

GROUNDING AND SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES

TIPS & RESOURCES

WHY SELF-CARE?

After people have experienced traumatic events, it is not uncommon to have flashbacks caused by sights, sounds, or experiences that trigger traumatic memories or feelings. Self-care like sleep and physical hygiene, regular exercise, therapy, music, grounding, journaling, and meditation can help prevent and redirect trauma-induced anxiety.

Grounding is useful for the two extremes that people often use to cope with trauma, either to dissociate and experience "numbness," or to become overwhelmed and experience intense emotional pain. Grounding is about centering oneself between those two extremes during an anxious episode.

Other types of self-care, both physical and mental, are about helping oneself to feel taken care of and safe. The aim of all self-care is to feel healthy, safe, and comfortable.

GROUNDING EXERCISES

If you've been triggered by something in your daily life, grounding techniques can help to avoid panic and manage stress and anxiety. Grounding is a very helpful technique if you are experiencing flashbacks and you find yourself sometimes losing touch with the present moment. Grounding can help you reorient to your surroundings. Here are some examples of grounding exercises:

- Think about carrying a small, comforting item to focus on in anxious moments.
- Press your feet into the ground, clap your hands, run cool water over your hands, or go for a run.
- Try chewing gum or eating something. Describe the flavors to yourself.
- Focus on the objects around you. What do you see? How do they feel? What do you smell? What do you hear? What can you taste?
- Try playing a categories game. How many dogs can you name? How many colors can you think of? How many shapes?
- Try reading something attentively or repeating a favorite saying.

ARE YOU SAFE?

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's safety, call **911** or **Vassar Safety & Security at (845) 437-7333**.

If you are safe and are looking for information about on/off campus resources or reporting options, you can call a **Vassar Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Advocate at (845) 437-7333** or visit [savp.vassar.edu/resources](http://www.savp.vassar.edu/resources) for a full list of resources and options.

MORE TECHNIQUES

BREATHING EXERCISES

Calm breathing (sometimes called, "diaphragmatic breathing") is a technique that helps you slow down your breathing when feeling stressed or anxious. Our breathing changes when we are feeling anxious. We tend to take short, quick, shallow breaths, or even hyperventilate. This is called, "overbreathing."

Calm breathing involves taking smooth, slow, and regular breaths. Sitting upright is usually better than lying down or slouching, because it can increase the capacity of your lungs to fill with air. It is best to "take the weight" off your shoulders by supporting your arms on the side-arms of a chair, or on your lap.

- Breathe through your nose so the air fills your stomach for about 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds.
- Exhale slowly for about 4 seconds.
- Wait 1 or 2 seconds before taking another breath, then repeat.

About 6-8 breathing cycles per minute is often helpful to decrease anxiety, but some might feel more comfortable with their own breathing rhythm. These cycles regulate the amount of oxygen you take in so that you do not experience the fainting, tingling, and giddy sensations that are sometimes associated with overbreathing.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS FOR SELF-CARE

The Counseling Service has a list of guided grounding and self-care exercises on their website that you can try on your own to relax and/or self-soothe. The exercises can be found on their website at: counselingservice.vassar.edu/online-help/irelax.html. Their website also has a list of free or low-cost apps that could be helpful for relaxing, managing anxiety, or learning meditation/yoga techniques. Some of these apps are listed below:

- Breathe2Relax
- Cognitive Diary CBT
- Tactical Breathing
- Stop Panic and Anxiety Self-Help
- Depression CBT Self-Help
- Social Anxiety-WayForward
- Simply Being
- Ambiance
- Affirmations
- Calm
- Headspace
- iYoga
- Simply Being

ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES

Remember that your self-care plan is personal to what works best for you and that you are not alone in taking this on!

There are various offices at Vassar that can assist you in taking care of yourself, feeling safe, and being comfortable. You can call a SART Advocate at (845) 437-7333 if you would like to hear about more techniques or if you would like to have someone walk you through these exercises.