

YOUR STRESS KIT

FOR GIRLS

Stress isn't proof that something is wrong with you. It's your body getting loud about something that matters. You can't delete it — but you can turn the volume down, and you get better at it with practice. Start with one tool on this page. Not all of them.

Stress vs. anxiety, healthy and unhealthy: Dr. Lisa Damour, *Under Pressure*. · Calm-down tools from *Pink Chaos*, Ch. 5, by Shayna Barksdale, LCSW-S.

STRESS

- Your body reacting to something hard, or something that matters
- Dr. Lisa Damour: some stress is healthy — it stretches you, then you recover
- A big test, tryouts, a first day. Uncomfortable, not dangerous
- It turns unhealthy when it never lets up and starts wearing you down

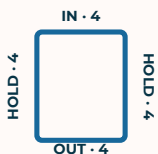
ANXIETY

- Your brain's alarm system going off
- "A brain trick that makes you feel like you're in danger"
- Healthy anxiety warns you about something real — that's information
- Unhealthy when it fires with nothing wrong, or won't switch off

HOW TO TELL

- Stress usually has an end date. Anxiety usually doesn't
- Ask: how will I feel when this is over?
- Name the finish line — Friday's test — and it's stress
- No finish line, and it follows you into things that are already fine? That's anxiety worth telling an adult about

01 Sixty seconds, right now



Square breathing. Trace the box with your finger while you do it — some girls trace it on the back of their hand. In for four, hold for four, out for four, hold for four. Four times through. Or breathe a calm color in, and breathe the anxious one out.

- **Name what's around you.** Five things you see, four you touch, three you hear, two you smell, one you taste. It pulls your brain out of the future and back into the room.
- **Shake it off.** Literally — shake out your hands, then your arms, then the rest of you. Changing the energy in your body changes the feeling.
- **Unclench your jaw and drop your shoulders.** Stress hides there.
- **Pet an animal.** Not a joke — it releases oxytocin. Dog, cat, horse, lizard. Caring for something else gets you out of your own head.

03 Find your mantra

- **A mantra is a short phrase that makes you feel better.** Borrow one until you write your own: "Everything will be okay — you've got this," or "Peace begins with me."
- **Press your thumb to each finger,** one at a time, saying one word of your mantra on each.
- **This is the tool for when you can't breathe well enough to breathe.** "Calm down" and "take a deep breath" don't work mid-panic. A mantra does.
- **Song lyrics count.** The best mantras come from you, not from a therapist.

WORTH REMEMBERING

Don't believe everything you overthink. You don't have to earn rest, and you don't have to be in crisis to deserve help — asking for it is a skill you get to practice now.

Tell someone if any of this is true

- You've felt anxious or low most days for more than two weeks
- You can't fall asleep, or you can't get out of bed
- You've stopped wanting things you used to want
- Your body hurts and no one can find a reason why
- You're avoiding school, or people, or both
- It keeps getting heavier, and there's no end date in sight

If you're thinking about hurting yourself, tell a trusted adult today — a parent, counselor, coach, teacher, or doctor. You can also call or text **988** anytime, free, from anywhere in the U.S. You are not too much, and this is not something you have to carry by yourself.

Austin Therapy for Girls

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02 Take a mini vacation

- **Build a place in your head where you are completely calm.** Real or invented — a beach, your grandmother's kitchen, a room that doesn't exist anywhere.
- **Fill in the senses one at a time.** What's in front of you? What's above you, and under your feet? What do you hear? What do you smell? Touch something — what does it feel like?
- **Make it exactly how you want it.** Too bright, dim it. Too lonely, add people. Want a lock on the door, or an ocean between you and everything else? Put it there.
- **Pick one word that takes you back,** and say it to yourself next time. Your brain gets there faster every time you practice.
- **Draw it or paint it afterward** — it makes the place easier to find next time.

04 Play it to the end

- **Anxiety plays scary movies and cuts them off at the worst part.** Your job is to finish the movie.
- **Say you bomb the test.** You see the grade. And then what?
- **You go to lunch with your friends. And then what?** You go home. And then what? You go to practice.
- **Keep asking "and then what?"** until the scene stops being scary. It usually takes about four steps.

05 When your brain won't stop

- **Write all of it down,** then circle only what's actually yours to control today. Cross out the rest — not forever, just for tonight.
- **Rank on most stressful scale 1 to 5.** Five means it truly must happen now. Most things are a two/three. Tackle the 4's and 5's first.
- **Zoom out like a helicopter.** Will this matter in a week? A month? A year? Keep rising until you can see it properly.
- **Make friends with your anxiety.** Give it a name—Bertha, Gummy Worms, whatever makes you smile. Anxiety is ultimately trying to protect you, even when it gets a little too loud or overprotective.