

Grounding Techniques

Purposes To give short, simple, effective techniques to use when distress levels rise to the point that a person begins to get carried away with emotion, in other words when the person begins to “daydream,” “fly,” lose language or dissociate. To help a person come back to their senses and be grounded in the present. To increase a person’s capabilities to bring themselves back to present time using techniques that are easy to use in any setting. *Note:* These activities are written for facilitators or companions to lead, and we recommend that they be learned with the help of another person. Some of these activities, indicated by *Italics*, are better done always with a companion to help the distressed person return to present time.

An Object “Take a small object in your hand—whatever you can reach, a small stone, a pen, a cell phone, whatever. Look at the object and describe it in as much detail as possible—its color, texture, size, shape, read any writing on it, what it is used for and so forth.”

3 2 1 “Look around above eye level and name three things you can see, three things you can touch, three things you can hear; now two things you can see, two things you can touch, two things you can hear; then one thing you can see, one thing you can touch, and one thing you can hear.”

Fingers Ask everyone to raise two fingers (index and middle finger on one hand) in front of their face and have their eyes follow the two fingers as they move from one side of the body to the other, crossing the center line of the body, weaving through the air. Stop a moment, rest and repeat.

Five-Letter Word Suggest a five-letter word. Ask people to think of geographic places, types of food, or other categories, that begin with each of the five letters.

In This Chair (or On This Floor) While sitting in a circle, say to everyone, “Feel your bottom on your chair (or floor). Notice the legs of the chair go down to the floor. Notice the floor goes out to the walls and the walls go into the foundation of the building. Notice the foundation goes into the ground and the ground spreads out to be the town of [Name] which is on the earth and the earth is a large ball of mass in the universe. The universe supports the earth, which supports the town of [Name], which supports this plot of ground, which supports the foundation of this building, which supports the walls, which supports the floor, which supports the chair, which supports me. I am supported by all of this.”

Closed Eyes [Recommendation: do this with a partner to help bring you back into the present. Remember that emotion builds inside. If the emotion is too high, then this approach may make it worse, not better. So, use this activity when it helps. If it makes you feel worse, stop immediately and use “An Object” or “3, 2, 1.”] When you are ready, close your eyes and remember your personal safe place, then ask yourself what it is you need right now. Before opening your eyes, say a concrete but unusual word such as “Snapdragon,” “Frog” or “What color is my shirt?” Something that pulls you into present time.

Silence Sit silently. Ten minutes is good; twenty will take people deeper. When you feel the group has become calm and centered and it is time to move on, simply say, “Thank you.” You may take hands on either side around the circle or shake the persons’ hands beside you.

Pleasant Memories Ask everyone to sit comfortably. “I will talk you through a few steps to recall a pleasant memory. When we get to the step where you are actually feeling really good and happy, we want to imprint that memory with a physical code. You may pick your own physical code, but often it is gently pinching or rubbing the skin between your thumb and first finger with the opposite hand. Whichever hand you use, always use the same hand when imprinting or recalling pleasant memories. So right now gently pinch or rub the skin between your thumb and first finger or pick your own simple, tactile action.” [Pause.] “Okay, now stop.” [Pause.] “Now, relax your breathing. Relax your eyes. Relax your mind. Smile. Remember a pleasant memory. Try to use all your senses to remember this pleasant memory fully. What colors do you see? What and who are around you? What sounds do you hear? What is the air like? As you feel the full goodness or happiness of the memory, do the action you have chosen.” Give the participants time to recall and rub their hand. When you see everyone doing their action for a bit, then say, “Okay, you can come back now. If you do this frequently, whenever you need to shift your mood or energy, you can repeat your action while recalling pleasant thoughts and the memories and feelings will tend to come to you more quickly even in difficult times and circumstances.”

Gong If you have a gong, you may use it. Say to everyone, “If it’s comfortable to do so, close your eyes; if not, that’s okay, but if your eyes get heavy you may close them later. Let your mind follow the sound.” Hit the gong and wait until the sound is completely gone.

Walk or Run If someone is carried away with emotion, invite them to a safe, quiet place away from others. Give them a moment to adjust to being out of the group. If they still don’t feel they can rejoin the group, invite them to go outside with you and walk really fast. If that doesn’t work, then run. After a bit you can return. If someone “goes berserk,” then take them outside to walk or run.