

*Part of a Care Package for Healthcare Professionals*

# Well-being Practices



UC San Diego  
SANFORD INSTITUTE FOR  
EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

## About the Booklet

Stress is the combination of an external challenge + our internal response to it. The same challenge often affects individuals differently. How much stress each of us feel and how our neurophysiology and emotional landscape are affected will depend on many factors. In large part, the stress we feel will be impacted by our internal resources to meet the challenge. It is of course important to acknowledge the systemic factors exacerbating the current covid-19 pandemic. With this acknowledgment, and in this emergency context, we offer these tools to help support the immediate health and well-being of healthcare professionals.

The following Well-being Practices are designed to support the resilience of healthcare professionals during moments of acute or chronic stress.

Furthermore, compassion has been shown to benefit not only clinician well-being, but also team well-being, patient health outcomes, and quality and process of care. (Compassionomics: The Revolutionary Scientific Evidence that Caring Makes a Difference is a comprehensive systematic review of the benefits of compassion in healthcare.)

Each of the Well-being Practices is designed to be brief and thus to be practical for use during the day. The accompanying cards can be conveniently kept in a pocket or safe place and referred to during moments of stress.

Thank you for supporting our health and well-being every day. We hope this booklet and other offerings in our Care Package for Healthcare Professionals will provide some support for you during this time.

# Contents

## 01. Calm & Settle the Mind

Breathe to Center	2
Box Breathing	4

## 02. Managing Emotions

Self-compassion Antidote	6
Just Like Me	8
Breathing Compassion (GESR)	10

## 03. Trauma Prevention

Flashback-halting Protocol	12
----------------------------	----

## 04. Conclusion & Wellness Cards

Acknowledgments	14
Wellness Cards	15





# Breathe to Center

Breathing regulates the autonomic nervous system. Deep breaths with elongated exhales through the mouth engender calm by activating the parasympathetic branch of the nervous system.

## How?

Rest your full attention on

three diaphragmatic breaths. Breathe for three full breaths, while taking deeper and longer breaths than usual.

If focusing on the breath causes anxiety, focus your attention on the sensation of your feet rooted into the ground or the weight of your seat on the chair.

## When?

During a routine activity. For example, while washing your hands, just before checking your email, as you pass through a specific doorway.

During transitions. For example, just before knocking on the door to see the next patient or before you step into your home after work.

Or during a moment of stress to center and to calm your nervous system.

# Box Breathing

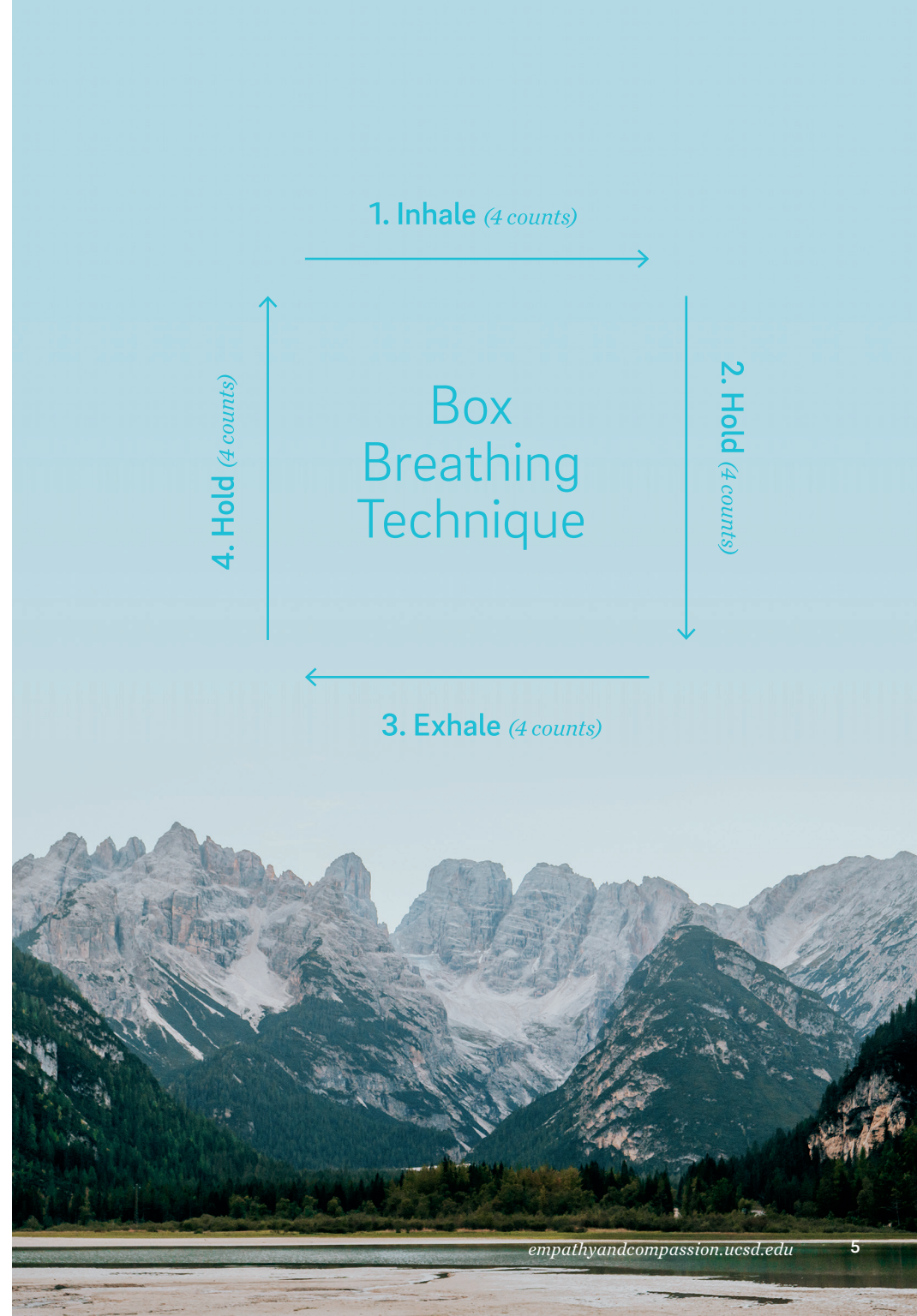
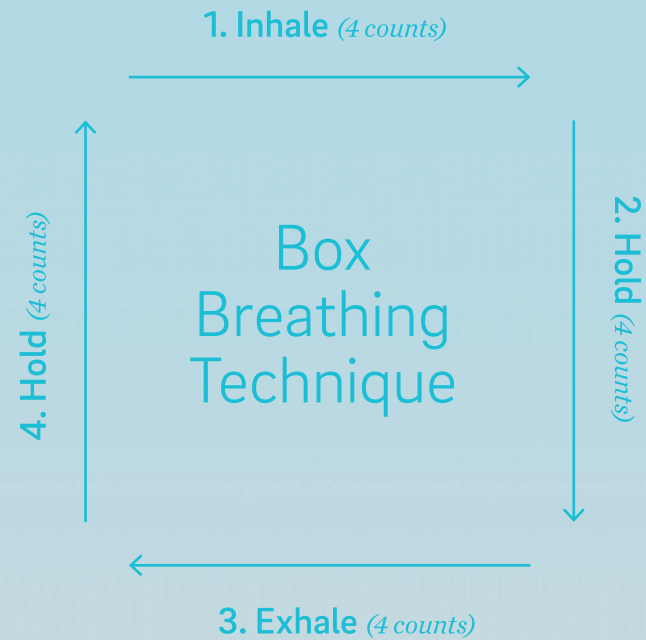
When the nervous system is in overdrive (feeling fear, panic, or rage) or shut down (feeling numb or immobilized), we're not able to think clearly or respond to what's happening around us. Counting engages your prefrontal cortex and enables executive functioning, while breathing regulates the nervous system.

## How?

1. Inhale for 4 counts
2. Hold for 4 counts
3. Exhale for 4 counts
4. Hold for 4 counts

## When?

During a moment of stress to center and calm your nervous system.







# Self-Compassion Antidote

Our inner critic impacts our performance and health by increasing our anxiety, heart rate and diverting cognitive functioning away from the patient and situation to self-referential thoughts. Self-compassion, an antidote, reduces the heart rate, sympathetic surges, and stress-induced immune responses and allows us to be focused and collected – at work and at home.

## How?

Recognize that what is happening is a form of suffering for you.

Acknowledge to yourself:

*"This is suffering."*

Choose a self-compassion ritual to signal the nervous system to settle.

For example, placing a hand on your chest/belly/wrist and taking a couple deep breaths.

Acknowledge what you can and can't control: *"I'm doing my best."*

*"Everyone is doing their best."*

*"I let go of outcomes beyond my control."*

(You might decide to revisit the outcome later. For now, the best way you can serve others and protect yourself is to be fully present in this moment.)

## When?

When your inner critic is present and speaking harshly.

When you're feeling stressed or tense about a situation.

# Just Like Me

The evidence is undeniable. Compassion from a clinician has been shown to significantly improve patient health outcomes, patient self-care, quality and process of care, and decrease medical errors. Clinician compassion is also associated with greater clinician well-being – lower levels of burnout, personal distress, depression symptoms, and a higher sense of personal accomplishment and enhanced quality of life. Compassionate workplace culture is also associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout. The jury is out – compassion for others is good for everyone involved.

## How?

From a place of curiosity, pick a word/phrase that epitomizes this moment of suffering/unease for you... Say it to yourself, acknowledging this reality (e.g., "This is suffering." "Frustration." "Anger." "Sadness.")

Take a deep breath...

Reflect: "Just like me, this person also suffers and \_\_\_\_\_ (wants to be happy, doesn't like bureaucracy...)."

Extend a wish. Examples include "May you be well" or "May you feel at ease."

## When?

Before or after interacting with someone you dislike or find challenging.

If you find yourself ruminating about a difficult person.







# Breathing Compassion<sub>(GESR)</sub>

When we're in the midst of dysregulated arousal, it can be enormously challenging to function and respond to what's happening around us – akin to experiencing a turbulent internal storm while trying to navigate the external environment. Rather than resist the emotion when it comes up which may lead to suppression and intensification, this practice helps us to find stability, and allow the emotion to run its course and pass through.

## How?

Use the GESR method – Ground, Emotion, Space & Relief.

Ground your attention on a few deep breaths or the feeling of the weight of your body being supported by the ground at your feet to gather your attention in the body, in the present moment.

Notice the Emotion as you feel it in the body, the body sensations.

For example, you might feel anxiety as shallow breathing, tightness in the chest, or a feeling of shakiness; or sadness as heaviness and an aching sensation in the heart or constriction in the throat.

On the next inhale, breathe in the emotion into a vast Space that can hold all things.

On the exhale, breathe out Relief into the ever-expanding sense of spaciousness, to yourself and the people suffering around you. Repeat this breathing cycle for a few moments.

Bring your attention back to your body in this moment, and the task/next moment at hand.

## When?

When feeling triggered or overwhelmed by a strong emotion.



# Flashback-Halting Protocol

This protocol was developed by trauma specialist Babette Rothschild. She writes, "The present-moment focus of mindfulness is an obvious natural antidote for PTSD, a condition where the mind and body of the trauma survivor are continually wrenched into memories of a terrifying past." Learning to stay grounded in the present while re-experiencing an unintegrated element of trauma is a critical skill in trauma recovery. To this end, the ability and skill to intentionally direct the attention help to support one's sense of stability and agency.

Out loud or in your mind, you might say the sentences below while filling in the blanks.

- Right now I am feeling (name the current emotion, usually fear)...
- and I am sensing in my body (describe at least three current bodily sensations)...
- because I am remembering (name the trauma by title only, no details).
- At the same time, I am looking around where I am now at (time) on (actual date / day of the week)...
- and I can see (describe in some detail some of the things that you see right now, in this place)...
- and so I know (name the trauma again) is not happening where I am now.



## Acknowledgments

This booklet was developed to support the well-being of healthcare professionals, informed by the (1) lived experience of healthcare professionals who are also experts in well-being and compassion in healthcare – Robert McClure (Sharp HealthCare) and Gary Hsin (Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System); (2) lived experience of responding in emergency settings in the humanitarian sector in disaster and conflict-affected countries while incorporating contemplative practice into the day-to-day (Jane Chun); and (3) renowned expertise in the philosophy and cultivation of healthy states of mind, and, in particular, compassion (Thupten Jinpa).

The authors would like to thank and acknowledge the feedback and advice from our healthcare/clinician colleagues during the chaos of the pandemic response. Gary and Bob – thank you.

This resource is made possible by the generous funding of the University of California San Diego Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion. Developed by Jane M. Chun, PhD and Thupten Jinpa, PhD.



Wellness Cards

## Take Wellness with You

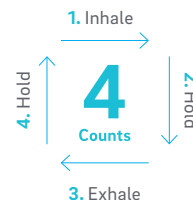
Carry these wellness cards with you wherever you go, for any moment you might need. Lost a card or want to share? A printable version is available at [empathyandcompassion.ucsd.edu](http://empathyandcompassion.ucsd.edu) or [compassioninstitute.com/healthcare](http://compassioninstitute.com/healthcare)

Calm & Settle the Mind

## Box Breathing

1. Inhale for 4 counts
2. Hold for 4 counts
3. Exhale for 4 counts
4. Hold for 4 counts

**During:**  
Moment of stress



Managing Emotions

## Just Like Me

Compassion for a neutral / difficult person

1. Pick a word/phrase that describes this moment of unease.
2. Reflect: "Just like me, this person also suffers and \_\_\_\_\_."
3. Extend a wish: "May you be well" or "May you feel ease."

Calm & Settle the Mind

## Breathe to Center

1. Rest your attention on three full breaths
2. OR on the sensation of your feet rooted into the ground, OR the weight of your seat on the chair

**During:** Routine activity, transition, or moment of stress

Managing Emotions

## Self-Compassion Antidote

When stressed / feeling self-critical

1. Recognize: "This is suffering."
2. Choose a self-compassion ritual (hand on chest/belly/wrist).
3. Acknowledge: "I'm doing my best."  
"Everyone is doing their best."  
"I let go of outcomes beyond my control."

Managing Emotions

## Breathing Compassion (GESR)

When triggered / overwhelmed by emotion

1. Ground your attention on deep breaths/ your feet on the earth.
2. Notice the Emotion as body sensations.
3. Inhale, breathe in the emotion into vast Space.
4. Exhale, breathe out Relief for yourself and others.





This booklet may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety, solely for non-commercial purposes. It may not be modified or used to create derivative material. If you would like permission to use any of the material contained in this handbook, please contact Compassion Institute. Developed by Jane M. Chun, PhD and Thupten Jinpa, PhD.