



Counselling Workroom

10 Grounding Techniques to calm down from distressing thoughts

Have you ever felt overwhelmed with some distressing thoughts?

Sometimes when we are facing stressful situations, we will have strong emotions like anxiety or anger; We feel hurt and sad when we recall a painful memory or flashback of a traumatic experience; When we wake up from a nightmare with a pounding heart, we have strong fear and insecurity; Or more seriously, there is self-harm urge when we are too emotional.

Whenever those distressing thoughts and feelings come out, we can try to calm ourselves down with some grounding techniques. They can bring us back into the “**Here and Now**”, and not being drowned by the distress.



Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method with our five senses

We can search for the senses in our surrounding backwards,

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



Take ten slow breaths

Focus your attention fully on each breath, on the way in and on the way out slowly. Say the number of the breath to yourself as you exhale.



Put your hands in water



Focus on the temperature and how it feels on your fingertips, palms, and the back of your hands. Does it feel the same in each part of your hand? How does the sensation change when time goes by?

Move & feel your body

You can take a short walk, do exercise or stretch. Pay attention to how your body feels with each movement e.g. How does your feet feel when you connect with the ground? How much tension do you feel when you stretch and how relaxing you are when you stop?



Clenching your fist

Imagine to draw all your distress from all over the body to your fist. Clenching your fist as tight as possible to hold on to the feelings, then letting them go when you release your fist. Repeat if necessary.



Sit with your pet



Sit with the pet or hold it on your knee. Touch and notice what special features it has, e.g. Its fur, breath, body temperature, colour, markings or unique characteristics.

Think in categories

Choose 1 or 2 broad categories, e.g. Fruit, Sports, My favourite food. Take 1 minute to speak or mentally list as many things in the category as you can. You can also visualize those things when you are thinking of them.



Use an anchoring phrase

Remind yourself of who you are now. Say your name, your age, where you are now. Say the date and time, what you have done today and what you will do next.



Describe a common task

Think of an activity you like to do or do frequently. E.g. Making a coffee, things you need to do before going to school. Mentally going through the process step-by-step with as many details as you can.



Practice self-compassion



Repeat caring, kind, supportive words to yourself, either aloud or mentally:

“You’re in fear, but you’ll make it through and you are safe now.”

“You’re strong, and you can move through this pain.”

“You’re trying hard, and you’re doing your best.”

You are invited to practice the grounding techniques to see which one helps you most. Remember, grounding techniques can help you cope with distressing thoughts in the moment, but the relief they provide is generally temporary.

Do contact us if you want counselling support. You can also enter our Counselling website to complete the Student Emotional State Self-assessment

(https://eduhk.hk/sao/info/counselling_services/psychological_counselling/article_sessa/) in order to know more about your emotional state. Our Counsellor will contact you if we find you are under emotional distress.