

THERAPEUTIC GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

A practical worksheet for returning to the present moment

Grounding techniques help reconnect the mind and body to the present moment during anxiety, emotional overwhelm, intrusive thoughts, or dissociation. The goal is not to force a feeling away. The goal is to give your nervous system a concrete anchor so you can respond with more steadiness and choice.

How to use this worksheet

Choose one technique when distress begins to rise. Practice it for 60-90 seconds, then rate your distress again. Over time, notice which tools work best for your body, your mind, and the situations you face most often.

Important note

Grounding is a coping skill, not a replacement for therapy, medical care, or crisis support. If you may harm yourself or someone else, seek immediate support from emergency services or a local crisis resource.

Before You Begin

Use this section to name what is happening before you practice.

DATE / TIME	SITUATION OR TRIGGER
DISTRESS BEFORE PRACTICE (0-10)	WHAT AM I NOTICING IN MY BODY OR THOUGHTS?

Quick Selection Guide

Pick a technique based on what is happening in the moment.

When you notice...	Try...
Panic, racing heart, or keyed-up energy	Breathing + physical grounding
Feeling unreal, numb, detached, or far away	5-4-3-2-1 + object focus + cold sensation
Catastrophic thoughts or mental spiraling	Grounding statements + counting/math
Restless body energy	Movement-based grounding
A need to process or organize feelings	Journaling or writing

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Practice several options and keep the ones that reliably help you return to the present.

1. 5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Reset

Use the five senses to reconnect with the physical environment around you.

Steps: Identify 5 things you can see; 4 things you can feel; 3 things you can hear; 2 things you can smell; and 1 thing you can taste.

Purpose: Redirects attention away from internal distress and back toward the present environment.

Write one detail for each sense as you practice.

2. Regulated Breathing

Controlled breathing helps calm the nervous system and reduce physiological arousal.

Steps: Box breathing: inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, pause for 4. Or try 4-6 breathing: inhale for 4 and exhale for 6.

Purpose: Supports calm, mindfulness, and greater control over the body response.

Circle one: Box breathing / 4-6 breathing / Other.

3. Grounding Statements

Repeat simple statements that remind you of safety, time, and control.

Examples: I am safe right now. This feeling will pass. I can take one step at a time. I am here, in this room, in this moment.

Purpose: Counters catastrophic thoughts and reinforces a sense of control.

Write one sentence that feels believable to you.

4. Physical Grounding

Use physical sensation to anchor attention in the body.

Examples: Press both feet into the floor. Notice the pressure of the chair. Hold ice, splash cold water on your face, or name the points where your body touches a surface.

Purpose: Interrupts emotional overwhelm by reconnecting you with the physical body.

Notice: feet, hands, temperature, pressure, posture.

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Continued practice options.

5. Guided Visualization

Imagine a safe, calm, or steady place in detail.

Steps: Close your eyes if safe to do so. Picture the place. Add details: what do you see, hear, smell, and feel there?

Purpose: Creates a mental refuge and supports relaxation.

Name your place and add three sensory details.

6. Counting and Math Exercises

Give the logical part of the brain a task to interrupt spiraling.

Examples: Count backward from 100 by sevens. Name as many states, cities, animals, books, or songs as you can. Count objects of one color in the room.

Purpose: Shifts attention toward cognitive effort and away from overwhelming emotion.

Pick a category before you need it.

7. Object Focus

Choose one object and study it carefully.

Steps: Pick an object like a pen, keychain, stone, mug, or ring. Describe its color, texture, weight, shape, temperature, and small details.

Purpose: Builds mindful attention and anchors awareness in the present.

Object used: _____

8. Movement-Based Grounding

Use movement to discharge energy and reconnect with the body.

Examples: Walk slowly and notice each footstep. Stretch. Do gentle yoga poses. Roll your shoulders. Open and close your hands.

Purpose: Releases pent-up energy while bringing attention back to the body.

What movement helped most?

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Continued practice options.

9. Sensory Stimulation

Use strong but safe sensory input to shift attention.

Examples: Chew mint or cinnamon gum. Smell a favorite scent. Hold a textured object. Drink cold water slowly and notice the sensation.

Purpose: Engages the senses to move attention away from distressing thoughts.

My useful sensory anchors: smell / taste / temperature / texture.

10. Journaling or Writing

Put thoughts and feelings onto paper so they are not only moving inside your head.

Examples: Write a stream of consciousness for two minutes. List three things you are grateful for. Write: Right now I am noticing...

Purpose: Organizes thoughts, externalizes emotion, and supports self-reflection.

Use the reflection space at the end of this worksheet.

11. Safe Word Technique

Choose a word or phrase that becomes a cue for steadiness.

Steps: Pick a word such as peace, steady, here, breathe, or beach. Repeat it slowly while recalling what it means to you.

Purpose: Creates a quick mental anchor during moments of distress.

My word or phrase: _____

My Grounding Plan

Make the skill easier to use when you actually need it.

Choose three techniques to practice before distress is intense. Grounding becomes more effective when the body has rehearsed it during calmer moments.

☐ 5-4-3-2-1	☐ Breathing	☐ Grounding statements
☐ Physical grounding	☐ Visualization	☐ Counting/math
☐ Object focus	☐ Movement	☐ Sensory stimulation
☐ Journaling	☐ Safe word	
MY TOP GROUNDING TECHNIQUE		WHEN I WILL USE IT
A SECOND TECHNIQUE THAT HELPS		A PERSON OR PLACE THAT SUPPORTS STEADINESS
DISTRESS AFTER PRACTICE (0-10)		WHAT CHANGED AFTER GROUNDING?

Reflection After Practice

Use this space to notice what worked and what did not.

WHAT WAS HAPPENING BEFORE I GROUNDED?
WHICH TECHNIQUE DID I USE AND HOW LONG DID I PRACTICE?
WHAT DID I NOTICE IN MY BODY, THOUGHTS, OR EMOTIONS AFTERWARD?
WHAT SHOULD I TRY NEXT TIME?
Practice reminder Do not wait until distress is at a 10/10. Practice grounding when distress is mild or moderate so the skill is easier to access when you need it most.