

Grounding – Goal: Be Present in the Moment

Grounding techniques are techniques that are used to prevent, dull, or distract from dissociation, flashbacks, switching, panic attacks, self harm, addiction cravings, or other negative emotions, internal experiences, or impulses. They work by engaging the senses and occupying the mind in a non-destructive fashion. Many grounding techniques are subtle and can be done anywhere without other people noticing, though some rely on specific sensory experiences or are made available through specific apps for phones or ipads. Grounding techniques are not the same as processing techniques and do not involve getting in touch with one's emotions or struggles. Instead, they help to orient one in the present and to achieve a healthy medium between being cut off from or overwhelmed by emotions.

Mental Grounding Techniques

Pick a category of objects and try to think of as many objects as possible that fit within that category (e.g., types of dogs, cities, types of trees, crayon colors, sports)

Pick a letter and think of all the words that begin with that letter

Pick a color and look for things of that color in the room

Say or think the alphabet backwards or alternate letters and numbers (A1, B2, C3, D4, etc)

Count backwards from 100 by 3s, 6s, or 7s or count up by prime numbers or perfect squares

Play "fizz-buzz" with yourself. Begin counting to 100 (or over!), but replace any number that contains the number 5 or is a multiple of 5 with the word "fizz" and any number that contains the number 7 or is a multiple of 7 with the word "buzz." For example, 1-15 would be "1, 2, 3, 4, fizz, 6, buzz, 8, 9, fizz, 11, 12, 13, buzz, fizz." When you mess up, compliment yourself and start over

Think of the words to your favorite song or poem or think of facts related to a specific theme

Pick a word or your name and see how many other or small words you can make from the letters in it

Describe an every day event or process in great detail, listing all of the steps in order and as thoroughly as possible (e.g., how to cook a meal, how to get from your house to your place of work or school, how to do your favorite dance)

Reading something technical or meant for children or read words backwards to focus on the process of reading and not the words

Look at a current news article that is not likely to be upsetting or distressing

Distract yourself with Tetris or Solitaire

Reorientation Grounding Techniques

Say or think to yourself: "My name is _____. I am safe right now. I am _____ years old. I am currently at _____ . The date is _____. If I need help, I am with _____/can call _____ .

Everything is going to be alright."

List reaffirming statements ("I am fine. Everything is going to be okay. I am strong. I can handle this.")

Ask yourself where you are, what day of the week it is, what day of the month it is, what month it is, what year it is, what season it is, how old you are, who is the current political leader of your country

Describe your surroundings in detail, including sights (objects, textures, shapes, colors), sounds, smells, and temperature

Name five things that you see, four that you feel, three that you hear, and two that you smell or taste, and then name one good thing that you like about yourself

Pick four or five brightly colored objects that are easily visible and move your focus between them. Be sure to vary the order of your gaze and concentrate briefly on each one before moving to the next

Think about a fun time that you recently had with a friend or call that friend and ask them to talk about it with you

Sensory Grounding Techniques

Run cool or warm (but not too cold or hot) water over your hands or take a cool or warm bath or shower

Spritz your face (with eyes closed), neck, arms, and hands with a fine water mist

Spray yourself with your favorite perfume and focus on the scent

Feel the weight of your body in your chair or on the floor and the weight of your clothing on your skin

Touch and hold objects around you. Compare the feel, weight, temperature, textures, colors, and materials

Keep a small object with you to touch or play with when you get triggered

Bite into a lemon, orange, or lime, and notice the flavor, scent, and texture or suck on a sour or minty candy or an ice cube. Put a few drops of Tabasco sauce on your tongue and focus on the flavor

Eat something, and describe to yourself the taste of the food in great detail

Place a cool wash cloth on your face or hold something cold like a can of soda

Listen to soothing or familiar music. If possible, dance to it

Pick up a book and read the first paragraph out loud

Hug a tree or another person (if interpersonal touch isn't a trigger). Pay attention to your own pressure and the physical sensations of doing so. Register the smells of being outside, the wind, and the sights around you

Movement Grounding Techniques

Breathe deeply and slowly and count your breaths

Grab tightly onto your chair or press your feet against the ground as firmly as you can

Rub your palms and clap your hands or wiggle your toes within your socks. Pay attention to the physical sensation of doing so

Stretch out your arms or legs, roll your head on your neck, or clench and unclench your fists

Stomp your feet, walk around, run, jump, ride a bike, do jumping jacks

While walking, notice each footstep and say to yourself "right" and "left" to correspond with the foot currently moving

Squeeze a pillow, stuffed animal, or ball

If you have a soft pet (dog or cat), brush its fur and stroke it. If you don't, brush your own hair slowly and without pulling too much

Finger paint or draw anything that comes to mind without worrying about quality

Write whatever comes to mind even if it's nonsense. Try not to write about the negative thoughts or feelings until you're more capable of doing so without increasing them

Pop bubble wrap or blow and pop actual bubbles

Dig in the dirt or garden, jump on a pile of leaves, or splash around in puddles or mud

Rip up paper or stomp on aluminum cans to crush them

How to Make a Grounding Box

Get a box or basket

Personalize and decorate it with construction paper, wrapping paper, ribbon, stickers, drawings, paint, photographs, glitter, sequins, or anything else that you like

Keep within it:

A list of grounding techniques

A list of positive affirmations and happy memories

A list of the contact information of trusted friends or family who are willing to help and support you

Small sensory objects such as: scented candles, perfumes or lotions; hard candies or gum; soft fabrics, a stress ball, a stuffed animal, or a stim toy; happy pictures of you with friends; a CD with relaxing music or meditation tracks. Try to cover all of the senses

A list of possible distractions such as books to read or movies to watch

Small portable distractions such as a pack of playing cards, a small game, or a joke book

A list of comforting things to do such as taking a bubble bath, snuggling up in bed, or meditating

A small journal or notebook

In the Case of a Flashback

Tell yourself that you are having a flashback and are safe now

Remind yourself that the worst is over, and you survived it. What you're feeling now is just a reminder of that trauma and does not fit the present moment

Remind yourself of when and where you are, who you're currently with, and who you can contact if you need help (use the reorientation-focused grounding techniques)

Breathe deeply and slowly. Count your breaths and make sure that you're getting enough air

Use other mental, sensory, and movement based grounding techniques in order to distract yourself, calm yourself, and reorient yourself within the present

If possible or necessary, go somewhere where you can be alone or with a close friend, where you will feel safe, or where you feel protected or shielded

If there is anyone who you can trust or who will support you, reach out to them, let them know what happened, and let them know what you need, what would be best for you, or what they could do to help

Be gentle with yourself and take the time to really recover. If what helps you to recover is to color, take a bubble bath, hug a stuffed animal, or watch a children's movie and if it would not be disruptive to do such things at that point in time, embrace those options whole-heartedly

If possible, note or write down what triggered the flashback, what techniques you tried to use to disrupt the flashback, and what techniques helped

Remember that you're a survivor. You're strong, and you can make it through this, though it might take some time. Be patient with yourself throughout the process of healing

Resources

https://www.e-tmf.org/downloads/Grounding_Techniques.pdf

http://www.peirsac.org/peirsacui/er/educational_resources10.pdf

http://knowledgex.camh.net/amhspecialists/specialized_treatment/trauma_treatment/Documents/first_stage_trauma_143_147.pdf

<http://www.incaresurvivors.org.uk/resources/ICSSS-Anxiety-Flashbacks-and-Grounding-techniques.pdf>

<http://joyproject.org/overcoming-eating-disorder/automatic-reactions-and-grounding-skills/>

<http://ptsdconfessions.tumblr.com/post/58024358090>

http://www.sac.ualberta.ca/en/~media/sac/Documents/Flashbacks_2009.pdf

<http://mental-health-matters.com/coping-with-flashbacks-goals-and-techniques-for-handling-the-memories/?start=1>

Grounding and Mindfulness Apps

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/practice-mindfulness-help-iphone-apps/>

<http://www.miassisttech.org/mdrcat/index.php/panic-attack-theres-an-app-for-that/>

<http://www.livingwell.org.au/get-support/living-well-app/>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ptsd-free/id658644270?mt=8>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/virtual-hope-box/id825099621?mt=8>

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.uwe.myoxygen&hl=en>

<https://www.headspace.com/>

<http://stopbreathethink.org/>

<http://smilingmind.com.au/>

Distraction Apps

<http://thisissand.com/>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/magic-fingers!/id483980400?mt=8>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/musyc/id489836689?mt=8>