



AMHERST COLLEGE

Grounding and Self Soothing Techniques

These techniques and practices are especially useful during times of stress, emotional disturbance, and exposure to troubling, disturbing and/or triggering stimuli. They are most effective when they are practiced routinely, both during times of difficulty and calm. They are designed to help you feel safe and present in the current moment. They are based upon well researched and evidence-based practices and are used as forms of self-care for a wide range of individuals working to maintain their wellness during overwhelming and difficult experiences.

Things you can do while in the classroom or a meeting:

Play categories: write down the alphabet on the side of your paper or visualize the alphabet in your mind. Think of a category (i.e. music, movie titles, food, favorite authors, etc.) and begin going through the category alphabetically. This exercise can help ground you in an activity that is not emotionally distressing and will allow you to distance and distract yourself from emotional response so you can get through the moment.

Say a safety statement to yourself: “My name is _____; I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. I am located in _____; the date is _____. What I am feeling right now is valid, but I don’t need it; I can put it away. I am safe right now.” You can also write this to ground yourself. This can be helpful if you are being actively triggered, experiencing disorientation related to trauma, or experiencing another acute stress response.

Repeat a favorite saying: Have a mantra, quote, or prayer on repeat in your mind that helps calm and soothe you. Positive self-talk can also be helpful. Use these words and their personal meaning to you as a way to ground and soothe yourself.

Physically ground your body: Dig your heels into the floor, focus on the tension needed in your muscles to do this. Become aware of the pressure on your body of the seat supporting you. Notice how deep breaths into your belly push the small of your back into the chair behind you. Scan through your body and notice what it is in contact with. Continue to focus on deep, long, slow, and “low” breaths that extend into your belly. Let your shoulders and chest remain still as you breathe and try to keep them from rising and falling. Bring your awareness into your body and away from the tension of pain and anxiety. This exercise will soothe you and activate your parasympathetic nervous center which is what helps your body calm itself.

Things you can do while walking around on campus:

Notice everything in stages: Start by noticing how the air around you feels on you. What is the temperature? Is the air moist? Dry? Without judging the condition of the air, notice it in heightened detail. Begin noticing sound, first obvious loud sounds, and gradually listen for quieter, more subtle sounds. Notice any rustling, subtle noises. Is there a rhythm? Are you making any sounds? Can you hear your breath? Can you slow and deepen your breath? What do you see? How many colors are

around you? What textures do you notice? Is there anything you never noticed before? After taking time with each of these sensory experiences, bring your attention to how your feet feel as they make contact with the ground below you. Do different surfaces change how your feet function? Where does your foot strike first? What touches last? How do the muscles of your feet, ankles, calves, etc. feel as they work in coordination with one another? Without judgment notice how your body moves and bring your awareness to the details of sensation. Practice this walking meditation frequently and allow it to calm and distract yourself. Breathe deeply into the bottom of your belly when you practice this. If you like running, you can also adapt this to running.

Play categories again. Use cracks in the sidewalk or something similar to determine when you have to come up with a new name...

Other things you can do:

Take a bathroom break and use cold and warm water to bring different awareness to your hands. You can also expand this practice to your shower routine. Focus on the nature of the sensation to distract and distance yourself from your current emotional distress. If you enjoy scents, use a favorite soap or lotion. Breathe deeply into your belly while doing this in long, slow, deep, and low breaths.

You can also hold an ice cube in your closed palm to distract yourself from your current emotions.

Plan a vacation you would like to take. Visualize the place, imagine the sounds, plan activities and outings. It doesn't matter if this vacation will ever happen. Just allow your mind to fantasize about all the pleasant details, experiences, sensations, and anticipation that goes with planning a vacation. This will give your mind and body a break from being activated within a stress response and can calm and soothe you.

Resources:

Administrator on Call (24/7) | 413.542.2111

Anonymous Reporting | 1.888.497.1022

Amherst College Police | 413.542.2111

Amherst Town Police | 413.259.3000

*CWC (24/7) | Rape Crisis Hotline |
413.545.0800

*Safe Passage Hotline (24/7) | 413.586.5066

*Counseling Center | 413.542.2354

*Amherst Health Services | 413.542.2266

*Cooley Dickinson Hospital (24/7) |
413.582.2000

*Amherst College Religious Life | 413.542.8149
Title IX Coordinator | 413.542.5707

Dean of Student Conduct & Community
Standards | 413.542.2337

Sexual Respect Education | 413.542.5671

**Confidential Resource*