

Grounding techniques



Introduction

Grounding is set of helpful strategies that can be utilized when we are feeling overwhelmed or in distress. Grounding helps to reorient the mind and body, bringing you back into the present moment where you can experience a current state of safety and move away from symptoms of distress. The distress and anxiety you are feeling may be a result of painful memories of a traumatic experience (included secondary traumatization) or simply an intense and challenging emotion. Grounding is an effective way for you to calm you down, regain a sense of control, and also improve your capacity to tolerate uncomfortable feelings.

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Note

Grounding is a short-term technique to manage discomfort and regain self-control in the here and now when feeling overwhelmed or anxious. It isn't a replacement for therapy which can help to address the underlying issues that may be causing the feelings of overwhelm and anxiety.



General Grounding Guidelines

The objective of grounding is to calm your thoughts and feelings by calming your body when you are experiencing distress. For example, imagine a stormy day where the clouds are thick and there is thunder. Our worries can feel like this. They can feel like thick clouds that surround us. Grounding helps the clouds to break up and the sun to shine through. We begin to feel calmer and the storm passes. Some general guidelines to follow for grounding include:



	Where	You can practice grounding anywhere
	When	Grounding can be done anytime you are triggered by a negative emotion. It can also be used as a general calming technique to bring you back to the present moment.
	How	Grounding can be done in a variety of ways but the key element is to shift attention to feeling your feet on the ground, feeling supported by the earth (or floor or a chair or mat where you are sitting). This reorients the mind and body to a current state of safety and away from symptoms of distress.










Grounding Techniques

Playing with the five senses

A simple way to practice grounding is to involve your five senses.

	Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, find a space that is calm, and you can sit comfortably. • Take a few deep breaths and notice your breathing.
	What do you see	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next, look slowly around in the room that you are in and begin to notice what is around you. • What do you see? Notice the colors, the objects.







	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop for a moment and focus on something that looks interesting to you such as a spot in the ceiling, or an object that you choose. Name the object in your mind as you keep looking at it and describe to yourself the color, the luminosity, the texture of that object. Imagine you are a painter and you want to draw that object from memory, so keep looking at it and try to capture all its physical characteristics. • Move on to another object and repeat this exercise with five objects in the room.
	<p>Breathe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take another breath, slowly and deeply breathing in and focus on breathing out slowly and completely emptying the air on your lungs.
	<p>What do you hear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now, focus on the sounds that you hear. • Imagine you are a musician and want to reproduce those sounds later in a song. Notice if you recognize those sounds, explore how they sound, if they are sudden or constant, if they are in the background or more evident. • Notice the location of the sound, where does it come from? Notice the tone, volume, and the time in which they appear and disappear. • Hear the rhythm of the sounds, how they relate to each other, the sort of music that they have between them, and what spaces of silence they have between them. • Do this for three minutes, exploring all the sounds that come to you.
	<p>Breathe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take another breath, slowly and deeply breathing in and focus on breathing out slowly and completely emptying the air on your lungs.
	<p>What do you feel/touch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the sensations that you have. • Notice how your clothes feel in your body, if the fabric is soft or rough. If you are seated, feel the texture of your chair. Your skin is all around you, notice how the contact with your skin feels like in your feet, your legs, your hips, your trunk, your chest, your arms, your neck, and your head. • Notice the temperature in the room, if you feel cold or hot in general, if one part of your body is hotter or colder than the others. You can bring an object such as blanket or a stuffed animal or anything else such as a cup. Touch that objects and feel its texture, shape, temperature, humidity. • Do this for three minutes at least, exploring all the textures and temperatures of your surrounding or the object that you chose.
	<p>Breathe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take another breath, slowly and deeply breathing in and focus on breathing out slowly and completely emptying the air on your lungs.
	<p>What do you smell/taste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus now on the smell and taste. • Notice any distinctive smells surround you. Sometimes you can notice if a room is humid or dry with your sense of smell. • Notice if you can detect your own smell. Notice the taste in your mouth. Spend some time trying to detect smells and tastes, even if at first you don't. You can take something small to eat, such as a candy, a chewing gum or an herb (for instance, peppermint). • First, bring the item to your nose and smell it. Try to describe the smell. Then put it in your mouth, let it stay there without chewing it, play around with it with your tongue. Notice its texture, smell,

	<p>flavor, and taste in your mouth. You can chew it a little bit and see how it changes, if the taste intensifies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take your time on doing this, if it is gum, chew it slowly, if it is a candy let it dissolve in your mouth.
<p>Breathe</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finally, take a deep breath and release the air slowly. Notice how you feel after this exercise. Move your arms and your shoulders to release any tension, open and close your mouth to release any tension there as well.

You can also do this exercise while performing an activity. For example, if you are knitting, you can slow down the process and see how the yarn looks, sound, feels and smells. Take time to notice the movement you do with the needles and yarn and pay attention to as many details as possibly Take your time, do it slowly.

Connecting body and mind through breath

Another way of grounding is an exercise that connects your body and mind through breath. You can choose to either sit comfortably in chair for 20 minutes or stand or if you prefer.

	<p>Sit (or stand) with both feet firmly on the ground. Feel your feet make full contact with the floor, so you can feel the ground beneath you. Imagine that roots are growing from your feet into the ground making you feel strong and sturdy</p>
	<p>Adjust your posture so you are upright but comfortable. Feel your body being supported by the chair. Notice where your legs and back make contact with the chair.</p>
	<p>Gently relax your eyes and let them settle on a point in front of you on the ground.</p>
	<p>Breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth and take a few breaths and notice your breathing.</p>
	<p>Notice your inhale and then your exhale. Now for the next five breaths when you exhale, press your heels into the floor, feeling like your feet are taking root in the ground.</p>
	<p>Take a moment to fully relax as you feel the support of the ground and the chair.</p>

After you have completed the grounding, spend a few minutes reflecting on:

- How did you feel while doing this exercise?
- Did you notice an increased sense of support from the ground/earth? From the chair?
- Did you notice any changes in your body? Are you aware of a sense of stability and calmness in your body?
- Did you notice any changes in your thoughts?

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Note

At the beginning you may feel anxious doing this exercise, which is a normal reaction and usually with practice it becomes easier. If you feel anxious, take a deep breath, say to yourself that you are doing this to take care of yourself and continue the exercise.

Additional recommendations

- Grounding is a technique that is deepened through regular practice so make time to practice grounding as often as you can
- The duration of grounding can vary; however, it is suggested to practice for at least 20 minutes
- Try more than one technique until you find one that feels that it is the right fit for you
- Once you have acquired some experience you can create your own method
- It is recommended to start your grounding practice as soon as you feel a negative or a painful emotion
- You can practice alone, or you can involve a friend or a relative



References & Further Reading

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