

A Simple Check-in Strategy for

EMOTION REGULATION

Use this simple tool to gain insight into the early indications that emotion is activating up so that you can utilize a coping strategy to return to the present moment.

Regulating emotion means we are better able to shift out of high emotion before it becomes distressing and painful, thereby rendering unhealthy coping behaviours unnecessary. To regulate emotion, we need to first recognize how we experience emotion in the body. This serves two important purposes:

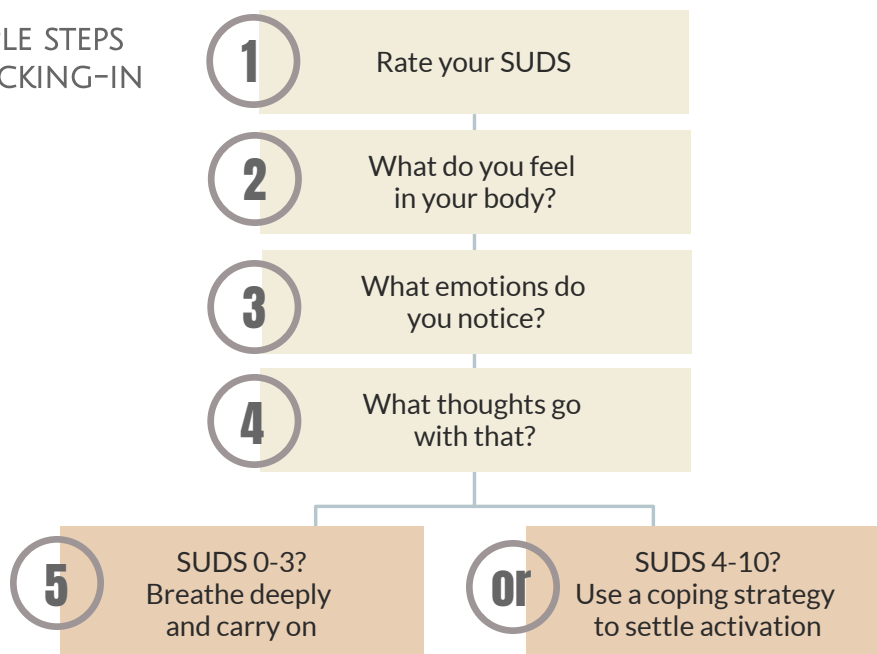
1. Awareness of emotion activating up in the body enables us to intervene with a healthy coping strategy before it reaches a distressing level, and
2. Developing awareness of the sensations of calm can enable us to grow and deepen them. It is also incredibly empowering because you will have created that internal sense of calm. One of the goals of learning to regulate emotion is to render all those unhealthy coping strategies unnecessary.

CHECKING IN USING THE SUBJECTIVE UNITS OF DISTRESS SCALE (SUDS)

While this might sound complicated, it's actually super easy to use and apply. The Subjective Units of Distress rating scale (SUDS for short), is a 1 to 10 rating scale. It is used widely in counselling psychology to measure the level of emotional distress a person is experiencing in a given moment. It is 'subjective', because you make the rating for yourself. Using the SUDS scale, 0 refers to no distress, and 10 refers to extreme distress.

Try checking in to rate your SUDS once or twice throughout each day. It's useful because often we miss the early signs of emotional activation and it only catches our attention when our present moment coping is completely derailed. If we can intervene at the early stages of activation, and engage in a calming activity, we will experience a lot less distress.

FIVE SIMPLE STEPS FOR CHECKING-IN



Subjective Units of Distress (SUDS)

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 01 | Feeling calm, at ease.
No distress, just totally relaxed. |
| 02 | Alert and awake, concentrating well.
Feeling okay, neutral. |
| 03 | First awareness of tension, stress.
Mild irritation; some anxiety, distress. |
| 04 | Some anxiety and distress; noticeable
discomfort and irritation but it is tolerable. |
| 05 | Uncomfortable distress and discomfort; tolerable
and not yet interfering with the ability to focus. |
| 06 | Distress is moderate to strong; it is interfering
with the ability to focus and function. |
| 07 | Strong distress; interfering with ability
to function. Emotional pain feels very
uncomfortable. |
| 08 | Very distressed and uncomfortable;
unable to concentrate; difficult to shift
thoughts away from the distress. |
| 09 | Emotional distress feels extremely
uncomfortable and intolerable. |
| 10 | The highest distress, anxiety, fear, or
discomfort you have ever felt. |



SUDS 7- 10

Don't go
it alone -
reach out
to your
Support
System



The early signals of the body shifting into activation can be subtle at times. Because of this, we can often miss the vital cues our body is giving off that indicate we are escalating into distress.

Learning to recognize the earliest sign that we are activating up can help us intervene sooner, and thus reduce that distress before it feels out of control. Developing awareness of distress lessening based on something you are in charge of directing is a remarkable achievement worth noticing!

USING THE SUDS IN DAILY LIFE

When we live with chronic anxiety, a certain level of physiological activation comes to be part of daily life. When a troubling situation arises or when we are triggered, we spike up into high activation super fast because we were already in physiological activation.

If this sounds like you, getting into the habit of checking your SUDS several times throughout each day is going to be very powerful. You will likely catch yourself with clenched muscles, tight shoulders, and restricted breathing (to name just a few). Each time you check your SUDS and notice your body activated, use a coping strategies to help it settle.

KNOW WHEN TO GET HELP

Emotion regulation strategies are useful for reducing distress at a SUDS of 7 and lower. If you rate your SUDS and notice you are feeling at a 7 or higher, please turn to your support system. Who can you call, where can you go, and what can you do? In these moments of distress, often the best and most useful thing we can do is have someone sit with us during the rain while we wait out the storm. Please don't go this journey alone.

INSERT SELF-COMPASSION HERE

Learning to check-in and shift out of emotional flooding is going to require an element of self-compassion. This means giving yourself the same kindness you would give to someone you care about. You need and deserve kindness and patience from you toward you.

If numbing or shutting down has been your go-to coping strategy in the past, you may find tuning in to be a little challenging. Please monitor your learning and your journey, and reach out to a counselling professional as needed.

The Felt Sense of Emotion

Activated

- Jittery, feeling shaky
- Muscle tension, rigidity, tightness
- Rapid breathing, chopping irregular breathing
- Heaviness in chest
- Lump/tightness in the throat
- Pounding heart, rapid heart rate
- Feeling hot, flushed
- Sweating
- Difficulty focusing, racing thoughts
- Sense of "foggy brain"
- "Butterflies" in the stomach, nausea
- Dizziness

Calm

- Full, deep even breathing
- Minimal muscle tension
- Relaxed yet alert
- Grounded
- Steady, even heart rate
- Sense of connectedness
- Open, curious state of mind
- Present moment awareness

Shut-down

- Shallow breathing
- Holding the breath
- Tightness, heaviness in chest
- Slowed heart rate
- Absence of sensations
- Lack of energy
- Numbness
- Difficulty focusing, "foggy brain"
- Emotional shut down
- Zoned out, dissociation
- Sense of disconnection
- Difficulty focusing

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