

Grounding Techniques Menu

Unwanted thoughts, memories, and emotions can pull you away from the present moment. Psychologists sometimes call this 'dissociation' and it is very common, especially in people who have experienced trauma. Grounding techniques are a way of bringing your attention back to the present moment, where you are safe.

Come back to your senses

Using your senses of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste is a quick and powerful way of bringing your attention back to the moment at hand.



- **5-4-3-2-1 technique:** name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
- **Water:** splash your face with cold water, run water over your hands, or have a bath or shower.
- **Smells:** smell a strong smell (e.g., chewing gum, essential oils).
- **Grounding object:** carry an object with pleasing sensory properties (e.g., a smooth pebble, a beaded bracelet).

Distract yourself

Dissociation and unwanted thoughts can be persistent. If your mind keeps going to unhelpful places, use distraction to gently bring it back to the present.



- **Nature:** go for a walk outside; watch the clouds; feel the wind on your face.
- **Other people:** call someone; go somewhere else; talk about something different; go 'people watching'.
- **Watch & read:** watch a funny video; read a book.
- **Listen:** use music or a podcast to change your mood.
- **Slow down:** walk somewhere slowly and mindfully, concentrate on each step.

Remind yourself that you are safe

Unwanted memories from the past can make you feel unsafe. Remind yourself that you are safe now.



- **Proof:** carry something that proves you survived (e.g. a photo of something good that has happened since your trauma).
- **Letter:** write a letter reminding yourself of why you are safe now, and carry it with you.
- **Coping statements:** "I survived", "This too shall pass", "This is just a memory", "I am safe now".
- **Then vs. now:** focus on what's different now compared to the time of your trauma.

Offer yourself compassion

You're already feeling bad, so there is no point in making things worse by criticizing yourself. Try offering yourself kindness instead.



- **Be understanding:** "It's no wonder you're feeling frightened because you have just had unwanted memories of the past. You are safe now."
- **Be kind:** what would you say and how you would act towards someone else who was suffering like this?

Use your body

If you feel distressed, you can use your body to help you to come back to the present moment.



- **Change position:** stand up if you were sitting down.
- **Exercise:** do some star jumps, go for a run, or swim.
- **Stretch your body:** reach up and try to touch the sky with your fingertips, then bend down and try to touch the ground.
- **Dance:** move your body to your favourite song.
- **Ground yourself:** press your feet into the floor and literally 'ground' yourself.
- **Hands or feet:** curl your fingers or toes, then release them.

Calm yourself physically

Your body and mind are connected. Use physical soothing techniques to help you to relax.



- **Breathing:** try a relaxed breathing exercise to calm yourself by slowing and deepening your breathing.
- **Muscles:** try a progressive muscle relaxation exercise to calm yourself and release tension, clench and release your fists, allowing tension to drain away as you release.
- **Yoga:** practice yoga or stretching.
- **Exercise:** use physical exercise to release pent-up energy.
- **Connection:** ask someone for a hug, give yourself a butterfly hug, or stroke a pet.

Orient yourself

Dissociation can make you forget *where* and *when* you are. Use grounding to orient yourself in space and time.



- **In space:** remind yourself of *where* you are right now.
- **In time:** remind yourself of *when* it is right now.
- **Relative to your trauma:** remind yourself of where you are now, and how it is different to where and when your trauma happened; remind yourself of what has happened since your trauma happened.

Use your imagination

Your mind can respond to imagined 'things' as powerfully as it does the 'real thing'. Regular practice of the exercises below can help when you need it.



- **Safe place:** do a 'calm place' or 'safe place' exercise, where you imagine being in a soothing place.
- **Compassionate other:** try a 'compassionate other' exercise, where you imagine being in the presence of a perfectly compassionate being who accepts you without judgment.
- **Positive memories:** deliberately think about happier times, places where you felt safe, or people you felt safe with.