

The top of the page features a stylized illustration of a bright orange sun with rays, partially obscured by several light blue, fluffy clouds. The sun is positioned on the right side, while the clouds are scattered across the top and middle sections.

Difficult emotions

5 ways to soothe difficult emotions

B r e a t h e. Try slow deep belly breaths, counting in for 4 or 5 and exhaling for 4 or 5. Try to focus on the exhale. The exhale activates the parasympathetic nervous system and this helps to relax you. This soothing system helps our mind and body to relax.

If you're feeling very anxious, and your thoughts are running away with themselves, try grounding yourself in the present moment. Practise expanding your awareness. Notice 5 things you can see around you, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste or any variation of this.

Place one hand on your heart, feel its warmth and contact, then send yourself a healthy dose of kindness and compassion for how you feel at a difficult time. Give yourself permission to feel and try asking yourself 'what do you need most right now?'

Label your emotion - name it to tame it! Studies show that just being able to label the emotion you are experiencing can help you to feel better able to cope and make helpful choices. eg. Here is anger; I am feeling anxious; I am feeling sad.

Picture your feelings as a wave on the sea, cresting and falling over time. The emotion will rise and fall like the waves, but in time the tide will turn.

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Difficult emotions

5 more ways to soothe difficult emotions

Remind yourself that feelings pass. Right now, it's like this, but emotions are like the weather, ever changing. Sometimes cloudy, sometimes dark, sometimes it's monsoon season. Beyond the clouds the spacious blue sky is waiting. Remind yourself, even though this feels difficult now, this feeling will pass.

Imagine your emotions are visitors to a guesthouse. They can all be welcomed. They're passing through, sometimes they come for a while, but in time they move on. New visitors will arrive. All visitors come and go.

Remind yourself that although this emotion feels difficult and painful, and even if you don't think you can bear it, you will get through it. Emotions help us to see what is important to us. Remember, we hurt where we care. Learn to practise treating yourself kindly when you are in pain, as you would someone you really cared about.

Talk over how you feel with a trusted, supportive friend or relative or your therapist.

Journal your thoughts and feelings. Try an ABC - what was the activating event (A), what was your interpretation of the activating event (B, your beliefs about the event), and what were the consequences of that on how you feel and on your actions (C). Is there another way of looking at this? Perhaps a more balanced perspective? Write this down. Sometimes our thoughts / beliefs create more distress than is necessary in a difficult situation. Changing the way we think may not get rid of our negative emotion, but it may lessen unnecessary layers of distress.