

**USE WITH:**

Individual students, small group, or whole class

**GRADE LEVEL:**

Upper elementary, middle school, or high school

**CONTEXT:**

Remote friendly

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Focus With the 5-4-3-2-1 Method

Help students calm their minds and bring their focus to the present moment.

Created by [Understood](#)

Description:

Students will learn how to use the 5-4-3-2-1 method to focus on the present and calm their minds. Students can increase self-regulation when they have skills to self-soothe in the face of strong emotions or other challenging moments.

Prep time needed:

5 minutes

Est. time to complete:

10 minutes

Steps:

1. Start with a brief discussion about self-regulation. Explain that having strategies to calm down when faced with strong emotions can help them to navigate these situations. Share one thing you do when faced with stress, such as taking deep breaths or going for a short walk. Ask students to share what strategies they've tried. Write their ideas on the board or somewhere visible to all.
2. Give each student a copy of the [5-4-3-2-1 Mindfulness Method download](#). Explain that this is a good strategy to use when you're feeling strong emotions, when you are overwhelmed, or even if you are wanting to ease some anxiety. It can help you focus on what's around you rather than on racing thoughts or strong emotions. By taking in your surroundings, this practice helps send a signal to your body and mind that you are safe.

3. Lead students through the strategy. Start by asking students to keep their eyes open so they can focus on what's around them in the present moment. Then have students take a few deep breaths.
4. Read through the prompts, pausing between each one. Give examples for each prompt, like “Notice and name 5 things you see, big or small: the clock, the plant by the window, the pencil on the desk, your shoes, a backpack.” Students can name the objects in their heads, whisper to themselves, or jot down notes or drawings on a piece of paper.
5. Close the activity by inviting students to talk about the exercise with the whole class, small group, or with a partner. Ask students how it felt to use this strategy and when they might use it again in another setting.
6. Remind students that self-regulation or calming strategies take practice, and not all strategies work for all people. This strategy is one of many they can try. Suggest that they put a copy of the strategy in a prominent place, such as on their desk or wall at home, so they can try it again.

Tips for Educators:

- Make a poster version of the strategy for your classroom. You might display it in a designated calming space in your classroom, if you have one. When students, or your entire class, need to reset, point to the poster and suggest students do the activity. Take care to always use a supportive and calming (non-punitive) tone when prompting students to use the strategy.
- Remind students that mindfulness is practiced throughout the world, and doesn't belong to a singular tradition. Let them know that it may be hard to do the first couple of times, but that with practice, they will improve, and it will become easier.
- Prior experience with mindfulness is not required to use this practice.
- Research suggests that practicing mindfulness can help you to develop more positive relationships with your students and colleagues, potentially leading to a more positive school climate.
- This practice, like many others, can be done over and over again. Each time you do this practice you may have new experiences and insights.

Inspired by:

1. Black, D.S., & Fernando, R. (2014). Mindfulness training and classroom behavior among lower-income and ethnic minority elementary school children. *J Child Fam Stud*, 23, 1242–1246.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9784-4>

Related Materials:

5-4-3-2-1 Mindfulness Method

https://assets.ctfassets.net/p0qf7j048i0q/2FTUPrJmGAGECe8uMMhVTr/3f3a1a8e6d937fe682241ed854f64763/5-4-3-2-1_mindfulness_method_Understood.pdf