5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

NEW YORK STATE | Office of Mental Health

New York State Trauma-Informed Network & Resource Center

ABOUT THIS TOOL

Audience
Therapists, clinicians, counselors, case managers, peers, aides, support staff, administrators

Description
This is a short grounding exercise brings your attention back to the present moment by using your senses. You slowly notice things you can see, feel, hear, smell, and then take one slow breath. This can help your nervous system settle when stressed.

This Tool May Help When
This reset fits naturally into moments that already exist in your shift.

- After intense or a challenging situation or interaction
- After a difficult client interaction
- During a busy workday
- Any time you need a quick reset to feel focused and calm

WORKPLACE STRESS

Supporting people through crisis and emotional pain is important work, and it comes with a real emotional cost. Behavioral health staff often carry the weight of others' experiences, which can affect their own mood, focus, and energy over a shift. Brief reset tools give you a practical way to check in with yourself and recharge without stepping away for long. Caring for your own well-being is not a luxury, it is what allows you to continue providing compassionate, quality care.

WHY THIS WORKS

Grounding exercises help calm your nervous system and bring your attention back to the present moment. This can help your body relax and your mind feel steadier and in control.

Resources:
Find additional wellness information on the NYS Trauma Informed Network and Resource Center at traumainformedny.org

Looking to go deeper?

Explore BREATH-BODY-MIND™ (BBM) for weekly breathwork practice, expert tips, and a welcoming community.
Check out the website here for additional details.

Source: Calm.com

THE PRACTICE

Notice and silently name:

- Five things you can see
- Four things you can (physically) feel
- Three things you can hear
- Two things you can smell
- Take one slow, deep breath

WHY THIS HELPS

Strong emotions and stress can activate your body's fight-or-flight response, which can cloud judgment and make it harder to focus, a real safety concern when returning to physical or high-responsibility work. Moving attention through each sense one at a time pulls your mind out of the stress spiral and back into the present moment, giving your nervous system a concrete path to settle down. By the time you take that final slow breath, heart rate has begun to drop and mental clarity has returned, so you can go back to work grounded and focused.