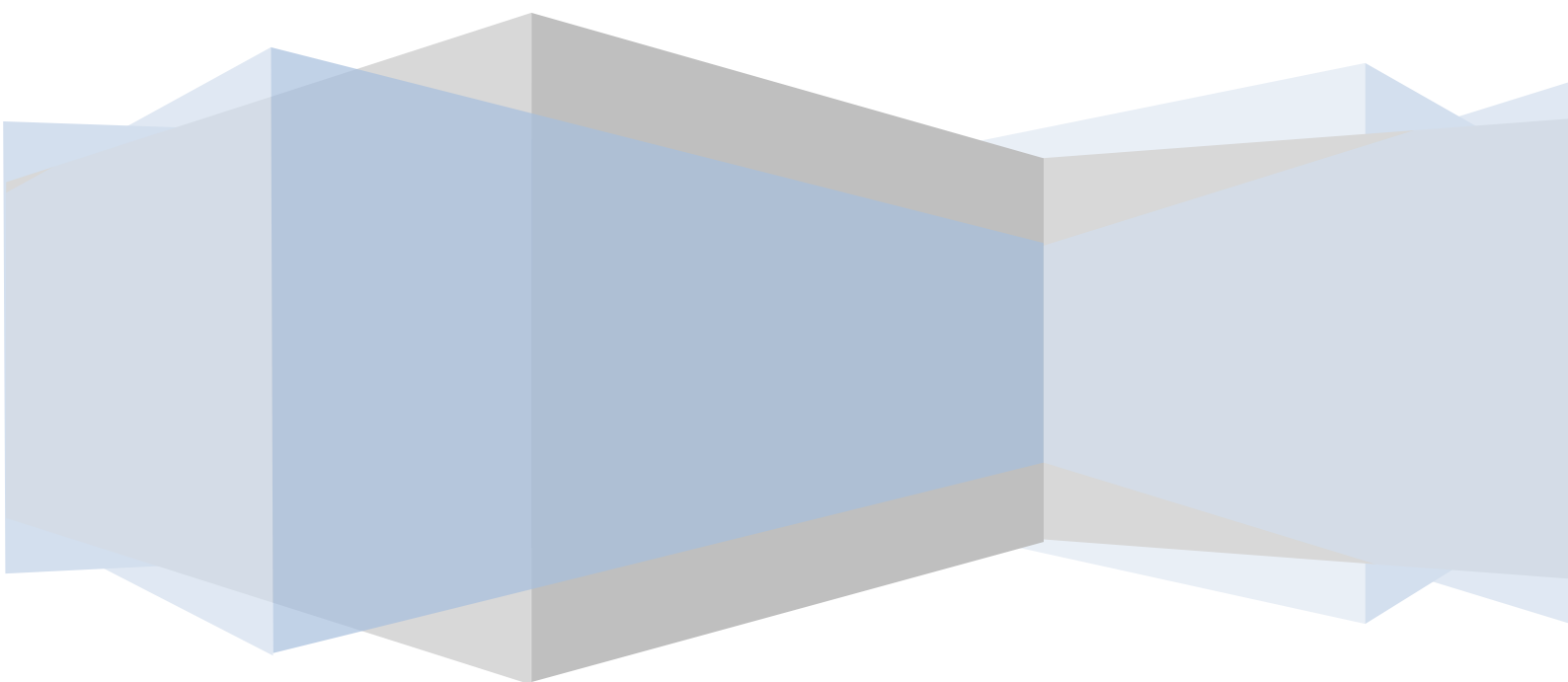


Cwm Taf University Health Board – Psychological Therapies Department



Soothing and safety

Stabilisation Pack



Soothing and safety

Finding ways to calm and soothe yourself will help to cope with overwhelming emotions, so that you feel safer and more in control. This section overlaps with the ones on 'Compassion' and on 'Mindfulness', and it may be useful to read all of them.

Children who grow up in a secure, loving environment are soothed and reassured by their parents when they are frightened, and this teaches them how to do the same for themselves as they grow up. If you did not have this kind of background, or if you experienced severe traumas, your mind and body may be left in a state of terror and high arousal. In this case, you need to learn how to calm yourself and your mind, body and emotions. The vulnerable part of you - the part that is still **afraid** and **overwhelmed** - needs **love**, **comfort** and **soothing** rather than self punishment. In a way, you need to learn to be a good, loving parent to yourself. This is particularly important when you are in a state of crisis.

None of the strategies in this section will work instantly, and they all need practice. It will take time before you start to be able to manage your distress more easily. With perseverance and determination, and support from friends, family, your mental health worker and perhaps from others in the same situation, you will find these strategies easier. It is important to praise yourself for every step you take on the way, even small ones.

Soothing strategies can be used at any time, but particularly when you are feeling at your worst. This section lists a whole range of ideas that you may find useful. Your mental health worker, if you have one, can help you to choose the most helpful ones and put them into practice.

Soothing techniques draw on all of the senses.

Some examples are below:-

SIGHT

It may be helpful to hold in mind comforting images, perhaps of people you know, or a picture of your favourite place. You could look at photos of places or people that have happy memories.

You could go for a walk outside or in the garden if you have one, so that you can look at the trees, flowers and nature.

It may help to watch television or a favourite film. The child part of you may be comforted by children's films or TV.

TOUCH

Touching objects such as a cuddly toy, soft blanket, or silky scarf can be comforting to the child part of you that needs reassurance. You may have a special item of clothing that belongs to you or someone you care about, such as your children or a relative, which can be used in this way. If you have a pet you can stroke or pat them.

Other people may want to take a warm bubble bath or put on comfortable clothes, or wrap themselves in a duvet.

Some people like to hold a 'grounding' object like a pebble (see the booklet on 'Grounding') or to release tension by squeezing a ball. Using a cold compress on your head or neck or snuggling a hot water bottle may also help.

Moisturising your face and body and combing or brushing your hair may feel soothing. Maybe you could slowly rub cream into your hands or massage part of your body. Some people like to do other kinds of beauty care, such as painting their nails.

SMELL

Different people find different smells soothing, so try to find one that suits you. This could be perfume or moisturiser, a scented candle, an essential oil like jasmine or lavender, a herb or spice like cinnamon, or perhaps a flower. Some people like smells that remind them of happy times or of people who have been comforting and safe, such as the smell of baking cakes and biscuits. Others like the smell of nature and breathing in the fresh air, or the smell of coffee.



SOUND

Hearing certain sounds and music can be soothing. Some people prefer classical music while others like pop music or songs from their childhood. Perhaps you could make a play list of all your favourite songs to listen to when you are feeling upset. Others like to hum their favourite song to themselves or sing it in their head.

Sounds from nature such as birds, animals or the sea may be comforting. It may help to talk to someone who will reassure you, or to make a tape of their voice.

TASTE

It can help to make a hot drink or eat a favourite food, such as one that you liked as a child. Savour the taste of a favourite treat by eating it slowly. You might want to suck on an ice cube or ice lolly and feel it slowly melt in your mouth, paying attention to the sensation of taste.

OTHER IDEAS

Reading your favourite books, stories, or poems.

Some people find it helpful to draw their thoughts and feelings, or to calm the child part of themselves by using colouring books.

Releasing feelings by crying, shouting, hitting pillows, writing things down and then tearing them up, painting.

Exercising – walking, running, going to the gym, yoga, tai chi, meditation.

Looking after pets, cooking, doing other creative activities.

Be creative and try as many ideas as you can.

In this box make a note of your soothing plan. It may be helpful to gather all of the items you need for soothing in a box that you can easily find when you need it.

Sight:

Taste:

Sound:

Smell:

Touch:

Creating your own safe places

When people have trauma memories or feel overwhelmed and frightened, they often feel unsafe. Something that may help is either making a place in the house where you feel safe, or creating an image of a safe place in your mind.

A SAFE PLACE IN YOUR HOME

Some people find it helpful to create a safe place at home, using some of the ideas discussed above. Your safe place might be on the sofa with a warm blanket around you, listening to your favourite music, or sipping a hot drink. Or it might be a corner of a room with your favourite photos on the wall or a peaceful view from your window. Wherever it is, try to make it as calm and comforting as you can.

A SAFE PLACE IN YOUR MIND

Another way of creating a safe place is to build up a picture in your mind. This might be a real place where you have felt happy and secure, such as a beach or a wood, or it might be somewhere imaginary. Use all your senses to make this as real as possible to you; for example, imagine a gentle breeze, the feel of the sun, the sound of the waves and so on.

They are only suggestions and yours might be different. Allow your body to relax, as you enter your own special unique safe place.

Soothing and Safety Resources

Chapters 7 and 8 in *'The compassionate mind approach to recovering from trauma using Compassionate Focussed Therapy'* (2012) by Deborah Lee.

See other resources in:

- **'Compassion' and 'Mindfulness' booklets**

Apps - These can be located and downloaded from the iPhone store and GooglePlay.

'Breaking Free – The Journey Begins' is an app for people who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, and consists of information and various coping strategies and is free to download.

'Breaking Free – Keeping Safe' is an app that provides strategies to help people stay safe while working through their difficulties, including managing harmful coping strategies, recognising triggers, coping with intense feelings and taking control of panic attacks.

'Breaking Free – Safety Zone' is an app that contains over 15 techniques to help the user to gain more control over their emotions, thoughts and behaviour.