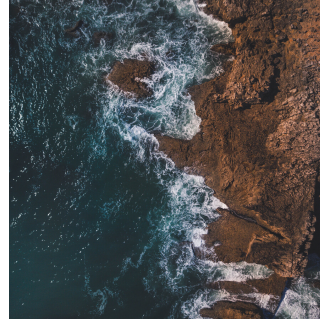
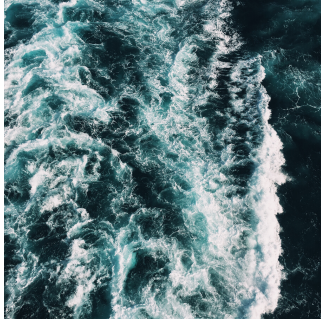




# DECATASTROPHIZING AMIDST CATASTROPHE

CREATED BY STEFANIE ROBACK LCSW, LCAS



## THE PURPOSE



May this serve as a guide and not a substitution for therapy with a licensed clinician. Therapy provides feedback, an open space for sharing without judgement and a connection that this guide absolutely cannot substitute. This guide is for short term use, for some information to help lighten the load of our current world catastrophe. I pray it brings you some peace in the chaos of what is and some faith in what will be.

This is meant to be an easily accessible compilation of exercises. \*None of these activities are my own. This is a compiled list of evidence based techniques\*

If you are in search of a therapist, visit [psychology today](https://www.psychologytoday.com) and filter for therapists using teletherapy during this time of shelter in place. If you need resources or assistance email:

[Stefanie@arisecounselingandtherapy.com](mailto:Stefanie@arisecounselingandtherapy.com)

## emergency phone numbers

IF YOU OR A LOVED ONE IS EXPERIENCING CRISIS OR MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY [DIAL 9-1-1](#)  
[OR VISIT YOUR LOCAL EMERGENCY ROOM](#)

CONTACT THE DISASTER DISTRESS HELPLINE IF YOU ARE IN DISTRESS:  
1-800-985-5990

CONTACT THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE OR DON'T  
FEEL SAFE BEING AT HOME 1-800-799-7233

# STEP ONE: BREATHE, BE MINDFUL, GROUND YOURSELF

*mind·ful·ness*  
*/'mīn(d)f(ə)lnəs/*  
*noun*

*state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique.*

## WE HOLD STRESS, ANXIETY, TRAUMA AND TENSION IN OUR BODIES

Right now, take a deep breath, bring your shoulders up to your ears and release them. Were you just holding your breath or tensing your shoulders?



## SUBCONCIOUS AND CONCIOUS

There are a lot of feelings in the world right now and they are displayed out there on social media, ebbing and flowing and changing by the moment. Whether we ourselves are feeling stress at the moment, or we are taking it in from all of the media we consume and conversations we have, we need to take a moment to slow things down for our systems to get the chance for relaxation.

Heightened stress = increase in cortisol = compromised immune system functioning

## GROUNDING AND MINDFULNESS

Some of these exercises will be for you and some will not. Work through them until you find something that works for you, that can cal you down when you're feeling anxious, worried, stress or unable to pinpoint what got you there.

There are so many exercises out there. Google "grounding exercise" for even more than the ones listed here!



## ● DEEP BREATHING

Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest to feel the way your breath moves through you.

Breathe in to the count of 4

Hold for 5 counts

Breathe out to the count of 6

REPEAT

## ● BODY AWARENESS

1. Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips.
2. Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.
3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.
4. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.
5. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.
6. Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth.
7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.
8. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

This exercise is from and can be found on Therapist Aid  
<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/grounding-techniques.pdf>

## ● ROUTINE REPETITION

Think of a routine that you complete often or daily and list out the steps (written, out loud or in your head) repeat this a few times until you are feeling calm. Visualize each step.

Example: Brushing my teeth...

Walk into the bathroom

Turn the light on

Get my toothbrush and hold it in my hand

Put toothpaste on my toothbrush

Turn toothbrush on

Brush top teeth

Brush bottom teeth

Rinse mouth

## ● BILATERAL STIMULATION

Cross your arms across your chest, tap opposite shoulders (this bilaterally stimulates the hemispheres of your brain) repeat a positive affirmation "I am safe, I am healthy"



## ● MEDITATION

Bring your attention to the present moment and focus on your breathing. Focus on where your breath is entering and leaving. As thoughts come, notice them and let them leave you and return to the breath. Set a timer and do this for 2-10 minutes.

**HINT:** Apps are wonderful for this, such as Headspace or Youtube search: Guided meditation for something more interactive that will talk you through this.

## ● 5 SENSES WITH A TWIST

We're looking to stimulate your brain here, using multiple areas of the brain at once. We're using senses and decision making aspects of our brain in this exercise. (*This one is personally my favorite of the grounding and mindfulness tricks*)

Name 5 things you can see, think hard and pick your favorite one out of the 5.  
Name 4 things you can feel, think hard and pick your favorite one out of the 4.  
Name 3 things you can hear think hard and pick your favorite one out of the 3.  
Name 2 things you can smell, think hard and pick your favorite one out of the 2.  
Name 1 things you can taste, think hard about why you chose this one.

## ● BODY SCAN

Begin by bringing your attention into your body.

You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.

You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.

Take a few deep breaths. And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.

You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat. You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.

Notice your back against the chair.

Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.

Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight. See if you can allow them to soften.

Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.

Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.

Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.

Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.

Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

## STEP TWO: FIND A RHYTHM

*Rhythm: "a regularly recurring sequence of events, actions, or processes."*

Finding a rhythm that is true to who YOU are is the most important part of this exercise. Try not to repeat what you see others doing on social media or what friends say you *should* be doing.

## HUMANS NEED RHYTHM

Our brains function well with patterns. Have you ever driven home from work and didn't know how you got there? That's because your brain basically ran on autopilot, on route to something it has seen done over and over again. Some routines are beneficial for our minds, stimulating and providing structure.



## STRUCTURED OR LOOSE?

These rhythms can be loose. I will say that morning routine is most essential, it maps out how our day is going to go. Now whether you are able to work during this time will determine how structured your routine might look. You might want to give yourself things you'd like to do, with no time-frame involved or you may need to schedule out hour-by-hour if you've got a love for lists and organization like I do. Let's try this.

## MY EXAMPLE

On the next page you'll find an example I've created for a rhythm. Again, this is all about you so feel free to create yours however you'd like. Make sure you're adding things that are important to you and your mental health. Just because Karen is using this time to train for a marathon, doesn't mean you need to, got it? (*I'm not running unless I am being chased by something, Karen.*)

## MY "MOVE YOUR BODY" OPTIONS

- Go for a walk around the neighborhood
- Join a virtual yoga class
- Do a HIIT workout virtually
- Youtube an exercise class
- Chase the dogs around
- Bike ride or skateboard

## MY "SOMETHING FUN" OPTIONS

- Play a board game or card game
- Write something creative
- Paint or draw a picture
- Rearrange a space
- Create a vision board
- Work on a dream project

## MY "SOMETHING RELAXING" OPTIONS

- Take a bath
- Read a book
- Journal
- Listen to calming music
- Using a grounding or mindfulness exercise

## MY "SPREAD KINDNESS" OPTIONS

- Call a loved one
- Send an encouraging text
- Donate to a local organization
- Write a nice post
- Write a kind letter to someone and mail

## TODAY'S RHYTHM

WAKE UP BEFORE 10AM

DO "SOMETHING RELAXING"

ZOOM CALL A FRIEND AND HAVE COFFEE

CLEAN MY SPACE

WATCH NETFLIX

DO "SOMETHING FUN" OR "MOVE YOUR BODY"

GO TO SLEEP BEFORE MIDNIGHT

**example: more open and loose**

## MY "MOVE YOUR BODY" OPTIONS

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- Join a virtual yoga class
- Do a HIIT workout virtually
- Youtube an exercise class
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- Bike ride or skateboard

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- Write a nice post
- Write a kind letter to someone and mail

WAKE UP (BETWEEN 7-8AM) LAMP ON OR SHADES OPEN TO HELP IN THIS PROCESS

MAKE COFFEE, PLAY SOOTHING MUSIC ON THE ALEXA AND READ A CHAPTER OF MY BOOK OR MEDITATE ON A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE.

SHOWER (AROUND 8:30AM/9AM)

MOVE TO A DIFFERENT AREA OF THE HOUSE | GET SOME WORK DONE

LUNCH IN A DIFFERENT AREA OF THE HOUSE OR OUTSIDE IF IT'S NICE

CHOOSE ONE FROM "SPREAD KINDNESS"

AROUND 4PM CHOOSE ONE FROM "MOVE YOUR BODY" OR "SOMETHING RELAXING"

COOK SOMETHING FUN FOR DINNER

DO ONE OR TWO THINGS ON "SOMETHING FUN"

END NIGHT WITH NIGHTTIME ROUTINE: CHAMOMILE TEA, SNUGGLE WITH PUPS AND FOCUS ON BREATH WORK AND RELAXING.

GO TO BED - WHENEVER I FEEL READY TO DO SO. SHELTER IN PLACE = MORE FREEDOM AND LESS RIGIDITY FOR ME HERE.

another example - more structured



What's important for you to incorporate into your days?

MY " \_\_\_\_\_ " OPTIONS

- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*

MY " \_\_\_\_\_ " OPTIONS

- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*

MY " \_\_\_\_\_ " OPTIONS

- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*

MY " \_\_\_\_\_ " OPTIONS

- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*

Loose or rigid, with times or without times, 2 things or 10 things; Whatever YOU need to provide rhythm for yourself

Blank writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines for notes.

your turn

# REFRAMING

Here we're going to talk about taming and reframing our own thoughts. A lot of the time, we experience cognitive distortions, or lenses with which we see the world that are not rational. These thoughts are shaped by internal core beliefs, experiences and teachings from others. Needless to say, we all do this from time to time and go running with a cognitive distortion that leads us to sheer panic, anger, sadness or worry.

## Some examples of cognitive distortions are:

- All-or-Nothing Thinking
- Overgeneralization.
- Disqualifying the Positive
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Mind Reading
- Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization
- Among many others.

# AN EXAMPLE

You go out to dinner with your friends. The three of you experience the same situation

**SITUATION:** The waiter quickly takes your orders, is not very interactive and his reactions are short and followed by sighs.

Here is where your lens/distortions/core beliefs come in and shape your experience, feelings and behavior. (For more work on lenses and core beliefs, ask your therapist)

**Molly's thought:** Wow, what a jerk. He seems like a really mean person.

this leads Molly to feel:  
**ANGER**

this leads Molly's behavior to appear:  
Short, stand-offish, leaves hardly any tip.

**Debbie:** experiences the same situation, but with a different distortion

**Debbie's thought:** Oh my gosh, what did I do? I know I looked at him too long. Was I not friendly enough? I must have done something to upset him. Why am I always like this?

**Debbie's emotion is then:** Anxious, upset

**Debbie's behavior:** Overthinking, ruminating on the thought, quiet and stuck in her head.

**Vanessa:** same situation

**Vanessa's thought:** He must be having a bad day, I hope he's alright.

**Vanessa's emotion is:** compassion

**Vanessa's behavior is:** kind gestures, smiling at the waiter and leaving him a nice tip.

Same situations, different lenses = different emotions felt and behaviors displayed. How you PERCEIVE something will influence how you EXPERIENCE something.

# THE MANY NUANCES OF DISTORTIONS

That was the quickest explanation of distortions that I could give, as this specific workbook is going to focus mainly on our current pandemic. There is so much to learn about the cognitive distortions that you carry with you, I highly suggest seeking out a therapist and digging into this stuff, it's life changing!

# LET'S TRY THIS WITH SOMETHING MORE RELEVANT TO OUR WORLD'S CURRENT PANDEMIC

EVENT: THERE IS A WORLDWIDE PANDEMIC. PEOPLE ARE POSTING AND SHARING ABOUT THEIR FEAR AND THERE HAVE BEEN RESTRICTIONS SET IN PLACE BY THE GOVERNMENT.



THOUGHT: "I CANNOT HANDLE THIS. I WILL BE TOO WORRIED, TOO OVERWHELMED, I CAN'T DO IT."



EMOTION: ANXIOUS, PANICKED, WORRIED, SAD



BEHAVIOR: ISOLATES, ENGAGES IN UNHEALTHY COPING BEHAVIORS, AVOIDS OWN THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

**Remember, what we're looking to address here in this exercise is the thought. One way of doing that is putting the thought "on trial." This is best done written down our out loud, to help you fully come to a rational counterstatement that you might find more calming than your original thought. It's like your brain used the logic to tie a nice bow on the thought and is then better able to move past it and let it go.**

## THOUGHT ON TRIAL: "I CANNOT HANDLE THIS. I WILL BE TOO WORRIED, TOO OVERWHELMED, I CAN'T DO IT."

What evidence makes this thought true

- I've never experienced a pandemic before

What evidence makes this thought false

- I've experienced tough situations before and gotten through them (list tough experiences you've overcome)
- I adapt to new situations, like when I went away to school and when I got that new job
- I've felt anxious before and coped with it well
- I have a support network of people I can reach out to
- I am not alone in this

**AFTER PUTTING YOUR THOUGHT ON TRIAL, YOU MIGHT NOTICE THAT THE EVIDENCE IS AGAINST YOUR ORIGINAL THOUGHT. NOW TRY REPLACING WITH A MORE RATIONAL COUNTERSTATEMENT, BASED ON THE EVIDENCE YOU'VE PROVIDED FOR YOURSELF**

**EVENT: THERE IS A WORLDWIDE PANDEMIC. PEOPLE ARE POSTING AND SHARING ABOUT THEIR FEAR AND THERE HAVE BEEN RESTRICTIONS SET IN PLACE BY THE GOVERNMENT.**



**THOUGHT: "I CANNOT HANDLE THIS. I WILL BE TOO WORRIED, TOO OVERWHELMED, I CAN'T DO IT."**

**RATIONAL COUNTER-STATEMENT THOUGHT: "THIS IS A REALLY TOUGH TIME. I MIGHT FEEL SCARED AT TIMES, BUT I'VE OVERCOME OBSTACLES, DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES AND UNCOMFORTABLE EMOTIONS BEFORE SO I CAN GET THROUGH THIS AND COPE THROUGH THIS. I'M NOT ALONE IN THIS AND HAVE PEOPLE I CAN CALL FOR HELP. I AM RESILIENT. I CAN LET GO OF WHAT I CANNOT CONTROL.**



**EMOTION: ANXIOUS, PANICKED, WORRIED, SAD**

**EMOTION: ASSURED, HOPEFUL, FEELING WORTHY, FEELING SUPPORTED**



**BEHAVIOR: ISOLATES, ENGAGES IN UNHEALTHY COPING BEHAVIORS**

**BEHAVIOR: USES GROUNDING AND RELAXATION SKILLS, FINDS WAYS TO FOCUS ON THE HOPE AND CALLS A FRIEND TO CHAT FOR SUPPORT. PRACTICES SELF-COMPASSION.**

**Thinking errors (cognitive distortions) change the way we feel and behave. We are in control of noticing and reframing negative thinking patterns. The more we notice, reframe and replace this will become automatic for us.**

# YOUR TURN

EVENT:



THOUGHT:



EMOTION:



BEHAVIOR:

## THOUGHT ON TRIAL:

What evidence makes this  
thought true

What evidence makes this thought false

EVENT:



RATIONAL COUNTERSTATEMENT/REPLACEMENT THOUGHT: (BASED ON EVIDENCE PROVIDED IN RIGHT COLUMN OF T-CHART)



EMOTION:



BEHAVIOR:

# DECATASTROPHIZING

Decatastrophizing is another way to delve further into the thoughts that may be causing you extra worry in this time and give you a chance to look at those thoughts objectively and to restructure them if need be. **This exercise calls attention to thoughts that may be catastrophized (seeing the worst possible outcome) or magnified (zooming in on only the potential downfalls)**

**WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT WORRY?**

**HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOUR WORRY WILL COME TRUE?  
PROVIDE EVIDENCE**

**IF YOUR WORRY DOES COME TRUE, WHAT'S THE  
WORST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN?**

**IF YOUR WORRY DOES COME TRUE, WHAT'S THE  
MOST LIKELY THING THAT WILL HAPPEN?**

**IF YOUR WORRY DOES COME TRUE, WHAT'S THE  
LIKELIHOOD THAT YOU WILL BE OKAY IN A DAY? A  
WEEK? A MONTH? A YEAR?**

# BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION

Some find it difficult in this time to find motivation to get up and get going, whether that is to do things we **want** to do or things we **have** to. When we set small goals and follow through with them, *the brain releases feel-good chemicals* that make us want to set another goal and so on. This is where behavioral activation comes in: keeping us going during a time where days might start to blend and it might be easier to remain stagnant than to move.

## 4 THINGS YOU'D LIKE TO DO

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## 4 THINGS YOU'D NEED TO DO (RESPONSIBILITIES, WORK, HYGIENE ETC.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

**Engage in one activity you'd like to do or one need to do per day. Rate your feelings of sadness (1-10), pleasure (1-10) and sense of achievement (1-10) both BEFORE and AFTER the activity. Call attention to increase in more positive feelings and decrease in negative feelings upon completion, for more encouragement to engage in these types of activities again.**

sadness      pleasure      achievement

today's activity:

before:

after:

# IN & OUT OF MY CONTROL

**Attempting to control the uncontrollable is another thing that may trigger more anxious or worried feelings during this time. Spend some time calling attention to the items that you have on your mind that you can control, versus the ones that you cannot. Having an awareness that we are tightly gripping something that is out of our control may help us in the process of loosening up that grip.**

**an example:**

## ***Things I can control:***

- My daily routine and habits
- My reactions to circumstances and to the behavior of others
- Implementing positive coping skills
- My interactions with others
- The compassion I give to myself
- The boundaries I set
- Monitoring and regulating time spent in media
- Applying for unemployment

## ***Things I can't control:***

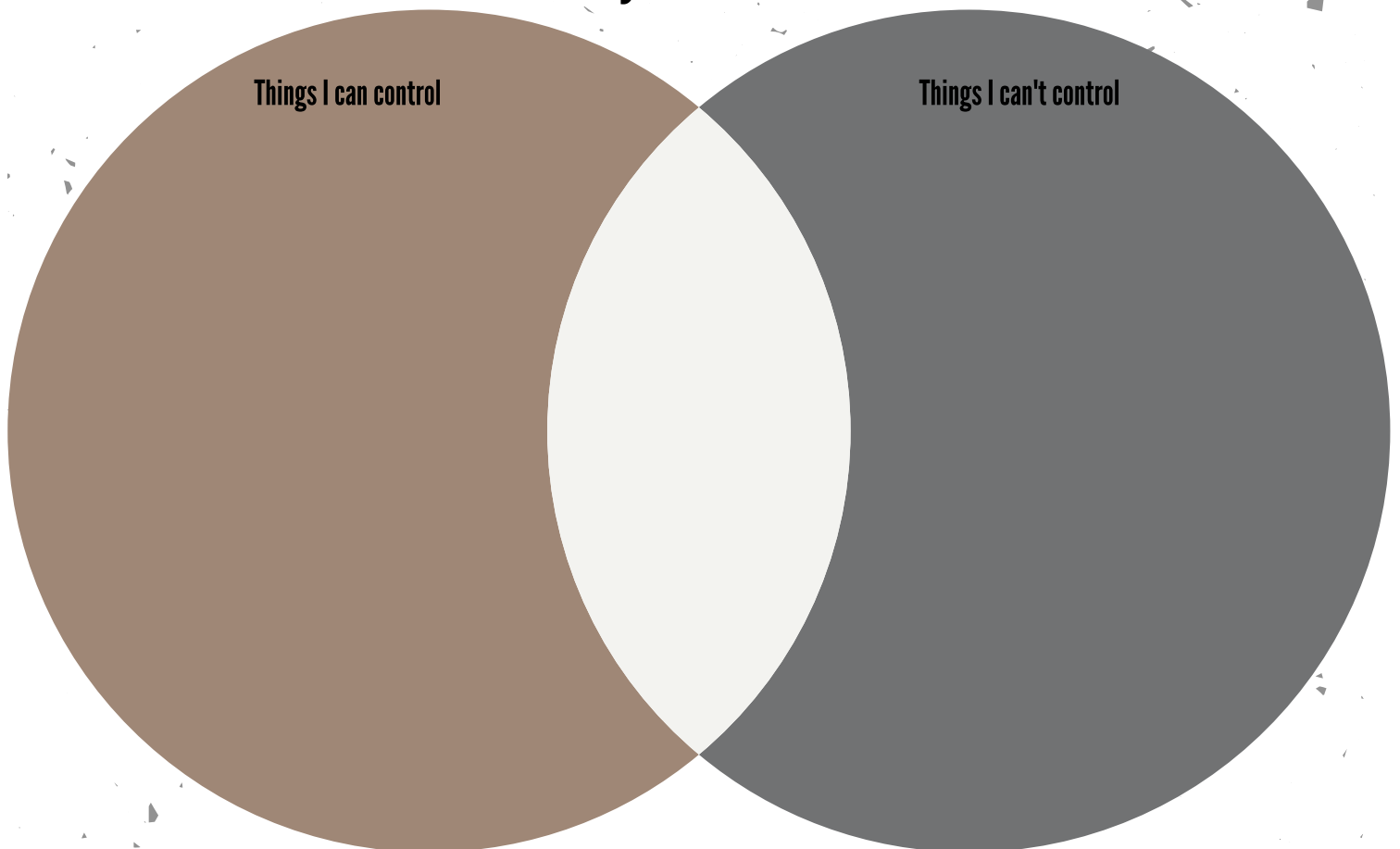
- The world's current events
- The timeline of the pandemic
- The behaviors of others
- The beliefs of others
- The rules being set into place by higher authorities
- Being let go from work



# IN & OUT OF MY CONTROL

**Attempting to control the uncontrollable... another thing that may trigger more anxious or worried feelings during this time. Spend some time calling attention to the items that you have on your mind that you can control, versus the ones that you cannot. Having an awareness that we are tightly gripping something that is out of our control may help us in the process of loosening up that grip and letting go.**

**your turn:**





## **COPING STRATEGIES**

**Some ideas of other ways to cope right now:  
bake, journal, cook, take a few deep breaths, stretch,  
read, listen to music, play music, have a movie night,  
craft, reframe thoughts, watch tutorials, play,  
bike ride, call a friend, donate to a charity, create a vision board,  
run, cry, talk with friends on zoom, learn a new skill,  
walk, knit, take a hot shower, take a bath, cuddle your pet**

**It's okay if thinking in the short term helps and it's okay if thinking in the long term helps.**

**It's okay if it helps to train for a marathon and it's okay if it helps to binge watch Netflix.**

**It's okay if you're hopeful and it's okay if you're afraid.**

**It's okay if you're setting goals and it's okay if you're just breathing through it.**

**Wherever you are, it's okay, you're okay.**

**I hope that some exercise in this workbook helps you to be even more okay.**