
A PRACTICAL THERAPEUTIC WORKBOOK

The Emotional Regulation Workbook

Understanding, calming, and expressing your emotions — one practised skill at a time.

PREPARED FOR

YOUR THERAPIST

DATE STARTED

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A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This workbook is a companion to your therapy, not a replacement for it. Move at your own pace, be honest on the page, and bring anything that comes up to your sessions. If you are ever in danger or in crisis, please use the support guidance on the final page right away.



Start Here

Your emotions are not the problem — they are messengers. But when they arrive fast and loud, especially when you feel ignored, rejected, criticised, or uncertain, they can take over before you have a chance to think. The aim of this workbook is not to silence your feelings or judge them. It is to help you slow them down, understand what they are telling you, and choose your response instead of being driven by reaction.

Emotional regulation is a skill, and like any skill it is built through practice in calm moments so that it is available to you in hard ones. Work through these exercises a little every day — not only when you are upset.

“When you are distressed:
regulate first, interpret second, communicate third.
Never reverse that order.”

How to use this workbook

- Practise the daily-foundation skills even on good days, so they are ready when you need them.
- When a wave hits, go straight to the Calm the Body First skills before you do anything else.
- Keep this workbook somewhere you can reach in a difficult moment — phone, bag, or bedside.
- There are no right answers. Write honestly. The pages are yours.
- If a single skill helps you most, lean on it. You do not need all of them at once.

Understand Your Inner Weather

1 Map Your Window of Tolerance

For recognising when you are calm, over-activated, or shut down.

WHY THIS WORKS

You can only use a skill once you notice you need it. Spotting your state early — before it peaks — is the very first move of regulation.

HOW TO DO IT

- Your window (calm): you can think and feel at the same time, and respond with choice.
- Over-activated (too much): anxiety, anger, panic, racing thoughts, the urge to attack or flee.
- Shut down (too little): numb, foggy, exhausted, disconnected, wanting to disappear.
- Read each zone, then write the signals you personally notice in your body, thoughts, and actions.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

Signs I am becoming OVER-ACTIVATED (in my body, thoughts, behaviour):

Signs I am SHUTTING DOWN:

What helps me return to my window:

Calm the Body First

2 Name • Locate • Regulate

Your first response the moment you feel activated.

WHY THIS WORKS

Putting a feeling into precise words and finding it in the body calms the alarm centres of the brain.
Naming an emotion begins to tame it.

HOW TO DO IT

- Name it in one precise word: anger, fear, shame, sadness, rejection, hurt.
- Locate it: where is it in your body? Tight chest, heavy stomach, hot face, tense shoulders?
- Notice the urge: what does this emotion want you to do — attack, withdraw, text, accuse, seek reassurance?
- Then say to yourself: "This is an emotional wave. It will rise, peak, and pass."

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

Right now, in one word, I feel:

I feel it in my body here:

This emotion is urging me to:

3 Extended-Exhale Breathing

Your fastest, always-available way to lower arousal.

WHY THIS WORKS

A longer out-breath than in-breath switches on the calming branch of your nervous system and lowers physical arousal within minutes. The exhale is the brake.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.
- 2 Hold gently for 2 seconds.
- 3 Exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds. Your exhale is always longer than your inhale.
- 4 Repeat for 10 full cycles. Practise three times a day, even when calm.
- 5 Need fast relief? Try a physiological sigh: two short inhales through the nose, then one long, slow exhale through the mouth. Repeat 1–3 times.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

Tick each day you practise:

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

Sun

What I noticed in my body afterward:

4 The 90-Second Rule

For the dangerous first moments of a surge.

WHY THIS WORKS

The chemical surge of an emotion peaks and begins to fade within about 90 seconds — unless your thoughts keep relighting it. Most emotional damage happens when we act inside that window.

HOW TO DO IT

- When a wave hits, do nothing for 90 seconds. No texting, calling, replying, or deciding.
- Simply breathe, observe, and wait. Let the chemistry crest and fall.
- After 90 seconds, check again before you choose what to do.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

Intensity at the start (0–10):

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Intensity after 90 seconds (0–10):

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What I was tempted to do — and what I chose instead:

5 5·4·3·2·1 Grounding

To pull yourself out of spiralling thoughts and back into now.

WHY THIS WORKS

Catastrophic thinking lives in the future and the past. Your senses live only in the present. Naming what is around you anchors you back to the here and now.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Name 5 things you can SEE.
- 2 Name 4 things you can TOUCH.
- 3 Name 3 things you can HEAR.
- 4 Name 2 things you can SMELL.
- 5 Name 1 thing you can TASTE.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

5 see / 4 touch / 3 hear / 2 smell / 1 taste:

6 The STOP Skill

A four-step circuit-breaker for the second before you react.

WHY THIS WORKS

In a flooded moment you do not need a long plan — you need a pause long enough to step off autopilot. STOP buys you that pause.

HOW TO DO IT

- Stop — freeze. Do not move on impulse.
- Take a step back — physically, or with one slow breath.
- Observe — what is happening inside you and around you? Just the facts.
- Proceed mindfully — ask what this situation actually needs from you.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

A recent moment I wish I had used STOP — and how it might have gone:

Crisis Survival: For Moments of Complete Overwhelm

Some moments are bigger than ordinary skills — when you feel you are breaking down, flooding, or about to lose control. This is your emergency sequence. You do not have to do it perfectly. Start at the top and move down, one step at a time.

7 The Reset Anchor

Your step-by-step protocol for a total-overwhelm moment.

WHY THIS ORDER

When you are flooded, thinking shuts down and the body takes over. So we work with the body first: slow the breath, signal safety, and reconnect to the present until the wave loses its grip.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Plant your feet flat on the floor and feel the ground holding your weight.
- 2 Lengthen the exhale: breathe in for 4, out slowly for 8. Repeat six times.
- 3 Butterfly hug: cross your arms over your chest and tap your shoulders slowly, left-right, like a calm heartbeat, for one minute.
- 4 Release the energy safely: stand and shake out your hands and arms, press your palms firmly together, or take a brisk walk.
- 5 Orient to now: say out loud today's date, where you are, and three things you can see.
- 6 Repeat your anchor phrase (write it below).
- 7 Reach out: contact one safe person from your list. You are not meant to carry this alone.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

My anchor phrase (e.g. "This is a wave. I have survived every one before. It will pass."):

My earliest warning signs that I am heading toward overwhelm:

Three things that genuinely help me come down:

Two safe people I can contact (name + how to reach them):

IF YOU EVER FEEL UNSAFE

If you have thoughts of harming yourself or feel you might act on them, treat it as the emergency it is. Contact your therapist, a trusted person, or your local emergency number or crisis line right now. Reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness — and you deserve immediate support.

My crisis contacts (fill in with your therapist):

MODULE FOUR

Don't Act on the Wave

8 Urge Surfing

For the pull to text repeatedly, argue, accuse, or seek reassurance.

WHY THIS WORKS

Urges are temporary. Like a wave, they rise, peak, and fall on their own — if you neither fight them nor obey them. Each time you ride one out, you teach your brain it can pass.

HOW TO DO IT

- Picture the urge as an ocean wave. Do not fight it; do not obey it. Ride it.
- Watch it rise and notice the peak without acting.
- Rate the intensity every two minutes until it falls.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

The urge I am riding right now:

Minute 0:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Minute 2:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Minute 4:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Minute 6:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9 The 30-Minute Rule

For messages written in the heat of the moment.

WHY THIS WORKS

A message written while activated is rarely the message you would choose calmly. Time is the cheapest, most powerful edit you have.

HOW TO DO IT

- Any message written while emotional must wait at least 30 minutes before sending.
- Re-read it once you have calmed down.
- Then decide: edit it, send it, or let it go. Most of the time you will change it — or not send it at all.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

What I wanted to send:

What I actually sent or decided after 30 minutes:

Opposite Action

For when a feeling does not fit the facts, or obeying it would make things worse.

WHY THIS WORKS

Emotions come with built-in urges. When the urge does not serve you, acting opposite to it — fully and wholeheartedly — actually changes the emotion itself.

HOW TO DO IT

- Name the emotion and the action it is urging.
- Check: does acting on this urge help, or harm? Does the emotion fit the facts?
- If it would harm, do the opposite, all the way: fear — approach gently; anger — step back or be kind; shame — stay visible; avoidance — take one small step in.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

The emotion and its urge:

The opposite action I will take instead:

MODULE FIVE

Question the Story

Reality Testing

To separate what happened from the meaning you added.

WHY THIS WORKS

Most emotional pain comes not from events but from the stories we tell about them. Pulling the facts apart from the interpretation loosens automatic, painful assumptions.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Write the facts — only what a camera would have recorded.
- 2 Write your interpretation — the meaning you gave those facts.
- 3 Write three alternative explanations. Example: "He ended the call early" is a fact; "He doesn't care about me" is an interpretation; tiredness, distraction, or bad timing are alternatives.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

The facts (observable only):

My interpretation (the meaning I added):

Three other possible explanations:

Which explanation is actually most likely?

The Wise Mind Pause

Before responding to anything emotionally charged.

WHY THIS WORKS

You have an emotional mind and a logical mind. Wise mind is where they meet. Acting from it is one of the strongest skills for lasting change.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Ask: what do my emotions want me to do?
- 2 Ask: what does logic suggest?
- 3 Ask: what would my wisest self choose?
- 4 Then act only from the third answer.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

My emotions want me to:

Logic suggests:

My wisest self would:

So the action I will take is:

Radical Acceptance

For the things you cannot change.

WHY THIS WORKS

Fighting a reality you cannot change adds suffering on top of pain. Acceptance is not approval — it is letting go of the struggle against what already is, so your energy can go to what you can affect.

HOW TO DO IT

- Name what you are fighting against.
- Say to yourself: "This is how it is right now."
- Notice the urge to resist, and gently come back to acceptance, again and again.
- Then choose one thing that is within your control.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

What I am struggling to accept:

One thing here that I can control:

Turn Toward Yourself

14

Self-Validation & Self-Compassion

For when shame is pouring fuel on the fire.

WHY THIS WORKS

Shame makes emotions escalate. Meeting yourself with understanding lowers the heat — while keeping you fully accountable for what you do next.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Place a hand on your chest and feel its warmth.
- 2 Say: "This is a hard moment."
- 3 Say: "Pain like this is part of being human. I am not alone in it."
- 4 Say: "May I be kind to myself right now."
- 5 Then: "It makes sense I feel this, given my history and this situation. My feelings are real — and they are not always reliable guides for action."

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

What would I say to a dear friend feeling exactly this?

Now say it to yourself, in your own words:

Express It Well

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Saying It Without the Storm

For getting your needs heard once you are calm again.

WHY THIS WORKS

Regulating is not about staying silent. Once you are back inside your window, clear and respectful expression is far more likely to be heard than a flood or a freeze.

HOW TO DO IT

- Use the format: "I feel [emotion] when [specific situation], because [why]. What I'd like is [clear request]." Avoid "you always" and "you never."

- For harder conversations, use DEAR: Describe the facts, Express your feeling, Assert your request clearly, Reinforce why it helps you both.
- Stay mindful of your goal, keep a calm and confident tone, and be open to negotiate.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

Draft your "I feel... when... because... I'd like..." statement:

Draft a harder message using DEAR:

Tip · Drafts written here still follow the 30-Minute Rule before you send them.

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Evening Emotional Review

A two-minute nightly habit that accelerates change.

WHY THIS WORKS

Regulation is built in review as much as in the moment. Looking back each night turns hard days into practice and slowly rewires your default responses.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Each night, answer four questions honestly and briefly.
- 2 What triggered me today? What did I feel? How did I respond? What would a regulated version of me have done differently?
- 3 Be curious, not critical. You are gathering information, not a verdict.

YOUR PRACTICE SPACE

What triggered me today:

What I felt:

How I responded:

What a regulated version of me would have done:

This week I... (tick each day you used at least one skill):

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

Sun

Keep This Close

“When you are distressed:
regulate first, interpret second, communicate third.”

You will not do this perfectly, and you are not meant to. Every time you slow a wave by even a few seconds, you are strengthening a skill that grows with practice. Be patient and kind with yourself — this is real, lasting change, built one moment at a time.

WHEN TO REACH FOR MORE SUPPORT

These skills support your wellbeing — they do not replace professional care. Please reach out to your therapist or a qualified professional if distress feels constant or overwhelming, if you are struggling to cope day to day, or if you ever have thoughts of harming yourself. In an emergency, contact your local emergency services or a crisis line immediately. Asking for help is part of taking your wellbeing seriously.

My support contacts — therapist, trusted people, local crisis line:

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