



Linda Bishopp MA, Dip. Couns., TFT Alg., Reg MBACP, MCThA, MHEA

Psychotherapist, Counsellor, Healer T: 07905 038378 E: linda@lindabishopp.co.uk

Grounding for PTSD and Trauma Symptoms

Grounding is a powerful tool in the trauma healing toolkit because it generally reduces states of activation, sometimes quickly and significantly. Experiencing an almost total reduction in activation just through grounding can be surprising, since grounding is very simple.

Definition: Grounding is the act of connecting more deeply and completely to the body, strengthening the feeling of being inside the body and connected to the ground or earth. Many grounding exercises help deepen our connection to anything that is supporting the weight of the body. Other grounding exercises help deepen our connection to our 5 senses, using them to connect us with our body in general.

When grounding by connecting to the ground or objects that support our body, we may tune into the following kinds of feelings in the body:

1. What it feels like to be physically supported
2. The feeling of having a definite physical location
3. The feeling of the solidity and stability of the physical objects that are supporting our body

When the body receives these messages about support, location and solidity, it naturally feels comfort, relief and relaxation. These natural bodily responses can contain, diffuse and diminish, to some degree, states of activation of the nervous system, e.g. panic, upset, anxiety or intense emotion.

Grounding can also be used to detach or distract from activation, to experience a brief time of relief. It can also be used as brain training – focusing on grounding can break us out of mental and emotional habit patterns, eventually retraining the neural pathways of the brain to respond in a new way to environmental triggers.

Whenever we have a first hand, embodied experience of transforming the state of the nervous system, this can help us feel less helpless and more in control. Also, grounding regularly may gradually shift us out of the grips of constant activation patterns and into present time.

Grounding Helps with Trauma Goals:

Goal 1. Danger to Safety – The body feels safer when sensing the support provided by the earth.

Goal 2. Activation to Calm Alert / Self-Regulation – Grounding can reduce activation states to some degree most of the time.

Goal 3. Dissociation to Groundedness / Into the Body – Grounding helps counter dissociation.

Goal 4. Overwhelm to Simplicity – Grounding helps focus the mind on one thing for a

while, reducing mental overwhelm and chaos.

Goal 8. Using the Five Senses – There are grounding exercises that use different senses, such as touch and hearing.

Supports: The kinds of materials and objects we can connect to while grounding include: **chair, couch, bed, floor, lawn, dirt path, concrete, sand, etc.**



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Multiple Ways to Connect: There are many ways to connect more with the earth, including:

- 1. Sensation** – using awareness and attention to tune into sensations in the body that result from gravity pressing us onto the supportive material/object.
- 2. Visualization** – using active imagination or guided meditation to encourage the body/mind system to become more connected to the idea and feeling of being supported by the earth, floor, chair etc.
- 3. Movement** – touching the floor or earth with one's hands or body, doing yoga, dancing, jogging etc. while consciously feeling the connection to the ground.
- 4. Tactile Sensations** – touching textures, temperatures (ice, cold or hot water), objects (putty, beanbag).
- 5. Sound** – listening to sound and feeling the sound vibration – particularly low sounds like Tibetan monks chanting, listening to nature sounds, creating or listening to rhythm (drumming).

Grounding for Trauma Healing Using Pressure – Therapy Pillow (application of pressure)

Instructions:

Obtain a therapy pillow, aka grounding pillow. You can also make your own grounding pillow using beans, rice, or sand.

Place the pillow onto your lap.

You may also experiment with placing the pillow on your feet or shoulders. If laying down you may place it on your chest, back, stomach, head – anywhere you feel could help bring calmness to your body.

Pay attention to your body.

Notice if you feel a shift in the sensations in your body.

Describe what you are feeling. For example, do you feel:

Tension?

Relaxation?

Stillness?

Motion?

Lightness?

Heaviness?

Solidity, compactness?

Diffusion, airiness?

Clarity?

Muddiness?

Spend a few minutes allowing your nervous system to shift in any ways it needs to.

When you feel complete, name any ways you feel different from when you began the exercise.



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Grounding Exercise – Feet, Seat and Back (Using Focused Attention on Sensations)

Focused attention is a skill of the mind.

Sensation is an attribute of our biology, our nervous system. Tactile sensations, the feeling of the body touching something, is one of our 5 senses – the sense of touch.

This is a basic grounding exercise that you may use if feeling stressed, anxious, panicked, hyped up, triggered, having racing thoughts, feeling dissociated, spaced out or exhausted.

Goal:

The goal of this exercise is to harness the skills of the mind – focus and attention – and an attribute of our biology – sensation – to transform the state of the nervous system from activation to calm alert. The goal is to successfully use our own willpower and intention to return ourselves to our own Resiliency Zone. This exercise also helps us emerge from numbness by activating one of the 5 senses – tactile sensations – that may have gone numb as a result of trauma. It also helps us to deepen the experience of being in a body and having a body, reducing dissociation.

Instructions:

Sit in a location where you will be able to relax and focus for a few minutes.

1. Focus your attention on the **sensations in your feet** resting on the floor.

Rest your attention on that area for a little bit. Relax. Be curious. Watch. Breathe.

Begin to hone in on specific sensations. What do you notice?

Is there pressure on any part of your foot?

Are there different temperatures?

Do you feel any sensations like slight tingling, your shoes touching your feet, or air moving around?

Describe in your mind or out loud the characteristics of the sensations on the soles of your feet, insides, and on the surface.

Feel what it feels like to be supported by the floor. Feel how solid the floor is. You may think to yourself, “The floor supports me.” You can slide or push your feet against the floor to make that sensation stronger if you want. Feel the floor just a little bit longer than you feel inclined to. Breathe.

2. Focus your attention on the **sensations in your bottom and thighs** sitting on the surface of your chair seat, bench etc.

Rest your attention on those areas for a little bit. Relax. Be curious. Watch. Breathe.

Begin to hone in on specific sensations. What do you notice?

Is there pressure on different parts?

Are there different temperatures?

Do you feel any slight prickling or tingling, sensations of your clothing, or of the air?



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Describe in your mind or out loud the characteristics of the sensations.

Let your awareness include the seat of the chair. Now let your awareness expand to include the legs of the chair, and the floor. Can you sense that below you there is a place where the feet of the chair are supported by the floor? It's OK if it feels kind of vague or just a general awareness. Just rest with whatever sense you have at this moment of the chair and of the floor under the chair.

3. Focus your attention on the **sensations in your back** leaning against the back of the chair.

Rest your attention in the area for a little bit. Relax. Be curious. Watch. Breathe.

Begin to hone in on specific sensations. What do you notice?

Is there pressure on certain parts of your back?

Are there different temperatures?

Do you feel any stiff areas, soft areas, sensations of tingling?

Describe in your mind or out loud the characteristics of the sensations.

Sense the back of the chair. Sense how the back connects into the chair seat and legs, and how the legs are supported by the floor.

These are the characteristics of the specific location where you are located in this present moment.

You are in one location and one time. You may think to yourself, "I am located here. I am supported by the floor. This is the place I am in this moment."

Finish by just sensing if there are any ways you feel different now than when you started the exercise.

Adapted from <http://www.new-synapse.com/aps/wordpress/?p=803>