

Creating Your Safe (or Safe-Adjacent) Place

This exercise is designed to help your nervous system build a reliable internal place of safety, comfort or steadiness that you can return to whenever life feels overwhelmed. Many therapists teach this as an EMDR resourcing exercise, but it can also be practised on your own as a grounding skill.

There is no right or wrong way to do this. Some people find a place immediately; others build it slowly over time. Take your time and trust whatever feels most comforting to you.

1 Choose your place

Think of a place where you feel safe, calm, peaceful or simply more at ease. It could be:

- an imagined place that exists only in your mind
- a real place you've visited
- somewhere in nature
- a favourite room
- a place you've created in a game (for example, Minecraft, Animal Crossing or Stardew Valley)
- somewhere from a book or film

If real places bring mixed feelings, create somewhere entirely new. It doesn't need to exist—it only needs to feel safe enough, or perhaps simply calmer than where you are now.

MY SAFE PLACE

2 Bring it to life

Rather than simply looking at your safe place, imagine yourself there. Notice:

- What can you see?
- What can you hear?
- Are there any smells?
- What is the temperature like?
- What textures can you feel?
- What makes this place feel welcoming?

Allow yourself to explore slowly and with curiosity.

3 Notice your body

As you imagine being there, notice whether your body changes in even the smallest way.

Perhaps your shoulders soften.

Your breathing slows.

Your jaw loosens.

Maybe your chest, stomach or hands feel a little lighter.

There is no need to force anything. Even tiny shifts matter.

WHERE DO YOU NOTICE THAT FEELING IN YOUR BODY?

4 Choose a cue word

Choose one word or short phrase that captures the feeling of your safe place. For example:

Safe

Home

Steady

Breathe

Here

Stillness

I can rest

MY CUE WORD

Repeating the same cue word each time acts like a shortcut for your brain. Over time, your nervous system begins to link that word with this place and its feelings of safety or calm, making it easier to find again when you need it.

5 Strengthen the feeling

Spend 30–60 seconds simply enjoying being here.

If it feels comfortable, gently alternate tapping your left and right knees or shoulders with your hands in a slow rhythm. Many people find this helps strengthen the connection between the place and the feeling of calm, but it isn't essential.

Notice whether the feeling stays the same, becomes stronger or gently grows over time. There is nothing to achieve. Simply allow your nervous system to experience a moment of steadiness.

6 Practise returning

Visit your safe place for a minute or two every day—even when you're already feeling okay.

A simple way to remember is to pair it with something you already do each day, such as brushing your teeth, making your morning coffee or getting into bed. You could also set a daily reminder on your phone.

Picture the place.

Repeat your cue word.

Notice what happens in your body.

Like learning a musical instrument, your brain learns through repetition rather than intensity. The more often you practise, the easier it can become for your mind and body to return there when life feels difficult.

Make it real

Some people find it helpful to create a physical reminder of their safe place. You might:

- build it in a sand tray
- make it with LEGO
- paint or draw it
- create a collage
- recreate it in Minecraft or another favourite game
- collect small objects that remind you of it

Having something tangible can make it easier to reconnect with the feeling later.

If difficult feelings appear

Sometimes a place that seemed comforting unexpectedly brings up sadness, fear or other difficult emotions. If that happens, that's okay—simply let it go and choose another that feels lighter or calmer.

You may also find this exercise feels impossible right now. If your nervous system has rarely known safety, it can be hard to imagine—and that doesn't mean you always will. You might instead choose one small object—a feather, a pebble, a shell, a favourite mug—and place it somewhere you'll see it: a promise to your future self that one day this may feel more possible.

Be gentle with yourself. There is no rush.

With love, Dr Jay x