

WHAT DOES *Mental Health*  
LOOK AND FEEL LIKE?



**Kawuma Miruma**

*to gather together and take care of*



**UNGOOROO**  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



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An electronic version of this document is available at <https://www.ungooroo.com.au/mental-health/>

## RESOURCES

Some support services that you could include:

- eheadspace (for 12–25 year olds) – chat online 9am – 1am Melbourne time
- ReachOut.com (for 14–25 year olds) – website and online forum
- Counselling Online (for anyone with a drug or alcohol problem) – call 1800 888 236 or chat online 24/7
- **000** in an emergency

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# Understanding Psychosis



**Psychosis is an experience where a person has problems interpreting the real world. They might see or hear things that other people can't, or have unusual ideas or beliefs.**

Psychosis is often frightening for the person going through it and misunderstood by those around them. But it can be treated. Most people who experience psychosis make a good recovery and go on to lead healthy, productive lives.

Psychosis is a serious issue that calls for professional clinical help – it can have a big impact on a person's life and should never be ignored. It's important to get help early to increase chances for a quicker, more complete recovery.

## **What are the symptoms of psychosis?**

**Confused thinking:** Everyday thoughts can become confused, making it hard to understand or express ideas.

A person might find it hard to concentrate, follow a conversation or remember things. Thoughts can seem to speed up or slow down.

**False beliefs (delusions):** A person can have strong beliefs in things that aren't real to other people. They might believe that they're being followed, that someone is trying to harm them, or that they're getting secret messages from TV. This can be very scary for the person and impact their behaviour.

**Hallucinations:** A person may hear or see something that isn't actually there. Sometimes other senses like touch, smell or taste can also be affected.

For example, they might:

- hear noises or voices that aren't there
- see things that seem strange, like faces in objects or shadows at the window
- have a strange taste in their mouth
- smell things others can't
- feel things on their skin that are not there.

**Changed emotions:** A person may feel strange and cut off from the world. They may seem to feel less emotion or show less emotion to those around them.

**Changed behaviour:** A person may be extremely active or find it hard getting the energy to do things. They might laugh when things don't seem funny or become angry or upset without any obvious reason. The person may stop doing the things they used to do like hanging out with friends and family. The person can seem excited, depressed or irritable for little or no reason obvious to others.

Symptoms of psychosis are different for everyone. They might not be present all the time, have different causes and can change over time.

## **What are the types of psychosis?**

Experiencing psychotic symptoms doesn't necessarily mean that someone has a psychotic illness.

- About three in every 100 people are diagnosed with a psychotic illness at some stage in their life.
- More than three quarters of psychotic experiences don't progress to a diagnosable illness.
- A person is most likely to have their first episode of psychosis in their late teens or early twenties.

Many people assume that people experiencing psychosis have schizophrenia, but there are lots of illnesses that have psychotic symptoms, including:

- brief psychotic disorder
- substance/medication-induced psychotic disorder
- bipolar disorder
- major depression with psychotic features
- delusional disorder
- schizophrenia.

Because people's symptoms often change over time, the type of disorder often changes, too. Sometimes people are diagnosed with one thing, and then later the diagnosis is changed or removed if they don't fit the criteria for that disorder anymore.

## **What causes psychosis?**

Like lots of mental health difficulties, psychosis is caused by a combination of different things. Things like genetics (inherited from parents) and a history of tough times (like trauma and childhood experiences) can make a person more vulnerable to psychosis.

Things people are exposed to in life (or 'stressors') can also contribute to developing a psychosis. They include:

- drug use
- grief and loss
- difficult times with family or friends
- problems at school or work.

## **Recovering from psychosis**

The recovery journey is different for everyone. Just like with any illness, recovering from psychosis can be an ongoing process. It's not just about getting rid of the symptoms – it's about learning to enjoy life while managing the tough times when they happen.

# Trauma and the Flight, Fight, Freeze response

**Trauma occurs when the experience or perception of extreme threat overwhelms our capacity to cope.**

Trauma activates the physiological 'survival' response in our brain known as the "fight, flight, freeze" (FFF) response. This is an automatic response over which we have no conscious control nor are we able to choose how our body responds.

The FFF response instantly causes hormonal and physiological changes. These changes allow us to act quickly so we can protect ourselves. It is a survival instinct that our ancient ancestors developed to stay alive.

When the FFF response is triggered by perceived fear, our amygdala will take over and start controlling our behaviour. Once this happens our frontal cortex or "thinking brain" gets locked up or goes "off-line". Once the danger has passed, our bodies return to its normal state after 20-30 minutes

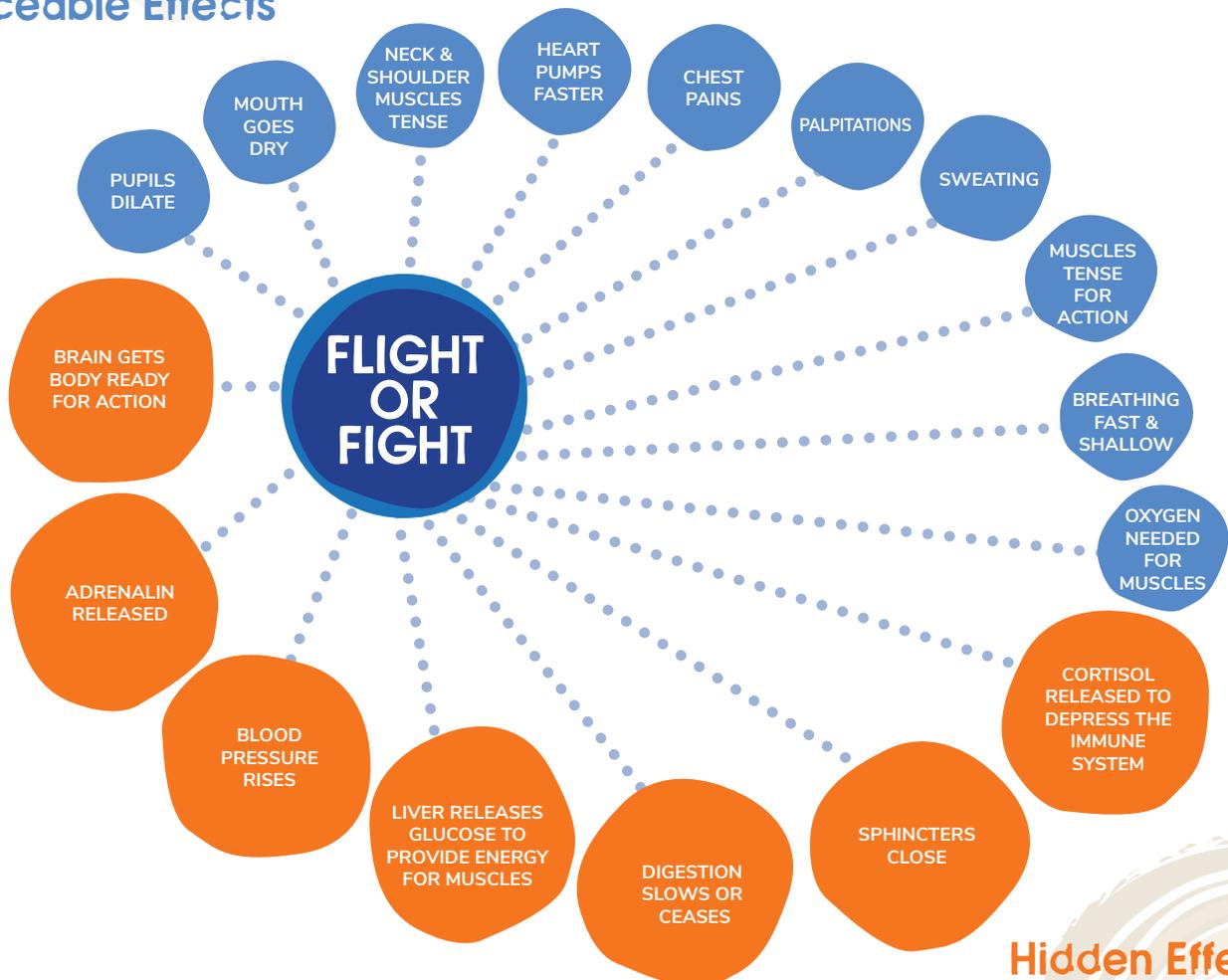
which is also known as homeostasis. It is at this point our amygdala unlocks our frontal cortex.

For some people who have experienced trauma they can remain stuck in the FFF response or find that their FFF response is easily triggered and this can lead to negative impacts on our physical and mental health.

Our memory of the trauma and it's perceived threats are different for each person and can be triggered by anything associated with that memory.

Trauma response are innate and cannot be helped. Our brain thinks we are in danger and because it considers the situation to be life threatening it automatically triggers a FFF response to keep you safe.

## Noticeable Effects



## Hidden Effects

# Stress

**Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension.**

Everyone experiences stress at times. A little bit of stress is not a problem. Stress can be caused by lots of different things including:

## PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES

- conflict with loved ones
- being alone
- lack of income
- worries about the future

## PROBLEMS AT WORK

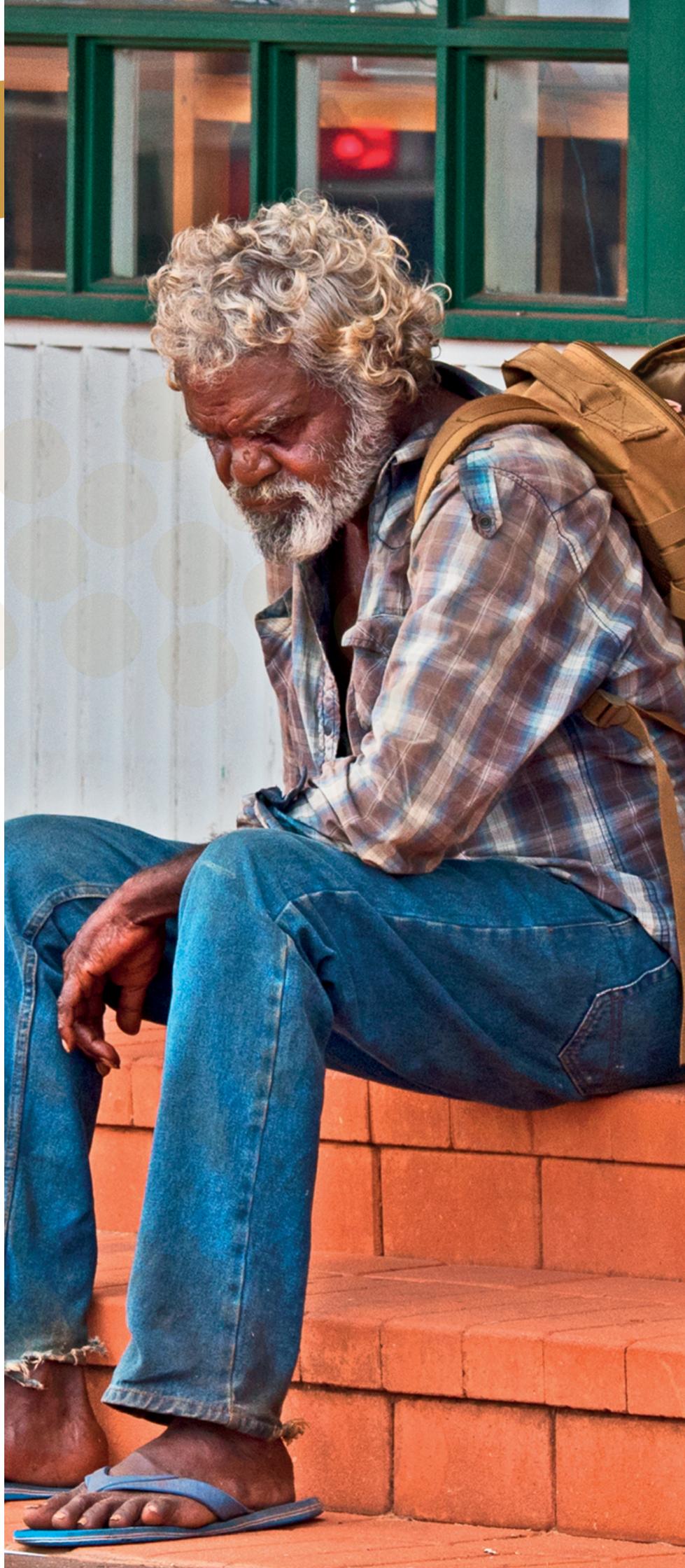
- conflict with colleagues
- an extremely demanding or insecure job

## MAJOR THREATS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- violence
- racism
- disease
- lack of economic opportunity

“Very high stress often affect the mind and the body”

**Stress can cause:** bad thoughts, feeling sad inside, blaming yourself for things even if it's not your fault, feeling like everything is a hassle being unable to think properly or make good choices and more.



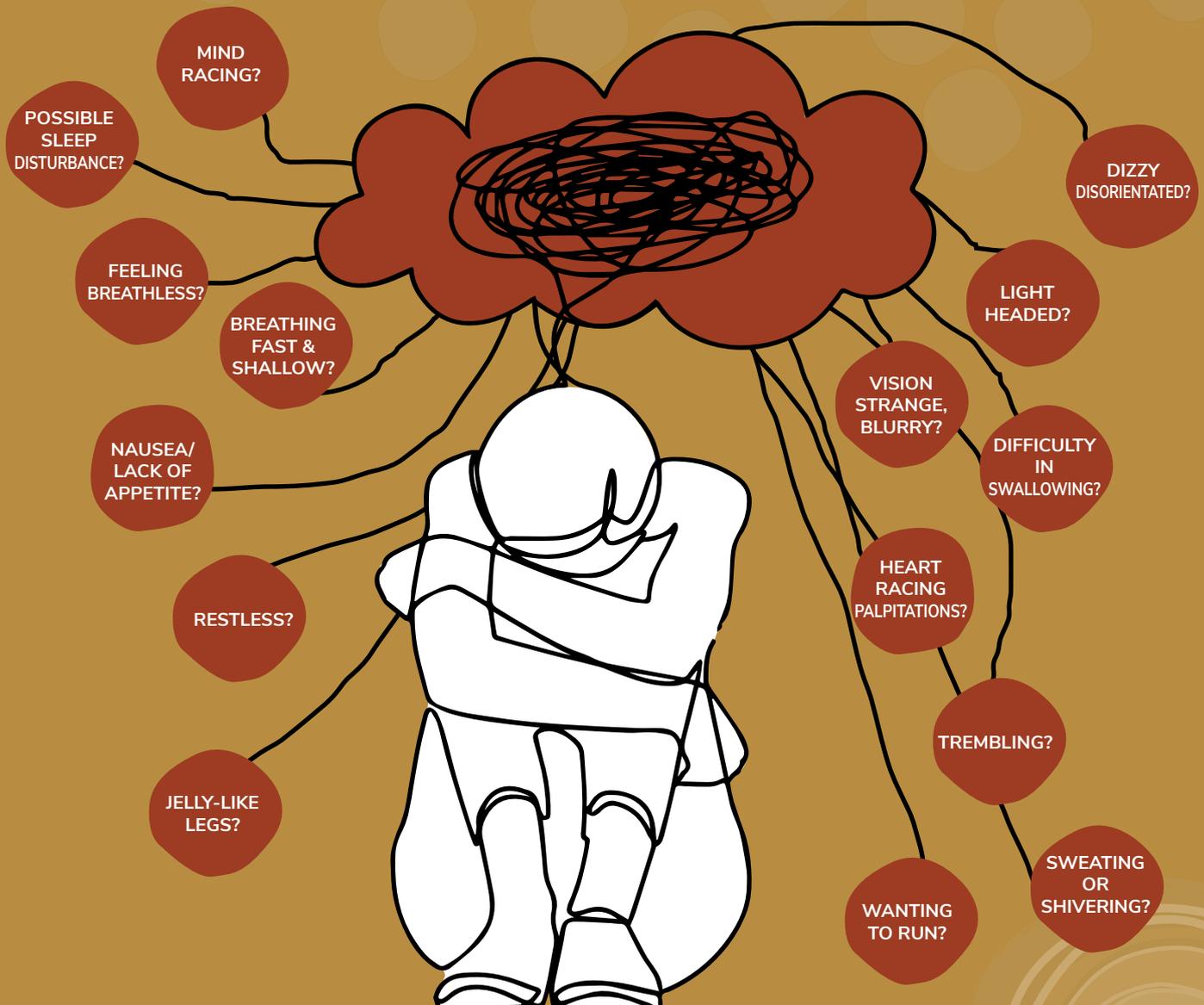
# Anxiety

**Anxious feelings can be part of your body's natural response to stress. It's a feeling of fear or apprehension about what's to come.**

The first day of school, going to a job interview, or giving a speech may cause most people to feel fearful and nervous. But these feelings go away once the cause of them has passed.

Clinical anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. While everyone feels anxious from time to time, when the anxious feelings don't go away, happen without any

particular reason or make it hard to cope with daily life it may be the sign of an anxiety condition. Anxiety can be related to a false activation of our "fight, flight or freeze" response discussed earlier. Anxiety can include a range of symptoms that are physical, psychological and behavioural.



# Depression

**Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and a loss of interest and pleasure in usual activities.**

It is normal to feel these symptoms from time to time but if they persist for longer than two weeks it is important to seek help.

Also called major depressive disorder or clinical depression, it affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems.

Seeking support is very important.



# PTSD

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**Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness that can develop in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event.**

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This event threatened the life or safety of the person or those around them and can include a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or rape or someone who has been threatened with death, sexual violence, or serious injury.

Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after a trauma and most will recover naturally in time. Those who continue to experience problems may have PTSD. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened, even when they are not in danger.

They often experience four main types of difficulties:

- **Re-living the traumatic event** – through unwanted and reoccurring memories, often in the form of vivid images (flashbacks) and nightmares.

There may be intense emotional and physical responses that accompany the memory.

- **Feeling overly alert or wound up** – e.g. difficulty sleeping, irritability, poor concentration, being easily startled and constantly on the lookout for danger.
- **Avoiding reminders of the event** – e.g. avoiding activities, places, people, thoughts or feelings associated with the event.
- **Feeling emotionally numb** – e.g. a loss of interest in day-to-day activities, feeling cut off and detached from friends and family.

*(Adapted from Beyond Blue)*

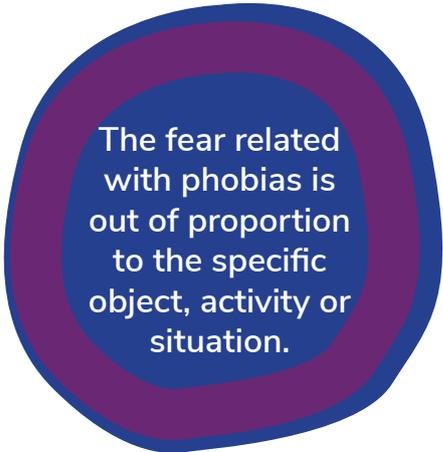
# PHOBIA

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**Phobia is a strong, irrational fear about a specific thing or situation.**

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It is closely related to anxiety and often produces many of the same symptoms. It strongly impacts on your life and can cause damage to important things like your relationships, your ability to work and do other everyday activities.



The fear related with phobias is out of proportion to the specific object, activity or situation.

# Deadly Tips to regulate yourself

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## GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

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Grounding techniques are simple active strategies to help with orientating and focusing on the present.

They can be used to distract or self-soothe when feeling distressed or detached from your body and/or the world (this happens during anxious states of mind).

**BLANKET WRAPS/USE A WEIGHTED BLANKET**

**STOMPING YOUR FEET**

**YOGA**

**CLEANING**

**GARDENING**

**CHEWING/HOLDING ICE**

**EATING SOUR LOLLIES,  
BITING A LEMON**

**AROMATHERAPY**

**LISTEN TO MUSIC**

**USE A STRESS BALL**

**RUNNING/WALKING**

**LIFTING WEIGHT  
OR WEARING A  
WEIGHTED ITEM**

Cut out these **BREATHING TECHNIQUES** and put them in your wallet or pocket to remind yourself to do them.

### Breathe Your Name

**TAKE A DEEP BREATH IN.**  
Then **BLOW OUT SLOWLY,** while moving your head, draw the letters of your name in the air with your breath.

### Square Breathing

This is a deep breathing activity that involves breathing while following the shape of a square.

- **BREATH IN** count for 4
- **HOLD** count for 4
- **EXHALE** count for 4
- **HOLD** count for 4

Repeat this process for 8 - 10 repetitions.

### Breathe Through Your Nose

Breathe in through your nose. **PUSH** out through your mouth. Breathe in and hold for 5 seconds. Then push out through your mouth. Do this 5 times and then roll your shoulders. Practice this 5 x per day and when needed.

Breath

### 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding

- 5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE (with eye icon)
- 4 THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH (with hand icon)
- 3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR (with ear icon)
- 2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL (with nose icon)
- 1 THING YOU CAN TASTE (with tongue icon)

**PUSHUPS**  
**WALL PUSH-UPS**

**COLD / WARM CLOTH**  
**TO FACE/NECK**

**JUMPING JACKS**

**HOT / COLD SHOWER**

**STRETCHING**

**PLAYING AN INSTRUMENT**

**PATting A PET**

**DOING ACTIVITIES MINDFULLY**



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