

Grounding Activities

Grounding activities can be used before, during, or after a distressing incident. The purpose of grounding is to keep or bring a person into the present in their mind and body. Grounding activities can also assist with calming yourself and someone you are trying to help.

Grounding activities involve engaging with one's senses whether through words, movement, or physical sensations (e.g., positive and soothing self-talk; look outside and count the number of trees, birds, and/or signs you can see; or running cool water over your hands while noticing the smell of the soap).

Below are six (6) techniques that you can quickly use in the here and now, from the Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust (with minor northern adaptations), to help you, a client or colleague.

The 5,4,3,2,1 technique

- Name 5 things you can see in the room with you (e.g., chair, painting)
- Name 4 things you can feel (e.g., my feet on the floor, cool air on my skin)
- Name 3 things you can hear right now (e.g., people talking outside)
- Name 2 things you can smell right now (e.g., toast, perfume)
- Name 1 good thing about yourself (e.g., I am strong)

Touch and describe an object

- Find an object around you, for example, a cushion, backpack/handbag, water bottle.
- Try to describe it as if you are explaining it to someone who has never seen it before.
- For example:
 - "This is a cushion; it is a square shape with a red and purple pattern of stripes ... it feels soft with some hard ridges around the corners"
- Repeat until you feel calm.

Memory Game

- When you are feeling stressed/anxious and you need to try to reorient yourself to the present moment, using declarative memory can help with this.
- For example:
 - Name as many types of birds or dog breeds that you can.
 - How many communities have you visited?
 - Repeat the alphabet backwards

Say your Mantra

- When you are not in a stressed, agitated, or anxious state, it can be helpful to develop a list of personal mantras or affirmations that help you when you become panicked or disoriented.
- Write them down somewhere (on your phone or in a notebook) and keep them easily accessible.
- For example:
 - I am safe, I am here in the present moment.
 - This feeling will pass, nothing bad is happening right now.
 - I can handle these emotions, I am strong.

Note: mantras can be used for various purposes to help regulate emotions – in preparation, in the moment, and for calming after an incident.

Tip for staff: mantras can be used to affirm commitments such as a commitment to remaining calm and/or respectful. For example, your mantra may sound like,

- No matter what, I will remain calm, I will not let my emotions determine my actions.
- I will speak calmly and respectfully. I will not raise my voice or say anything hurtful or inappropriate.
- Stay calm, do not react.
- Feel free to repeat your mantra as many times as needed

Square Breathing

- Getting your breathing under control can be hugely effective in reducing stress and anxiety. Square breathing is a simple way to refocus your attention to your breath and the present moment.
- With your index finger, slowly trace the shape of a square in front of you, keeping your eyes on that finger.
- With one side, breathe in for 3 seconds...
- With the next side, hold your breath for 1 second...
- With the third side, breathe out for 3 seconds...
- With the final side, hold for 1 second...

Note: there are many different breathing exercises that can help ground an individual. Breathing exercises are a common form of emotional regulation and means of promoting a sense of calm. A quick search online will identify many options, such as counting breathing, cycle breathing, breathing combined with a calming phrase, breathing deeply to a count or words, and more.

Self-Soothe Box

For your clients or for yourself – at work or at home (contents are likely to vary)

- It's recommended to have a range of sensory things and something to focus your mind on. You could include something to smell, to touch, to look at and maybe even something to taste.
- Touch – Stress/fidget toys, smooth stones, playdough, soft fabric, yarn, etc. This serves as a good distraction for your hands and can encourage your muscles to relax.
- Smell – Peppermint for grounding, and lavender, rose, or chamomile for relaxation. Go with smells that you find comforting.
- Taste – Mints, chocolate, gum. (Drinking water can be soothing as it engages the senses, and you can use it to regulate your breathing. It is also important to stay hydrated.)
- Music – Identify/write down calming songs that are personal to you. Create a playlist of music you find calming and listen to it when you need or want to.
- Memories – Nostalgic items or photos of people or places with positive memories linked to them.
- Positive Affirmation/Quote Cards/Posters and/or Breathing/Calming Techniques Cards/Posters
- Activity – Having an activity to complete can really help you self-soothe, for example, knitting, beading, carving, drawing/painting, colouring sheets, and reading.

Trauma Crash Kit

Many workplaces that provide support services to people experiencing various forms of violence, whether interpersonal or systemic, recognize that the people they interact with on a regular basis are often in a heightened state from trauma. This idea of a “trauma crash kit” was developed at a shelter for women experiencing homelessness who would frequently arrive very agitated.

The kit was simply **a basket containing several objects** including smooth stones, stress balls, paper fans, soft hand size pieces of flannel, braids of sweetgrass, sage bundles, herbal tea packets, small vials of soothing aromatherapy, little chocolates, peppermints, gum, a deck of grounding cards, etc.

People could choose something from the kit to support them to feel safe, grounded, and regulated. Whatever would work for them in that moment.

Women would also suggest, and sometimes add, something to the basket to help other woman in the future.

The basket became a valuable trauma tool that everyone participated in.