Grounding Exercises for Grief & Trauma

Grief and trauma can cause the body and mind to feel unsafe, disconnected, or overwhelmed. Grounding exercises help bring you back into the present moment and remind your body that you are safe right now.

Why Grounding Matters

Trauma and grief activate the nervous system. You may feel frozen, panicked, numb, or disconnected from your surroundings. Grounding techniques help calm the nervous system by reconnecting you with your body, your senses, and the present moment. These exercises are tools, not tests and you can use them whenever you need.

What Trauma Responses Can Look Like

You may notice:
- *Feeling detached from your body or emotions*
- *Racing heart or shallow breathing*
- *Sudden fear, panic, or overwhelm*
- *Difficulty concentrating or remembering*
- *Feeling numb or "shut down"*

These responses are common after loss or trauma and are not signs of weakness.

Grounding Through the Senses (5–4–3–2–1)

Use your senses to anchor yourself:
- *5 things you can see*
- *4 things you can feel*
- *3 things you can hear*
- *2 things you can smell*

• *1 thing you can taste*

Say each item out loud or silently to yourself. Take your time.

Body-Based Grounding

• *Place your feet flat on the floor and press them gently down*
• *Hold a comforting object (blanket, stone, photo)*
• *Wrap your arms around yourself and apply gentle pressure*
• *Stretch or gently move your body if it feels safe*

These movements send signals of safety to your nervous system.

Breathing to Regulate the Body

Slow breathing helps calm the stress response:
• *Inhale through your nose for 4 counts*
• *Exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 counts*
• *Repeat for 1–3 minutes*

If counting feels hard, focus on making your exhale longer than your inhale.

Grounding During Waves of Grief

Grief can come in waves sudden sadness, anger, or longing. When this happens:
• *Name what you are feeling without judgment*
• *Remind yourself: "This feeling will pass."*
• *Choose one grounding tool and stay with it for a few minutes*

You are allowed to grieve at your own pace.

When Grounding Is Not Enough

If grounding exercises do not bring relief, or if distress continues to worsen, additional support may be needed. This can include counseling, trauma-informed therapy, or crisis support. Asking for help is a healthy next step.

Alabama-Specific Note

In Alabama, grief and trauma support may be available through community mental health centers, faith-based programs, hospital grief services, and Medicaid-covered

counseling. Your healthcare provider or local health department can help with referrals.

A Gentle Reminder

You are not broken. Your reactions make sense given what you have experienced. Take what helps, leave what does not, and return to these tools whenever you need grounding.