



FREE GUIDE • GROUNDING SKILLS

When the past feels close. *Ways to come back to now.*

Four stabilization skills our therapists use in trauma work. Gentle practices that can help you feel steadier when the past pulls you out of the present.

PREPARED BY

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01

BEFORE THE SKILLS

What grounding *is for*.

Trauma has a way of folding time. A smell, a tone of voice, a passing thought, and suddenly your body is reacting as if the hard thing is happening again.

Grounding skills are how you remind your nervous system, gently and over and over, that you are here. That it is now. That in this moment, you are safe enough. The four practices in this guide come from approaches our therapists use in trauma therapy. They are stabilization skills, the steady work that supports deeper healing.

They are not a replacement for trauma therapy itself. But they can help you feel more anchored between sessions, or while you decide whether therapy is your next step.

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT RIGHT NOW

Call or text **9-8-8** (Suicide Crisis Helpline, available 24/7).

Call **ConnexOntario at 1-866-531-2600** for mental health services in Ontario.

In an emergency, call **9-1-1**. The skills in this guide are for everyday steadying, not for emergencies.

A suggestion before you begin: practise these skills on an ordinary day, when things feel relatively calm. Skills rehearsed in quiet moments are easier to reach for in hard ones. And try each with curiosity rather than pressure. Different skills work for different people on different days.

02

A MAP FOR WHAT'S HAPPENING

The window *of tolerance*.

Everyone has a zone where they can feel emotions without being swamped by them. Therapists call it the window of tolerance. Inside the window, you can think, feel, and respond. Trauma tends to narrow that window, so you get pushed out of it more easily, and by smaller things.

WHERE YOU ARE

WHAT IT CAN FEEL LIKE

Above the window

Racing heart, racing thoughts, panic, irritability, feeling on guard

Revved up

Inside the window

You can feel things and still stay connected to the here and now

Present

Below the window

Numbness, fog, heaviness, feeling far away or unreal

Shut down

Neither direction is a failure. Both are your nervous system trying to protect you with the tools it has. The aim of grounding is not to never leave the window. It is to have doorways back in.

HOW TO USE THIS MAP

Before trying a skill, take one second to guess where you are: revved up, present, or shut down. The guess doesn't have to be exact. Naming it is itself a small step back toward the window, and it helps you pick the skill that fits the moment.

03

SKILL ONE

Orienting: a slow look *around the room.*

When the body is braced for danger, the eyes tend to fix or dart. Orienting reverses that. You let your head and eyes move slowly, the way an animal does when it senses the coast is clear.

- i. **Let your eyes wander slowly** around the space you're in. No rush.
- ii. **Allow your head and neck to turn** with your gaze, all the way to each side.
- iii. **Let your eyes rest on anything neutral or pleasant.** A colour, a plant, the light through a window.
- iv. **Notice what happens in your body.** Often there is a breath, a swallow, a small settling.

The slowness is the technique. Moving your eyes slowly tells your nervous system there is time, and where there is time, there is usually safety.

WHEN TO USE THIS

Orienting suits moments when you feel on guard, startled, or freshly triggered. It needs no equipment and looks like nothing from the outside, so it works in a meeting, on a bus, or in a waiting room. Many people use it as their first response, before reaching for any other skill.

04

SKILL TWO

Feet on the floor, plus a *temperature anchor.*

Trauma responses often pull awareness up and out of the body. This skill brings it back down through two strong physical signals: pressure and temperature.

- i. **Press both feet flat into the floor.** Feel the ground push back.
- ii. **Notice the weight of your body** in the chair, the points where you are supported.
- iii. **Add temperature.** Hold something cool (a cold glass, water on your wrists) or something warm (a mug, a heated blanket).
- iv. **Keep your attention on the sensation itself.** Cool. Warm. Solid. Here.

You are not trying to talk yourself out of anything. You are giving your body louder, truer information than the alarm: ground under your feet, real temperature against your skin, this room, this moment.

WHEN TO USE THIS

Check your map from section 02. Cool sensations tend to help when you feel revved up. Warm ones tend to help when you feel shut down or far away. Some people keep a cold water bottle or a wheat bag nearby for exactly this reason.

05

SKILL THREE

The container *exercise*.

Some memories and feelings are too much to carry through an ordinary Tuesday. The container is an imagery practice for setting them down on purpose. Not to avoid them forever, but to choose when you face them.

- i. **Picture a container strong enough** to hold whatever needs holding. A vault, a chest, a shipping container. Yours can look any way you like.
- ii. **Give it a secure lid or door**, and a way to lock it.
- iii. **Imagine placing the distressing image, memory, or feeling inside.** You can use a picture of it rather than the thing itself.
- iv. **Close it. Lock it.** Decide where the container stays, somewhere away from you but reachable.
- v. **Remind yourself:** it will keep until I'm ready to open it, ideally with support.

The container is not about pretending something didn't happen. It is about consent. You decide when the hard material gets your attention.

WHEN TO USE THIS

The container suits the end of the day, the minutes before sleep, or any moment when something has been stirred up and now is not the time to work through it. Many therapists teach it early in trauma therapy so the week between sessions feels more manageable.

06

SKILL FOUR

Safe or calm *place imagery*.

This is the companion to the container. Instead of putting something away, you bring something steadying closer: a place, real or imagined, where your body remembers what calm feels like.

- i. **Call to mind a place where you feel calm or at ease.** A beach, a grandmother's kitchen, a quiet church pew, somewhere entirely invented.
- ii. **Build it out with your senses.** What do you see there? Hear? Smell? Feel against your skin?
- iii. **Notice where the calm shows up in your body,** and let yourself stay with that for a minute or two.
- iv. **Give the place a one-word name.** With practice, the word alone can start to bring the feeling back.

If "safe place" feels out of reach right now, "calm enough place" works just as well. Some people start with a place that is simply neutral, and that counts.

A GENTLE WORD BEFORE YOU GO

Grounding can help you feel steadier, and that matters. But stabilization is the beginning of trauma work, not the whole of it. If these skills feel hard to use, or if flashbacks, nightmares, or numbness are shaping your daily life, that is not a failure on your part. It is a sign you deserve more support than a printout can offer.

YOUR NEXT STEP

The first conversation *costs nothing.*

When you're ready, working with a therapist on what's underneath can happen gently, and at your pace. The next step is a free 15-minute consultation. Answer a few questions, get matched with the therapist who fits your situation, and pick a time that works. No obligation, no pressure, and nothing to pay.

Get matched & book your free consultation

gracewaywellness.com/book/free-consultation · about 90 seconds

Meet our therapists first

gracewaywellness.com/our-team

Prefer to reach out directly?

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