

GROUNDING

Create personal calm

Instructions:

Review this handout. Then, answer the reflection question that follows.

What is Grounding?

Grounding is a set of simple strategies that can help you detach from emotional pain (e.g., anxiety, anger, sadness, self-harm). It is basically a way to distract yourself by focusing on something other than the difficult emotions you are experiencing. You may also think of grounding as centering, distracting, creating a safe place, or healthy detachment.

Although grounding does not solve the problem that is contributing to your unpleasant emotions, it does provide a temporary way to gain control over your feelings and prevent things from getting worse. Grounding anchors you, gives you a chance to calm down, and allows you to eventually return and address the problem that is triggering the unpleasant emotions to begin with. And grounding can be done anytime, anywhere, and no one has to know.

Ways of Grounding:

There are three types of grounding. You may find that one of these types works better for you, or that each is helpful.

1. Mental (focusing your mind)
2. Physical (focusing your senses)
3. Soothing (talking to yourself in a very kind way)

Mental Grounding:

1. **Describe your environment in detail**, using all of your senses – for example, “The walls are white, there are five blue chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere.
2. **Play a “categories” game with yourself**. Try to think of types of dogs, jazz musicians, animals or famous people that begin with each letter of the alphabet, cars, TV shows, writers, sports, songs, cities.
3. **Describe an everyday activity in great detail**. For example, describe a meal that you cook (e.g., “First, I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters; then I boil the water; then I make an herb marinade of oregano, basil, garlic, and olive oil...”).
4. **Imagine**. Use a pleasant or comforting mental image. Again, use all of your senses to make it as real and vivid as possible.
5. **Read something, saying each word to yourself**. Or read each letter backwards so that you focus on the letters and not the meaning of words.
6. **Use humor**. Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
7. **Count to 10 or say the alphabet**, very s . . . l . . . o . . . w . . . l . . . y.

Adapted from: *Seeking Safety* by Lisa M. Najavits (2002).

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Physical Grounding:

1. **Run cool or warm water over your hands.**
2. **Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can;** notice the sensations and the experience.
3. **Touch various objects around you:** a pen, your clothing, the table, the walls. Notice textures, colors, weight, temperature. Compare the objects you touch.
4. **Carry a grounding object in your pocket** – a small object (a small rock, ring, piece of cloth) that you can touch whenever you feel unpleasant emotions rising.
5. **Notice your body:** the weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair.
6. **Stretch.** Extend your fingers, arms, legs as far as you can; slowly and gently roll your head around.
7. **Clench and release your fists.**
8. **Jump up and down.**
9. **Eat something in a savoring way;** fully experience the food; describe the sights, aromas, textures, flavors, and the experience in detail to yourself.
10. **Focus on your breathing,** noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each exhale.

Soothing Grounding:

1. **Say kind statements,** as if you were talking to a friend or small child – for example, “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”
2. **Think of favorites.** Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
3. **Picture people you care about** and look at photographs of them.
4. **Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem** that makes you feel better (e.g., serenity prayer).
5. **Say a coping statement:** “I can handle this,” “This feeling will pass.”
6. **Plan a safe treat for yourself,** such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
7. **Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week** – perhaps time with a friend, going to a movie, or going on a hike.

TIPS:

- **Practice! Practice! Practice!** Like any other skill, grounding takes practice. So practice as often as possible and before you actually need it. Then, when you need to call upon this skill you will have it, know it, and use it well.
- **Try to notice which methods you like best** – physical, mental, or soothing grounding methods, or some combination.
- **Start grounding early on in a negative mood cycle.** Start before the anger, anxiety, or other feeling gets out of control.

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- **Create your own method of grounding.** Any method you make up may be worth much more than those you read here, because it is yours.
- **Make up an index card or type in your phone a list of your best grounding methods.** Have the list available so it is there when you need it.
- **Create an mp3 of a grounding message that you can play when needed.** Consider asking your counselor or someone close to you to record it if you want to hear someone else's voice.
- **Have others assist you in grounding.** Teach family and friends about grounding, so that they can help guide you with it if you become overwhelmed.
- **Don't give up!**

Now, list three of the strategies described above that you think will work best for you. Then practice these skills regularly, so in times of need you will know what to do and how to do it successfully.

3 grounding strategies I am committed to learning, practicing, and applying:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

After practicing and/or applying these grounding strategies, what have you noticed? Do you feel more in control? Do your emotions change? Are you able to calm yourself and focus on something other than the unpleasant emotions and situations?
