



GIVE NO ONE CAUSE TO FEAR YOU

Adapted from Rick Hanson, *Just One Thing*

WHY?

Multiple hair-trigger systems in your brain continually scan for threats. At the least whiff of danger – which these days comes mainly in the form of social hazards like indifference, criticism, rejection, or disrespect – alarm bells start ringing. See a frown across a dinner table, hear a cold tone from a supervisor, get interrupted repeatedly, receive an indifferent shrug from a partner, watch your teenager turn her back and walk away . . . and your heart starts beating faster, stress hormones course through your veins, emotions well up, thoughts race, and the machinery of fighting, fleeing, freezing, or appeasing kicks into high gear.

The same thing happens in the other direction: when you send out any signal that others find even subtly threatening, their inner iguana gets going. That makes them suffer. Plus it prompts negative reactions from them, such as defensiveness, withdrawal, counter-attacks, grudges, dislike, or enlisting their allies against you.

Thus the kindness and the practical wisdom in the traditional saying, "Give no one cause to fear you."

You can – and should – be direct, firm, and assertive. Without needing to fear you, others should expect that if they break their agreements with you or otherwise mistreat you, there will be consequences.

Much of the time the fear – the anxiety, apprehension, unease – we trigger in others is mild, diffuse, in the background, maybe not even consciously experienced. But studies show that people can feel threatened by stimuli they're not actually aware of. Think of the little bits of irritation, caustic tone, edginess, superiority, pushiness, nagging, argumentativeness, eye rolls, sighs, rapid fire talk, snarkiness, demands, high-handedness, righteousness, sharp questions, or put downs that can leak out of a person – and how these can affect others. Consider how few of these are necessary, if any at all – and the mounting costs of the fears we needlessly engender in others.

Think of the benefits to you and others of them feeling safer, calmer, and more at peace around you.

HOW?

- Assert yourself for the things that matter to you. If you are sticking up for yourself and getting your needs met, you won't be as likely to get reactive with others.
- Appreciate that the caveman/woman brain inside the head of the person you're talking with is automatically primed to fear you, no matter how respectful or loving you've been. So do little things to prevent needless fears, like starting an interaction by expressing whatever warmth, joining, and positive intentions are authentic for you. Be self-disclosing, straightforward, unguarded. Come with an open hand, weaponless.
- As you can, stay calm in your body. Get revved up, and that signals others that something bad could be coming.
- Slow down. Fast talk, rapid instructions or questions, and quick movements can rattle or overwhelm others. Sudden events in our ancient past were often the beginning of a potentially lethal attack.
- Be careful with anger. Any whiff of anger makes others feel threatened. For example, a crowded and noisy restaurant will suddenly get quiet if an angry voice is heard, since anger within a band of primates or early humans was a major threat signal.
- Consider your words and tone. For example, sometimes you'll need to name possible consequences – but watch out, since it's easy for others to hear a threat, veiled or explicit, and then quietly go to war with you in their mind.
- Give the other person breathing room, space to talk freely, a chance to preserve his or her pride and dignity.
- Be trustworthy yourself, so that others do not fear that you will let them down.
- Be at peace. Know that you have done what you can to help prevent or reduce fears in others. Observe and take in the benefits to you – such as others who feel safer around you give you less cause to fear them.



Using Grounding Strategies

When you get triggered, this means your stress response is active. Mindfully applying these sensory-based strategies can support personal emotional regulation.

What is grounding?

Grounding is a set of simple strategies to self-regulate, manage stress, detach from emotional pain, or disengage from self-harm impulses. Distraction works by focusing outward on the external world rather than inward toward the self. You can also think of it as centering, creating a safe place, looking outward, or healthy detachment.

Why use grounding?

When you are overwhelmed with stress or emotional pain, you need a way to detach, so you can gain control over your feelings and stay safe. Many people with PTSD or high levels of toxic stress struggle with feeling either too much (overwhelming emotions or memories) or too little (numbing and dissociation). In grounding, you attain balance between the two: you are conscious of reality and able to tolerate it.

How do you use grounding?

Grounding can be done any time, any place, anywhere. Three major ways of grounding are mental, physical, and soothing. Individuals may find that one type works better, or all types may be helpful. Turn this page over for a list of suggested strategies.



Ways of Grounding

Mental Grounding: helps focus your mind

Describe your environment in detail using all of your senses. Describe objects, sounds, textures, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature.

Say a safety statement. “My name is ____; I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. I am located in ____; the date is ____.”

Repeat positive affirmations or mantras.

Count to 10 or say the alphabet very s...l...o...w...l...y...

Play a categories game with yourself. Try to think of types of dogs, states that begin with A, cars, TV shows, writers, sports, songs, or cities.

Physical Grounding: focusing on your senses

Run cool water over your hands.

Press your toes or dig your heels into the floor—literally “grounding” them. Notice the tension centered in your toes or heels as you do this.

Carry a small grounding object in your pocket.

Stretch. Extend your fingers, arms, or legs as far as you can; roll your head around.

Focus on your breathing; notice each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each breath.

Put on lotion, massaging pressure points and inhaling the scent of the lotion.

Walk slowly, noticing each step.

Soothing Grounding: treating yourself with compassion

Say kind statement, as if you were talking to a small child; fill your voice with calm and confidence. For example: “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”

Place your hand on your heart.

Remember a safe place. Describe a place that you find very soothing (perhaps a beach, or mountains, or favorite room) and focus on everything about that place—sounds, colors, objects.

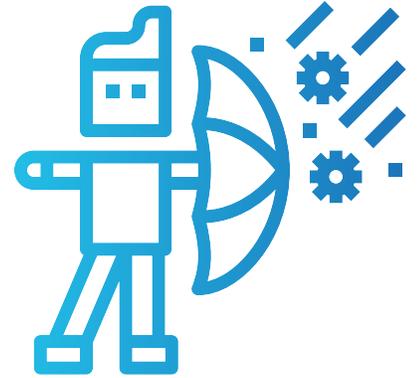
Say a coping statement: “I can handle this. This feeling will pass.”

Visualize calm places and favorite things.



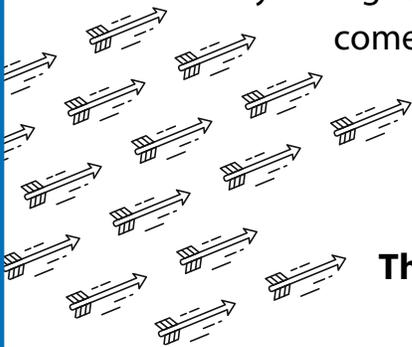
The Shield

When you are with someone who is highly emotional, imagine a shield or force-field completely surrounding you. As the person expresses emotion, you picture the emotion as a moving object, with shape and color.



Your shield is semi-permeable; you get to choose what you allow inside and what you release out into the world.

For example, if you are with someone who is making sharp, sarcastic comments, you might imagine those comments as arrows. In your mind, you see the arrows come at you, hit your shield, and dissipate. They just fall away, while you remain safe inside your shield.



Do not deflect the emotions back at them. That activates the "fight" part of your brain and effectively moves you deeper into your own stress response.

If the person is very angry, you might imagine their emotions as raging flames or lava. If the person is experiencing overwhelming sadness or grief, with pain so big it feels like you could completely drown in it, you could visualize a massive, blue wave.



Give the emotion shape and color, watch it hit your shield in your mind's eye, and watch it fall away.

You are imagining this all in your mind, while still actively listening to the person and engaging with them. This is not easy to do -- it takes intention and skill.

Be sure to practice The Shield when you are NOT in a highly emotional situation, so your brain can develop familiar pathways of use. With practice, you will be able to access The Shield with ease when you most need it.

Why The Shield works as a protective practice:

The Shield practice reinforces the intrapersonal boundaries that protect your life energy and well-being. Everything inside The Shield is yours to manage; everything outside The Shield is not.

It takes a lot of work in your prefrontal cortex to imagine all of these things while you are actively listening. Therefore, The Shield practice effectively anchors you in your rational mind, decreasing the chance you will experience secondary trauma that could occur if your stress response becomes activated.

By providing such a vivid and engaging picture in your mind, The Shield practice reminds your brain that you are indeed safe. When you feel safe, you are able to remain calm, provide the most effective support, and discern what it is the other person may truly need.



You can also imagine sending an emotion to the other person through your semi-permeable shield.

For example, if you realize the person needs hope and kindness, you might imagine those as beautiful yellow and orange rays of light flowing towards the person, surrounding them, and giving them warmth and comfort.

This particular practice will actually change your nonverbal communication cues, and the other person will feel more support even if no words are spoken.

Use The Shield to protect and encourage one another

If your family or team members all know how to use The Shield, remind each other "Shields up!" when you perceive someone may be about to have a highly emotional encounter or may be about to witness or hear something that could be stressful or even traumatizing for them.

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the Center for Trauma Informed Innovation
<https://bit.ly/AdvancingResilience>



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Complete the Stress Response Cycle

“Dealing with your stress is a separate process from dealing with the things that cause your stress. In most situations in the modern, post-industrial West, the stress itself will kill you faster than the stressor will -- unless you do something to complete the stress response cycle.”

Emily & Amelia Nagoski, Burnout

Some suggestions for how to do it:



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