



Grounding Techniques

Staying in the moment when
depression or anxiety is high

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This book is dedicated to trauma survivors, and the friends and family who are supporting them in their journey.

Grounding Techniques

What is grounding?

Very often when an individual is experiencing anxiety or depression, their mind is not in the present moment. Sometimes they become unaware of their physical body. They may even lose track of time. These symptoms can contribute to racing thoughts, flashbacks, inability to recognize physical needs like hunger or illness, memory problems, and a variety of other issues. Grounding is a way to combat these symptoms while you are working to heal at a deeper level.

Anxiety and depression tend to take your mind into memories from the past or worries and fears of the future. When in either of these states of mind, you are much more likely to miss out on what is happening in the moment. You may be so triggered by a past memory from childhood that you don't realize you are safe with your family in your adult home. You may be so fearful about something that might happen in the future that you can't identify if you are safe in your present moment.

The internal world can pull you around so much that you lose track of your phone, keys, or other items. You may be so numbed out that you cannot recognize when your body is hungry, tired, or sick. In this state basic functioning and healthcare can suffer. This can also impact your ability to focus on healing from the root causes of your depression and anxiety. Grounding techniques can help you put the focus on the present and put your energy into healing and moving forward.

There are many different types of grounding techniques including: grounding to the present, grounding to the current date and time, and grounding to a specific belief. Different grounding techniques work for different people. It can take time and practice for grounding to become helpful, but once learned, it can be vital in improving daily functioning and improving self-care.

Grounding to the present

You can use any of your five senses to help you ground to the present: sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch. These senses are the primary way we explore the world around us. These senses can also be used to help us navigate our mind from either the past or future back into the present moment.

To use this technique, you should pick one of your senses and use it to explore the space where you are in this present moment. You can use your eyes to count the items hanging in the walls. Use your ears to identify the sounds around you. Use touch to examine the different textures of the items in the space with you. We have listed more examples at the back of this booklet.

It is essential that your engagement with the space around you is very intentional and that you focus your thoughts on what you are doing. If you are counting the pictures on the walls, make efforts to describe them in detail: two square pictures, one round sign, one is red, one has flowers. Be specific. This will force your mind into the present moment and pull you out of the fearful future thoughts or the worrisome memories of the past.

Grounding to the current date and time

If you are working through past trauma, you may find yourself deep in a memory or even experiencing the memory as if it is happening in the present. There are also some mental health conditions that can create this same sense of detachment or derealization. In these moments you may experience some confusion as to where you are, what month it is, what time of the day it is, or even how old you are.

If you have experienced any of these symptoms before, it is important to plan ahead to help yourself ground to the current date and time. You can keep a small pocket calendar in your purse or wallet with the current month and year marked. You could also keep a 4x6 card with your name, the current date and year, and your age along with any

other personal information that you struggle to remember when you become disoriented.

With practice, you can train yourself to pull out your grounding card when you start to become disoriented. It may be helpful to ground to the present before you read through your card.

Grounding to a specific belief

It has been said “Not everything you think is true,” in other words, not all of the thoughts that go through your mind are accurate. Thoughts like “I am worthless” or “no one loves me,” are common thoughts that come with a history of trauma. The more a thought runs through your mind, the more likely you are to believe it is true. Eventually, your mind will begin to collect evidence that the thought is true – disregarding any data to the contrary. Before long, you have a belief – or two or three – that are not true.

These faulty beliefs can be difficult to identify and even harder to change. A counselor, pastor, mentor, or life coach may be able to help you identify the faulty beliefs and speak truth into that belief.

Unfortunately, your mind has likely spent many, many years collecting evidence to confirm the truth of these beliefs, and a few experiences with something different is unlikely to change the pattern of thoughts.

It is important to examine the thoughts that pass through your mind. Write them down. Remind yourself that just because you think it, that doesn't mean it is true. You may be able to identify patterns in your thinking, and with help, you can identify the faulty beliefs and start the process of choosing what you want to believe.

Poor beliefs around one's value or worth is one of the most common inaccurate thought patterns to develop from trauma. When you experience frequent or intense trauma – especially in childhood – the mind struggles to make sense of your experience. Determining that the trauma must have happened because you have no worth may be the belief that makes the experience make sense. This belief probably helped you function as a child, but now as an adult, it drags you down and keeps you from doing your best.

Your pastor or counselor may help you see the value you have as a person. You will likely reject this idea when it is first presented to you, but as you think about it more you will begin to want it to be true. Anywhere in the process you can begin making the choice about what you want to believe.

The mind is incredibly powerful, but it is also growing and learning all throughout life. When your mind starts to tell you what it has told you your entire life, you can gently remind yourself that you are learning something new now. You can appreciate that the old belief helped you make sense of a difficult situation, but now you are choosing to believe something different.

Successful Grounding

For grounding to be effective in your life, you must practice, practice, practice. It is essential to practice grounding when you are not completely shut down or totally overwhelmed. You must get in the habit of using the grounding techniques for your mind to remember what to do. As you practice grounding techniques, your brain will be building new pathways – or new ways to think.

As these new pathways are formed, it will become easier and easier to access these new pathways when you are in distress. There are dozens of different ways you can implement the techniques presented in this booklet. The first few techniques you try may be unsuccessful. Keep trying. Some people find many techniques that are useful, and others only find a few. All you really need is one or two different techniques that will help you break the cycles of anxiety and depression enough to focus more on your present-day life and move forward toward more healing.

GROUNDING IN THE PRESENT

Sight

- Count the number of pictures, chairs, trees, or other items in the space where you are right now.
- Describe these items out loud in detail.
- Focus on your surroundings to bring yourself into the present.

Touch

- Touch items around you and describe in detail how they feel (i.e. rough, smooth, cold, warm, etc.).
- Hold a glass of ice water or a warm cup of tea or water. Notice how it feels on your skin. Describe the feeling using as many words as you can.
- Push your feet into the floor and feel the pressure of the floor against your heels, against your toes, against your arches. Focus on the applying pressure and releasing pressure.

Taste

- Keep a bag of mixed food items nearby, something like trail mix works well, but anything with different flavors and textures is good.
- Try one item at a time.
- Describe the flavor, texture, and shape of each item as you eat it. Doing this out loud is helpful.

Smell

- Take a deep breath through your nose in the space where you are right now. What do you smell? Describe it out loud in detail.
- Keep something with a pleasant smell like lavender, cinnamon, or something else familiar and safe nearby. Use this smell often when you are doing activities you enjoy such as reading, going for a walk, or spending time

with a friend. This associates the smell with positive feelings. Use this smell when you need to feel more grounded. Describe the smell and any positive feelings it brings to mind.

Hearing

- Take a moment to listen for sounds around you. Do you hear birds? The air conditioner or dishwasher? Cars driving by? Describe the sounds out loud in as much detail as you can.
- Tap with your fingers on different surfaces and describe the differences in the sounds.

GROUNDING TO THE CURRENT DATE AND TIME

Prepare a 4x6 card with the current year and month. Include your current age, name, and any other information that may be useful if you become confused or disoriented. You may want to include an emergency name and phone number.

GROUNDING TO A SPECIFIC BELIEF

Identifying Faulty Beliefs

- Listen to your own thoughts.
- Remind yourself that not everything you think is true.
- Write down your most common thoughts and try to identify patterns or themes.
- Find a counselor, pastor, or reliable friend who can help you identify thoughts that are not accurate or healthy.
- Find healthy replacement thoughts.
- Remind yourself you can choose what you want to believe.
- Practice thinking the new thoughts whenever the old thoughts start to come.

This is helpful for grounding, but it may be important to do some healing work to determine the root of the other beliefs and to find healing from the past.

Focusing on Gratitude

- Spend a few moments looking for big and small things you are grateful for in your present life.
- Make a gratitude list every day – NOTHING IS TOO SMALL FOR THE LIST.
- Meditate on your gratitudes for a few minutes every day.

Utilize External Sources

- Listen to a song about the new belief you are choosing and think about that song.
- Meditate on a verse or passage in the Bible.
- Have a friend on-call to speak truth to you in a kind and gentle way.

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