



Practices to Calm the Emotional Brain

1. **Use the calming breath** For adults breathe through your nose for a count of 5, hold the breath for a count of 5 and exhale through pursed lips (create a small opening) for a period of time longer than the inhale. For a child, you may want to reduce the inhale and hold parts of the breath to a lower count.
2. **Create a safe, peaceful place in your imagination** for you to go when you want to calm yourself. This may be a beach with the sound of the ocean. It may be a mountain lake with the smell of pines. The more you can involve all of your senses in very specific ways, the better.
3. **Create a container in your imagination** for your worries, “anxiety monster,” and intrusive thoughts. Make sure it is secure and has a lock only you can open. Only open it in the service of your well-being.
4. **Create a Nurturer figure.** This may be a person in your life, a historical figure, a spiritual figure, a figure from a movie, book, TV show, a comic book figure. It could also be an animal, a fairy, an angel. The important thing is that you can feel the nurturing quality in your body as you imagine being in the presence of this figure.
5. **Create a Protector figure.** This is similar to the nurturer figure. But in this case, you want to be able to feel the protective quality of this figure. You want to be able to trust this figure to have your back.
6. **Imagine or actually sit under your “Let Things Be” tree.** The “Rose is Rose” comic strip portrays Rose leaning against her tree, saying “My ‘Let Things Be’ tree gives me the tranquil mindset needed to just let things be”. Use nature to calm yourself.
7. **Use the mindful breath.** Focus on the air entering your nostrils and leaving your nostrils. Some like to focus on the air going all the way into the lungs and traveling all the way back out of the body. Still others like to focus on the rise and fall of their belly. This can be enhanced by placing a hand on the belly.
8. **Conduct a total body scan.** Start with your big toe on your left foot and bring your awareness to each toe, each part of your foot, all the bones, ligaments, tendons and muscles. Scan your entire body including the skeletal system and internal organs. It’s very helpful to start with a guided body scan. (Check out Jon Kabat Zinn, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program)
9. **Tap certain meridian points on the body.** The most readily accessible is the karate chop part of your hand. Tap with your fingertips. (Check out “Tapping” resources.)
10. **Use sound, music and vocalizations** to regulate the autonomic nervous system.
11. **Total body relaxation.** Breathe in and tighten a specific part of your body. Hold for 5. Exhale and release the tension.
12. **Constrict and relax the muscles of your throat and mouth as you vocalize** different sounds and words. As you alternate between expanding and constricting your throat and noticing the difference in the sound, you can develop awareness and conscious control over the habitual pattern of constriction and tension in your throat.

Some of these practices may actually increase your emotional arousal. You will need to experiment with these and many other calming interventions to learn which ones work best for you.

Brain calming strategies work best when practiced for at least 3 - 5 minutes daily. They will be more accessible to you under stress if you practice on a regular basis. You can learn meditation or other daily practice. Some useful resources to support your daily practice are:

Phone Apps:

"Insight Timer" - free meditation app
"Aura" app - iPhone, annual fee
"Head Space" – phone app

Website:

1. TaraBrach.com - free guided meditations Mindfulness Course - well researched training often offered by hospitals or other programs
2. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

