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The program guide is intended as a rough outline for the topic and can be adapted as you see fit to meet the needs of your program, school, or situation. The guide also includes copy-permissible pages for use in activities as a supplement to instruction. **Please note that color handouts are copyright-protected and duplication in any form is strictly prohibited.** See our website www.dreamcatchercurriculum.com for additional info, resources, and new curriculum topics.

► **BEFORE YOU BEGIN:** This workshop requires minimal prep, however, it is strongly recommended that you read and review the program guide along with the handout before meeting with students.

CHILL OBJECTIVE & INCLUDED TOPICS

To provide middle school and high school students with strategies to help regulate their emotions through proven stress relief techniques to manage day-to-day stress, as well as improve overall mental well-being. *Chill* covers how to identify common stress factors, defines the difference between stress and anxiety, promotes the understanding that not all stress or pressure is bad, and provides a variety of stress relief tips and strategies to incorporate into a daily routine; *Mental Health, Regulating Emotions, Self-Esteem, Empathy, Physical Health, Stress Relief, Seeking Help*

BEFORE THE WORKSHOP/SESSION

This transitional mini workshop topic is designed for middle school through high school-level students. As a mini topic, the workshop should easily take less than an hour, but you can also supplement the material through extended discussion, guest speakers, or adding more time for the activities. Review this guide and prepare the additional materials in advance.

STEP ONE TIME: ABOUT 5 MINUTES

See the DreamCatcher Tip below about using music to set the tone for today's session. Before distributing the *Chill* handout, introduce the topic by asking participants how they currently feel about their personal level of stress. Are they feeling stressed out, anxious, or overwhelmed? Ask what they believe causes stress in general. Is social media a factor? Share the following stats and facts with the group:

According to a 2022 Pew Research Center study, 95% of teens said they use some social media, and about 1/3 said they use it constantly.

Recent data shows that 22% of 10th grade girls spend 7 or more hours per day on social media.

In May of 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a warning that social media poses a "profound risk of harm" to kids and teens' mental well-being.

Ask participants how they feel about those facts. Do they think social media is a problem? Does it make them want to *reduce* the amount of time they spend on social media? Further introduce the topic as you distribute the handout by stating: *today's session is going to provide tips and strategies for managing emotions and stress. Your mental well-being is critical for success in school, work, and life. Stress and anxiety can prevent your brain from concentrating and sustaining focus, so learning to manage stress is foundational to being a better student, professional, and functioning adult. Stress management is a life skill.*

DreamCatcher Tip: As participants enter the workshop space, consider playing "stress" themed music on a portable Bluetooth speaker that goes along with today's session topic. This will require advance preparation to find songs on your phone (like on YouTube, iTunes, Spotify, etc.). Music to consider: [Under Pressure](#) by David Bowie & Queen, [Help](#) by The Beatles, [Stressed Out](#) by Twenty One Pilots, or [Growing Pains](#) by Allesia Cara. According to brain science, there is a direct correlation between music and mood. Music can help set the emotional tone for a workshop session, elevate the mood, and establish a theme for learning. The brain loves themes and figuring out patterns and rhythm. Music is brain-healthy and a fun way to engage learners!

CHILL Program Guide



DreamCatcher Extra: During the workshop, you'll be sharing several BRAIN TIPS with participants, which are imbedded within the steps of this guide. For ease of reading and sharing, print out the enlarged versions of the BRAIN TIP cards to make it easier to read and share as you facilitate the session. We've also included bonus tips and extra printables to share with the group as time permits.

STEP TWO TIME: 10 MINUTES

Cover the content on the front page of the *Chill* handout, making certain to review the common stress factors for teens and allowing time for the "What's giving you anxiety?" brainstorming section. After students have jotted down their anxieties, share this stress-relief/brain tip:

BRAIN TIP 1—*The act of writing down your worries, to-do lists, or concerns is good for stress relief. Brain research has shown that writing out worries, like in a diary, or even doodling, is beneficial to reducing stress. It can help you regain focus and clear your mind of the clutter that worries can create.*

If you started today's session with music (or even if you didn't) make certain to share this next tip. Remind students of the tunes you played at the intro of the workshop.

BRAIN TIP 2—*Music is brain-healthy! It reduces stress by lowering the production of cortisol (a stress hormone in your body) and improves your mood by increasing production of dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins (feel good hormones). It also helps with feelings of isolation. Depending on the type of music you listen to, it can give you a boost during physical exercise, improve concentration in times of focus, and elevate your overall mood.*

After sharing the above brain tips, review the "Feelin' the Pressure" section of the handout that covers the concept that not all pressure is bad. Read aloud and emphasize the sentence that starts with "Retrain your brain's reaction...." Ask students to circle it. Do the same thing with the last sentence in that section. Before moving to the back page, cover the section about anxiety and take a moment to clarify the difference between stress and anxiety. Share this statement:

Although stress and anxiety can share the same bodily reactions and have similar symptoms, know that stress is temporary (often linked to an event that has an end date) whereas anxiety is a persistent, ongoing feeling of dread or apprehension in general, which can lead to anxiety disorders and mental health issues.

Ask students to write on their handout: "**stress = temporary**" and "**anxiety = ongoing**" to help remember the difference. Wrap up the front page of the handout by explaining that it's important to learn strategies to manage stress before it becomes anxiety or leads to mental health struggles.

STEP THREE TIME: 5 MINUTES

Before turning to the back page to cover the various *Chill* tips, take a moment to do the following breathing exercise so participants can have a moment to reset and relax before moving forward with the session. Brain breaks are a fabulous way to regain focus. Feel free to use these breathing exercises when covering other sessions with your participants.

Begin by sharing this stress relief/brain tip:

BRAIN TIP 3—*Breathing exercises are the easiest and most convenient way to relieve stress. You can do this at any time and anywhere, which makes it convenient to use as a coping mechanism when you start to feel overwhelmed. Your brain associates emotions to breathing patterns. When you're stressed, you breathe in quick, short, shallow breaths. In times of calm emotions, your breathing slows and is deeper. Deep breathing is effective because it "tricks" the brain into thinking you're relaxed. Breathing exercises help you think more clearly and lower your heart rate, creating a sense of calm.*

Simple Deep Breathing Exercise Instructions (note that this is included with this guide as a printable sheet):

With both feet on the floor, sit up straight and turn your attention to your breath. Feel the air entering your lungs. Focus on the rising and falling of your chest. Relax your shoulders. Close your eyes or cast your gaze downward, unfocused. Very slowly, take in a deep breath through your nose. Feel your lungs expand. When able, hold your breath for a count of 6. Exhale slowly through your mouth. As you exhale, purse your lips slightly and keep your jaw relaxed. You may hear a whooshing sound as the air escapes your lungs. Repeat. In through the nose, breath deep and slow. Hold for a count of 6. Release the air through your mouth. Repeat.

DreamCatcher Tip: Providing students “think time” during a session is critical for brain health. It can be as simple as one moment of quiet contemplation before moving to the next activity or step. For this workshop, which addresses relaxation and stress relief, it’s a chance to practice this strategy in the coordinating context of brain science. Prepare in advance to play for students some meditation music during think time or quiet reflection times (like the breathing exercise in Step 3 or the mantra activity in Step 4). Find [meditation music](#) easily on YouTube, Apple Music, iTunes, etc.

STEP FOUR TIME: 10 MINUTES (AS TIME PERMITS)

Depending on how much time remains in your session, this step could be optional. For the sake of the assessment and learning objective, it is necessary to cover last step below (reviewing the Chill tips on the back of the handout). If time allows, however, this activity would be great to help with relaxation and provide some engagement with the topic. In advance of the session, use the included “Chill Chatter” Mantra Sheet to create mantra cards. Print sheets on cardstock paper, then cut and trim into individual cards. Create enough cards so that each student will have one to keep.

Before distributing cards in this step, share this brain tip:

BRAIN TIP 4—*Another way to find inner peace is to repeat a mantra to yourself. Mantras have been used by people for thousands of years to help with stress relief and to find a sense of calm. This is usually a sort of prayer or statement one repeats silently to relax mind and body. People use mantras in yoga, meditation, or in cultural or religious practices, but it can be as simple as repeating encouraging words or short positive statements.*

If possible, softly play some meditation music or calming sounds on a portable speaker during this step (just loud enough that you can still provide instructions). See DreamCatcher Tip above for suggestions on meditation music. Distribute one mantra card per student. Provide think time for students to read and consider the mantra card. Ask if they find the statement encouraging. Will it help them find better focus in times of stress? You could have them do a round of deep breathing while silently repeating the mantra to themselves.

Further the activity by having students find a partner with a different mantra card. Provide a few minutes for partners to share and discuss the mantras. Did one mantra stand out over the other? Why? Students could also create their own mantra on the back side of their card. If they have trouble thinking of calming words, they could doodle an image to think about meditatively, or simply write down a short list of what gives them feelings of comfort or gratitude.

LAST STEP & ASSESSMENT TIME REMAINING

Cover the Chill tips on the back side of the handout. Provide the answer to the fill-in-the-blank sleep question: **teens need 8-to-10 hours of sleep each night**. Students can also fill in the box with the number of hours’ sleep they got last night. Cover the section about seeking help when needed, telling participants:

It’s okay to not be okay. Reaching out for help is healthy and the first step toward feeling better. When it comes to feeling overwhelmed, you don’t have to work through those feelings on your own. The first step is telling someone how you feel. Seek support from a teacher, school counselor, coach, club leader, nurse, school social worker, etc.

At the conclusion of today’s session, you can easily and quickly assess learning by providing each student with a few sticky notes. Instruct students to **write one Chill strategy learned today on each sticky note provided** and to place the notes in a designated space as they leave the workshop. You could use a posterboard or larger sticky page to collect the notes. Following the workshop, you can read and compile the responses as evidence of learning. As participants are leaving, you could also ask what is the difference between stress and anxiety for open response.

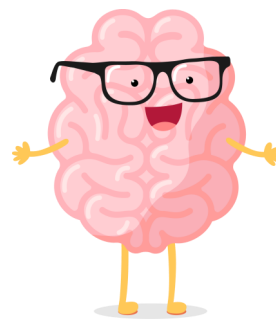
LEARNING OUTCOME

At the end of this session, participants will provide at least two “chill” strategies they learned for stress relief and mental well-being. Further evidence of learning can be assessed verbally by asking students to explain or identify the difference between stress and anxiety and/or name one person to whom they can seek help if ever feeling overwhelmed.



BRAIN TIP #1

The act of writing down your worries, to-do lists, or concerns is good for stress relief. Brain research has shown that writing out worries, like in a diary, or even doodling, is beneficial to reducing stress. It can help you regain focus and clear your mind of the clutter that worries can create. Got a big test coming up? Spend a minute doodling or writing out your worries just before the test to free your brain of “worry clutter” for better focus.



BRAIN TIP #2

Music is brain-healthy! It reduces stress by lowering the production of cortisol (a stress hormone in your body) and improves your mood by increasing production of dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins (feel good hormones). It also helps with feelings of isolation. Depending on the type of music you listen to, it can give you a boost during physical exercise, improve concentration in times of focus, and elevate your overall mood.

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BRAIN TIP #3

Breathing exercises are the easiest and most convenient way to relieve stress. You can do this any time and anywhere, which makes it convenient to use as a coping mechanism when you start to feel overwhelmed. Your brain associates emotions to breathing patterns. When you're stressed, you breathe in quick, short, shallow breaths. In times of calm emotions, your breathing slows and is deeper. Deep breathing is effective because it “tricks” the brain into thinking you're relaxed. Breathing exercises help you think more clearly and lower your heart rate, creating a sense of calm.



BRAIN TIP #4

Another way to find inner peace is to repeat a mantra to yourself. Mantras have been used by people for thousands of years to help with stress relief and to find a sense of calm. This is usually a sort of prayer or statement one repeats silently to relax mind and body. People use mantras in yoga, meditation, or in cultural or religious practices, but it can be as simple as repeating encouraging words or short positive statements. Even using the simple word “peace” is fine!

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BONUS BRAIN TIP: Go Outside!



Studies show that a 20-minute nature break relieves stress and provides a sense of calm. Leave tech devices inside, then get into nature and let your mind wander as you observe the world around you. The Japanese call this practice “forest bathing” and it means engaging the senses through nature. What do you hear, smell, and feel by touch (grasp a blade of grass or a leaf; run your hand over the bark of a tree). Connect with nature and disconnect with tech for real health benefits.

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BONUS BRAIN TIP: Look Cute!

More specifically, look at cute stuff! If you find looking at baby animals or cute images soothing, that’s because research shows it really does help induce a sense of calm, igniting our innate parenting sense, increasing focus, and regulating emotions. Also beneficial: images of lush green nature, photos in shades of blue, and repeating patterns (called fractal images). Looking at pleasant images provides a mental escape during times of moderate stress.



BREATHING EXERCISE

With both feet on the floor, sit up straight and turn your attention to your breath.

Feel the air entering your lungs.

Focus on the rising and falling of your chest.

Relax your shoulders.

Close your eyes or cast your gaze downward, unfocused.

Very slowly, take in a deep breath through your nose.
Feel your lungs expand.

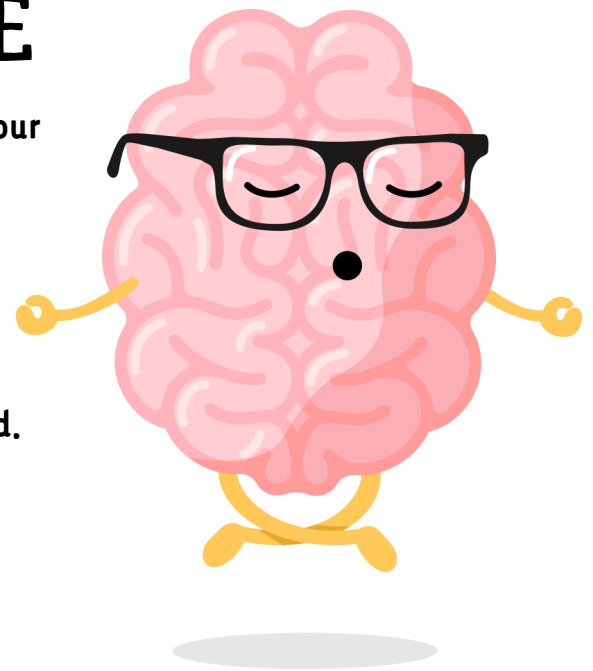
When able, hold your breath for a count of 6.

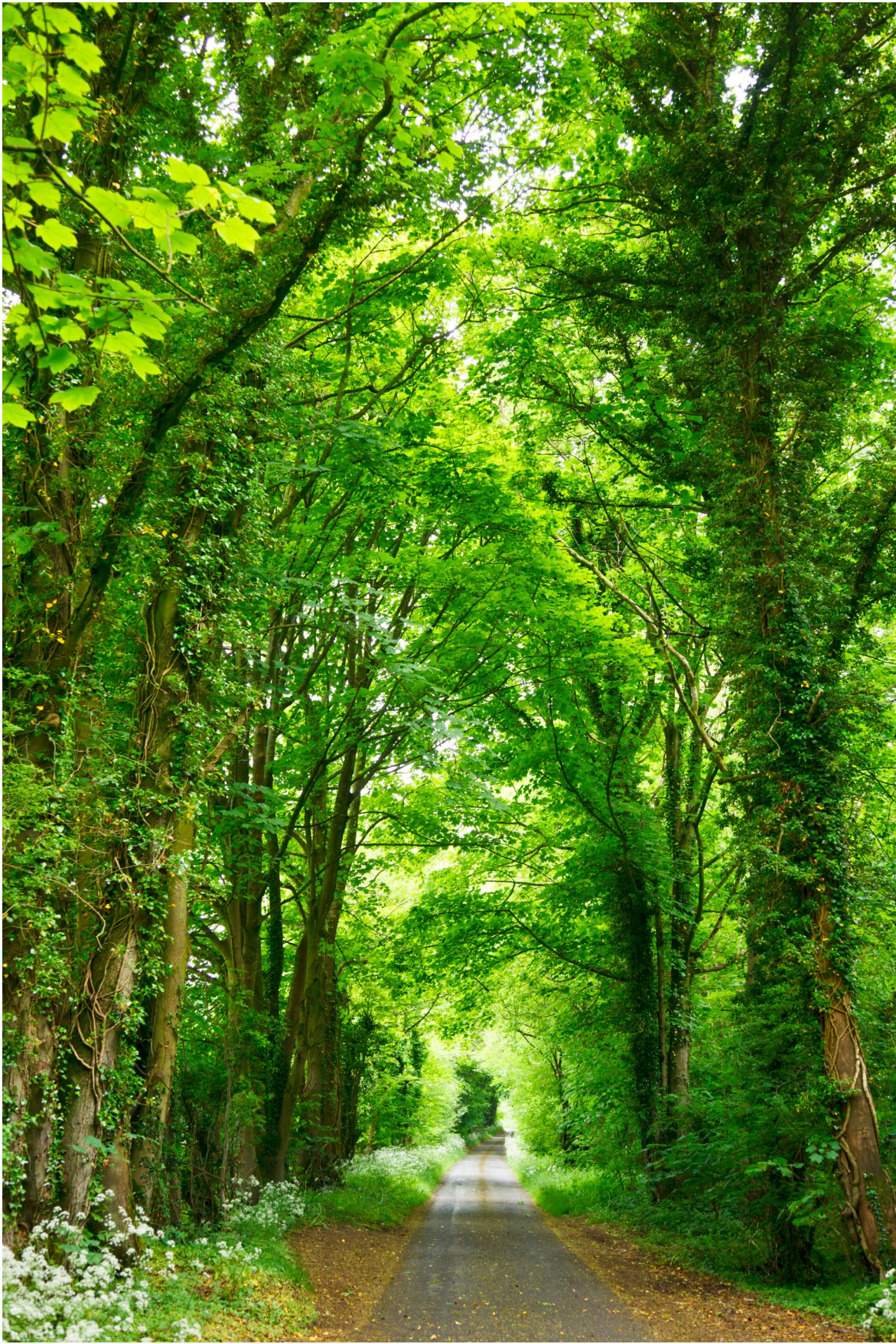
Exhale slowly through your mouth.

As you exhale, purse your lips slightly and keep your jaw relaxed. You may hear a whooshing sound as the air escapes your lungs.

Repeat. In through the nose, breath deep and slow. Hold for a count of 6. Release the air through your mouth.

Repeat.





Can't go outside right now? That's okay. Studies show even *looking* at photos of nature can lower levels of stress. Particularly in shades of **green**.

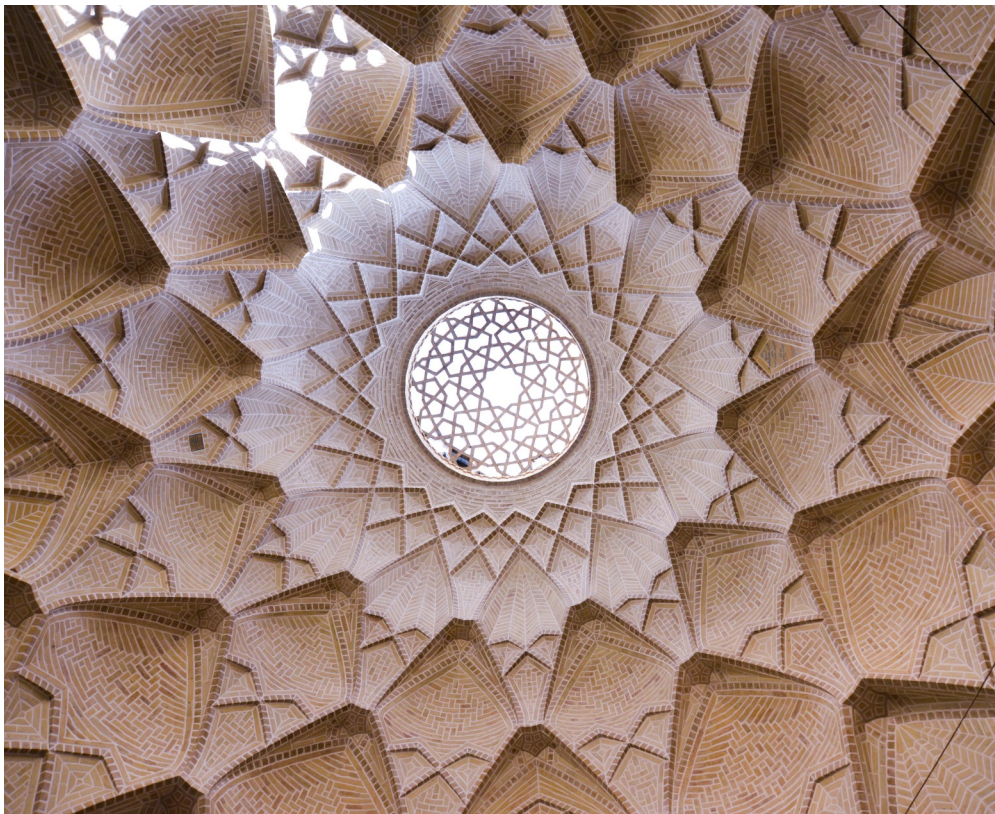


The brain also finds shades of blue especially calming.





Fractal images can be either man-made or occur in nature. "Fractal" is a mathematical term that means never-ending pattern. These patterns are found to have a strong calming effect on the brain. A study showed that looking at images of patterns can speed up our recovery from stress by up to 60%.



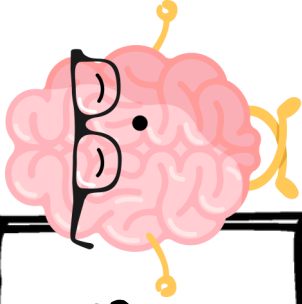


Give your brain **cute photos** for an extra boost of "Awwwwww!" It's an instant injection of calm right to the nervous system. Watch videos of baby animals online or if you have a pet, that's been shown to reduce levels of cortisol and lower blood pressure, as well. Pets can help with mental health and stress, but they're good for health in general! According to the American Heart Association, dog owners are less likely to die from a heart attack or stroke. Woof!

Chill Chatter.

Mantras. Personal Affirmations. Self-Talk. Meditation. Call it whatever you'd like, but repeating silently to yourself phrases or words of encouragement can have a drastic positive impact on your overall mental health and well-being. Put yourself in a space for quiet contemplation, then relax your body and breathe deeply while repeating these words:

**Every storm runs
out of rain.**



What mantra would bring YOU peace in times of stress? Take time to consider, then write your own mantra on the back of this card.



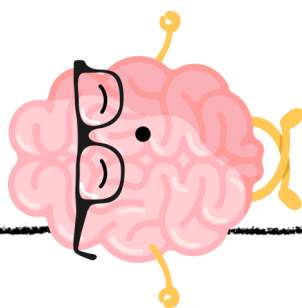
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**Anxiety is
contagious.
But so is calm.**



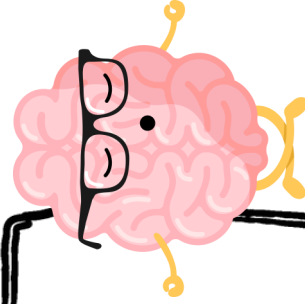
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**I move through
stress with a
steady calm.**



What mantra would bring YOU peace in times of stress? Take time to consider, then write your own mantra on the back of this card.

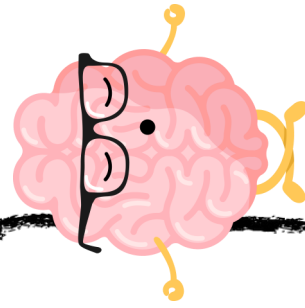
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**My challenges
will bring
a better me.**



What mantra would bring YOU peace in times of stress? Take time to consider, then write your own mantra on the back of this card.