



STEFFEN  
COUNSELING SERVICES

# When Anxiety Feels Overwhelming

A practical handout for getting through moments when anxiety feels intense.

**Start here:** You do not have to solve everything right now. When anxiety is high, focus on the next few minutes and the next manageable step.

## 1. Slow Your Breathing

Take a few slow, comfortable breaths. Let your exhale be a little longer than your inhale if that feels comfortable. Don't force deep breaths—gentle and steady is enough.

## 2. Ground Yourself in the Present

Notice what you can see, hear, and physically feel around you. You might place both feet on the floor and notice the support beneath you, or name a few things you see in the room.

## 3. Name What Is Happening

Try describing the experience without judging yourself: "I'm feeling very anxious right now. I can take this one step at a time." Naming what you're experiencing can help you step out of the spiral for a moment.

## 4. Focus on One Small Next Step

Ask yourself: "What is one small thing I can do in the next five minutes?" You might get a glass of water, sit somewhere quieter, step outside, or take care of one simple task.

## 5. Reduce Things That May Intensify Anxiety

When possible, step away from excessive caffeine, alcohol, or other factors you know can make your anxiety worse. Basic needs such as food, water, rest, and gentle movement may also help support your nervous system.

## 6. Reach Out to Someone You Trust

You don't have to explain everything perfectly. Try a simple message such as: "I'm having a really anxious moment. Could you stay on the phone with me for a few minutes?"

## 7. Consider Professional Support

If anxiety regularly feels overwhelming or interferes with sleep, relationships, work, school, or everyday activities, consider talking with a qualified mental health professional. Therapy can help you understand patterns of anxiety and develop coping strategies tailored to your needs.

## A Quick Grounding Reminder

- **Pause.** Breathe gently.
- **Notice** what is happening right now.
- **Name** what you're feeling.
- **Choose** one small next step.

*You don't have to figure everything out at once.*

## When to Seek Immediate Help

If anxiety is accompanied by thoughts of suicide, self-harm, or harming someone else, seek immediate help. In the United States, call or text **988** to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency department.