



# 5 Grounding Techniques for Anxious Moments

A gentle guide from Natalie Ellis, DSW, LCSW-QS

"When anxiety rises, grounding brings you back to the present — to your breath, your body, and this moment. These techniques are simple, effective, and always available to you."

## Technique 1 — The 5-4-3-2-1 Senses Method

This classic grounding exercise anchors your awareness in the physical world by engaging all five senses. It is especially helpful during moments of acute anxiety or panic.

5	THINGS YOU CAN SEE	Look around and name five things in your environment — a plant, a shadow, a color.
4	THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH	Feel the texture of your clothes, the coolness of a surface, the weight of your hands.
3	THINGS YOU CAN HEAR	Notice sounds near and far — a fan, birds, your own breathing.
2	THINGS YOU CAN SMELL	Breathe in gently. Notice any scent — coffee, fresh air, fabric.
1	THING YOU CAN TASTE	Notice any taste in your mouth, or take a slow sip of water.

## Technique 2 — Box Breathing (4-4-4-4)

Box breathing activates your parasympathetic nervous system — the "rest and digest" response — helping to slow your heart rate and calm racing thoughts. Used by therapists, athletes, and first responders alike.

<b>INHALE</b>	<b>4 counts</b>	Breathe in slowly through your nose, feeling your belly expand.
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<b>HOLD</b>	<b>4 counts</b>	Pause gently at the top of your breath. Relax your shoulders.
<b>EXHALE</b>	<b>4 counts</b>	Release slowly through your mouth, letting tension leave with the breath.
<b>HOLD</b>	<b>4 counts</b>	Rest at the bottom of the exhale. Notice the stillness.

Repeat 3–4 cycles. Pause between rounds and notice how your body responds.

### Technique 3 — Cold Water Reset

Temperature is one of the fastest ways to interrupt the anxiety response. Cold water activates the dive reflex, which slows the heart rate and shifts your nervous system out of fight-or-flight.

<b>1</b>	Splash cold water on your face or run it over your wrists and inner arms.
<b>2</b>	Hold an ice cube in your palm and focus entirely on the sensation.
<b>3</b>	Take three slow breaths while the cold sensation holds your attention.
<b>4</b>	Notice how your heart rate begins to slow. Stay with the present moment.

### Technique 4 — Body Scan & Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Anxiety often lives in the body before we notice it in our thoughts. A brief body scan helps you identify and release physical tension, reconnecting you with a sense of safety in your own body.

<b>Jaw &amp; Face</b>	Clench your jaw gently for 5 seconds, then release. Let your face soften.
<b>Shoulders</b>	Raise your shoulders to your ears, hold for 5 seconds, then drop them completely.
<b>Hands &amp; Arms</b>	Make tight fists, hold for 5 seconds, then open your hands wide and let go.



<b>Belly</b>	Take a deep breath and hold it for 3 seconds, then exhale fully and let your belly relax.
<b>Legs &amp; Feet</b>	Press your feet into the floor, hold for 5 seconds, then release. Feel the ground beneath you.

## Technique 5 — Affirmation Anchoring

Words have the power to shift our nervous system. A short, truthful affirmation — spoken aloud or silently — can interrupt anxious thought spirals and return you to a place of steadiness and self-compassion.

	I am safe in this moment.
	This feeling is temporary. It will pass.
	I have navigated hard moments before.
	My body knows how to find calm.
	I am allowed to take up space and breathe.
	I am doing the best I can, and that is enough.

Remember: grounding techniques are tools, not cures. If anxiety is significantly affecting your daily life, relationships, or well-being, reaching out to a licensed therapist is a courageous and meaningful step. **Natalie Ellis, DSW, LCSW-QS** is currently accepting new clients in Florida and Pennsylvania. Schedule a consultation at [sagesoltherapy.com](https://sagesoltherapy.com)