



Grounding Strategies

Waves and Whirlpools

We are complex human beings, and our emotional experiences don't always seem to make sense, or to follow a pattern or purpose. One of the aims of therapy is to help you, as you join with the psychologist, come to observe your feelings from a place of acceptance and self-compassion, and most often over time they do come to make sense, and we begin to proactively and more helpfully relate to our feelings in new ways.

The aim of therapy is not to learn “control” our feelings, and certainly not to dismiss them or shut them out, or run from them. We acknowledge that your feelings, while not always pleasant or wanted, are all part of living a rich, fulfilling, grand and meaningful life. It is just that we can develop habits and cycles that become so automatic that they overwhelm us. It can feel like we are thrown right into the deep end, in a whirlpool, as our thoughts and feelings swirl and grow ever bigger. Our instinct is to try to escape the feelings, because they become all-encompassing. We can fear being driven down deeper into these feelings, because at that moment it feels like we will never come back up.

However, this is not the case. Feelings are not like whirlpools, they are like waves. They come, they are big and overwhelming, (and we get wet), but inevitably they will pass. Emotional storms are certainly not easy to navigate, but there are some tips and strategies you can use to learn to survive them, and not fear them.

Learning to “Surf”

The first thing to do is to acknowledge that you most likely need some help in learning to ride these waves. So many of us are taught that the ocean of emotions is scary, and that the best thing to do is stay out of the water at all times. Then we find ourselves flung into the deep end, we panic, and flap around trying to get ourselves out. But this panic usually leads to more panic, we don't think as clearly, we grasp for whatever is in our reach, until eventually it all ends in exhaustion and despair. Sound familiar? Well, when you look at it this way, it is clear that firstly we may need to bust a few myths about emotions, in that they are not themselves scary or terrible, or “weak”. It's just that you fear the unknown, and really, no one has ever taught you how to surf.

Go With The Flow

Once we accept that we don't get anywhere panicking, struggling, or even worse – judging ourselves – we can remove a huge part of the cycle that maintains negative emotions. When you are caught in a riptide, we are all taught to go with the flow, not to struggle and fight, and that eventually we will be spun out of the rip and into clearer waters. All you really need to do is to let go, relax, and float. Eventually, this will pass.



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Notice The Source

Weather patterns are naturally occurring in nature, and all play a role in some way in restoring homeostasis within environments. Our emotions work a bit the same way. Mindfulness techniques, observing, and monitoring tasks can help you get in touch with how your emotional storms get stirred up.

*Where is the wind coming from (what are your common triggers)?
What is fueling the cycle (thoughts – body sensations – actions)?
How can we disrupt these to lessen the impact?*

Look For The Lifesavers

We all find ourselves “out of our depth” from time to time, and of course emotional whirlpools, waves, and riptides are no joke, they are actually very, v-e-r-y hard to navigate. We always need to remember that we have helpers, who are calm, steady, and ready to lend a hand. Try to be prepared for rough waters by letting your friends and supports know what type of help you may need when the big feelings strike.

We are all different, so it could be things like...

- A warm smile
- Some comforting words
- A mantra or saying, song lyrics, and image or metaphor
- Telling a joke
- Help me get some fresh air

Drop An Anchor

These techniques, commonly referred to as “grounding strategies”, are mind, body, and action techniques that are designed to disrupt the emotional swirls. Inside your brain, emotions light up regions the limbic system, our “reptilian brain” associated with survival and in this state we are primed to see more danger, and act instinctively to protect ourselves. Our prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for rationality, problem solving, and creativity, is virtually non-functional. Grounding techniques are designed to exercise and ignite this region so that we can help steady ourselves while we wait out the storm.



Grounding Strategies

Use Your Body

- STRAIGHTEN your body, stand (or sit) upright, press your feet into the ground, feel the contact with the earth as though you are a tree with roots hooking you into the ground.
- STRETCH your arms – bring them high above your head, out wide, bring your palms together and gently press, feel the energy inside your body and use the big muscles of your arms to anchor this feeling into your palms.
- MOVE your body in whatever way you feel, stomp your feet, walk about, shake out the feelings, circle your arms and waist, just keep moving.

Use Your Breath

- NOTICE your breath, simply bring your attention there and watch. You may deepen your breath if you choose, or simply notice it.
- SEND your breath to the place in your body with the intense feeling. Imagine your breath surrounding the hurt place with loving kindness.

Harness Your Thinking

- FOCUS your attention onto the HERE and NOW... Name for yourself...
 - My location
 - Today's date, the time, the year
 - The weather, what season is it, what is it like today
- ORIENT to your surroundings... What can you sense around you... Name what you can see, hear, touch, smell, taste... describe these items as though you were describing them to a young child.

Notice and Name Your Feelings

- I am having a feeling of... use these cues (or use your own word)...

DISTRACTED	OVERWHELMED	ANGRY	PANIC
FEAR	CONFUSION	DISORIENTED	NUMB
WORRY	UNSAFE	THREATENED	SAD
- "This feeling is here for a reason (it is not a 'bad' feeling)"
- "This feeling will pass"
- "I am big enough to manage this feeling and support myself"

Be Kind To Yourself

- HOLD onto your comfort (anchoring) item – this is an object with a unique texture such as a stone, a bead, a charm
- SOOTHE your feelings by repeating your comforting MANTRA