Introduction to Grounding

Adapted from Seeking Safety by Lisa Najavits (2002)

What is Grounding?

- Grounding is a practice that can help us stay safe and present during moments of distress.
  - Situations in which grounding might be useful include:
    - Intense emotional pain
    - Impulses to engage in harmful coping strategies (substance misuse, self-injury, and other unsafe behaviors)
    - Anxiety and panic
    - Dissociation
    - Flashbacks and other trauma-related intrusive experiences
- Sometimes when we are overwhelmed with pain, we react in extremes—either by numbing or by losing ourselves in the pain. Grounding puts a “healthy distance” between us and our painful feelings.
- Grounding is not relaxation or avoidance.
- Grounding is one strategy for remaining anchored in reality while tolerating whatever painful feelings are part of that reality.

Types of Grounding

Three types of grounding are mental, physical, and soothing. You might find some types and techniques more helpful or more accessible than others. Feel free to take what works and leave the rest.

Mental Grounding

- Describe your surroundings in detail. For example, “I’m sitting at my desk in my room, I feel the smooth wood of my chair, I see my laptop and my water bottle on the desk, the walls are beige and there are shadows from the sunny window…
- Find a rainbow in your surroundings. Try to go in order, starting with something red and ending with something purple (ROYGBIV).
- Recite a phrase from a favorite song, poem, or book.
- Play “categories.” (E.g. name as many movies, holidays, breakfast foods, cities, etc.)
- Use an anchoring statement. “My name is ______. I am ____ years old. I am currently located ______. The date is ___. The time is ___. I am safe here in the present.

Physical Grounding

- 5-4-3-2-1. List 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
- Clench and release your fists or curl and release your toes.
- Do jumping jacks.
“Ground” your heels into the floor or place your hands flat against the wall and use your whole body to push as if you could move it.

Pay attention to your breathing, maybe noticing the sensation of air entering your nostrils and exiting through your lips, or your chest and stomach rising and falling.

Hold your hands under cool (not freezing) or warm (not scalding) water. Observe how the water feels on your palms versus your knuckles.

**Soothing Grounding**

- Think about or write down five things that bring you joy.
- Talk kindly to yourself. For example, “I’m having a hard time right now, and these feelings will pass.”
- Visualize your “internal support team.” Picture three people who are or were a caring presence in your life. Picture their faces, voices, and comforting words.
- Touch a furry pet or something soft and pleasant, like a favorite blanket or sweater.

**Tips for Practicing Grounding**

- Practice grounding before you need it! It might be easier to access your favorite techniques in moments of distress if you’re already in the habit.
- Stay neutral in your observations; don’t assign values like “good” or “bad” to your observations and experiences.
- Keep your eyes open to help you stay in the present.
- Carry an index card or a note on your phone with your top three grounding techniques, a soothing or anchoring statement, or a quote that helps center you.
- Offer patience to yourself if grounding doesn’t work right away. Keep practicing! Try creating your own grounding techniques!

**Resources**
