

Harnessing Emotional Agility: Grounding Techniques for Navigating Overwhelming Emotions

Emotional agility is the practice of using feelings as information to help us make decisions based on core values and goals. When we use feelings as data or information, we are not getting swept up in their intensity. But how can we accomplish this when emotions can sometimes be overwhelming?

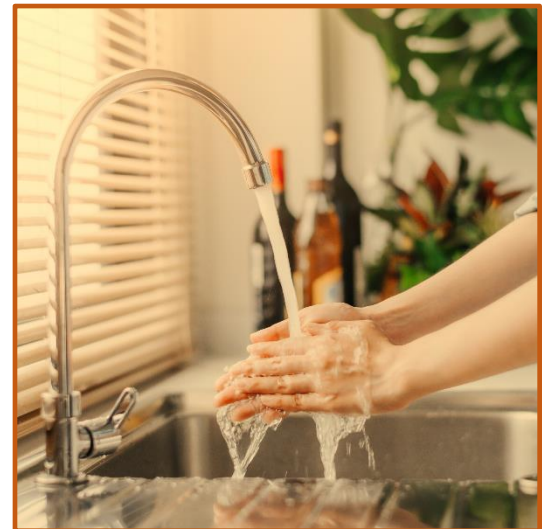
Becoming emotionally agile, like anything else, takes practice. One of the best ways to prepare ourselves is to focus on tools that will assist us in regulating our emotions, especially the ones that can feel overwhelming. When we're overwhelmed, it's much harder to use our feelings as a guide.

Emotional Agility Call to Action: Easy-to-Do Grounding Exercises

"Grounding" is a tool that can help us manage challenging emotions by allowing us to refocus on and engage in the present moment. With grounding, we utilize our five senses (sight, sound, hearing, taste, and touch). Grounding techniques are especially helpful for improving things like anxiety, stress, depression, and symptoms related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Physical Grounding Techniques: These techniques use your five senses or tangible objects to help you move through distress.

- **Put your hands in water:** Focus on the water's temperature and how it feels on your skin. Does it feel the same in each part of your hand? Try using cold and warm water and note the differences.
- **Pick up or touch items near you:** Use descriptive language to describe each item. Are the items heavy or light? Warm or cool? Focus on the texture and color of each item.
- **Breathe deeply:** Slowly inhale, then exhale. If it helps, you can say or think "in" and "out" with each breath. Feel each breath filling your lungs and note how it feels to push it back out.
- **Savor a food or drink:** Take small bites or sips of a food or drink you enjoy, letting yourself fully taste each bite. Think about how it tastes and smells and the flavors that you notice.
- **Take a short walk:** Concentrate on your steps — you can even count them. Notice the rhythm of your footsteps and how it feels to put your foot on the ground and then lift it again.
- **Hold a piece of ice:** What does it feel like at first? How long does it take to start melting? How does the sensation change when the ice begins to melt?



- **Savor a scent:** Think of a scent that appeals to you. This might be a cup of tea, an herb or spice, a favorite soap, or a scented candle. Inhale the fragrance slowly and deeply and try to note its qualities (sweet, spicy, citrusy, and so on).
- **Move your body:** Pay attention to how your body feels with each movement and when your hands or feet touch the floor or move through the air. Quick exercises to try include jumping jacks, jogging in place, or stretching.
- **Listen to your surroundings:** Take a few moments to listen to the noises around you. Do you hear birds? Dogs barking? Machinery or traffic? If you hear people talking, what are they saying?
- **Feel your body:** Focus on how your body feels from head to toe, tuning into and noticing what you feel. Do you feel any pain or tightness? Is your heart beating rapidly, or slow and steady? Try focusing on one area of the body at a time and describe how it feels.
- **Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method:** Working backward from 5, use your senses to notice things around you. For example, you might start by listing 5 things you hear, 4 things you see, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

Mental Grounding Techniques: These grounding exercises use mental distractions to help ease distressing feelings.

- **Play a memory game:** Look at a detailed photograph or picture for 5–10 seconds. Then, turn the photograph face-down and recreate the photograph in your mind in as much detail as possible. Or mentally list all the things you remember from the picture.
- **Think in categories:** Choose one or two broad categories, such as “musical instruments,” “ice cream flavors,” or “baseball teams.” Take a minute or so to mentally list as many things from each category as you can.
- **Recite something:** Think of a poem, song, or book passage you know by heart. Recite it quietly to yourself or in your head.
- **Make yourself laugh:** Watch your favorite funny animal video, a clip from a comedian or TV show you enjoy, or anything else you know will make you laugh.
- **Use anchoring statements:** This might be something like, “I’m Full Name. I’m X years old. I live in City, State. Today is Friday, June 3. It’s 10:04 in the morning. I’m sitting at my desk at work. There’s no one else in the room.” You can expand on the phrase by adding details until you feel calm, such as, “It’s raining lightly, but I can still see the sun. It’s my break time. I’m thirsty, so I’m going to make a cup of tea.”
- **Describe a common task:** Think of an activity you do often or can do very well, such as making coffee, brushing your teeth, or tuning a guitar. Go through the process step-by-step, as if you’re giving someone else instructions on how to do it.
- **Imagine yourself leaving difficult or overwhelming feelings behind:** Visualize:
 - gathering the emotions, balling them up, and putting them into a box
 - walking, swimming, biking, or jogging away from painful feelings
 - your thoughts as a song or TV show you dislike, changing the channel or turning down the volume — they’re still there, but you don’t have to listen to them

Soothing Grounding Techniques - You can use these techniques to comfort yourself during difficult emotional moments.

- **Conjure the voice or face of someone you love:** Visualize a positive person in your life. Imagine their face or think of what their voice sounds like. Imagine them telling you that the moment is tough but that you'll get through it.
- **Practice self-kindness:** Repeat kind, compassionate phrases to yourself such as "You're having a rough time, but you'll make it through" or "You're trying hard and you're doing your best."
- **Sit with your pet:** If you're at home and have a pet, spend a few moments just sitting with them. Pet them, focusing on how their fur feels. Consider their markings or unique characteristics. If you have a smaller pet you can hold, concentrate on how they feel in your hand. Not at home? Think of your favorite things about your pet or how they would comfort you if they were there.
- **Visualize your favorite place:** Think of your favorite place, whether it's the home of a loved one or a foreign country. Using each of your senses, imagine the noises you hear, the objects you see, and the scents you smell.
- **Plan an activity:** This might be something you do alone or with a friend or loved one. Think of what you'll do and when. Maybe you'll go to dinner, take a walk on the beach, see a movie you've been looking forward to, or visit a museum. Focus on the details, such as what you'll wear, when you'll go, and how you'll get there.
- **Touch something comforting:** This could be your favorite blanket, a much-loved T-shirt, a smooth stone, or anything that feels good to touch. Think about how it feels under your fingers or in your hand. If you have a favorite article of clothing, put it on think about the sensation of the fabric on your skin.
- **Listen to music:** Put on your favorite song but pretend you're listening to it for the first time. Focus on the melody and lyrics, and the sensations in your body while you're listening.

Emotional agility is a powerful skill that can transform how we navigate life's challenges. By incorporating grounding techniques into our daily routine, we can better manage our emotions and stay connected to our core values and goals. Remember, the journey to emotional agility is ongoing, and with consistent practice, we can all become more resilient and emotionally balanced.

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