Chapter 4.
Feeling Tools: Controlling Anxiety and Frustration

Try this:

Sit with your feet flat on the floor and put your hands in your lap. Take a slow, deep breath inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth.

You have just mastered the first two steps in learning relaxation skills.

Why is relaxation an important tool in treating depression?

You are probably aware that intense feelings of anxiety and/or anger often accompany depression. Many people report that increased anxiety and anger worsen negative thoughts, create significant physical tension and intensify any physical pain they are experiencing. We often hear people describe themselves as feeling "overwhelmed" by these emotions, unable to find a way to reduce their impact. It is also common for these feelings to be so intense that people find it hard to imagine a time when they were absent. Skills of relaxation can be another effective tool to break this vicious cycle and take control of these emotions.

How do you know that you are anxious or angry? Do you find that the same types of situations bring on these intense feelings? Many people report patterns of emotional reactions to specific situations. Becoming aware of when you experience these feelings will help prepare you to take control of them.

How do you know that you are anxious or angry? Is your body tense? Does your head hurt? Are you breathing too quickly? These physical symptoms are typical signs of anxiety or anger. These physical symptoms are called "danger signals." Spend a few moments thinking about your danger signals of anxiety and frustration and write them below:
DANGER SIGNALS:


Danger signals are your body's way of telling you that you must stop what you are doing to calm down and refocus your thoughts. When you are experiencing the signals that you indicated above, it is time to introduce a "stop sign," which is a behavior or a thought that will put the breaks on the negative feelings. Some examples of "stop signs" are taking a deep breath, leaving the room, turning the lights off for a moment, or even a combination of all of these things.

What kinds of "stop signs" do you have?


In order to better control your anxiety or frustration, it is important to understand the sources of your feelings and the danger signals you experience. Your therapist will give you a Tension Diary where you can make a daily record of your most stressful times, least stressful times, and your physical symptoms of tension. Let's go through an example of how to complete the Tension Diary.

Eduardo is a 69 year old Hispanic man who retired 1 year ago from a 40 year career in investment banking. He lives with his wife of 49 years in a home they have shared since they were first married. Eduardo reports good relationships with his wife, his 5 adult children, and his 19 grandchildren. He started therapy to help him with the depression and anxiety he has experienced for the past 6 months since his mother moved into his home from Mexico after she had a stroke.
Eduardo reported that he had just started several new hobbies (both alone and with his wife) to keep him active in retirement. Eduardo is the full time caregiver for his mother, since his wife stills works out of the home during the day. He specifically reported to the therapist that he feels tremendous tension in responding to these caregiving duties, yet he is the only one of his mother's children who can care for her. He explains that his one brother recently died of heart disease, and his one sister lives in Europe with her family.

Eduardo requests that his first goal be to reduce his tension and anxiety. The therapist asks him to complete a Tension Diary for the week. Eduardo’s Tension Diary from Monday through Wednesday is illustrated:
TENSION DIARY

Directions: For each day, rate your average tension score. Indicate your least relaxed and most relaxed situations, as well as any physical symptoms that you experience.

Tension rating: 1 = Least tense you have ever been
10 = Most tense you have even been

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Score for the day</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most Tense Score</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When &amp; Where?</strong></td>
<td>9:00 am breakfast</td>
<td>8:00pm livingroom</td>
<td>1:00pm study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What was the situation?</strong></td>
<td>wife was frustrated with my mother</td>
<td>on the phone with my broker</td>
<td>doing taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Signs</strong></td>
<td>head hurt</td>
<td>back tense quick breathing</td>
<td>headache overall tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.e. headache, stomachache, restless sleep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Least Tense Score</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When &amp; Where?</strong></td>
<td>12:00pm restaurant</td>
<td>2:00pm garden</td>
<td>3:00pm car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What was the situation?</strong></td>
<td>golf with friend</td>
<td>reading paper, but thinking of discussion with broker and financial situation</td>
<td>running errands- but stuck in traffic</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Eduardo does experience variations in tension throughout the day, which is very common. He notices that headaches appear each day as a physical sign of tension. This information has helped him recognize "danger signals," as well as begin to learn his/her patterns of stressful
situations. In addition, Eduardo noticed that when he is engaged in a few pleasant events, his tension decreased significantly.

**Practice the Tension Diary**

Think about the day you had yesterday and complete one entry to become familiar with this form.

**Directions:** For each day, rate your average "tension" score, indicate your least relaxed and most relaxed situations, as well as any physical symptoms that you experience.

Tension rating: 1 = Least tense you have ever been
10 = Most tense you have even been

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>YESTERDAY</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Score</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>for the day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Least Relaxed</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When &amp; Where?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What was the</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>situation?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Most Relaxed</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Score</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When &amp; Where?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What was the</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>situation?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Signs</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>i.e. headache,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stomachache,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restless sleep</td>
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Relaxation Exercise

There are many effective methods of relaxation, so it is best to experiment with different methods to find the one that works for you. We use a brief, guided relaxation exercise that is quite effective with older people who are experiencing significant anxiety and frustration along with depression. As you begin learning relaxation skills, it is important to gauge whether it is helpful. On the scale below, rate how tense you are feeling right now by circling a number on the line. If you circle "1," then you feel no anxiety, if you circle "10," then you are feeling the most tense you have ever felt. A "5 or 6" would mean that you have a medium level of tension:

![Scale with numbers 1 to 10 and descriptions: not tense, so-so, extremely tense]

Why do I feel this way?

________________________________________________________________________

What danger signals am I experiencing now?

________________________________________________________________________

**PRACTICE THE RELAXATION EXERCISE NOW**

Now rate your anxiety after this exercise:

![Scale with numbers 1 to 10 and descriptions: not tense, so-so, extremely tense]
My physical symptoms now:

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

Comments:

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

Did your tension decrease after this exercise? You may have expected your tension to decrease more than it did. If so, keep in mind that the more you practice relaxation on your own, the more relaxed you will feel immediately following the exercise. Also, as you practice more, you will decrease the time it takes to reach a relaxed state. Some people report that their body and mind become completely relaxed by the first deep breath! You can keep track of your before and after relaxation experience using a Relaxation Practice Log that your therapist will give you.

Relaxation on your own

The guided relaxation exercise is a jump-start for learning how to initiate the feelings of relaxation on your own. Recall that your therapist said that you "can return to your safe place any time when you take 3 deep breaths." You may be surprised how quickly you can do this outside of therapy. Many people select one comfortable, quiet place in their home to practice relaxation. Selecting one place can also help you remove yourself from stressful situations in order to take care of yourself.

Relaxation can also be used to prepare yourself for an upcoming stressful event. For example, if visits to a particular family member are stressful for you, spend a few moments in your "relaxation spot" prior to the visit. Using the skills this way can help you relax both your body and mind to better control an upcoming unpleasant event. In addition, many people report that they start the
day with relaxation exercises even if they are not in the middle of a high stress moment. The effects of relaxation can be a nice way to start your day, or give you a calm break to refocus yourself throughout the day.

In addition, many people report that music enhances the benefits of relaxation. If you think this may be true for you, find a copy of your favorite music and spend some quiet time in your relaxation spot.

**RELAXATION: GENERAL PRINCIPLES:**

1. Notice your "danger signals" and introduce your "stop sign!"
2. Sit in a comfortable place, keeping your arms and legs uncrossed.
3. Close your eyes and block out all external sounds.
4. Breathe very slowly, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Focus on your breathing throughout the entire exercise.
5. When you imagine your safe place, let all thoughts floating into your awareness float out quickly. This time is meant as a break from the demands of your life and **NOT** a time to focus on your responsibilities.
6. Set aside times to treat yourself to relaxation. Remember: Practice enhances the effect!
**RELAXATION PRACTICE LOG**

**Directions:** Rate your level of tension from "1," least tense to "10," most tense before and after the relaxation exercise. Record the time of day that you did the exercise and some comments regarding the prior stressful situation and whether the relaxation helped you. Do this each day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>RELAXATION SCORE</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Before: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>After: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<td>Before: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<td>After: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>After: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Special Skills: Anger Management**

Many older people experience intense anger or frustration associated with their depression. For example, a great deal of work has been to help older people who are caring for an elderly relative or spouse with strategies to handle the many frustrating situations they experience. The steps involved in anger management are a consolidation of several different skills that you will be learning in therapy and this workbook. These steps include:

1. Recognizing the situations that make you angry.
2. Recognizing your danger signals (i.e. How does your body feel?).
3. Engaging in an activity to physically calm yourself down, such as relaxation, breathing slowly, or even exercise.
4. Using thinking tools to identify and modify the automatic thoughts that lead to intense anger and frustration.
5. Using assertiveness skills (to be covered later) if needed.
6. Rewarding yourself for managing these feelings.

Here's an example:

*Roberta is a caring for her husband of 40 years who has Alzheimer's Disease. She has recently paid someone to come to her home for several hours each day so she can run errands and do some visiting with friends. Whenever she gets ready to leave the house, her husband follows her around, walking closely behind her, repeatedly asking where she's going and when she will return. Roberta says that her husband's repeated questions are an extreme source of stress for her. She reports that at these times, her body tenses, her breathing is difficult, her head begins to hurt, and she is near tears. She handles the situation by screaming at her husband and leaving quickly, but then she says that "my whole day is ruined because I cannot shake this tension."*
Let’s follow Roberta through the steps outlined above to see if she can reduce her anger.

Step 1: What situations are the most stressful?

When my husband repeats questions over and over.

Step 2: Danger Signals: How do I know that I am angry?

I feel like I can’t breathe, my head hurts, and all of my muscles feel like rocks. All I want to do is escape!

Step 3: How do I calm down my danger signals?

I know that I need to practice relaxation, but the only place I can do it is in the car before I go anywhere. Sometimes I hide in the bathroom to take a few relaxing breaths. I would like to start a walking program again to get my muscles moving.

Step 4: Changing my “angry head set”: The Unhelpful Thought Diary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressful Event</th>
<th>Automatic Thoughts</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| My husband asks the same question over and over | I am trapped! – 95%  
He’s trying to make me crazy. – 85%  
I can never stop this! – 95% | frustration!! – 100% |

Adaptive thoughts:

Getting upset will not help me.

He is not doing this on purpose, it is the disease.

I deserve to enjoy my time alone. I will just take a few breaths, leave
the house and continue with my plans.

Current Emotions:

Frustration – 50%

Some hope – 45%

Step 5: Reward for managing emotions.

I asked my helper to come for an extra hour at the end of this week so I can go to the movies with my friend Estelle.

Trying the steps of anger management on your own:

Step 1: Identify a stressful situation.

Step 2: Danger Signals: How do I know that I am angry?

Step 3: How to I calm down my danger signals?
Step 4: Changing my “angry head set”: The Unhelpful Thought Diary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Automatic Thoughts</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adaptive thoughts:

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Current Emotions:

________________________________________
________________________________________
Step 5: Reward for managing emotions.

________________________________________
________________________________________
Summary and Review

What were the key points brought up in this chapter?
1. 
2. 
3. 

What skills did I learn?
1. 
2. 
3. 

What assignments might help me practice these skills?
1. 
2. 
3. 
Additional thoughts or questions I have about this material.