CARES Box



A THERAPEAUTIC TOOL

ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-DESTRUCTIVE COPING

A gentle structure for expressing distress, finding relief, and offering yourself care. CARESS was developed by Lisa Ferentz to offer alternatives to self-destructive coping. Use this worksheet with your therapist to choose options that fit your body, energy, and sensory needs.

HOW TO BEGIN: CHOOSE ONE ACTIVITY FROM EACH STEP. THE ORIGINAL MODEL SUGGESTS ABOUT 10-15 MINUTES PER STEP; ADAPT THE PACE WITH YOUR THERAPIST. YOU MAY PAUSE OR SEEK SUPPORT AT ANY TIME.

01

C
A

Communicate Alternatively

10-15 MINUTES

> *Give what you feel a safe form outside your body. You do not need to explain it perfectly.*

> Try: Sketch shapes or colors, write a few words, or record a private voice note.

> What might help me express what is happening?

02

R
E

Release Endorphins

10-15 MINUTES

> *Explore safe comfort, connection, or enjoyment. Notice what feels supportive.*

> Try: Watch something funny, hug a pillow, or choose gentle movement if it suits your health.

> What could offer me a little relief?

03

S

Self-Soothe

10-15 MINUTES

> *Offer your senses something comforting. Choose less stimulation if that feels better.*

> Try: Hold a soft object, dim the lights, or listen to a familiar calming sound.

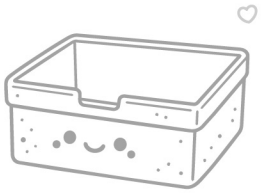
> My soothing option:
Write your choice in your personal plan on page 2.

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CARES Box

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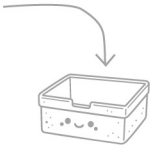
> GRAB A BOX



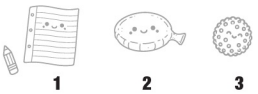
> PRINT HANDOUT



> INSERT IN BOX



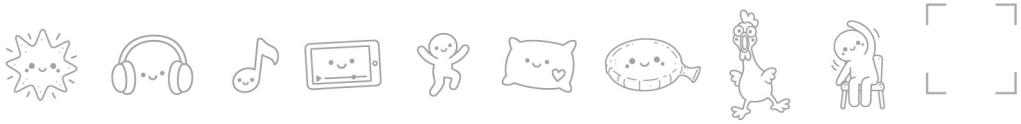
> PICK ONE FROM EACH SECTION BELOW & PLACE ITEM OR REMINDER IN BOX.



01 *Communicate Alternatively* / *Pick one:* / *10–15 Minutes* /



02 *Release Endorphins* / *Pick one:* / *10–15 Minutes* /



03 *Self-Soothe* / *Pick one:* / *10–15 Minutes* /



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C A Communicate Alternatively

Menu of Examples

CA: Communicate Alternatively: part of CARESS, the idea is to give feelings, thoughts, needs, or urges a safe form through words, images, sound, movement, or connection. Lisa Ferentz developed CARESS as an alternative to self-destructive coping. www.pesi.co.uk

Menu of Examples

Communicating doesn't have to mean talking, explaining yourself clearly, or sharing with another person. A scribble, gesture, or single word can count.

When words are hard

* Choose one word for how you feel.
* Point to a feeling on an emotion wheel.
* Pick a color that matches your experience.
* Choose an emoji or series of emojis.
* Write "I don't know what I feel yet."
* Finish: "Right now, something feels…"
* Write three disconnected words.
* Rate how intense the feeling is.
* Show its size with your hands.
* Point to where you notice it in your body.
* Select an image that captures your experience.
* Use a communication card: "Overwhelmed," "Need space," or "Please stay."
* Type a message instead of speaking.
* Use a text-to-speech or other communication device.
* Circle words from a prepared list.
* Write "There is more here than I can explain."

Writing and journaling

* Write whatever comes to mind for two minutes.
* Make a list of everything weighing on you.
* Write a letter you do not send.
* Write what you wish someone understood.
* Finish: "What hurts most is…"
* Finish: "What I need right now is…"
* Finish: "I wish I could say…"
* Finish: "I'm angry because…"
* Finish: "I'm grieving…"
* Finish: "I feel pulled between…"
* Write a paragraph without worrying about grammar.
* Write in bullet points instead of sentences.
* Make a list of questions you cannot answer yet.
* Describe what happened using only observable facts.
* Write how the experience affected you.
* Separate "What happened" from "What it meant to me."
* Write the boundary you wish you could express.
* Write what you needed to hear at that moment.
* Write a private message to your future self.
* Write a compassionate response to your own words.

Poetry, stories, and metaphor

* Write a three-line poem.
* Write a poem that does not rhyme.
* Use repeated words to capture a feeling.
* Write a six-word story about this moment.
* Describe your feelings as weather.
* Describe your experience as a landscape.
* Give the moment a book title.
* Write a headline for what is happening inside.
* Describe the feeling as an animal.
* Imagine the feeling as a visitor: what is it trying to say?
* Write a short fictional scene that reflects your experience.
* Create a character carrying a similar burden.
* Write dialogue between two conflicting feelings.
* Finish: "If my sadness could speak…"
* Finish: "If my anger had a message…"
* Describe what the feeling is asking for without assuming you must act on it.

Drawing and painting

* Scribble with a pencil or crayon.
* Draw lines that match your energy.
* Fill a page with the colors of your feelings.
* Draw the feeling as a shape.
* Draw its texture: tangled, sharp, heavy, scattered, or soft.
* Draw how much space it takes up.
* Draw what "overwhelmed" looks like.
* Draw what feels missing.
* Draw an image of what you need.
* Make an abstract painting.
* Draw a face showing your internal experience.
* Create a simple comic strip of what happened.
* Draw yourself with a speech bubble.
* Add a thought bubble containing what stayed unsaid.
* Draw the difference between your outside appearance and inside experience.
* Use a body outline to mark sensations with colors or symbols.
* Draw a boundary around something you want to protect.
* Draw a bridge between where you are and what you need.
* Draw a container and place your worries inside it on paper.
* Draw a symbol for something difficult to name.

Collage and hands-on expression

* Make a collage of images matching your mood.
* Cut out words that say what you cannot yet say.
* Arrange scraps of colored paper into an emotional landscape.
* Tear paper into shapes that represent your experience.
* Make a "What people see / What I feel" collage.
* Create a page showing what you need more of.
* Arrange stickers into a story.
* Shape clay or dough into the feeling.
* Make a second clay shape representing a need.
* Build a small scene with blocks or objects.
* Arrange stones or buttons to represent different concerns.
* Use yarn to show how tangled something feels.
* Weave colors together to represent mixed emotions.
* Make a small paper flag with a message.
* Create a card you can hand to someone when speaking is difficult.

Sound, music, and voice

* Record a private voice memo.
* Speak one sentence aloud to an empty room.
* Whisper something that feels difficult to say.
* Read your own writing aloud.
* Sing an improvised line about how you feel.
* Hum a sound that matches your mood.
* Create a short melody.
* Play notes on an instrument that express the feeling.
* Tap a rhythm on a cushion or tabletop at a comfortable volume.
* Make a playlist that tells the story of your experience.
* Choose a song and write why it fits.
* Record an imaginary podcast episode about your day.
* Use different tones of voice to express different emotions.
* Say what you wish someone had asked you.
* Practice a sentence you may eventually want to share.

Movement and gestures

Choose comfortable movements within your physical limits; small or imagined movements count.

* Make a gesture that means "too much."
* Hold out a hand to express "stop."
* Practice a gesture for "I need space."
* Reach outward to represent wanting connection.
* Curl and open your hands to express tension and release.
* Use seated movement to show the feeling.
* Move a scarf or ribbon to express what is happening inside.
* Create a short movement sequence with a beginning and ending.
* Let your posture briefly show the emotion, then return to a comfortable position.
* Make a facial expression that matches your internal experience.
* Use your hands to show two competing needs.
* Imagine a movement and describe or draw it.
* Act out asking for help.
* Practice stepping or gesturing backward to represent a boundary.
* Make a gesture that represents the support you want.

Photography and digital expression

* Photograph something that matches your mood.
* Photograph something that represents what you need.
* Make a digital mood board.
* Create a private slide with words and images.
* Draw in a phone or tablet app.
* Make an abstract digital image.
* Create a meme that captures your experience.
* Make a private video diary.
* Use speech-to-text to capture thoughts.
* Create a word cloud.
* Arrange emojis into a visual story.
* Make a digital comic.
* Choose a GIF that expresses your feeling.
* Create a private folder titled "What I wish people understood."
* Make a two-image comparison: "How it looks / How it feels."

Communicating with someone you trust

You can choose how much to share and ask whether the person has space to listen.

* "Do you have a few minutes to listen?"
* "I'm having a hard time finding words."
* "I need listening more than suggestions right now."
* "Could I text this instead of saying it?"
* "Can I show you something I drew?"
* "I don't need you to fix this. Being here would help."
* "I'm feeling overwhelmed and need a quieter space."
* "I want company, but I don't have energy to talk."
* "I need some time before I can answer."
* "That affected me more than I expected."
* "I'm angry, and I want to talk when I can express it safely."
* "I'm feeling disconnected. Could we check in?"
* "I need reassurance about…"
* "Please ask one question at a time."
* "Could you help me name what I'm feeling?"
* "I need help with one practical thing."
* "I want to tell you something, but I'm worried about your response."
* "Could we agree on a signal for when I'm overloaded?"
* "I'm having urges to hurt myself and need support staying safe."
* "Can you help me contact my therapist or follow my safety plan?"

Exploring different parts of your experience

* Write "One part of me feels…" and "Another part feels…"
* Give each feeling its own speech bubble.
* Write what the overwhelmed part wants understood.
* Ask yourself: "What might this reaction be trying to protect?"
* Draw different feelings as characters.
* Write a dialogue between your need for closeness and your need for space.
* Let each feeling have a sentence without deciding which is right.
* Write "I can feel this and still choose what I do next."
* Describe the difference between a feeling, an urge, and an action.
* Write what support each part of you might need.

Very small options for low-energy moments

* One word.
* One dot of color.
* One emoji.
* One sentence fragment.
* One gesture.
* One selected picture.
* One brief voice recording.
* One checked box on a feelings list.
* One written need.
* One message: "Please check in with me."