

Grounding Exercises for when grief becomes overwhelming

Grounding techniques are simple tools that help bring your mind and body back to the present moment when everything inside feels overwhelming. When grief, anxiety, panic, or emotional waves hit, our nervous system can go into fight, flight, or freeze. Grounding helps interrupt that spiral and gently reminds your body that, right now, you are safe.

These techniques don't make the pain disappear, and they're not about "fixing" your grief. They're about creating a small pause, a breath of space, so your body can settle enough for you to keep going. You can use grounding anytime you feel flooded, disconnected, numb, panicky, or even when you just feel off and can't quite explain why.

Exercise 1: Name the Moment

Quietly name what's happening.

You can say it out loud or just inside your head.

"This is grief."

"This is a wave."

"This is not danger."

If it helps, add this:

"I am safe right now."

Trauma has a way of making your body believe the loss is happening again. Naming it separates memory from reality. You're not erasing the pain, you're grounding it.

Exercise 2: Feet-First Grounding

Let's bring your body back into the present.

If you can, press your feet into the floor. Really feel them there.

Wiggle your toes.

Notice the surface under your feet.

Say to yourself, "My feet are here. I am here."

When grief pulls us up into our heads, grounding starts from the ground up.

Exercise 3: Gentle Breathing for Safety

Let's slow the breath, but gently. No counting. No pressure.

Breathe in slowly through your nose.

Pause just for a second.

Then let the air leave your body longer than it came in.

That longer exhale is your body's signal that it doesn't have to fight or flee. Do that a few times at your own pace.

If your thoughts keep racing, that's okay. Let them pass. We're working with the body first.

Exercise 4: Orienting to the Present

Let's orient ourself to this moment in time.

Ask yourself quietly:

What day is it today?

Where am I right now?

What's one thing I can see in front of me?

Trauma freezes time. These questions restart it.

Exercise 5: Grounding Through the Five Senses

Let's bring in the senses now.

Look around and name **five things you can see.**

Colors. Shapes. Light. Shadow.

Then notice **four things you can feel.**

The chair under you. The fabric on your skin. The temperature of the air.

Listen for **three things you can hear.**

One close. One farther away. One you usually tune out.

If you can, notice **two things you can smell.**

Or imagine two smells that feel comforting or familiar.

And finally, name **one thing you can taste**, or one food that feels safe and grounding to you.

This isn't about distraction.

It's about reclaiming your senses from the past.

Exercise 6: Self-Contact for Regulation

Place a hand somewhere on your body.

Your chest. Your heart. Your belly. The back of your neck.

Feel the warmth. Feel the pressure.

Say to yourself, “I can feel this and still be okay.”

Human touch, even from yourself, tells the nervous system that it’s not alone.

Exercise 7: Containment for When You Can’t Fall Apart

If you’re in a place where you can’t fully fall apart right now, there’s one more tool that may be helpful.

Picture your grief as something real, because it is.

Maybe it’s heavy. Maybe it’s sharp. Maybe it’s aching.

Now imagine placing it gently into a strong container.

A box. A jar. A safe place.

You’re not locking it away.

You’re just telling it, “I’ll come back to you when I can.”

Close the lid softly.

That’s not avoidance. That’s self-respect.

These exercises can be done when you feel grief crashing down on you out of nowhere as it often does.

You may choose to do some or all of them as a regular wellness routine throughout the day.

