

# Implementation Guide

## Tools to Notice Stress and Support Yourself in the Moment



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## Purpose of This Guide

Frontline settlement work often involves urgency, emotional labour, and cumulative exposure to complex situations. Over time, these conditions can place strain on the nervous system, especially when workers move quickly from one interaction to another without opportunities to reset.

This guide introduces simple ways to notice early signs of nervous system strain and respond with small regulation skills that help restore steadiness in the moment. Recognizing these signals early can help protect capacity, clarity, and dignity while continuing to support others.



*This resource was developed by Breelove Wellness as part of the ARAISA Learning Series to support frontline settlement workers across Atlantic Canada. The information in this guide is intended for educational and professional development purposes. It is designed to help workers recognize early signs of nervous system strain and apply small, practical skills that support steadiness in demanding work environments. This resource may be shared with participants and hosted within the ARAISA Learning Hub as part of the ARAISA training series.*

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## Understanding Early Signals

Frontline work often involves urgency, emotional intensity, and cumulative stress. The nervous system responds to these conditions over time.

Burnout rarely appears suddenly. In most cases, the body signals strain well before crisis occurs. Learning to notice these early signals allows workers to respond with care and protect their capacity before stress builds.

Below is a table that outlines some common early signs that can manifest physically, emotionally, cognitively and relationally.

## Common Early Signals

Physical Cues	Emotional Cues	Cognitive Cues	Relational Cues
Changes in breathing (rapid, shallow)	Irritability	Racing thoughts	Feeling disconnected
Muscle tension	Anxiety or nervousness	Difficulty concentrating	Feeling disconnected
Restlessness or agitation	Sudden sadness	Catastrophic thinking	Feeling disconnected
Fatigue or slowed movement	Feeling overwhelmed	Negative self-talk	Feeling disconnected
Headaches, stomach discomfort	Emotional numbness	Feeling mentally "foggy"	Feeling disconnected

These skills are designed to be used in real work environments where time is limited. Even brief regulation moments — 30 seconds to two minutes — can interrupt escalation and support nervous system steadiness.

## Micro-Skills for Regulation

In stressful moments, it can feel like everything is happening too quickly to respond thoughtfully. Small regulation skills help interrupt that cycle. Micro-skills are short practices that help the nervous system settle and regain clarity in the moment.

They do not require leaving the interaction or stopping the work entirely. Even brief moments of awareness and regulation can reduce escalation and help restore steadiness.

### **Pause**

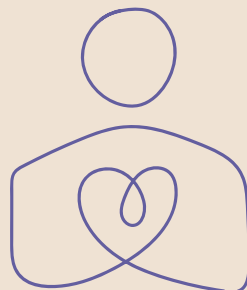
Take a moment to slow down, breathe, and step back internally without leaving the interaction.

### **Orient**

Notice what is stable and safe in your environment right now. Ground yourself in the present moment.

### **Resource**

Access something that helps your nervous system feel steadier. This could be a comforting thought, a supportive person, a grounding object, or a simple regulation exercise.



## Applying Skills: When I notice → I can try

These examples show how early signals can be paired with small regulation responses. Over time, recognizing these patterns can help workers respond earlier and protect their energy in demanding environments.

When I notice	I can try
Tight jaw	Slow exhale or gentle stretch
Racing thoughts	Orient to what is stable in the room
Feeling overwhelmed	Ask for a brief pause or step back internally
Shallow or rapid breathing	Take a full, slow breath and notice your body
Tension in shoulders	Roll, gently massage, or shake out tension, notice release

## Intentional Reflection

Reflection gives you a chance to understand your patterns and care for yourself in the moment. Use the prompt below to notice your early signals and explore ways to respond that feel grounding and supportive.

### **Reflection Prompt**

*Think of a recent stressful moment. What early signals were present, and how might you respond differently next time using these skills?*

————— *Breelove.ca* —————