

Coping Handout: Grounding

Breathing and relaxation techniques can be effective for people with anxiety. But sometimes they can trigger flashbacks, disturbing memories, or panic in people with post-traumatic stress disorder. Grounding, centering, or distraction from the inner pain can focus attention on the outside world rather than on distressing memories, feelings of splitting from reality, or strong addictive cravings.

Examples of mental grounding:

- Describe objects in your environment in detail, using all your senses.
- Describe an everyday activity, such as eating or driving to work, in detail.
- Use a grounding statement. “I am Jo, I am 23 yrs old, I am safe here, today is ...”
- Say the alphabet slowly, or count backwards from 20.

Examples of physical grounding:

- Run cool or warm water over your hands.
- Press your heels into the floor. Stretch.
- Touch objects around you as you say their names.
- Jump up and down.
- Be as upright as possible -Sit or stand straighter.
- When inhaling say “in.” When exhaling say “out,” “calm,” “easy,” or “safe”.

Examples of soothing grounding:

- Rub nice smelling hand cream slowly into hands and arms. Focus on its feel and smell.
- Say encouraging self-statements such as “It’s okay, I’ll get through this”.
- Think of your favorite things, (e.g., cars, flowers) or animals.
- Think of a place where you felt calm and peaceful. Describe where you were, what was around you and what you were doing.
- Plan something nice for yourself, like a bath or a good meal.

Adapted from: Najavits LM. Seeking safety: A treatment manual for PTSD and substance abuse. New York: The Guildford Press; 2002.

- **Thinking backwards** – Try to think of and say what you had to eat for your last meal. Then think of and say what you ate for the meal before that, and before that. Continue thinking backward until you feel like you are “on solid ground” again.

Modified with permission from: Mills, K. L., Deady, M., Proudfoot, H., Sannibale, C., Teesson, M., Mattick, R., et al. (2009). *Guidelines on the management of co-occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions in alcohol and other drug treatment settings* Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.