



## For Acute Emotional Distress: ABC123 tool

- This memory aid and tool provides techniques to reduce symptoms of acute anxiety and other emotional distress
- These individual techniques can be used *sequentially or in any order or combination* depending on the situation
- Medical and non-medical personnel are encouraged to become familiar with using these techniques to help with their own stress and to be able to teach others how and when to use the techniques appropriately
- These tools do not replace the need for specialized mental health care in cases where there is prolonged or severe distress. Contact mental health crisis team or mental health services if concerned

<b>A</b>	<b>Awareness</b>	Notice your body, hands, legs, feet. Orient to self, place, date, time
<b>B</b>	<b>Breathe</b>	Take 3 long slow comfortable breaths with prolonged exhale
<b>C</b>	<b>Count</b>	3 things you can see, hear, feel, smell, taste
<b>1</b>	<b>ONE THING</b>	What is the 1 next thing for you to do right now?
<b>2</b>	<b>TWO STRENGTHS</b>	What are 2 strengths you can draw on? (internal and external resources)
<b>3</b>	<b>THREE THANKS</b>	What are 3 things you are grateful for? (large or small)



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<b>A</b>	Awareness	<p><b>This brings your attention to the present and helps you become oriented.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Look at and notice your hands, your arms, your legs, your feet on the ground.</li> <li>2. What is your full name? Say it out loud if appropriate.</li> <li>3. Where are you right now? Be specific at first e.g. “in this chair”, then “in the ___ hospital”, in “(city)” etc.</li> <li>4. What day is it? What time is it?</li> </ol>
<b>B</b>	Breathe	<p><b>Breathing helps to calm the nervous system, focus your attention and reduce panic. STOP if you feel lightheaded.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Breathe in for 5 seconds, then breathe out for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times OR,</li> <li>2. Try box breathing to reduce panic: Trace the shape of a box with your finger as you breath in for 4, hold in for 4, breathe out for 4, hold out for 4 OR,</li> <li>3. Slightly prolonging the exhale can help slow a rapid heart rate. Try:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Breathe in for 4, out for 6</li> <li>b. 4-7-8 Breathing: Breathe in for 4, hold for 7, purse lips and breathe out forcefully for 8</li> <li>c. When exhaling, let out a sigh or the sound “mmm”</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<b>C</b>	Count	<p><b>Noticing and naming makes you more mindful and aware of your surroundings and experience. Pause a moment and notice any details.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name 3 things you can see. List them out loud if appropriate. Notice one or two details of each.</li> <li>2. Name 3 things you can hear (e.g. close by, farther away, and from each ear).</li> <li>3. Name 3 things you can feel (e.g. your feet on the floor, air on your face, clothing on your skin).</li> <li>4. Name one thing you can smell and/or taste (e.g. gum, a mint)</li> </ol>
<b>1</b>	ONE THING	<p><b>Focus on what must be done or could be done right now to regain a sense of healthy control and agency.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be practical. What is the next thing for you to do <b>right now</b>?</li> <li>2. Common examples are self care (I need to eat, sleep, shower), a task (I need to phone ___), or something meaningful (I need to give (name) my full attention).</li> </ol>
<b>2</b>	TWO STRENGTHS	<p><b>Reminds you of your strengths, qualities, abilities and helps you feel capable</b></p> <p>Choose 2 strengths:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are my strengths? What do other people tell me I’m good at?</li> <li>2. Who could help me right now? (E.g. friend, family, colleague, etc.)</li> <li>3. What things in my environment are here to help me? (E.g. books, phone, internet, vehicle)</li> <li>4. What have I learned from past experience that could help me now?</li> </ol>
<b>3</b>	THREE THANKS	<p><b>Thinking about what you are grateful for shifts and broadens your attention, promotes positive feelings and can make you feel more connected.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What am I thankful for today?</li> <li>2. Who am I thankful for right now, in my life, in my past?</li> <li>3. What simple things do I enjoy and appreciate? (E.g. warm drink, sunset, bath, music)</li> <li>4. Consider being grateful to yourself for doing this calming practice.</li> </ol>

**Helpful tip:** Obtain simple verbal consent before initiating ABC123 skills. E.g. “Would you like to try some techniques to help you feel a little calmer?” or “There is a technique to help with your breathing, would you like to try it?”