

Managing Derealization and Depersonalization

Tools to help you feel grounded, real, and connected again

What Are Derealization and Depersonalization?

- **Derealization:** Feeling like the world around you is foggy, unreal, or dreamlike.
- **Depersonalization:** Feeling detached from your own body, thoughts, or identity—like you're watching yourself from outside.

These are common responses to stress, anxiety, trauma, or panic. They are not harmful or permanent, and there are tools to help.

Grounding Skills (Reconnect with the Present)

Try these when you feel disconnected:

5-4-3-2-1 Technique

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Temperature Reset

- Hold an ice cube, splash cold water on your face, or drink something hot or cold.

Movement

- Take a walk, stretch, stomp your feet, or do jumping jacks to feel your body.

Texture and Touch

- Run your hands over something textured and describe how it feels out loud.
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Nervous System Regulation

- **Breathing:** Breathe in for 4, out for 6. Focus on the feeling of air entering and leaving. If this feels overwhelming, only focus on trying to make the exhale longer than the inhale (sometimes it helps to narrow your lips to make the air leave your mouth more slowly--- focus on the feeling of the air passing out of your mouth)
 - **Humming or Singing:** Stimulates the vagus nerve and brings calm.
 - **Limit stimulants:** Reduce caffeine, sugar, and screen time when symptoms are active.
 - **Sleep & Nutrition:** Stable blood sugar and rest reduce episodes.
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Mental Techniques

- **Name the Symptom:** “This is derealization. It’s a stress response. I am safe.”
It feels scary, but it is a feeling, not a reality—and it is temporary, it WILL pass.
 - **Reality Check:** Read a sign, look at a clock, touch a solid object and describe it.
 - **Accept, Don’t Fight:** Trying to “snap out of it” often makes it worse. Try: “It’s okay to feel this. It will pass.”
 - **Competing Stimulus:** Engage in another activity that occupies your attention and competes with your ability to pay attention to the feeling of derealization. This is a “feeling” and even though it is scary, we don’t need to pay attention to it- if we do something that requires focus/attention, our mind can no longer focus on the feeling (think of something that might require using your hands or some sort of concentration, perhaps movement)
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Long-Term Support

- **Track Triggers:** Note when symptoms come up (lack of sleep, conflict, overstimulation).
 - **Routine:** Regular structure helps the nervous system feel safe.
 - **Creative Activities:** Art, music, movement, or cooking bring you back into the present.
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You are not broken.

These symptoms are your brain’s way of protecting you when overwhelmed. With time, practice, and support, they can fade and become manageable.