

## **Guided Imagery: Introduction for Stress Class/COVID**

I want to invite you to be very gentle with yourselves.

Pause right now for just a moment. Close your eyes and place your hand on your heart. For a minute allow yourself to feel the full spectrum of whatever emotions are moving through you - welcome them all in. Just make some space inside of you to feel the tenderness, the anxiety, the overwhelm, the grief, as well as the joy, excitement, anticipation.

Then breathe into your heart center and see if you can just rest in a connection to the divine presence within you. Not fixing anything or doing anything, just being present.

Invite in an awareness of "enoughness" - what is enough for you this day? Listen for what the response is. Rest in that deeper knowing.

Anytime you start to feel a rise of anxiety or overwhelm - take just five or ten minutes to practice this simple exercise of making space for the feelings, connecting with your heart, asking what is enough, and listening.

You are each brilliant and beautiful You are each much more than enough. If we were doing this in person I would pause a while, put my hand on your hand and look you right in the eye as I said those words to you.

Adapted from Christine Valters Paintner

## **The Brain in the Palm of your Hand**

(From *Parenting from the Inside Out*, by Daniel Seigel and Mary Hartzell)

Adapted by Suzanne Smitha and Jody McVittie

### **Your Wrist and Palm:**

Brain Stem - responsible for survival instincts: flight, freeze or fight;  
Autonomic ("automatic") functions

### **Your Thumb:**

Mid brain - where we store and integrate memories, hold fears.

### **Your Fingers over your Thumb:**

Cortex - perception, motor action, speech, higher processing and what we normally call "thinking,"

### **Your Fingernails:** (this is approximately behind your eyes in your head)

Orbitofrontal cortex/ pre-frontal cortex - a primary integration center for the brain, almost like a "switchboard" that makes sure messages get where they need to go.

Documented functions of the pre-frontal cortex are:

Regulation of body through autonomic nervous system

Emotional regulation

Regulation of interpersonal relationships

Response flexibility

Intuition

Mindsight

Self Awareness - auto-noesis

Letting go of fears (only in lab animals so far)

Morality

What happens when you are stressed, overwhelmed, or trying to deal with traumatic or painful memories? The pre-frontal cortex shuts down; it no longer functions. (This is temporary, thank goodness!) You have flipped your lid. You can't use most of those 9 functions above. And you can't learn without them. So you need to calm down and bring the orbitofrontal cortex back into functioning.

**Mirror Neurons:** the "monkey see, monkey do" neurons that play a key role in social interaction, connection and learning.

Go to: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sciencenow/3204/01.html>

To see an excellent 14 minute Nova episode on Mirror Neurons.

# The Four Elements for Stress Reduction

(Earth, Water, Air, & Fire)

**Rationale:** External & internal stress triggers have an accumulative effect during the day. We cope better with stress when we stay within our arousal “window of tolerance.” An antidote to stress triggers: frequent random monitoring of stress level with simple stress reduction actions to keep stress levels within our “window of tolerance.” Wear a 4 Elements bracelet (coloured rubber band or string) on your wrist and every time you notice it take a quick reading of your current stress level (SUD) and perform 3 or 4 brief self calming/self control exercises, then take a second SUD reading. The modest goal is to reduce your stress level by 1 or 2 each time and do this at random times and at various initial stress levels. By preventing your stress responses from accumulating, you may be better able to stay within your “window of tolerance.”

**Earth:** Grounding, Safety in the Present Reality...take a minute or 2 to “land”...to be here now...place both feet on the ground, feel the chair supporting you...or stand and feel your feet connecting to the earth (or lie on the floor). Look around and notice 3 new things...What do you see?...What do you hear? (don't ask this if it draws attention to on-going dangers, e.g. if there are still explosions going on.)

**Water:** Calm and Controlled - switch on the RELAXATION RESPONSE...do you have saliva in your mouth?...make more saliva by moving the tip of your tongue back and forth on the inside of your jaw right below your front teeth...(when you are anxious, stressed, your mouth often dries out because part of the stress response (Sympathetic Nervous System) is to shut off the digestive system. So when you start making saliva you switch on the digestive system again (Parasympathetic Nervous System) and the relaxation response. That is why people are offered water or tea or chewing gum after a difficult experience.

**AIR:** Breathing for Strength, Balance and Centering. (Anxiety = excitement without oxygen -you stop breathing. Start breathing again and your anxiety reduces.) Deep breathing - take 3 or 4 deeper, slower breaths, filling your lungs full of fresh, energizing air until it pushes against your diaphragm and your belly moves away from your spine.

**FIRE:** Light up the path of your IMAGINATION. Bring up an image of a calm/safe place, or some other soothing, calming image. Notice the sensations you feel in your body? Install with brief slow BLS/butterfly hugs.

**Tips:** The rubber band can be stretched (gently!) and released each time to signal the beginning of the 4 Elements exercise to stop negative thoughts and to ground quickly in the present. You can suggest: “as you breathe out, imagine that you are letting go of some of the stress.” The sequence of the 4 Elements (Earth, Air, Water, Fire) is now designed to follow the body up from the feet, to the stomach and chest, to the throat and mouth, to the head. As each new “Element exercise” is presented, briefly review the previous ones (“as you continue feeling the security 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. Or a memory in which you felt good about yourself.

## **Resources to Assist in Reducing Anxiety**

### **Apps to Download**

Insight Timer – Meditations, coping with anxiety, managing stress, Improving sleep, Mindfulness at work, Self-esteem, morning meditations (often some courses available as well)

**NO COST**

Calm - Short video lesson describing about anxiety including “habit loops”, mindfulness, unwinding anxiety, stress tests, mindfulness exercises like breathing, body scan, loving kindness, resting.

**NO COST**

**(each lesson must be completed before moving on to the next. Lessons are short and are divided in 5 week lesson pods) The “gears” selection helps explain the process so it’s a good place to begin.**

Mindfulness Coach – Guided audio’s with some visuals on awareness of breath, senses, Building compassion, mindful eating, listening, looking, walking, for Emotional discomfort, seated practices. It also includes practices used in !Rest Yoga (!Rest.org) that teach muscle relaxation, Sensory noticing, breathing, etc.

**NO COST**

## **You Tube Videos**

Sitting Yoga (Example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fkl88Nq3BiU&feature=youtu.be>)

EFT (Emotional Freedom Therapy) - Founded by Gary Craig  
Jessica Ortner has some good videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAclBdj20ZU>

Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) - Christine Valters Paintner, Ph.D. (some are at no cost; [www.AbbeyoftheArts.com](http://www.AbbeyoftheArts.com) )

<https://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2020/05/03/monk-in-the-world-conversion-4-guided-meditation-by-christine-valters-paintner-audio-a-love-note-from-your-online-abbess/>

## **Guided Imagery**

Health Journeys – [www.Healthjourneys.com](http://www.Healthjourneys.com)