

# A Guide to **GROUNDING EXERCISES**



**TU DUBLIN STUDENT  
COUNSELLING SERVICE**

# What are Grounding Exercises?

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Grounding exercises are things you can do to bring yourself into contact with the present moment – the here and now. They can be quick strategies (like taking three deep “belly breaths”) or longer, more formal exercises (like meditation). Different strategies work for different people, and there is no “wrong” way to ground yourself. The main aim is to keep your mind and body connected and working together.

Grounding is a set of simple strategies that can help you detach from emotional pain (e.g., anxiety, anger, sadness, self-harm). It is basically a way to distract yourself by focusing on something other than the difficult emotions you are experiencing. You may also think of grounding as distracting yourself, creating a safe place for yourself, or healthy detachment.



Although grounding does not solve the concern that is contributing to your unpleasant emotions, it does provide a temporary way to gain control over your feelings and prevent things from getting worse. Grounding anchors you, gives you a chance to calm down, and allows you to eventually return and address the problem that is triggering the unpleasant emotions to begin with. And grounding can be done anytime and anywhere.

It is recommended to develop and practice a selection of grounding exercises that you can use in different situations; no one technique works for all people or for all situations. Trial a few different grounding techniques and then choose 3-5 that you like.

Practice these 3-5 techniques in times when you don't feel stressed or distressed. Practising when you feel calm will make it easier for you to use these techniques when you really need them.

This booklet lists 15 different grounding techniques that you can trial.

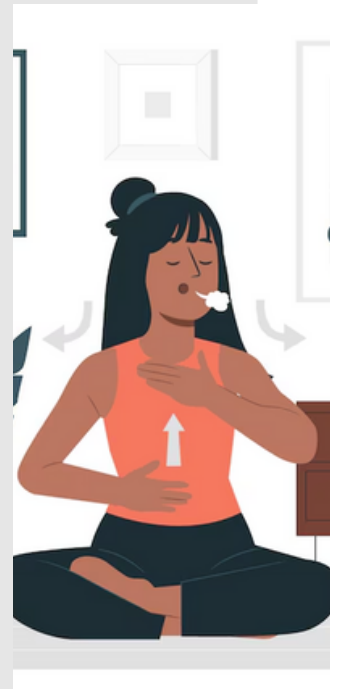
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## Reciting Information

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Remind yourself of who you are now. Say your name. Say your age now. Say where you are now. Say what you have done today. Say what you will do next.

- a. "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am 19 years old. I am in my living room, in my home, in Rathmines, Dublin, Ireland. I woke up early today. I had a shower and fed my dog. I just finished my coffee and toast. Soon I am going to walk to the bus stop and go into college. I am going to walk down \_\_\_\_\_ street and then turn left at the bike shop. Then I am going to...."



## Deep, Long, Slow Breaths

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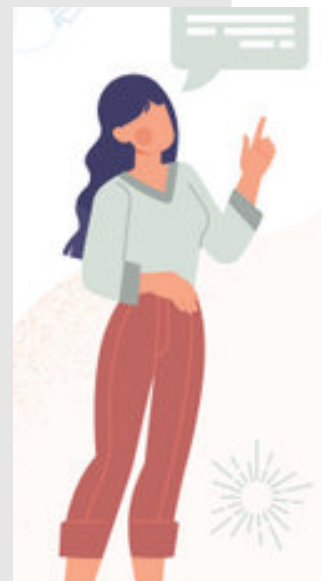
Take ten slow breaths. Focus your attention fully on each breath, on the way in and on the way out. Say the number of the breath to yourself as you exhale.

## List Categories

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Choose at least three of the categories below and name as many items as you can in each one; aim for at least ten. Spend a few minutes on each category to come up with as many items as possible.

Movies	Cars	Countries
Books	Cereals	Colours
Animals	Cities	TV Shows
Famous People	Movie Characters	Sports Teams



## 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

When using this technique, you purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object. Then, answer these 5 questions:

1. What are five things that I can see? Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.
2. What are four things I can feel? Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.
3. What are three things I can hear? Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.
4. What are two things I can smell? Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.
5. What is one thing I can taste? Carry sweets, gum or small snacks for this step can be useful. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavour.

## Sing a Song

Pick a song. It should be a song that you know reasonably well. Sing the song to yourself in your head and “listen” as you do so. Try to remember every word of the song in the correct order. “Listen” to the instruments as they play.

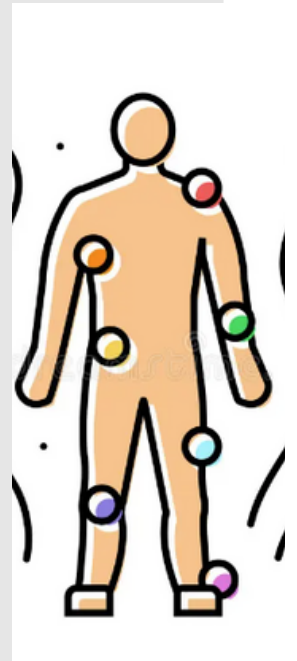


## Body Awareness

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The body awareness technique will bring you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step.

- Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose and exhale through puckered lips.
- Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes 5 times. Notice the sensations in your feet.
- Stomp your feet on the ground a few times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet.
- Clench your hands into fists. Do this as hard as you can, and hold for 15 seconds. Repeat at least twice.
- Press your palms together. Press them as hard as you can and hold for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the sensations in your hands. Repeat at least twice.
- Reach your hands over your head as if you are reaching for the sky. Hold the stretch for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax.
- Take 5 more deep breaths.



## Describe the Steps of a Task

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Pick a task. This can be anything from getting dressed, making toast, driving your car out of your gate, cooking dinner, etc. Make sure it is a task you know well. Describe to yourself every step of that task, one by one. Make sure you describe each step in detail.

## Kind Statements

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Come up with at least 10 kind things you can say about yourself. Remember them, and recite them when you need to feel grounded. Examples could be: “Your name is \_\_\_\_\_, and you are a good person who is going through a hard time right now. You will get through this.” Or “Give yourself credit for the things you have achieved – remember this achievement \_\_\_\_\_.”



## Focus on Your Hands

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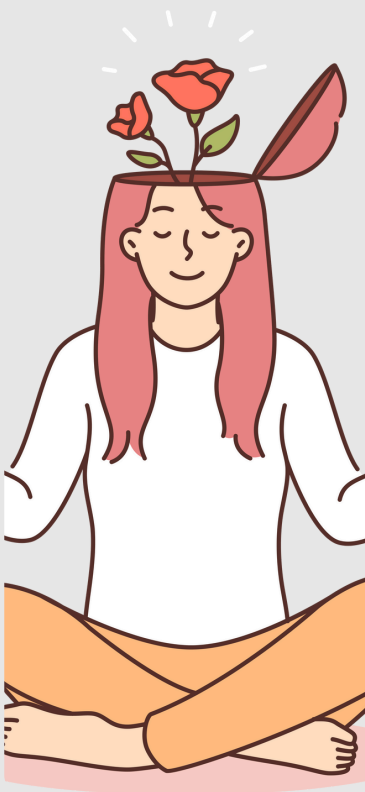
Place your palms together and rub them together quickly. This will create a warm feeling of friction. Focus your attention on that sensation. Then, place your palms on your forearms or thighs, and rub your palms against the fabric. Focus your attention on the sensation of your hands on the fabric. Repeat at least five times.

## Mindfulness Visualisation

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Sometimes it can be helpful to try to view your mental activity as if it belonged to someone else. In general, mindfulness can be described as looking at your thoughts and feelings from outside of your usual self-orientated experience and observing your mind as a stream of consciousness without attaching judgment.

For an example of a simple awareness exercise, use the following guide:



- Start by taking your mind inwards for a moment by focusing on the breath. Take a few gentle deep breaths, from the belly. In and out. Relax. Let go. Continue to breathe for as long as you wish.
- Now take your mind outwards. See your thoughts, feelings, moods, and sensations as objects floating down a stream, coming into view and vanishing from sight. Simply watch without judgment or analysis. Just watch them pass.
- Now pluck an object from the stream and focus on it. Let the other sensations and thoughts go by in the background. Note any new thoughts or feelings that arise from observing this object. Sit with these thoughts and feelings for a moment.
- Whenever you're ready to leave this object behind, simply deposit it on a leaf and let it float downstream.

## Walking Mindfulness

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Take a leisurely walk at a gentle but familiar pace. Observe how you walk and pay attention to the sensations in your body as you walk. Notice how your shoulders feel (tight? Loose? Strong?), the sensations in your feet as they meet the ground, the swing of your arms with each step. Notice the sensations of the ground under your feet – do you feel different textures underneath your feet as you walk? Pay attention to all the different sensations around you, and describe the sensations to yourself as you walk e.g. “I can feel the wind in my hair. I can feel my hair against my face. I can feel the wind against my cheeks. My cheeks feel warm,” and so on.

## Worry Surfing

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Approach your thoughts and feelings like you’re surfing on a wave. Turn your awareness to the warning signs of a negative feeling like worry, anxiety or anger approaching. Imagine the negative emotion coming at you like a wave that gets bigger and bigger as it approaches, crests as it reaches you, and then falls as it moves away.

Imagine riding that wave as it passes, and let the negative emotions go with it. Make sure to celebrate your ability to surf the emotion, but also acknowledge that more will come eventually. When they do, you will be able to “ride” the wave, just like you did now.



## Focus on Your Feet

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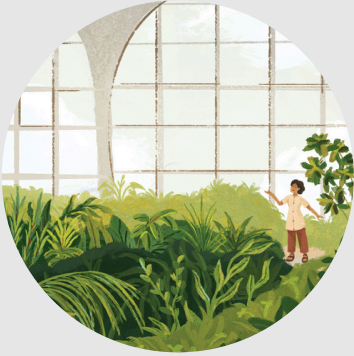
Place your feet on the ground and in your imagination pick your favourite colour to draw an outline around each foot. Start at the heel and using your imaginary pencil slowly go up the side of your foot to your pinky toe and then make sure you draw around each toe and then go back towards the heel. Repeat on the other foot.

Another quick way to focus on your feet when you are in a stressful situation is just wiggle your toes inside your shoe. Pay attention to the sensation as you move each separate toe. Do some move independently of the others? Tense up your whole foot then stretch it out. Now do the other foot, and repeat as necessary.

## 6 Sense Self-Soothe

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Use 6 senses to soothe and calm yourself:

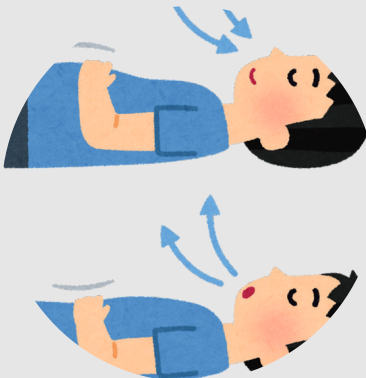


- Sight: Focus your attention on something pleasing in your environment; a tree, a picture, etc.
- Touch: Feel the softness of a fuzzy blanket or the warmth of a bubble bath.
- Sound: Listen to rain falling, a cosy fire crackling, or calming music.
- Smell: Rub a favourite scented lotion on your skin, or burn some candles.
- Taste: Savour a few pieces of sour candy or dark chocolate.
- Movement: Take a leisurely walk or do some gentle stretches.

## Object Meditation

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Hold an object that is special or interesting to you; it might be a good idea to keep such an item in your pockets for when you need it. Focus all of your senses on it and note the information your senses feed back to you, including its shape, size, colour, texture, smell, taste, or sounds it makes when you interact with it.



## Diaphragmatic Breathing

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Close your eyes and pull as much air as you can into your lungs. Try to take in enough so that your belly actually pokes out. Hold your breath for a couple of beats, then let it out as slowly as possible. Try to breathe out as much air as you can by tightening your abdominal muscles.

Research shows that the slower you exhale, the more you engage the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for calming the body down after it's had a bad fright or shock.