

Staying Steady Under Pressure

When you're worried about someone you love — or stretched thin yourself — thinking clearly gets harder exactly when it matters most. Five brief, evidence-based ways to steady yourself.

None of these fix the problem. They do something more useful first: they settle your body and mind enough to see the problem clearly.

1 • Lengthen the out-breath

Breathe in through your nose, then out slowly for longer than you breathed in — repeat for a minute. A longer exhale activates the body's calming system. It's the fastest reliable way to lower physical stress.

2 • Ground in the room (5-4-3-2-1)

Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste. This pulls attention out of spiralling thoughts and back into the present, where decisions get made.

3 • Name the feeling

Silently label what's happening: "this is fear", "this is frustration". Research on affect labelling shows that naming an emotion measurably reduces its intensity. You're not indulging the feeling — you're filing it.

4 • Give worry an appointment

Choose a daily 15-minute "worry window". When worries intrude outside it, jot a word down and return to them at the set time. Worry shrinks when it's contained; it grows when it's on call 24 hours a day.

5 • Ask: what would I tell a friend?

Under stress we speak to ourselves more harshly than we'd ever speak to someone we love. Answering as you would for a good friend restores perspective — and usually reveals the sensible next step.

When steadiness isn't enough: if pressure has felt unmanageable for weeks, or it's affecting sleep, work or family life, that's not weakness — it's a signal worth taking seriously, with proper support.

Ready to talk it through? Begin with a First Step Consultation — 90 minutes with Dr Millward, and a written formulation that explains what is going on and exactly what she recommends. → drclairemillward.com

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