



**upstream**  
education

# AT-HOME TOOLKIT

**TOOLS INCLUDED:**

**FINGER BREATHING / THREE WINS / NAME IT  
GO-TO SELF-COMPASSION PHRASES / TIME BUFFER**

## FINGER BREATHING

1. Find a comfortable, upright position. When you arrive in this position, soften your gaze and shift your focus to your fingers. With Finger Breathing, focusing on the present is your only job. Thoughts may arise during this exercise, and that's normal. When they do, bring your attention back to your breath and your fingers.
2. Hold your right thumb in front of you. Take hold of your right thumb with your left hand. As you hold your right thumb, take a deep breath in through your nose, pause for a moment, then exhale through your mouth. Now we are going to do the reverse. Hold your left thumb with your right hand this time. Again, take a deep breath in, pause, then exhale as you continue to hold your left thumb.
3. Hold your right pointer finger with your left hand and slowly inhale through your nose – feel your chest rise and belly expand. Pause at the top. And slowly exhale through your mouth and soften your body. Hold your left pointer finger with your right hand and slowly inhale through your nose--feel your chest rise and belly expand. Pause at the top. And slowly exhale through your mouth and soften your body.
4. Repeat with the rest of your fingers, alternating between hands.  
*(This should take about a minute.)*
5. Research shows that it takes seven deep breaths to calm the nervous system, and we just did 10. Take a moment to notice how you feel. Has anything shifted for you?



## THREE WINS

A common phrase in brain science is “neurons that fire together get wired together.” Essentially, when a certain thought is activated and reinforced, those neural pathways in the brain become stronger and more automatic. For example, if you frequently think that you are unlikeable, that thought pattern becomes your “go-to” way of thinking about yourself in social situations.

But, there’s good news! Our brains are incredible machines and have the ability to change through the process of neuroplasticity. Through practice, we can rewire our brains to intentionally and routinely focus on the good. We have the ability to be active directors of our own thoughts.

This tool, Three Wins, will help us make the best use of our brain’s power which can easily become an everyday routine to shape the way you automatically think.

1. Let’s intentionally search for the good in our lives by answering this simple question: **what are three wins you can claim for today?** It doesn’t matter if it’s early in the morning or late in the afternoon, we can always find three wins. Some examples are: *I got some fresh air; I made my bed; I stretched in the morning before I checked my phone.*
2. For the next minute, write down three wins you’ve experienced so far today.

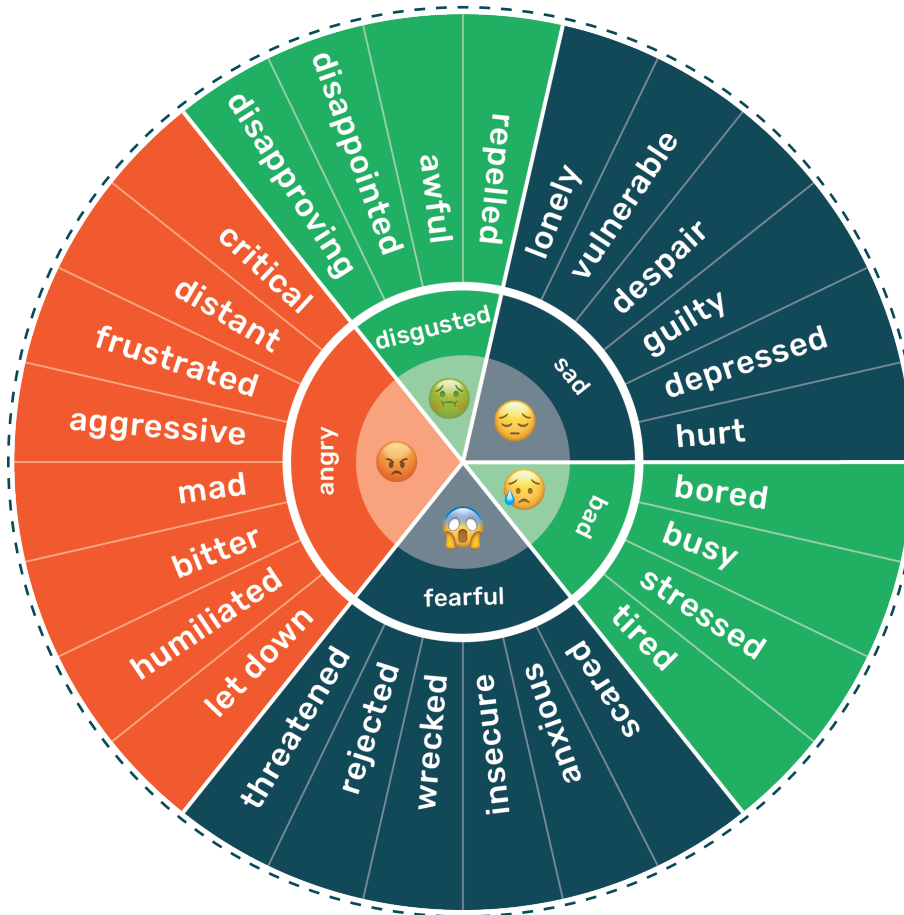
**What are three wins  
I can claim for today?**

## NAME IT

Emotions exist for a reason. Just like hunger lets you know that you need to eat, emotions give us important information about ourselves and our needs. Our emotions – even difficult ones – are helpful, valid, and healthy.

1. First, think of an emotion you've recently experienced that is often viewed as negative. You can use this wheel to help you identify one. It's important to learn how to notice our emotions as they happen.
  - *See the Emotion Wheel on the next page*
2. Second, what situation caused you to experience that emotion? Without overthinking, write down your response.
3. Third, and most importantly, validate what you're feeling. Suppressing any emotion isn't healthy; emotions don't get resolved until they're taken seriously. Pick one or more of these affirmative sentence frames, and complete them based on the emotion you've focused on.
  - "It makes sense that I feel \_\_\_\_."
  - "I give myself permission to feel \_\_\_\_."
  - "My feelings about \_\_\_\_ are valid."
  - "It's okay for me to feel \_\_\_\_ right now."
  - "I can feel \_\_\_\_ and still be okay."
4. If it's helpful, write one of those statements on a post-it note and stick it on your planner or somewhere else you look frequently when you need a reminder. As we make room for all the emotions we experience, we strengthen our self-trust and start to feel calmer.

## NAME IT – EMOTION WHEEL



## NAME IT – AFFIRMATIVE SENTENCE FRAMES

**“It makes sense that I feel \_\_\_\_.”**

**“I give myself permission to feel \_\_\_\_.”**

**“My feelings about \_\_\_\_ are valid.”**

**“It’s okay for me to feel \_\_\_\_ right now.”**

**“I can feel \_\_\_\_ and still be okay.”**

# GO-TO SELF-COMPASSION PHRASES

No one leads a perfect life, yet we are often most critical of our own imperfections or failures. Today, we are going to practice some self-compassion.

Self-compassion means giving ourselves grace; it means showing ourselves understanding and kindness instead of harsh judgments when we make mistakes or a situation doesn't turn out how we had hoped. With self-compassion, we are realistic; we don't sweep our difficulties under the rug. Rather, we practice mindfulness. We are aware that something may have been challenging or painful, yet we acknowledge that imperfection is universal – it is experienced by everyone!

1. Our practice today will be to try on different phrases that help us feel a bit more self-compassionate when faced with a difficult moment. To help us determine what works for us, please think and briefly write about a challenging moment you've recently experienced. Choose one that was tough but is not too overwhelming or painful to write about. This could be related to school, family, friends, or extracurricular activities. It's important to hold space for challenges by allowing yourself to feel and acknowledge a painful moment.
2. Now, read through this list of phrases below, and write down the ones that resonate with you.
3. Which ones resonated the most with you? Is there another phrase you already use that isn't on this list? You can recite these phrases to yourself in the middle of class or during a performance – whenever you need some reassurance or a moment of self-compassion. Also, the more you regularly practice this exercise and think about these phrases, the easier it will be to tap into them when you do need them – when your emotions are higher and when your thoughts are busier.

- **Other people feel this way.**
- **We all struggle in our lives.**
- **I am not alone.**
- **Feeling this way is part of being human.**
- **Challenges are a part of life.**
- **The darkness helps us appreciate the light even more.**
- **Everyone is on their own life journey.**
- **Things like this happen, and that's okay.**
- **I make mistakes like everyone else, and I'll learn from them.**
- **I can restart my day at any time.**
- **I'm doing the best I can.**

## TIME BUFFER

A little stress can be good for us, but extreme stress can be harmful to our minds and bodies.

One research-backed strategy to tame stress is something called Temporal Distancing, which is when you distance yourself from the stressor by imagining how you'll feel about it in the future. For example, let's say you worked up the nerve to tell your crush you liked them and they totally rejected you. If that is leading you to excessive worry, you can use Temporal Distancing to put this one situation in perspective. In 20 years, will this truly matter? Maybe it will be a story you'll tell your own children when they get their hearts broken. Thinking this way doesn't diminish the impact of that situation (*it is perfectly healthy to experience whatever you're feeling!*); rather, it helps you see the bigger picture and highlights the fact that this feeling and situation are temporary.

**Let's practice this tool by answering the three questions below.**

Take a moment to reflect here. Is this something you'd still be stressed about in the future? Did viewing this situation with a time buffer help ease the stress you feel now?

- 1. What is something that is causing you stress?**
- 2. Let's name it – what emotions or feelings are you experiencing in response to this particular stressor right now?**
- 3. Try to see this situation from a different perspective. How might you view this situation in a month, a year, or even 20 years from now? Pick a time frame in the future and write about how you might think or talk about this situation.**