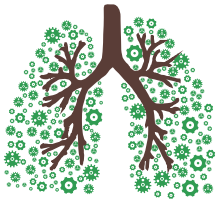
Grounding Techniques

With PTSD it is common to have intrusive memories of traumatic events. Even though these events happened in the past, when the memories come it can feel as though the events are happening again in the present. This can be extremely upsetting, and it is helpful to find ways that help you to 'ground' yourself back in the safety of the present moment.

Breathing



When we are anxious or upset our breathing becomes more rapid. We can feel better by deliberately slowing and relaxing our breathing. Anxious breathing is up in the chest, whereas relaxed breathing happens deeper in the belly.

Relaxed breathing instructions

- Breathe in slowly and steadily through your nose for a count of 4 - don't rush this!
- Pause for a count of 1.
- Exhale slowly and steadily for a count of 4 - breathe out gradually - try not to breathe out with a sigh.
- Repeat for a few minutes until you notice a change in how your body feels.
- If you get distracted, or if your mind wanders, just bring your attention back to how it feels to breathe in and out.

Smells

Smells are an incredibly powerful way of coming to our senses. If you are deliberately paying attention to a smell you are truly in the present moment. Try to find a smell that has positive associations for you – maybe one that reminds you of happy times, or a smell which you enjoy. Carry it with you and use it to bring yourself back to the present moment if you get caught up in an unwanted memory.

Helpful smells

- Small bottles of essential oils - e.g. eucalyptus, mint, lavender, lemon.
- Small dried flowers such as lavender.
- Perfume soaked on a tissue.
- Whole spices from the kitchen.

Grounding statement

Unwanted memories in PTSD can make us mentally 'time travel' back to the trauma, and we can sometimes forget that we are safe in the present. It can be helpful to write a 'grounding statement' to remind yourself that you are safe. You can carry it around with you and read it if you become upset. Useful statements talk about safety, or remind you of what is different now compared to then.

It is 2020 and I am safe. my trauma happened a long time ago and I survived.

my trauma happened in the past and I am only remembering it now. The memories upset me, but they are just memories, they cannot hurt me.

I am safe in the present moment. I know I have survived because I am bigger and older than in my trauma memory. I have my own family now, and I am loved.

Downloaded by Beverley Cummins on 2022-04-23

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