

EMOTIONAL ADULTING

- THE SKILLS YOU DIDN'T GET IN SCHOOL

FOUR ELEMENTS OF STRESS REDUCTION

What: The "Four Elements of Stress Reduction" technique (Shapiro & Laub, 2012) is a way to stabilize and calm yourself during times of high arousal by grounding yourself in your body and noticing your physical sensations. The elements are Earth, Air, Water and Fire.

Where: This technique can be done anywhere, though the ability to shift your attention from current surroundings and/or close your eyes is helpful (ie, maybe not something to do while driving).

When: When you feel your level of arousal rising outside of your window of tolerance.

Why: To reduce anxiety and hyperarousal.

How: Check where you are on a 0-10 scale of distress. Then begin to focus on:

Earth: Take a minute or two to land. Place both feet on the ground, feel the chair supporting you. Look around and notice 3 new things. What do you see? What do you hear? Once grounded in the earth, move to:

Air: Breathe in through your nose as you count 4 seconds, then hold for 2 and then breathe out for 4 seconds. Take about a dozen deeper slower breaths like this. After centering with air, move your attention to:

Water: Do you have saliva in your mouth? Make more saliva. When you are anxious or stressed your mouth often dries because part of the stress emergency response is to shut off the digestive system. So when you start making saliva you switch on the digestive system and the relaxation response. After calming with water, bring your mind to:

Fire: Illuminate the path of your imagination. Bring up an image of a safe and calm place. What do you feel & where do you feel it in your body? Stay here as long as you like. Then check in once more on the 0-10 scale.

