

# Using Grounding To Detach From Emotional Pain

## What Is Grounding

Grounding is a set of simple strategies to detach from emotional pain. This emotional pain can be caused by a number of factors including; drug cravings, self-harm impulses, anger, and sadness. Distraction works by focusing outward on the external world, rather than inward toward the self. You can also think of it as distraction, a safe place, looking outward, or healthy detachment.

## Why Do Grounding

When you are overwhelmed with emotional pain, you need a way to detach so you can gain control over your feelings and stay safe. Grounding anchors you to the present and to reality.

Many people struggle with feeling either too much (overwhelming emotions and memories) or too little (numbing and dissociation). These two extremes could be described as our consciousness of reality. Grounding allows you to attain a balance between the two consciousnesses of reality.

Remember, pain is a feeling. Pain is not who you are. When you get caught up in these extremes of emotion, it feels like you are your pain, and that is all that exists. That pain is only one part of your experience. The other parts of who you are can be found again through grounding.

# Guidelines

- **Accessibility:** do it at any time, any place, anywhere, and no one has to know.
- **Broad:** put a healthy distance between you and negative feelings (useful for when faced with a trigger, enraged, dissociating, having a substance craving).
- **Present Focused:** keep your eyes open, scan the room, and turn the lights on to stay in touch with the present. Do not focus on the past or the future.
- **Scaling:** scale your emotions when using grounding. Rate at your emotion (craving, impulse... etc) on a scale from 0–10 before beginning grounding. After implementing your grounding technique, rate your emotion again.
- **Focus Outward:** Do not talk, think, or journal about your feelings. The purpose of grounding is to distract away from negative feelings, not get in touch with them.
- **Stay Neutral:** avoid judgments of good and bad.
- **Not Relaxation Training:** note that grounding is not the same as relaxation training. Grounding is more active, focuses on distraction strategies, and is intended to help extreme negative feelings.

# Methods For Grounding

Three major ways of grounding are described below; mental, physical, and soothing. Mental means focusing on mind. Physical means focusing on your senses (e.g., touch, hearing... etc). Soothing means talking to yourself in a very kind way. You may find one type works better for you, or all three types may be helpful.

# Mental Grounding Techniques

*When performing mental grounding, many of the techniques ask for you to distract yourself by a detailed analysis of something. For the mental grounding techniques to work, it is important to be as detailed and vivid as possible.*

- **Detail Environment:** Describe your environment in detail, using all your senses. Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature.
- **Categories Game:** Think of as many things in a specific category as you can. For example, types of dogs, jazz musicians, states that begin with A, cars, TV shows, writers, sports, songs, or cities.
- **Detail an Activity:** Describe an everyday activity in detail. For example, describe a meal that you cook, your morning routine.
- **Pleasant Imagery:** Visualize yourself somewhere or doing something. For example, visualize a

time you watched the sunset, fresh baked cookies.

- **Metaphor:** Externalize your pain by imagining it separate from yourself. Glide along on skates away from your pain, change the TV channel to get to a better show, think of the walls as a buffer between you and your pain.
- **Safety Statement:** Say a safety statement, such as “My name is \_\_\_\_; I am safe right now. I am in the present, not in the past. I’m located in \_\_\_\_; the date is \_\_\_\_.”
- **Reading:** Distract yourself by reading something. Say each word to yourself, or read each letter backward so that you can focus on the letters and not on the meaning of the words.
- **Humor:** Thinking of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
- **Numbers or Letters:** Count backwards from a number higher than 10, or say the alphabet backwards.

## Physical Grounding Techniques

- Run cool or warm water over your hands.
- Tightly grab onto your chair as hard as you can.
- Touch various objects around you. A pen, keys, your clothing, the table, the walls, Notice textures colors, materials, weight, temperature. Compare objects you touch.
- Dig your heels into the floor.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket. Carry a small object (a small rock, clay, a ring, a piece of cloth or yarn) you can touch whenever you feel triggered.
- Jump up and down.
- Notice your body. The weight of your body in the chair, wiggle your toes in your socks, the feel of your back against the chair.
- Stretch, extend your fingers, arms, or legs as far as you can; roll your head around.
- Progressive muscle clench and release for your whole body.
- Eat something, describing the flavors in detail to yourself.
- Focus on your breathing, noticing each inhale and exhale.

# Soothing Grounding Techniques

- Say kind statements, as if you were talking to a small child. For example, “you are a good person and you are going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”
- Think of favorites. Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
- Picture people you care about, and look at photographs of them.
- Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem that makes you feel better.
- Remember a safe place. Describe a place that you find very soothing (perhaps, the beach or mountains, or a favorite room); focus on everything about that place. The sounds colors, shapes, objects, textures.
- Say a coping statement: “I can handles this,” “this feeling will pass.”
- Plan a safe treat for yourself, such a s a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
- Think of things you are looking forward to the next week, perhaps time with a friend, going to a movie, or going on a hike

## What If Grounding Does Not Work

Grounding does work! Like any other skill, you need to practice to make it as powerful as possible. Below are suggestions to make it work or you

- Practice as often as possible, even when you do not need it, so you know it by heart.
- Practice faster, speeding up the pace gets you focused on the outside world quickly.
- Try grounding for a long time (10–30 minutes), repeat, repeat, and repeat.
- Create your own methods of grounding. Any method you make up may be worth much more than those you read here, because it’s yours
- Start grounding early in a negative mood cycle. Start when a substance craving just starts or when you have just having a flashback. Start before anger gets out of control.
- Make up an index card on which you list your best methods and how long to use them
- Have others assist you in grounding. Teach a friends or family about grounding, so that they can help guide you with it if you become overwhelmed
- Prepare in advanced. Locate places at home, in your car, and at work where you have materials and remind yours for grounding
- Create a cassette tape of yourself giving a grounding message that you can play when needed. Consider asking your therapist or someone close to you to record it if you want to hear someone else’s voice
- Think about why grounding works. Why might it be that focusing on the external world, you become aware of an inner peacefulness? Notice the methods that work for you. Why might those be more powerful for you than other methods?