

HOW TO KEEP CALM



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BITESIZE

Control your reactions, manage fear and anger and maintain peace of mind

NERVOUS SYSTEMS

The most important reactive emotions are **fear and anger**. The purpose of fear is to keep you safe by alerting you to potential dangers. Anger helps you enforce boundaries and protect what matters to you. Both can be useful - but they can also overwhelm your mind with **panic and rage**.

Keeping calm is about managing reactive emotions. Reactive emotions help you deal with threats. They give you energy and narrow your focus on the threat, preparing your body for **fight or flight**. They are a natural part of how our minds work, but they need to be managed. They can cause you to overreact, and can make you ill over long periods. You may literally need to calm your nerves.

"When we get **reactive**, nothing **productive** happens." - Dan Siegel

RECEPTIVE

"Parasympathetic system"
Relaxes your body
and helps you recover
Opportunities: rest & digest



REACTIVE

"Sympathetic system"
Prepares your body for
intense physical activity
Threats: **fight or flight**

CONTROL YOURSELF



NERVOUS ENERGY

When you feel threatened, **adrenaline and cortisol** flood your body. Notice when you go into reactive mode, so you can control yourself in these moments.

Watch particularly for tense muscles, shaking, sweating, pounding heart, grinding teeth, fast or loud speech, restlessness, impatience, trouble thinking or a desire to lash out and get control.



Here are some things to try:

- Engage your mind to make yourself less reactive.
- Separate facts from judgements and focus on what's real and true.
- Label your feelings: say "I feel angry", "I'm scared".
- Talk things through, not just about what happened but how you feel about it.
- Ground yourself: focus on what you can see, hear, taste, smell and feel.
- If in doubt, get out: take some time to calm down.

BREAKING THE LOOP

Calm actions

Stay energized: sleep well, rest more and take breaks.

Slow down: speed means adrenaline, so pause more.

Keep cool: we can be more reactive when we feel hot.

Seek people: psychologists call this "tend and befriend".

Be in nature: green scenes seem to calm our minds.

Train your attention: practice mindfulness by focussing on an object, then noticing where your mind wanders, and returning your attention back. This practice is called "notice and return".

THE COGNITIVE TRIANGLE

Your actions, thoughts and feelings affect one another, so watch for negative loops and try to build calm habits.



The neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor argues the physical impulse of an emotion only lasts **90 seconds** - unless you keep thinking about it!

Calm thoughts

Accept your feelings: it's too late to change the past.

Keep perspective: you are not your feelings, and you can choose how to react.

Identify rage-creating beliefs: notice when your thoughts feed your anger.

Avoid self-blame: instead, focus on what you did well.

Think positive: develop supportive self-talk and avoid doubts and catastrophising.

Befriend uncertainty: not everything is a threat, and sometimes you might even be pleasantly surprised.

This free tip sheet was created by Mindapples to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic. To find out more about our apps, e-learning, webinars, face-to-face training and charitable work, visit www.mindapples.org.