

# substances

Substances might seem like a way to escape, but they often add more weight to your worries. What if you tried something different? Something that helps you feel lighter, stronger, and more in control?

The ideas here aren't a magic fix.

They're small, simple shifts you can try - one step at a time - to start lightening the load and moving forward. Sometimes, just showing up for yourself changes your entire day.



## PRESS PAUSE

Find a moment of calm, wherever you are.

### 1. Box Breathing

- When everything feels like it's spiraling, pause and try box breathing. Even CIA agents use this technique to stay steady in high-pressure situations.
- Here's how it works:
  - **Breathe in for 4 counts** and imagine drawing one side of a box.
  - **Hold for 4 counts** (draw the next side).
  - **Breathe out for 4 counts** (third side).
  - **Hold for 4 counts** (close the box).
- You can do this anywhere - while walking, sitting, even waiting for the bus.

### 2. Thought Passengers

- Your thoughts are like passengers in a car. Some help you navigate; others try to take control.
- The good news? You're the one behind the wheel. When big feelings get overwhelming, simply name them out loud. Science shows this can help dial down their intensity:
  - "My mind is feeling anger."
  - "My mind is feeling worry."
- Once you've named the feeling, move your body: stretch, shake out your hands, or take a quick walk..



## BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION

Small habits for stronger days ahead.

### 1. Find Your Anchor

- Substances might feel like support at first, but they often pull you further down. Instead, **find an anchor - something that steadies you when life feels shaky:**
  - A favorite song.
  - A memory of a great day.
  - A comforting routine to start your morning or end your night.
- Anchors can help you stay grounded, no matter what life throws your way.

### 2. Daily Wins Jar

- **Every time you do something small, add it to your "wins" jar or notebook.**
  - Finished your laundry? Write it down.
  - Got through a tough moment? Write it down.
  - Took a break when you needed one? Write it down.
- Celebrating these small achievements boosts your brain's dopamine—the "feel-good" chemical—and builds momentum for even more wins



## SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE

What if we could see things a little differently?

### 1. The "What's True?" Game

- When your brain gets stuck on the worst-case scenario, **break the loop:**
  - Pause and ask yourself: "What's actually true?"
  - Say or write down 2-3 facts to ground yourself:
    - "I've gotten through hard things before."
    - "This moment won't last forever."
    - "Today, I haven't used a substance."

### 2. Body Battery Check-In

- Picture your body as a phone battery. How charged are you right now: 10%? 50%?
  - Ask yourself: What's one small thing I can do to recharge?
  - Maybe it's starting the day with your favorite breakfast.
  - Stepping outside for some fresh air.
  - Talking to a neighbor.
- **The YMCA is a great place to recharge.**
- **Find your local Y here for a free drop-in.**