

# A Plan to Help Calm Your Nervous System

## Calm Your Nervous System

*Evidence-Based Skills for Anxiety and Emotional Overwhelm*

### Understanding Your Nervous System

Anxiety is not a sign that something is wrong with you. It is a normal survival response that prepares your body to respond to perceived danger. When your brain detects a possible threat, it activates your sympathetic nervous system, often called the fight, flight, or freeze response. Your heart may beat faster, your breathing may become shallow, your muscles tense, and your mind may race. These changes are designed to protect you, even when there is no immediate danger.

When anxiety becomes frequent or intense, your alarm system can begin responding to situations that are safe or only mildly stressful. The goal is not to eliminate anxiety completely. The goal is to help your nervous system recover more efficiently so you can respond thoughtfully rather than react automatically.

### Why Calming Your Body Matters

When anxiety is very high, clear thinking becomes more difficult. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) teaches that our thoughts influence how we feel and behave. Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) adds practical skills for tolerating intense emotions without making situations worse. Before challenging anxious thoughts, it is often helpful to calm your body first. As your nervous system settles, it becomes easier to think clearly, solve problems, and choose effective actions.

### Evidence-Based Skills

**Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Place one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen. Breathe in slowly through your nose so your lower hand rises more than your upper hand. Exhale slowly through pursed lips. Repeat for several minutes.

**Grounding:** Notice five things you can see, four you can touch, three you can hear, two you can smell, and one you can taste. This gently redirects attention to the present moment.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Tense then relax one muscle group at a time, noticing the difference between tension and relaxation.

**DBT TIPP (adapted):** When emotions are extremely intense, changing your body state can help. Splash cool water on your face if medically appropriate, engage in brief vigorous movement if safe, slow your breathing, and intentionally relax tense muscles.

**Self-Soothing:** Use comforting sensory experiences such as warm tea, calming music, a soft blanket, pleasant scents, or stepping outside for fresh air.

**Worksheet: Build Your Personal Calm Plan**

How does anxiety usually show up in your body?

What situations tend to activate your nervous system?

What are your earliest warning signs that anxiety is increasing?

Which calming skills have helped you in the past?

-----  
-  
-----  
-  
-----  
-

Which new skill from this handout would you like to practise this week?

-----  
-  
-----  
-  
-----  
-  
-----  
-

**My Calm Skills Tracker**

Complete after using a calming skill.

| Situation | Skill Used | Anxiety Before<br>(0-100) | Anxiety After (0-100) | What I Learned |
|-----------|------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
|           |            |                           |                       |                |
|           |            |                           |                       |                |
|           |            |                           |                       |                |
|           |            |                           |                       |                |
|           |            |                           |                       |                |
|           |            |                           |                       |                |

**Creating a Daily Nervous System Care Plan**

Three small habits that help keep my nervous system healthy:

-----

-

People I can reach out to when I need support:

-----

-

My favourite grounding or breathing exercise:

-----

-

One activity that helps my body feel safe and settled:

-----  
—

One commitment I will make this week to care for my nervous system:

-----  
—

### **KALM Psychology**

Learning to calm your nervous system is a skill that develops with practice. These strategies are intended to support education and self-reflection and are not a substitute for psychological assessment or treatment. If anxiety is persistent or significantly affecting your daily life, consider seeking support from a qualified mental health professional.

© KALM Psychology | Zahra Domingo, Registered Psychologist