

Grounding Exercises

What Are Grounding Exercises and How Can They Help You?

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Most people with [borderline personality disorder](#)¹ (BPD) can benefit from grounding exercises. These exercises are helpful during [dissociation](#)², [panic](#)³, strong [impulsive urges](#)⁴, [flashbacks](#)⁵, and intense emotional distress. Learn and practice one or two of these techniques to use when you are in a tough spot.

What Are Grounding Exercises?

Grounding exercises are designed to help you focus your attention on the present moment. They are helpful whenever you are having an experience that is overwhelming, or that is absorbing all of your attention. Grounding exercises are meant to "snap you back into reality" relatively quickly.

There are a variety of exercises that have been developed, and different exercises can be used to target different situations. For example, some of the exercises can be done in public; others are more suitable for being used in private for very intense [dissociative experiences](#)⁶. It is usually best to practice a variety of these exercises so that you have several to draw on when needed.

Visual and Auditory Grounding Exercises

Visual and auditory grounding exercises rely on using your senses of sight and hearing to ground you in the present moment.

These exercises are suitable for any environment — you don't need to be able to see or hear anything special to be able to practice these. They are particularly useful for times when you are in public and need to practice grounding, because you can do these without anyone else knowing what you are doing. You can stop the exercise whenever you are feeling reconnected to the present moment reality.

To conduct a visual grounding exercise, take a deep breath, and then start to mentally catalog the things you see around you. Notice even the mundane details (e.g., that electrical outlet is white, and is a little bit crooked).

To conduct an auditory grounding exercise, listen to the sounds you hear around you. Don't just notice the obvious sounds, but notice the layers of sound (e.g., the sounds behind the sounds). Notice how sounds rise and fall, their pitch and timbre.

Tactile Grounding Exercises

Tactile grounding exercises use your sense of touch to ground you in the present moment. These exercises can be used when you are experiencing particularly intense distress or dissociation.

One commonly used tactile grounding exercise is done using an ice cube. Grab an ice cube out of the freezer and hold it in your hand until it starts to cause some mild discomfort (don't hold on to it for too long or it can cause pain). Many people find that the discomfort helps them reconnect with the present moment.

Other tactile ground exercises include taking a cool shower, or using a rubber band on your wrist to quickly "snap" yourself back to the present moment.

Other Grounding Exercises

If none of the above work for you, be creative and make up your own grounding exercise. What senses are most powerful for you? Smell? Taste? Touch? Perhaps a strong smell (such as a whiff of peppermint from very strong mints) can bring you back into the present moment. Try different grounding tools until you find one that works for you.

Sources: Linehan, MM. "Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder." New York: Guilford Press, 1993.

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