






What is the Incredible 5-Point Scale?

The Incredible 5-point scale was developed by Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis. Scales are essentially a tool for emotional self-regulation and understanding, developing a child's awareness of escalating levels of emotion and strategies to help them manage these feelings.

Who is it for?

It is particularly successful for autistic children, who have some understanding of their emotions but who may struggle to control them. It can be useful for children with other additional needs/conditions, or simply for those children who present with 'a very short fuse'.

For younger children, or those working at earlier developmental levels, it can be simplified to a 3-Point Scale.

	Looks like	Feels like	I can try to
5		I feel angry, it feels like my eyeballs are going to pop out.	I will try to walk away to an adult.
4		I feel like saying something I don't want to say.	I need some space. Tell an adult how I am feeling.
3		I have butterflies in my stomach.	Tell an adult I am getting angry. Please don't talk to me.
2		I might bite my nails.	I can try to ask for help.
1		I am smiling.	I feel like a king. Keep smiling.

How to create a 5-point scale?

Before beginning a 5-point scale It may be difficult for the child to express how they feel. Some initial work on emotion vocabulary may be required first i.e. looking at facial expressions/body language to teach the child that feelings can be expressed non-verbally.

It is helpful to use some pre-written social situations to help the child to think about how different environments or actions make them feel and where they might be place them on a scale of 1-5. It is also good practice for adults to label emotions as and when they occur when with the child.

3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breathe deeply Get a drink
2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think of something nice Close my eyes Play with blue tack
1		Do nothing....everything is good

The following breakdown for each level on the scale can be used as a guide:

1. I am happy, I can handle this.

2. This might make me feel uncomfortable or confused.

3. This could make me really nervous or upset.

4. This can make me mad.

5. This can make me lose control.

You may find that the child needs to experience the emotion to be able to describe the feeling. Therefore, it may be useful to use real life situations to complete the scale. After a negative experience, a discussion about how they felt and what they did/could do to calm down can be noted on the template.

Therefore, it can take a couple of weeks to complete a chart. It is usually easier to begin with number 1 and discuss how the child feels when happy. You can use words to describe or ask the child if they would like to draw a picture of what their face might look like for each number on their scale. The use of emotion symbols or a word chart of possible suggestions can be helpful. It is then useful to discuss how they can remain like this i.e. at number 1, keep smiling, stay focused etc. are useful.

It may be that the child escalates from number 1 to number 5. If this is the case, it will be easier to talk about and complete this section of the template next. Depending on the child, you can either move up the scale or move straight to number 3 and talk about how they feel when they may be beginning to lose control.

For the resource to be meaningful to the child it is important that, as much as possible, the information gathered comes from them. It may be difficult for the child to think of their own self-help strategies so you can suggest some that you know are available, or things that have calmed them in the past.

Once the chart is complete, it can be laminated or made more durable, or even made pocket-sized for older children.

How to use the 5-point scale?

All staff involved with the child should be aware of the child's five-point scale and encourage the child to refer to it when it becomes apparent that their level of emotion is rising. Initially, it is useful to observe the child and identify where they might be on their scale. It may be helpful to say, 'I think you are at number two. What strategies have you put at number 2 on your scale to help you stay calm?'

This will support the child to refer to the scale and become familiar with their emotions and what to do when they are feeling unsettled.

A template Five-Point Scale and Three-Point Scale are below.

FIVE-POINT SCALE

	Looks Like	Feels Like	I Can Try To
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			

THREE-POINT SCALE			
	Looks Like	Feels Like	I Can Try To
3			
2			
1			