

Ways To Stay Calm During An Emergency

It is impossible to accurately predict how we will react during any given emergency. Even seasoned professionals like firefighters and nurses sometimes get overwhelmed and panic during a crisis. However, you can practice key skills *now* that give you a better chance of staying calm in a crisis and helping yourself and others.

What happens to our body and brain in an emergency?

During an emergency or traumatic event, our body goes into high alert. Large amounts of adrenaline and other stress hormones are released. These stress-response chemicals speed up our heart rate and breathing and reduce our ability to use the part of our brain that is typically responsible for logical thinking, planning, and decision-making.

Because we are hardwired to react emotionally and instinctively during an emergency (rather than logically and thoughtfully), we need to actively coach ourselves to **calm down** and **focus** during highly stressful events.

6 ways to calm yourself down during an emergency

Your first job in an emergency is to ensure you are calm enough to think clearly. You will not be able to help yourself or others effectively if you are panicking. The quickest way to calm yourself down is to slow down your breathing and heart rate. Here are some things you can do:

1. **Stand still:** Unless there are urgent safety issues, STOP. Stand still while you practice one of these other techniques.
2. **Slow your breathing with the 3-3-3 technique:** Breathe in very slowly to the count of three, hold for three, release slowly for three. Repeat this sequence several times while saying the word “calm” to yourself as you exhale. In high-stress situations we often breath rapidly and shallowly, which can make us feel dizzy, confused, and panicky. Slowing down your breathing is one of quickest and most effective ways to help yourself calm down.
3. **Count slowly to ten:** This can also help slow your breathing and heart rate and calm yourself down.
4. **Imagine a safe space bubble:** Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a quiet bubble of safe space surrounding you.
5. **Ground yourself by focusing on your senses:** As you slow your breathing, ground yourself in the present moment by focusing on what you can *feel*, what you can *hear*, and what you can *smell*.
6. **Remember others are watching you:** Remembering that others are watching how you are reacting can sometimes take the focus off your own panic and help you stay calm. Your sense of calm will then help others stay calmer.

What next?

After you feel calmer, ask yourself what the most important thing is to do next.

- Do you need to get yourself or others to safety?
- Does anyone need first aid?
- Do you need to call emergency services?

Practice calming your stress reactions BEFORE an emergency

It is impossible to predict how you will react in any given crisis or emergency situation. You can, however, do one thing to increase the chances that you will maintain composure during a crisis instead of becoming overwhelmed. That thing is this: **Practice calming your own stress reactions before you find yourself in an emergency situation.**

What you practice can become second nature, which is why skills related to controlling your breathing and mindfulness can help you in emergency situations where you often act instinctively. Of course, you cannot practice and prepare for every emergency event. But you *can* practice for predictable emergencies, as well as practice techniques that can help you calm yourself in a crisis.

Practice simple things you may need to do in an emergency

Practicing or rehearsing some simple things you may need to do during an emergency can help you feel more prepared and in control should it occur. For example, you and your loved ones (including children) should always know:

- How to call emergency services where you live (if they exist)
- What sort of information emergency services will ask for when called (e.g., your address or location)
- Where your essential emergency items are located (e.g., an inhaler, an Epi-pen, a fire extinguisher, a snake-bite kit)
- Where building exits are where you live and work.

It is always a good idea to do first aid training, too. Having a feeling of knowing what to do in a crisis gives a sense of control and direction that is very calming and grounding.

Practice calming techniques

Many of the techniques that will most help you during an emergency need to be practiced regularly before you can hope to use them effectively under extreme pressure. These skills are particularly valuable:

- Slow, deep breathing
- How to focus and pay attention through mindfulness
- How to discern and slow down your heartbeat

There are many apps that can help you practice deep breathing, mindfulness meditations, visualizations, and other calming techniques. Start by checking out CALM, AURA, and HEADSPACE.