

Stabilisation & Grounding Techniques

A Practical Session

Dr Gabriel Schnitzer
Senior Clinical Psychologist
Mental Health Homeless Team



Frontline
Network
Partner



Aims

- Define stabilisation and grounding
- Discuss uses
- Practice some commonly used techniques

What does it mean?

- Generally speaking grounding, stabilisation, and coping skills can be used interchangeably
- Techniques are meant to reduce arousal, help manage strong emotional states, and re-focus on the here-and-now
- There is no wrong here !! You can be creative. Anything that achieves the above can be used. Be person-centred and responsive to your service-user.

When would you use techniques?

- Any strong emotional state including anxiety, panic, anger, depression
- To prevent a specific and unwanted behaviour such as deliberate self-harm, suicide, angry outbursts, compulsive behaviours
- To manage specific symptoms such as flashbacks, rumination, excessive worries

Technique 1: Distraction

- The easiest and arguable most effective technique !
- Help your service-user take their mind off whatever is troubling them
- Ideally using a pleasurable/enjoyable activity (e.g., football, swimming, read engaging novel)
- Get them to think about something else that is unlikely to trigger strong emotions
 - What's the first thing you ate today? Yesterday? The day before?
 - What was the weather like on your last birthday?
 - What's your favourite place in town? Describe it to me in as much detail as possible using all sensory information?
 - What's the last news item you read/hear about? What did you make of it? (distraction and here-and-now focus)

Using your Senses

Technique 2

The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Technique 2: The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

- **Instructions:**

- Tell me 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can hear (and where the sound is coming from)
- 3 things you can feel by touch (you can pick an object up)
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Technique 3

Grounding with the Body

Technique 3: Grounding with the Body

• **Instructions:**

- If that feels alright, please close your eyes. Now focus on those points of contact with your chair/bed? Notice how your body is supported. Feel the weight on your chair/bed.
- Notice both feet on the floor. Feel what it's like to be supported by the floor. Where exactly in your feet do you feel the connection between foot and floor most clearly?
- What other sensations can you detect in your body right now? (any aches/pains/tension or tingling/pins and needles in hands or feet)

Technique 4: Bringing Focus back to Here-and-Now

- Particularly useful for flashbacks/intrusive memories
- **Instructions:**
 - Please tell me what date/day of the week/time of day it is?
 - Where are you right now? Describe some the room you're in.
 - Who is there with you? What are they doing/wearing?
 - What can you see around you? Can you describe something blue in your vicinity in as much detail as possible (and using different sensory channels)?



Inducing Physical Sensations

Technique 5: Self-Soothing

- Normally by inducing (strong) sensory experiences and **fully** focussing on the experience
 - Smelling essential oils
 - Lavender pillows
 - Bubble bath
 - Weighty blanket
 - Deep tissue pressure
 - Music
 - Dark chocolate
 - Herbal teas
- **Top tip:** If you have a client on the autistic spectrum, explore with them if they have any sensory hyper- or hypersensitivities. You can utilise this for maximum effect of self-soothing !! And avoid those sensory channels where clients may experience discomfort when stimulated.

Technique 6: Minor and Unharmful Pain/Discomfort

- Particularly useful for urge to self-harm and to release pent up emotions
 - Snapping rubber band
 - Letting ice cube melt in mouth
 - Pinching skin
 - Chilli sauce
 - Biting into a lemon
 - Be careful with this! Works well but it can tip into self-harming behaviour
- **Top tip:** Consider putting together a coping box for your client with self-soothing and minor pain stimuli! Spend some time jointly deciding what should go in it.

Inducing Physical Sensations

Technique 7

Butterfly Hug

Technique 7: Butterfly Hug

- Developed for flashbacks and intrusive memories but can work with any strong emotional states related to fear/anxiety
- **Instructions:**
 - Cross arms across chest, linking your thumbs, tops of thumbs resting on centre collarbone. Tap your hands on chest, first left, then right, at a speed and pressure that is comfortable. Continue for a minute or two.
 - Now release thumbs and move hands as if giving yourself a hug, with right hand resting on left upper arm, and left hand on right upper arm tap your hands on your arms alternately – left, right, left, right – at whatever speed and pressure is comfortable for you.
 - Now move hands using your fingertips at whatever speed and pressure is comfortable to and stroke the outside of your arm from shoulder to elbow and back again. Continue for a minute or two.



Breathing Techniques

Breathing Techniques

Technique 8

Diaphragm/ Controlled Breathing

Technique 8: Diaphragm Breathing

• **Instructions:**

- Get comfortable in a relaxed (but not slouched) position
- Deep breath in, deep breath out (x 2)
- Become aware of rhythm, don't try to slow it down or speed it up just observe it
- Imagine having a balloon in tummy
- Imagine balloon inflating with every in-breath
- Imagine balloon deflating with every out-breath

Technique 9-12: Yogic Breath Exercises

- **4-2-4 Rhythm (aka Square Breathing):** in to a count of 4, pause to a count of 2, out to a count of 4
 - then play around with it (e.g., increase just the out-breath, increase in- and out-breath, increase pause in between in- and out-)
- **4-7-8 Rhythm:** Yogic sleep breath
 - works wonders for having trouble falling asleep
- **Mindfulness of the Breath:**
 - Focus on rhythm of the breath, just observe and don't change it
 - Focus on the muscles involved in up and down (i.e., chest, tummy, side of rip cage)
 - Follow direction and flow of air from nose/mouth through wind pipe into lungs and back
- **Alternate nostril breathing** (see description at end)



When to Use Which Technique?

- Basically up to the service-user and whatever works for them and when
- Rule of thumb: sensory-based techniques better for flashbacks; pain for urges to self-harm; breathing worries/rumination and anxiety/panic; distraction best at a lower level of arousal/distress
- Feel free to give some of these a go in your work. Even if you don't get it right, you are unlikely to cause any harm/further distress
- Encourage your service-users to be **playful and persistent**. Only they will be able to work out what works for them. They all take practice. The more you use them the more effective they'll become

Thank you
Any Questions?



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Technique 12: Alternate Nostril Breathing

When to use it:

To quiet the mind of chaotic, racing, self-deprecating, or illogical thoughts

To manage stress, anxiety, fear, or sleeplessness

Instructions:

- Sit comfortably with your spine erect and shoulders relaxed.
- Optional: Place the tip of the index finger and middle finger of the right hand in between the eyebrows, the ring finger on the left nostril, and the thumb on the right nostril. We will use the ring finger to open or close the left nostril and thumb for the right nostril.
- Press your thumb down on the right nostril and breathe out gently through the left nostril.
- Now breathe in from the left nostril and then press the left nostril gently with the ring finger. Try to take long and smooth breaths into your tummy.
- Removing the right thumb from the right nostril, breathe out from the right.
- Breathe in from the right nostril and exhale from the left. After every exhalation, remember to breathe in from the same nostril from which you exhaled.
- Continue inhaling and exhaling from alternate nostrils for as long as you like.

