

Before Choosing a Tool...

Ask yourself three questions:

1. What am I noticing?

- Thoughts
- Emotions
- Body sensations
- Urges
- Environment

2. What does my nervous system need right now?

- Safety?
- Calming?
- Energy?
- Connection?
- Processing?
- Perspective?

3. Which tool best matches that need?

→ Turn to the Self-Regulation or Co-Regulation guide.

The Data Cycle:

1. **Pause**
2. **Notice** (collect data*)
3. **Understand** (what does my nervous system need?)
4. **Choose** (match the tool)

*Mindfulness is not the intervention. It is the first step in good decision making. Mindfulness gives you information. That information helps you choose the right tool.

Self-Regulation- Match the Tool to the Moment

1. What do I do when I am struggling?

TOOL	Grounding	Breathing	Guided Mindfulness	Movement	Meditation	Distress Tolerance	Cognitive Skills
Primary goal	Orient to the present	Regulate the nervous system	Notice awareness with curiosity	Complete the stress response	Build sustained attention and stability	Survive the moment safely	Increase flexible thinking
Best for...	Panic, dissociation, flashbacks	Stress, anxiety, anger	Awareness, insight, anxiety	Stress, trauma, low mood	Resilience, attention	Crisis, urges, overwhelm	Perspective, distorted thinking
Use with caution when...	Emotional avoidance is the main pattern	Breath increases panic	You're highly dysregulated or emotionally flooded	Your body needs rest	You are in acute crisis	It is replacing deeper work	Emotions are too intense to think clearly
Examples	5-4-3-2-1, orienting, temperature, object focus	Box breathing, physiological sigh, long exhale	Body scan, guided audio, noticing practice	Walking, stretching, shaking, dancing	Breath, meditation, open awareness, mantra	TIPP, self-soothing, distraction	Thought record, reframing, identifying cognitive distortions
Common pitfall	Can become emotional avoidance	Can become symptom monitoring or increase anxiety	Can become overwhelming if awareness outpaces regulation	Can become overexertion or "pushing through"	Can become emotional avoidance or increase activation	Can become the only coping strategy	Can become rumination, reassurance-seeking, or chasing certainty
Ask yourself	What is happening around me?	What does my body need?	What am I noticing?	What changes when I move?	Can I stay with this experience?	How do I get through this safely?	Am I solving a problem?
Signs it is time to choose a different tool	You are feeling numb instead of present	Your breathing makes you more anxious	You are becoming overwhelmed rather than curious	Movement is increasing pain or exhaustion	Meditation is increasing activation	The crisis has passed and you need processing	You are thinking in circles rather than gaining clarity

Co-Regulation- Match the Tool to the Moment

2. What if I can't do it alone?

TOOL	Trusted Person	Therapist	Pet	Nature	Community	Touch/ Pressure	Music/ Voice
Primary goal	Feel understood	Safe exploration	Calm and connection	Nervous system settling	Belonging	Physical regulation	Emotion regulation
Best for...	Loneliness, overwhelm	Trauma, processing	Anxiety, stress	Stress, burnout	Isolation	Panic, hyperarousal	Anxiety, sadness
Use with caution when...	Relationship is unhealthy	Therapy becomes dependence	Pet isn't available	Used only to escape	Group feels unsafe	Doesn't feel safe in your body	Used only to avoid feelings
Examples	Calling a friend	EMDR, talk therapy, somatic therapy	Holding your dog	Walking outside	Support group	Weighted blanket, hug	Singing, calming playlist
Common pitfall	Depending on one person for regulation	Looking for therapist to "fix" you	Expecting constant comfort	Avoiding life	Masking to fit in	Ignoring body cues	Using it to numb
Ask yourself	Who feels safe?	What do I need help with?	What changes when I'm with my pet?	What happens when I'm outside?	Where do I feel like I belong?	What helps my body settle?	What does my nervous system need to hear?

Need more support? Sometimes regulation isn't enough.

Warm Line

- For emotional support when you need someone to talk with.
- No immediate safety concern.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

- If you're in crisis, thinking about suicide, worried about your safety, or need immediate support

If you are in immediate danger, call **911** or go to your nearest emergency department.