

5-Point Scales: Strategies for Self-Regulation

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| WHAT IS A 5-POINT SCALE? | <p>A 5-Point scale is a visual support, which is an evidence-based practice for autistic students. Visual supports are defined as a “visual display that supports the learner in engaging in a desired behavior or skills independent of additional prompts” (Steinbrenner et al., 29). The 5-Point scale is designed to teach social and emotional competencies to autistic learners by categorizing behaviors into five different categories, ranging from most intense (5) to least intense (1) (Buron & Curtis, 2012).</p> |
| WHY DO WE USE THE 5-POINT SCALE? | <p>The 5-Point scale is beneficial for learners who have a history with black-and-white thinking and/or have difficulty with self-regulation. This strategy makes abstract concepts concrete and can remove stigma around behaviors by categorizing their intensity level as opposed to framing them as “good” and “bad” (Buron, 2009).</p> <p>This also helps with differentiating levels of behaviors in a way that doesn’t restrict it as “all-or-nothing.” For example, talking at a level 5 volume may be considered disruptive, but that doesn’t mean the student should not talk at all. Instead, they can lower their volume to a level 3 or lower so that they are accomplishing their goal without being disruptive to others.</p> |
| WHAT TOPICS CAN BE ADDRESSED WITH THE 5-POINT SCALE? | <p>The 5-Point scale can be applied to a wide variety of topics, including, but not limited to:</p> <p>personal space, volume, walking speed, fairness, emotions, asking for help, anxiety, anger, sadness, distractions, self-advocacy, energy levels, interacting with others, completing academic tasks, perspective taking, competition, following class rules, problem solving, identifying friends, handling change, and many more (Buron, 2009).</p> |

HOW TO USE THE 5-POINT SCALE

- ❑ Before you implement a 5-Point scale strategy, it's important to do preparation ahead of time. The first step is to determine what is the situation your student is struggling with. Next, identify the skill or concept that must be taught to help them with that situation.

For example, if your student is struggling with noise level, you can teach situational awareness by identifying what volume is appropriate for different scenarios.

- ❑ Break the concept down into five parts, with 1 being the smallest/least intense and 5 being the biggest/most intense. Avoid stigmatizing labels such as "good" and "bad." **Include the student in this process as much as possible**, coming up with levels, situations, and solutions together!

Using our earlier example, noise level can be broken down into five levels: 1) no noise, 2) quiet/whispering, 3) indoor voice/baseline volume, 4) outdoor voice/louder volume, and 5) screaming/yelling.

- ❑ To supplement the 5-Point scale, use a social story or video model that relates to the skill being taught. This can help the student visualize and understand the different levels clearly. **It's important to review the scale with your student prior to when the difficult situation may occur.** This will help increase the likelihood of success by preparing the student ahead of time of expectations and strategies for self-regulation.

Using our earlier example, go over the 5-Point scale for noise level with the student at the beginning of class (or at a time before the student may typically have a loud volume, such as during lunch). A social story and/or a video may be created to show the student in what scenarios different volumes are acceptable and how to assess what level the current situation calls for.





- ❑ Once the scale has been created and discussed with the student, create a visual representation of the scale so that it is portable and/or easily accessible. This visual can be referred to during the difficult situation to help them implement their self-regulation strategies. The visual can also be created so that the student always has personal access (e.g., a pocket-sized scale they can keep) to increase independence.

| 5-Point Scale (Blank with Feelings) | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| | Feels Like | What I can do |
| 5 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 1 | | |

Adapted from Burns & Curtis, 2003

| 5-Point Scale (On the Job) | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| | How I Feel | I Can Try To |
| 5 | Over the Edge | I'm ready to quit!! I could lose my job at this point so I need to calm my "Hot" head and ask for assistance. |
| 4 | Closer to breaking point | I can feel myself starting to lose control, I can leave and take a walk. |
| 3 | Ruining | I am feeling overwhelmed and having difficulty concentrating, I can ask my boss for a break. |
| 2 | Unruly | I know something is not right, I can Self-Talk (Use Calm) and do deep breathing. |
| 1 | Awesome | I feel good and confident with doing my assigned tasks. |

Adapted from Burns & Curtis, 2003

| 5-Point Scale (Doing Math Assignments) | | | |
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| | Feels Like | Looks Like | I Can |
| 5 | Word problems really upset me! Makes me feel like a stupid idiot! |  | Let an adult know I am at a 5 and need to take a break and calm. |
| 4 | Long division problems make me angry like a bear makes protecting itself! |  | Go to my break area Take 5 deep breaths. |
| 3 | Subtraction problems make me mad to my classmates must be a specific grapher error. |  | Expects my stress ball Get a drink. |
| 2 | Multiplication problems make me feel like I'm on fire like a ring burner. |  | Stand and Stretch |
| 1 | Addition problems make me feel like a great warrior. Calm and proud. |  | I can relax and have a great day! |

Adapted from Burns & Curtis, 2003

| 5-Point Scale (Anxiety) | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| | Feels Like | What I can do |
| 5 | I'm going to black out!! I'm beginning and banging my head! | I can leave the room with permission and go to home base. |
| 4 | My stomach is starting to hurt and I'm having difficulty concentrating. | I can ask to talk privately to an adult, I can listen to my iPod with calming music (headphones). |
| 3 | I'm feeling uneasy and I'm starting to sweat. | I can refer to my coping cards and use deep breathing. |
| 2 | I feel ok, I can handle the situation. | Self-talk and reassure myself that I can do it! |
| 1 | I feel great, No problem! | Smile and relax! |

Adapted from Burns & Curtis, 2003

EXAMPLE 5-POINT SCALE(S) AND RESOURCES

- ❑ Although the 5-Point scale can be individualized for any student and any behavior, here are the general guidelines for the numbers on the scale and what they mean:
 1. Appropriate, positive and/or neutral behaviors
 2. Reasonable behaviors that are no longer neutral but do not have a negative impact on others
 3. Atypical behavior that may make others feel uncomfortable or nervous
 4. Alarming behavior that compromises the emotional safety and wellbeing of others
 5. Dangerous behavior that threatens the physical safety and wellbeing of others
- ❑ A blank 5-Point Scale is available [here](#) for customization. This includes empty spaces where you and the learner can identify: 1) what each level feels like and 2) different strategies that can be implemented for each level. If you would also like to include visuals and/or descriptions of what every level looks like, a different template is available [here](#). This is a great way to incorporate your student's interests into this strategy, thereby encouraging them to be more involved and can help them understand better.
- ❑ Here are different examples you may access as it refers to different scenarios related to work, academics, and social and personal competencies.
 - » [5-Point Scale for Handling Work](#)
 - » [5-Point Scale for Completing Math Problems](#)
 - » [5-Point Scale for Anxiety](#)
 - » [Blank 5-Point Scale \(Feels Like + Strategies\)](#)
 - » [Blank 5-Point Scale \(Feels Like + Looks Like + Strategies\)](#)

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| <p style="text-align: center;">TRIAD RESOURCES</p> | <p>TRIAD is a proud member of the Tennessee Technical Assistance Network (TN-TAN) through the Tennessee Department of Education. Through this network, we provide interactive training and consultation for administrators, teachers, paraeducators, school psychologists, and other professionals serving Tennessee students, including autistic students, in K-12 school settings. Learn more at Triad.vumc.org/schools.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">REFERENCES</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Steinbrenner, J. R., Hume, K., Odom, S. L., Morin, K. L., Nowell, S. W., Tomaszewski, B., Szendrey, S., McIntyre, N. S., Yücesoy-Özkan, S., & Savage, M. N. (2020). <i>Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with Autism</i>. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice Review Team. ❑ Buron, K. D. (2009). <i>A 5 is against the law! Social boundaries: Straight up! An honest guide for teens and young adults</i>. AAPC Publishing. ❑ Buron, K. D., & Curtis, M. (2012). <i>The incredible 5-point scale</i>. AAPC Publishing. ❑ Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (n.d.). <i>Autism Center Grab and Go Resource Gallery of Interventions Incredible 5-Point Scale</i>. OCALI. https://www.ocali.org/project/resource_gallery_of_interventions/page/5_point_scaleold |