

Grounding *

Grounding is a way of helping yourself cope with stressful periods in your life. While the intrusive symptoms of traumatic stress – like flashbacks, memories, and upsetting thoughts – cannot always be stopped, you can learn techniques that will minimize their impact. Grounding techniques can help you regain a sense of safety and control in your life. They can help you anchor yourself in the here and now and keep you from getting lost in the past.

Below you will find a description of several grounding techniques. ** One (or more) of these techniques is likely to suit you better than the others. Choose the technique that you would like to focus on and practice it regularly, especially when you are feeling well. If you become good at using the technique during non-crisis times, you will be better equipped to use it when you are in crisis.

Seated Grounded Posture: This is a posture in which both feet are on the floor and your spine is straight, but not rigidly so. In this posture, you are actively aware of your body's existence and its connection to the ground. Your legs should be uncrossed – this allows the flow of energy to pass freely through the body. Your hands may be resting on your thighs or on the arms of the chair. Your head is held high. Notice the way your body rests in the chair; notice the way your feet are resting on the ground. This is a posture that can allow you to feel both strong and at ease.

Mindful Walking: Walk carefully, mindfully around the room. Mindful walking can be slow or brisk. The goal is to be fully present with each step as you take it. Bring your attention to the actual sensations of walking. Notice how the heel, then the ball of your foot makes contact with the floor as you walk. Notice the bend in your knees, the flex in your toes, the shift in your weight with each step you take. When your attention wanders, bring it back to your walking. Center yourself in your body and be present in the moment. Count ten steps, and ten more, and ten more, until you feel calmed.

Writing / Saying Grounding Statements: Develop several grounding statements that remind you that you are safe and provide you with comfort. You may want to write the statements on a small piece of paper or “flashcard”

and carry them around in your wallet. You may want to write the statement on a larger piece of paper that you will hang on a wall in your home. Write your statements in a color that represents safety and strength to you. You can say the statements out loud, or simply read or think them.

Examples of grounding statements include:

- “This feeling will soon pass.”
- “You are no longer a child. You are an adult now, and you are safe.”
- “You are strong; you are safe now.”

Develop your own grounding statements, ones that have special meaning for you.

Grounding Through Breathing: The breath serves wonderfully as a focus for your attention. Think of it as an anchor that holds you in the present moment and guides you back to the here and now when your mind wanders to the past. By bringing awareness to your breathing, you are reminding yourself that you are here now. Breathe in and attend to the feeling of breathing in; breathe out and attend to the feeling of breathing out. You may want to focus on the air coming in and out of your nostrils or on your abdomen expanding and contracting as you breathe. You may want to count ten breaths on the exhale, and keep counting groups of ten breaths until you feel calmed. You may also want to use calming, grounding statements as you breathe, like:

- Inhaling, “I am breathing in calm.” or “I am breathing in good energy.”
- Exhaling, “I am breathing out anxiety,” or “I am breathing out bad energy,” or “I am safe.”

Other Grounding Techniques

- Dance and/or sing to a song that makes you feel good.
- Stamp your feet. Feel the power in your legs.
- Visual grounding
 - Make eye contact with a safe person.
 - Scan the room to remind yourself that you are here now.
 - Don't direct your gaze downward: Look up, look out, look around.

- Hold, look at, listen to and/or smell a grounding object. Grounding objects may be distinguished by their smell, shape, weight, sound, or texture. Any object that comforts you, that helps you to remember that you are in the present, rather than the past, can be a grounding object. Some examples are:
 - A smooth stone that you've found on the beach
 - A bell that, when you ring it, has a soothing sound
 - A piece of sandpaper with a course texture
 - A photograph of a beautiful scene or of loved ones
 - A small vial of a pleasant fragrance
 - A piece of jewelry, like a ring or bracelet
 - A picture that you've drawn of a scene that represents safety and comfort.

You may want to hold, look at, smell, listen to your grounding object while engaged in one of the other grounding techniques. For example, you can hold your stone while repeating your grounding statements, while walking mindfully, or while doing grounding breathing. This way, you strengthen the grounding properties of your grounding object because it becomes associated with other experiences of comfort and safety. If your grounding object is small enough, you can carry it with you wherever you go. Knowing that you have access to a small oasis of calm and comfort right there can help.

** Prepared for the Trauma Center by Allyson Pimentel, Ed.M., March 2001*

*** taken from Susan L. Simonds, Bridging the Silence; Nonverbal Modalities in the Treatment of Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse And Jon Kabat-Zinn, Wherever you go, There You Are*