

What is a Trigger?

When we become anxious, we can become 'ungrounded', find our anxiety growing, and begin to lose contact with reality as our thoughts get more panicked or fearful, and as our body reacts with tightening or sensations. This is often referred to as being **triggered**.

If we have experienced any kind of trauma, it can happen that **certain things such as specific smells, tastes, touches, shadows, images or something someone says or does can trigger us into a traumatic reaction**.

We may find ourselves suddenly in a state that feels like panic, or mentally transported back to a traumatic event so that it feels like it is happening in the present. We can also sometimes find ourselves feeling collapsed, numb, and flatlining.

What are Grounding Techniques?

Grounding Techniques are ways in which we can **regulate our emotions and reactions if we become triggered** and also can help to regulate anxiety and keep us grounded and present.

These techniques need to be practised and may need to be adapted to your own needs.

You can try them out, adapt them, and see which ones might work for you. Some may not suit you at all because of the associations they hold for you.

If you practice these techniques and have them as a resource in your life, you will be able to access them easily when you need to do so.

These techniques are based on our **senses and our breath**.

Using our Thinking

We can use our thinking to help ground ourselves by:

- **Being aware** and reminding yourself of what is different in this place than what was in the place from the past you have been triggered into.
- **Using a thought**, for example, say to yourself "That was then, this is now". **Calmly and gently ask yourself to listen** and to hear this "Did you hear – I said that was then, and this is now. None of that is happening right here, right now". Say it aloud if possible.
- **Using words or short phrases** such as 'I am safe here and now'. Try out some words and phrases, say them and listen to them, notice which ones calm and ground you; which ones steady you; which ones give you support or hope



Using our Breath

Breathing with intent is a good grounding technique for some, as when we breathe, the breath quite literally goes right down through the centre of your body and could centre and align and ground you. You may like to keep brief breathing and calming exercises on your phone so that you can listen to them if you begin to feel triggered.



Sometimes focusing on breathing can increase panic and anxiety: if this is the case, stop focusing.

- **Focus on breathing slowly and deeply rather than shallowly and rapidly.** Place your hand on your tummy so that you can feel it rise as the breath comes in. You may place your other hand against your chest, and feel how that contains and supports you.
- **When you are hyperaroused** – anxious, thoughts moving fast, body tight, breathing shallow – breathe so that the in-breath is shorter than the out-breath – for example, breathe in for the count of 4 and out for 7, or in for 6 and out for 9.
- **If you are feeling flat, numb, or lethargic**, let the out-breath be shorter than the in-breath – for example, breathe in for 6 and out – phew! – for 4.
- **A short mindfulness exercise** could become part of your daily routine e.g. a 3-minute breathing space like this one. This will keep your system calmer, and your body will respond more to the use of your breath when you are activated.

Using Touch

Using our sense of touch can be a helpful grounding technique. You could:

- **Get up and touch objects.** See 5 things, name 5 things and touch 5 things.
- Stroke and/or talk to a **pet**.
- Stroke and/or talk to a **cuddly toy**.
- Take a **hug** or give a hug
- Get a **massage or a comforting touch** from a trusted person.
- **Touch and feel an object you connect with support** – the necklace a friend gave you, a spiritual emblem you wear, the small teddy on your key ring.





Using our Vision and Imagery

Using our vision can be helpful, and bringing our thinking brain back online through concrete describing of what we see.

To use **vision**, you might try:

- **Make eye contact** with a supportive person, or pet.
- **Open your eyes and really study** and notice the details of the things around you: ask yourself about colour, shape, image, design..... describe an object or picture to yourself, try to find the right word for the colour, the texture, the shapes.
- **Name what you see around you:** look around the room and name what you see on the walls, and the furniture, or count how many objects there are.



To use **imagery**, you could:

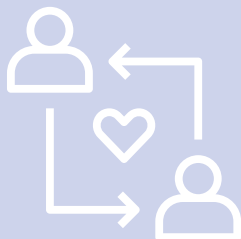
- **Spend time developing grounding images** so that you can access and use them easily when triggered: allow yourself to imagine and deepen into a felt image of being in a safe place; being on top of a mountain feeling expanded; being in a soft bubble; with a supporter at your side...
- Consider whether there are images that bring on feelings of comfort and security, of calm. If so, **think of having these on your phone or nearby at home.**



These activities may help to bring our thinking brain back online.

Using our Relationships

Our relationships can be a source of grounding and support.



- If there is someone else around and available that you trust, talk to them.
- Call or text a friend.
- Imagine a supportive person, and think of what they would say to you now.

You can also name what is happening if you are with others and get anxious or dissociate: “I just left there for a moment”, “I got disconnected”.

Using Our Bodies

You can use different parts of your body to help return yourself to a more grounded state.

If you can move freely, you could try:

- **Rub your feet flat on the ground.** Take your shoes off, if you can to do this. Walk on the grass in your bare feet.
- Your body may feel frozen in place: **If you can, move your body or some part of it.** Get up and move around, if you can. Wave or stretch your arms. Jump. Stamp around, feel and hear your feet contact the ground.
- **Hold your hands under cold or warm running water** and savour the sensation.
- **Hold an ice cube**, or place your hands around the sides of a cup of warm drink.
- **Splash water on your face.** Wash your face carefully, noticing each sensation



If you can't move freely, you could try:

- Rub one hand against another. Rub the back of your neck. Feel a texture, the ribbed sleeve of your sweater, the arms of your chair. Lean back against the chair, and feel its solid support.
- **Make small movements** e.g. rotate your shoulder or ankle, or move your elbows, wiggle your toes, notice how this feels, the rhythm of it
- **Comb or brush your hair.** A lot of people 'play with their hair' in different ways – this is often an unconscious self-soothing or grounding mechanism. If you do something like this, notice, and notice in what way it helps you.
- **Bring your hands together.** Fold them over each other. Stroke one with another. Bring them together palm to palm: notice which ways of holding and moving your hands help you to feel grounded, steady, and held.



Using our Taste and Smell

To use your senses of taste and smell to ground you, you might try:

- Eating something with a strong taste.
- Piercing the flesh of an orange, lime or lemon and draw in the scent
- Inhaling the smell of fresh ginger, or coffee.
- Cook, and smell the spices as you do so.



Using Music and Hearing

Different types of music can be helpful as different grounding techniques.

For example:

- When **anxious or panicked**, calming music can be very helpful.
- When **numb or low**, music that has a strong rhythm can be helpful – bluegrass, and salsa.
- Sometimes we need **first to listen to the music that reflects where we are at the moment** – fast music when anxious, moving to a slower piece, moving to calm; – calm and comforting music when numb or dispirited, moving to music with more energy and rhythm.

Think of making your own playlist you can use when your anxiety begins to rise, or your energy lowers.

You could also try:

- **Singing a song and paying attention to the words.** Think about what songs might support you when anxious or panicky, so you don't have to think of one when you experience these emotions.
- **Experiment with humming or singing different tunes.** Which ones calm you. or give you energy? Which ones bring a smile, or comfort your sadness or aloneness? Which ones give you hope?

You could also concentrate on what you hear as a grounding technique. **Listen to and really pay attention to the sounds around you:** a ticking clock, the birds outside, the rattle of a bracelet or the tapping of keys on a keyboard.

Following trauma, becoming anxious, experiencing panic or collapsing and experiencing low energy are very common.

These suggestions may be helpful, or experimenting with them may lead you to find your own individual ways of supporting yourself when these things happen to you.

Remember: You can call the 24-hour National Helpline at 1800 77 8888 at any time for free, confidential support.