



Controlled healthy breathing and grounding, and other stabilization

A) Controlled healthy breathing

- In acute stress, the breathing pattern is changed, e.g., hyperventilation and/or over-breathing (frequent sigh), also known as anxious breathing, is relatively common.
- These breathing changes lead to an unbalanced level between oxygen and carbon dioxide with lower blood concentrations of CO₂.
- That could lead to feeling unpleasantly light-headed, tingly in fingers and toes, clammy, and sweaty → the panic attack or dissociation can occur.
- When our breathing returns to its usual rate, the levels of carbon dioxide in the blood return to normal, and the symptoms resolve.

Breathing can be calmed down by simple steps (relaxing breathing):

1. Sit or lie down comfortably (if a client wants, the eyes can be closed);
2. Breathe slowly and steadily through the nose into the abdomen - belly (count to 4);
3. Hold breathe (count to 2);
4. Breathe out slowly and steadily through the mouth (count to 4);
5. Repeat for a few minutes.

Controlled breathing leads to:

- lowered blood pressure and heart rate;
- reduced levels of stress hormones in the blood;
- reduced lactic acid build-up in muscle tissue;
- balanced levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood;
- increased physical energy;
- increased feelings of calm and wellbeing;
- diaphragmatic breathing (into the belly) stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system and promotes relaxation and soothing.

Controlled breathing also increases the feeling of control, focusing on breathing increases contact with reality and perceiving here and now.

B) Grounding

- Set of simple strategies,
- Help with detaching from emotional pain,
- Focusing on the external world – rather than inward toward the self,
- Gain control and feeling safe,
- Increase contact with reality,
- Anchoring in the present,
- Is much more active and focuses on distracting strategies than relaxation training,
- Can be done any time, any place, anywhere.
- Keep eyes open, scan the room, and leave the light on to stay in touch with the present.

1) Mental grounding:

- describe your surroundings in detail, including sights (objects, textures, shapes, colors), sounds, smells, and temperature (e.g., “The walls are white, there are four wooden blue chairs ...”),
- “categories” games (e.g., think of “types of cars”, “types of food”, “dogs“...),
- describe every activity in great detail (e.g., cooking),
- saying safety statement (e.g., „My name is ..., I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. I am located in ..., the date is.“)
- count slowly, say alphabet slowly...

2) Physical grounding:

- run cool or warm water over your hands (not extremely cool or extremely warm),
- grab tightly onto the chair as hard as possible,
- touch various objects around (compare them in different options – texture, colors, materials, weight, temperature...),
- eat something and describe a taste in details,
- dip heels into the floor,
- jump up and down,
- stretch,
- walk slowly (saying left, right with each step),
- focus on breathing (notice every inhale and exhale).

3) Soothing grounding:

- think of favorites (colour, animal, season, food, movies, ...),
- picture people you care about,
- remember the words to some song,
- remember the safe place,
- Think of the things you are looking forward to, e.g., in the next week.

C) Butterfly Hug

The “Butterfly Hug” (BH) is a self-administered Bilateral Stimulation (BLS) method (like the eye movement or tapping) to process traumatic material for an individual or for group work. Desensitization (self-soothing) is a reprocessing byproduct using the BH as BLS.

Whole protocol for this stabilization technique can be found there:

<https://emdrfoundation.org/toolkit/butterfly-hug.pdf>

There you can find other suggestions of useful stabilization techniques:

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.energypsych.org/resource/resmgr/resources_for_resilience/all_resources_for_resilience.pdf