My Grounding Toolkit

PAGE 1 / FIND YOUR BEARINGS

Grounding is a way of gently bringing attention to what is happening here and now. It may help when thoughts race, panic rises, you feel detached, or your senses become overwhelmed. It is not a requirement to become calm, and it does not have to work every time.

First: check your surroundings

Before trying an exercise, notice whether you are physically safe. You can keep your eyes open, stay seated, move, take a break or stop. Choose an exercise that feels neutral or tolerable rather than forcing yourself through discomfort.

1. Three steady facts

Name three simple facts: my name is… / today is… / I am in… If dates or places feel difficult, name a familiar object, a colour or the room you are in. You can speak, write or think the answers.

2. Find one neutral detail

Look for a shape, straight edge, pattern or ordinary object. Describe it without judging it: “The window has four sides” or “The chair is blue.” This can be gentler than searching for five things at once.

3. Follow your compass

Without straining, notice what is in front of you, then to one side, then behind you. Move only your eyes if turning your head is uncomfortable. Let your attention return to the surface supporting your body.

When thoughts are racing

Try one external detail for 20–30 seconds. If your attention wanders, that is not failure. Simply return to the same object, or choose another exercise. You do not need to complete a sequence.

My early warning signs

What might tell me I need a little grounding? Examples: tight shoulders, rushing thoughts, feeling unreal, irritability, wanting to escape.

My easiest first step

Choose one small action you could try without preparing anything.

Choose a Grounding Route

There is no single correct way to ground yourself. Some people find sensory exercises reassuring; others find them intense. Choose only the routes that suit you.

Sight — look for what is steady

Notice one colour, a familiar object or a shape. Trace its outline with your eyes. If looking around is overwhelming, focus on one small area instead.

Touch — find a comfortable surface

Notice your feet against the floor, your back against the chair or your hands resting on your legs. If it feels helpful, press gently and release. Avoid textures that are unpleasant or overstimulating.

Sound — listen without searching

Notice one nearby sound, or the quiet between sounds. You might prefer a familiar voice or low-volume background sound. Skip this if noise is already too much.

Smell and taste — entirely optional

A familiar, tolerable smell or sip of water can sometimes help you orient yourself. Never force a smell, food or taste that is unpleasant, triggering or unsafe.

The flexible 5–4–3–2–1 approach

The traditional method invites you to notice five things you see, four you feel, three you hear, two you smell and one you taste. You can reduce this to one sight, one touch or one sound. It is a choice, not a test.

Body-based grounding

Feel support: notice where your body meets a stable surface. Unclench one area: soften your hands, jaw or shoulders slightly, if comfortable. Move gently: stretch fingers, roll shoulders or walk a few steps where safe.

Breathing is optional

If breathing feels reassuring, notice its natural rhythm without changing it. Breath-focused exercises can worsen discomfort for some people, including during panic. You can use touch, movement or an external object instead.

What feels helpful — and what should I avoid?

My Personal Grounding Plan

PAGE 3 / MAKE IT YOUR OWN

A useful toolkit is personal, flexible and realistic. You might need different approaches at home, in public, at work or during a particularly difficult day. Use this page to choose a starting point rather than creating another task to complete.

1. What do I notice first?

My signs of overwhelm, panic, disconnection or sensory overload:

2. My first small action

Choose one: three steady facts, one neutral object, feet on the floor, a familiar sound, gentle movement, or another option.

3. My backup approach

If the first technique does not suit the moment, I could try:

4. My environment and accessibility needs

Consider lighting, noise, privacy, communication, movement, sensory preferences and whether you need to keep your eyes open.

5. Support from another person

Who could help? What would I want them to say or do? It may help to ask for quiet company, a reminder of one step or permission not to explain.

Afterwards: what did I learn?

Did anything feel a little more manageable? What would I change next time? A technique can be useful even if distress does not disappear.

Important: Grounding is a self-support option, not a substitute for clinical care. If an exercise increases distress, stop or change approach. If you are in immediate danger, call 999. For urgent NHS mental health help in England, contact NHS 111 and select the mental health option; elsewhere in the UK, consult your local NHS urgent mental health service.