



DISTRACTION
&
GROUNDING
TECHNIQUES



What are these techniques designed for?

Distraction techniques are literally what they say on the tin! These are techniques that can be used by people when they're feeling extremely anxious - as if they may have an anxiety (panic) attack - or if they are feeling like they might self-harm. Anger management techniques can be used when someone feels as though they may have an outburst of anger that they don't know how to control. People can use grounding techniques when they're experiencing symptoms of dissociation, and can also be useful for those experiencing anxiety. Many of these techniques overlap, so you may find one of the techniques from a different category helps you more than something in another category.

All these techniques are designed to divert your attention from your current mood or impulse into something more constructive until you have calmed down enough to manage your feelings.

It's worth taking time to understand what your triggers are and what the warning signs of an attack/outburst are so you understand what makes you anxious, sad, angry, or want to self-harm. Understanding what causes these feelings and noticing the early signals will help you to better prepare yourself for them.

If you are experiencing a severe mental health crisis, you should contact your GP or local mental health crisis team for support.

Distraction Techniques

- **Watch TV.** If you're feeling anxious put the TV on and watch your favourite show or movie. Focus on what is happening on the screen – even try your hand at acting out one of the scenes by yourself. If you're feeling sad, why not put on a movie that makes you laugh out loud?
- **Listen to music.** Music can be very therapeutic. If you're feeling anxious or like you might self-harm, put your favourite record on loud (try not to annoy the neighbours!) and listen to it the whole way through. You can dance around the house and sing your heart out while you're at it. Keep doing this until your mood passes.
- **Go for a walk.** Put on your boots and head on out for a nice long walk until you're feeling better. This is a good opportunity to take the dog out for a walk (if you have one).
- **Exercise.** Whether you put on those running shoes and get your pulse racing by going to a local park and running around the fields or you go to the gym and continue until you're all worn out and your frustrations are gone. Don't get too worn out, though and don't over do it Exercise is great for releasing lots of 'good' body chemicals and hormones that can help you feel better. And you'll be keeping in shape too!
- **Take a cold shower.** Sometimes just the shock of cool water raining down on us is enough to make us 'snap out of it'.

- **Write it all down.** Write down all your thoughts and feelings and how you think they're affecting you. Get it all out on to a piece of paper. Read it back and then tear it up. This is a symbolic gesture that shows you're letting go of all the negativity and moving on.
- **Have a bath.** Run a comforting bubble bath and just lie in it while you let all your 'bad' thoughts drift away. h) Cry it out. There's absolutely nothing wrong with going back to bed, wrapping yourself up in your duvet or a blanket and bawling your eyes out. You do whatever it is you need to do to make yourself feel better. Sometimes connecting with these sad thoughts and feelings allows us to process them.
- **Phone a friend.** Friends aren't just there to answer a difficult question when you're stuck during a quiz. Pick up the phone and give them a call. You can talk about anything you want to talk about until you feel better. If you don't feel as though you can phone a friend, phone a helpline such as the Samaritans. Talking about how you're feeling can be very cathartic.
- **Organise.** Right now might be the perfect time to tidy your home. Do laundry. Do the washing up. Vacuum the house. Dust things. Sort out your wardrobe. Clean the bathroom. Get yourself sorted.
- **Check in with yourself.** Think about what is bothering you in that moment constructively. Ask yourself if the situation really as bad as you think? What can you do to make the situation right? Sometimes we need to take a step back from our feelings and emotions and think about them logically in order to process them.

Anger Management Techniques

Anger can be a very difficult emotion to control, especially if you have a mental health disorder, such as Borderline Personality Disorder, which makes it more difficult for you to bring your emotions under control. You may find the distraction techniques above useful, but you can also try a couple of additional techniques not listed there:

- **Count to 10.** This is something we probably all got told as a child, but it can be a very useful way of giving yourself time to calm down before responding to something that has irritated you. Close your eyes and concentrate on slowing your breathing and slowly count to 10. You don't need to rush through the numbers, take your time. Some people mentally count upwards by thinking 'one one-thousand; two one thousand; three one-thousand,' and so on until they reach 10.
- **Remove yourself from the situation.** If you find yourself starting to feel angry with a person or situation, try to distance yourself from them or it. If need be, politely excuse yourself, and walk away from them or leave the room and go for a short walk until you have calmed down enough to return. Concentrate on slowing your breathing and allow the tension to leave your body.

- **Scream it out.** In an appropriate situation (such as when you're alone in your house), pick up a cushion or a pillow, hold it up to your face, and SCREAM into it until all your frustration is out.
- **Thrash it out.** In an appropriate situation (such as when you're alone in your house), hit a cushion or pillow over and over until all your physical frustrations have subsided. You can also go to the gym and hit a punch bag to release all this tension. Never hit another person, and make sure that what you're hitting isn't going to cause you physical harm (like punching a wall).

Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques can be very useful in the event of an anxiety attack, but they can also be very effective in bringing someone 'back down to Earth' if they're having a dissociative episode or a flashback, which can be very frightening to experience. These techniques focus on bringing the person back into the here and now by allowing them to reconnect with the reality around them.

This is a nice, simple walkthrough that you can practise on your own, or ask someone to guide you through it. Take your time and don't rush through it.

- **Close your eyes**, slip off your shoes and feel the ground beneath your feet, press your feet down into the ground if need be and focus on your breathing. Breathe in and out slowly, taking long, deep breaths. What can you feel beneath your feet? Is it grass? Is it soft carpet? Is it wood, or is it stone?
- **Listen** to the sounds that are happening around you. Can you hear birds singing? Can you hear traffic passing by? Can you hear children laughing? Can you hear the rain? Concentrate on all the noises you can hear.
- **Now concentrate on any scents you can smell.** Can you smell flowers? Can you smell incense? Can you smell freshly cut grass? What can you smell?

- **Slowly become aware of other physical sensations around you.** Can you feel a cooling breeze? What clothes are you wearing? Start to feel connected to these physical sensations around you. Rub your hands together gently and feel your fingers interlocking as they move over each other. You can rub your hands on your clothing, and feel the material between your fingers. What does this feel like? Is it smooth or rough?
- **Open your eyes and become aware of the objects around you.** Is there a clock? Is there a chair? Are there books on shelves? Are there plants in the room, if so, what are they? Are there trees in the garden? What are those things?
- **Have the 'adult' in you tell your inner-child that you're safe and nothing bad is going to happen.** Say the words aloud and repeat them if need be.
- **Now focus on the present** and think about what you're going to do next or for the rest of the day.

Further Reading

You may find our guide on mindfulness and meditation useful.