

Three emergency personal change techniques to try before starting work on longer-term sustainable growth and development

Sometimes before you can do any significant behaviour change and development, you first need to shift your state to be a little more positive or flexible. Or perhaps you just need to get yourself out of a temporary 'stuckness'. Here are my favourite quick and easy actions to create some space, order and momentum. You'll still need to do the developmental work and growth that leads to longer-term, sustainable change, but these simple actions often seem to help get that started.

Angry or frustrated?

GREEN EXERCISE

Studies have shown that as little as five minutes of low-intensity exercise outdoors and in the presence of nature can decrease the stresses and emotions that cause anger or frustration. My clients report that even just walking part of the way to work along a tree-lined road has a huge impact on their ability to manage their emotional state. Or that getting out to the park at lunchtime and having a vigorous stroll around helps put everything into perspective. My own experience also suggests that changing my focal distance, for example by walking up a hill so that I can see a long way, has a similarly positive impact.



Anxious or over-reacting?

CONTROLLED BREATHING

Anxiety and the tendency to over-react without thinking are closely related to the unconscious physiological and emotional states of our systems. Breathing is one autonomous function of our bodies over which we can exercise a degree of control, and doing so has been shown to have hugely beneficial effects. Practice breath control whenever you are anxious or acting out of fear, by breathing in through your nose for a count of 4, holding it for 4 and then breathing out through your nose for a count of 6. Four or five breaths like this is usually enough. I'd say don't try to do meditation at this stage, but check out 'mindfulness meditation' longer-term if you want to.



Confused or chaotic?

KEEP A JOURNAL

There's a significant amount of evidence and research around which suggests that expressive writing has positive effects on health, mood, and behaviour. Clients have told me that even just a half-hour of free-flow writing in a journal helps to clarify and organise what they are thinking and feeling and, as one person put it: *"To stop it all whirling around in my head"*. I don't believe that you need to commit to frequent or even regular journaling to get these benefits. Instead, whenever you want to, just grab a pen and some paper and write about (1) what you're currently experiencing; (2) what's important to you; and (3) what you want. The physical act of writing by hand, on paper, might be slightly better than typing, but try for yourself.

