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The Quieting Response

Technique:

1. Cue: Usually being annoyed or tense.
2. Response: Break into a "sparkle smile." Sparkle (twinkle) with the eyes. (Stroebe suggests that in public this may be done inwardly, to avoid the reaction of a stranger who is sparkled at.) The idea is to "get the facial muscles out of the grim posture of a dog going to battle."
3. At the same time you are smiling, give yourself the suggestion of an alert and amused -this is important - mind and a calm body.
4. Take an easy deep breath - Stroebe used to call for two, but the Type A's asked if one wasn't enough - through imaginary holes in the bottom of your feet. (This makes use of the diaphragm.)
5. Inhale the breath up through the legs and into the stomach to experience a sensation of flowing warmth and heaviness.
6. Exhale the breath back down through the legs and let your jaw, tongue, and shoulders go limp (unclench the teeth), and feel the warmth and heaviness go out of your body.

Use the QUIETING RESPONSE at the "scene of stress," as in driving on the Beltway behind a car that's going 20 miles an hour with bumper-to-bumper lanes on either side of you.

Think of yourself as a car, with your brain shifting the body into the appropriate gear to achieve homeostasis, or natural balance.

* Sandy Rovner, Washington Post, 5/9/80.
Dr. Charles Stroebe, Director, Hartford Institute of Living.