

This handout provides a simple yet effective tool for managing escalating emotions and refocusing attention. Regular practice can help both service providers and Veterans build confidence in their ability to navigate these tense situations and foster calmer, more constructive interactions.

Box breathing

Trauma affects your fight/flight/freeze responses, known as the sympathetic nervous system. Deep breathing can be a very useful strategy to calm this response. Deep breathing activates the “rest” response, or the parasympathetic nervous system, which can signal to your body that you are safe. This is particularly true if you focus on a nice long out breath.

Try this breathing technique:

- 1 Pause and focus on your breathing.
- 2 Inhale deeply through your nose for four seconds.
- 3 Hold your breath for four seconds.
- 4 Exhale slowly through your mouth for four seconds.
- 5 Hold again for four seconds before starting the next breath.
- 6 Repeat three to four times, noticing your body gradually relaxing.



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