

Grounding & Somatic De-Escalation Toolkit

For Anxiety, Panic, Trauma Triggers, or Emotional Overload

Purpose: These tools help calm the nervous system, reduce physiological arousal, and restore a sense of control. They work best when practiced regularly, not only during crisis.

Tool	Best for	Why it works	How to do it / Steps
1. Diaphragmatic (Belly) Breathing	Panic, racing heart, chest tightness	Slow diaphragmatic breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system and reduces physiological arousal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One hand on chest, one on belly. • Inhale through nose for 4 seconds (belly rises). • Pause 1–2 seconds. • Exhale through mouth for 6 seconds. • Repeat 2–5 minutes. <p>Coaching cue: “Longer exhale than inhale.”</p>
2. 5–4–3–2–1 Sensory Grounding	Dissociation, overwhelm, intrusive thoughts	Redirects attention to present-moment sensory input (mindfulness-based attentional anchoring).	<p>Identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 things you see • 4 things you feel (touch) • 3 things you hear • 2 things you smell • 1 thing you taste <p>Move slowly. Describe details.</p>
3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)	Muscle tension, irritability, stress build-up	Alternating tension and release reduces somatic anxiety and improves awareness of stored tension.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clench fists 5 seconds → release 10 seconds. 2. Shrug shoulders 5 seconds → release. 3. Tighten jaw 5 seconds → release. 4. Press toes into floor 5 seconds → release. <p>Work through major muscle groups. Total time: 5–10 minutes.</p>
4. Box Breathing (Structured Regulation)	Anger, agitation, pre-conflict	Adds structure and predictability to breathing to support regulation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhale 4 seconds • Hold 4 seconds • Exhale 4 seconds • Hold 4 seconds <p>Repeat 8–10 cycles.</p>

<p>5. Temperature Reset</p>	<p>Acute anxiety, anger spikes, emotional flooding</p>	<p>Strong cold sensory input can interrupt escalating sympathetic activation and help reset the stress response.</p>	<p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold an ice cube. • Cool washcloth on back of neck. • Splash cool water on face or run cool water over wrists. • Step outside for fresh air. <p>Pair with slow breathing.</p>
<p>6. Orienting Statement (Cognitive Grounding)</p>	<p>Trauma triggers</p>	<p>Re-engages frontal cortex and present safety.</p>	<p>Say (out loud if possible):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is March 10, 2026.” • “I am in _____.” • “I am safe right now.” • “This feeling will pass.” <p>Repeat until distress drops by at least 2 points (0–10 scale).</p>
<p>7. Modified Sternal Pressure (Deep Pressure Grounding)</p>	<p>Intense overwhelm, dissociation, frustration</p>	<p>Deep pressure increases body awareness and can help shift attention back to the present moment.</p>	<p>Important: This is not a medical sternal rub (used to assess responsiveness). This is controlled, self-applied firm pressure for grounding.</p> <p>How:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place palm or knuckles over center of sternum. 2. Apply firm, steady pressure (not painful). 3. Pair with slow breathing. 4. Repeat: “I am here. I am safe. This will pass.” <p>Do not use to cause pain or injury. Stop if discomfort occurs.</p>
<p>8. Ground Through Movement</p>	<p>Restlessness, agitation</p>	<p>Gentle movement discharges stress activation and supports regulation.</p>	<p>Try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow walking while naming objects • Wall push (press palms firmly into wall for 10 seconds) • Seated forward fold stretch • Gentle stretching

Rapid De-Escalation Plan (Fill In)

My early warning signs:

Body sensations I notice first:

Top 2 tools that work for me:

1. _____
2. _____
3. **Distress rating before:** ____ /10
After: ____ /10

Support person (if needed):

Practice Plan

- Practice 1 skill daily (5 minutes)
 - Use before difficult conversations
 - Track what works best; Rate distress before and after (0–10)
 - Keep tools accessible (ice pack, frozen disposable water bottle, reminder card)
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Crisis Resources

When to Seek Higher Support: Escalate to emergency support or crisis services.

If distress escalates to:

- Loss of behavioral control
- Thoughts of harming self or someone else
- Severe dissociation or confusion
- Escalating panic with medical symptoms (chest pain, fainting, difficulty breathing)

Crisis Resources & Emergency Support

If you are in **immediate danger** or feel unable to keep yourself safe:

Call 911 (or your local emergency number)

or go to the nearest **Emergency Room**

United States – 24/7 Crisis Support

Resource	Contact	Notes
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline	Call or text 988 Chat: 988lifeline.org	Free, confidential, 24/7 support
Crisis Text Line	Text HOME to 741741	24/7 text-based support
Veterans Crisis Line	Call 988 , then press 1 Text 838255	For Veterans and those who support them

If Outside the U.S.

Visit: www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres (International directory of crisis lines)

Personal Crisis Plan

My emergency contact:

Trusted person I can call:

Local crisis center / urgent care:

Reaching out during crisis is a **strength**, not a failure.
You deserve support.