

## 5-4-3-2-1 Relieving Anxiety

These certainly are anxiety ridden times. People have lost their jobs and thus their income. People have lost their businesses. Children are behind in their schoolwork, and very much missing their devices, when they must get caught up on their schoolwork. The threat of losing their devices for connecting to their friends and playing video games is the biggest motivator parents have. And use it they must. Some people are fortunate enough to be able to work from home, but their children are at home also, so, the parents are stressed out and not able to work as completely or as efficiently as they ordinarily would.

And I haven't even mentioned the anxiety over getting this disease, or the anxiety over whether or not people should wear a mask, or is it okay to open a package that was purchased online, for fear that deadly germs are on that cardboard box.

I find myself worrying about the children. I particularly worry about the children with special needs who really need extra help in the school setting. I worry about children who do not have the most capable parents and school was the safest part of their day.

When the worry gets to be too much, I find that the simple 5-4-3-2-1 coping mechanism is a big help. This technique quickly brings you to the moment. We hear the phrase “being in the moment” when learning about mindfulness. The significance is we rarely are in the moment. Instead, most of our time is thinking about the past which is already gone and worrying about the future which has not even happened yet. Techniques that help us to be in the moment allow us to get rid of, at least for a while, worries about the past and worries about the future.

Before describing this easy technique, I will add that it is always helpful to employ deep breathing. It calms the body, lowers the blood pressure and creates real changes in brain activity. So, take a couple minutes to sit comfortably and slowly breathe in and slowly breathe out. You might find it helpful to count. And you might notice that your breaths get longer and slower as you practice this. You also might notice that, as you relax, your exhalations become about twice as long as your inhalations and that is a good thing.

Here is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique:

**5:** Name **FIVE** things you see around you. Anything. It could be the rug, a pillow, a book, a plant. Any five things in your environment. I think it helps to say them out loud, but you don't have to. You also might find it helpful to point at your fingers as you notice those five things.

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

**4.** Name **FOUR** things you can feel or touch. It might be the shirt you are wearing, or your hair. or the pen on your desk. If you are outdoors might be the breeze on your skin.

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

**3:** Name **THREE** things you hear. This could be any sound. Even when indoors you might hear the birds singing outside. You might hear the clock ticking or the heat coming on.

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

**2:** Name **TWO** things you can smell. Tap your index finger as you notice the first scent. Is it the smell of coffee? Is it the smell of soap?

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

**1:** Name **ONE** thing you can taste. Just one thing. Toothpaste? Tea?

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

This exercise did not take long did it? I hope you enjoyed it and if so, please pass it along to others. This technique is so simple it can even be taught to children. And they can learn to apply it themselves. I find it way better than the age-old technique of counting to 10. That technique was for achieving some self-control when feeling impatient or impulsive. And while there might be some similarities and overlap, this 5-4-3-2-1 technique is for relaxation, being in the moment and achieving mindfulness. It brings about a sense of appreciation and is a brief getaway from all those past and future worries.

And if you forget which sense is being acknowledged for these numbers, no worries about that either. That has happened to me lots of times and I still go through seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, in one order or another, allowing me to be in the moment.

Help:

For people needing assistance with unemployment due to COVID-19

<https://www.mass.gov/lists/unemployment-and-covid-19>

For assistance with maintaining emotional health and well-being

<https://www.mass.gov/resource/maintaining-emotional-health-well-being-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>

It is nice to know that you can talk to somebody at any time, day or night by simply dialing 2-1-1.

*Cathleen Drinan is the Health Agent for the Halifax Board of Health. She can be reached at 781 293 6768 or at [cathleen.drinan@halifax-ma.org](mailto:cathleen.drinan@halifax-ma.org)*