
SURVIVOR SUPPORT



GROUNDING EXERCISES

WHAT IS GROUNDING? WHY IS IT HELPFUL?

Grounding is the feeling of being present and connected in the here and now.

Grounding is helpful when you are triggered, and re-experiencing parts of a traumatic incident. In that moment you are caught in the past and grounding limits the distress of flashbacks and helps to bring you back into the present. If you are having a hard time calming yourself down during a flashback, you can call your local 24 hour helpline and ask for help getting grounded. You may want to find the number of your local advocacy program and have it handy should you need to call. It also might help to call and check to make sure you feel comfortable talking with them when you aren't in distress. That way you know what to expect if you call when you need to.

Grounding is also be a helpful tool for managing a situation that could be triggering. By diverting your attention away from the potential trigger, you are able to minimize the impact of it. For example, you could use grounding techniques to focus on other aspects of an examining room during a gynecological exam in order to get through the exam, a potentially triggering experience.

Grounding is also helpful when dissociation begins to happen outside of your control. After years or decades of coping with the trauma of child sexual abuse, you may have effectively used dissociation as a coping mechanism to numb yourself, so you don't experience the terror and the horror of trauma in the moment of the abuse. Years after the abusive incidents have ended, dissociation is still a great coping tool when you feel overwhelmed or unsafe. However, dissociation, can reduce present day awareness of your surroundings. Grounding can help you be more present, have here and now awareness and utilize present-day resources.

HOW TO GROUND YOURSELF

There are a number of things that you can do to be more present and connected. We have provided a number of examples below for you to see which feel most helpful for you given your circumstances. You don't need to use them all. Just find the one that helps you best and practice it often so that you have experience in using it when you need it.



TIPS TO CONSIDER

1. Practice these grounding techniques as much as you can. The more familiar you are with them the more helpful they will be for you.
2. You might want to create a grounding kit to carry with you. Familiar, comfortable items will be much more effective when you need them. You could include items like a cell phone for sight or sound, scented lotion or essential oils for smell, candies or gum for taste, a stone or ball for touch. These should all be things that have positive connections for you.
3. You might want to tell close friends, family, and advocates you are working with about the most effective grounding exercises for you in case they need to help you at some point. It might also be good to practice with them to make sure they understand how to best help you when needed.

USING BREATHING FOR GROUNDING

- Notice your breathing. Don't judge it or control it, just notice.
- Take a slow deep breath through your nose and hold it for 2 to 3 seconds and release your breath, slowly through your mouth.
- Once you feel you are focused on your breathing, breath in through your nose to a mental count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 4.
- Release your breath, slowly, through their mouth for a mental count of 8.
- Repeat this exercise as needed to become more present.
- If you like, you can find GIFs and phone apps that provide an image to focus on and time the breath

FEELING PRESENT IN YOUR BODY FOR GROUNDING

- Notice how your body feels and focus on parts of your body.
- Focus on your feet and notice how they feel on the floor. Notice from your toes to your heel. If you are able to, wiggle your toes and move your feet from front to back and back to front.
- Focus on your legs and how they feel against the chair you are sitting in.
- Focus on your back and how it feels against the back of the chair.
- Focus on your arms and how they feel on the chair. If you are able reach your arms up and stretch them and back down.
- Repeat this exercise as needed to become more present.



USING YOUR SENSES FOR GROUNDING

Notice your senses identify what you can see, hear, smell, taste and/or touch in your surroundings.

- **Sight** – Look around; name some present-day sights that are a particular color or shape and then connect with them. “I see a red ball. I squeeze this red ball when I get nervous.” You can also identify 3 blue objects in the room, 2 square things that you can see and connect to them by asking yourself whose are those things?
- **Sound** – Listen for present-day sounds and name them. What is that sound connected to in your life now? For example, identify what the noise is – a dog barking – and whether you know the dog’s name or owner.
- **Taste** – Put a candy or gum you like (you can carry this with you as part of a grounding kit) or drink a cup of tea or soda. Ask yourself what it tastes like or how it tastes.
- **Smell** – Smell something you have with you or in the room. Try to use comforting smells like scented candles or incense or essential oils. Notice what it smells like and whether you like it?
- **Touch** – Run their hands under cold water, hold a fuzzy blanket or pet a cat or dog and notice how it feels. Describe it to yourself. Emotional support animals are perfect for this sense. Ask yourself “whose is this?”

OTHER EXERCISES TO SHAKE OFF REMNANTS OF FLASHBACKS OR DISSOCIATION

If after these grounding exercises you are still struggling to stay in the present, **use the alphabet to focus.** Identify objects in the room that start with each letter of the alphabet or name a country, state, city or town for each letter of the alphabet.

Ask yourself what day it is and where you are. Think back to what you are doing there. The kind of focus required to do this can help you release the remnants of a flashback, dissociative state or keep your focus away from something you are trying to avoid.

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