

Grounding: Restoring Calm

When we experience or remember a difficult emotion we can begin to feel overwhelmed. This is uncomfortable. Grounding does not solve the problem that leads to these feelings, but it can provide you a temporary way to regain control over your feelings and thoughts. It can help prevent the feelings and sensations from becoming worse. Grounding allows you to calm down by helping you create a safe feeling, a healthy sense of detachment, or a distraction from the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that are causing difficult and unpleasant emotions and feelings. Grounding is a skill that can grow and become easier with time. It can eventually help you as you address the problem that triggers your emotions. It can be done anytime.

Types of Grounding

There are three ways to experience grounding. You can practice to see which works best for you, or you may find all three are helpful.

1. Physical (focus your senses)
2. Mental (focus your mind and thoughts)
3. Soothing (talking to yourself)

Physical Grounding:

1. **Hold an ice cube in your hand**, or run your hands under cool or warm water.
2. Squeeze a chair or a ball tightly and then release; notice the feelings it produces in your muscles.
3. **Touch different things** around you; say this is a pen, there are the walls, this is my chair. Note the texture, colors, etc.
4. **Keep a small object in your pocket** that you can hold when you feel the emotions rising; this might be a small stone, seashell, ring, some cloth. Hold it and focus on it, describing it in your mind.
5. **Stretch**; lift your arms and legs, gently roll your head
6. **Move**; walk around, jump up and down
7. **Chew or smell something**; inhale the aroma of an orange or something minty. Chew a piece of gum and pay attention to the smell and taste.
8. **Focus on breathing**; deep breaths in through your nose, hold for a moment, then release slowly through your mouth.

Mental Grounding

1. **Describe your environment**; be detailed and say things like, "The wall is blue, there are two chairs, the chairs are soft. The bookshelf is here, it has three books. The sun is shining it feels warm."
2. **Remember and describe a {pleasant} activity**; use detail (e.g. What do I need to do to wash dishes? "First, I fill the sink with water, then I put soap on the sponge. The water is warm, the soap smells like lemon", etc.)
3. **Remember a happy memory**; describe a memory as though it was a picture and you were telling someone about it. (e.g. This is my birthday party. It was at a restaurant. This is who was there...I felt happy. The cake was chocolate, etc.);
4. **Count or say the alphabet**; do this very slowly.



Soothing Grounding

1. **Speak kindly to yourself;** speak as you would to a young person or friend, e.g. “You are going through a hard time. It’s ok. You can do this, breathe slowly.”
2. **Think of your five favorites;** your favorite thing to touch, your favorite thing to taste, your favorite thing to smell, your favorite thing to see, your favorite thing to hear.
3. **Read or recite a favorite song or saying**
4. **Think of something you are looking forward to;** a trip, a visit with a loved one, a special meal

Tips:

- Grounding is a skill and it takes practice. Take time to practice these before you need to do them.
- Take note of which things work well for you, it may be a combination of the different types of grounding.
- Begin to use these things as soon as you notice your emotions are beginning to change. Start before things feel out of control.
- Have a small list of what works best for you.
- Teach a friend or family member how they can assist you with grounding when you feel overwhelmed.
- Don’t give up!

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

