

Creative + Practical Grounding Tools (And When to Use Them)

Why Grounding Tools Work

When your nervous system goes into fight, flight, freeze, or fawn mode, grounding tools help bring you back into the present. They send signals to your brain that you are safe, helping to re-engage your parasympathetic nervous system (the 'brake pedal').

When to Use Grounding Tools

You don't have to wait until you're completely overwhelmed. Grounding works best when you catch anxiety early-but it can also support you during full-blown panic or emotional shutdown. Different tools work for different intensity levels. Here are some examples:

[Mild Scenario] Scenario: I Got an Anxious Text From My Partner

Try these gentle grounding tools:

- 5-4-3-2-1 Technique: Name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste
- Take a 3-minute walk and narrate what you see out loud
- Chew gum or eat something with texture (crunchy, cold, etc.)

[High Scenario] Scenario: The World Feels Like It's Ending (Overwhelm, Panic, Spiral)

Try these stronger regulation tools:

- Run cold water over your hands or splash your face
- Place an ice pack or frozen veggies on your chest or neck
- Ground your feet and push them into the floor while naming where you are and what day it is
- Use a weighted object (blanket, backpack, heavy pillow) on your lap or shoulders

[Restless Scenario] Scenario: My Thoughts Won't Stop and I Can't Focus

Try these redirecting tools:

- Doodle, color, or scribble on paper (no art skills needed!)
- Do a silly task on purpose: sing your grocery list, alphabetize a playlist
- Try 'brain dumping': write down everything on your mind as fast as you can for 3 minutes

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[Shutdown Scenario] Scenario: I Feel Disconnected or Zoned Out (Dissociation or Freeze)

Try these sensory tools to reconnect:

- Clap your hands, stomp your feet, or shake your body for 30 seconds
- Hold something textured or scented (stress ball, essential oil roller, rough fabric)
- Listen to upbeat music and gently tap along

Your Nervous System Is Listening

There's no wrong way to ground. Experiment with what feels soothing, engaging, or even silly. The goal isn't to 'fix' how you feel-it's to stay with yourself through the feeling. That's regulation. That's healing. That's you doing the work.