

Using your Senses to Feel Grounded

Objective

To notice what you see, hear, and sense in your external surroundings to “ground you” when you experience distressing thoughts and feelings.

You Should Know

When you experience difficult situations, your distressing thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations may be the only things you notice. It might be challenging to focus your attention on what others are saying, or to concentrate on a task. However, the physical or mental distress you feel can be quite different from what is taking place externally, in the world around you.

By focusing on what you perceive through your senses, you can become more aware of what is happening outside of your feelings in that moment. This view helps to “ground you,” enabling you see the situation more fully and become “present.”

The following meditation exercise shows you how to shift your attention between your internal and external experiences to increase your awareness of your senses.

What to Do

Name: _____ Date: _____

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted, and set your timer for 10 minutes. Focus on breathing and relaxing throughout this exercise.

- Take several deep breaths and notice how your breath feels in your body.
- Using your sense of sight, focus your attention on one object in your surroundings.
- Notice how the object looks, including size, shape, color, and other visible details. If you find your attention wandering, return your focus to the object without judging yourself.
- Shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths.
- Now focus your attention to your sense of hearing, noticing any sounds you hear. This can be a clock ticking, birds tweeting outside, or a car honking nearby. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to listening.
- Once again, shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths. Notice the sensation of your body sitting in the chair, of your feet on the floor, and of your chest expanding with each breath.
- Next, focus on your sense of smell. If you do not notice any pleasant or unpleasant smells, focus on the air flowing through your nose and mouth as you inhale and exhale. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your nose.

- Return to physical sensations, scanning your body from your head to your toes and notice any tension, tingling, or pain. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to your body.
- Finally, focus your attention on your sense of touch. Reach out with your hand to touch something in your reach, or the chair you are sitting on, or your arm or leg. Notice if it is hard or soft, smooth or tough, solid or hollow. Notice how your fingertips feel as you touch the object. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your fingertips and the object.
- Take three to five long slow breaths, and refocus on yourself and your surroundings.

How easy or difficult was it to sit quietly and focus on your senses? Explain.

Describe any physical sensations you noticed during this exercise.

Describe any changes in your thoughts or emotions that you noticed during this exercise.

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe a situation where this exercise might have been helpful in allowing you to see the situation more fully. Had you used this technique would you have reacted differently? Explain.

How could you use this technique to help “ground” you the next time you experience upsetting or overwhelming emotions?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
