Grounding card

Prepare this while relatively settled. Choose neutral cues that help you; leave out anything uncomfortable.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

MY QUICK ORIENTATION CARD

Where and when I am now

e.g. At home, Sunday afternoon.

Two or three details around me

e.g. A blue mug, the chair beneath me and the window.

Next action / person I can contact

e.g. Make a drink; contact Alex if I need support.

Cues to avoid / changes that help

e.g. Keep my eyes open; leave out strong smells.

What helped / what to change

e.g. Noticing the room helped me return to the conversation.

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Using this resource

Grounding card

What this helps with

When attention is pulled into worry or distress, noticing your current surroundings may help you reconnect with the task or place you are in. You can use simple external details, such as the colour of a door, the date or the feel of a supported chair. You do not have to complete a fixed sensory sequence. The aim is orientation and choice, not forcing calm or using a ritual to guarantee that nothing difficult will happen.

How to use it

1. First check what the current situation needs: actual danger calls for protective action.
2. If you are safe enough to pause, name your location, the date and one ordinary feature nearby.
3. Choose a neutral detail to look at, listen to or touch, only if comfortable.
4. Notice what you want to do next: return to a task, move to support or take a break.
5. Write a short card using the prompts you found useful; stop if they increase distress.

A fictional worked example

After a difficult message, Rowan feels caught in imagined future arguments. They look at the blue folder on the desk and say, 'It is Tuesday afternoon; I am in my kitchen.' They notice the support of the chair and the sound of the washing machine. Counting sensations feels irritating, so they leave that out. The worry has not disappeared, but Rowan can choose to finish lunch before deciding whether a reply is needed. Later they write a brief card: location, date, one neutral detail, next useful action. Their version is simple and does not need to be repeated until they feel completely settled.

Keep in mind

With flashbacks or dissociation, agree a personalised plan with a trauma-trained therapist. Do not use sensory prompts that trigger memories or distress. Grounding does not make an unsafe place safe. If orientation worsens or you cannot regain contact with the present, seek support.

Sources and attribution

NHS Inform. Grounding exercises.

Roth, A. D., & Pilling, S. (2007). The competences required to deliver effective CBT for people with depression and anxiety disorders. UCL competence framework.

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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