**Managing Anxiety and Stress**

Feeling anxious and stressed can cause us to become ‘ungrounded’ and as the anxiety grows, we can begin to lose contact with reality as our thoughts get more panicked or fearful, and our body can become tight and sensitive. It is very common to feel anxious or numb and it is good to find ways to help you manage it, so you don’t become overwhelmed.

If we have experienced any kind of trauma, certain things such as specific smells, tastes, touches, shadows, images or something someone says or does can trigger us into a traumatic reaction. We may find ourselves suddenly in a state that feels like panic or terror, blanked out, or mentally transported back to a traumatic event so that it feels like it is happening in the present. We can also sometimes find ourselves feeling numb or flat. Grounding techniques can really help: below you will find some possibilities. Try them out, adapt them, some may work for you, others may not.  Some may not suit you at all because of the reminders and associations they hold for you.

These techniques need to be practiced. This will allow you to find out which techniques work for you, and if you practice them throughout the day, they will help to manage your anxiety, keep you grounded and present, and you will be able to access them easily when you need to.

**Grounding Techniques**

**Taste and smell**

* Eat something with a strong taste.
* Smells can help. Pierce the flesh of an orange, lime or a lemon and draw in the scent. Maybe there is a smell you find comforting? Draw in the scent of coffee.
* If going into a possibly triggering situation, wear a strong scent that is associated with comfort or safety, and breathe it in when needed.

**Breathing**

* When you breathe, notice how the breath goes right down through the centre of your body.
* Focus on breathing slowly and deeply rather than fast and shallow. Place your hand on your tummy so that you can feel the breath. You may place your other hand against your chest and feel how that contains and supports you.
* When you feel anxious, focus on breathing so that the in breath is shorter than the out breath – for example breathe in for the count of 4 and out for 7, or in for 6 and out for 9.
* If you are feeling numb or flat, focus on letting the outbreath be shorter than the in breath e.g. breathe in for six and out four.
* Sometimes focusing on breathing can increase panic and anxiety: if this is the case, stop focusing.
* A short mindfulness exercise could become part of your daily routine e.g. a 3-minute breathing space. This will keep you calmer and your body will respond more to the use of your breath when you are anxious.
* There are some breathing and calming exercises you can download onto your phone so that you can listen to them during the day or when you start to feel anxious.

**Using our vision can be helpful to engage our thinking brain by describing what we see**

* Make eye contact with a supportive person, or pet.
* Notice the detail of the things around you: colours, shapes, textures, design. Describe an object or picture in detail to yourself.
* Name the objects you see in the room and on the walls.
* Count the number of objects in the room.

**Using Images**

* Develop comforting, soothing images so that you can access and use them easily when feeling anxious. It may be an image of a supportive friend or something more abstract: allow yourself to imagine an image of being in a safe place
* Are there images that bring on feelings of comfort and security, of calm? If so, think of keeping them on your phone or close by.

**Using our bodies to ground ourselves**

* Rub your feet flat on the ground. Take your shoes off, if you can do this. Walk on the grass in your bare feet.
* Rub one hand against another. Rub the back of your neck. Lean back in your chair, feel its solid support.
* Move your body or some part of it. Get up and move around, if you can. Wave or stretch your arms. Jump, stamp around, feel and hear your feet contact the ground.
* If you can’t move around, make small movements e.g. wiggle your toes, notice how this feels.
* Comb or brush your hair. A lot of people ‘play with their hair’ in different ways – this is often a self soothing technique. If you do something like this, notice in what way it helps you.
* Hold your hands under cold or warm running water and notice the sensation.
* Hold an ice cube or place your hands around the sides of a cup of warm drink.
* Splash water on your face. Wash your face carefully
* Bring your hands together. Fold them over each other. Stroke one with another. Bring them together palm to palm: notice which ways of holding and moving your hands help you to feel grounded, steady, held. Use hand cream to rub and stroke your hands.

**Using thoughts**

* Use a thought, for example say to yourself “That was then, this is now”. Calmly and gently ask yourself to listen and to hear this ‘Did you hear – I said that was then, and this is now. None of that is happening right here, right now’. Say it aloud if possible.
* Try a short phrase like ‘I am safe here and now’. Try out some words and phrases, say them and listen to them, notice which words or phrases calm and sooth you.

**Using Music**

* When anxious or panicked, calming music can be very helpful. What music calms you? Think of making your own playlist you can use for when you are feeling anxious or low
* Sing a song, paying attention to the words. Think about what song might support you when anxious or panicky, so that you do not have to think of one at the time.
* Try humming or singing different tunes. Notice what calms you, energises you, makes you smile, comforts you, makes you feel hopeful.

**Sounds**

* Listen to and really pay attention to sounds: the clock ticking, the birds outside, music, songs

**Using touch**

* Get up and touch objects. See 5 things. Name 5 things. Touch 5 things.
* Stroke and/or talk to a pet.
* Stroke and/or talk to a cuddly toy.
* Take a hug and give a hug.
* Massage or comforting touch from a trusted person
* Touch and feel an object that connects you with a support – the necklace your friend gave you

**Relationships**

* If you can talk to a friend. If they are not there call or message them.
* Imagine a supportive person, think of what they would say to you now.