

# Anxiety Relief Methods for Youth

Methods that can be carried out with young people to relieve and healthily process climate-change-induced emotions

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Although all climate emotions are valid and natural, they can be very difficult to bear and climate anxiety can become a problem when its intensity interrupts daily functioning and coping strategies, which can lead to paralysing distress and have a negative impact on health.

Therefore, skills for healthily coping, relieving and shifting our overwhelming climate anxiety are crucial. Emotions can sometimes be shifted and calmed more quickly and effectively through the body and movement, rather than the mind. However, it is also important to be aware of and able to work with the repetitive thoughts that come into mind and influence your well-being.

An important skill of mental health and the healthy process of climate change induced emotions is the ability to shift one's body state from anxious to calm.

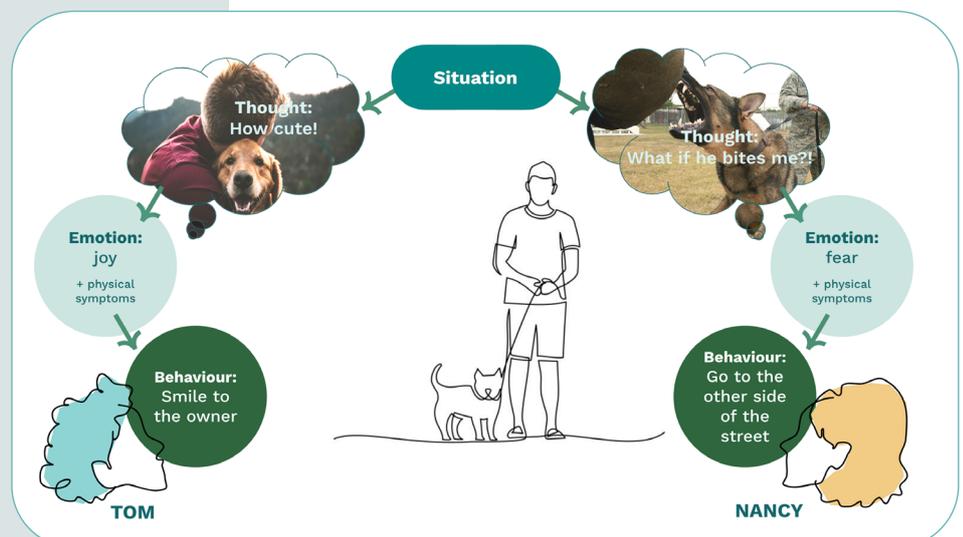
In this chapter, you will find a variety of exercises to relieve the intensity of the feelings and help the person to move into a more tolerable state of mind to function well and find opportunities to take needed action. This is not supposed to be a conclusive list.

## The Cognitive Behavioral Therapy model

A very useful model for understanding how thoughts, emotions and actions influence us and our wellbeing, is the CBT model. This model forms the basis of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which was created by the psychologist Aron Beck.

*Imagine a situation. A dog comes towards two people walking on the street. Let us call the first one Tom and the second Nancy. How do they react to the dog? This depends on many conditions.*

*Let us imagine that Tom likes dogs, he has one at home and he is used to them. Nancy, however, has been bitten by a dog as a child. Probably, Tom's and Nancy's thoughts, feelings and actions will be very different from one another.*



From this, it follows that feelings do not come directly from the situation. In between, there are our thoughts about what is happening, which are based on our previous life experiences. Our actions, in turn, are influenced by our thoughts and feelings.

What could Tom and Nancy do?  
 Their possible thoughts, feelings and actions are depicted in image 1.

From this example, we can construct a simplified CBT model (image 2).

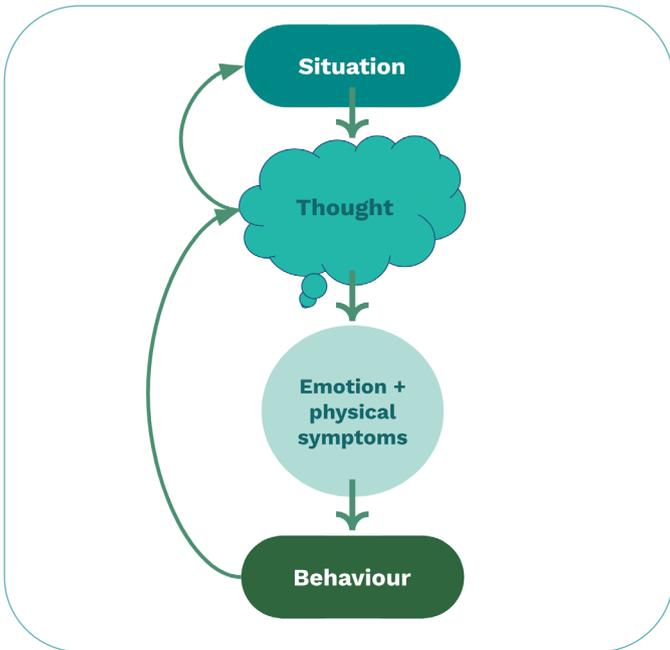


Image 2. Simplified CBT model

However, things are a bit more complex. Most parts of the model influence each other directly (image 3).

Note that according to this theory, the situation influences other parts of the model only through our thoughts and cognitions. This means that our brain always interprets a situation in some way before the situation can influence our emotions, physical reactions and behaviours. This interpretation can be so quick and automatic that we are not aware of it, but it is still there. The cognition can be a verbalised thought or just a quick mental image (for example, an image of an angry dog).

**How can we influence ourselves according to this model?**

This can be done by:

- + Analysing thoughts and changing them into more realistic and/or motivating ones
- + Accepting emotions
- + Doing something differently

In the following pages, different techniques are introduced. Above the descriptions, there are labels showing which part of the CBT model the technique influences most.

**NOTE FOR YOUTH WORKERS**

The CBT model shows that difficult feelings can be addressed in various ways and helps clarify why different techniques are effective. We encourage youth workers to try to grasp the model themselves, but they do not need to explain it to the young people they support. Understanding the model and its techniques allows youth workers to tailor their approach to meet individual needs, as some may prefer working with thoughts while others may favor physical exercises. You don't need to be a mental health expert to benefit from this understanding, but remember that you are not providing cognitive behavioral therapy; rather, you are using its basic principles and simpler techniques.

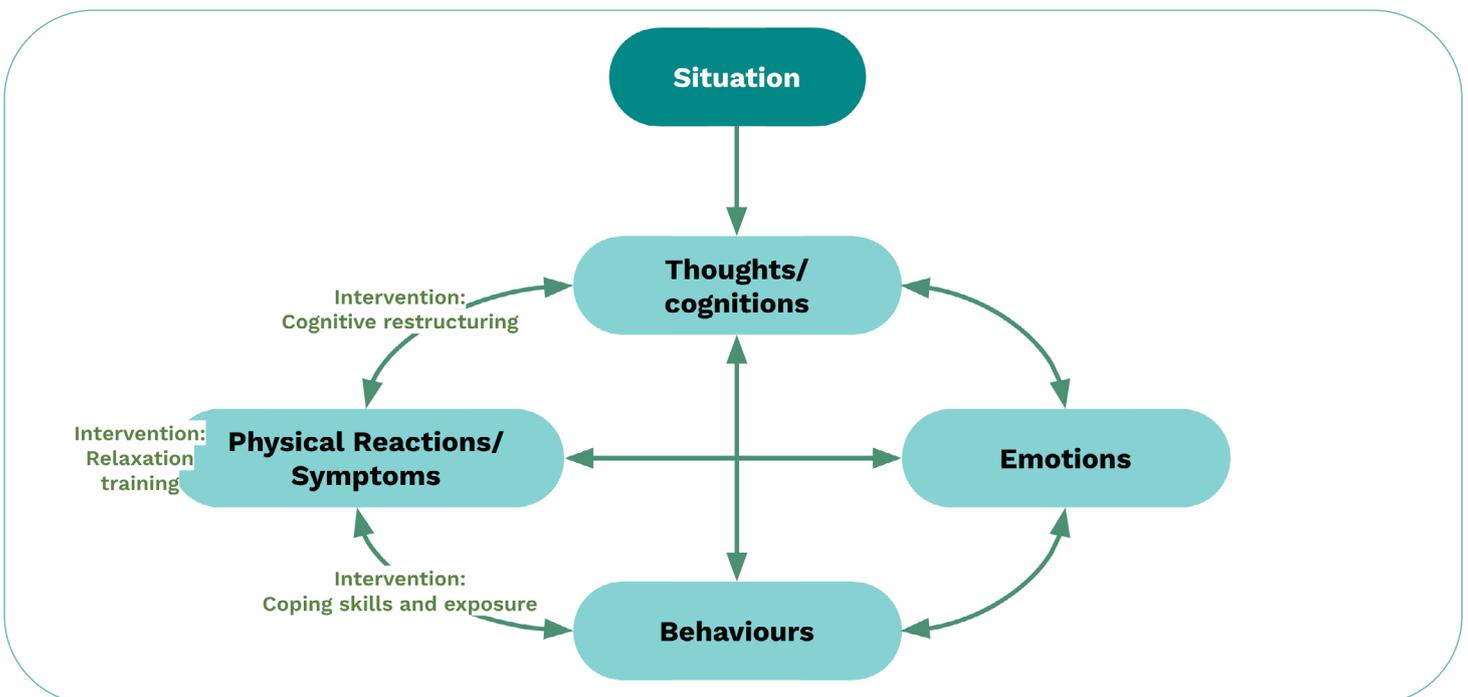


Image 3. The CBT Five Areas Model

1

## THOUGHTS

## STOPP: an exercise for taking a step back and analysing thoughts

In this exercise, it may be useful to ask the young person to write things down. This helps to sort out thoughts better. It is best to start with a moderately difficult situation and work towards more challenging ones. Explain to the young person that it is a skill to be learned and practised. Only then can it become a natural thing to do in your head or on paper when facing challenging situations.

**STOP!** – Just pause for a moment.

**TAKE A DEEP BREATH** – Notice your breathing, the sensations that arise when the air enters and leaves your body.

**OBSERVE** – Try to look objectively at what is happening without making judgements.

1. What emotions do you feel? (*Use a list of emotions or the emotion wheel if needed*)
2. What thoughts are going through your head?
3. What sensations can you feel in your body?
4. How can the situation at hand be described as objectively as possible?

**PULL BACK** – Put in some **PERSPECTIVE**.

Choose a distressing thought that came into your mind. There are several paths here that you can take to analyse the thought.

1. **Look at the evidence.** Is the thought in accordance with reality? What are the arguments that speak for and against the thought being true? What would be a more balanced way of looking at the situation that takes into account all the evidence?
2. **What is the effect of believing this thought to be true?** Is it good for you to hold on to it? Does it help you live in accordance with your values and move towards your aims? Is there another way to see the situation?
3. **What advice would you give a friend who is thinking this thought?** What would another person you trust think of the situation?

**PRACTICE** – Think of what it would be best to do in this situation, now that you have looked at it in a balanced way.

- + Do you need to act or just let things be as they are?
- + If you already acted in a way you do not like, how can you do better next time?
- + What can you do that fits your values?
- + Where can you focus your attention?
- + What did you learn from this exercise?

### GOOD TO KNOW

It is important not to invalidate a thought that is true (e.g. the world and humanity are in great danger). In case of a thought that is in accordance with reality, it would be better to choose options 2 or 3 from the list under “Pull back”. You can let the young person read the questions and ask them which block seems to speak to them the most at a given moment. There is no need to cover all the blocks in the “Perspective” part or answer all the questions in the “Practice” section.

2

## THOUGHTS

## FEELINGS

## Radical Acceptance

This skill is inspired by Marsha Linehan’s work and is used in dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT). This is a bit of a difficult skill to teach if you have not practised it yourself. However, it is an important prerequisite to working towards change. In order to change something, you first need to accept things as they are now and face the truth. Perhaps the most important thing is to make sure the young person understands what is *not* radical acceptance: it is *not* approving of things that are not okay, and it is *not* giving up or being passive. It is a deep process of acceptance in your mind, heart and body. It happens when you stop fighting the reality of things and let go of bitterness.

### BEFORE THE EXERCISE: THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING

#### WHAT DO WE NEED TO ACCEPT?

1. Reality (the facts about the past and present, even if we do not like them)
2. That there are limits to the way you can influence the future (but you only need to accept realistic limits)
3. Life is worth living, even if there are painful things in it

#### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO RADICALLY ACCEPT?

1. Denying reality does not change it
2. To change reality, you first need to accept it
3. It is not possible to completely avoid pain in life
4. Denying reality makes pain into suffering
5. Not accepting can cause feelings such as bitterness, unhappiness, anger and sadness to spiral endlessly
6. Acceptance can cause sorrow, but usually it is followed by a deep sense of peace

#### EXERCISE:

1. Just notice how you are denying reality or fighting against it.
2. Remind yourself that things are just as they are. You cannot change the past.
3. Remind yourself that reality has its causes. A myriad of conditions has led to the way things are now. Notice how these conditions have influenced your life. Due to these conditions, it is practically logical that things are as they are now.
4. Practice radical acceptance with your entire being (mind, body and soul). Be creative in how you do it (use mindfulness, relaxation, praying, imagination, drawing, going to places that help you etc.)
5. Pay attention to your bodily sensations as you are trying to radically accept them.
6. Tell yourself that life can be worth living, even though there is also pain in it.
7. If this kind of acceptance seems unpleasant, consider its pros and cons (on paper, if possible).
8. If you cannot totally accept at this point, accept that you cannot accept.

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## THOUGHTS

## Values And Goals

It can be beneficial to talk to young people about their values. Explain that it is never possible to “achieve” a value like you would achieve a goal. Life can be seen as a never-ending journey of moving towards and trying to live in accordance with your values (like a moth flying towards the moon).

It can be helpful to show them a list of values and discuss which are most important to them.

## CORE VALUES LIST

Authenticity	Justice
Achievement	Kindness
Adventure	Knowledge
Authority	Leadership
Autonomy	Learning
Balance	Love
Beauty	Loyalty
Boldness	Meaningful Work
Compassion	Nature
Challenge	Openness
Citizenship	Optimism
Community	Peace
Competency	Pleasure
Contribution	Poise
Creativity	Popularity
Curiosity	Recognition
Determination	Religion
Environment	Reputation
Fairness	Respect
Faith	Responsibility
Fame	Security
Friendships	Service
Fun	Spirituality
Growth	Status
Happiness	Success
Honesty	Trustworthiness
Humour	Wealth
Influence	Wisdom
Inner Harmony	

Then you can take a few values and discuss how to formulate clear goals that the young person can work towards to live in accordance with their values.

## SMART GOALS

It is good to keep in mind **SMART** goals. A good goal is:

**Specific** – It should be narrow enough for more effective planning. You can divide big goals into small steps.

**Measurable** – It is good if you have an objective way to measure if the goal has been achieved or not.

**Achievable** – Make sure you can reasonably accomplish your goal within a certain time frame.

**Realistic/Relevant** – It should be realistic and align with your values.

**Timely/Time-based** – Set a realistic end date to enhance motivation.

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## FEELINGS

## Anchor To The Ground

This is a grounding exercise that helps the young person to anchor their awareness into the present moment. When anxious, we tend to get lost in our heads, so it is a good technique to fix your awareness into the farthest point possible from your head. That is, your feet. This is a good alternative for people who do not like breathing exercises. The best way is to do this while standing, but it can be adapted to a sitting position. Then, awareness should be directed toward the buttocks. It can be done both with the eyes open and with the eyes closed.

## SHORT VERSION:

1. Stand with your feet firmly on the ground.
2. Feel the ground under your feet. Feel the gravity pulling you towards the earth.
3. Sense the tension in your feet and legs as you hold yourself upright.
4. Sense how your feet are holding the weight of your whole body. This feeling of heaviness flows from your head, through your spine into your legs and feet.

## FOR LONG VERSION, ADD THESE:

5. Imagine you are a tree in the wind. Gently adjust the weight of your body to your toes, then to your heels, to the right, to the left.
6. Now put almost the entire weight of your body on your right foot. Then, on your left foot.
7. If you would like to, you can now take a few mindful steps, noticing how your weight moves from one foot to the other.
8. Stand again and feel your weight flowing evenly into both of your feet.
9. Now broaden your awareness. Take notes of what you hear and see. Where are you?

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## FEELINGS

## The 5 Senses Exercise

This is a good grounding exercise. It helps the young person to get away from their thoughts for a while and tune in to the present experience as it is here and now. It is important to note that it is OK also to sense nothing. Then the exercise is to experience the lack of any sensation (e.g lack of smell). The exercise can be done in two ways: either silently or the young person should say the things they notice out loud.

1. Notice five things that you can see. Look around you.
2. Notice four things that you can feel. Tune in to your sense of touch.
3. Notice three things you can hear. Listen carefully.
4. Notice two things you can smell. Notice and name two smells you recognise.
5. Notice one thing you can taste. Think of its flavour on your tongue.

## The Mindfulness Of Breathing Exercise

...has 4 basic steps. The first two include counting breaths, the other two do not. It is important that in this exercise, the young person should not try to change their pattern of breathing in any way. It can be quite difficult, though, to let go and just observe. You can say that this is also completely normal.

It is important to explain the steps briefly before starting the exercise for the first time with the young person. The length of the exercise can vary, but it might be better not to make it too long when trying it for the first time.

During each stage it is helpful to occasionally say something like: "If you get carried away by thoughts, it is normal, it happens to all of us. Just notice this and turn your attention back to your breathing." Staying still for so long can cause tensions and even pain. Make sure to tell the participants that they are free to change their position during the exercise, if necessary.

When reading out the script, do it slowly and make sure to pause between sentences.

### INTRODUCTION

For this exercise, you can either sit or lie down. The traditional way is sitting. Pay attention to your posture. It is good to find a position where your back can be naturally straight (e.g., kneeling on a couple of pillows, or sitting cross-legged on a pillow). Make sure that the nape of your neck is not tense. For that, you can gently move your jaw towards the front of your neck and let the back of your neck lengthen. Feel how gravity pulls your body to the ground and, at the same time, imagine that your head is reaching upwards (upwards and slightly to the front, so that you do not strain the nape of your neck).

*(longer pause)*

Now, notice any sounds you can hear around you. Do not judge them as good or bad, just observe them.

*(pause)*

Pay attention to your emotions. How are you feeling right now?

*(pause)*

Notice any thoughts that come to your head. Try not to get carried away by thoughts, just let them come and fade away again. If, at any time during the exercise, you notice that you have become lost in your thoughts, it is normal, it happens to everyone. Just take note of that and turn your attention back to your breathing.

### STAGE 1

Now, turn your attention to your breathing. Just observe, do not try to change the way it is. Pay attention to how your body expands and shrinks. Also, you can notice the little pauses between in-breath and out-breath. Count your breaths after each out-breath from 1 to 10. Then start again from 1 and so on. If you lose track, just start again from 1.

### STAGE 2

Count your breaths just before each in-breath from 1 to 10. Then start again from 1.

### STAGE 3

Let go of the counting. Just observe your breathing. You can be aware of your whole body, as it moves gently with each breath.

### STAGE 4

Turn your attention to the place where the air first touches you when it enters your body. It can be somewhere in the nose, throat or the upper lip. Pay attention to the subtle sensations.

### ENDING THE EXERCISE

Now, take your mind off your breathing. Just take a few moments to notice how you are feeling now.

What does your body feel like?

Has anything changed?

*(pause)*

Do you feel any emotions?

Where are they in your body?

*(pause)*

What thoughts are going through your head?

*(pause)*

When you are ready, open your eyes and finish the exercise.

### NOTE ON BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathing exercises can be done in two different ways. One method involves simply paying attention to the breathing as it is, constituting a mindfulness exercise. The other method deliberately makes exhalations longer than inhalations, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, known as the "rest and digest" mode, and inducing relaxation.

At the beginning, it is important to say that not everybody benefits from breathing exercises; some might feel more anxious. Tell the young person that it is always OK to stop if they get uncomfortable.

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## FEELINGS

## Embodied Check-In

This could be a group exercise to start with a session, to ground and help to bring participants into the present moment and into their bodies.

**BEFORE THE EXERCISE**

Before starting with the check-in, guide them to take a comfortable position sitting or standing, put foot soles to the ground and feel the support of the ground or the chair.

Take a moment to consider where you are.

Close your eyes if you want,  
and make your body comfortable.

Notice if you are IN your body  
and to what degree.

Feel the contact of your body  
with the surfaces supporting it.

Can you rely on the support of the  
ground/chair/wall?

Move your attention to your breath:  
where is it? How is it?

Following your breath,  
move your attention to the lower belly.

Can you soften it?  
Stay for a moment, notice the breath,  
but also any sensation or perception.

Can you move or change the sensation  
you are experiencing?

Notice if you are in your body,  
and to what degree.

Open your eyes and see where you are.

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## FEELINGS

## Imagining Emotions

This exercise helps to visualise emotions and thus gain distance from them (and perhaps a sense of clarity). It is important to note that not every person has a natural knack for imagining things visually. So, it would be good to tell the young person before the exercise that it is also OK to not get a clear picture of the emotion in your mind's eye.

It may be good to first practice with a pleasant emotion and then work towards more challenging ones. If the young person currently does not feel any emotions, it would be a good idea to help them remember and imagine a recent situation where emotions came up. It is easier to do this exercise with the eyes closed, but if that feels uncomfortable, the young person can fix their gaze on a neutral point (e.g., the wall, the floor). It is also good to say that it is normal for other thoughts to come and interfere with the exercise: you should just take note of this and focus your mind on the exercise again and again.

Many people find doing this exercise a bit strange at first and this is normal, but the exercise can still help one accept one's feelings more readily.

1. What are you feeling right now?  
What do you feel in your body?  
Give a name to the emotion (*with the aid of a list, if necessary*). If you have several, just choose one.
2. Close your eyes and imagine that you take the emotion out of your body and place it about a metre in front of you. Don't worry, you will be putting it back in a few minutes!
3. If the emotion had a size, how big would it be?
4. If the emotion had a shape, what would it be?
5. If the emotion had a colour, what would it be?
6. What are its edges like? Clear or soft or blurry?
7. Does it look solid or transparent?
8. Does it stay still or move?
9. Does it remind you of a specific thing?
10. Now imagine the emotion with the size, shape and colour you gave it. Just look at it for a few moments and let it be just as it is.
11. When you are ready, put the emotion back into your body where you took it from.
12. Notice what happens to the emotion in your body when you breathe in and out, how it moves with each breath.
13. Take a deeper breath. Notice what happens to the emotion.
14. When you are ready, open your eyes and come back to the present moment and your surroundings.

**AFTER THE EXERCISE**

1. Did you notice a change in your emotion when you took a little distance from it?
2. How is your reaction to the emotion different?
3. Are you more distressed than before or less?
4. Did the emotion look or feel different after the exercise?
5. Did you notice your thoughts interfering with the exercise? This is completely normal.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is an exercise that reduces stress and anxiety in one's body by slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle. It is important to note that the relaxing effect is enhanced by practice. It is good to make it a daily routine.

When leading the exercise, make sure you leave enough time for the participants to really feel and experience the relaxation. The tensing phase can be relatively short (5 seconds, for example). The classical way is to start with the feet, but it is also possible to start with the head. Both have their own benefits.

Begin by sitting or lying on your back.  
If you feel comfortable, close your eyes.

Take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds.  
Feel the tension related to that.  
(5 second pause)

Release your breath and breathe normally,  
feel the relaxation in your chest.  
(10–15 second pause)

Tense your feet by curling your **toes** and the arch  
of your foot.  
(5 second pause)

Release the tension. Notice the relaxation, possible  
feelings of warmth.  
(10–15 second pause)

Focus on your **calves**. Hold them tightly!  
(5 second pause)

Now relax your calves and notice what it feels like.  
(10–15 second pause)

Next, tense your **upper legs and pelvis** by squeezing  
your thighs together.  
(5 second pause)

Release the tension in your upper legs and pelvis.  
Notice the sensations that come with it.  
(10–15 second pause)

Tense your **stomach**. You can do this by sucking  
your stomach in.  
(5 second pause)

Release the tension, notice the relaxation in your  
stomach.  
(10–15 second pause)

Now tense the **muscles in your back**. You can bring  
your shoulders together behind you.  
(5 second pause)

Release the tension. Notice the difference it brings  
into your body.  
(10–15 second pause)

Now, tense the **muscles of your arms**.  
(5 second pause)

Release the tension in your arms and experience the  
feeling of relaxation.  
(10–15 second pause)

Tense your **hands**. To do that, make a fist.  
(5 second pause)

Now release your hands. Notice how they feel limp  
and at ease.  
(10–15 second pause)

Tense your **shoulders** by bringing them up towards  
your head.  
(5 second pause)

Relax your shoulders. Let them go limp.  
(10–15 second pause)

Tense your **jaw** by pushing your teeth together.  
(5 second pause)

Relax your jaw. Feel the sides of your head relaxing.  
(10–15 second pause)

Tense your **face** by distorting the muscles around  
your eyes and mouth. You can do this by making a  
funny face.  
(5 second pause)

Relax your face. Feel the muscles around your eyes  
and mouth loosen.  
(10–15 second pause)

Finally, tense your **entire body**. Your feet, legs,  
stomach, chest, arms, head, neck.  
(5 second pause)

Relax your entire body. Allow your whole body to go  
limp. Notice any sensations of warmth or tingling.  
Feel as if your entire body is very heavy. Feel the  
gravity holding you, pulling you towards the ground.  
(longer pause)

When you are ready, begin to gently move your  
fingers and toes.  
(10–15 second pause)

Stretch your muscles and open your eyes when you  
are ready.

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FEELINGS

BEHAVIOUR

BREATHING

## Slow Breathing With Prolonged Exhalations

This exercise has many variations. It is important to tell the young person that it is not essential to aim for any specific number of seconds. The main objective is to make exhalation longer than inhalation. It is important to listen to what your body needs at that given moment. Some options:

### OPTION 1

Count to 4 while breathing in,  
count to 6 while breathing out.

### OPTION 2

Count to 4 while breathing in,  
count to 8 while breathing out.

### THE 4-7-8 TECHNIQUE

Breathe in for 4 seconds,  
hold your breath for 7 seconds,  
exhale for 8 seconds.

### NOTE ON BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathing exercises can be done in two different ways. One method involves simply paying attention to the breathing as it is, constituting a mindfulness exercise. The other method deliberately makes exhalations longer than inhalations, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, known as the “rest and digest” mode, and inducing relaxation.

At the beginning, it is important to say that not everybody benefits from breathing exercises; some might feel more anxious. Tell the young person that it is always OK to stop if they get uncomfortable.

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BEHAVIOUR

## TIPP Skills

When in crisis, when emotions feel overwhelming, these skills can be helpful.

### TEMPERATURE

Splash cold water on your face or dunk your head into a sink filled with cold water and hold your breath for a while.

Hot temperatures can theoretically also be used (e.g., a hot sauna), but cold is the more classical way.

**Important!** Do NOT use the sink technique without talking to your doctor if you have heart problems, bulimia or anorexia nervosa!

### INTENSE EXERCISE

Go for a run or cycle for at least 20 minutes.

If you do not have the time, just run, jump or dance on the spot for a while.

### PACED BREATHING

The exhalations should be longer than inhalations.

See the breathing exercises on the left.

### PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

See exercise 9 for more information.

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BEHAVIOUR

## Connecting With Others

Encourage the young person to get in contact with other like-minded people. This can be done in designated groups, individuals, or environmental organisations.

It is very important not to be alone with your worries.

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BEHAVIOUR

## Taking A Meaningful Action

Taking actions that are meaningful in the context of the climate crisis is one of the best antidotes, together with connecting with others. Actions can be divided into 6 basic frameworks to help to solve the climate crisis: **equity, reduce, protect, sequester, influence and support**.

Those actions can be from learning about regenerative agriculture, using your influence to start a community compost, growing a diversity of plants in your garden, leaving spots in your garden for bugs, volunteering in your local NGO-s, joining a community garden, buying your food from local markets (when possible, from woman-owned, regenerative companies), writing an opinion piece to a newspaper, joining workparties to restore a natural area, and so much more.

### LEARN MORE

Look for more about the frameworks of meaningful action in here: [regeneration.org/frameworks-for-action](https://regeneration.org/frameworks-for-action)

Look for the variety of actions to take here: [regeneration.org/nexus](https://regeneration.org/nexus)

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## BEHAVIOUR

## Soothing Through The Senses

When upset, soothing sensual experiences can be of great help. You can conduct the 5 Senses Exercise first (exercise 5).

For each of the five senses, brainstorm positive activities and experiences together with the young person. You can also share the following list for further inspiration:

**SIGHT:** Look at something pretty, people watch, window shop, go to an art gallery, go to the cinema or watch a beautiful video

**HEARING:** Listen to soothing music, pay attention to sounds, sing your favourite song, play an instrument

**TOUCH:** Take a hot bath or shower, pet your dog or cat, hug someone, put on comfy clothes

**SMELL:** Use a favourite soap/perfume, burn a scented candle, smell flowers, make popcorn, peel an orange

**TASTE:** Chew your favourite gum, eat a favourite food, eat mindfully, drink hot chocolate

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## BEHAVIOUR

## Mental Health Vitamins

Young people, and especially young activists, can lose sight of taking care of their own needs and mental health. It is important to go back to the basics – to mental health vitamins.

**REST**  
during the day and night

**EAT**  
balanced nutrition

**MOVE**  
physical activity

**FEEL**  
pleasant emotions

**SOCIALISE**  
good relationships

A great feature of mental health vitamins is that you can choose how you will take them yourself. It is up to your preferences, depending on what you choose to do as a physical activity or for pleasant emotions. Nevertheless, we recommend you to find ways how to do them also outside and in natural surroundings, as this can give an extra value.

Mental health vitamins support the prevention of mental health challenges, but also help you to recover when you face them.

## LEARN MORE

A list of pleasant activities could be helpful. These can readily be found on the internet: [peaasi.ee/en/mental-health-vitamins](http://peaasi.ee/en/mental-health-vitamins)

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## BEHAVIOUR

## FEELINGS

## Shake, Stretch, Soothe

This tool for stress and nervous system regulation takes less than a minute and involves different parts of the body by movement. This self-regulation tool comes from the embodied trauma and resilience research by Jo McAndrews, who is a psychotherapist, environmental campaigner and trainer for parents and professionals who work with children.

**SHAKE:** Stand up and start by shaking your body – hands, feet, shoulders, following what feels good. Do that until you feel it is enough or about 20 seconds. If you feel comfortable, add your voice to the shakes, letting out the “aaa” sound and letting it vibrate with your body movements.

**STRETCH:** Stretch out your hands and legs while taking up as much room as you can, making your body big. Follow your body’s impulses (try to notice which parts of your body need stretching). You can stretch your lower back, arms, shoulders or any other part of your body. Finish when you feel ready or after about 20 seconds.

**SOOTHE:** Stand with your legs wider than your hips, steady with weight divided evenly between the legs. When you are ready, start swaying/swinging from side to side like rocking a baby. Add sweeping movement from your shoulders to the tips of your fingers. Do that at the same rhythm, so swinging side to side carrying your weight from one leg to another and alternately stroking one arm and then the other arm.

Finish by standing on both legs evenly again with one hand on your belly and the other arm on your heart, if this feels good. Additionally, to bring language in with brain integration, say out loud what you need to hear or, for example: “I am safe and I am loved”.

Give participants a moment to return from this movement exercise to their seats or places.

## GOOD TO KNOW

**Shaking** – This helps to release the body if it is stuck and allows it to move on and finish the trauma response cycle. For example, deer shake off their stress after they have been chased by a wolf, and then move on.

**Stretching** – opens up the body, which is the opposite of the fight-flight-freeze response, where under threat the body will make itself as small as possible. Physically opening up the body and stretching it messages the nervous system that it is safe. Nobody faces an attacking tiger with open arms.

**Soothing** – a mixture of swaying and sweeping alternative arms engages lateral integration. Soothing integrates the nervous system across its two sides. The pressure from swaying and the feeling of touch helps to regulate and calm us. Our skin is linked to the immune and sensory systems in the neuro-immuno-cutaneous system. Cutaneous innervation is a key part of the peripheral nervous system, creating an instant connection to the body from the outside world (Vidal Yucha et al 2019).

**Spoken words** – by saying out loud how we want ourselves to feel, the left and right side of the brain are integrated through language to the feelings.

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BEHAVIOUR

FEELINGS

## Being In Contact With Living Things And Nature Mindfully

This exercise grounds us to the present moment and helps us appreciate the beauty of living things that are still there, and to benefit from the calming effect that nature tends to have on us. One problem with this exercise is that it can sometimes lead to strong emotions of grief for the disappearing nature. Then, it is important to normalise the emotions, help the young person articulate them and just be with the grief.

Any living or non-living thing from the natural world can be observed, but it may be helpful if the chosen object does not run away in the middle of the exercise (i.e. pick a body of water, a stone, a plant). Here is an example with a tree.

1. Go outside to a reasonably private location and choose a tree.
2. Take a close **look** at the tree. What colours does it have? What are its roots like? Its trunk? Its branches? The leaves or needles? Does it have blossoms or fruits?
3. Do you **hear** something from the tree? A rustling of the leaves?
4. Now **touch** the tree. What is the texture of the trunk like? Can you reach a leaf/needle or pick one up? What does it feel like to touch it? If you like, you can rest your back on the tree or put your arms around it.
5. **Smell** the tree. Do you sense any smells from the trunk or leaves?
6. If the tree has ripe fruit, you may want to try one. Feel the **taste** and texture in your mouth.
7. What does the tree do for you? Do you perhaps **feel thankful** for the tree for providing the oxygen you breathe? For the shade it provides from the sun? For being a shelter from rain? A place to live for animals and insects? For the beauty of its blossoms? For the nourishment its fruits bring you? Do you feel the impulse to do something for the tree in turn?
8. Now bring your attention to **yourself**. What kind of emotions do you feel after doing this exercise? Where are they located in your body? Welcome every emotion, pleasant or unpleasant. Whatever you feel, it is fine and normal. If you feel nothing special, this is also completely normal.
9. When you are ready, **say goodbye** to the tree, if you would like to, and finish the exercise.

### THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

Optional: If you and the young person both appreciate poetry, you can also read this poem by **Wendell Berry**.

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

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## Radical Joy For Hard Times

This is an initiative (see [www.radicaljoy.org](http://www.radicaljoy.org)) of being creatively in contact with wounded places. It includes being creative and leaving a "gift" to the place by creating something beautiful from the materials that are there. It is best to do it as a group of people – then you can validate each other's feelings and support each other.

From the website of the initiative: "There are countless ways to do the RadJoy Practice! You can do it alone or with a group. You can do it spontaneously or plan weeks in advance. Only Steps 1 and 5 are essential. You make the experience your own by adding details that feel right for your community, your place, and your traditions."

1. Go, alone or with friends, to a wounded place.
2. Sit awhile and share your stories about what the place means to you.
3. Get to know the place as it is now.
4. Share with the others what you discovered.
5. Make a simple gift of beauty for the place.

Make your gift out of materials the place itself offers: seashells, stones, the limbs of cut trees, trash, sand, your own bodies, or other "art supplies." By creating your gift with what is on hand, you remember that places, like people, already have all they need to become beautiful.

### ADDITIONAL READING LIST

Reading books can have a therapeutic effect too. Here's a list of recommended literature related to climate anxiety.

Britt Wray, *Generation Dread*

Leslie Davenport, *Emotional Resiliency in the Face of Climate Change and All the Feelings Under the Sun*  
(for older children/youth)

Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*

Sarah Jaquette Ray, *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*

Laura Schmidt, *How to Live in a Chaotic Climate*

Joanna Macy, *Coming Back to Life and Active Hope*

Find more books, podcasts and videos at:  
[climateemotionalresilience.org/resources](http://climateemotionalresilience.org/resources)