

Tips on Managing Stress and Internal Upset Caused by Mask Wearing for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault



As Ohioans, we have to wear a face mask in public places due to the July 23, 2020 statewide mask mandate from Governor's office. This is for all 88 counties in Ohio resulting from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. It is meant to keep us safer and lessen the spread of the virus. Survivors and advocates have shared that wearing a mask can stir up feelings of anxiousness for some who have lived through intimate partner violence.

Here at the Ohio Domestic Violence Network we hope to offer you some ways to help yourself manage through wearing a mask when you find you are required to do so.

We understand that wearing a mask can feel upsetting or result in trauma reactions for individuals who are Survivors of domestic violence. Body sensations such as a racing heart, rapid breathing, dry mouth or feelings of nausea or dizziness are some of the possible physical sensations an individual may experience among others.

We hope you find some helpful ideas in the next few pages. You will see brief information about the body's internal reaction to stressful situations, trauma reactions, and several examples of breathing and grounding that may



decrease feelings of overwhelm and upset when you have to wear a mask in public places. Please know that you matter and take great care of you!

THIS IS BRIEF REVIEW OF
UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA
WHICH MAY VALIDATE
WHAT YOU MAY BE
EXPERIENCING

What can happen when someone has gone through an experience that was overwhelming, upsetting or frightening?

- This experience is called a trauma. A traumatic experience is known as a "whole body experience".

Experiencing a trauma in the moments it occurs - An individual's body goes into flight, fight or freeze in order to survive what is happening to them. Some of the experience might be recalled, pop into a person's head or some might not be remembered at all. Experiencing trauma can cause hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts and/or flashbacks.

- A person's body is responding to survive by going into flight, fight or freeze during the traumatic event.

Traumatic experiences can occur one time or many times. It is said that living through a traumatic experience is a "whole body experience" meaning that an individual experiences the trauma on the inside of their body and on the outside. Feelings of upset can occur after the assault is over such as nightmares, trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, feeling numb, and/or trouble concentrating to name a few. There are many others that survivors have described and research has shown.

- A person's senses are heightened, adrenaline surges and the stress hormone cortisol floods the body in order to prepare for surviving.

In the moments of the traumatic experience an individual's heart rate increases, blood pressure rises, and the five senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste are acute. This information is important to understand because sometimes there are things that happen later, which may "trigger" or cue a person to feel the overwhelm and upset again. When there is a trigger, a person can go into flight, fight or freeze. The physical sensations happen inside again. This is where we can learn to calm them down when we are aware and notice the cues of what is happening inside.

- Understanding the types of trauma reactions is important because sometimes there are things that happened which can "trigger" or cue a person to feel overwhelm or upset again.

It is important to share the link between the mind-body connection so you may learn to calm down and manage through upsetting moments by using your "on purpose breathing" or intentional breath work. There are other centering activities that work with your body and the vagus nerve to bring regulation back to your parasympathetic nervous system. Intentional breathing, movement, and other activities can lower your heart rate, and help you to calm down inside.

BRIEF INFO ABOUT EXPERIENCING TRAUMAS

**And some tips
for learning
ways to find
relief**

People who have experienced trauma scan for what can happen next

"An individual who experiences trauma, brain, is tuned too high alert, sensitive to the tiniest of triggers." *

Learn more about the vagus nerve and how you can calm your body down

"Breathing deeply," "immediately relaxes the body because it stimulates the vagus nerve, which runs from the neck to the abdomen and is in charge of turning off the 'fight or flight' reflex." ***

"The vagus nerve is what relaxes us."

"The vagus nerve is basically listening to the way we breathe and it sends the brain and the heart whatever message our breath indicates.

Breathing slowly, for instance, reduces the oxygen demands of the heart muscle (the myocardium), and our heart rate drops." Relaxing us... **

Yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi

"Each of these awareness-based movement practices has been found to have positive effects on anxiety and depression levels when carried out on a regular basis.

In fact, any form of mild exercise will stimulate the vagus nerve leading too many general and physical benefits." ****

Expressing your voice

"Letting your voice be heard, whether through singing, chanting, humming or laughing will increase your heart rate variability and kickstart the vagus nerve so that it can send relaxing waves through your entire nervous system." ****

References

- *Peter Levine, Trauma Through A Child's Eyes (pg 361)
- **Lucy Norcliffe-Kaufmann, Associate Professor of Neurology at NYU-Langone
- ***Katie Brindle Yang Sheng: The Art of Chinese Self-Healing
- ****Unlock The Power Of The Vagus Nerve To Reduce Chronic Stress 02/26/2018



Did you know that we breathe without even thinking about it?

Over and over again, our brain tells our body to keep breathing. We use our lungs, nose, and mouth to bring oxygen into our body and out of our body.

Sometimes when we are active, we might breathe faster so we can keep up, while other times when we are tired, we might yawn so we can wake up. Then there are times when we might shallow breathe because we might feel scared, worried, or upset. Shallow breathing means that we aren't taking deeper breaths in and out.



Did you know you could use your breathing to help you?

It's true! You can use your breath, on purpose, like magic to help you when big feelings come up or if something happens that causes you to feel upset, worried, excited, or even sad. "On purpose breathing" helps to calm you on the inside by slowing you down.

What does "on purpose breathing" look like?



"On purpose breathing" means you tell yourself to think about breathing in and out. Telling yourself to do this makes your breath help your body, to feel calmer when big feelings come up or if something happens.

It works because you are paying attention to breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, repeating this 4 or 5 times in a row.

The next few pages give you some helpful ways to remember "on purpose breathing" like hand tracing breathing.



Tracing Hand Breathing

Trace your fingers, breathing in as you go up
and breathing out as you
go down. Go around your hand 3 to 5 times.

CALMING DOWN

USE THESE CALMING ACTIVITIES

"On Purpose Breathing"

Breathe in through my nose to the
count of 4

Hold my breath for 2 seconds

Exhale out my nose to the count
of 5 or 6

Repeat over and over and over

Ground Yourself with Your Feet

Stand firmly with both feet on the
ground

Notice gravity and that it holds you
safely

Straighten your back

Relax your shoulders

Breathe in and breathe out

Hum or sing a comforting song to
yourself

Recall this feeling of feeling safer

Wear Something That Anchors Me

Select or make a bracelet, ring or
wear a color that makes you feel
safer. Touch the object if you
begin to feel upset inside your
body, bringing your attention
back to your "on purpose
breathing" in and out

"I am Okay "

Using each of my hands - touch
my thumb to my pinky finger,
then my thumb to my index,
then my thumb to my middle
finger, then my thumb to my
ring finger. As I am doing this
bi-lateral motion I am saying to
to myself - "I am OKAY"
(repeating this action 3- 5
times)

When we feel stressed or nervous we might shallow breathe, which means our breaths are quick, short and faster. This type of breathing can make our bodies feel more upset. It happens to all of us. Begin recognizing if you are shallow breathing.

What can help is to use our voice, by signing or humming or saying to yourself, "I am breathing in and out and I am calming myself down".

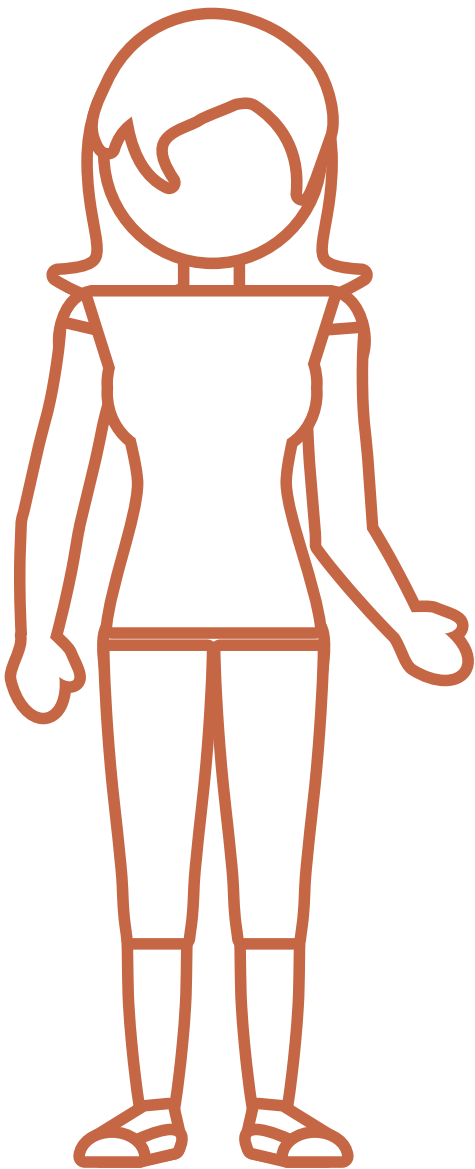
Or try using the "I am Okay mantra or use words that work for you.



Try practicing the wearing of your mask (often) while in your own home.

Please read through these ideas and discover ways that may help you to manage through.

- Practice placing your mask on your face often. This will give you awareness of how your body may respond. Then you can respond with grounding exercises like "on purpose breathing" and connecting to your body with your voice.
- Notice your internal body reactions (or your physical sensations) when you are wearing the mask:
 - What are you noticing?
 - Where are you noticing it?
 - Say to yourself, "I love me. I will help myself through this moment of sensations, knowing they won't last forever."
 - Maybe sit down on the ground or in a chair and cross your arms - hugging - breathing deeply, in and out.
- Draw or write on this body outline where you notice your body's reactions.
- Now as you think about where it is in your body you feel the sensations - breathe in through your nose and then exhale your breath out through your nose.
 - Focus your breath to the part of your body where you feel the upset. Releasing the tension as you exhale.
- Say the words, "I can manage through this by using my own awareness and deeper breathing."

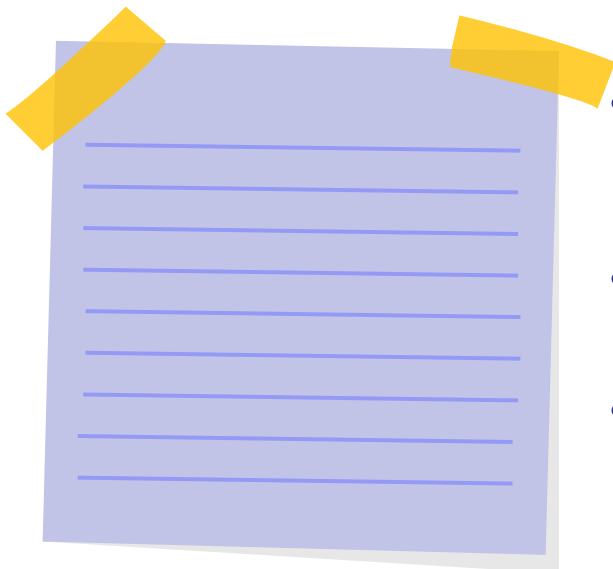




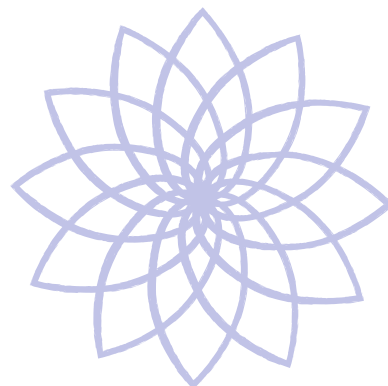
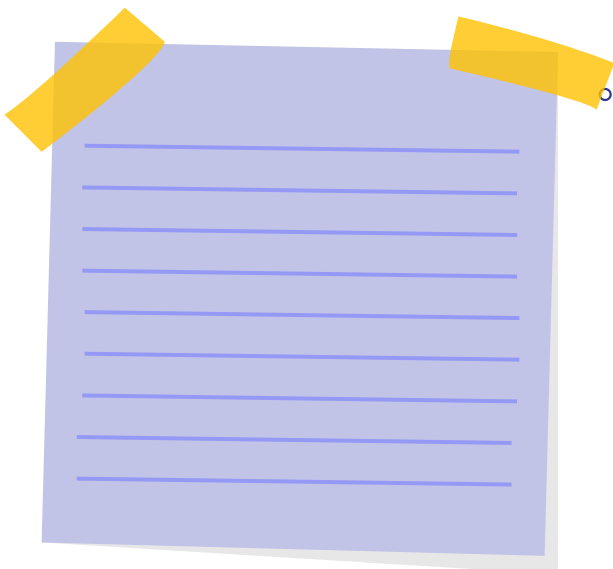
Practice putting a mask on outside when you are walking or in your yard. This gives your body a chance to feel the mask on your skin and cheekbones outside of our home.

- Have a script you have written to say out loud or inside your head when you are putting it on such as:

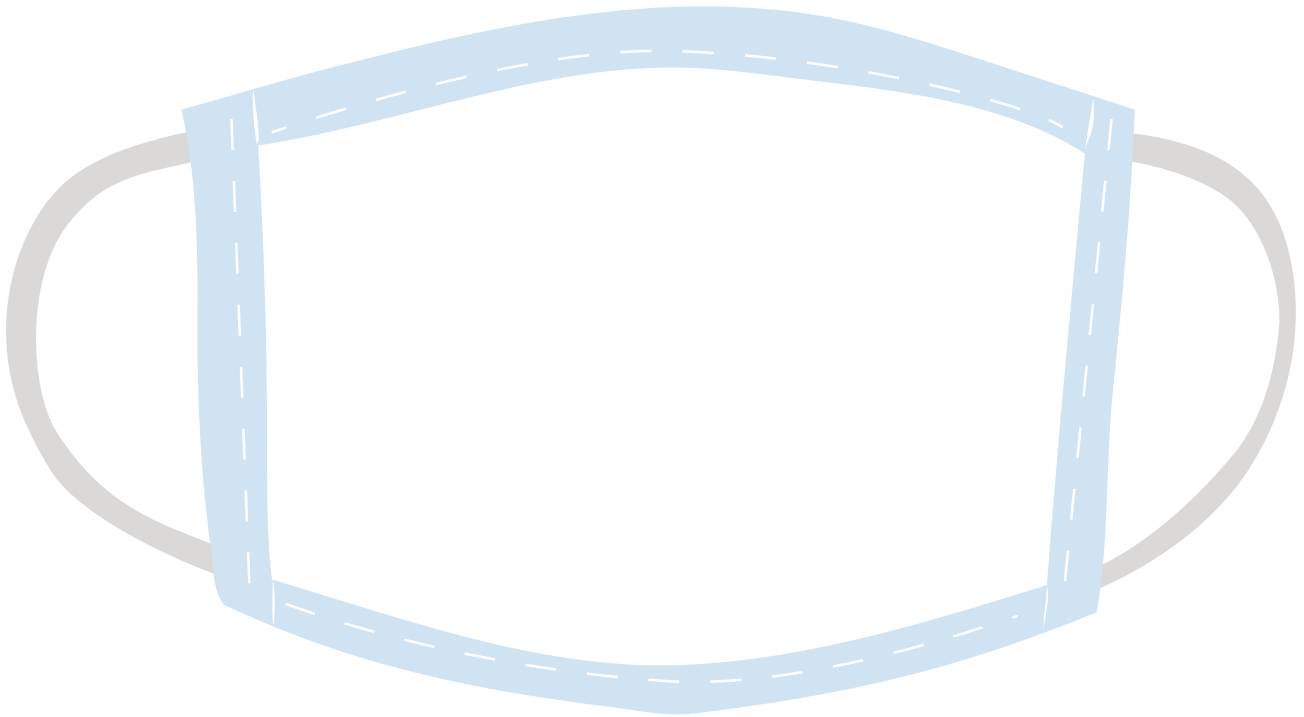
My script would say...



- I am safe here, now, in the present.
- I can see my hands and feel my feet on the ground.
- I know I am anchoring myself by breathing in through my nose and exhaling out through my nose.
- I am now doing my "on purpose breathing" over and over.
- I am standing firmly with my feet, solid on the ground, knowing that I am able to be control and calmer inside.
- I am placing my hands in my pockets holding my body steady.
- I am placing my tongue on the roof of my mouth, feet grounded on the floor.



THIS MASK REPRESENTS WHO I AM



Decide to design this mask the way you would like it to look. You are the designer and get to decide how you want to be represented to others. You choose the colors, messaging, what fragrance you wish it to smell like, and any other additions you decide to put on it.

I choose the color of my mask. These colors might be calming to me, strong and bold, or my favorite.

My mask will have the fragrance or smell of

I choose this smell because it

If I were to write my own message on this mask it would say

.....

.....

.....

.....

Perhaps try any of the following ...



Maybe try putting a light mist or spray your mask with a soothing essential oil such as lavender. Be aware of sensitivities to smells before trying.



You can also try massaging your temples with pure essential oil. The temples are a key pressure point. Lavender, peppermint and lemon essential oils are all known to help relax and de-stress.



Other suggested ways to use essential oils to decrease anxious feelings is to place a few drops of the oil on a tissue to keep in your pocket or on an aromatherapy bracelet or necklace.



Chew gum while arriving and perhaps bring mints such as a peppermint to place in your mouth to help with saliva production, which will aid in preventing dry mouth resulting from stress and anxiousness. Peppermint helps an upset stomach.



Select a song you can sing that has provided you comfort. Sometimes we hum the tune, sometimes it is a prayer or words of wisdom from someone in our caring circle. Mine is _____

Grounding and Centering Techniques: Once you find your breath, go through the following steps to help ground yourself:



- 1- Name one thing you can hear
- 2- Wiggle your fingers
- 3- Move your feet back and forth
- 4- Cross your arms together while noticing your own strength

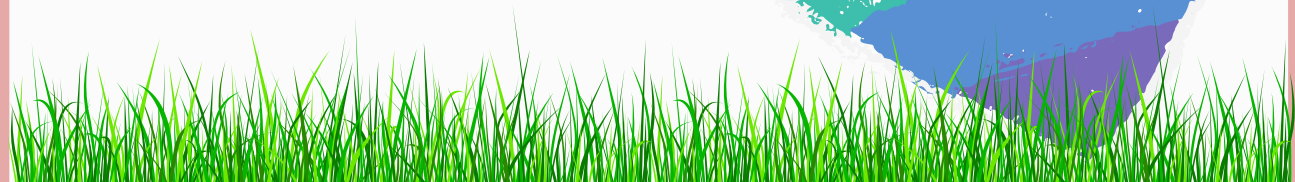


Please know that if you are feeling you need to talk with someone who can support you - it is important to do so - You can call your local helpline for referrals to a counselor or mental health professional. Throughout Ohio, you can text the keyword "4hope" to 741 741 to be connected to a trained Crisis Counselor. (Data usage while texting Crisis Text Line is free and the number will not appear on a phone bill with the mobile service carrier. People of all ages can use Crisis Text Line.)



Go to www.odvn.org for more resources like "Just Breathe". It also offers ways to support your wellness and care. For more information contact soniaf@odvn.org

A MESSAGE TO MYSELF





A blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines, set against a decorative teal background with a repeating circular pattern. The paper is oriented vertically and features 20 evenly spaced horizontal lines. The lines are a light gray color and extend across the width of the paper. The background pattern consists of overlapping circles and floral motifs in a darker teal shade.