

Grounding exercises

Grounding is a set of simple exercises that can help people anchor themselves in the present moment and detach from emotional or physical (including anxiety, anger, sadness, self-harm). It can also be helpful for those who have experienced trauma and find themselves reliving the trauma at times having flashbacks or dissociation (out of body/mind experiences). Grounding is basically a way to distract yourself by focusing on something other than the difficult emotions you are experiencing.

Although grounding does not solve the problem that is contributing to your unpleasant emotions, it does provide a temporary way to gain control over your feelings, ground yourself in the present moment and prevent things from escalating. Grounding anchors you, gives you a chance to calm down, and allows you to eventually return and address the problem that is triggering the unpleasant emotions to begin with at a time that feel appropriate. There are a variety of grounding exercises and it can be done anytime, anywhere and can also be done both discreetly, so no one even has to know or openly with others for support with the technique.

Types of grounding

There are three main types of grounding and people will vary in the form they find most helpful to have a practice of each to find what works best.

1. Mental grounding (focusing your mind)
2. Physical grounding (focusing your senses)
3. Compassionate or soothing grounding (talking to yourself in a very kind way)

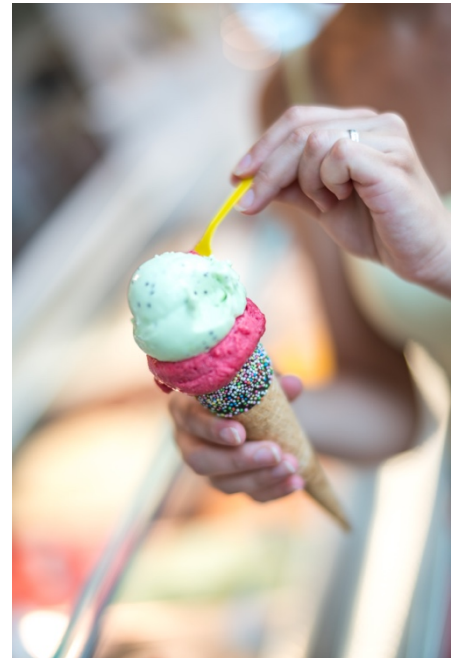


Mental grounding exercises

1. **Describe your environment in detail, using all your senses** – for example, “The walls are white, there are five blue chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colours, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere.
2. **Play a “categories” game with yourself or someone else.** Try to think of types of dogs, jazz musicians, animals or famous people that begin with each letter of the alphabet, cars, TV shows, writers, sports, songs, cities.
3. **Describe an everyday activity in 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...”).
4. **Read something, saying each word to yourself.** Or read each letter backwards so that you focus on the letters and not the meaning of words.
5. **Count to 10** or say the alphabet, very s . . l . . o . . w . . l . . y

Physical grounding exercises

1. **Focus on your breathing**, noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each exhale.
2. **Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can**; notice the sensations and the experience. Or clench and release your fists; Jump up and down.
3. **Touch various objects around you**: a pen, your clothing, the table, the walls. Notice textures, colours, weight, temperature. Compare the objects you touch.
4. **Carry a grounding object in your pocket** – a small object (a small rock, ring, piece of cloth) that you can touch whenever you feel unpleasant emotions rising.
5. **Stretch**. Extend your fingers, arms, legs as far as you can; slowly and gently roll your head around.
6. **Eat something in a savouring way**; fully experience the food; describe the sights, aromas, textures, flavours, and the experience in detail to yourself.



Try savouring the taste of an ice cream

Compassionate/soothing grounding exercises

1. **Say a coping statement**: “I can handle this,” “This feeling will pass.” Or Say kind statements, 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.”
2. **Think of favourites**: think of your favourite colour, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
3. **Picture people you care about and look at photographs of them**.
4. **Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem that makes you feel better** (e.g., serenity prayer).
5. **Plan a safe treat for yourself**, such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
6. **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.

Top tips

Try to notice which methods you like best

Physical, mental, or soothing grounding methods, or some combination.

Intervene early

Start grounding early on in a negative mood cycle and before the distress, anger, anxiety, or other feeling progress too much.

Practice! Practice! Practice!

Like any other skill, grounding takes practice. So, practice as often as possible and before you need it. Then, when you need to call upon this skill you will have it, know it, and use it well.