

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise

When your body is already activated — use your senses to come back to now.

Say each answer out loud if you can. Naming pulls sensory processing online and interrupts the amygdala's threat loop.

// BEFORE YOU START

Distress level right now:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5

THINGS I CAN SEE

Look around the room. Name what's actually there, not what should be.

4

THINGS I CAN PHYSICALLY FEEL

Touch something—your chair, your feet on the floor, the fabric of your sleeve.

3

THINGS I CAN HEAR

Still yourself. Listen past the obvious. Background sounds count.

2

THINGS I CAN SMELL

Breathe slowly. Even faint or neutral scents count.

1

THING I CAN TASTE

Notice any lingering taste, or take a sip of water.

// AFTER YOU FINISH

Distress level now:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What shifted, if anything? It's okay if the answer is "not a damn thing." That matters too.

If a technique spikes your anxiety or feels destabilising, stop. Go simpler: name 5 objects in the room, feel both feet on the floor.

My Regulation Toolkit

What actually works for you. Write it down. Come back to it when you can't think clearly.

"I know what helps me" evaporates under stress. Naming it here makes it real — and findable when you need it most.

PEOPLE

Who feels calm and safe to be around?

Who can you call without needing to explain everything?

PLACES

Where does your body soften?

Where do you feel least watched or judged?

THINGS

Objects, textures, scents, sounds, blankets...

Anything that reliably shifts your state.

PRACTICES

Breathing patterns, movement, grounding techniques...

What have you actually done that worked?

// WHEN EVERYTHING FAILS — MY ONE GO-TO

The single thing that has never not helped, even a little:

I will keep this somewhere I can find it. My nervous system doesn't need inspiration — it needs a list.