



GROUNDING

Skills for Trauma-Informed Practice

Grounding skills are simple and practical activities that can help individuals relax, stay present, and re-connect with what is happening around them. For individuals who have experienced trauma, grounding can be used if they are feeling “triggered” or overwhelmed, as a coping skill and as part of self-care. For service providers, teaching grounding skills can be an important part of trauma-informed practice. Service providers can use grounding skills to work with individuals who are experiencing an “in-the-moment” trauma response. They can also be used for those who appear frozen in fear, threatened, overwhelmed, angry, worried or disconnected from themselves, their bodies, and the world around them.

Grounding skills can be taught as part of intake, at initial meetings with clients, or at the beginning or end of an individual or group therapy session. They can be included in safety plans and can be used as a tool for helping individuals learn about and heal from trauma. Grounding skills can also be important for service providers as a part of self-care and can be used at an organizational level (e.g., at the end of a staff meeting or discussed in supervision).

Grounding skills can be used when working with individuals who may become escalated due to their experiences of trauma. However, this will likely depend on the individual, the situation, and whether the service provider has an established relationship with the individual. In crisis situations, there may be other more suitable approaches that service providers can use, e.g., clearing the space of extra people to ensure safety and privacy.

Service providers can draw upon traditional knowledge, collaborate with a client to develop a unique approach tailored for them, or seek guidance from local Knowledge Keepers or Elders. It is imperative that service providers not make assumptions and an ongoing dialogue in any working relationship needs to occur to ensure these tools are used appropriately and in a way that is culturally sensitive. Grounding

skills are often categorized as “mental,” “physical,” and “self-soothing.” These categories can be one way to explore different strategies with individuals and groups and to help them identify which strategies work best for them and in which circumstances. Many grounding skills used in Western counselling contexts can easily be adapted by service providers and clients interested in using Inuit-specific approaches.

Here are examples of a range of grounding skills. Be open to learning about Inuit-specific approaches.

Physical	Mental	Self-Soothing
Walk slowly, noticing each footstep, saying “left” and “right” with each step.	Name your favourites. What are your three favourite colours? Favourite foods? favourite animals?	Try a butterfly hug by crossing your arms (as if giving yourself a hug) and alternately tapping your left and right upper arm. Breathe and gently tap for a minute or two.
Sip a cool drink of water.	Talk yourself through what you are experiencing. "My heart is pounding. It's slowing down as I breathe in and out. These feelings will pass. I will get through this."	Look at a calming photo.
Rub your palms together; clap your hands. Listen to the sound. Feel the sensation.		Say the words to a comforting verse or song
Dig your feet into the ground. Feel supported, rooted, connected to the earth.	Change the “channel” in your mind or visualize your fear dissolving like a melting ice cube.	Imagine yourself in a familiar, comfortable place. Relax in this safe place. This could include imagining being on the land.
Take a deep breath in through your nose. As you breathe out through your mouth, make a sound like the ocean. Feel the rhythm of your breathing, like ocean waves moving in and out.	Count to 10 slowly in the language that is most familiar and then count backwards	Imagining support from a comforting/soothing person
Carry a grounding object such as a stone in your pocket. Touch it for comfort when you need it.	Describe step-by-step and in great detail how to prepare for a cultural activity such as making traditional foods, sewing or going hunting.	Comfort yourself as you would comfort a child. "I am loved. I am safe here."

Discussion Questions

1. What opportunities exist for developing grounding skills with your clients (e.g., during intake, as a way to begin or end a group program)? Are there creative ways to incorporate grounding strategies in environments that upon initial assessment offer limited access to resources, e.g., hospitals or correctional facilities?
2. Are you able to recognize the signs of a trauma response or when your client is “triggered”? Which grounding activities might be the most useful in this situation?
3. When helping an individual to ground themselves, how can we adapt our approach to be reflective of the unique ways in which a person sees, understands or experiences their culture? What barriers may be created between the service provider and the individual if they do not share the same cultural background or have distinctly different ways of being and knowing?
4. How might you use grounding skills with different populations, e.g., women, men, youth, involuntary clients, individuals with physical disabilities?

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