

Mental Health Readiness *CHECKLIST*

A Mental Health Assessment Tool
for Fact-Checkers

PREPAREDNESS

Are you ready to sustain your mental health in times of crisis?
Is your team ready for mental health leadership in times of crisis?
A crisis can be any unexpected stressful event, from online harassment to an earthquake, that disrupts daily newsroom operations while having the potential to negatively impact one's mental health.

Consider this checklist of core actions from The Self-Investigation. We recommend that you go over it in a quiet moment so the answers can support you when you need it. In other words: don't wait until you're in a crisis to run this checklist!

»» For more information about specific steps, be sure to read the **Mental Health Leadership Toolkit for Fact-Checkers** (available in English and in Spanish).



Individual Preparedness

- ☐ I know my personal signs of stress and burnout.
Learn more about warning signs in [this burnout prevention guide](#).
- ☐ I am aware of my most common trauma triggers.
More on this in the [vicarious trauma and moral injury guide](#).
- ☐ I am aware of my most effective coping mechanisms when I am outside my window of tolerance, the optimal emotional “zone” I can exist in (see page 7).
- ☐ I have a preferred set of mindfulness techniques for when I am outside my window of tolerance:
 - ☐ Box Breathing (see [page 8](#))
 - ☐ Movement
 - ☐ Five Senses Grounding (see [page 9](#))
 - ☐ Other or N/A: _____
- ☐ I have documented all my major medical information:
 - ☐ Medical history and current diagnoses
 - ☐ Emergency contacts
 - ☐ Medication (date prescribed, prescriber, dosage)
 - ☐ Allergies to anything, including medications
 - ☐ Insurance details

Team Preparedness

- ☐ Our team members are familiar with the [most common signs and symptoms](#) of stress, burnout, vicarious trauma and moral injury.
- ☐ Our team has established a communications protocol for urgent and time-sensitive items.
- ☐ Our team has discussed online harassment threats and mitigation plans.
See more about [online harassment in our guide here](#).
- ☐ Our team’s check-in protocols include space for discussions around mental health and well-being, especially before, during and after a crisis.
- ☐ We have a risk assessment plan that includes mental health and well-being plans for each team member (see [page 10](#) for a template).
- ☐ We have a schedule for regularly reviewing and updating our risk assessment plans.

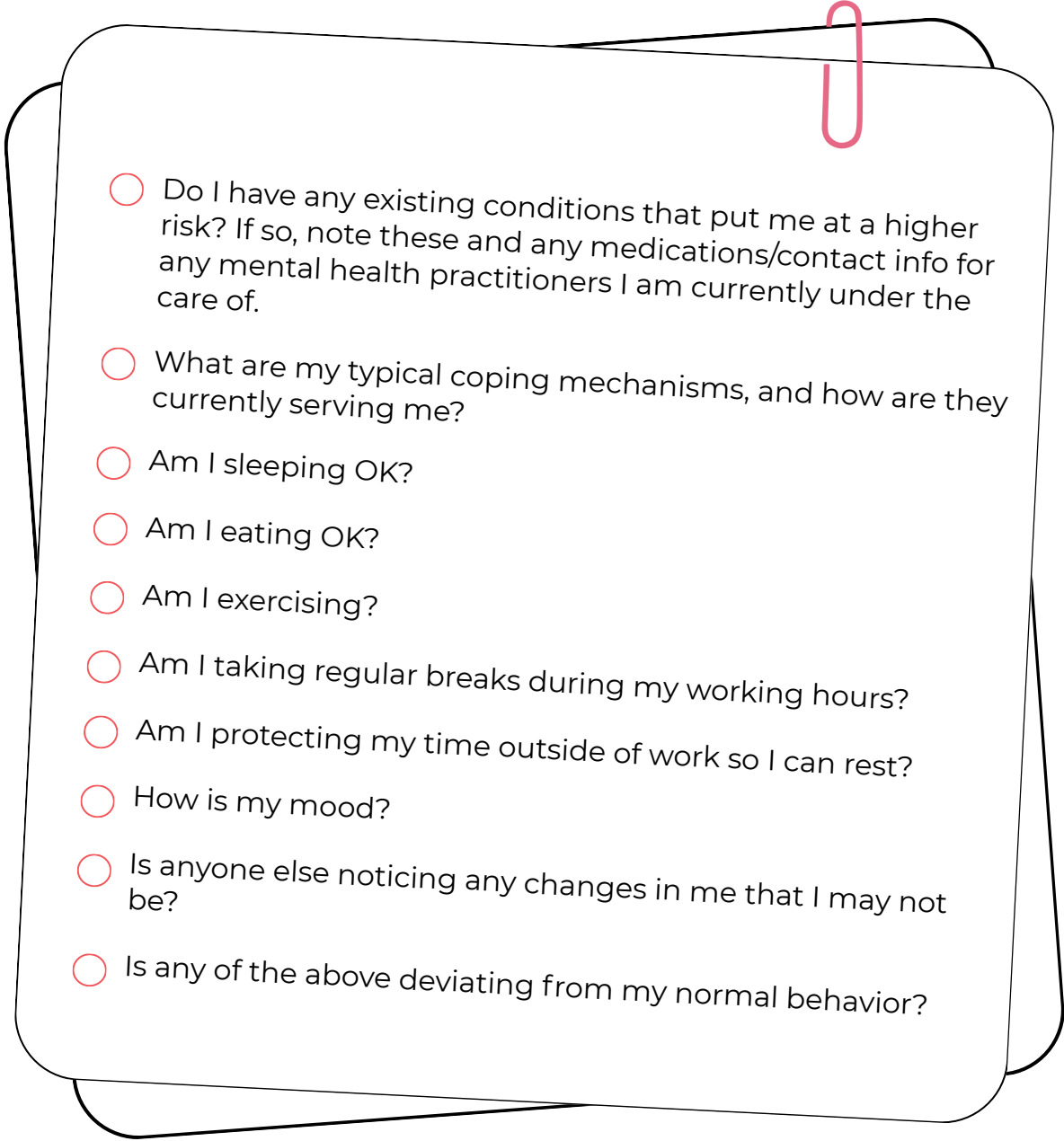


PROTOCOLS

The following protocols might be effective when checking in with oneself during stressful moments and setting good digital boundaries to promote focus and protect rest.

A Simple Mental Health Protocol

Below are questions to gain awareness about how you're coping:

- 
- ☐ Do I have any existing conditions that put me at a higher risk? If so, note these and any medications/contact info for any mental health practitioners I am currently under the care of.
 - ☐ What are my typical coping mechanisms, and how are they currently serving me?
 - ☐ Am I sleeping OK?
 - ☐ Am I eating OK?
 - ☐ Am I exercising?
 - ☐ Am I taking regular breaks during my working hours?
 - ☐ Am I protecting my time outside of work so I can rest?
 - ☐ How is my mood?
 - ☐ Is anyone else noticing any changes in me that I may not be?
 - ☐ Is any of the above deviating from my normal behavior?



My Mental Health Protocol

A large, rounded rectangular box with a black border, containing horizontal lines for writing. A red pencil icon is positioned at the top right corner of the box.

TIPS TO PROMOTE DIGITAL FOCUS AND PROTECT REST

Below are suggestions on how to set healthy digital boundaries. Circle the ones that work best for you and add others.

Email

- ☐ Check in batches with a certain frequency (eg- every hour or every two hours).
- ☐ Be explicit about when you need a response to avoid urgency bias on the receiver's end.
- ☐ Schedule messages.
- ☐ Create rules to help you filter key emails.
- ☐ Keep your inbox closed or use tools such as [Inbox When Ready](#) (for Gmail / Google Workplace) to hide incoming messages so you don't get distracted as emails come in (and that allows you to have the email open in a tab).



Social Media

- ☐ Turn off notifications, tweak notifications or have them delivered in a [scheduled summary](#).
- ☐ Add friction by setting screen time limits, putting the app in the second or third screen of your phone, or even go cold turkey and uninstall the apps from your phone!
- ☐ Install an add-on to have the images / videos blurred and audio muted by default to avoid unwanted triggers.

WhatsApp

- ☐ Pin the messages from the three most important people so they appear at the top.
- ☐ Archive group chats when you don't need them (eg- on weekends).
- ☐ Mark messages as unread so you can reply to them later by clicking on the "unread messages" list.
- ☐ Add chats from key people to your list of favorites.

Slack / Teams / G chat

- ☐ Use status updates (to show when you are available) and set up your out of office hours to avoid being notified then.
- ☐ On most platforms (eg- in [Microsoft Teams](#) or on [Slack](#)) you can schedule messages to go out, and schedule reminders about messages you've received.
- ☐ Agree as a team on how you want to use it.

➤➤➤ Learn more about how to relate to your devices in a healthier way in our **digital boundaries guide**.



My Digital Well-Being Protocol

A large, rounded rectangular box with horizontal lines for writing. A red pencil icon is positioned at the top right corner of the box.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Sometimes, we need professional help from a licensed therapist or social worker. Make sure to understand what mental health support your company provides. If it feels safe, reach out to your manager and/or human resources team to get to know what professional support is available to you. If this is available to you, you might consider reaching out if you're experiencing some of these factors:

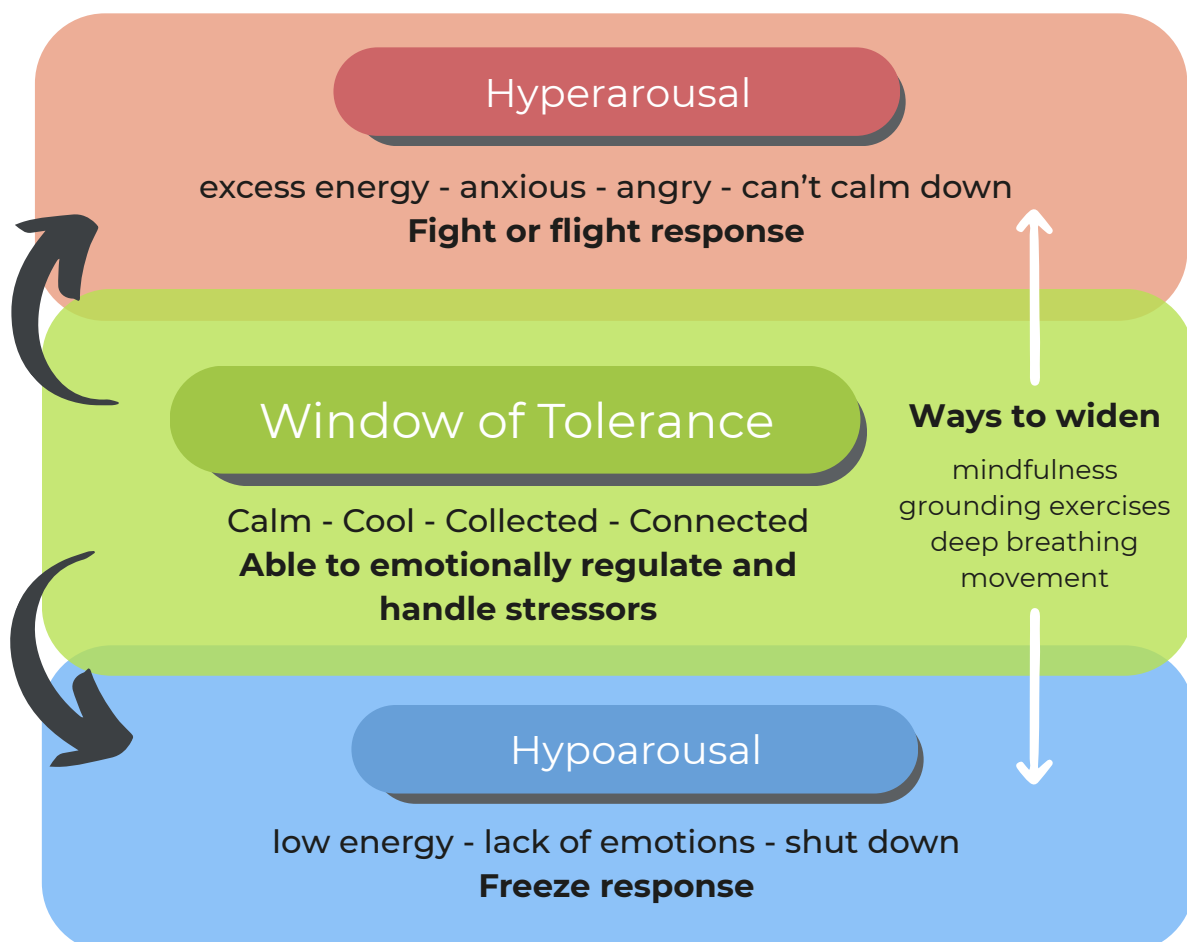
- ☐ Suppressing and ignoring feelings like "I'm not myself," "I can't keep this up" or "I'm in crisis".
- ☐ Your ability to function and to set boundaries is impaired.
- ☐ A recurrence of a mental health challenge: depression, chronic anxiety, trauma, bipolarity, etc.
- ☐ You resist the concerns of people you trust.

RESOURCES

➡️ *Window of Tolerance*

The "Window of Tolerance" refers to the optimal emotional zone where individuals feel grounded, present, and capable of managing stress. Internal or external factors can bring you out of it and into states of hyperarousal (anxiety, overwhelm) and hypoarousal (numbness, disconnection), which can hinder daily functioning. However, through practices like mindfulness and grounding techniques, individuals can expand their window, enhancing resilience and emotional well-being.

More details [here](#) (Psychology Today).



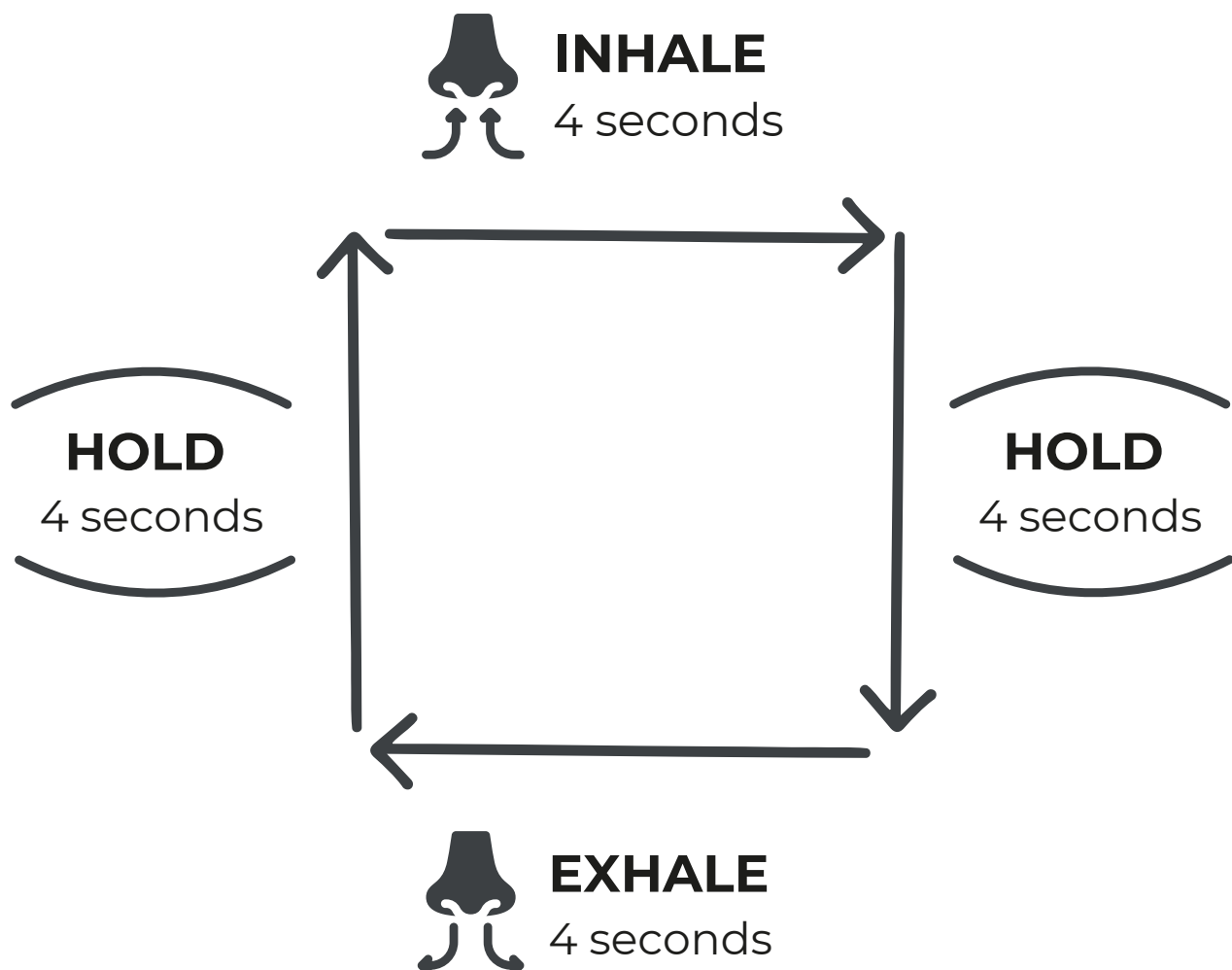
RESOURCES

➡ *Box Breathing*

The breath is the one thing that is always constant in life. This simple deep-breathing technique can help you ground in minutes and calm your mind if you find yourself in a fight-or-flight state.

Slowly exhale all the air from your lungs, then breathe in through your nose while counting to four, feeling your lungs and stomach expand. Hold your breath for four counts, exhale for four counts, hold again for four counts, and repeat for three to four rounds.

More details [here](#) (Cleveland Clinic).

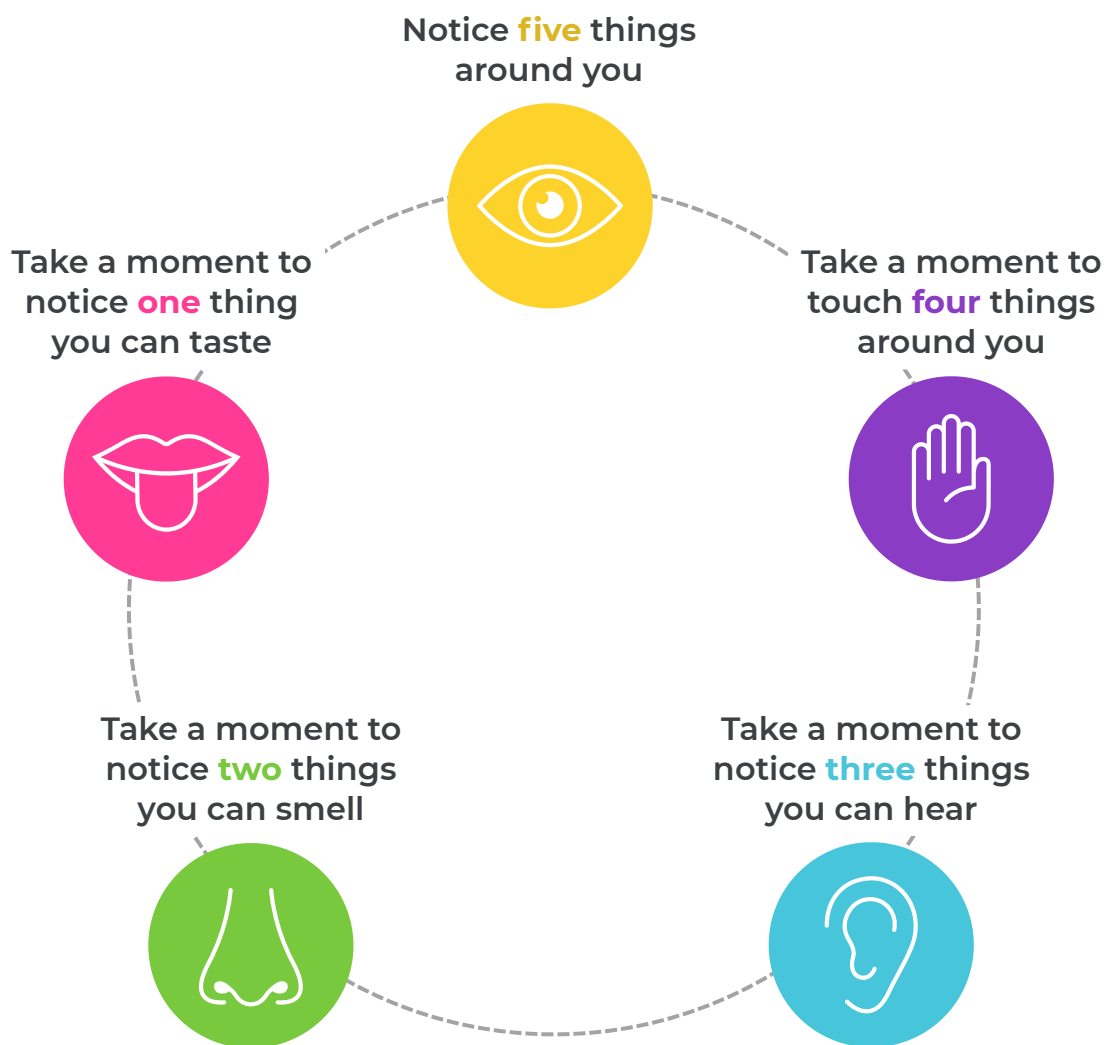


RESOURCES

➡️ *Five Senses Grounding*

This five-step exercise can help you in emergency relief and coping with anxiety or when you are feeling overwhelmed. It will distract your mind from anxious thoughts and bring you back to your body and the present moment.

More details [here](#) (University of Rochester Medical Center Rochester).



RESOURCES

Team Risk Assessment Template



1. Identify potential hazards

- Observe or anticipate from current or projected situation or historical trends.
- Consider what actions or events might create additional harm.



2. Identify who might be harmed by those hazards

- List who might be affected (job title, role, or identifying groups)
- Identify those who may be at higher risk than others (e.g. children, new employees, those with known health risk factors)



3. Evaluate risk severity and establish precautions

- Consider the level of likelihood and severity of harm that may occur
- List what is known about each risk and what might be done to eliminate or reduce risk (including the cost of each)



4. Develop mitigation strategies and document

- What should change in order to help reduce or eliminate risk for harm?
- Who should do the work to implement these strategies (and when)?



5. Review your assessment and reassess if necessary

- Periodically review the assessment and make changes if necessary
- Ask yourself:
 - Has there been a significant change in the work or process?
 - Has there been a significant change in the environment or situation?
 - Have there been any accidents or ill-health incidents (or near-misses)?

More information [here](#) (Freedom of the Press Foundation).



CREDITS

This checklist was developed collaboratively by The Self-Investigation team, based on trainings led by Kim Brice, Mar Cabra, Natalia Martin Cantero, Emma Thomasson, Janeen Williamson and Hannah Wise, coupled with insights from guests Jency Jacob, Alessandra Monnerat, Martín Slipczuk, Karla Torres, and Blanka Zöldi. The **Mental Health Leadership Toolkit for Fact-Checkers** was developed with generous support from the **International Fact-Checking Network**.

Editors: A.X. Mina, Mar Cabra, Kim Brice
Design: Paula Montaña

About The Self-Investigation

The Self-Investigation is a non-profit on a mission to build a healthier work culture in journalism. Founded by journalists for journalists, we have experienced firsthand the mental toll that comes with the job. We train, coach and create resources so no journalist ever has to walk away from the profession because of their mental health.

We're here to help you and your media organization.

Get in touch at contact@theselfinvestigation.com