

SENSORY SELF-SOOTHING

Sensory self-soothing is one of the most helpful distress tolerance skills in my opinion, especially for us neurodivergent folks with sensory differences.

Sensory self-soothing probably speaks for itself - the aim is to relieve any distress or overwhelm by soothing ourselves with our senses.

When we focus on our senses, we can provide feelings of comfort and even joy, reduce the intensity of the emotions we might be feeling and distract ourselves from any overwhelming thoughts and feelings.

Remember, everyone is different so take some time to figure out what works for you but here are some suggestions to get you started:

LOOK

- go for a walk in nature
- walk a feel-good movie
- look at funny memes
- watch TikTok videos

TASTE

- sip on a cup of tea
- bake cookies
- focus on a hard candy

HEAR

- listen to a calming playlist
- listen an angry playlist
- call a friend
- listen to music as a distraction

SMELL

- light a candle
- bake cookies
- keep a favourite scent on hand

TOUCH

- have a shower or a bubble bath
- cuddle your pet
- use a weighted blanket

SENSORY SELF-SOOTHING

Self-soothing is all about soothing yourself with objects, smells or sounds that ground you and calm you. When you need it, you can come back to this list as a reminder or share it with your partner, family, parents or your doctor so they can also support you.

VISUAL



TASTE



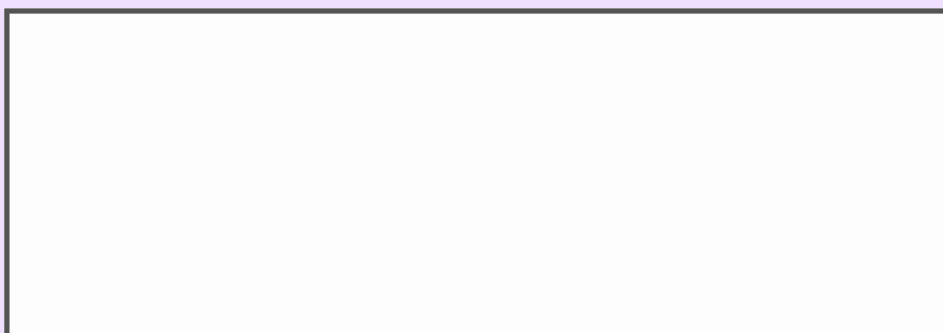
SOUND



SMELL



TOUCH



SPECIAL INTERESTS

Special interests (otherwise known as SpIns) are a source of well-being, coping and community and they can actually be used as a positive strategy as neurodivergent individuals. Engaging with our SpIns can help us distract ourselves as well as help us regulate and bring positive feelings.

SPINS THAT ARE AN ACTIVITY YOU CAN YOU DO

make up
cooking an baking
taking care of your plants
looking at the stars
arts and crafts
photography

SPINS YOU CAN LISTEN TO AND WATCH

TV shows
podcasts
music
YouTube videos

SPINS YOU CAN DEEP DIVE AND DISTRACT YOURSELF WITH

space and stars
plants
dinosaurs
neurodiversity

SPINS YOU CAN SHARE OR DO WITH OTHERS

doing make up
cooking or baking
arts and crafts
looking at photos

ALEXITHYMIA

Alexithymia is a difference in emotional processing and a common experience in Autistic and ADHD individuals where we struggle identifying, describing and expressing our emotions. It can look like:

- having trouble finding the right words to describe what you're feeling
- difficulty expressing emotions using verbal words
- difficulty discriminating between emotions and bodily sensations
- difficulty in identifying faces and facial expressions

I'm someone who experiences alexithymia, and I like to describe it as lacking an internal label maker for emotions where I often have to rely on physical sensations to figure out what I'm feeling. This means I'll usually give vague approximations like "I'm fine" when someone asks how I am.

USE ALTERNATIVE DESCRIPTIONS

Try using alternative descriptions to describe your emotions or how you're feeling. One alternative is to describe physical sensations like "feeling tense" to describe anger or perhaps your stomach is feeling sore to describe anxiousness. Another alternative is to use activities to describe your emotions like "I just want to lie in bed all day" to describe sadness or "I want to throw something" to describe frustration.

EMOTION WHEEL

There are a number of emotion wheel charts available, which are helpful in identifying what emotion you might be feeling. Emotion wheels are helpful when you find it difficult to recognise and label an emotion especially if it's a complex emotion.

USE MUSIC OR LYRICS

You can also use music and lyrics to describe your emotions. I'm someone who often uses music and lyrics to both communicate and describe my emotions as well as a way to figure out my own emotions.

DESCRIBING YOUR EMOTIONS

Sometimes it can be hard to describe or identify our emotions, so I've included this section to make it a little easier. You will find a list of common emotions like anger or anxiety and with each emotion, a list of common sensations or things you might experience.

IF YOU'RE ANGRY, YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

irritation
hurt
heart racing
hands clenching
feeling hot
inside is shaking
muscles tightening
mouth/jaw feel tight
a need to explode
like stomping or slamming

IF YOU'RE SAD, YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

lonely
rejected
empty or hollow
a need to be alone
like crying
tired or fatigue
like you aren't interested
like you don't care

IF YOU'RE ANXIOUS, YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

breathlessness
racing heart
fidgeting
frozen or tense
lump in throat
nausea
muscles tightening
overthinking
feeling clammy/cold

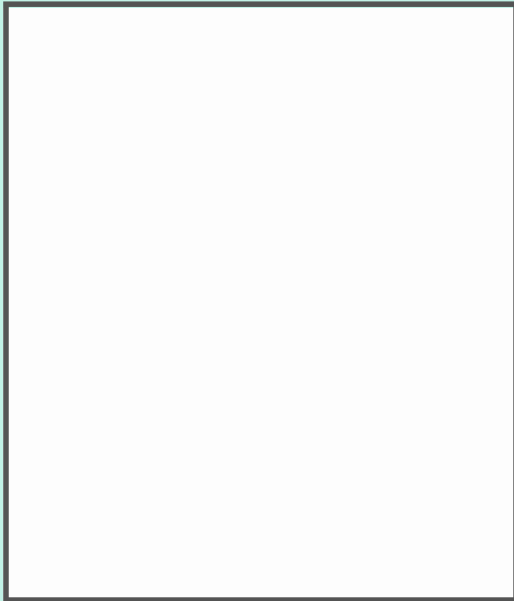
IF YOU'RE JEALOUS, YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

rejection
insecure
racing heart
difficulty breathing
tight chest
feeling a need for control
racing thoughts
overthinking

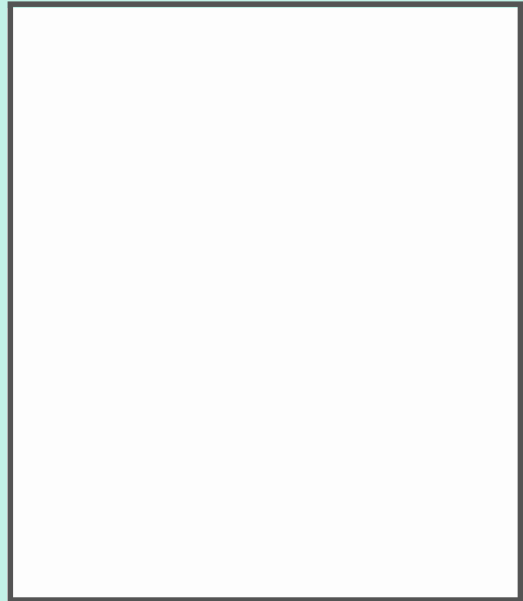
DESCRIBING YOUR EMOTIONS

Everyone experiences emotions differently which means we might find we experience different sensations, thoughts or urges/behaviours. You can use this worksheet to describe how you personally experience certain emotions. Use the previous page for a starting point if you like.

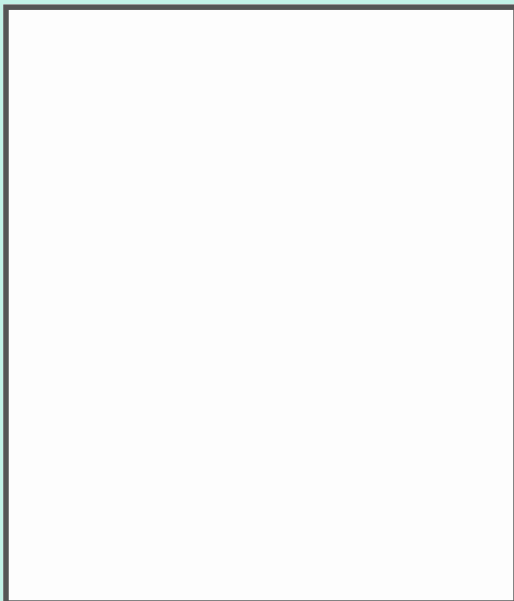
**WHEN I'M _____
I MAY EXPERIENCE:**



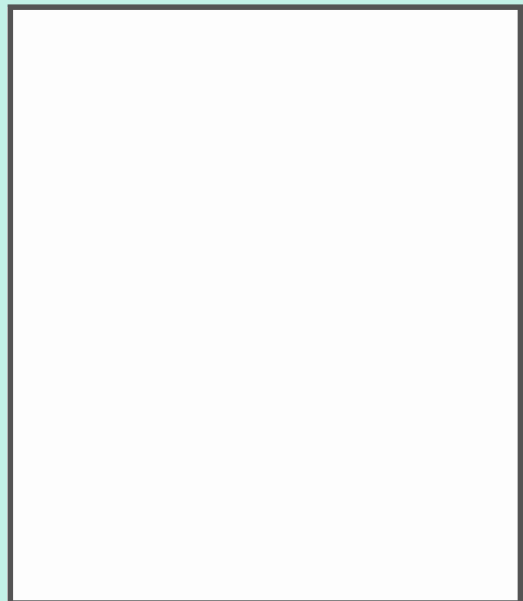
**WHEN I'M _____
I MAY EXPERIENCE:**



**WHEN I'M _____
I MAY EXPERIENCE:**



**WHEN I'M _____
I MAY EXPERIENCE:**



WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

The Window of Tolerance was coined by Dr. Dan Siegel and it's since been adopted to understand our emotions. The zone of tolerance can be described as the perfect window where we aren't overstimulated or overwhelmed and we aren't understimulated or underwhelmed.

Everyone has their unique zone of tolerance where they can experience different emotions and remain within the zone or a regulated state. Here you can think clearly, process information and do what you need to do, so it's the ideal state to be in.

However, when emotions get too much (hyperarousal) or things are getting you down or you feel numb (hypoarousal), it can take you outside of that zone of tolerance and that's when things start happening e.g. anxiety, fast heart, racing thoughts vs disassociating, feeling numb or tired.

As neurodivergent individuals, we often feel emotions more easily and more intensely. While this can be a beautiful thing, experiencing intense joy and excitement over small things, it also means we experience the other, not so fun, emotions intensely too.

HYPERAROUSAL

flight or fight response
anxiety and panic
fear
racing thoughts
inability to keep still

reactive emotions
shaking
aggression
defensiveness

ZONE OF TOLERANCE

feeling safe
feeling calm
thinking clearly
self-soothing

regulating your emotions
insight and awareness
being present in the moment
feeling all the emotions

HYPOAROUSAL

disassociation
unable to think
intrusive thoughts
no energy
depression

numb
withdrawn
disconnected from self
shutting down
fatigue

YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Everyone has their unique zone of tolerance, so it can be helpful to understand what it looks like when we're in our zone and what it looks like when we're outside our zone. As emotions also influence our thoughts, physical sensations and our actions or urges, there's often a lot going on and a lot of signs to notice.

HYPERAROUSAL *Write down the signs or things you notice...*



ZONE OF TOLERANCE *Write down the signs or things you notice...*



HYPOAROUSAL *Write down the signs or things you notice...*