

EMOTIONAL RESOURCE

3.3 BODY GROUNDING

Dissociation is a sense of disconnection from what is happening in the moment. It is something that can happen in both the red zone (feeling too much) and the blue zone (feeling too little). There are different kinds of dissociation that affect people in different ways. The main types are called 'derealisation' and 'depersonalisation'. Derealisation is a sense of being disconnected from the world around you, as though the world is dream-like. Depersonalisation is a kind of disconnection from yourself, like an out-of-body experience. Other kinds of dissociation include emotional numbing (where you may not feel any emotions) and disengagement/absorption (where you stare off into space or get lost in your thoughts). What they all have in common is that they all involve a sense of disconnection from what is happening in the moment.

Even though it can be unpleasant, dissociation is not harmful or dangerous. In fact, some dissociation is normal (e.g. daydreaming). Various things can cause dissociation too (e.g. not getting enough sleep or not eating enough). However, it can also be caused by overwhelming emotions. It is only a problem when it becomes an autopilot reaction, as it prevents us from connecting with a trigger or emotion and responding to it in a more helpful way.

Grounding is a technique to help manage dissociation by connecting to the present moment through your body and its senses. It can also help with extreme emotional states more generally. It works by helping you to reconnect to what is happening in the here-and-now. Some kinds of grounding might work better for some kinds of dissociation. For example, grounding by focusing on what's around you might work well for derealisation or absorption, while grounding in the body might work well for depersonalisation and emotional numbing.

Grounding is a particularly helpful resources because it can be used when in the red zone (feeling too much) or in the blue zone (feeling too little). The instructions on the next page can be helpful in thinking about how to use it.

Grounding – Instructions

At the heart of all grounding techniques is the use of your body's senses to connect with the present moment. As long as you are doing this there really isn't a right or wrong. For example, some people like to use special objects for grounding, with some people creating a "grounding box" for these. Other people like to use their senses to notice 3 things they can see, two they can hear, and one they can touch wherever they are. Others like to use their body itself to feel grounded. There are pros and cons to all of these, but it's best to find what works for you personally. Below are some examples of how to use these different senses for grounding.

SIGHT: focus on the objects around you and describe them in a curious, factual, detailed way. Notice the textures, colours, shapes, light and shadow. Notice symmetry, patterns or angles in what you can see.

SOUND: focus on the sounds around you. Notice what you can hear nearby or far away. Notice the pitch, tone and volume of the different sounds. Notice the duration of the sounds and how frequent they are.

TASTE: If you have something to hand that you can eat, focus on the different tastes, textures and sensations. You might want to carry something small (e.g. mints, raisins) around with you to begin with, so you can use this whenever you need to.

SMELL: Notice any scents. If you have a favourite perfume/aftershave, lip balm or scent, try to carry it around with you so you can use it as required. If it's pleasant, try to focus on these pleasant sensations.

TOUCH: focus on the physical surfaces or objects around you. Even something as everyday as a chair can be explored for some time in a curious and non-judgemental way, using the sense of touch. Run your hands under a cold tap, or hold an ice cube or a fluffy, cuddly toy.

Carry a grounding object that you can touch, see and/or smell.

BODY AWARENESS: Use your body to connect with the present moment. Push your feet into the floor to feel a solid, present connection with the ground below. Tense your muscles and notice the sensation. Try to connect with your breath, or any other part of your body. Notice any sensations in your body in a curious and open way. Explore the boundaries of your body by touching your skin and by noticing where it meets your clothes or the environment around you. Walk for a bit, noticing all the time what this feels like.

You may wish to couple your chosen grounding strategy with a brief safety statement: something to remember you are safe in the here-and-now. For example "It is November 2018 and I am safe here in my living room".