

# Calm Ground

Grounding tools to help you  
feel safe and solid in the present



**Megan Williams**





## The purpose of this book

*Calm Ground* has been created to give you a set of easy to follow tools and strategies to help restore some calm when anxiety, other difficult emotions, or memories, feel overwhelming. Grounding is a process of getting in touch with yourself and your immediate environment in a way that provides moments of comparative calm.

In order to feel more safe and solid in the present, grounding tools include the use of your five senses, awareness of your body, some body movements, and orientation to safe objects in your environment. This book gives many examples of how to become more grounded by using simple strategies which will help in different situations.

Becoming more grounded allows you to soothe yourself when you are anxious or distressed by a difficult thought process or memory. Also, once you feel grounded you can gain a clearer and calmer frame of mind from which to make decisions.

This book provides a number of Grounding options in an easily accessible format that you can carry with you to places that have made you anxious. It is a mobile self-help device.

This book begins by explaining a few basics such as the nature of anxiety and an expanded explanation of what grounding is and how it can help you. Each technique is first given a rationale then the strategies are explained. Finally, ideas are provided for specific places or contexts that can make some people very anxious such as public places or being home alone.

Once you are familiar with the process you can just go straight to the tools themselves when you feel anxious, stressed, or you are having a flashback of a traumatic event from the past. There is also a section where you can track your own use of grounding tools and rate their effectiveness.

As a bonus I have included the instructions for making your own Mood Enhancing First Aid Box (MEFAB) which will also help to ground you and remind you of positive aspects of your life when things seem gloomy or if you are prone to low self esteem.

Sometimes though, grounding tools may not be enough and it is then important to seek professional counselling.

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# What is grounding?

## **Connecting to the present**

The purpose of grounding is to help you reduce your experience of anxiety or stress in any given moment. Grounding enables you to self-soothe by being connected to the earth and solid objects through the use of supportive breathing techniques and the use of your body, including some movements.<sup>5</sup> Grounding can also be achieved by focusing on the information from your 5 senses to be in moment by moment connection with the present.<sup>8</sup>

## **Feeling safer**

When you ground yourself it gives you a greater sense of safety and stability in the present moment from which to go forward in a calmer frame of mind. This occurs because grounding requires you to focus on the here and now rather than on unhelpful thoughts that can fill your mind or distressing memories of past events that appear to come from nowhere. When you use grounding tools they can provide you with a sense of physical and psychological safety, which counteracts anxiety that can leave you feeling shaky and unsure of your capacity for composure.

Grounding exercises can also be very important and useful for people who feel a sense of numbness in parts of their body or feel unreal or disembodied at times. These experiences of depersonalization, or not feeling quite real, can occur in response to high levels of anxiety or trauma. Instead of being in a state of Hyperarousal, which involves high reactivity to stimuli (e.g. feeling jumpy or irritable), some people experience Hypoarousal in which they feel detached emotionally and physically from themselves and their environment.<sup>2</sup>

Hypoarousal, which is discussed in more detail in the chapter about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, is a defence strategy used by the mind to cope with overwhelming thoughts, feelings or memories related to past events by reducing conscious awareness of yourself and your immediate environment. However, if you become hypoaroused it is just as important to get more grounded as this state suggests you are either extremely anxious and so have shut down or you are responding to memories which occurred in the past rather than in the present moment.<sup>2</sup>

## **Letting the body lead the way**

The orientation to the present that grounding provides is about connecting with our own senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, as well as the action of breathing, to calm both our body and our mind. Often our mind will follow our body, so if we can calm our body by breathing more deeply for instance, then our minds will get the message that there is no imminent danger. Our mind can then stop generating reasons why we feel anxious in our bodies. This is called “bottom up” processing because we start with the basic bodily responses to help change what is going on at a higher level in our mind.<sup>5</sup>



## **It helps to think clearly**

The opposite of bottom up processing is “top down” processing which involves using rational thinking to counter our anxious and often irrational thoughts about what we are experiencing physically. For example, if you start feeling anxious about a presentation you are due to give, you could tell yourself “I do not need to be perfect to do this presentation and nothing bad is going to happen if I make a mistake”. This can work as long as you are not already highly physiologically aroused. But if you are already feeling highly anxious then it is hard to think clearly. So using grounding tools can help you reduce your arousal so you can then examine your fears rationally.<sup>5</sup> Not every situation is dangerous despite our body reacting as if it is under immediate threat.

## **Everyone can benefit**

Grounding does not just apply to people with severe anxiety or a history of traumatic stress. All people can become lost in anxious thoughts or hold their breath when anticipating a difficult situation. So grounding can be helpful for most people. For example, do you feel a build up of day to day stress that leaves you feeling generally uptight? Grounding techniques can be helpful for you too.

Next I will try to give a crash course on the nature of anxiety but you don't need to have been given a formal diagnosis of anxiety to get some benefit from understanding the fundamentals. I will also refer to several websites that you can visit for more extensive material about different types of anxiety disorders.

## WHAT CAN CALM GROUND DO FOR YOU?

**Calm Ground** will give you plentiful and easy to follow strategies to help you manage anxious thoughts, distressing feelings, or bad memories of the past. **Calm Ground** is created to be easily used when you are upset or anxious without wading through a lot of theory to find the tools you need NOW. It will guide you through strategies for:

- Sleep
- Managing cumulative stress
- Using your 5 senses and your body to soothe yourself
- Dealing with specific fears such as public places, being alone, and many more daily activities.

**Calm Ground** includes soothing photos of nature to calm your senses and illustrations to add extra meaning to the words. Megan wrote this book to help people everywhere who need to feel more safe and solid in the present. It is a mobile self help device.

*“This book is a gift, the grounded learnings and observations of an experienced practitioner translated into disarmingly simple and accessible yet deep ideas. Beautifully presented, it includes a fount of useful practices, perspectives and information.”*

Mr Jonathan Norton, Counselling Psychologist and  
Senior Public Sector Mental Health Manager

*“Megan Williams’ book is one of the most clearly written, for both clients and workers, on grounding techniques and stress management I have read. Her visuals, her self-guided exercises and her depth of content is accessible and beautifully described.*

*I am a Psychologist in private practice and also a Program Manager of a program that trains Aboriginal child, youth, and family workers in family therapy skills. This book will be an invaluable resource for both workers and participants. It is both informative and invitational.”*

Dr Kerry Proctor – Psychologist, Family Therapist, and Manager of the Indigenous Program, The Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University, Victoria.

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