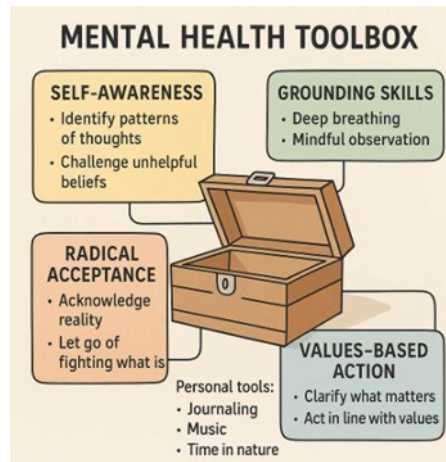


## Session Seventeen

# TOOLBOX RESILIENCY: TOOLS, SKILLS, STRATEGIES & PRACTICES



### THE TOOLBOX ANALOGY:<sup>1</sup>

Consider your mental health journey as the maintenance of a well-organized (self-care) workshop.

**Tools** are tangible, external resources you can use to influence your environment or physical state when you need support.

(e.g.: *journal, digital support app, noise-canceling headphones*)

**Skills** are learned techniques that help you use each tool effectively through practice and improvement.

(e.g.: *breathwork technique, cognitive reframing, grounding technique*)

**Strategy** is your guide for facing challenges with a clear plan and choosing the right tools and skills. Building strategies helps you move from being a passive patient to an active, informed manager of your condition.

(e.g.: *create a “Wellness Toolbox,” create a “Crisis Intervention Plan,” become an “expert” in your own condition through “Comprehensive Psychoeducation”*)

**Practices** are daily habits and ongoing activities that maintain your well-being and help prevent problems before they grow.

(e.g.: *sleep hygiene, daily movement/exercise, gratitude journaling*)

## **CAUTIONARY NOTES**

**Your stage of recovery affects which tools, skills, and strategies will help most, especially in crisis versus stable periods.**

**Just as a carpenter or mechanic chooses the right tool for the job, no single mental health skill works for every emotional situation.**

**Some moments call for crisis management, while others are best supported by steady daily habits.**

**My goal is to help you build a toolkit of resources you can turn to when needed.**

## **NOTES:**

### **ACUTE VS. CHRONIC STAGES:**

#### **Acute Stage**

During the acute stage, the primary focus involves stabilization, prioritizing safety, and rapid symptom relief. While self-help coping mechanisms may help, this period typically does not lend itself to learning new skills unless recommended by a healthcare provider.

Individuals in acute episodes may encounter symptoms such as cognitive impairment, hallucinations, or significant memory deficits, potentially hindering medication adherence, or the implementation of complex management strategies.

#### **Healing-Recovery and Chronic Lifestyle Stage**

Following stabilization, attention shifts toward sustained health, relapse prevention, and enhancement of quality of life. This stage is optimal for acquiring recovery skills and exploring new coping approaches.

## **PRECISION VS. PERSONALIZATION:**

Balancing **precision** and **personalization** is critical. The intention is not to achieve “perfect practice,” but rather to prioritize **efficacy** (practical benefit).

### **Recommended Approach**

- Think of coping skills as tools in a toolbox. When you try a new one, use it as intended first so you can judge how well it works. This helps you understand it before making changes.
- Just as you would not modify a tool before learning how it works, try coping strategies in their original form first to see whether they fit your needs.
- Standard tools will be introduced alongside explanations of their physiological and cognitive foundations.
- If any part of a strategy feels unsafe or uncomfortable, such as closing your eyes, skip that part right away.
- After using a tool, ask yourself: “What helped, and what felt ineffective or uncomfortable?” Then adjust it to better fit your needs.<sup>1</sup>

NOTE: It is wise to discuss these decisions with your support team, such as your doctor, psychiatrist, therapist, support partner, or spiritual guide.

## **NOTES:**

## **SELF-AWARENESS:**

Self-awareness means noticing your thoughts and how they affect your actions, not just recognizing a diagnosis. For example, thinking “I’m having the thought that I’m a failure” helps you see thoughts as information, not truth. This shift connects impulsive reactions to coping strategies. You observe your condition rather than be overwhelmed by it.<sup>2</sup>

***“It’s about moving from a reactive state to a proactive one; instead of feeling overwhelmed, you regain control over how you think and feel.”***

## **RADICAL ACCEPTANCE:**

Radical acceptance reduces emotional distress by acknowledging reality instead of resisting it. Accepting conditions like bipolar disorder helps you to compassionately recognize your pain without worsening it. It allows you to focus energy on practical steps rather than the struggle of resistance.<sup>3</sup>

***“What is, is! What I do with what is significantly determines what’s next.”***

## **CAUTIONARY NOTE**

***Radical acceptance is not appropriate in every situation. If you are experiencing abuse, harassment, or a dangerous relationship or environment, seek help from a qualified mental health professional or the proper authorities.***

## **GROUNDING SKILLS:**

Grounding skills are coping methods that use sensory or mental focus to bring you back to the present and interrupt negative thoughts. They act as a “circuit breaker” for the mind, helping you reconnect with reality through your senses when intense emotions or intrusive thoughts feel overwhelming.<sup>4</sup>

(e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 Technique: Identify 5 things you see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.)

## **NOTES:**

## **VALUES-BASED ACTION:**

Values-based action means choosing behaviors that reflect your core beliefs, even when doing so is difficult. Instead of letting feelings drive your decisions, you act on what matters most — for example, reaching out to a friend because you value friendship. Your values provide direction, and small, meaningful steps can help you regain a sense of control during hard times.<sup>5</sup>

## **“BREATHWORK” BREATHING TECHNIQUES — WHY THEY MATTER:**

Breathing affects mental health: shallow breaths often relate to anxiety or stress, while deeper breathing activates the parasympathetic system for better emotional control. Practicing breathwork can lower cortisol and boost brain oxygen, reducing stress and anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

**Stress Reduction:** Deep breathing can lower cortisol (the stress hormone), calming both the body and mind.

**Mental Clarity and Focus:** By increasing oxygen flow to the brain, breathing techniques can help improve concentration and cognitive performance.

**Improved Health:** Certain techniques can lower blood pressure, improve heart rate variability, and even boost the immune system.

**Better Sleep:** Slow, controlled breathing can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation and better sleep quality.

**Emotional Regulation:** Breathing practices can help manage feelings of anxiety, frustration, or anger by promoting relaxation and emotional balance.

---

**NOTE:** Endnote number 6, in addition to discussing “Diaphragmatic Breathing” (Belly Breathing), there is a discussion of seven other “breathwork” recommendations.

## **NOTES**

## QUOTE

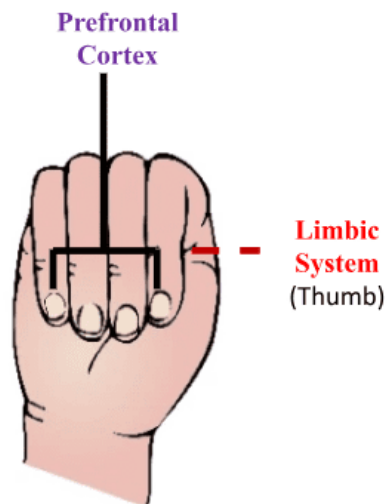
*“By controlling our breath, we can willfully influence the brain and the autonomic nervous system and literally change our mind-body state.*

*“By changing the pattern of our breathing, we change the pattern of the information being sent to the brain. In other words, how often, how fast, and how much you inflate your lungs directly affects the brain and how it operates.”*

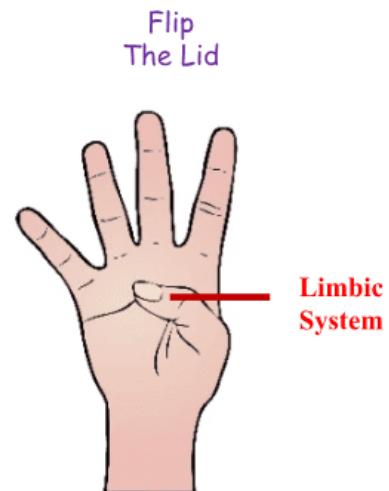
—Dr. Curt Thompson MD

## NOTES:

## ACTIVATING



## TRIGGERS



Dr. Daniel Siegel (psychiatrist / interpersonal neurobiologist) created the “Hand Model of the Brain.” It illustrates how the brainstem, limbic system, and prefrontal cortex interact to regulate emotions and what occurs during stress when these connections are disrupted.<sup>7</sup>

- **Brainstem (Survival Center):** Controls essential functions (breathing, heart rate, sleep) and connects to the spinal cord.
  - The hypothalamus signals the brainstem to activate the SNS, causing increased heart rate, rapid breathing, and adrenaline release. **(2)**
- **Limbic System (Emotional Center):** Includes structures like the amygdala and hypothalamus; manages emotions, memory, and threat detection.
  - The amygdala alerts the hypothalamus when stressed. **(1)**
- **Prefrontal Cortex (Executive Center):** Handles complex thinking, decisions, and impulse control.
  - Normally, it evaluates threats and sends inhibitory signals to calm SNS arousal if no real danger is found. **(3)**

Red numbers denote the sequence of our “emotional center” being activated in a way that triggers SNS / “fight-or-flight.”

## SKILL: PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGHING

***“When we teach people to control the physical effects of a stressor on their body, it puts them in a better position to deal with the stressor itself.”***

— Dr. David Spiegel

Research from Dr. David Spiegel and Dr. Andrew Huberman at Stanford suggests that physiological sighing, or cyclic sighing, can reduce stress and anxiety quickly — in some cases even more than mindfulness meditation.<sup>8</sup> Practicing this breathwork for five minutes a day can calm the nervous system and may help during acute episodes of bipolar disorder, anxiety, or depression. Both experts describe breath control as an active tool for self-regulation rather than a passive response.

### Physiological Sigh Breathing

Also called “cyclic sighing,” this technique uses a natural reflex that helps keep the lungs healthy: sighing.

- **How to do it:** Inhale deeply through your nose, then take a second, shorter sip of air to fully expand your lungs. Exhale slowly and completely through your mouth.<sup>9</sup>

**Why it works:** Stress can partially collapse the tiny air sacs in your lungs, allowing carbon dioxide to build up. The second inhale helps reopen them so you can exhale more fully. The longer exhale also activates the *vagus nerve*, which engages the parasympathetic nervous system to lower heart rate and reduce *fight-or-flight*.

Definition: The *vagus nerve* is the longest nerve in the ANS and links the brainstem to major organs like the heart, lungs, and digestive tract, helping regulate *rest-and-digest* functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, and immune response.

**Best for:** When anxiety or stress spikes and you need a quick “hard reset” without stopping what you’re doing.

### Physiological Sigh: The Instant Reset for Stress & Focus



<sup>9</sup> = “how to” endnote

## “TRAFFIC LIGHT”

TOOL → SKILL → STRATEGY → PRACTICE



**ABBREVIATION DEFINITIONS:** ANS = Autonomic Nervous System which is comprised of three subset systems: (1) SNS = Sympathetic Nervous System (*fight or flight*); (2) PNS = Parasympathetic Nervous System (*rest & digest*); (3) ENS = Enteric Nervous System. For our purposes, we are only interested in SNS and PNS.

### YELLOW LIGHT = CAUTION

Gas “pedal-to-the-metal” refers to triggering *fight-or-flight*. SNS increases heart rate, releases stress hormones, and directs blood to muscles. Extended SNS activity may cause health and spiritual issues.

### RED LIGHT = STOP

The “physiological sigh” is your “brake” for inducing *rest and digest*. PNS lowers heart rate and blood pressure and activates the *vagus nerve*.

### GREEN LIGHT = GO

After you have braked to a self-calming stop, strategically determine your best strategy and tool option for skillfully going forward.

## CAUTIONARY NOTES

**Too much sighing can cause hyperventilation or low CO<sub>2</sub>, which may trigger anxiety or panic. If this happens, stop and check in with your healthcare provider for advice on an appropriate breathwork technique for you.**

**Because it may make you drowsy, do not practice while driving or using heavy machinery.**

**With some illnesses or during intense focus, frequent sighing may increase SNS arousal instead of calming you. If this happens, stop and check in with your healthcare provider for advice on an appropriate breathwork technique for you.**

**In panic disorder, irregular breathing and spontaneous sighing may signal respiratory or psychological distress.**

## **NOTES:**

## ENDNOTES

- 1. Google:** Building your coping toolbox | Mental Health America (<https://share.google/BYukRCHed8tH9vY8r>); **Google:** Emotional Wellness Toolkit | National Institutes of Health (NIH) (<https://share.google/54TJV40X27uaidwG2>); **Google:** DBSA Wellness Toolbox - Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (<https://share.google/rHFg1GnBV5ljQxR7B>); **Google:** bpHope.com | Hope & Harmony for People with Bipolar (<https://www.bphope.com/>); **Google:** Bipolar and Anxiety: Side-by-Side Solutions (<https://www.bphope.com>).
- 2. Google:** Self-Awareness in Mental Health Key Insights and Importance (<https://share.google/zSoVPmfoki0Aq6GPd>); **Google:** The Importance of Self-Awareness in Mental Health - Monarch Behavioral Health (<https://share.google/IQL5cs11xp7sHBOs8>); **Google:** Self-Awareness: Key to Mental Health - Inner Melbourne Psychology (<https://share.google/ZnrMFO6DzWUMs5BEz>).
- 3. Google:** How to Practice Radical Acceptance (<https://share.google/g4vwfWPqwzlxvBi3L>); **Google:** How to Practice Radical Acceptance | Psychology Today (<https://share.google/OxAVHeSQ60emaUUpd>); **Google:** 3 Surprising Impacts of Radical Acceptance | Psychology Today (<https://share.google/IGbPn5BSAGN76svM8>); **Google:** Radical Acceptance & Turning The Mind | DBT Self Help (<https://share.google/p6Kh7vr2vIJGe3Pcd>).
- 4. Google:** Ten Grounding Strategies To Help You Redirect Your Thoughts - Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (<https://share.google/ONJvA0ePptRJ8u7pd>); **Google:** Grounding Skills | Manchester Memorial Hospital (<https://share.google/yy7TeRWYxAfhNKPk5>); **Google:** Grounding Techniques: Exercises for Anxiety, PTSD, and More (<https://share.google/5rYVp9HS4CoD4K2ZY>); **Google:** Using Grounding Techniques to Manage Your Mental Health | Raleigh Oaks Behavioral Health (<https://share.google/40BtutImLSPPC5CFD>).
- 5. Google:** Values: Connecting To What Matters | Psychology Tools (<https://share.google/tkFlgmFwAG5p0cyQ7>); **Google:** Moving Toward Values-Based Actions | Psychology Today (<https://share.google/uNMI4u13UEiEFeEyW>); **Google:** Acceptance and Commitment Therapy | Psychology Today (<https://share.google/51oFxPsAyEQQleyfq>).
- 6. Google:** Benefits of Breathwork / Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) ([https://www.dbsalliance.org/wellness/wellness-toolbox/benefits-of-breathwork/#:~:text=Breathing%20techniques%20can%20have%20a,Alternate%20Nostril%20Breathing%20\(Nadi%20Shodhana\)](https://www.dbsalliance.org/wellness/wellness-toolbox/benefits-of-breathwork/#:~:text=Breathing%20techniques%20can%20have%20a,Alternate%20Nostril%20Breathing%20(Nadi%20Shodhana))).

7. **Google:** The Hand Model of the Brain / Alliance Behavioral Psychiatry (<https://www.alliancebehavioralpsychiatry.com/blog/the-hand-model-of-the-brain>)

8. **Google:** Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal / National Institute of Health / National Library of Medicine (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36630953/>  
#:~:text=We%20show%20that%20breathwork%2C%20especially%20the%20exhale%20Dfocused,reduction%20in%20respiratory%20rate%20(p%20%3C%20); **Google:** 'Cyclic sighing' can help breathe away anxiety / Stanford Medicine News Center (<https://med.stanford.edu/news/insights/2023/02/cyclic-sighing-can-help-breathe-away-anxiety.html#:~:text=But%20taking%20charge%20of%20your,which%20ones%20are%20most%20beneficial>).

9. **“HOW-TO” VIDEO / Google:** Discover How This Simple Physiological Signal Can Transform Your Life! with Dr. Andrew Huberman (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afAZ1hlvRjl&t=30s>).

**DISCLAIMER:** The eighteen video chapters and syllabi are meant for information and education only, not clinical advice. Tim Reside is not a healthcare provider; he seeks expert guidance for his own care. Please consult medical professionals before making health decisions.