



STRESS-BUSTING: GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

Feeling stressed or caught up in racing thoughts? Grounding techniques are an easy way to refocus your mind and reconnect with the present moment. These practical exercises help reduce anxiety, giving you a sense of stability and balance when you need it most.



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Grounding skills can be divided into three (3) specific approaches:

Physical or Sensory

Focus: Body-based grounding. These techniques engage the senses to bring awareness back to the present moment.

Examples

- Holding an ice cube or touching something textured
- Splashing cold water on the face
- Noticing your surroundings
- Tapping, stretching, deep pressure, and self-stimulatory (i.e. stimming) behaviour
- Taking a short walk across campus, feeling your feet on the floor, or pressing your hands against a desk

Cognitive Awareness

Focus: Mental focus or reorientation. These techniques redirect thoughts to something logical, structured, or neutral to break the cycle of distress.

Examples

- Naming objects in a room or categorizing items (e.g., animals that start with A)
- Describing surroundings in detail
- Doing simple math problems or reciting a song you have on repeat
- Time-location orientation: "It's Monday, I'm in the library, it's 2:15 PM"

Emotional or Self-Soothing

Focus: These approaches focus on calming the nervous system through comfort, compassion, or self-talk.

Examples

- Using visualization of a safe or peaceful place
- Saying kind affirmations: "This feeling will pass" or "I am safe"
- Listening to calming music
- Wrapping in a blanket or using a weighted item
- Engaging in a favourite self-care ritual (tea, warm bath...etc.)



"Be here now."

- Ram Dass

(20th-century spiritual teacher and psychologist)



These grounding exercises can be done anytime, anywhere - before a test, in between study sessions, or when stress starts to build.

QUICK TIP



Try different techniques when you're feeling calm to find what works best for you so you're ready during times of stress.

Purpose: These techniques help you reconnect with your body and surroundings, stay present, manage overwhelming thoughts or emotions, and feel more grounded and safe.

5-4-3-2-1

Look around the room and name...

Five (5) things you can see

Four (4) things you can hear

Three (3) things you can touch

Two (2) things you can smell

One (1) thing you can taste

Naming Categories

Choose one or two broad categories, such as "musical instruments," "ice cream flavours," or "hockey teams."

Take a minute or so to mentally list as many things from each category as you can.

Visualization

If you can find a quiet spot and get comfortable. Close your eyes and bring your mind to a place where you feel calm and safe - this could be real or imagined. Engage your senses and stay there for 1-2 minutes.

Cold Water

Have a few slow sips of cold water, feeling the sensation of the cold water in your mouth and notice the sensation.

Can also substitute holding an ice cube or splashing your face.

Counting

Start at 100 or a number of your choice and begin counting backwards. Try mixing it up and count backwards by 3s or 7s. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the counting process.

Special Item

Keep a small item in your pocket or on your person (such as a fidget toy, a stone, a coin...etc.) and hold the item. Bring your attention to the item in your hand, including its weight and texture.

Movement

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.

Orientation

Use an anchoring statement, something like "I'm [Full Name]. I live in [City]. Today is [Date]. I am [Current location]." You can expand on the phrase by adding details until you feel calm.

Self-Care Savour

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 flavours that linger on your tongue.

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Monday to Friday

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Crisis Contacts

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- Durham Advanced Learning Centre: (905) 435-5123

National Suicide Helpline 24/7: 9-8-8
Good2Talk 24/7: 1-866-925-5454