



Tiny booklet of resources

Tension regulation exercises for
therapeutically and everyday usage.



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Original proverbs of the citation on the second page

Martin Luther:

„Like you can't fight the birds flying above you, but stop them from nesting on your head, you can't fight bad thoughts, but stop them from growing roots inside you.“

Chinese proverb:

„You can't stop the birds of worry and sorrow from flying above your head. But you can stop them from building nests in your hair.“

„Thoughts are like birds, circling around you, flying and resting on you. You can't avoid this. The thing you can influence is whether or not you allow those “thought birds” to build a nest.“

Metaphor of a patient referring to
Martin Luther and an old Chinese proverb

The exercises are based on:

- Dolan, Yvonne M. (1991), *Resolving Sexual Abuse: Solution-Focused Therapy and Ericksonian Hypnosis for Adult Survivors*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Harter, M. (2014), *Achtsames Gehen. Abrufbar unter: <http://www.achtsamleben.at/praxis/achtsamesgehen/>*
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Small breathing exercise.....	4
4 – 3 – 2 – 1 – exercise.....	5
Five-color-exercise	6
Animal chain exercise.....	7
Numerical series backwards	8
Attentive walking	9
Lightflow exercise	10
Protective light circuit.....	11
Attentive ball tossing	12
My own exercise	13
My own exercise	14

Small breathing exercise

Sit down upright and comfortable. For example, choose a chair with a backrest. Keep your feet in a relaxed position next to each other on the floor. Rest the back of your hands on your legs.

Now, close your eyes lightly and take a deep breath through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Notice how at first your stomach and then your rib cage moves when you inhale. While breathing, slowly count to four in your thoughts.

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 *[alternative: 1 -- 2]*

Hold your breath for a moment (think „stop“)

Exhale now. Let your breath escape through your open mouth and slowly count to six meanwhile. At first, let the breath in your stomach stream out and then the air in your rib cage.

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 -- 6 *[alternative: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4]*

Relax while breathing. Because your mouth is opened slightly, it is all right for the jaw to hang loosely. Repeat this exercise five times. It is also recommended to exercise outside or next to an open window.

Inhale: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 *[alternative: 1 -- 2]*

Short pause

Exhale: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 -- 6 *[alternative: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4]*

Breathe in your own rhythm. Take care to exhale longer than you inhale.

My own exercise

Attentive ball tossing

This exercise, for example, is suitable to avoid an arising dissociation by focusing on a ball. This exercise also serves as a strategy to distract you from negative thoughts.

You can do this exercise while you are sitting or standing. But you need at least one other person to play with you.

Throw a ball, no matter which size, to your teammate. Especially the catching of the ball should need a lot of attention. All teammates should be completely focused on the ball.

Like „brain flic-flacs“ can be combined with physical activity, this exercise can be combined with „brain flic-flacs“. For example, every time you toss the ball, a city with a special first letter has to be named.

4 – 3 – 2 – 1 – exercise

Try to find a comfortable position for your body and a spot where you can rest your eyes on. And keep your eyes open in the beginning!

Keep in mind that, throughout the whole exercise, you are allowed to move in any way to make you feel comfortable (e.g. move your legs, yawn). It is all right if you fall asleep during the exercise.

Tell yourself, either loudly or in your thoughts, what you perceive with all your senses in that moment!

4 things I see – 4 things I hear – 4 things I feel.

For example: I see a book shelf, a telephone, a tee cup and a windowpane. I hear a door, the ticking of the clock, a car on the street and the rustling of the leaves. I feel the backrest, the spot where my arms touch the material, my feet in my shoes and the warmth in the room.

Continue with more impressions:

3 things I see – 3 things I hear – 3 things I feel.

2 things I see – 2 things I hear – 2 things I feel.

1 thing I see – 1 thing I hear – 1 thing I feel.

It is also fine if you can't name as many things as the exercise suggests. In that case, just repeat a couple of things you already mentioned. In the end of the exercise slowly count from 4 to 1. Start to move your feet and legs at 4. Also move your hands and arms at 3. Stretch your whole body and head and take a deep breath at 2. Open your eyes, refreshed and wide awake, at 1.

Five-color-exercise

This exercise aims to actively focus your whole attention on your surroundings.

Please, take a look around you and name **five** things you see which are **blue**.

For example: Five blue things in this room are a cup, the picture on the wall, the label of the water bottle and my sweater.

Now, name **four** things which are **green**.

Then, **three** things which are **red**.

Two things which are **yellow**.

And **one** thing which is **white**.

In the end of the exercise take another look around the room. Try to perceive and value very precisely how colorful the different objects that surround you are.

Protective light circuit

Sit down upright and comfortable. For example, choose a chair with a backrest. Keep your feet in a relaxed position next to each other on the floor. Rest the back of your hands on your legs.

Close your eyes lightly and concentrate on your breathing. Breathe calmly and regularly.

While breathing, imagine how you inhale light through your head – the light has a color that is related to healing for you – and imagine how this light is passing through your whole body and leaving through the bottom of your feet again.

Every time you inhale, the healthful light is smoothly passing from your head through your whole body. Every time you exhale, the light is leaving your body through the bottom of your feet.

All the time: the light is entering through the head and leaving through the bottom of your feet. Little by little a circuit of light is building up around you.

While you continue inhaling and exhaling light, the protective circuit of light is growing and stabilizing. It is getting bigger and stronger. When the circuit around you is big enough, imagine how you sit inside the circle of light ... how you can spread yourself inside it ... how it is surrounding you, wherever you go, wherever you are.

Enjoy the protective light around you for another moment. Then, slowly return with your whole attention to the room.

Lightflow exercise

Sit down comfortably. Close your eyes softly or look with your half-opened eyes to the floor. Feel inside your body and perceive one feeling which is disturbing you, for example, some pain or an unpleasant feeling. Try to imagine this feeling in a picture.

Concentrate on this feeling.

Which shape has it – round, cornered ...

Which color has it – red, green, grey ...

Which temperature has it – cold, hot ...

How is the surface – rough, smooth, soft ...

Now, feel inside yourself. Which color is especially related to healing processes? Imagine that a light with such a color is coming towards you. All by itself, it is flowing to the feeling in your body and completely surrounding it. It is passing through the feeling ... passing through its shape and the shape starts vibrating.

Precisely observe what is happening to the shape. Observe how it is surrounded by the healing light, how the light is passing through, how it starts to vanish... it is disappearing bit by bit until all pieces are vanished and gone.

Stay patient. Let the light flow through you as long as necessary, as long as you prefer. When a pleasant feeling appears and the shape changed or disappeared in a way that isn't unpleasant any more, you can still use the light.

The light flows from your head down to the shoulders over your upper body, over your belly, down to the legs and feet to the ground.

Now you are completely surrounded by the healing light. Enjoy to be completely surrounded by light for one moment.

Then, return with all your attention to the room again.

Animal chain exercise

The animal chain exercise is a method with which you distract yourself from unpleasant thoughts. This type of exercise is also called "brain flic-flac".

Think of an animal. Try to find another animal which starts with the last letter of the previous animal. And continue in that manner.

A short example:

crocodile

elephant

tiger

rat etc.

Of course, it is possible to build a chain with other categories. You can choose, for example, names of cities or first names instead of names of animals. Feel free to choose anything you like.

If this exercise is not distracting you from unpleasant thoughts, you can also combine it with physical exercises. You can walk up and down the stairs or do knee bends, for example. Physical activity is also a good method to ease a high level of inner tension.

Numerical series backwards

This exercise is part of the category „brain flic-flac“. It is especially recommended for people who like numbers and calculating.

Start with any chosen number. For example, start at 1000 and count backwards by subtracting 13 each time. Even the number 13 is a freely chosen number. If favored, any other number can be chosen.

Another small example:

Start with 100

Count backwards by subtracting 7

93 – 86 – 79 – 72 – 65 etc.

Similar to the animal chain exercise, this one can also be combined with physical activities.

Attentive walking

The attentive walking is a possibility to practice the so-called attentiveness. Attentiveness means “to deliberately perceive and observe”.

The attentive walking serves as a method to channel your attention to the present. Present means the actual moment and the current experiences. For the attentive walking you need nothing but yourself and your body. The walking distance is just about ten steps back and forth. A room that allows you these ten steps is suitable for the exercise. Basically, you can choose every walking pace but a slow pace is recommended.

Observe the feelings in your body while you walk and breathe. Observe also everything else that is happening inside you. Perceive what is happening in your body while you are walking: How the bottom of your foot touches the ground... feel how the weight of your body is shifting from one foot to the other... how the weight of your body is distributed when your foot lifts off the ground... how the foot moves forward and touches the ground again.

While you are in touch with your feelings during the walking, you can also observe your breath. On one hand perceive the two rhythms separately. On the other hand perceive how they join together.

The purpose of this exercise is to stay focused on your walking and breathing in each and every moment. If thoughts occur, let them pass and return with your whole attention to your body and its feelings.