
7 STRATEGIES FOR CONQUERING STRESS

#1 - Challenge Self-defeating Thoughts

Everyone has self-defeating thoughts from time to time, especially when feeling stressed out or overwhelmed. To overcome getting caught up in self-defeating thoughts, first identify what you say to yourself: these statements typically have “catastrophic” overtones. Once you recognize what you are saying to yourself, you can develop a realistic coping statement. Coping statements allow you to problem-solve instead of panic.



Catastrophic statement

“I could never prepare enough for this argument.”

“I have a lousy memory. There’s no way I can memorize all of the points on my outline for this argument!”

Coping statement

“I have a lot to review to prepare for this argument, and if I stick to my schedule, I know that I can do it.”

“I can do well at this hearing by staying calm. I will need to make a short outline and practice out loud.”



#2 - Thought Stopping

When you feel anxious, take a moment to consciously listen to what you are telling yourself. Interrupt your anxiety-producing thoughts by telling yourself “STOP.” Take a deep breath, and devise a coping statement to replace the anxious thought. Do this as often as necessary, whether preparing for a meeting, a hearing, or for a presentation. You can use one or all of the following procedures to practice this technique.

Silent practice: Think of a recent event in which you experienced anxiety. Bring up enough of the details that you start to feel some discomfort and anxiety. Focus on what you are saying to yourself.

1. Silently say “STOP.”
2. Breathe deeply several times.
3. Come up with a coping statement to tell yourself.

Written practice: Think of a recent moment in which you experienced anxiety. Recall enough of the details that you start to feel some discomfort and anxiety. Focus on what you are saying to yourself.

1. Silently say “STOP.”
2. Breathe deeply several times.
3. Write a coping statement that helps you problem-solve instead of panic. This puts you in control of your anxiety.

Oral practice: Think of another situation in which you experienced feelings of anxiety. This time, practice the thought-stopping technique out loud, away from other people (your car or home are good locations). Practice the thought-stopping technique any time you begin to feel anxious. Eventually, it will become a method that feels comfortable and almost automatic.

#3 - Recognize Areas Where You Do Have Control

It is self-defeating to tell yourself that your judge, colleagues, or clients are not in your control. These thoughts create anxiety and prevent you from effectively handling your cases. Instead, focus on the concrete actions you can take to improve your skills and performance.

Examples: Bounce your ideas off of a trust colleague, practice your presentations or arguments out loud, make sure you are using your time efficiently.





#4 - Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is one of the simplest techniques you can use to reduce anxiety. Breathing provides you with oxygen necessary to think clearly and releases physical tension at the same time. Those big deep breaths tell your nervous system that you are not afraid—you are in control!

1. Close your eyes.
2. Breathe through your nose. Breathe in deeply into your abdomen. Pause before you exhale.
3. Breathe out from your abdomen slowly.
4. Use each inhalation as a moment to become aware of any tension in your body. Use each exhalation as an opportunity to let go of tension.
5. Repeat several times whenever you feel anxiety or feelings of being overwhelmed creep up on you.

#5 - Imagery and Visualization

Use these simple techniques to calm yourself and improve your concentration. Create a visualization that works for you: remember, the purpose of visualization is to help you relax and cope with stress more effectively.

Imagery

- Imagine a scene that feels pleasurable and relaxing.
- Let yourself stay with that scene for a few moments.
- Once you feel relaxed, imagine going in the room to start the deposition.
- Imagine calmly sitting down, waiting for the deposition to begin. As you start to begin the deposition, say to yourself, “I am prepared. I am relaxed. I am ready to concentrate and do my best.”

Visualization “Quick pics”

- Think about something melting when you want to relax. “Melting” evokes many images:
 - A flame melting candle wax
 - Marshmallow melting in hot chocolate
 - Butter melting in a pan
 - Chocolate chips melting in Toll House cookies



#6 - Muscle Relaxation

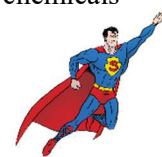
Progressive muscle relaxation is a very effective technique which you can use on a daily basis as needed.

Psychologists Steve Sprinkle and Bonnie Lambourn from Hobart and William Smith Colleges' Counseling Center have recorded two audio files outlining relaxation exercises that you can download for your own use.

#7 - Power Posing

Power posing adjusts your brain chemicals by reducing stress hormones and increasing confidence-boosting chemicals in your system. And it takes just a few moments! And it is the perfect stress buster.

See: http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are



More Ways to Reduce Stress

- Exercise
- Eat healthy: reduce or eliminate alcohol and caffeine use while preparing for an important meeting or hearing
- Art therapy such as doodling or coloring during built-in and necessary breaks
- Get plenty of sleep
- Ask friends and family for their support: YOU CAN DO THIS!

