

Grounding Techniques

One of the most useful tools to learn and use is a technique called Grounding, this is highly effective when we become anxious or upset. When our mind is racing and our thoughts feel out of our control, grounding brings you back to the 'here-and-now' and is very helpful in managing any overwhelming feelings or anxiety. It is a great way to calm down quickly and it's easy to learn.

Grounding basically means to bring your focus to what is happening to you physically, either in your body, or in your surroundings instead of being trapped by the negative thoughts in your mind which are causing you to feel anxious. It helps you stay in the 'present moment' instead of worrying about things that may happen in the future (negatively forecasting) or events that have already happened (negatively introspecting) but you still find yourself going over and over them in your head.

Why Grounding Works to Calm You Down

When we start to think about something negative or stressful, our primitive emotional brain (amygdala), goes into action. The amygdala is the part of our brain that is responsible for our emotional responses, especially fear. It is great for preparing for emergency events but sometimes it kicks into action and detects a threat where there really isn't one.

Here is a typical process; we have a negative thought about a situation (remember a thought doesn't necessarily mean it is real), our amygdala says "emergency! emergency!" and initiates changes in our body, such as increased muscle tension, rapid heartbeat and faster breathing. The amygdala then interprets these bodily changes as further evidence that something is actually wrong. This further activates it and creates a vicious cycle, where we become more and more anxious, and physically and emotionally overwhelmed.

Thankfully, we can use grounding techniques to break out of this vicious cycle. By re-focusing on our body and what we are physically feeling, we get out of our primitive emotional mind (which is always negative) and diverts our mind back to our intellectual mind (which always comes up with an answer based on a proper assessment of the

situation, and is generally positive) and away from anxious or stressful thoughts.

Grounding Techniques

I am going to describe four different grounding techniques, try practicing them when you are slightly stressed or anxious so they will become familiar to you. You will then have access to these new techniques the next time that you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed or stuck in an anxiety attack.

1. The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique



This technique gets you to use all your five senses to help you to get back to the 'present moment'. It starts with you sitting comfortably, close your eyes and taking a couple of deep breathes - In through your nose (for a count to 3), out through your mouth (for a count of 3).

Now open your eyes and look around you. Name out loud:

5 – things you can see (you can look around the room that you are in and out of the window)

4 – things you can feel (the silkiness of your skin, the texture of the material on your chair, what does your hair feel like? What is in front of you that you can touch? your desk perhaps?)

3 – things you can hear (traffic noise or birds outside, when you are quiet and actually listening things in your room constantly make a noise but typically, we don't hear them).

2 – things you can smell

1 – thing you can taste/and or list at least 3 positives about yourself! You can always leave your chair for this one and when you taste whatever it is that you have chosen, take a small bite and let it swirl around your mouth for a couple of seconds, really savouring the flavour. If you don't have anything handy to taste list 3 positives about yourself.

To end- close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths - In through your nose (for a count to 3), out through your mouth (for a count of 3).

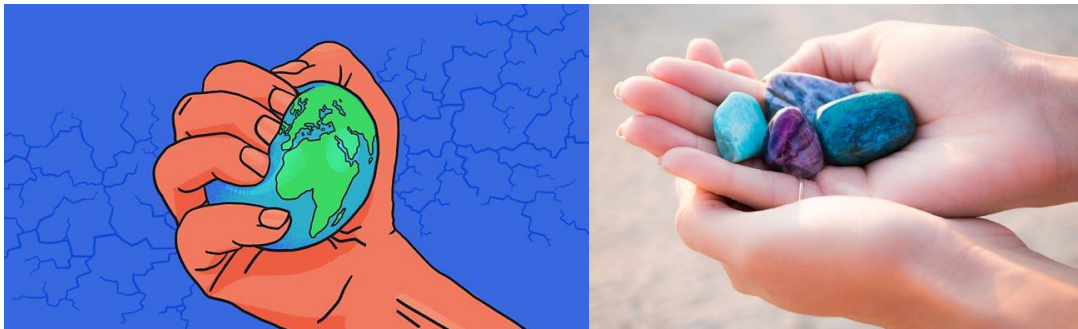
Well done!

2. Let Your Thoughts Come and Go



When we are anxious our negative thoughts and worries go around and around in our mind like a washing machine on full cycle. They appear to be never ending and they build on each other, until we feel exhausted by them. We might try to tell ourselves not to worry, or others will offer the same useless advice. Whenever you try not to do something it is guaranteed to make you do it more (try to not think of a pink flying elephant-it's impossible) So instead, try to observe your thoughts, much like you are on the outside looking in. Just watch your thoughts for a minute. Now imagine leaves floating on the surface of a stream. For each thought that comes into your mind, allow that thought to take its place on a big leaf and watch it blow away in the wind. Or try allowing the thought to turn into a big and brightly coloured fish and watch it swim away down the stream. Allow those thoughts to come and give yourself the permission to let them go. Well done!

3. Hold Something and Really Focus on It



I keep gems and stones at home and in my office just for this purpose. You might not have any of these at home but look around your house for things that have a texture or are nice or interesting to look at.

Hold this interesting object in your hand, really bring your full focus to it. If I was to look at one of my stones or gems, I would see the patterns that run through it, see how the colour varies. Some have streaks of different colours running through them, or even sparkly bits. Look for any shapes that form within the object. Feel how heavy or light, cold or warm it is in your hand. What does the surface texture feel like under your fingertips?

This grounding technique can be done with any object you have, and if you know you are going into a stressful situation, take one of your favourite small objects and put it in your pocket so that you can do this calming exercise anywhere you choose.

Well done!

4. The Grounding Chair



It doesn't matter what is actually happening in our lives, we have the power of our imagination to brighten our day

You can also do this technique on your own or with a family member or with a friend via facetime/skype/zoom. Read the following script in slow and calm voice to your family or friends to help them to relax, they could read it to you too. You could add some soothing relaxation music whilst you practice grounding on your chair (It is helpful to use a chair where your feet touch the floor)

- Together we are going to help you to relax. Now is the time to capture a recapture a sense of growing quiet. Flop yourself down in your favourite comfortable chair. This chair is a wonderfully luxurious and comfortable chair and when you sit in it you enjoy that deep sense of tranquillity that sweeps over you as you sink into the cushions. Now slowly and gently close your eyes and focus on your breath. Breathe in slowly for the count of three, then slowly out for a count of 5. Notice now that your breathing has become a little slower and steadier. Bring your awareness now to your body. How does your body feel sitting in that chair? Shift your bum right into the back of the seat so the whole length of your back is pressing into the back of the chair. Can you feel the contact between your body and the chair's surface? If the chair has arms, touch

it, is the material smooth or textured? Press your arms down the length of the chair arm, notice how your hands hang off the end. If your chair doesn't have arms, touch the material on the seat, how does that feel?

- I would like you to push your feet into the ground now, imagine the stresses of the day as energy draining down from your mind, down through your body and out through your feet into the ground. I sometimes picture it as a colour filling my body as it goes from head to toe, but this is your image so choose whatever you want your energy to look like. As the energy drains from your head, feel how heavy each body part becomes, your torso feels heavy and now your arms as you relax those muscles. Lastly, feel the heaviness go down your legs, through your feet and down into the ground. As your body relaxes, your mind relaxes with it, drawing yourself into an even deeper state of relaxation.

Now I would like to tell you a story. Once there was a Village in a very isolated part of the world so isolated that they very rarely saw visitors from the outside world, and the people of the village had a secret

They had a magical painting-it had been given to them by a stranger back in the past, in a time before anyone could remember. The stranger had said "as long as this picture stays in the village everything will go right for the people of the village" and the people felt safe having this picture.

One day another stranger came to the village, and the people of the village, being very hospitable, made the stranger feel welcome, and they let him stay in the room where the painting was kept. When they got up in the morning the stranger had left, and the painting had been taken away. The villagers were devastated, they felt their happiness had gone, life could never again be the way they had pictured it. They looked out of the window, the blue sky had turned dark, the trees had stopped blooming and the birds no longer sang, and they felt very sad.

Then one of the young villagers walked over to where the painting had been on the wall, and started to paint a picture of their own. A beautiful painting of trees and birds began to form on the wall, then some other villagers joined in and soon all the villagers were cooperating making this painting. They all got so absorbed in this painting and it wasn't until one of the young villagers looked out of the window

and said “look everything is changing” that they realised that the sky had become blue again, the birds were singing again and the trees were back in bloom.

- Take some time to really enjoy this moment, when you are ready to finish slowly wiggle your fingers and wiggle your toes and notice your body becoming lighter and lighter as it begins to move, slowly and gently open your eyes.