

BE PREPARED

Helping you to cope better on Bonfire Night

OpCOURAGE

The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

Being prepared can help you cope

1. Plan your day

When you know there will be fireworks, e.g. Bonfire Night or New Years Eve, being prepared can help you cope. Start by planning your day and what you are going to do beforehand, whether this is staying at home or going out; being prepared can help to keep you comfortable.

2. Know your triggers

The smells and sounds caused by fireworks can act as strong triggers for memories. You can reduce the impact of this by having sensory aids such as essential oils or music. Noise cancelling headphones or ear defenders can help to reduce the shock of sudden or loud explosions. Also, if you have them, using blackout blinds can help to block out unexpected or intermittent flashes caused by fireworks.

3. Use Coping Skills

Coping skills can help to effectively manage and reduce distressing and overwhelming sensations. A selection of coping skills can be found on the next page.

4. Ground yourself

If fireworks trigger unwanted or distressing memories it can feel like you are back at that time, it is important to remind yourself that you are safe. Look around you notice where you are, what you can see, smell feel, taste and what is actually happening e.g.

- I am at home, I am safe and I'm not back then
- I am wearing..... and I am not wearing my Uniform or Military Fatigues

Use techniques like 5-4-3-2-1 sensory grounding.

5. Talk to others

It can be helpful to talk to and connect with friends and loved ones. This can be in person by asking family and/ or friends to be with you during Bonfire Night or arranging to call them on the day, this can help to keep you entertained and reassured. Ensure you make plans ahead of time to talk to or spend some time with others.

6. This will pass

Tell yourself this will pass and it will

STOP SKILL

- S**
STOP
Do not just react. Stop! Freeze!
Do not move a muscle! Your emotions may try to make you act without thinking. Stay in control!
- T**
TAKE A STEP BACK
Take a step back from the situation. Take a break. Let go. Take a deep breath. Do not let your feelings make you act impulsively.
- O**
OBSERVE
Notice what is going on inside and outside you. What is the situation? What are your thoughts and feelings? What are others saying or doing?
- P**
PROCEED MINDFULLY
Act with awareness. In deciding what to do, consider your thoughts and feelings, the situation, and other people's thoughts and feelings. Think about your goals. Which actions will make it better or worse?

SENSORY GROUNDING

- 5**
SEE
Look around and identify 5 things you can see. An example could be an ornament or a rug. Think about how it looks, does it shine, what colour is it?
- 4**
TOUCH
Focus on four things that you can feel. It may be the warmth of a radiator or the smooth surface of a mug. The key is to state the things you feel either out loud or in your head.
- 3**
HEAR
Name three things you can hear at this moment. Traffic noises, birds singing, leaves rustling. Again state the things you can hear out loud or deliberately in your head.
- 2**
SMELL
Notice two things you can smell right now, coffee or citric washing up liquid. If you can't then imagine smelling two of your favourite smells, freshly cut grass or fresh baked bread.
- 1**
TASTE
Focus on one thing you can taste. Perhaps toothpaste or a recent drink. Again, if you can't, then imagine a taste of something you really like, maybe something sweet.

TIP SKILL

- T**
TIP THE TEMPERATURE of your face with **COLD WATER*** (to calm down fast)
- Holding your breath, put your face in a bowl of cold water, or hold a cold pack (or zip-lock bag of cold water) on your eyes and cheeks
- Hold for 30 seconds. Keep water above 50°F
- I**
INTENSE EXERCISE* (to calm your body down when it's revved up by emotion)
- Engage in exercise, if only for a short while
- Expend your body's stored up physical energy by running, walking fast, jumping, playing basketball, lifting weights etc
- P**
PACED BREATHING (Pace your breathing by slowing it down)
- Breathe deeply into your belly
- Slow your pace of inhaling and exhaling way down (on average, five to six breaths per minute)
- Breathe out more than you breathe in (for example, 5 seconds in and 7 seconds out)
- P**
PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION (to calm down by pairing muscle relaxation with breathing out)
- While breathing into your belly, deeply tense your body muscles (not so much as to cause cramp)
- Notice the tension in your body
- Let go of the tension
- Notice the difference in your body

BOX BREATHING

THE TECHNIQUE
Box Breathing is a technique where you take slow, deep breaths while counting to four while you breathe in, hold for four, breathe out for four, hold for four.

Scan the QR to watch the video

Please don't struggle alone when you don't have to.

Call our service if you would like to talk or receive some support: OpCourage Northwest England:

0300 323 0707

SUPPORTED BY

OpCOURAGE
The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

There are more resources specifically to help at this time of year via the links below.

COMBAT STRESS
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

www.combatstress.org.uk

WALKING WITH THE WOUNDED
Supporting Those Who Served

www.walkingwiththewounded.org.uk