

For August 2, 2018

Stress Management through Grounding: A Guide for Disability Workers

Stress is something that we all face as a normal—and sometimes necessary—part of life. Stressful situations can motivate us to take charge and accomplish tasks necessary to thrive. For example, feeling pressure at work to follow specific rules might lead to a more conscientious work attitude. There are times, however, when stress exceeds the level at which it is motivational and becomes problematic. If left unchecked, stress can worsen both mental and physical health. Stress increases the likelihood of smoking, overeating, or taking risks. Disability workers are at risk for compassion fatigue and burnout because their roles are highly demanding and uniquely challenging. Our daily work provides the best support and quality of life for individuals with disabilities; however, sometimes we overlook the toll it takes on our own mind and body.

Stress can be experienced in many unique ways, two of which are through physical symptoms (i.e., soreness, rapid heart rate, sweating, dry mouth, digestive issues or headaches) and psychological experiences (i.e., heightened emotions, persistent or racing thoughts). Both of these ways of experiencing stress can be uncomfortable, distressing or even painful. It is then, if not before, that one must use stress management techniques and skills to correct the situation. By taking an active role in your own stress management, you can remain present in your life but not engaged in the stressors that trouble you.

Grounding is a strategy that can be used to detach from physical or emotional pain and thus reduce stress. Grounding works by focusing your attention on the outside world rather than focusing inward on the recurring negative thoughts, feelings and pain. It is a way of re-centering yourself. You can think of it as a healthy form of distraction to get through a rough time. Grounding techniques help bring you back to the here-and-now of reality and help you regain your focus. Grounding helps you find balance between being conscious of your stress and also being able to tolerate it.

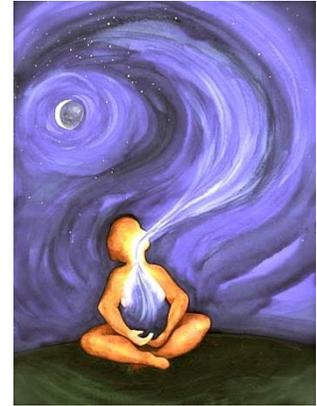
Some signs that you are not grounded and should try grounding are becoming distracted easily, overthinking problems, engaging in personal drama, worrying, desiring material things, lying to yourself about stress, being obsessed with how others see you, poor sleep, chronic pain and fatigue to name a few. When practising grounding, one must remember the following:

- Grounding is a personal experience and you must find the technique(s) that work best for you individually.
- Grounding exercises are exercises! They are not the same as relaxation techniques and meditation. Grounding does not try to empty your mind.
- Grounding can be done at any time and in any place. It can be done subtly so that no one has to know you are grounding yourself.
- Mastering grounding techniques takes practice. Try them in different locations, at different times and at varying levels of stress. The more you practise, the easier these techniques will be to use when you really need them.
- Focus on what is happening here-and-now. Do not let your mind slip into thoughts of the past or future.
- Try to keep your eyes open and scan the room while grounding. Keep the lights on.
- Be fully present in your body and feel the connection between yourself and the earth.



Some grounding techniques to try:

- Do things that produce sensations that are difficult to ignore, like listening to loud music, gripping an ice cube, smelling something strong (peppermint), biting into a lime or lemon, taking a visual inventory of the objects around you, snapping a rubber band, or taking a cold shower.
- Cover the top of your head with one hand and focus on the feeling of having your hand there for 30 seconds.
- Feel your feet from a sitting or standing position. Put all your attention and awareness into the bottoms of your feet and observe the sensations.
- Follow your breath. Trace the air as you inhale through your nose. Follow the path that the air takes through your lungs and as it exits your body on the exhale. Do not try to change your breathing in any way; simply observe it.
- Stand like a tree with your feet directly below your shoulders. Tuck your chin and straighten your spine while resting your hands at your sides or placing them over your navel. Sink your body's weight and tension into your feet so that it can be absorbed into the ground. You may imagine roots coming out of your feet and growing into the ground.
- Find the rainbow in the space around you by looking at an object of each colour of the rainbow in order (red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple).
- Name five things you can see, four things you are touching, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.
- Do a body scan and notice what each individual part of your body is feeling.
- Look around your space for five things that are square and five things that are round.
- Create a list of everything you can think of that fits in a certain category, such as fruits or breeds of dogs.
- Read a document backwards.
- Describe your environment in great detail.
- Repeat a safety statement or affirmation of yourself (e.g., "I am here now. I am safe and this feeling will pass.").
- Recite your favourite poem or song to yourself.



More grounding techniques can be found online. (Below are a few web pages with more techniques.) It is important to seek out and practise techniques that work for you and fit your individual needs. Practise grounding daily as part of your self-care routine to maintain a healthy and balanced life.

More grounding techniques are found at

- <https://www.winona.edu/resilience/Media/Grounding-Worksheet.pdf>
- <https://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/files/Grounding%20Techniques.pdf>
- <https://themighty.com/2017/08/grounding-exercises-manage-stress-anxiety-trauma/>

ADWA thanks Rayna Tonellato, Registered Provisional Psychologist, for contributing this E-Bulletin. Rayna is a Counselling Therapist at Calgary SCOPE Society.

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