builtbymeli

NAME _____

DATE _____

Grounding When You're Overwhelmed

When the nervous system floods, thinking your way out doesn't work. Sensory grounding returns you to the present through the body.

WHY GROUNDING WORKS

During high activation, the prefrontal cortex — the part of the brain that thinks, plans, and reasons — becomes much harder to access. Telling yourself to think rationally rarely works in that moment, because clear thinking is temporarily out of reach. Sensory grounding bypasses this by engaging the body and the present environment directly.

1 Orienting — The Most Basic Grounding

Orienting is what animals do after threat passes — they slowly turn their head and scan the environment for safety. Try it now: slowly look around the room. Notice what's there. Let your eyes settle on something neutral. Describe what you find.

When I slowly scanned the room, I noticed...
What caught my attention and felt neutral or safe was...
What happened in my body as I did this was...

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2 Sensory Grounding Techniques

Try each technique and rate how useful it is for you specifically (1–5). Note what it does in your body.

TECHNIQUE	RATING 1–5	WHAT IT DOES IN YOUR BODY
5-4-3-2-1 Name 5 things you see, 4 hear, 3 touch, 2 smell, 1 taste	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	
Cold water Wrists, face, or holding ice. If you have a heart condition, skip putting your face in cold water	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	
Feet on floor Press feet firmly, feel the contact	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	
Texture focus Slowly feel an object — fabric, wood, skin	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	
Safe or calm place visualization A place that feels safe or calm — real or imagined. If no place feels safe, choose one that feels neutral or comforting, and stop if it brings up distress	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	

3 Your Personal Grounding Kit

Based on what you've tested — what are your most reliable grounding tools? Keep this as a quick reference for moments of high activation.

MY TOP THREE GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

1.
2.
3.

PHYSICAL OBJECTS THAT GROUND ME

e.g. A specific stone I carry, my dog's fur, a cold surface, a familiar smell...

4 Your Sequence

When overwhelmed, having a pre-decided sequence means you don't have to think — you just follow the steps. What is yours?

When I'm overwhelmed, my sequence is: first I _____, then _____, then _____. I know I'm grounded again when _____.

CLOSING REFLECTION

When you're flooded, the thinking brain is hard to reach. What does it mean for you to have a body-based route back to yourself?

What I want to remember from this worksheet is...

BETWEEN-SESSION PRACTICE

Choose one grounding technique from your top three. Practice it once a day this week in a neutral state. The nervous system learns through repetition in calm — not just in crisis. The goal is to make the technique automatic.

BRING TO YOUR SESSION

→ What grounding techniques work best for your nervous system?

→ Do you have a sequence for moments of overwhelm that you don't have to think about?

→ What gets in the way of using these tools when you most need them?

NOTES