

# Grounding Strategies – the Basics

## Grounding

Grounding uses simple strategies to give us respite from what is distressing or bringing us emotional pain. It allows us space to regain control over our thoughts/sensations/emotions and bring the ‘thinking’ part of our brain back online.

Grounding does this by helping us reconnect to the ‘outside’ world rather than keeping us in our ‘inside world’, that is, in our heads.

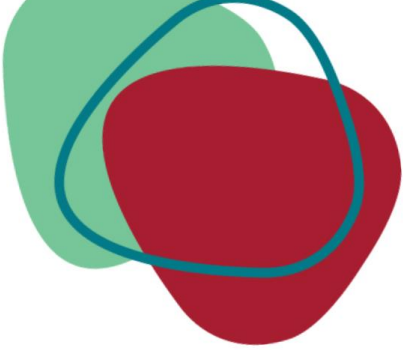
Grounding can help when we are feeling too much, for example, we are feeling overwhelmed, or too little – such as feeling numb, disconnected.

Listed below are some tips followed by mental grounding, physical grounding or soothing grounding strategies.

### Tips on using grounding strategies

- Grounding can be done anytime, anywhere; be prepared and practice when you are calm rather than hope it works when you are stressed out!
- Use grounding when you identify your stress responses getting activated – the earlier the better but better late than never.
- As you use a grounding strategy, bring attention to your breathing.
- Focus on the present – not the past or future
- Find what works for you as everyone is different.
- Rate your mood before and after (if you can); do you need to do more or try something else?
- Keep the judgements aside –notice the thoughts or sensations in your body – be curious rather than judgmental: “I can feel the churn in my tummy” rather than “I’m stressed out and I shouldn’t be stressed”.

Remember to **recognise** your signs or clues of stress, **acknowledge** what you notice in your body, **reassure** yourself, **ground**, and **check-in** again. If you can, allow yourself at least 30 seconds for your grounding exercise and remember to breathe...!



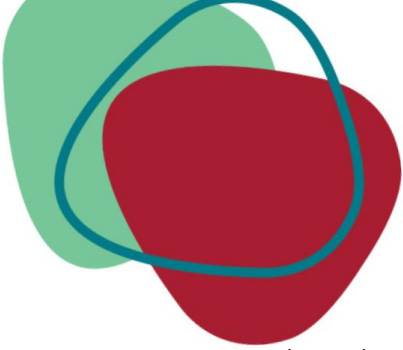
## Grounding Strategies

### **Mental Grounding**

1. Describe your environment using as many senses as you can. 'I can see the trees, the breeze blowing through the leaves, I can feel the breeze against my skin, I can hear the birds singing, dogs barking in the distance.
2. Play a 'categories' game with yourself, for example, favourite shows, cars, types of dogs.
3. Describe an everyday activity in great detail. For example, describe a meal you regularly cook – 'first I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters, then I boil the water and put the potatoes in...'
4. Imagine – Imagine putting on ice skates and gliding away from the source of your pain/distress. Imagine putting your thoughts into a container or a glass jar. Give yourself permission to come back to them at another time – it might be 10 minutes. Any break is good.
5. Say a safety statement to yourself, it can be out loud or in your head: 'I'm okay. I'm safe here. I am in the present and I'm going to take some time for myself.'
6. Read something, saying each word to yourself or read the letters in the words backwards so you focus on the letters and not the words.
7. Use humour. Think of something that makes you laugh and feel good.
8. Count to 10 or say the alphabet veeeerrrry slowly
9. Repeat a favourite saying – whatever you like – so long as it works for you and reduces your level of stress/distress.

### **Physical Grounding**

1. Run cool water over your hands. Focus on the temperature and the sensation of the water on the back of your hands, your palms, the inside of your wrists. As you dry your hands, notice the texture of the paper towel/towel, the sound as you take it out of the dispenser, the sensation on your hands. Or you can try ice cubes on your wrists.
2. Grab tightly onto your chair - as tightly as you can.
3. Touch different objects around you – notice the different textures, the pen, the cushion, the chair, the door.



4. Gently push your heels into the floor. If you can, be barefoot. Notice any tension in your feet. You can rock forward onto your toes and back to your heels. Remind yourself, you are connecting to the ground.
5. Carry an 'anchor' in your pocket – a small object such as a small rock, ring, something fluffy or textured that you can touch when you start to feel overwhelmed (this can be helpful in times of significant stress; even better if the object has special meaning).
6. Jump up and down.
7. Notice your body. Feel the weight of your body in the chair, wiggle your toes in your shoes, feel your back leaning against the chair.
8. Stretch. Extend your fingers, arms or legs as far as you can; rotate your head slowly from left to right and back.
9. Walk slowly, noticing each footstep – you might find you start fast because you feel agitated - that's fine, start fast. Then see if you can slow down. Feel your feet on the floor or shoes contact the floor.
10. Eat something – notice the sensations/flavour in your mouth.
11. Focus on your breathing – notice how you inhale and exhale. State soothing words on each inhale, for example: I'm safe, I'm okay, I'm calm.

### **Soothing Grounding**

1. Say kind statements to yourself – as if you are speaking to a good friend. 'I'm okay, it's been a rough time but I am doing really well. It's okay to be scared, frustrated, sad...'
2. Picture people you care about – a favourite memory, look at photos – having them on your phone is handy and easy to access.
3. Remember the words to a favourite song, quotation, poem that makes you feel better.
4. Remember a safe place – the beach, the bush, rain forest, and focus on everything in that place.
5. Reassure yourself with coping statements: 'I can handle this', 'this will end'.
6. Plan a safe treat for yourself: an evening walk, a cool shower, a fave meal.
7. Think of things you are looking forward to – such as time with a friend, travel or time with family or friends over the weekend, holidays or special celebrations.

The information in this hand out is drawn from Najavits, L.M. (2002). *Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse*. Guilford Press: New York.