
4. What progress would you like to see in pursuing everyday wellness?
5. Write out prayers for people in your life.
6. Write out a prayer expressing your needs and desires. Ask for wisdom from God to follow his directions.

Listening to Music

Music is a universal language that touches the soul and moves the listener to experience a wide range of emotions. Genres of music range from classical to jazz, country to rock & roll, pop to hip-hop, electronic to heavy metal, and many more.

Listening to music as a wellness activity can include sinking into instruments-only melodies and harmonies or singing along to favorites from the past. But in order to reach the goal of experiencing peace, joy, comfort, and relaxation, certain types of music may be more beneficial than others.

Recommended Music

Instrumental music can bring a sense of calm and happiness into a person's life without the distraction of words.

- Classical (especially from the Baroque and Classical periods of music)
- New age instrumental (primarily piano music)
- Smooth jazz
- Instrumental hymns
- Easy listening (instrumental versions of popular songs)

If someone prefers listening to music with words, the following types of music are suggestions.

1. Acapella
2. Songs from the 1950's-1960's
3. Smooth jazz
4. Contemporary Christian

It is important to avoid listening to music that could cause stress, agitation, depression, or other emotions that could be detrimental to your mental health.

Meditation (Christian Focus)

There are many approaches to meditation, but a common goal is to achieve a sense of peace and focus regardless of circumstances. In Christian meditation, your focus is on the promises and presence of God. This may involve reading and reflecting on Scripture, listening to a Christian song or hymn, or simply letting your thoughts dwell on the power of the Holy Spirit. While prayer is a conversation with God, meditation is an opportunity to let God do the talking. Open your heart to his message and watch for him to reveal his purpose for your life.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
(Psalm 19:14)

Practice: Meditation on Psalm 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times
of trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

1. Begin with a time of prayer. Practice awareness of God's presence by asking the Holy Spirit to join you in this exercise.
2. Read the verse out loud focusing on the beauty of the words. Depending on the verse, you may speak this as a prayer.
3. Read the verse silently, more slowly. Be aware of words that bring you peace, comfort, or joy.
4. Close your eyes and repeat the word or phrase silently. Continue repeating as you consider the meaning of the words and how God can use them. Throughout this step, breath in and out slowly.
5. Turn your thoughts to God. Pray that he will fulfill these words in your life.
6. Make your prayer personal. Example: "God, you are my refuge and strength. You are always ready to help in times of trouble."

This activity does not need to be restricted by time. Even as little as 2-3 minutes of meditation can bring you peace and relief from anxiety.

Suggested sources and examples for meditation.

From songs

- Jesus Loves Me

Jesus loves me, this I know.
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong.
They are weak but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
The Bible tells me so.

- God is So Good.

God is so good. God is so good.
God is so good. He's so good to me.

- Father, I adore you.

Father, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.
Jesus, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.
Spirit, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.

From the Bible

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16, NASB)

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

In a prayer

From John 14:27

“Lord, you’ve promised to leave me your peace. You said you would give me your peace; not as the world gives. I will not let my heart be troubled, nor will I be afraid.”

Mindfulness

Mindfulness activities are designed specifically for helping someone stay in the present moment. The goal is to avoid dwelling on the unchangeable past or unknowable future and embrace life in the here and now. Good mental health includes being aware of what is happening in the present.

Mindfulness exercises help you focus on the present. You can learn to live in the present moment and reduce the worry or anxiety you may experience when dwelling on the past or future. However it's important to remember that reflecting on the past and future can be beneficial. Your past has shaped who you are today and is an important aspect of your identity. You can look forward to the future by discovering your purpose and setting goals. Keeping a positive outlook about the past, present, and future is important for emotional and mental health.

At a recent mental health conference in Kansas City, Missouri, Jacie Harris, LMLP gave a presentation on mindfulness. At that time, Jacie worked as a Behavioral Health Training and Development Specialist with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas City. She shared three points that can aid in our understanding of how to engage in mindfulness activities. These steps also demonstrate the benefits of mindfulness as part of everyday life.*

**The write-ups below include content from Jacie Harris as well as this author, Caroline S. Cooper. Used by permission.*

3 Points of Mindfulness

1. Present-focused

Being mindful of the present includes awareness of your emotions. How are you feeling in this moment? Why? How do you typically respond when you are feeling this way?

It is important to realize that you cannot always control your thoughts and feelings, but you can acknowledge them and make a choice on how to respond. It is also important to accept your feelings without judging yourself.

2. *Intentional recognition*

Intense emotions can sometimes come on without warning. A stirring in the abdomen moves to a tightness in the chest. Words and behaviors begin to tumble out of control. It can be scary to experience unwanted and unhealthy feelings. Many times you may feel helpless. What can you do?

When you become aware of what you are experiencing internally, you can gain back a sense of control. You can strive for responding in a healthy way to each surge of emotion as it occurs: moment to moment. Again, it is important to stress the importance of giving yourself grace. You can celebrate your success in keeping anger in check or finding hope in the midst of despair. Or, actions that you may perceive as failure to cope in stressful situations can be welcomed as opportunities for improvement.

3. *Increased acceptance*

“Our mind’s job is to wander and go through events in life. Whatever our mind is giving us in the moment is important.” Jacie Harris

Random memories, out-of-the-blue thoughts, past conversations. . .

Your mind is amazing and sometimes has a ‘mind’ of its own. Instead of telling yourself you should not have disturbing or unhealthy thoughts, acknowledge them just as you acknowledge your emotions. Accept them and maybe even enjoy them. But do not dwell on them when you are working towards being mindful. Reserve this time for living in the moment.

How do you bring your mind back to the present? The three points listed here work together for a more pleasant and beneficial mindfulness experience.

Exercise based on the three points

1. *Present-focused.* Sit quietly in a chair. Close your eyes if that is helpful. Become aware of your senses. What do you hear, or smell? Is there a taste or touch to recall? If your eyes are open, what do you see?

2. *Intentional recognition.* As you sit quietly, let your mind explore any feelings you may be experiencing. Can you name your emotions? Remind yourself that feelings do not define you. Accept them without judgment and consider healthy ways to respond.

3. *Increased acceptance.* Accept the thoughts that are running through your head. Then, reign in your wandering mind by focusing on a specific mental activity. Can you reflect on the people and events in life for which you are grateful? Play your preferred style of music and focus on the music. (This author suggests instrumental music so you will not get distracted by lyrics.)

Physical Activity

All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. (1 Corinthians 9:26-27a)

These verses are pulled from a passage of Scripture where Paul beautifully uses the illustration of athletes to describe the importance of perseverance in running a spiritual race. In other words, being disciplined in their spiritual life.

There are many references to and illustrations of physical activity throughout the Bible which demonstrates the importance of taking care of your body. After all, God created your physical body. And because he wants to see you embrace recovery completely, movement and exercise is part of that process.

Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn your back on evil. Then you will gain renewed health and vitality. (Proverbs 3:7-8)

- Write a list of how you could begin to increase your physical activity.
EXAMPLE: Park the car at the far end of the parking lot and walk.

Recreational Sports

When you are physically active, even in the casual ways you listed above, you will begin to have more energy for everyday life. Do you already play recreational sports through your community or church? Are there sports you used to play that you would like to try again? Are you ready to try a new game or activity? List your present or future recreational ideas below.

Prayer

The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

God really does hear you. He does listen. And he always answers – although not always in the way or time you think would be best. Even when you doubt his very existence, he still loves you and wants a personal relationship with you. In the exercises that follow, it does not matter if you use correct grammar, proper spelling, or multi-syllable words in your prayers. This is simply your time to talk with God.

Sample Prayers

The Lord's Prayer: Matthew 6:9-13 (NASB)

Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]’

The Serenity Prayer: by Reinhold Neibuhr (1892-1971, German theologian)

*This is the full, original version

(https://www.prayerfoundation.org/dailyoffice/serenity_prayer_full_version.htm)

God, give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.

Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.

Amen.

Personal Prayers

- 1. Write a prayer expressing your pain, struggles, doubts, questions, etc. God can take whatever you have to say. He wants you to come before his throne and pour out your heart to him. So pour away.

2. Write a prayer thanking God for listening. Offer words of praise for the blessings in your life.

3. Write a prayer, asking God to make his presence known to you throughout this process of recovery and into the future. Express your commitment to healing and health by whatever means God designs.

Safe Place Visualization

When you experience unhealthy emotions or behaviors that spiral out of control, especially those that could result in harm to yourself or others, it may be time to retreat. Creating a safe place in your mind is an opportunity to rest and be rejuvenated. When you have achieved calmness and the ability to think rationally, you can get back to the work of healthy living with new energy. You can renew your hope.

This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for your souls.
It leads you through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary.
(Hebrews 6:19)

When depressed or distressed, lie on your bed or sit back in a comfortable chair. Close your eyes, focus on breathing, and imagine a safe place involving all of your senses. In this place, you will find relaxation and clarity. Focus on God's presence and his power to overcome the emotional distress that brought you here.

If needed or desired, you can imagine an item in your safe place for capturing or sending negative thoughts that may try to distract you from this relaxation experience. For example, a small container, a hole in the sky, behind a door, etc.

The short descriptions below can serve as examples as you create your unique place(s) of safety in the guided exercise that follows.

Example 1: On the Beach

(This is a safe place created and used by the author.)

I walked on a warm beach where I could escape when I felt chilled and depressed. On a small, sandy hill overlooking the water, I lay on a beach chair with an umbrella stuck in the sand behind me, offering shade from the heat of the sun. On the sand beside me was a beautiful conch shell where I could banish negative thoughts while I enjoyed the beauty of my surroundings.

I heard seagulls crying, the ocean breaking on the beach, and children laughing in the distance. I smelled and tasted the saltiness of the air, and enjoyed

the refreshing lemonade poured over ice. The clear blue water sparkled in the sun. I saw a boat in the distance and seashells scattered on the beach. I closed my eyes and listened to soft music playing. I felt the presence of God and rested in his arms.

Example 2: In the Hammock

(This is a safe place created and used by the author. The hammock hung in her grandparents' backyard.)

When my face grew hot in anger or anxiety, I retreated to a hammock under a shade tree where my flushed cheeks could cool down. The hammock hung between two tall, strong trees. One of them had a knothole that could hold negative thoughts or emotions that tried to pull me away from my rest.

I saw sunrays casting shadows across the lawn. The colorful flowers permeated the air with a pleasing fragrance. When I closed my eyes, I could hear the rustle of leaves, birds calling, bees buzzing, and a random 'snort' from the pigs on the farm. I felt the hammock swaying beneath me as the cool breeze meandered around me. God's presence reminded me of his love. I felt at peace.

Personal well-being is a priority that might occasionally require a break from the worries of the world. Retreating to a safe spot provides an opportunity to focus on rest and experience peace. You can reflect on the hope you have in the Lord and in his ability to guide your journey. After you have enjoyed a time of renewal and relaxation, you will have a rejuvenated spirit and strength.

Guided Safe Place Activity

Complete the following questions to design your place for hope and peace. If needed, use your computer or extra paper for more space. Use summaries or write in great detail, whatever works for you. Your safe place can be real or imaginary.

Think of a real or imaginary location: in the mountains, at the beach, lounging on a favorite recliner, in a library, swinging on a hammock in the woods. The possibilities are endless. Write down a brief description of your safe spot. As a spiritual exercise, include how you will experience God's presence in your special.

1. Give a brief description of your safe place. (For example: a beach, a cabin in the woods, your bedroom, the jacuzzi, etc.)

2. In this special place, do you see a clear blue sky with white fluffy clouds? Are you surrounded by pictures of loved ones? Would animals call this place home? Write what you SEE.

3. Are birds calling gently to each other? Can you hear the breeze whistling through the trees? Is music playing softly in the background? Write down what you HEAR.

4. What scents surround you? Salty sea air? Flowers? Home-baked cookies? Write down what you SMELL.

5. Are your taste buds tingling? Have you memorized the flavor of your favorite food? Do you have the aftertaste of a barbecue dinner on your tongue? Write down what you TASTE.

6. How cool grass tickling your toes? Are you snuggling under a warm blanket? Are you in a boat that is rocking gently on the waves? Write down what you FEEL.

Using Your Safe Place

When you find it necessary to retreat to your safe spot, try these suggestions.

- Close your eyes and imagine yourself in your safe place. Allow your mind to dwell on the characteristics of this place as expressed in the guided exercise so your senses become part of the experience. If it helps, turn on your favorite music in the background, light a candle, or make any other adjustments needed for a pleasing environment.

Spiritual focus: In God’s arms you are peacefully held, perfectly safe, and separated from the circumstances that cause you stress, anger, or anxiety. Engage in prayer and fellowship with God. Ask him to give you the self-control you need for emotional stability and rational thought. Invite his peace to surround you as you release control of your life to him.

- Identify an object of containment somewhere in the safe place where you can send intrusive or negative thoughts. Review the example safe places for containment object ideas: a conch shell on the beach or a knot in a tree.

Spiritual focus: Jesus says we can come to him with our burdens and he will give us rest (see Matthew 11:28-30). When you visualize your stress moving into an object in your safe place, keep in mind that Jesus is the one carrying it there.

- After you have regained composure and emotional stability, it will be necessary to return to the “real world” and face the responsibilities of life. However, you are not alone. You are never alone.

Spiritual focus: As a follower of Christ, the Holy Spirit will continue giving you the peace you experienced in your safe place. However, it takes practice to be aware of the peace of Jesus above the challenging circumstances and stresses of life. Visualizing a safe place is one way to enjoy resting in the peace of Christ.

Jesus said, “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” (John 14:27)

Strengths List

When you begin to focus on your positive qualities, you can identify strengths and areas of success. Celebrate those moments!

Strengths – emphasize personality or character traits

Talents/Abilities – emphasize things you do well

Successes

Sometimes we only recognize our strengths through our success. How have you been successful in everyday? Did you achieve a major success on a long-term project? List them below.

Examples: I got out of bed on time. I graduated from college. I have been sober for 10 years.

For you are God's masterpiece. He has created you anew in Christ Jesus, so you can do the good things he planned for you long ago. (Ephesians 2:10)

About the Author



Caroline S. Cooper is a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) in mental health whose mission is to offer encouragement for life in this complicated world. She is a writer on topics primarily related to mental health from a Christian perspective and has taught and written Bible studies for over 30 years.

Caroline is also the host of a podcast, *Mental Health and Faith: A Closer Look*. In this podcast, Caroline teaches on topics intended to further her mission of encouragement. In addition, she interviews guests with a wide range of experiences in mental health and faith such as pastors, fellow writers, mental health professionals, and peers.

As an experienced speaker, Caroline enjoys preparing unique and interactive presentations on a variety of topics. She has presented at the Real Voices, Real Choices peer-led conference pertaining to mental illness, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse and sponsored by the Missouri Mental Health Foundation; the Mental Health KC conference, organized by the Kansas City Metro Council of Behavioral Health Centers; and the Missouri Department of Mental Health Spring Training Institute.

Caroline is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC). She is also a member of the Heart of America Christian Writers Network (HACWN) in Kansas City, Missouri and was selected as their 2017 Writer of the Year.

In 1983, Caroline married her college sweetheart, Harry. They have four grown children and many grandchildren. Caroline and Harry live in Harrisonville, Missouri.

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