

# Sensory Orientation Technique

Created in collaboration with Licensed Professional Counselor [Katie Fleming Thomas, MS, LPC](#)



[Nervous System Regulation & Somatic Tools](#)

**Orientation** is the process your nervous system uses to gather information from your surroundings through your senses. It helps you assess safety and supports a sense of calm and stability in your body. For example, a deer in a field looks around, listens, and smells the air to stay safe and settled. Humans do this too, naturally taking in cues from the environment as part of how we feel secure and grounded.

Often, we're very good at orienting to what makes us feel unsafe: scanning for threats, dangers, or problems. But our nervous system also has the ability to settle by using our five senses to find what supports us.

Somatic work is a therapeutic approach that emphasizes body awareness as an important part of emotional well-being.

## Beyond the 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique is the most common orienting exercise.



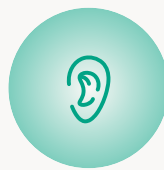
5

things you  
can see



4

things you  
can touch



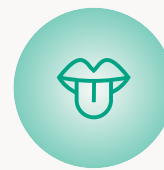
3

things you  
can hear



2

things you  
can smell



1

thing you  
can taste

This exercise engages your senses and helps bring your attention back to the present moment, which can be very helpful for settling anxiety or overwhelm.

In somatic work, however, orienting goes even deeper, focusing on how each sensory cue affects your body's sense of safety and ease. Most importantly, you notice: Where and what do I feel this in my body? How do I know this helps me settle? Everyone's orientation system is different. Some people settle best through visual cues, others through touch, sound, or movement. This might even change depending on the day, your energy, or what's happening in your life.

## Your Five Orientation Systems



### Visual Orientation

- Soft gazing at nature, sky, or horizon
- Looking at colors that feel soothing
- Noticing light, shadows, or movement

Body check: Does your breathing slow? Do your eyes feel more relaxed?



### Auditory Orientation

- Listening to calming sounds (birds, water, music)
- Noticing the quality of silence
- Your own humming or sighing

Body check: Does tension release around your jaw? Do some sounds feel more pleasant than others?



### Tactile Orientation

- Feeling different textures (soft fabric, smooth stone, tree bark)
- Temperature changes (warm sun, cool breeze)
- Self-touch (hands on heart, gentle self-massage)

Body check: Does your skin feel more alive? Do you notice warmth or softening?



### Movement Orientation

- Gentle swaying, stretching, or walking
- Feeling your feet on the ground
- Rolling your shoulders or moving your spine

Body check: Does your body feel more connected? Do you notice more flow or ease?



### Smell/Taste Orientation

- Pleasant scents (flowers, herbs, familiar comfort smells)
- Tastes that feel nourishing or grounding
- Even the taste of fresh air

Body check: Is there a warming or cooling sensation? Does something soften or expand?

**Remember:**

The key is not just engaging your senses, but noticing how your body responds. Does something soften? Open? Settle? Get curious about the physical sensations that let you know “yes, this helps me feel more grounded.”

**Take-Home Message**

Your orientation system is your built-in anchor to the present moment and to safety. By learning what specifically helps your nervous system settle - and how you recognize that settling in your body- you're building a personalized toolkit for regulation that's always available to you.

Start with curiosity: Which sense feels most supportive today? How does your body let you know when you've found something that helps you orient to safety?

 **Reflection Questions**

1. Which of the five orientation systems feels most natural or accessible to you right now?

---



---



---

2. Think of a time when you felt truly settled and grounded. What do you remember about what your senses were taking in during that moment?

---



---



---

3. How does your body specifically signal to you that you're feeling more oriented and safe? (What sensations specifically let you know you're settling?)

---



---



---

**Further Worksheets on Somatics by Katie Fleming Thomas, MS, LPC:**

- [Stress Vortex and Resource Vortex](#)
- [Somatics 101: Learning Your Body and Nervous System](#)
- [Understanding Your Nervous System Regulators](#)
- [Window of Tolerance: Nervous System Zones](#)
- [Recognize and Regulate Your Activation Responses](#)