

Self-Soothing Plan (Printable)

Self-soothing advice fails for a structural reason rather than a motivational one. Activation narrows attention, and a narrowed mind cannot generate options — which means the moment you most need a coping strategy is precisely the moment you are least able to think of one. Every list of forty techniques is written for a calm reader who does not need it.

Who this is for: You know what you are supposed to do when the panic arrives and you have never once done it in the moment.

The exercises

1. Know your own activation signature

You cannot intervene in something you notice ten minutes late.

First physical sign, before any thought:

Second:

Third — by now, what is the thought?

How long, roughly, from the first sign to the peak?

2. The three-tier menu

Sorted by available time, not by how good it sounds.

Two-minute options that reliably change my breathing or heart rate:

Twenty-minute options that change my physical location:

Two-hour options that fully occupy my hands:

Which of these have I actually tested?

3. Soothing or avoiding?

One test, applied honestly.

What I currently reach for first:

Applying the test — soothing or avoiding?

What it costs, if anything:

One swap I could make for the most costly item:

4. The crisis card

Six lines. Small enough to carry, short enough to read.

Line 1 — my first sign:

Line 2 — the two-minute action:

Line 3 — one true sentence (not "everything is fine"):

Lines 4–6 — who to contact, what I will not do, when I check back:

5. The weekly review

Five minutes, and it is what makes the plan improve.

Activations this week:

Times I reached for the card:

What worked, and what to cross off:

Average onset-to-settled time, versus last week:

This worksheet is free to print, photocopy and share, including with clients. It is self-reflection material, not a diagnosis, an assessment or a substitute for professional support. If a relationship involves fear, control or coercion, or if working through this raises more than feels manageable, please speak to a doctor, a therapist or a domestic abuse service.