WORKSHEET 135 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

When the alarm takes over

My plan for coming back when I “lose it”

AIM

Build a personal step-by-step plan for moments when the alarm dominates and the prefrontal cortex works less well: first the body, then words, finally reflection.

WHO IT IS FOR

Panic attacks, anger, arguments that get out of hand, emotional overwhelm, parents who “explode”.

DURATION

20 min to prepare; to use when needed

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Explain that intense stress reduces the functioning of the prefrontal cortex (Arnsten): reasoning in the middle of the storm works poorly; the body needs calming first.
2. The person identifies their early signs (body, thoughts, behaviours).
3. For each step they choose a concrete, realistic action.
4. The plan is written briefly, kept on the phone or in the wallet and tried out in a low-intensity situation.

POINTS TO WATCH

> If there is violence towards oneself or others, this plan isn’t enough: also build a safety plan (worksheet 89).

REFERENCES

Arnsten, A. F. T. (2009). Stress signalling pathways that impair prefrontal cortex structure and function. Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 10(6), 410-422.

Lieberman, M. D., Eisenberger, N. I., Crockett, M. J., Tom, S. M., Pfeifer, J. H. & Way, B. M. (2007). Putting feelings into words: Affect labeling disrupts amygdala activity in response to affective stimuli. Psychological Science, 18(5), 421-428.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 135 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

When the alarm takes over

Under very strong stress, the part of your brain that reflects works less well: that is normal, and it explains why “reasoning” doesn’t work at that moment. This plan follows the order that helps: first the body, then words and finally reflection.

1. For each step in the table, write a concrete action that works for you.
2. Choose easy actions that you can do anywhere.
3. Keep this plan on your phone or in your wallet.
4. Try it out first in a low-intensity situation.

Step	What I do, concretely

The sentence I tell myself when I notice the alarm rising:

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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