

# RESPONSES TO OVERWHELMING DISTRESSING EVENTS

When faced with overwhelming distressing events, God created our bodies to naturally respond in four specific ways:

## FIGHT

**How you feel:** angry, offended, upset, stressed out, irritated, tense

**How you act:** controlling, bullying, defensive, aggressive

**What can you do about it:** Four Square Breathing Exercises<sup>1</sup>, Grounding Exercises<sup>2</sup>

## FREEZE

**How you feel:** anxious, scared, zoned out, trapped

**How you act:** over thinking, can't stay still, avoid conflict, perfectionism, workaholic, hypervigilant

**What can you do about it:** Safe Space Visualization<sup>3</sup>, Butterfly Hugs<sup>4</sup>

## FLIGHT

**How you feel:** numb, empty, bored, unable to focus, scared

**How you act:** depressed, avoid relationships, daydream, seek solitude

**What can you do about it:** Use 5 senses.

Taste a fizzy or cold drink; eat spicy, sweet or other vibrant tasting foods.

Listen to the sounds and smell the scents around you.

Change your environment. Turn on bright lights. Step outside into fresh air.

Take action. Move your activity to a different room. Play. Take a brisk walk,

Shake It Off<sup>5</sup>

## FAWN *Anxiety driven pattern of people-pleasing behaviors*

**How you feel:** overwhelmed, scared, overly responsible for others; emotionally burned out

**How you act:** people pleasing, over caring, having difficulty saying no

**What can you do about it:** Prioritize self-care. Make a gratitude list. Practice saying no. Develop your creativity through art, cooking, woodworking, playing music, gardening, writing.

## **1. Four Square Breathing Exercise**

Breathe in for four counts, hold for four counts, breathe out for four counts, hold for four counts.

## **2. Grounding Technique**

Focus on each of your senses according to the following list:

- 5 things you see (trees, the ceiling tiles, picture in the room, birds, clouds)
- 4 things you feel or touch (the sofa or chair you are seated on, the clothing you are wearing, your hands, a cool glass of tea, the sun on your skin)
- 3 things you can hear (clicking of a clock, air conditioner, a barking dog, people talking in the distance)
- 2 things you can smell (perfume or after shave, soap, peppermint, air freshener, freshly mowed grass)
- 1 thing you can taste (chewing gum, chocolate candy, coffee)

## **3. Safe Space Visualization**

Imagine yourself in a very special place. It may be a real place or imagined place. You may know the place well or have never seen it before. Your special place may be indoors or outdoors. It doesn't really matter. The only thing that matters is that it is a place in which you feel completely comfortable, safe, and strong. Ask the Lord to join you in this peaceful place. As you relax there with Him, examine this scene with all your senses.

- Hear the sounds.
- Smell the aromas.
- Feel the air as it moves across your skin.
- Notice the beauty in your special place.
- Touch and feel the whole environment.

Now while you're in your peaceful and safe place, give it a name, whether one word or a phrase, that you can use to bring that image back anytime you need to.

## **4. Butterfly hugs**

Cross your arms over your chest with your fingers on top of your shoulders. Lightly tap one shoulder, then the other while saying, "Believing God is Peace." Tap slowly to calm your heart and slow your pulse. Do this in 4-minute cycles for as long as you need to relax.

## **5. Shake it Off**

Release stress and regulate your nervous system by shaking your body. Shake specific body parts, like an arm or leg, one at a time; or shake your whole body at once. Let yourself laugh at the silliness of this experience and thank God for the gift of movement.