



GROUNDING STRATEGIES

When we are overwhelmed with a memory from the past, stress from the present, or fear about the future, our brains can get stuck in past memories, present stress or future fears, and we can either relive something that happened or repeatedly imagine a fear that hasn't occurred, and disconnect from the present moment. When our minds and our bodies disconnect from the present moment, if we don't do something to become unstuck, overwhelming feelings we experience may remain and overpower us. Grounding activities allow us that reconnect with the present moment using all of our senses. This activity is grounded in neuroscience. When overwhelmed, our nervous systems may activate and stress chemicals are sent all throughout our bodies, sending a message of alarm, threat and danger.

The following strategies are grounding techniques useful for relaxation, to return to the present moment and calm our nervous systems and decrease symptoms of anxiety, panic and depression. ***These strategies do not replace visiting a professional when experiencing severe symptoms.***

MINDFUL BREATHING



Deep breathing exercises have a few functions. It allows our sympathetic nervous system (or stress response) to “calm down,” and it allows us the opportunity to return to the present moment when we get stuck in the past or future worries.

Inhale/exhale through nose.

- ❖ Sit up straight but relaxed.
- ❖ Allow your eyes to close or find a spot you can gaze at.
- ❖ As you inhale, trace the air as it enters your nose and goes into your lungs.
- ❖ On the exhale, follow the air leaving your lungs and exiting your nose. This grounding technique gets more effective with practice. The key is to observe the with your mind.
- ❖ Follow each breath from beginning to end.
- ❖ Some people find it useful to inhale through the nose for 4 seconds and exhale through the nose for 4 seconds.
- ❖ Repeat breathing until accessing a feeling of calmness or lower heart rate.

BODY SCAN



As you deep breathe, you can add a body scan. Body scans can be done in a seated position or lying down.

- ❖ With your eyes closed or open, as you deep breathe, direct your attention with your mind to the top of your head and notice what that feels like.
- ❖ Direct your attention to your face, and notice what your face feels like. If it is tense, relax it.
- ❖ Bring your attention to your chest, and notice it as you breathe in and out through your nose.
- ❖ Bring your attention to your shoulders, and if you notice tension, soften your shoulders.
- ❖ Bring your attention down to your tummy area and notice what it feels like.
- ❖ Bring your attention to your butt sitting on a chair or your back against the chair or your body lying on a bed or couch and notice what that feels like.
- ❖ Bring your attention to your feet planted on the ground or lying on a bed and notice what they feel like.
- ❖ Bring your attention back to your breathing.

4-7-8

BREATHING TECHNIQUE



Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise.

- ❖ Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.
- ❖ Begin by clearing out air in your lungs. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- ❖ Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a count of 4.
- ❖ Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- ❖ Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of 8.
- ❖ Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths. Try it twice per day.

Caution: this exercise may make you sleepy. Stop breathing this way if you become exhausted and sleepy and breathe regularly inhaling and exhaling through your nose.

SAFE SPACE VISUALIZATION



When we deep breathe, we can add visualization, imagining a place that brings us tranquility and peace as we deep breath in and out or a past happy memory.

- ❖ Allow your eyes to close or find a spot that you can gaze at.
- ❖ Bring to your mind an image of a place that brings you peace, relaxation or that makes you feel comfortable. This place can be a real place you have been to before or an imagined place. If this safe place has the image of people, notice if the people that evoke positive emotions. If emotions like sadness, frustration or anger arise, pick a new safe place without people or without those emotions.
- ❖ Notice the details in your image: colors, people, objects.
- ❖ Notice how thinking about the safe place or looking at the image makes you feel. Notice and name emotions that arise.
- ❖ Notice where those emotions show up in your body. For instance, if joy arises, notice where is landing in your body (heart, face, chest, etc.).
- ❖ Stay with exercise until you reach a level of relaxation and calm and you can notice relaxation and soothing in your body.
- ❖ We can add a variation to the safe space exercise and add positive affirmations about ourselves such as: I am worthy, I can, I matter, I belong, I am safe.

FIVE SENSES GROUNDING



Five senses grounding allows our nervous system to “calm down” and return to a baseline ((our balanced, calmer self) or as close to baseline as possible. Throughout the exercise, deep breathe in and breath out slowly through your nose. You can keep your eyes open or closed for this exercise.

- ❖ **Sight.** As you breathe slowly and deeply, take a scan around the room you are in, noticing objects you have in that room. Notice their size, colors, dimensions. Spend a few seconds with each item, noticing each detail. If you notice that you start creating narratives or stories about the items, come back to your breathing and move on to a new item. You can direct your mind to notice 5 things you see. You will notice them and label them in your mind. *For example*, yellow lamp, green pillow, brown desk, etc.
- ❖ **Hearing.** As you breathe slowly and deeply, listen to the sounds in the room you are in. Allow your ears to follow the sounds, those inside the room, anything outside of the room, or even sounds coming from your body. Just notice those sounds, each sound. Don’t classify sounds or label them as loud or good or bad, just notice them. You can direct your mind to notice 4 things you hear. You will notice them and label them in your mind. *For example*, car driving by, my neighbor singing, etc.
- ❖ **Touch.** As you breathe slowly and deeply, you are going to pay attention and notice sensations in your body. Gently bring your palms together and rub your hands, you can feel your face slowly with your hands. Notice what it feels like to have your feet planted on the ground. Notice what it feels like to be sitting on the chair you are sitting in, to have you back against the chair. Notice everything your body is touching. You can direct your mind to feel 3 things. You will notice how something feels. *For example*, warm hands, feet grounded on the floor, etc.
- ❖ **Smell.** As you breathe slowly and deeply, see if you can detect any scents in the room. What can you smell? If you are having trouble identifying a smell, bring one of the items you have in your room/office close to your nose and see if you can identify a scent. You can direct your mind to notice 2 things you smell. You will notice them and label them in your mind. *For example*, lavender candle, rain, etc.
- ❖ **Taste.** If you have something in your office or room to chew or sip, pick that item. Before bringing that item to your mouth, notice what it looks like, you can even smell it. Bring it to your mouth, and take a few bites or sips. When you chew or sip, take one bite or sip at a time, not going for a second bite or sip until you are done with the first. Notice sensations in your mouth, notice your tongue, your teeth as you chew, and the taste of what you are eating. Notice your tongue, teeth, and sensations in your mouth as you chew or take a sip. If you don’t have anything to taste, lick your lips.

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SCHEDULING WORRIES/ WORRY BOX

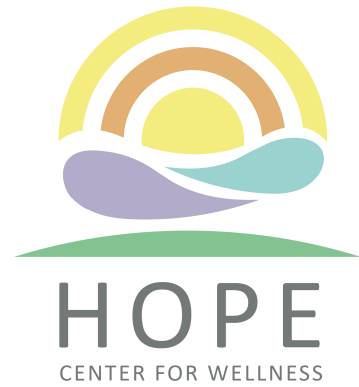


Our minds think approximately between 50,000 to 70,000 thoughts per day. Most of our thoughts are automatic (we don't even notice them) and most are repetitive. But we don't have to entertain our thoughts as they arise, especially if they are anxious or distressful thoughts.

Scheduling worries is an activity that allows us to put a stop to a distressful thought by tabling it until we have more time to deal with it. At first this activity may feel silly but the more it is practiced the more organic it becomes.

- ❖ When a worry thought arises, notice it and label it as it is – worry thought.
- ❖ If you decide that is not the time to worry about that thought or to give it attention, tell your mind: worry, I see you but I don't have time for you right now. I will entertain you at _____ (designate a time where you can go back to that worry). For some people this time may be after work, during a work break or the weekend.
- ❖ You can also imagine dumping your worry on a box we will call worry box. You hold the key to the worry box and control when you open and close the box.
- ❖ When you get to your designated worry time, allow yourself a few minutes to entertain your worry but time yourself. You don't want to have the worry time to be open ended.
- ❖ Some people find it helpful to schedule "worry time" at a recurrent time per day.

PAINT DISTRESS AWAY



When we have an image or distressful thought, we can use visualization to make the feeling, emotion, memory, image or thought minimize its intensity.

- ❖ When experiencing a distressful memory, imagine the emotion, thought or image in front of you.
- ❖ Imagine holding a can of paint on top of that image, thought or distressful emotion or memory.
- ❖ Imagine slowly pouring the paint on top of the distressful memory until it's entirely covered by the paint.
- ❖ As you pour the paint and finish pouring, notice emotions that may arise and sensations in your body.