

IDEAS FOR GROUNDING

From Dr Carla Humphrys

Grounding refers to a set of strategies that can shift focus away from uncomfortable thoughts, memories, worries and feelings and towards the present moment. Grounding can serve as an anchor in the storm of strong feelings.

Grounding is not:

- A magic wand solution that will make everything that feels uncomfortable disappear.
- A method of solving problems.

Tips to remember for grounding include:

- Practice!!! If practiced regularly when calm, grounding will be easier to use when feelings are stronger. Practice will also help you to find techniques which work for you in different situations.
- Try to be non-judgemental and when using techniques which require describing, make sure that you are describing facts rather than opinions.
- Rate your distress (out of 10) before and after using the technique. This will help determine which techniques work best for you in different situations and also help you to notice (and appreciate) smaller changes in the way you are feeling.
- Use it sooner rather than later when noticing unhelpful thoughts or uncomfortable feelings.
- You can create your own method of grounding, which is likely to be much more meaningful for you.
- Create a list of your most helpful grounding methods for different situations. You can write them on a card, sticker, or type them into your device so it is there when you need it.

Types of Grounding Exercises

You may find that one type works better for you, or that each is helpful. Either is OK. There are so many different exercises that they can be adapted to different situations.

Physical Grounding:

Draws your attention to your body and different senses.

- Grab tightly onto your chair or the table as hard as you can while noticing the sensations you experience in your hands and arms.

- Clench and release your fists or scrunch and release your toes while noticing the sensations you experience in your hands or feet.
- Touch objects around you (e.g., pen, clothing, drink bottle, table, chair) and notice textures, weight, temperature etc. You can also carry a specific, small object (a small rock, ring, piece of cloth) with you that you can touch whenever you feel uncomfortable emotions rising.
- Focus on your breathing and notice the cooler air enter your nose when you inhale and the warmer air exit your nose upon each exhale. You can also place a hand on your belly, and notice how your belly rises when you breathe in and deflates when you breathe out.
- Put both of your feet on the floor or ground. Stomp them several times, jump, imitate walking while sitting, shift weight or wiggle your toes, paying attention to the sensations in your toes, feet, and legs.
- Stretch your whole body, or smaller parts of your body, and pay attention to how it feels as you move or the difference between how your muscles feel when they are stretched compared to when they are relaxed.
- Press or rub your palms together, noticing the pressure, warmth or coolness, and sensations of touch.
- Tap your fingers in your lap. Pay attention to sensations in both your fingers and your lap, and to the rhythm you are tapping. Try alternating left and right taps.
- Put your hands in water (if available), focusing on what it feels like on different parts of your hands.
- Hold a piece of ice (if available) in your hand, noticing the sensation of coldness and the feeling of the water on your skin as the ice melts.

Many of the ideas presented above can be used individually or incorporated into the following exercise:

- 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Exercise

Name 5 things you can see; E.g., notice small details such as patterns, light reflecting off surfaces or objects you have never noticed

- Name 4 things you can feel; E.g., notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, feeling of the chair you are sitting on, examine the weight, temperature or texture of a nearby object.

Name 3 things you can hear; E.g., notice the noise of distant traffic, the wind blowing in the trees, grounds crew working outside, ticking clock, tapping on a desk, birds or students outside.

- Name 2 things you can smell; E.g., notice the smell of freshly mowed grass, food cooking in the canteen, someone's perfume or body spray, laundry detergent on your clothes, the smell of your shampoo or conditioner in your hair or even carry a favoured scent with you to smell in these moments.
- Name 1 thing you can taste; E.g., notice any residual tastes in your mouth such as toothpaste from the morning or remnants of lunch or recess. You can also have a drink of water or carry a small food item, such as a sultana or mint (not gum at school) to help with this one. Make sure you focus your attention closely on the flavours.

Mental Grounding:

Focusing your mind on a mental task can help you take the focus off negative thoughts for a moment:

- Name each member of your family, their ages, and something special about each of them.
- Play a memory game. Remember as many details as you can about a familiar place, or look closely at a photograph, then turn it over and try to recreate it in your mind with as much detail as possible.
- Count backward from 100 by sevens, or another number.
- Solve math problems
- Spell your full name or the names of multiple people you know backward.
- Recite something, a poem or passage from a book that you know well, or the words to a favourite song.
- Pick something to read and read it backwards.
- Pick an image and imagine drawing it with your finger.
- Think of an ordinary activity and describe to yourself each step it requires.
- Narrate your current activities in detail, like a commentator. It could be what you are doing as you are walking to class, brushing your teeth, eating recess etc. Describe each action thoroughly, in as much detail as you can.
- Play a category game. Choose a category, like animals, sports teams, rivers, or vegetables, and name as many things as you can in that category in a minute or two.

You can even try to name things from that category that start with each letter of the alphabet (e.g., apple, banana, cranberries, dragonfruit).

Soothing Grounding:

- Say kind/coping statements to yourself as if you were talking to a friend or small child – for example, “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this. You can handle this. This feeling will pass.”
- Picture the face of someone you love, or imagine their voice and what they might say to calm you. You can also carry a photo or keepsake that reminds you of someone who brings you comfort.
- Think of your favourite things. For example, think about what your favourite place looks, smells, sounds like and what it feels like to be there. You can also think of your favourite colour, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
- Recite the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem that help soothe you.
- Touch something comforting, such as a soft or smooth fabric. It could be an item of clothing, hair accessory or an object you carry with you.
- Spend a few quiet minutes with your pet, or imagine what it would be like to be sitting with them.