

# Back in Session: How to take care of your mental health in the classroom

January 26, 2018 | Liz Dugas

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*This post is presented in collaboration with [Active Minds](#), the national organization dedicated to empowering students to speak openly about mental health.*

**January 29, 2018** – Welcome back to school, and for the stress that that brings up for so many stigma fighters like us. We have all felt it, our attention slipping from a lesson, the words from the professor become just letters and sounds. Too much is happening in our brains to understand the lecture, to read the slide, to do the paperwork. And then the fear comes from missing the rest of the class, and falling behind. You are not alone in experiencing this, and with some helpful tips, it is possible to destress at your desk, right in the moment. The stigma of just shoving it down, of pushing our mental health out of the way for the sake of being students in the class is one that we cannot continue! Here are some helpful ways to de-stress and reorganize in the classroom.

- **In and Out**

This is one which seems simple, as though we have been doing it all our lives. From the moment we saw light, we took a breath! But breathing can be the quickest way to retake control of your situation. When we focus on our breathing, the rest of the body has a break. It restores what many of us crave during an anxiety attack, control. We can control this one, immensely vital part of our lives. If you feel your minds spinning out of control, close your eyes and breathe. In for 6 seconds, hold for 4, out for 8. 6-4-8. Or any combination that works for you, just keep it consistent. Tell yourself in those moments,

# SIX WAYS TO PRACTICE GROUNDING

with anxiety + intense emotions



## body

lay on the ground, press your toes into the floor, squeeze playdough



## 5 senses

wear your favorite sweatshirt, use essential oils, make a cup of tea



## self-soothe

take a shower or bath, find a grounding object, light a candle



## observe

describe an object in detail: color, texture, shadow, light, shapes



## breathe

practice 4-7-8 breathing: inhale to 4, hold for 7, exhale to 8



## distract

find all the square or green objects in the room, count by 7s, say the date



THE GROWLERY

“I am resilient. I am strong.” [Or breathe in sync with this gif!](#) Breathe until you feel your mind clearing and repeat as often as you need. You are in control.

- **Put those hands to work**

There is something immensely soothing about having something to play with! When I had to give speeches (my least favorite part of being a student leader), I would roll around a stone I found at my favorite beach in Maine. A friend of mine has a small pack of play dough she will bring to class. A tactical tool is enough to keep the mind and body focused. The best tip for this- find what works. For some, it's a

malleable toy, like clay or dough. For some, it's a fidget spinner or cube (leave all the memes about it behind, they are useful! And pretty). Some may find comfort in doodling or pen clicking. Playing with hair elastics, as many of our SAC members do! Or you may be me and have a small stone or trinket

that has both comforting texture and sentimental value to you. For you, it is whatever works! Get those hands busy and keep that mind clearer.

- **Senses all around**

When I have immense stress in class and I find myself pulling away from a lecture, what helps me is reconnecting with the world around me. This is a technique called grounding, which is using your senses to draw you back into the now. This can be done either mentally or graphically. I find that seeing words on a paper helps me to see things more concretely, so I often will write down my grounding steps. This what I use- (and examples as I am writing this)

*5 things you can see.*

(Desk, lobby of my Residence hall, coffee, scissors, residents)

*4 things you can hear.*

(Soundtrack music, muffled chatter, keys, laughter)

*3 things you can tactilely feel.*

(Mouse, nail polish on my fingers, breath on my lips)

*2 things you can smell*

(Coffee, BO)

*1 thing you can taste*

(Sweet Dunkin's coffee)

- **You do you**

In the end, I can't tell you what will work for you! Only you can! I didn't one day wake up and decide "I'm going to practice grounding today when I get overwhelmed in my classes!" Use the subconscious things that you do already as your basis. Think back to what helped you in those moments of fear, think about what got you to feel more in control. And use that. Don't compare your ways of destressing in class to others. Everyone comes to the table with different skills. Be willing to learn and ask questions, but don't compare or derogate your own methods.

The classroom can be stressful, triggering, overwhelming. Some days it is a struggle to get through a lecture. But with these tips, as well as your own home brewed skills, we will break the stigma of college mental health from within the classrooms. Welcome back to school, stigma fighters, and here's to a great year.

Liz is a member of the [Active Minds Student Advisory Committee](#) and a chapter leader at Worcester State University.

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