

# Emergency Grounding Step by Step for emotional flashbacks.

Use this when you feel flooded, frozen, panicky, or disconnected — like you are not safe, even though your logical mind can see that you are safe.

This can be an **emotional flashback**: your body is reacting to old danger signals in the present.

Your goal is to **return to the present moment** and help your nervous system recognise safety again.

If you know the time that the flashback relates to, pay attention to what is different **now**.



## ORIENT TO NOW

- Look around and name 3 things you can see
- Say your name and today's date or notice other things about now that help you feel present
- Say: "I am safe right now. This is a false alarm, not danger."

## STEP 1: CONTAIN THE BODY



Choose what feels least overwhelming.

- Sit with feet firmly on the floor
- Lean back into a chair or wall
- Wrap arms around torso or use a weighted item

## STEP 2: TEMPERATURE RESET



Trauma responses are stored in the body.

Choose:

- Cold water on face or ice in hands
- Warm shower, blanket, or hot water bottle

### STEP 3: SOOTHING BREATHING

(No forcing. Gentle only.)

breathe

- In through nose (count 3–4)
- Out through mouth (count 5–6)
- Pause if dizzy
- 3–5 rounds only

### STEP 4: RELEASE THE ADRENALINE (Stay in the Present)



- Stomp feet or press heels into floor
- Clench fists → release
- Push palms into wall or thighs

Do not revisit memories or try understand why you feel this way. Focus only on sensation.

### STEP 5: WAIT & ALLOW



- Give your nervous system 15–30 minutes
- No decisions. No self-judgement.
- Waves rise and fall.

### STEP 6: Sensory Regulation

**Use sensation to stay here, not to escape.**



- Weighted blanket, firm pressure, tight hoodie
- Rocking, pacing, or repetitive safe movement
- Strong but neutral input (mint, sour candy, textured object)
- Low lighting or eyes closed (only if grounding, not dissociative)
- Noise-cancelling headphones, brown or white noise

**If dissociation increases, switch to movement or temperature.**

## Gentle reminder

A lot of people who experience emotional flashbacks describe that it takes them back to feeling very vulnerable, or as if though they are a small child inside. This is a very common and human experience and **it is not your fault**. This happens because the human brain is very tricky and it can store overwhelming painful emotional memories separate to regular ones. The part of the brain that is signalling to you that you aren't safe is signalling false alarms and that is not your fault.

Many people who have this experience are self critical, they may call themselves "weak" or they may say other unkind things to themselves, that they feel ashamed of because they wouldn't speak that way to another person. Sometimes they may even think they deserve this criticism because they blame themselves or feel guilty, embarrassed or ashamed. Experiencing with these thoughts can feel very overwhelming when you are having an emotional flashback. These thoughts can also make emotional flashbacks more intense and commonly lead to urges to cope in ways that can have harmful unintended consequences. In that sense, they are **not helpful**.



Instead of engaging with self-critical thoughts, you can choose to shift your intention and attention to being **helpful** to yourself. You can do this by making a commitment to be helpful and to focus on soothing and settling, and letting yourself feel a little bit safer by using the techniques provided. You can also use [soothing rhythm breathing](#) and **safe place exercises**

🌐 **Mindful relaxation exercises: safe place imagery** .

Remember, this is a journey, not of blaming but of taking responsibility to be helpful to yourself and to be supportive and encouraging to that small child inside. With time things can change and your therapist is here to help you.

**You are already being very helpful to yourself by seeking support, and learning these new ways of coping. So that is a great step in the right direction.**