



THE 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

This strategy is suggested in the 11-14 lessons: **Managing worry** and **My changing brain**

About the strategy

The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique is a sensory coping strategy that can help manage acute anxiety, panic and overwhelming emotions. During moments of stress, the mind can become consumed by racing thoughts and bodily anxiety signals. This technique brings focus back to the present moment by engaging all five senses in a deliberate, structured sequence:

- **5 things you can see:** Notice visual details in your surroundings (e.g. shapes, patterns, or colours).
- **4 things you can touch:** Focus on physical textures (e.g. your clothing, a smooth table, or your feet on the floor).
- **3 things you can hear:** Listen for subtle background sounds (e.g. distant traffic, a clock, or breathing).
- **2 things you can smell:** Detect scents around you (e.g. fresh air, coffee, soap, or clothes).
- **1 thing you can taste:** Focus on a current taste in your mouth (e.g. mint, water, or a recent drink). NB some versions use 'Name 1 emotion you are feeling'.

The scientific evidence behind the strategy

While the 5-4-3-2-1 technique is one of the most widely recommended tools in clinical settings, its empirical evidence base primarily stems from its classification as a brief mindfulness intervention, rather than isolated clinical trials evaluating just this technique:

As part of the [Wellcome Trust's Active Ingredients Commission](#), this study conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of relaxation techniques (RTs) to reduce the symptoms of distress, anxiety and depression in young people, aged 14 to 24 years old, globally. It found that RTs were highly effective in treating anxiety and moderately effective in reducing distress:

- Hamdani, S.U. et al. (2022). *Effectiveness of relaxation techniques 'as an active ingredient of psychological interventions' to reduce distress, anxiety and depression in adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis*. International Journal of Mental Health Systems: 16, 31.

Further reading

This page explores the neuroscientific foundations of mindfulness for young people: detailing how present-moment awareness and attention practices positively shape developing brain networks to enhance emotional regulation, focus, and executive function.

<https://missionprephealthcare.com/mental-health-resources/self-help/grounding-techniques/>