

GROUNDING

Grounding is a set of strategies or skills to detach from emotional pain. It works by initially distracting the brain and focusing outward on the external world rather than inward on the self. This is followed by centering in the present moment and stepping out of the past pain and future worry.

Guidelines

Practice both the first step (distracting) and the centering every day in a calm state, while you're shaving, showering, or doing something that's routine. This allows the brain to access the skill more easily when you're in distress, and also brings it back to the calm environment you were in when you learned it. This bears repeating – practice it often, even when you don't need it!!

Keep your eyes open, scan the area, and stay in touch with the present.

Stay neutral – avoid judgments of good and bad. For example, “that's a blue chair” – not “I don't like blue on furniture”

Focus on the present, not the past or the future

Start distracting immediately in a negative cycle of anxiety, depression, panic

First step:

Look around and describe your environment in detail using all your senses. For example “That's a wall covered in wallpaper, that's a chair with blue fabric pillow.” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and even temperature. You can do this anywhere, indoors or out, in the car, in a train, in a plane...

Next:

Choose one of the following mental or physical grounding strategies. If it resonates with you, stick with it for the practice and it will become natural to use it:

Mental strategies

- Play a categories game with yourself. For example, try to think of types of cats, people you know whose name starts with 'A', name states that have the letter 'e' in them, etc.
- Describe an everyday activity in great detail. For example, describe a meal you cook “first, I peel the potatoes, then cut them into quarters, then put them in the pot, turn on the stove...”
- Count – to 100, or by 3's, or 7's, or something that requires you to think about it.
- Say the alphabet forward and backward slowly
- Spell out objects you see around you.
- Spell out objects using the phonetic alphabet
- Think of favorites – animals, food, time of year, a tv show – and describe them in detail in your head.
- Recite the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem that makes you feel calm.
- Find a mantra that reminds you of what you're capable of, who you are, what you've survived. For example “This too shall pass.”

Physical strategies

- Run cool or warm water over your hands
- Clench your fists tightly then release them, or repeatedly grab onto your chair and let go
- Touch various objects around you, noticing textures, colors, weight, etc.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket- like a pebble, ring, special coin, piece of cloth – that you can touch whenever you need it
- Jump up and down, run in place, walk in place or anything physical
- Stretch – extend your fingers, arms, legs; roll your head around
- Walk very slowly, going nowhere, noticing each footstep and saying 'left' or 'right' with each step

What if it doesn't work?

Practice for a long time – 20 or 30 minutes – repeating each step over and over

Create your own strategy for grounding

Ask someone you trust to help you practice and remind you when to use it