



# Healthy Coping Strategies for Mental Health

## Deep Breathing

Deep Breathing or diaphragmatic breathing plays a vital role in maintaining good mental health. It's effective because it helps regulate the body's stress response by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for relaxation.

**Box breathing** is a popular strategy because it's simple and easy to remember. **TRY IT!** Simply, inhale, hold your breath, exhale, and then hold again, all for equal counts of 4, hence the term "box breathing". The goal is to expand your diaphragm to the point of seeing your belly rise (as opposed to your shoulders). It can be helpful to put your hand on your belly while you are doing this. By consciously focusing on our breath and engaging in deep breathing, we allow ourselves to slow down, release tension, and bring a sense of calmness to our minds. It's like hitting the reset button for our nervous system.

## Visualization

Visualization is a powerful tool that has been shown to help reduce anxiety, promote relaxation, encourage a health mindset and improve overall well-being.

When we engage in visualization exercises, we allow our minds to walk through various situations to create vivid and positive images of our desired outcomes. This practice can help you prepare in advance mentally for different scenarios, their potential "What if's" and how you might respond. Whether you are about to engage in a difficult conversation, deliver a presentation or enter into any other kind of situation or event, practicing visualization can help you feel better prepared and more at ease.

### Resources

- 9-8-8 (Suicide Crisis Helpline)
- 310-6789 (Mental Health Support)
- [heretohelp.bc.ca](http://heretohelp.bc.ca)
- [bouncebackbc.ca](http://bouncebackbc.ca)

## Challenge Thinking Traps

Thinking traps are patterns of distorted thinking that can negatively impact our mental health. These traps often involve cognitive distortions, such as:

**Overgeneralization:** Avoid using words like "always" or "never" to describe situations, as they may not take all perspectives or possibilities into account. Focus instead on specifics.

**Mind reading:** Try not to jump to conclusions, based on what others may or may not be thinking or intending. Ask questions to clarify or confirm your understanding.

**Catastrophizing:** This trap involves imagining the worst possible thing that could happen and predicting that you won't be able to cope. When in fact, the worst-case scenario rarely occurs and you'd probably be able to cope if it did.

Recognizing when we are falling into thinking traps and taking steps to challenge them by adjusting our thinking can help release their hold, improve one's mindset and decrease anxiety levels.

[workmentalhealthbc.ca](http://workmentalhealthbc.ca)

