



Sea Change

Get Grounded



Importance of internal/external

- Usually our **external** senses evaluate our environment to check if it is safe, for example crossing the road, listening, looking, observing.
- Our **internal** senses check what is happening on the inside, for example if you are hungry or tired.
- Unfortunately after we have experienced a trauma and are suffering from flashbacks we do something quite different...
- 'People who have experienced trauma will routinely check/evaluate external reality based on what they feel inside.' (Rothschild, 2010)

Instead of checking what is going on around us and checking for safety, sometimes our body and mind can assume we are in danger due to what we are feeling on the inside (our internal).





Inside/Outside

We have two sensory systems:



Internal: what is happening inside the body, the internal senses, include the ability to feel what is happening on the inside, for example butterflies in the tummy.

External: The five senses- touch, taste, sight, sound and smell. These are the information (ingredients) gathered to tell us about our environment. We usually use our external senses to evaluate if a situation is safe.





Reality checking

- If a person is working out what is happening based on what they feel inside, they might react as if they are in danger even when they are safe .
- In a flashback a person might feel like the trauma is happening again, ignoring the external evidence that they are safe.
- Evaluating external reality using internal senses is actually what enables the flashback to take hold (Rothschild, 2010)
- Rothschild (2010) describes the importance of a person checking what is around them; shifting this focus from assessing everything from the inside (butterflies in tummy etc) to assessing what is outside the person, the environment around them. She describes this as concrete indicators of safety; this means looking and observing what is around you and checking rather than assuming you are unsafe due to the feelings on the inside.
- Things such as smells or sounds might trigger a flashback. This might result in the body reacting as if there is danger.



What does this mean?

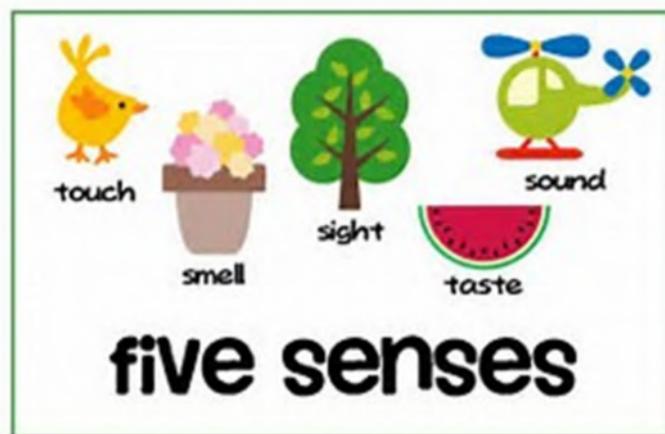
- What we have discovered then is that a trauma can cause our hippocampus (librarian) to be overwhelmed-causing confusion.
- This confusion can mean our body/brain begins to evaluate experiences based on our internal senses rather than the reality of the situation. Our focus is internal rather than external.
- This can mean we miss actual danger or more often feel like we are in danger when we are not.

(Babette Rothschild,(2000) *The Body Remembers*)





Why are the senses so important



•The part of the brain that gathers information from our senses (thalamus) takes in information from our 5 senses, therefore these can be triggers- these can remind us of something and set off the alarm system in our brain that detects danger, like a 'smoke detector' (amygdala). Once the smoke detector has gone off, our body acts as it did in the past, it might feel the same. For example a person might freeze or feel like running away. It can make us feel overwhelmed (hyper) where we feel like we want to run or fight, or underwhelmed (hypo) which can make us feel faint, tired and like we might freeze.

•**However, the senses can also help to reset or calm the smoke detector, bringing us back to the present moment...**



What do we mean by 'grounding'?

'Grounding' simply means using your senses to get you back in touch with the present time and place.

Grounding can help you get back in touch with what is happening around you right now. You can gain control over your brain to stay in the present .

Grounding can also help you to find a balance between feeling overwhelmed by your emotions and being out of touch with them.

Our thoughts are often either in past or future, when we have experienced trauma the brain is often on the constant alarm system, this is influenced by the past- checking continuously we are safe.

[Sometimes these thoughts pull us away from the present moment](#)

You can find a touch, taste, sight, sound and smell which help to soothe you or bring you back quickly to the present moment.





Making a sensory grounding kit to keep you in the 'here and now'

You can use your senses to 'anchor' you to the present moment.

You can create a set of touches, tastes, sights, sounds and smells which help you in either a comforting way to be in the present moment , or can pull you back quickly to the here and now.

You can make up a mini kit or basket full of the different sensory items which help you. These will be specific to you, they will be particular smells, objects, touches, tastes or photographs, music or sounds which help you.

These kits can be used when waking from nightmares or dreams, they can be kept in part or in full as a transportable kit in your bag or car. They can also be used for flashbacks.





Creating a sensory grounding kit

If you think of a first aid kit, this has different things in it which might help someone if they have hurt themselves. You can create your own kit which helps you emotionally, some people term this their 'survival kit' others say it is like a 'comfort kit'. However you wish your kit to be labelled or thought about, a kit is a box or set of things that you can touch, smell, taste or see, created by you. These things can help you feel better or connect you back to the present moment.

The smells, sights, sounds, touch and tastes are going to be personal to you, each person will have different sensory likes or dislikes, therefore you can tailor a sensory grounding kit to your own needs.

You are the expert!

You choose what things can go into your kit– you decide which senses help you.

You might choose different smells, touches, tastes, sound or sight depending on whether you want to soothe yourself or pull yourself back quickly to the present moment. For one person this might be the smell of coffee, for someone else it might be a strong mint smell or strong mint taste, it might be keeping a small photograph of a pet or close friend or family member, these are all very personal and down to you to decide.





Composing the 'grounding' kit

You can choose a box, basket, bag, to put the different sensory grounding objects, things, smells, etc into.

It might be useful to build this as a transportable kit, something which you can keep on you– that you can carry around, or you can make a mini version you keep with you.

This is your personal survival kit– with things in which you know help to calm, relax, soothe or invigorate you.





Different kits for different things

- Now that you have seen that the five senses are part of your external grounding you can create kits for different situations.
- You can create a sleep kit/basket, which can help with aiding sleep, which might have things in it such as soothing items to help when you awake from sleep, like photographs of enjoyable times, or a smell which you love, or a blanket.
- You might create a kit specifically for your bag, or for the car, these can have miniature or mini transportable versions of grounding tools.
- You might want a kit which has items in which inspire you or make you think about focus and goals, these kits can be completely tailored to you and what you want/need them to be.





Pulling yourself back to the present moment

Another useful technique which can help to pull your attention to your external environment is:

Room spotting technique– observe:

5,4,3,2,1

5. Objects

4. Colours

3. Shapes

2. Touches

1. Breathe

(In for count of 5 and outward breath to the count of 7).



Whenever you start to feel anxiety rise, or your body feels on edge, try this out. Just looking around the room to find these different elements. When using touch as grounding try to touch an object around you or a piece of fabric from your clothing, and then slowly breathe calmly and slowly.



Quick grounding skills

- Notice
- Observe
- What now



Notice– where my attention is

Observe– what am I doing? Notice and state in your head what you are doing right now, then notice what are the sensations in your body.

What now– wise mind, how shall I continue, what do I need to do to help myself be back in the present moment.

Taken from: getselfhelp.co.uk



Developing a grounding phrase/sentence

A grounding phrase can be made up of a few words which are positive and which remind you of the present moment and pull your thoughts back to the here and now.

A grounding phrase acknowledges the feelings you are having, such as fear, anxiety or panic, and also makes you conscious of being safe in the present moment.

For example:

'I am feeling scared and I am safe now'

The reference to the present moment is what is important here, although you feel something on the inside, outside might actually be safe when you stop for a moment and look around yourself and ground yourself to the present time .

Another option for a phrase might be to use a statement that reminds you of your positive strengths, for example:

'I have survived the past and I am safe now in this moment'

These sentences/phrases can be written on a card and kept with you, they can be recorded on a phone as a statement you can hear, they can be written on post it notes around the house or in your car or at your work space to remind you throughout the day. You can tailor this to what works best for you.





Grounding objects

As well as your sensory grounding kit you can also have a single object which you find comforting, which carries a positive meaning for you and can distract you when needed.

When you start to feel your anxious thoughts or have butterflies in your tummy, or you feel on edge, you can hold your grounding object and really focus on its colour, weight, texture, temperature, smoothness etc.

Your grounding object needs to be something which you did not own when the trauma(s) happened, it needs to be small enough for you to be able to carry with you.

For example :

You might use a pebble from your favourite beach, or a stone/jewel/necklace/ring given to you by someone important to you, or it might be a small cloth or piece of material which holds important meaning to you.





Quick grounding techniques

- Running cool water over your hands, noticing the feeling of this on your skin.
- Tap your feet on the floor– feel your heels on the ground and the solid ground beneath you.
- Touch something near you, a texture or object, notice how it feels on your skin.
- Notice the weight of your body against a chair if you are sitting down, push your back into the chair and notice the boundaries of the surface and where your body meets the chair.
- Focus on your breathing, in through your nose out through your mouth and notice your tummy and the movement of this as you breathe in and out. Try to increase your outward breath making this breath longer.





Top tips for grounding

- Just because something works one day does not mean it will work the next for helping to ground you. Keep trying out different things.
- Grounding can be used at anytime, wherever you are, no one has to know you are doing it, because it is a focus on attention– bringing your attention back to the present moment and you have the ability to do this wherever you are, using whichever skill works best for you.
- Practice as often as possible, even when you don't actually feel anxious or worried or overwhelmed , try it out all the time. If you are able to use these skills when you already feel relaxed it will be even more helpful when your emotions/body/brain feel overwhelmed.
- Notice or log which skills/strategies work best for you and try creating your own as well.





Notes:



Notes:

Never suffer in silence, please contact us...

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