

Take a Bath



Listen to Music

Take a Nap

Go to a body of water

Watch the clouds



Light a candle



REST your legs up on a wall



Let out a sigh



Fly a Kite

Watch the stars



Learn something

NEW



Listen to a guided relaxation

Read a Book



50 Ways to Take a Break



sit in NATURE

Write a Letter

2x

Move twice as slowly



Take Deep Belly Breaths

MEDITATE



Call a friend



Meander around Town



WRITE in a journal

Notice your Body



Buy some Flowers



Find a relaxing scent



Walk Outside

Go for a run



Take a bike ride



pet a furry creature

Create your own coffee break



View some ART



Eat a meal in SILENCE



Turn off all electronics

Go to a park



Go to a Farmers Market



Forgive Someone



read or watch something FUNNY

COLOR with Crayons



Make some MUSIC



Climb a Tree



Let go of something



Engage in small acts of KINDNESS

Do some gentle stretches



Paint on a surface other than paper



Write a quick poem



Read poetry



Put on some music and DANCE



Give Thanks

GROUNDING

Create personal calm

Instructions:

Review this handout. Then, answer the reflection question that follows.

What is Grounding?

Grounding is a set of simple strategies that can help you detach from emotional pain (e.g., anxiety, anger, sadness, self-harm). It is basically a way to distract yourself by focusing on something other than the difficult emotions you are experiencing. You may also think of grounding as centering, distracting, creating a safe place, or healthy detachment.

Although grounding does not solve the problem that is contributing to your unpleasant emotions, it does provide a temporary way to gain control over your feelings and prevent things from getting worse. Grounding anchors you, gives you a chance to calm down, and allows you to eventually return and address the problem that is triggering the unpleasant emotions to begin with. And grounding can be done anytime, anywhere, and no one has to know.

Ways of Grounding:

There are three types of grounding. You may find that one of these types works better for you, or that each is helpful.

1. Mental (focusing your mind)
2. Physical (focusing your senses)
3. Soothing (talking to yourself in a very kind way)

Mental Grounding:

1. **Describe your environment in detail**, using all of your senses – for example, “The walls are white, there are five blue chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere.
2. **Play a “categories” game with yourself**. Try to think of types of dogs, jazz musicians, animals or famous people that begin with each letter of the alphabet, cars, TV shows, writers, sports, songs, cities.
3. **Describe an everyday activity in great detail**. For example, describe a meal that you cook (e.g., “First, I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters; then I boil the water; then I make an herb marinade of oregano, basil, garlic, and olive oil...”).
4. **Imagine**. Use a pleasant or comforting mental image. Again, use all of your senses to make it as real and vivid as possible.
5. **Read something, saying each word to yourself**. Or read each letter backwards so that you focus on the letters and not the meaning of words.
6. **Use humor**. Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
7. **Count to 10 or say the alphabet**, very s . . . l . . . o . . . w . . . l . . . y.

GROUNDING

Create personal calm

Physical Grounding:

1. **Run cool or warm water over your hands.**
2. **Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can;** notice the sensations and the experience.
3. **Touch various objects around you:** a pen, your clothing, the table, the walls. Notice textures, colors, weight, temperature. Compare the objects you touch.
4. **Carry a grounding object in your pocket** – a small object (a small rock, ring, piece of cloth) that you can touch whenever you feel unpleasant emotions rising.
5. **Notice your body:** the weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair.
6. **Stretch.** Extend your fingers, arms, legs as far as you can; slowly and gently roll your head around.
7. **Clench and release your fists.**
8. **Jump up and down.**
9. **Eat something in a savoring way;** fully experience the food; describe the sights, aromas, textures, flavors, and the experience in detail to yourself.
10. **Focus on your breathing,** noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each exhale.

Soothing Grounding:

1. **Say kind statements,** as if you were talking to a friend or small child – for example, “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”
2. **Think of favorites.** Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
3. **Picture people you care about** and look at photographs of them.
4. **Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem** that makes you feel better (e.g., serenity prayer).
5. **Say a coping statement:** “I can handle this,” “This feeling will pass.”
6. **Plan a safe treat for yourself,** such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
7. **Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week** – perhaps time with a friend, going to a movie, or going on a hike.

TIPS:

- **Practice! Practice! Practice!** Like any other skill, grounding takes practice. So practice as often as possible and before you actually need it. Then, when you need to call upon this skill you will have it, know it, and use it well.
- **Try to notice which methods you like best** – physical, mental, or soothing grounding methods, or some combination.
- **Start grounding early on in a negative mood cycle.** Start before the anger, anxiety, or other feeling gets out of control.

GROUNDING

Create personal calm

- **Create your own method of grounding.** Any method you make up may be worth much more than those you read here, because it is yours.
- **Make up an index card or type in your phone a list of your best grounding methods.** Have the list available so it is there when you need it.
- **Create an mp3 of a grounding message that you can play when needed.** Consider asking your counselor or someone close to you to record it if you want to hear someone else's voice.
- **Have others assist you in grounding.** Teach family and friends about grounding, so that they can help guide you with it if you become overwhelmed.
- **Don't give up!**

Now, list three of the strategies described above that you think will work best for you. Then practice these skills regularly, so in times of need you will know what to do and how to do it successfully.

3 grounding strategies I am committed to learning, practicing, and applying:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

After practicing and/or applying these grounding strategies, what have you noticed? Do you feel more in control? Do your emotions change? Are you able to calm yourself and focus on something other than the unpleasant emotions and situations?

Positive Self-Talk/Coping Thoughts Worksheet

Positive statements encourage us and help us cope through distressing times. We can say these encouraging words to ourselves and be our own personal coach. We have all survived some very distressing times, and we can use those experiences to encourage us through current difficulties.

Examples of coping thoughts might be:

- Stop and breathe; I can do this.
- This, too, will pass.
- I can be anxious/angry/sad and still deal with this.
- I have done this before, and I can do it again.
- This feels bad; however, it's a normal body reaction. It will pass.
- This feels bad, but feelings may sometimes be wrong.
- These are just feelings; they will go away.
- This won't last forever.
- Short term pain for long term gain.
- I can feel bad and still choose to take a new and healthy direction.
- I don't need to rush; I can take things slowly.
- I have survived before, so I will survive now.
- I feel this way because of my past experiences, but I am safe right now.
- It's okay to feel this way; it's a normal reaction.
- Right now, I am not in danger. Right now, I'm safe.
- My mind is not always my friend.
- Thoughts are just thoughts—they are not necessarily true or factual.
- This is difficult and uncomfortable, but it's only temporary.
- I can use my coping skills and get through this.
- I can learn from this and it will be easier next time.
- Keep calm and carry on.

Write down a coping thought or positive statement for each difficult or distressing situation—something you can tell yourself that will help you get through. Write them down on a piece of card and carry it in your pocket or handbag to help remind you.

Difficult or Distressing Thought	Coping Thought/Positive Statement
<i>Ex: I always feel so awkward around people.</i>	<i>Ex: Just because I feel awkward does not mean that others see me that way.</i>

Safe Coping Skills (Part 1)

from "Seeking Safety: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse"
by Lisa M. Najavits, Ph.D.

1. **Ask for help-** Reach out to someone safe
2. **Inspire yourself-** Carry something positive (e.g., poem), or negative (photo of friend who overdosed)
3. **Leave a bad scene-** When things go wrong, get out
4. **Persist-** Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never give up
5. **Honesty-** Secrets and lying are at the core of PTSD and substance abuse; honesty heals them
6. **Cry-** Let yourself cry; it will not last forever
7. **Choose self-respect-** Choose whatever will make you like yourself tomorrow
8. **Take good care of your body-** Eat right, exercise, sleep, safe sex
9. **List your options-** In any situation, you have choices
10. **Create meaning-** Remind yourself what you are living for: your children? Love? Truth? Justice? God?
11. **Do the best you can with what you have-** Make the most of available opportunities
12. **Set a boundary-** Say "no" to protect yourself
13. **Compassion-** Listen to yourself with respect and care
14. **When in doubt, do what's hardest-** The most difficult path is invariably the right one
15. **Talk yourself through it-** Self-talk helps in difficult times
16. **Imagine-** Create a mental picture that helps you feel different (e.g., remember a safe place)
17. **Notice the choice point-** In slow motion, notice the exact moment when you chose a substance
18. **Pace yourself-** If overwhelmed, go slower; if stagnant, go faster
19. **Stay safe-** Do whatever you need to do to put your safety above all
20. **Seek understanding, not blame-** Listen to your behavior; blaming prevents growth
21. **If one way doesn't work, try another-** As if in a maze, turn a corner and try a new path
22. **Link PTSD and substance abuse-** Recognize substances as an attempt to self-medicate
23. **Alone is better than a bad relationship-** If only treaters are safe for now, that's okay
24. **Create a new story-** You are the author of your life: be the hero who overcomes adversity
25. **Avoid avoidable suffering-** Prevent bad situations in advance
26. **Ask others-** Ask others if your belief is accurate
27. **Get organized-** You'll feel more in control with lists, "to do's" and a clean house
28. **Watch for danger signs-** Face a problem before it becomes huge; notice red flags
29. **Healing above all-** Focus on what matters
30. **Try something, anything-** A good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow
31. **Discovery-** Find out whether your assumption is true rather than staying "in your head"
32. **Attend treatment-** AA, self-help, therapy, medications, groups- anything that keeps you going
33. **Create a buffer-** Put something between you and danger (e.g., time, distance)
34. **Say what you really think-** You'll feel closer to others (but only do this with safe people)
35. **Listen to your needs-** No more neglect- really hear what you need
36. **Move toward your opposite-** E.g., if you are too dependent, try being more independent
37. **Replay the scene-** Review a negative event: what can you do differently next time?
38. **Notice the cost-** What is the price of substance abuse in your life?
39. **Structure your day-** A productive schedule keeps you on track and connected to the world
40. **Set an action plan-** Be specific, set a deadline, and let others know about it
41. **Protect yourself-** Put up a shield against destructive people, bad environments, and substances
42. **Soothing talk-** Talk to yourself very gently (as if to a friend or small child)

With appreciation to the Allies Program (Sacramento, CA) for formatting this Safe Coping List.

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Safe Coping Skills (Part 2)

from "Seeking Safety: Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse"
by Lisa M. Najavits, Ph.D.

- 43. Think of the consequences-** Really see the impact for tomorrow, next week, next year
- 44. Trust the process-** Just keep moving forward; the only way out is through and participate, the quicker the healing
- 45. Work the material-** The more you practice
- 46. Integrate the split self-** Accept all sides of yourself; they are there for a reason
- 47. Expect growth to feel uncomfortable-** If it feels awkward or difficult you're doing it right
- 48. Replace destructive activities-** Eat candy instead of getting high
- 49. Pretend you like yourself-** See how different the day feels
- 50. Focus on now-** Do what you can to make today better; don't get overwhelmed by the past or future
- 51. Praise yourself-** Notice what you did right; this is the most powerful method of growth
- 52. Observe repeating patterns-** Try to notice and understand your re-enactments
- 53. Self- nurture-** Do something that you enjoy (e.g., take a walk, see a movie)
- 54. Practice delay-** If you can't totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible
- 55. Let go of destructive relationships-** If it can't be fixed, detach
- 56. Take responsibility-** Take an active, not a passive approach
- 57. Set a deadline-** Make it happen by setting a date
- 58. Make a commitment-** Promise yourself to do what's right to help your recovery
- 59. Rethink-** Think in a way that helps you feel better
- 60. Detach from emotional pain (grounding)-** Distract, walk away, change the channel
- 61. Learn from experience-** Seek wisdom that can help you next time
- 62. Solve the problem-** Don't take it personally when things go wrong- try to just seek a solution
- 63. Use kinder language-** Make your language less harsh
- 64. Examine the evidence-** Evaluate both sides of the picture
- 65. Plan it out-** Take the time to think ahead-it's the opposite of impulsivity
- 66. Identify the belief-** For example, shoulds, deprivation reasoning
- 67. Reward yourself-** Find a healthy way to celebrate anything you do right
- 68. Create new "tapes"** Literally! Take a tape recorder and record a new way of thinking to play back
- 69. Find rules to live by-** Remember a phrase that works for you (e.g., "Stay real")
- 70. Setbacks are not failures-** A setback is just a setback, nothing more
- 71. Tolerate the feeling-** "No feeling is final", just get through it safely
- 72. Actions first and feelings will follow-** Don't wait until you feel motivated; just start now
- 73. Create positive addictions-** Sports, hobbies, AA...
- 74. When in doubt, don't-** If you suspect danger, stay away
- 75. Fight the trigger-** Take an active approach to protect yourself
- 76. Notice the source-** Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who's telling it to you
- 77. Make a decision-** If you're stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; don't wait
- 78. Do the right thing-** Do what you know will help you, even if you don't feel like it
- 79. Go to a meeting-** Feet first; just get there and let the rest happen
- 80. Protect your body from HIV-** This is truly a life-or-death issue
- 81. Prioritize healing-** Make healing your most urgent and important goal, above all else
- 82. Reach for community resources-** Lean on them! They can be a source of great support
- 83. Get others to support your recovery-** Tell people what you need
- 84. Notice what you can control-** List the aspects of your life you do control (e.g., job, friends...)

Detaching From Emotional Pain (Grounding)

WHAT IS GROUNDING?

Grounding is a set of simple strategies to *detach from emotional pain* (for example, drug cravings, self-harm impulses, anger, sadness). Distraction works by **focusing outward on the external world**-- rather than inward toward the self. You can also think of it as "distraction," "centering," "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 that you can gain control over your feelings and stay safe. As long as you are grounding, you cannot possibly use substances or hurt yourself! Grounding "anchors" you to the present and to reality.

Many people with PTSD and substance abuse struggle with either feeling too much (overwhelming emotions and memories) or too little (numbing and dissociation). In grounding, you attain balance between the two-- conscious of reality and able to tolerate it.

Guidelines

- ◆ Grounding can be done any time, any place, anywhere and no one has to know.
- ◆ Use grounding when you are: faced with a trigger, having a flashback, dissociating, having a substance craving, or when your emotional pain goes above 6 (on a 0-10 scale). Grounding puts healthy distance between you and these negative feelings.
- ◆ Keep your eyes open, scan the room, and turn the light on to stay in touch with the present.
- ◆ Rate your mood before and after to test whether it worked. Before grounding, rate your level of emotional pain (0-10, where means "extreme pain"). Then re-rate it afterwards. Has it gone down?
- ◆ No talking about negative feelings or journal writing. You want to distract away from negative feelings, not get in touch with them.
- ◆ Stay neutral-- no judgments of "good" and "bad". For example, "The walls are blue; I dislike blue because it reminds me of depression." Simply say "The walls are blue" and move on.
- ◆ Focus on the present, not the past or future.
- ◆ Note that grounding is *not* the same as relaxation training. Grounding is much more active, focuses on distraction strategies, and is intended to help extreme negative feelings. It is believed to be more effective for PTSD than relaxation training.

WAYS TO GROUND

Mental Grounding

- ☞ Describe your environment in detail using all your senses. For example, "The walls are white, there are five pink chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall..." Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere. For example, on the subway: "I'm on the subway. I'll see the river soon. Those are the windows. This is the bench. The metal bar is silver. The subway map has four colors..."
- ☞ Play a "categories" game with yourself. Try to think of "types of dogs", "jazz musicians", "states that begin with 'A'", "cars", "TV shows", "writers", "sports", "songs", "European cities."
- ☞ Do an age progression. If you have regressed to a younger age (e.g., 8 years old), you can slowly work your way back up (e.g., "I'm now 9"; "I'm now 10"; "I'm now 11"...) until you are back to your current age.
- ☞ Describe an everyday activity in great detail. For example, describe a meal that you cook (e.g., "First I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters, then I boil the water, I make an herb marinade of oregano, basil, garlic, and olive oil...").
- ☞ Imagine. Use an image: *Glide along on skates away from your pain; change the TV channel to get to a better show; think of a wall as a buffer between you and your pain.*
- ☞ Say a safety statement. "My name is ____; I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. I am located in ____; the date is ____."
- ☞ Read something, saying each word to yourself. Or read each letter backwards so that you focus on the letters and not on the meaning of words.
- ☞ Use humor. Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
- ☞ Count to 10 or say the alphabet, very s...l...o...w...l...y.
- ☞ Repeat a favorite saying to yourself over and over (e.g., the Serenity Prayer).

Physical Grounding

- Run cool or warm water over your hands.
- Grab tightly 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: Is one colder? Lighter?
- Dig your heels into the floor-- literally “grounding” them! Notice the tension centered in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself that you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a *grounding object* in your pocket-- a small object (a small rock, clay, ring, piece of cloth or yarn) that you can touch whenever you feel triggered.
- Jump up and down.
- Notice your body: The weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair. You are connected to the world.
- Stretch. Extend your fingers, arms or legs as far as you can; roll your head around.
- Walk slowly, noticing each footstep, saying “left,” “right” with each step.
- Eat something, describing the flavors in detail to yourself.
- Focus on your breathing, noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each inhale (for example, a favorite color or a soothing word such as “safe,” or “easy”).

Soothing Grounding

- ❖ Say kind statements, as if you were talking to a small child. E.g., “You are a good person 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 (e.g., your children; and look at photographs of them).
- ❖ Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem that makes you feel better (e.g., the Serenity Prayer).
- ❖ 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 handle this”, “This feeling will pass.”
- ❖ Plan out a safe treat for yourself, such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
- ❖ Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week, perhaps time with a friend or going to a movie.

WHAT IF GROUNDING DOES NOT WORK?

-
- Practice as often as possible, even when you don’t “need” it, so that you’ll know it by heart.
 - Practice faster. Speeding up the pace gets you focused on the outside world quickly.
 - Try grounding for a looooooonnnnnngggg time (20-30 minutes). And, repeat, repeat, repeat.
 - Try to notice whether you do better with “physical” or “mental” grounding.
 - Create your own methods of grounding. Any method you make up may be worth much more than those you read here because it is *yours*.
 - Start grounding early in a negative mood cycle. Start when the substance craving just starts or when you have just started having a flashback.