

Soothing Touch

One way to soothe and comfort yourself during or after a difficult situation is to give yourself a gentle hug, caress, or put your hand on your heart and feel the warmth of your hand. Initially, it might feel awkward or embarrassing, but your body doesn't know that. It just responds to the physical gesture of warmth and care, just as a baby responds to being cuddled in its mother's arms.

Our skin is a sensitive organ. Research shows that physical touch releases oxytocin, which provides a sense of security, soothes distressing feelings, and calms cardiovascular stress. So why not try it?

For example, if you're feeling tense, upset, sad, or self-critical, try stroking your skin, such as the skin on your arm or face. You may also try gently rocking your body. What's important is that you make a gesture that conveys feelings of love, care, and tenderness. If other people are around, you may want to fold your arms in a non-obvious way, gently squeezing yourself in a comforting manner. You may also imagine hugging or caressing yourself if you can't make a physical gesture at the moment.

During a difficult period, try the following several times a day for at least a week.

- When you notice you're under stress, take 2-3 breaths slowly, smoothly, and lowly.
- Gently place your hand over your heart, feeling your hand's gentle pressure and warmth.
- If you wish, place both hands over your heart, noticing the difference between one and two hands.
- Feel the touch of your hand on your chest. You may make small circles with your hand.
- Feel your belly's natural rise and fall as you breathe in and out.
- Stay with the feeling for as long as you like.

With practice, you'll develop the habit of physically comforting yourself when needed, taking advantage of this simple way to be kind and understanding to yourself.

References

Gallo, F. J. (2016). *A practitioner's guide to using the acceptance and commitment therapy matrix model*. Frank J. Gallo.

Neff, K. (2015). *Self-compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself*. New York, NY: William Morrow.

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