

Grounding Techniques

Do you ever experience unwanted memories, ‘space out’, or feel detached or disconnected from what’s going on? The term for anything that takes your attention away from the present moment is ‘dissociation’. We all do it from time to time – daydreaming or concentrating hard are both types of dissociation. However, there may be times when dissociation feels unpleasant or takes you to places you don’t want to go. Sometimes when we re-experience unpleasant memories, it can feel like they’re happening again *right now*.

If you struggle with dissociation, grounding techniques can help you come back to the present moment. The *Grounding Techniques* exercise provides lots of examples, so you can find out which ones work best for you.



How could this tool help me?

- Grounding techniques help you come back to the present moment when you feel like you might be detaching or disconnecting from reality.
- If you feel distressed by upsetting thoughts or memories, grounding techniques can help you cope with these intense emotions and feel safe.
- With practice, you can learn to recognise the signs of dissociation and use these techniques to stay in the present.



How should I use it?

The *Grounding Techniques* exercise describes three ways you can ground yourself:

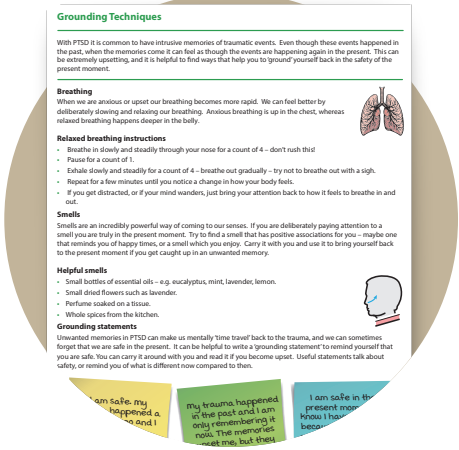
- Using a body-based breathing technique (your breath is great because it’s always with you)
- Using your sense of smell
- Using your mind and your ability to reassure yourself

Read through the examples and choose some techniques you would be willing to try. Experiment with several of them, so you can find the ones that work best for you.



Helpful tips

- Grounding takes practice, so try these techniques regularly.
- Not everybody is the same: if a grounding technique doesn’t work for you after you’ve tried it a few times, move onto another one.
- Find some grounding objects that you can keep with you and use whenever you need to (e.g., essential oils or a list of coping statements).

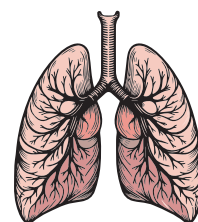


Grounding Techniques

With PTSD it is common to have intrusive memories of traumatic events. Even though these events happened in the past, when the memories come it can feel as though the events are happening again in the present. This can be extremely upsetting, and it is helpful to find ways that help you to 'ground' yourself back in the safety of the present moment.

Breathing

When we are anxious or upset our breathing becomes more rapid. We can feel better by deliberately slowing and relaxing our breathing. Anxious breathing is up in the chest, whereas relaxed breathing happens deeper in the belly.



Relaxed breathing instructions

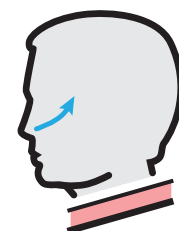
- Breathe in slowly and steadily through your nose for a count of 4 – don't rush this!
- Pause for a count of 1.
- Exhale slowly and steadily for a count of 4 – breathe out gradually – try not to breathe out with a sigh.
- Repeat for a few minutes until you notice a change in how your body feels.
- If you get distracted, or if your mind wanders, just bring your attention back to how it feels to breathe in and out.

Smells

Smells are an incredibly powerful way of coming to our senses. If you are deliberately paying attention to a smell you are truly in the present moment. Try to find a smell that has positive associations for you – maybe one that reminds you of happy times, or a smell which you enjoy. Carry it with you and use it to bring yourself back to the present moment if you get caught up in an unwanted memory.

Helpful smells

- Small bottles of essential oils – e.g. eucalyptus, mint, lavender, lemon.
- Small dried flowers such as lavender.
- Perfume soaked on a tissue.
- Whole spices from the kitchen.



Grounding statements

Unwanted memories in PTSD can make us mentally 'time travel' back to the trauma, and we can sometimes forget that we are safe in the present. It can be helpful to write a 'grounding statement' to remind yourself that you are safe. You can carry it around with you and read it if you become upset. Useful statements talk about safety, or remind you of what is different now compared to then.

I am safe. my trauma happened a long time ago and I survived.

my trauma happened in the past and I am only remembering it now. The memories upset me, but they are just memories, they cannot hurt me.

I am safe in the present moment. I know I have survived because I am bigger and older than in my trauma memory. I have my own family now, and I am loved.