

# UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

Emotions are complex and important. They signal us to think and respond in a particular way to different situations. Our moods can be triggered by many different factors (both internal and external) such as, memories, sights, smells, and sounds. While emotions can feel difficult sometimes, it is important to remember that all emotions have a purpose and need to be attended to. You may notice that when you try to shut down what you are feeling, it works in the short-term but not in the long-term. Where possible, try to let yourself feel the emotions and process them instead through things like music, journaling, crying, and self-expression. For occasions where it is not possible to do this or when your emotions feel too intense, it can be helpful to use emotional management skills. The strategies outlined in this worksheet can be used to help you calm down when you are feeling overwhelmed and stressed. Give it a go.

## Emotion Management Skill: TIPP

- ◆ Temperature
- ◆ Intense exercise
- ◆ Paced breathing
- ◆ Paired muscle relaxation

### Temperature

While holding your breath, submerge your face in cold water for 10–30 seconds. This will activate your mammalian diving reflex, which indicates to your brain that you have just dived under water. The resulting ‘dive response’ causes a change in your body chemistry, which slows your heart rate and the activates your parasympathetic nervous system, leading to a relaxation response.

### Intense exercise

Intense exercise helps you to release stored up physical energy and helps you to regulate your body. When feeling overwhelmed, engage in intense exercise for 20 minutes, such as running, star-jumps, cycling, or dancing.

### Paced breathing

When feeling intense emotions, our heart rate tends to increase, and our breathing can become shallow. To get your body to relax, it is important to slow your breath down by breathing out for longer than you breathe in. A good trick is to look at a clock while focusing on your breathing. Breathe in for four seconds, hold for seven seconds, and breathe out for eight seconds.

### Paired muscle relaxation

You may notice that your body can automatically become quite tense when you are stressed or overwhelmed. Pairing your breathing with tensing your muscles and then releasing allows the body to relax. While breathing in, tense a part of your body (like your fists) for five seconds. Breathe out for 10 seconds and slowly release the tension. Pay attention to the sensation of the tension leaving your body as you relax.

## How do I know if I'm not coping well with my emotions?

If you struggle with any of the following, seek professional help:

- ◆ excessive panic attacks
- ◆ self-harm/suicidal thoughts
- ◆ excessive overthinking
- ◆ drug and alcohol abuse
- ◆ addiction
- ◆ aggression
- ◆ avoiding responsibilities
- ◆ struggling to function and do everyday tasks.

## Who can I contact for more support?

VU's Counselling Service provides free professional services to enrolled students that are designed to support you in your personal, psychological, academic, and social development. To book an appointment, call 9919 5400 and have a look at our webpage: [vu.edu.au/counselling](https://vu.edu.au/counselling)