

# FIRST AID ARTS

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## MINI TOOLKIT

TOOLS FOR MENTAL & EMOTIONAL FIRST AID

# FIRST AID FOR THE HEART

First Aid Arts utilizes a wide range of different arts and body-based approaches to care for yourself and others in moments of distress and discomfort. **It's first aid for a person's mental and emotional well-being.**



This Mini Toolkit includes our Window of Tolerance Card, seven Response Cards, and a Support Network card.

This is a small sampling of what we include as part of our First Aid Arts Responder Toolkit and Manual distributed at our Level I Responder trainings.

In this time of uncertainty, things are changing quickly and we are having to adapt even as we grieve on many levels. We invite you to try these simple tools which may help you:

- Acknowledge and express what you are feeling
- Discover what moves you towards more comfort and care
- Learn ways to boost your mental and emotional health both in the short and long term

As you find tools that work for you, keep adding to this resource—your first aid kit for the heart.

**You don't have to be an artist to use First Aid Arts. Everyone is creative and creativity is healing. Art is medicine.**

# HOW TO USE THESE CARDS

## Prepare:

1. Try identifying where you are on the Window of Tolerance scale throughout your day. This helps build self-awareness.
2. Try the Response Cards in a time of calm. Being familiar with the different cards can help you respond more effectively in a moment of stress or crisis. Keep track of which Response Cards best help you regulate. Individual responses to cards may vary. Use the ones that work for you or adapt them for comfort. If you can, practice them regularly.
3. Fill in your Support Network card so you have access to important contact information in a crisis.

## Respond:

1. When you feel yourself moving into the zones of fight, flight, or freeze, see if you can identify where you are on the Window of Tolerance scale.
2. Use a Response Card that helps you shift up or down and closer to your Window of Tolerance, depending on where you are on the scale.
3. After trying the activity, see if you can identify where you are on the scale now.
4. Reach out to a resource on your Support Network if you need additional support.

# RESPONSE ZONES

We respond most effectively to stress when we are regulated in our Window of Tolerance. Finding yourself in the zones of fight, flight or freeze are normal reactions to stress. What does it feel like for you when you are in the different zones?



## FIGHT/FLIGHT

- Stress sends brain and body into fight or flight mode
- Signs you are here: High unpleasant energy, inability to think and communicate clearly, racing thoughts, pounding heart, feelings of anxiety and fear



## WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

- The brain and body are balanced
- Signs you are here: Engaged pleasant energy, body and mind in balance, access to language and learning, able to engage with others, feelings of calm and connection



## FREEZE

- Stress sends brain and body into freeze
- Signs you are here: Low energy, feels unpleasant, inability to think and communicate clearly, shut down, emotionally numb, disconnected, feelings of sadness

# WINDOW OF TOLERANCE SCALE

## WHERE ARE YOU ON THE SCALE?

It is helpful to monitor your physical and emotional health. Try to identify where you are on this simple scale throughout the day. What causes you to move to different zones? Notice what moves you closer towards comfort and a sense of pleasantness.

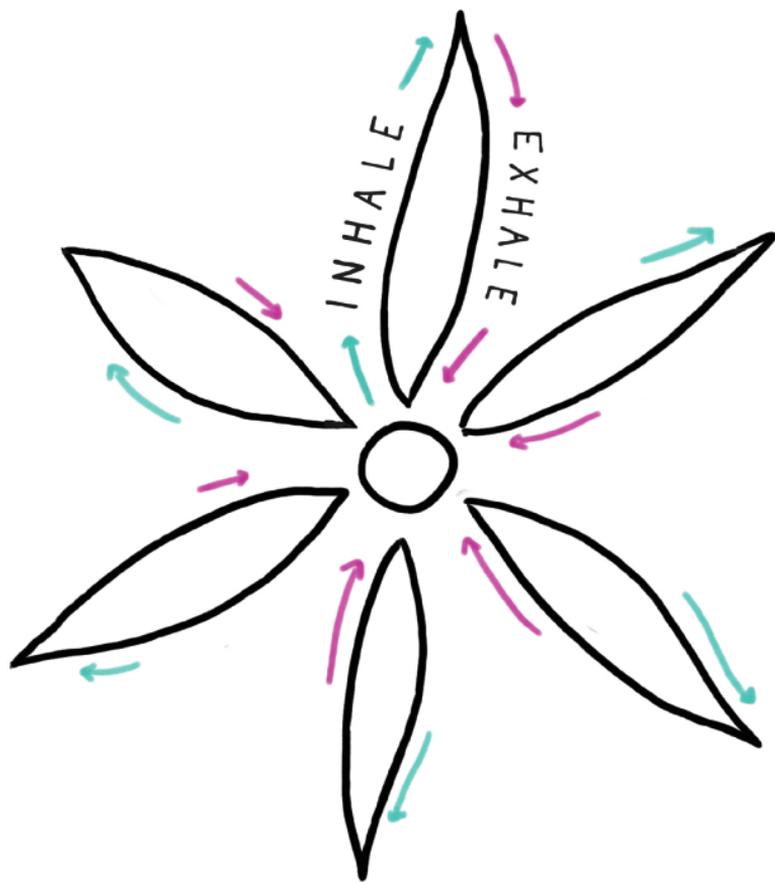


## TRY A RESPONSE CARD

Notice if any of the Response Cards help you move closer to your Window of Tolerance zone. Remember that responses work differently for everyone and may also affect you differently from moment to moment.



# BREATHE & DRAW



# BREATHE & DRAW

Draw each element of a flower as an accompaniment to your inhale and exhale:

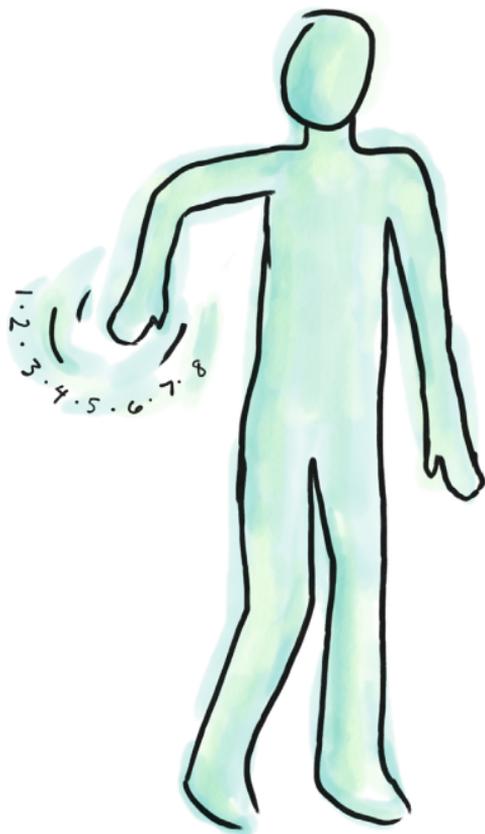
- Breathe in and out as you draw a circle.
- Start drawing the petals of the flower around the circle. Beginning at the center, inhale as you draw the first side of the first petal. Pause.
- Exhale as you draw the corresponding side coming back to center. Pause.
- Continue drawing the flower petals as you breathe in and out. You can draw the flower as small or as big as you want. Allow yourself to draw freely and remember that it does not have to be a masterpiece.
- Add additional layers of petals, leaves, vines, or stems if you would like. You could even create a whole garden of breath flowers or plants. Don't worry if you lose focus on the breath; you can come back to the breath whenever you remember to.

## Why does this help?

Paying attention to the breath can help regulate the body and relax the nervous system. Combining mindful breathing with simple drawing techniques can deepen focus and help us to stay in the present moment.



# SHAKE IT OUT



# SHAKE IT OUT

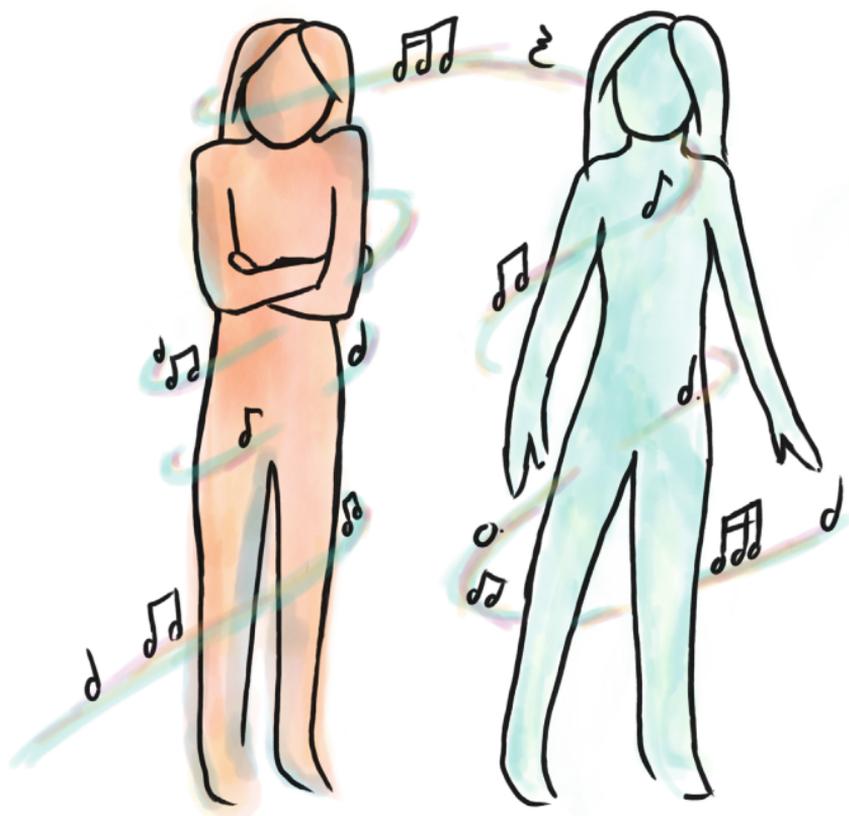
- Count out loud to 8. As you count, vigorously shake your right hand out to each count
- Repeat with the left hand, and then the right leg, and then the left leg.
- Repeat the whole process but this time counting out loud to 4.
- Repeat, counting out loud to 2.
- Repeat, counting out loud to 1.
- End the sequence by shaking or wiggling your whole body, and taking a breath.
- You can do this in slow motion, or speeding up as you count down.
- You can make a sound to represent release or say something to yourself like, “I’m safe. I’m letting go.”

## Why does this help?

Stress creates patterns of muscular tension and activates stress hormones that can build up in our body. This tension and stress can be released through vigorous shaking. Counting out loud while we do this engages our executive functioning, which helps to integrate our brain and body.



# TURNAROUND TUNE



# TURNAROUND TUNE

- Think about a song that can turn your mood around 180 degrees for the better.
- You can listen to the song, sing/hum the song, or imagine that you are listening to this song. Notice how you feel.
- Write down or draw a word, phrase, symbol, or image that represents the essence of this song.

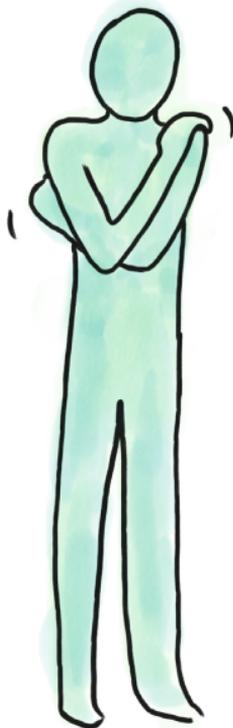
## Why does this help?

Music is a powerful tool that can change our nervous system so that our energy level matches what we need or want to do. Singing and humming can also calm our nervous system down and encourage us to breathe. Using a song that has known associations of pleasure or joy, and which activates memories of well-being can provide an anchor that helps us to regulate and self-soothe.

Research shows it takes 13 minutes listening to music to release sadness and 9 minutes to make you happy.



## COMFORT HOLD



# COMFORT HOLD

- Start by sitting or standing in a position that feels comfortable.
- Place your right hand on your left shoulder (or over your heart, tucking your fingers under your armpit) and wrap your left arm across your belly button in a calming self-hug.
- Take a few breaths into your Comfort Hold, with your eyes open or closed.

## Why does this help?

The Comfort Hold regulates our nervous system so that we can be responsive and effective by activating self-compassion and provides a sense of physical containment and safety which help reduce the nervous system's reactivity to pain and threat.

When you hug someone, your brain produces a chemical that reduces stress (also known as the cuddle hormone or oxytocin). Hugging ourselves can have the same effect!



# COLOR SOMETHING



# COLOR SOMETHING

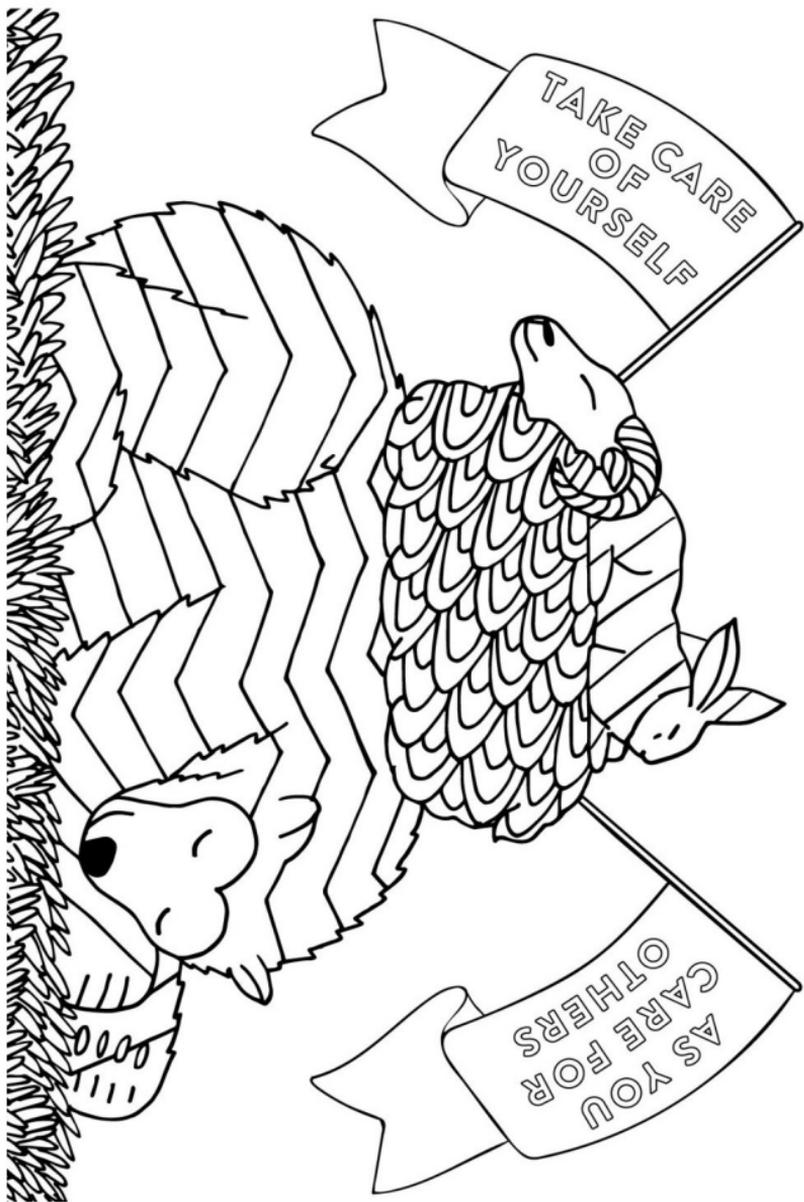
- Use the coloring page provided, a coloring book, or an image from your own imagination. You can also sketch a flower, a toy, or anything else inspiring around you. If possible, color for at least 15 minutes.
- If available, listen to some calming or inspiring music or try to color to the rhythm of the sounds around you.
- Pay attention to your own breath while you color.

## Why does this help?

Coloring heightens and sharpens awareness so that we can focus and supports nervous system regulation through rhythmic repetitive action which can help to decrease anxiety. It takes approximately 15 minutes for our brain and body to calm down through a regulatory action like coloring.



"TAKE CARE" BY SCOTT ERICKSON



## SING A CALMING SONG



# SING A CALMING SONG

- Sing or hum a calming song with long deep breaths.
- Try these lyrics to the tune of ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’:

“I am here and I am strong  
Take a breath, and  
sing this song  
I am growing strong  
each day

Everything will be ok  
I am here and I am strong  
Take a breath, and  
sing this song”

- What other calming songs do you know?
- If possible, hum and sing with others.

## Why does this help?



Singing and humming calms our nervous system down and encourages us to breathe. Singing can lower cortisol levels related to stress, and releases chemicals like dopamine and serotonin which help to regulate our mood and connect us to feelings of reward and pleasure.



## RESOURCE HAND



# RESOURCE HAND

- Trace your right or left hand on a piece of paper or in your journal. Draw, write, collage, or paint in response to the following prompts.
  - I HAVE: Fill in the fingers with names, phone numbers, symbols, images, or words of people, places, animals, and things that you can call or rely on for support, or that help you to feel safe and connected. These can include 911 or international crisis lines.
  - I AM: Fill in the upper part of your palm with things that you are proud of about yourself. These can be values, strengths, personality traits, beliefs, areas of growth, cultural or spiritual resources.
  - I CAN: Fill in the bottom part of your palm with things you can do, including skills or abilities or things you are learning. Examples include daily tasks like getting out of bed in the morning, expressing emotions appropriately, asking for help, exercising.
  - I WILL: Fill in the wrist with things you do to feel comforted and to care for yourself.
- Embellish or decorate the page. You can refer to it whenever you need a reminder of the resources that you have available to you.

## Why does this help?

Creating a visual representation of available resources provides a tangible tool for self-regulation. The process of creating engages the kinesthetic-sensory qualities of art-making that can calm the nervous system down and help to regulate lower brain functions such as heart rate and respiration.



# SUPPORT NETWORK

Fill in your Support Network card so you have access to important contact information in a crisis.

## **In Case of Emergency Contact:**

### **Trusted Friend(s):**

### **Non-Emergency contact:**

### **Medical Resource:**

### **Religious or Spiritual Leader/Mentor:**

### **Community Mental Health Center:**

### **Therapist or Psychologist:**



# LEARN MORE

## SUPPORT

- Additional resources for using this toolkit are available at [firstaidarts.org/toolkit-support](https://firstaidarts.org/toolkit-support)

## TRAINING

- To learn for yourself how to use the arts as an antidote to trauma, become a First Aid Arts Responder. [Visit firstaidarts.org/events](https://firstaidarts.org/events)

## VISIT OUR SHOP

- Order our complete printed deck of Response Cards (16 arts-based activities), tools for creativity and regulation, and fun merchandise in our store at [www.firstaidarts.org/shop](https://www.firstaidarts.org/shop)



**ART FIELD KIT:** Designed for you to be creative wherever you are. Complete with sketch pad, watercolor brush & pencils, and more.

# PAY IT FORWARD

## GIVE

- When you give, you provide First Aid Arts tools and training to people working on the front lines of crisis and trauma around the world. [Visit firstaidarts.org/give](https://firstaidarts.org/give)
- The heart of our mission is to make our resources accessible to the least served and most in need. Over the past ten years we have trained **800+ people in over 50 countries!**



DR Congo, 2015



Seattle, WA, 2017



Jordan, 2019

## SHARE

- Was this Mini Toolkit helpful? Share the link with your friends, family, & colleagues: [firstaidarts.org/covid-19](https://firstaidarts.org/covid-19)
- Connect with others online by sharing how these First Aid Arts tools were helpful for you and your community @[FirstAidArts](https://twitter.com/FirstAidArts).
- Use hashtags [#firstaidartstoolkit](https://twitter.com/firstaidartstoolkit) & [#lovecreatively](https://twitter.com/lovecreatively)
- When you spread the word, you are giving more people access to simple accessible tools for mental and emotional health.

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## FIRST AID ARTS MINI TOOLKIT

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**Email: [info@firstaidarts](mailto:info@firstaidarts) • Social: [@firstaidarts](https://www.instagram.com/firstaidarts)**

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### References:

*WINDOW OF TOLERANCE: Siegel, Daniel J. (1999). The Developing Mind: How Relationships and Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are. New York: Guilford Press*  
*Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.*

*SING A CALMING SONG: Adapted from the song found in Baggerly, Jennifer N. (2006). Preparing play therapists for disaster response: Principles and practices. International Journal of Play Therapy 15:59-81.*

*RESOURCE HAND: Adapted from 'The Resilience Hand' developed by Dr. Vivian Nix-Early for BuildaBridge's work with children & youth and the 'Safety Hand' in Malchiodi, C.A., Editor. Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children. The Guilford Press, 2008. chap 12*



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YOU MAKE THE WORLD MORE

**BEAUTIFUL**