

Grounding – Practical strategies



Trauma is a powerful emotional response to a distressing event, such as war, an accident, an unexpected loss or abuse. Trauma can continue to cause both emotional and physical symptoms long after the event.

Everyone's experience of trauma is unique. Some people will be affected in many ways, whilst others will develop few symptoms. Below is a list of symptoms commonly associated with trauma, it is not a comprehensive list and should not be used to form a diagnosis:

Avoidance of trauma reminders, including memories	Hypervigilance and an exaggerated startle response	Irritability, anger and other negative emotions
Flashbacks to the traumatic event – experiencing it as if you were actually back there	Distressing dreams and other sleep problems	Self-blame regarding the traumatic event

Grounding is a particular type of coping strategy that is designed to "ground" you in, or immediately connect you with, the present moment. It is often used as a way of coping with panic attacks, flashbacks or dissociation.

Grounding techniques often use the five senses—sound, touch, smell, taste, and sight—to immediately connect you with the here and now. For example, singing a song, rubbing lotion on your hands, or sucking on a strong-flavoured sweet are all grounding techniques that produce sensations that are difficult to ignore and so can distract you from what's going on in your mind.

This helps you directly and instantaneously connect with the present moment. At the same time, grounding reduces the likelihood that you will slip into a flashback or dissociation.

Some grounding techniques include...

- **Focus on your breathing.** When you are frightened, you might start breathing more rapidly which increases feelings of fear and panic, so it can help to concentrate on breathing slowly in, holding your breath and then breathing out. At each stage count to 5. Repeat several times.
- **Engage your senses:**
 - **Open your eyes. Uncover your ears.** Make as many senses available as you can!
 - **Look around.** Try to label 5 things you can see, 5 things of a single colour, 5 things of one shape.
 - **Listen.** What do you hear? Is it close or far? Loud or soft? Pleasant or grating?
 - **Open up, feet on the floor.** Shifting your position from fear-based body postures can send messages to your brain that you are not in danger. Although the foetal position may feel self-soothing, but they're doing the exact opposite to your mind, they are telling it you are in danger!
If you're curled into a ball, or have your feet tucked up on the chair, try to put them on the floor and press your feet firmly into the ground. Become rooted to the space you're in, squeeze your toes into the ground and feel the present around you
 - **De-trance.** If you are rocking, tapping, swaying a limb, clicking, or engaging in any other rhythmic, trancing motion, try to start slowing it to a pause or make sure it's no longer a pattern.
 - **Sit upright.** If you are slouching deep in your seat or laying down on your bed, try to sit up. Lying prone can be very disorienting and triggering for many.
 - **Orient.** Remind yourself of the date, your age, where you are, and that you're safe now.
 - **Movement.** If you feel frozen and unable to move, start by just trying to wiggle your toes or finger tips. Slowly work up the body, little by little, until you regain movement.

- **Smell.** Inhale strong fragrances (they don't have to be pleasant!). Coffee, candles, lemon, lotions, the kitty litter, it doesn't matter! Just awaken yourself to what's before you.
 - **Taste.** Chew gum, eat mints, or suck on sour. Eat a meal or snack. Drink a very cold or warm beverage.
 - **Touch.** Run your fingers over unique textures within reach. Your clothes, the furniture, a zipper, a pet, a grounding stone or fidget item.
 - **5, 4, 3, 2, 1 technique** – engage each of your senses in turn to bring you to the here and now – see the card at the bottom of this sheet which you could print out and carry with you as a helpful reminder
- **Carry an object that reminds you of the present.** Some people find it helpful to touch or look at a particular object during a flashback. This might be something you decide to carry in your pocket or bag, or something that you have with you anyway, such as a keyring or a piece of jewellery. IT could even be a lock of your pets hair which reminds you of the here and now and that you are safe.
 - **Tell yourself that you are safe.** It may help to tell yourself that the trauma is over and you are safe now. It can be hard to think in this way during a flashback, so it could help to write down or record some useful phrases at a time when you're feeling better – you could then read or listen to these during the flashback. See the [flashback halting script](#) on my website for ideas.
 - **Comfort yourself.** For example, you could curl up in a heavy blanket, cuddle a pet, listen to soothing music or watch a favourite film.
 - **Keep a diary.** Making a note of what happens when you have a flashback could help you spot patterns in what triggers these experiences for you. You might also learn to notice early signs that they are beginning to happen.

