

Coping with Conflict and Threat

In the midst of a perceived threat your body reacts physiologically in a primitive attempt to protect you. Increased blood flow and heart rate are preparatory and automatic reactions to sensed danger, enabling you to fight, flee, or freeze. The problem is the body has a hard time distinguishing a imagined fiction from an actual physical threat, often arousing you unnecessarily. Learning about your heart rate and arousal can help you manage your fears effectively. For most people, resting heart rate is generally between 60 and 100 beats/minute.

THE TROUBLE IS...

If your heart rate increases 15 - 20% above your resting rate, then your system is **FLOODED**. Adrenalin overwhelms your nervous system, your frontal lobe disengages, and your primal brain takes over. Fight, flight, or freeze are the best you'll be able to do.



YOU CAN HELP...

Calm your physiology before you attempt to solve a conflict. With a relaxed nervous system, you have access to your prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain that helps with complex cognitive functions including planning, decision making, and moderating behavior. Managing fears without these frontal lobe capacities usually isn't pretty.

CONSCIOUS ACTIONS TO CALM YOUR PHYSIOLOGY WHEN ACTIVATED

- Proactively, **learn what works** for you to calm your body. Explore various options, write down and post your best strategies. Do this in a non-activated state and before the next conflict arises. Ask others for assistance in creating a list of strategies, if desired.
- **Experiment** with calming strategies such as deep breathing, progressive relaxation, splashing cold water on your face, or engaging in hard exercise. Instructions for many calming actions are available online.
- Discuss, with others in your life, the new strategies you plan to use, so others know your intention. This will help hold you **accountable** to taking conscious action.
- **Step away** from the perceived threat or conflict, even for a minute. Focus on your restoration and your planned intention. This isn't avoidance, it's smart. The conflict will wait for you. Bring your best self to it.
- **Adrenalin takes twenty minutes to wash out** of the body. You may need at least that long to calm your physiology. Distract yourself with a new focus (entertainment, non-conflict related discussion, exercise).
- **Come back** to the issue **when** your body is **relaxed** (heart beat at resting rate). You'll be much more skillful.

WITH FRONTAL LOBES BACK ONLINE, TAKE ANOTHER LOOK

- Keep your thoughts on the **present-moment** and gather data. What's really true?
- Focus on **what you can do** to help yourself be safe in the moment and do it.
- Bring your attention to **solutions** to the larger problem, rather than the details of the problem.
- Identify a **variety** of possible solutions. Think outside the box. There likely are many options and ways to resolve the conflict or manage the perceived threat.
- Remind yourself of the **actions you have already taken**.
- Ask yourself **if you have done all you can** do in this moment. If so, let the conflict be and **turn your attention** to soothing and comforting yourself. Repeat.
- **Reflect on your successes** and recognize your growing skillfulness.
- Recite the **Serenity Prayer**—it says it all!



Elsbeth Martindale
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST