

## How Grounding Works

Grounding techniques often use the five senses—sound, touch, smell, taste, and sight—to immediately connect you with the here and now. For example, singing a song, rubbing lotion on your hands, or sucking on sour candy are all grounding techniques that produce sensations that are difficult to ignore or distract you from what's going on in your mind.

This helps you directly and instantaneously connect with the present moment. At the same time, grounding reduces the likelihood that you will slip into a flashback or dissociation or become panicked.

How you ground yourself is highly personal. What works for one person may trigger anxiety or flashbacks in another. You may need to do some trial and error to figure out what grounding techniques work best for you. Pay attention to the coping mechanisms you've already developed to help you get through flashbacks and anxiety and see if you can build on them and/or use them as grounding techniques.

## Ways of Grounding

Three major ways of grounding are described below—mental, physical, and soothing.

“Mental” means focusing your mind; “physical” means focusing on your senses (e.g., touch, hearing); and “soothing” means talking to yourself in a very kind way. You may find that one type works better for you, or all types may be helpful.

## Mental Grounding

- Describe your environment in detail, using all your senses—for example, “The walls are white; there are five pink chairs; there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall ... “
- Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere. For example, in a car: “I’m in the car. I’ll see the river soon. Those are the windows. I feel my hands on the wheel.”
- Play a “categories” game with yourself. Try to think of “types of dogs,” “jazz musicians,” “animals that begin with ‘A’ ,” “cars,” “TV shows,” “writers,” “sports,” “songs,” or “cities.” •
- Count backwards from 100 by 3s.
- Describe an everyday activity in great detail. For example, describe a meal that you cook (e.g., “First I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters; then I boil the water; then I make an herb marinade of oregano, basil, garlic, and olive oil ... “).
- Imagine. Use an image: Glide along on skates away from your pain; change the TV channel to get to a better show; think of a wall as a buffer between you and your pain.
- Say a safety statement. “My name is \_\_\_\_\_; I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. I am located in \_\_\_\_\_; the date is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Read something, saying each word to yourself. Or read each letter backward so that you focus on the letters and not on the meaning of words.
- Use humor. Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
- Count to 10 or say the alphabet, very s ... l ... o ... w ... l ... y.
- Spell in another language if you know one.
- Knit, crochet or some other activity that requires your focus

- Create a container in which to put negative thoughts, feelings, images – it can be real or imaginary but needs to be very detailed i.e. a chest with two locks that is buried in the dirt in another town, country, etc. Practice using this container.

### Physical Grounding

- Run cool or warm water over your hands.
- Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can.
- Touch various objects around you: a pen, keys, your clothing, the table, the walls. Notice textures, colors, materials, weight, temperature. Compare objects you touch: Is one colder? Lighter?
- Dig your heels into the floor—literally “grounding” them! Notice the tension centered in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself that you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket—a small object (a small rock, clay, a ring, a piece of cloth or yarn)that you can touch whenever you feel triggered.
- Jump up and down.
- Notice your body: the weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair. You are connected to the world.
- Stretch. Extend your fingers, arms, or legs as far as you can; roll your head around.
- Clench and release your fists.
- Walk slowly, noticing each footstep, saying “left” or “right” with each step.
- Eat something, describing the flavors in detail to yourself.
- Focus on your breathing, noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each inhale (e.g., a favorite color, or a soothing word such as “safe” or “easy”).
- Hold ice cubes in your palms.
- Splash cool water on your face
- Squeeze your hands together
- Brush your hair
- Get up and get active
- Pet your dog, cat, etc.

### Soothing Grounding

- Say kind statements, as if you were talking to a small child—for example, “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”
- Think of favorites. Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
- Picture people you care about (e.g., your children), and look at photographs of them.
- Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem that makes you feel better.
- Remember a calm place. Describe a place that you find very soothing (perhaps the beach or mountains, or a favorite room); focus on everything about that place—the sounds, colors, shapes, objects, textures. Use butterfly tapping (arms crossed across chest and tap alternately on each shoulder) or tapping alternately on each leg as you notice feelings of calmness or peacefulness.

- Say a coping statement: “I can handle this,” “This feeling will pass.”
- Plan a treat for yourself, such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
- Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week—perhaps time with a friend, going to a movie, or going on a hike.

### WHAT IF GROUNDING DOES NOT WORK?

Grounding does work! But, like any other skill, you need to practice to make it as powerful as possible. Below are suggestions to help make it work for you.

- Practice as often as possible, even when you don’t need it, so that you’ll know it by heart.
- Practice faster. Speeding up the pace gets you focused on the outside world quickly.
- Try grounding for a looooooonnnnnngggg time (20-30 minutes). And repeat, repeat, repeat.
- Try to notice which methods you like best—physical, mental, or soothing grounding methods, or some combination.
- Create your own methods of grounding. Any method you make up may be worth much more than those you read here, because it is yours.
- Start grounding early in a negative mood cycle. Start when anxiety just starts or when you have just started having a flashback. Start before anger gets out of control.
- Make a note in your phone in which you list your best grounding methods and how long to use them.
- Have others assist you in grounding. Teach friends or family about grounding, so that they can help guide you with it if you become overwhelmed.
- Prepare in advance. Locate places at home, in your car, and at work where you have materials and reminders for grounding.
- Create a recording of a grounding message that you can play when needed. Consider asking your therapist or someone close to you to record it if you want to hear someone else’s voice.
- Think about why grounding works. Why might it be that by focusing on the external world, you become more aware of an inner peacefulness? Notice the methods that work for you-why might those be more powerful for you than other methods?
- Don’t give up