



## Mindfulness and Grounding exercises: how they help children (and adults).

After a traumatic, frightening or upsetting experience, **a grounding exercise can help children calm down**. Grounding exercises encourage children to focus on the things around them, rather than on the thoughts and feelings that are distressing them.

Grounding exercises can help adults too, so you could do a grounding exercise together with your child.

Grounding exercises are a kind of mindfulness.

It's important for children to be able to calm down after traumatic or distressing experiences. Calming down helps them cope in the moment and recover over time. With practice and your help, children and teenagers can learn to calm down by themselves.

### What you need for a grounding exercise

You can do a grounding exercise **anywhere and anytime**. It helps to have:

- a quiet, comfortable place
- a few minutes when you won't be interrupted.

### How to do a grounding exercise

Start by making sure **your child is sitting comfortably with their legs and arms uncrossed**. Then use a calm, quiet voice to guide your child through the exercise. Take it slowly and allow time for each step.

Here's how to talk your child through the steps in this exercise:

1. 'Get comfortable. Uncross your arms and legs.'
2. 'Now breathe in and out slowly 3 times.' You can guide your child by saying, 'Breathe in ... breathe out ... . Breathe in ... breathe out ... . Breathe in ... breathe out...'
3. 'Now look around you. Name 5 objects that you can see.' You can prompt your child with examples like, 'I see the ground. I see my shoe. I see a tree. I see a car. I see my friend'.
4. 'Close your eyes. Breathe in and out slowly 3 times.'
5. 'Keep your eyes closed and listen carefully. Name 5 sounds that you can hear.' You can prompt your child with examples like, 'I hear a person talking. I hear a bird chirping. I hear a door close. I hear a car going past. I hear myself breathing'.
6. 'Keep your eyes closed. Breathe in and out slowly 3 times.'
7. 'Keep your eyes closed and think about how your body feels. Name 5 things you can feel.' You can prompt your child with examples like, 'I can feel my toes inside my shoes. I can feel my feet on the ground. I can feel my fingers pressed together. I can feel my t-shirt on my shoulders. I can feel my teeth with my tongue'.
8. 'Keep your eyes closed. Breathe in and out slowly 3 times.'

If **your child names distressing objects or sounds**, gently interrupt and suggest they choose something else. For example, you could say, 'Yes, I know you can hear that, but what else can you hear? Can you hear the bird chirping?'

### **Adapting this grounding exercise for children at different stages or with diverse abilities**

For **younger children, autistic children or children with disability**, you could change the things you ask your child to focus on and name. For example, you could ask them to name the colours or shapes of objects around them, or things they can smell or touch.

**Older children** might like to do the activity independently. You could show your child how to do the exercise, or record yourself talking them through it, and then suggest they use it when they need to calm themselves.

- Don't forget to check your emails for further ideas to support mindfulness!