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Grounding Techniques

## Physical Techniques

### These techniques use your five senses or tangible objects

### — things you can touch —

### to help you move through distress

1. Put your hands in water

Focus on the water’s temperature and how it feels on your fingertips, palms, and the backs of your hands. Does it feel the same in each part of your hand? Use warm water first, then cold. Next, try cold water first, then warm. Does it feel different to switch from cold to warm water versus warm to cold?

2. Pick up or touch items near you

Are the things you touch soft or hard? Heavy or light? Warm or cool? Focus on the texture and color of each item. Challenge yourself to think of specific colors, such as crimson, burgundy, indigo, or turquoise, instead of simply red or blue.

3. Breathe deeply

Slowly inhale, then exhale. If it helps, you can say or think “in” and “out” with each breath. Feel each breath filling your lungs and note how it feels to push it back out.

4. Savor a food or drink

Take small bites or sips of a food or beverage you enjoy, letting yourself fully taste each bite. Think about how it tastes and smells and the flavors that linger on your tongue.

5. Take a short walk

Concentrate on your steps — you can even count them. Notice the rhythm of your footsteps and how it feels to put your foot on the ground and then lift it again.

6. Hold a piece of ice

What does it feel like at first? How long does it take to start melting? How does the sensation change when the ice begins to melt?

7. Savor a scent

Is there a fragrance that appeals to you? This might be a cup of tea, an herb or spice, a favorite soap, or a scented candle. Inhale the fragrance slowly and deeply and try to note its qualities (sweet, spicy, citrusy, and so on).

8. Move your body

Do a few exercises or stretches. You could try:

* jumping jacks
* jumping up and down
* jumping rope
* jogging in place
* stretching different muscle groups one by one

Pay attention to how your body feels with each movement and when your hands or feet touch the floor or move through the air.

How does the floor feel against your feet and hands? If you jump rope, listen to the sound of the rope in the air and when it hits the ground.

9. Truly listen to your surroundings

Take a few moments to listen to the noises around you. Do you hear birds? Dogs barking? Machinery or traffic? If you hear people talking, what are they saying? Do you recognize the language?

Let the sounds wash over you and remind you where you are.

10. Feel your body

You can do this sitting or standing. Focus on how your body feels from head to toe, noticing each part. Consider:

* your hair on your shoulders or forehead
* the weight of your shirt on your shoulders
* whether your arms feel loose or stiff at your sides
* your heartbeat, and whether it’s rapid or steady
* whether your stomach feels full or you feel hungry
* whether your legs are crossed or your feet are resting on the floor

Curl your fingers and wiggle your toes. Are you barefoot or in shoes? How does the floor feel against your feet?

11. Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method

Working backward from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. For example, you might start by listing:

* 5 things you see
* 4 things you hear
* 3 things you can touch from where you’re sitting
* 2 things you can smell
* 1 thing you can taste

Make an effort to notice the little things you might not always pay attention to, such as the color of the flecks in the carpet or the hum of your computer.

# Mental Techniques

### These grounding exercises use mental distractions to help redirect your thoughts away from distressing feelings and back to the present

12. Play a memory game

Look at a detailed photograph or picture (like a cityscape or other “busy” scene) for 5–10 seconds. Then, turn the photograph face-down and recreate the photograph in your mind in as much detail as possible. Or, you can mentally list all the things you remember from the picture.

13. Think in categories

Choose one or two broad categories, such as “musical instruments,” “ice cream flavors,” or “baseball teams.” Take a minute or so to mentally list as many things from each category as you can.

14. Use math and numbers

Even if you aren’t a math person, numbers may help center you.

Try:

* running through a times table in your head
* counting backward from 100
* choosing a number and thinking of five ways you could make the number (6 + 11 = 17, 20 – 3 = 17, 8 × 2 + 1 = 17, etc.)

15. Recite something

Think of a poem, song, or book passage you know by heart. Recite it quietly to yourself or in your head. If you say the words aloud, focus on the shape of each word on your lips and in your mouth. If you say the words in your head, visualize each word as you’d see it on a page.

16. Make yourself laugh

Make up a silly joke — the kind you’d find on a candy wrapper or popsicle stick.

You might also watch your favorite funny animal video, a clip from a comedian or TV show you enjoy, or anything else you know will make you laugh.

17. Use an anchoring statement

This might be something like, “I’m Full Name. I’m X years old. I live in City, State. Today is Friday, June 3. It’s 10:04 in the morning. I’m sitting at my desk at work. There’s no one else in the room.”

You can expand on the phrase by adding details until you feel calm, such as, “It’s raining lightly, but I can still see the sun. It’s my break time. I’m thirsty, so I’m going to make a cup of tea.”

18. Visualize a daily task you enjoy or don’t mind doing

If you like doing laundry, for example, think about how you’d put away a finished load.

“The clothes feel warm coming out of the dryer. They’re soft and a little stiff at the same time. They feel light in the basket, even though they spill over the top. I’m spreading them out over the bed so they won’t wrinkle. I’m folding the towels first, shaking them out before folding them into halves, then thirds,” and so on.

19. Describe a common task

Think of an activity you do often or can do very well, such as making coffee, locking up your office, or tuning a guitar. Go through the process step-by-step, as if you’re giving someone else instructions on how to do it.

20. Imagine yourself leaving the painful feelings behind

Visualize:

* gathering the emotions, balling them up, and putting them into a box
* walking, swimming, biking, or jogging away from painful feelings
* your thoughts as a song or TV show you dislike, changing the channel or turning down the volume — they’re still there, but you don’t have to listen to them

21. Describe what’s around you

Spend a few minutes taking in your surroundings and noting what you see. Use all five senses to provide as much detail as possible.

“This bench is red, but the bench over there is green. It’s warm under my jeans since I’m in the sun. It feels rough, but there aren’t any splinters. The air smells like smoke. I hear kids laughing and dogs barking.”

# Soothing Techniques

### You can use these techniques to comfort yourself in times of emotional distress. These exercises can help promote good feelings that may help the negative feelings fade or seem less overwhelming

22. Picture the voice or face of someone you love

If you feel upset or distressed, visualize someone positive in your life. Imagine their face or think of what their voice sounds like. Imagine them telling you that the moment is tough but that you’ll get through it.

23. Practice self-kindness

Repeat kind, compassionate phrases to yourself:

* “You’re having a rough time, but you’ll make it through.”
* “You’re strong, and you can move through this pain.”
* “You’re trying hard, and you’re doing your best.”

Say it, either aloud or in your head, as many times as you need.

24. Sit with your pet

If you’re at home and have a pet, spend a few moments just sitting with them. If they’re of the furry variety, pet them, focusing on how their fur feels. Consider their markings or unique characteristics. If you have a smaller pet you can hold, concentrate on how they feel in your hand.

Not at home? Think of your favorite things about your pet or how they would comfort you if they were there.

25. List favorites

List three favorite things in several different categories, such as:

* foods
* trees
* songs
* movies
* books
* places

26. Visualize your favorite place

Think of your favorite place, whether it’s the home of a loved one or a foreign country. Using each of your senses, imagine the noises you hear, the objects you see, and the scents you smell.

Try to recall the last time you went there. Think about what you did there and how it felt at the time.

27. Plan an activity

This might be something you do alone or with a friend or loved one. Think of what you’ll do and when. Maybe you’ll go to dinner, take a walk on the beach, see a movie you’ve been looking forward to, or visit a museum.

Focus on the details, such as what you’ll wear, when you’ll go, and how you’ll get there.

28. Touch something comforting

This could be your favorite blanket, a much-loved T-shirt, a smooth stone, or anything that feels good to touch. Think about how it feels under your fingers or in your hand.

If you have a favorite sweater, scarf, or pair of socks, put them on and spend a moment thinking about the sensation of the fabric on your skin.

29. List positive things

Write or mentally list four or five things in your life that bring you joy, visualizing each briefly.

30. Listen to music

Put on your favorite song, but pretend you’re listening to it for the first time. Focus on the melody and lyrics (if there are any).

Does the song give you chills or create any other physical sensations? Pay attention to the parts that stand out most.