Grounding Exercises

REFERENCES

Grounding is a term often used synonymously with mindfulness. They are simple techniques that you can use to “anchor” yourself to the present moment if you feel anxious, stressed, or upset.

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Balanced Thinking

What it is:

A way of looking at a tricky thought and checking it from all sides so you can see what is true, what might not be completely true, and what is a kinder and more helpful way to think.

Why it is helpful:

It helps your brain slow down, keeps thoughts from getting too big or too negative, and makes it easier to handle stress, solve problems, and feel more in control.

When to use it:

When you have a strong, stressful or unhelpful thought and want to work past it.

Examples might be:

- Jumping to conclusions – “I failed a test; I don’t belong in school”
- Thinking the worst – “My friend didn’t say hi, they must hate me.”
- Being hard on yourself – “I made a mistake; I mess everything up.”
- All-or-nothing thinking – “If I’m not perfect at this, I’m no good at all.”

Why this works:

Sometimes our brain tells us a story that makes things feel bigger, scarier, or worse than they really are. When we think in a more balanced way, our emotions are not making decisions for us, and it is easier to figure out what to do next.

It helps us ask:

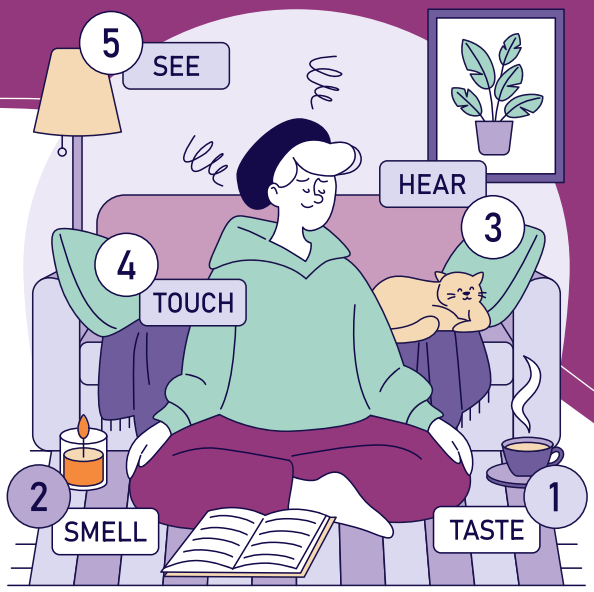
- Is this thought completely true?
- Is there another way to look at this?

How to practice Balanced Thinking

Think of a recent situation that made you feel stressed or worried. Write down the first thought that came to mind, then use the prompts below to examine it from a more balanced perspective.

The situation is…
The tricky thought is...
Something that is true about this is...
Something that is not true about this is...
A more helpful thought is...

The 5-4-3-2-1 Method



What it is:

An exercise that helps you use your five senses to bring your attention back to the present moment. It helps your mind focus on what is around you.

Why it is helpful:

Focusing on your senses can slow your breathing, lower stress, and help you feel more grounded and in control.

When to use it:

When you feel overwhelmed, anxious, distracted, upset.

Why it works:

When you are stressed, your brain can get stuck on worries or “what if” thoughts. This exercise gently shifts your focus to what you can see, hear, and feel right now. It does not make the problem disappear, but it can help your body settle enough to think clearly.

How to practice 5-4-3-2-1

Start by pausing, taking a breath, and looking around. Then follow the steps using your senses:

- **Name FIVE things you can see**. What is the smallest thing you can see? What is something new that you can see?
- **Name FOUR things you can touch**. What do your hands feel? What about your toes? What textures or temperatures can you feel?
- **Name THREE things you can hear**. Are the sounds close by, or far away? Are they loud, or quiet?
- **Name TWO things you can smell**. What smells do you notice? Is there something around you that you can pick up and smell?
- **Name ONE thing you can taste**. Can you taste toothpaste, a meal you ate earlier, or just the air?

If one sense does not feel comfortable, you can change the order, choose a different sense, or skip it entirely.

What I Can Control

What it is:

This activity helps you to focus your energy on the things you can do something about.

Why it is helpful:

When you are stressed or worried, your brain often tries to fix things that are outside your control. This tool can help you let go of those parts and feel confident and calm by focusing on the small, realistic actions you can take.

When to use it:

When you feel worried, overwhelmed, or stressed about something that feels big, confusing, or out of your hands and you want to figure out what you can do next.

Why this works:

When we are stressed, our brains often focus on things we cannot control, which can increase anxiety and make problems feel bigger. Research shows that focusing on small, realistic steps can increase feelings of control, reduce stress, and improve coping. By sorting what you can and cannot control, your brain can calm down and focus on what to do next.

How to practice this?

Think about a situation that is causing you stress or worry. Then complete the prompts below:

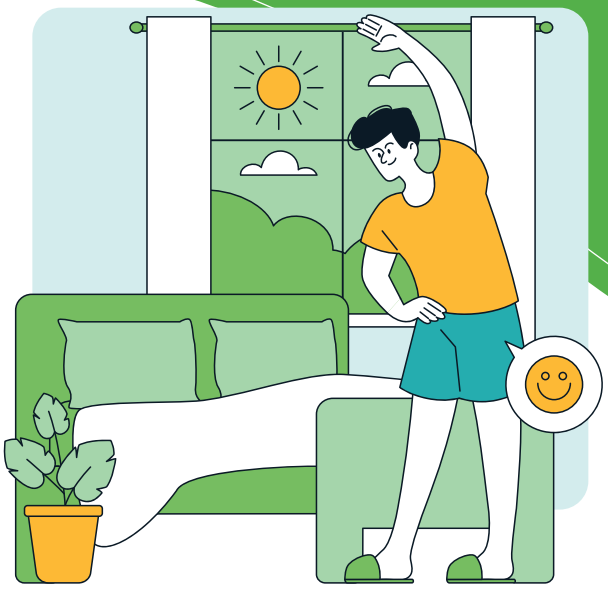
The thing I am worried about is...

Something I can control is...

Something I cannot control is...

One thing I can do to help myself right now is...

Slow Head-to-Toe Relaxation



What it is:

Slowly tightening and relaxing different muscle groups one at a time helps to calm your body, working from your head down to your toes.

Why it is helpful:

It teaches your body how to let go of tension. When your muscles relax, your brain feels calmer too, making it easier to manage stress, worry, or big feelings.

When to use it:

When your body feels tight, jumpy, tense, or full of stress, especially after a long day, before bed, or when you need to settle your nerves.

Why this works:

Focusing on each part of your body can help to slow your attention down. Focusing on relaxing distinct groups of muscles sends a message to your brain that it is okay to rest, which can help your entire body feel more at ease.

How to practice this?

Start at your feet. Tighten the muscles for **5 seconds**, then release.

Move to your legs. Tighten for **5 seconds**, then release. Then, see if you can relax it even more. Notice how they feel.

If tightening your muscles feels uncomfortable, you can simply focus on relaxing each area without tensing first.

Continue the same process for your stomach, shoulders, arms, hands, and face.

Each time you release, take a slow breath out and notice your body becoming heavier and more relaxed.

When you finish, take one more deep breath and notice how your body feels.

Thought Dump

What it is:

A way to empty all the thoughts in your head onto paper (or a phone/computer), so your mind feels less full.

Why it is helpful:

Getting your thoughts out helps you understand what is bothering you, it can help big feelings feel smaller and gives your brain more space to calm down.

When to use it:

When your mind feels crowded, busy, or stressed, or when you have lots of thoughts and do not know where to start.

Why this works:

Your mind can get cluttered, like a messy room full of stuff. Writing your thoughts down is like cleaning that room. You can take things out, sort them, and make space so it feels like there is more space and it can be easier to focus and think.

Thought Dump

Start with a blank paper, note in a phone, or document on a computer.

Write down anything and everything that comes to mind. You can turn your thoughts into paragraphs, bullet points, or single words, whatever feels right. Keep writing until you run out of things to say. Do not worry about spelling, grammar, or making it sound perfect.

When you're finished, you can choose to keep what you wrote if it helps you remember important things, share it with someone you trust, or delete/throw it away if it feels helpful to let those thoughts go after getting them out.

If you do not know where to start, try one of these prompts:

- Right now, I am thinking about...
- One thing I wish I could tell someone is...
- I am feeling nervous/excited/confused because...
- Something that keeps popping into my mind today is...

Circles of Support

What it is:

A way to think about the different people in your life you can go to for help. Some people are in your inner circle (you trust them most), and others are in outer circles (people you can still reach out to if needed).

Why it is helpful:

When you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed this exercise helps you remember that you are not alone and gives you options, so you do not feel stuck or unsure.

When to use it:

When you are not sure who to talk to, when your usual support person is not available, when you are feeling alone, or when you need help thinking of safe and trusted people you can reach out to.

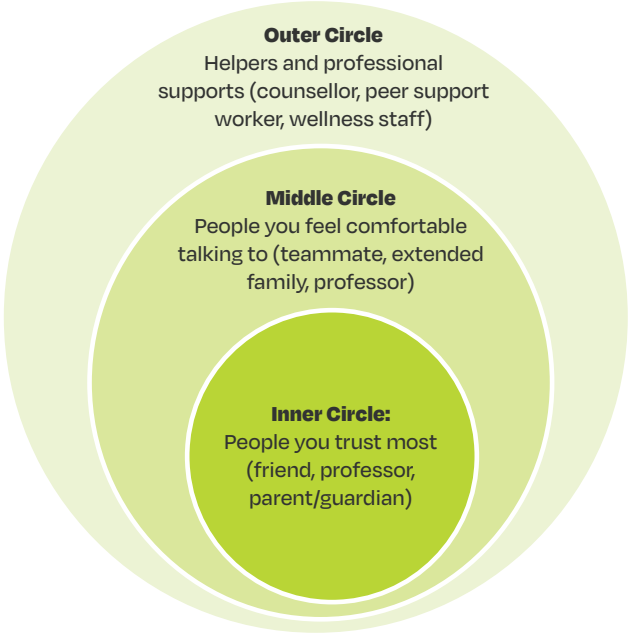
Why this works:

Mapping out your circles helps you see that there are different people you can turn to. It also makes it easier to choose one person instead of feeling overwhelmed trying to decide.

Circles of Support

Think of, or draw three circles:

1. **Inner Circle (Closest Support):** These are people you trust the most and feel safest talking to.
    - Examples: parent/guardian, close friend, a professor you trust.
2. **Middle Circle (Safe Support):** These are people you feel comfortable with and could talk to if needed.[MV4.1]
    - Examples: professor, teammate, extended family member.
3. **Outer Circle (Extra Support):** These are people whose role is to help, even if you do not know them as well.
    - Examples: counsellor, peer support worker, campus wellness services.



Try to name at least one person in each circle. If a circle feels empty, that is okay. You can always add people later. Pick one person you could reach out to today if you needed support.