

# GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

## **WHAT IS GROUNDING?**

Grounding techniques are tools, or simple strategies, used to help find some stabilization in the midst of intense panic, anxiety, fear, stress and concern. Grounding techniques can be a way for people to detach or distract from emotional pain, flashbacks, or dissociation, and may help people feel more centered and present in the moment.

## **WHY DO GROUNDING?**

When you are overwhelmed with emotional pain, you need a way to detach so that you can gain control over your feelings and stay safe. Grounding “anchors” you to the present and to reality by focusing outward on the external world, rather than inward towards the self.

Many people who struggle with overwhelming emotions and memories, or those who may feel numb, benefit from grounding. In grounding, you attain a balance between being conscious of reality and able to tolerate it. Remember that pain is a feeling; it is not who you are. When you get caught up in it, it feels like you are your pain, and that is all that exists. But it is only one part of your experience-the others are just hidden and can be found again through grounding.

- Grounding can be done any time, any place, anywhere, and no one has to know.
- Use grounding when you are faced with a trigger, enraged, dissociating or having a craving. Grounding puts healthy distance between you and these negative feelings.
- Keep your eyes open, scan the room, and turn the light on to stay in touch with the present.
- Stay neutral-avoid judgments of “good” and “bad.” For example, instead of “The walls are blue; I dislike blue because it reminds me of depression,” simply say “The walls are blue” and move on.
- Focus on the present, not the past or future.
- Grounding is active, focuses on distraction strategies, and is intended to help lessen negative feelings.

## **WAYS OF GROUNDING**

There are three major ways of grounding, mental, physical, and soothing. “Mental” means focusing your mind; “physical” means focusing on your senses (e.g., touch, hearing); and “soothing” means talking to yourself in a very kind way. You may find that one type works better for you, or all types may be helpful.

### **Mental Grounding**

- Play a “categories” game with yourself. Try to think of “types of dogs,” “jazz musicians,” “states that begin with A...”
- Describe your environment in detail, using all your senses-for example, “The walls are white; there are five pink chairs; there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and the temperature. You can do this anywhere.
- Describe an everyday activity in great detail. For example, describe the meal that you cook (e.g., “First I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters...”
- Say a safety statement. “My name is \_\_\_\_\_; I am safe right now. I am in the present, not in the past.”
- Read something, saying each word to yourself. Or read each letter backward so that you focus on the letters and not on the meaning of the words.

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## **Physical Grounding**

- Run cool or warm water over your hands.
- Touch various objects around you: a pen, keys, your clothing, the wall...
- Dig your heels into the floor-literally “grounding” them! Notice the tension centered in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket, which you can touch when ever you feel triggered.
- Notice your body: the weight of your body in the chair; wiggle your toes in your socks; the feel of your chair against your back...
- Stretch. Roll your head around; extend your fingers...
- Clench and release your fists.
- Walk slowly; notice each footstep, saying “left or “right”...

## **Soothing Grounding**

- Say kind statements, as if you were talking to a child-for example, “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this. You are doing the best you can in this moment”
- Think of favorites. Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day...
- Picture people you care about, look at a photograph.
- Remember the words to an inspiring song, quote, or poem.
- Remember a safe place. Describe the place that you find so soothing.
- Say a coping statement: “I can handle this. I am okay.”

## **More Examples of Grounding:**

- **Deep Breathing Technique**
  - Place feet on the floor or sit on the floor, if possible
  - Place hands on legs or floor in a comfortable position
  - Close eyes if comfortable
  - Breathe deeply through the nose and out through the mouth, repeat this a minimum of three times
- **Visualization**
  - Visualize current situation on the television and then change the channel
  - Visualize putting up a stop sign to intrusive images or thoughts
- **5-4-3-2-1 Technique**
  - Get into a comfortable position
  - Say 5 things you hear, see and feel
  - Progress to 4, 3, 2 and then 1

## **WHAT IF GROUNDING DOES NOT WORK?**

- GROUNDING DOES WORK, but like any other skill it might take some practice.
- Practice as often as possible, even when you don’t need it.
- Try grounding for a long time (20-30 minutes).
- Notice which methods you like best.
- Create your own methods of grounding.
- Have others assist you, prepare in advance and DON’T GIVE UP!

*August 2017, Adapted from Grounding Techniques, by Maryann Rigoni*