

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The following stress management strategies may be used in Phase Two: Preparation when the client is unable to develop a Calm/Safe Place or in Phase Seven: Closure at the end of a treatment session if the client is still highly aroused.

A. LIGHT STREAM TECHNIQUE

- Ask client to concentrate on upsetting body sensations.
- Identify the following by asking, *“If it had a _____, what would it be?”*
 - *shape*
 - *size*
 - *color*
 - *temperature*
 - *texture*
 - *sound (high pitched or low)”*
- *What is your favorite color you associate with healing?”*
- *“Imagine that this _____ (name the color) light is coming in through the top of your head and directing itself at the shape in your body. Let’s pretend that the source of this light is the cosmos so the more you use, the more you have available. The light directs itself at the shape and resonates, vibrates in and around it. As it does, what happens to the shape, size or color?”*
- If the client gives feedback that it is changing in any way, continue repeating a version of the underlined portion and ask for feedback until the shape is completely gone. This usually correlates with the disappearance of the upsetting feeling. After it feels better, bring the light into every portion of the person’s body, and give her/him a positive statement for peace and calm until the next session. Ask the client to become externally aware at the count of five.

B. SPIRAL TECHNIQUE

- *“I’d like you to bring up a disturbing memory and concentrate on the sensations in your body. This is an imaginal exercise. There are no right or wrong responses.”*
“When you bring up the memory, how does it feel from 0-10?”
“Where do you feel it in your body?”
“Concentrate on the feeling in your body. Pretend the feelings are energy. If the sensation were going in a spiral, what direction would it be moving – clockwise or counterclockwise?”
- Whatever the client answers, respond, *“Good,”* and instruct him/her to move the spiral in the opposite direction.
“Now with your mind, change the direction and move the spiral in the opposite direction. Just notice what happens as it moves in the opposite direction? (pause) What happens?”
- If the technique works, the client will report that moving the spiral in the opposite direction will cause the feelings to dissipate and the SUD to drop. Teach it to the client for self-use. If the client says the spiral doesn’t change, doesn’t move, or nothing happens, then choose another technique.

C. BREATHING SHIFT

- *“I’d like you to bring up a good, happy or positive memory. Notice where your breath is starting and put your hand over that spot.”* (Let the client breathe a moment or two.) *“Notice how that feels. (pause) Now I’d like you to bring up a memory with a low level of disturbance and notice how your breathing changes. (pause) Put your hand over that spot. Now I want you to move your hand back to your _____ (name the spot) and change your breathing.”*
- This should cause the disturbance to dissipate. Teach it to the client for self-use.

D. DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

- If your client is unfamiliar with diaphragmatic breathing, explain that one must draw air into the lungs in a way that will displace the diaphragm and expand the lower rib cage while trying not to let it move the shoulders. Do the exercise with the client.
- *“This is a three-part breath. We will be breathing to a slow count of five (or three) – inhaling through your nose (or pursed lips), holding, exhaling through your mouth, holding, and so forth. When we start, I’d like you to place one hand on your upper chest and the other just under your ribcage. While slowly inhaling through your nose, bring your attention to the feel of the air moving into your nostrils. Let the air flow into your chest, gently expanding your lower ribcage, while your upper chest and shoulders remain motionless. Let go of your breath in reverse order, relaxing the lower rib cage first. As you exhale through your mouth, notice the feel and sound of the air as it moves across your vocal cords, almost like a snore. Ready? Here we go.”*
- Repeat this until the client is comfortable with the process.
 - *I’d like you to do this at least ten minutes, twice a day. If you get dizzy, return to regular breathing for a couple of breaths and then return to diaphragmatic breathing.”*

E. ELEMENTS: EARTH, AIR, WATER, FIRE (Elan Shapiro, MD, Brurit Laub)

- *“Take a current reading of your stress level, 0-10, where 0 is no disturbance and 10 is the worst you can imagine. How much disturbance do you feel now?”*
- *“Take a minute to ground yourself in the here and now. Place both feet on the ground and feel the floor. Direct your attention outwards. Look around and notice 3 things. (pause) What do you see? (pause) What do you hear?” (pause)*
- *“As you continue feeling the security now of your feet on the ground, take 3 or 4 deeper, slower breaths from your stomach, making sure to breathe all the way out and make room for fresh, energizing air. As you breathe out, imagine that you are letting go of some of the stress and breathing it out. Direct your attention towards your center”.*
- *“As you continue feeling the security now of your feet on the ground and feel centered as you breathe in and out, notice if you have saliva in your mouth. Make more saliva.”*
 - When anxious or stressed, the sympathetic nervous system responds by shutting off the digestive system as part of the stress emergency response, resulting in a dry mouth.
 - Making saliva switches on the digestive system (parasympathetic nervous system) and the relaxation response. Hence, offering people something to drink or chew after a difficult experience can be helpful.
- *“As you continue feeling the security now of your feet on the ground and feel centered as you breathe in and out and feel calm and in control as you produce more and more saliva; you can let the fire light the path to your imagination to bring up an image of a place where you feel safe/ calm/peaceful/relaxed, or a memory in which you felt good about yourself.”*
- *“Now, let’s take a current reading of your stress level, 0-10. Where are you now with stress?”*
- *“Practice the 4 Elements at least 10 times a day for the first two weeks. It is helpful to practice when your stress levels are not high, to create the positive conditioning that will help you to use it more effectively when your stress is high. Consider placing a label on your cell phone or a bracelet on your wrist that will remind you to practice the 4 Elements.”*