

Grounding Techniques

WHAT IS GROUNDING? Grounding techniques are a set of simple strategies to detach yourself from emotional pain (for example: feelings of panic, self-harm impulses, anger/rage, and intense sadness). You can also think of grounding as “centering,” “finding a safe place,” or “healthy detachment.”

WHY DO GROUNDING? When you are overwhelmed with a significant emotion you need a way to detach so that you can gain some control over your feelings and stay safe. Grounding “anchors” you to the present and to reality and puts a healthy distance between you and your pain. Grounding does not stop you from feeling the emotion but it helps to decrease the intensity of the emotion so that you are able to more effectively cope with the situation that prompted the emotion.

GUIDELINES FOR GROUNDING TECHNIQUES:

- Grounding can be done at anytime, anywhere, and no one else has to know.
- You can use grounding when you are faced with intense painful memories, panic attacks, thoughts about self-harm, or any time your emotional pain is high.
- Rate your mood before and after trying a technique, to help you determine if it is working (rate your emotional pain on a scale of 0-10 with 10 being extreme pain). Try each technique several times. Don't say “it doesn't work” after just one try because it may take your mind/body a few tries to recognize what the technique is doing.
- Grounding is about taking a break from negative feelings, not getting in touch with them. This means no journaling or talking about negative feelings right now. You can journal or talk through the situation after you have calmed yourself.
- Stay neutral. No judgments of “good” and “bad.” For example: “The walls are blue, and I don't like blue. It makes me depressed.” Instead, leave it as “The walls are blue.”
- Focus on the present, not the past or the future.
- Grounding is NOT the same as relaxation training. Grounding is more active, focusing on distraction and intended to help reduce extreme feelings.

MENTAL GROUNDING (activate your brain by giving it something else to do):

- Describe your environment in detail using all of your senses. Describe objects, shapes, colors, textures, smells, numbers, sounds, and temperature. If you are around other people, you can do this silently in your head so that no one has to know.
- Play a “categories game” with yourself. Try to think of types of dogs, musicians, states that begin with “A,” cars, TV shows, European cities, etc.
- Describe an everyday activity in detail. Think of a hobby or something that you like to do and describe how to do it in as much detail as possible. For example, describe each step in making a meal that you like (first, I peel the potatoes and cut them in quarters, and then I put water in a pot and turn on the stove top. I put the pot on the burner until the water comes to a boil, etc).
- Imagine. Visualize. Think of yourself gliding away from your emotion on skates; Think of your painful situation as a TV show and mentally change the channel; Think of there being a wall between you and your pain.
- Say a safety statement. “I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. Today's date is ____ and I am located in ____.
- Count backwards from 100 or say the alphabet and do it very s...l...o...w...l...y.
- Repeat a favorite saying to yourself over and over (any quote or saying that is calming/reassuring to you).

PHYSICAL GROUNDING (you brain will focus on the physical sensations instead of the intense emotion):

- Run cool water over your hands.
- Use body sensations. Tap on your chest. Rub your legs. Hold ice in your hand. Lightly snap a rubber binder on your wrist.
- Grab the arms of your chair as tightly as you can and then slowly relax and let go.
- Touch objects around you: a pen, your clothing, a table, a wall. Notice textures, material, weight, temperature. Compare objects: Is one colder? More smooth?
- Dig your heels into the floor literally grounding them! Notice the tension in your heels as you do this, and remind yourself that you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket – a small object (a rock, a ring, a piece of cloth or yarn) that you can touch any time that you feel triggered.
- Jump up and down.
- Notice your body. Wiggle your toes in your socks, feel your back against the chair, etc. Remind yourself that you are connected to the world.
- Stretch. Extend your fingers, arms, and legs as far as you can. Roll your head in a circle.
- Walk slowly, noticing each footstep. Say “left” and “right” with each step.
- Eat something, describing the flavors to yourself in as much detail as you can.
- Focus on your breathing. Notice each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each inhale (example: a soothing word like “safe” or “easy” or a favorite color). Breathe in for 4 counts, out for 4 counts.

SOOTHING GROUNDING:

- Say kind statements. Talk to yourself as if you were talking to a child (“You are a good person. You will get through this.”)
- Think of favorites. Favorite color, animal, season, time of day, song, movie.
- Picture people you care about. Look at photographs of them if you can.
- Remember the words to an inspiring song, quote, or poem that makes you feel better.
- Think of a safe place. Describe a place you find very soothing. Focus on every detail about that place – sounds, colors, shapes, objects, textures, smells.
- Say coping statements. “I will get through this.” “This feeling will pass.”
- Plan a safe treat for yourself such as a nice dinner, a warm bath, etc.
- Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week, perhaps spending time with a close friend, seeing a new movie, etc.

WHAT IF GROUNDING DOESN'T WORK?

- Practice as often as possible even when you don't “need” it.
- Practice faster. Speed up the pace to get you focused on the outside world quickly.
- Try it for a long time (20-30 minutes) and repeat, repeat, repeat.
- Notice whether you do better with physical or mental grounding.
- Create your own methods. A method you make up on your own may be worth much more than these examples because it is *yours*.
- Start grounding early as soon as you recognize the beginning of a strong emotion, a negative mood, or a difficult memory.