

Muscle Relaxation

Tighten a group of muscles, hold for 5 seconds, and release. Repeat as needed with any muscles you like.

Star breathing



List items in a category

Disney movies
Fruits or vegetables
Restaurants in town

5-4-3-2-1 Technique

5 Things you can see
4 Things you can touch/feel
3 Things you can hear
2 Things you can smell
1 Thing you can taste

4-7-8 Breathing

Breathe in for a count of 4.
Hold for a count of 7.
Exhale for a count of 8.
(Count quickly at first to find your natural rhythm.)



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When we experience violence or trauma, our bodies and brains may respond by:

- Being extra vigilant or alert to our surroundings
- Increasing our sensitivity to things like loud noises, quick movements, certain smells—things that may remind us of the violence we experienced
- Difficulty controlling worst-case-scenario type thoughts
- Repetitive thoughts about the traumatic experience
- Having a difficult time making decisions, tracking time, forgetting things easily
- Activating our “fight, flight, freeze or fawn” response

In our day to day lives, this might look like:

- Not being able to concentrate on work
- Feeling “jumpy” or startled easily
- Extreme tiredness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Reducing the amount of time we spend with others
- Staying home a lot, or only accessing spaces that we feel safe in
- Feeling anxious or easily angered
- Sudden flashbacks of the assault in places like the coffee line up or the bookstore
- Nightmares
- Headaches
- Sudden increase in heart rate, difficulty breathing, feeling an overwhelming sense of fear or panic
- Feeling numb or detached from our bodies—(some people describe this as if they’re floating above themselves or watching their life like a movie).

It’s important to remember that these are strategic mechanisms we enact to protect ourselves –it doesn’t mean that we’re broken or “crazy”. These are common responses to an extraordinarily harmful situation, and you are not alone. It can take time and deliberate work (perhaps with a trusted professional or support person) to feel safe again. Many victim/survivors notice that these responses become more manageable or stop altogether, once a sense of safety has been re-established.

So, what can we do in the meantime to help our bodies and brains re-establish a sense of safety and calm?

Grounding techniques are a great place to start. These exercises can help us remain focused in the present moment and remind our bodies what ‘safe’ feels like. They may be quick strategies like breathing techniques or longer, more formal exercises like meditations. There is no wrong way to ground yourself, and you need to find the right exercise for you.