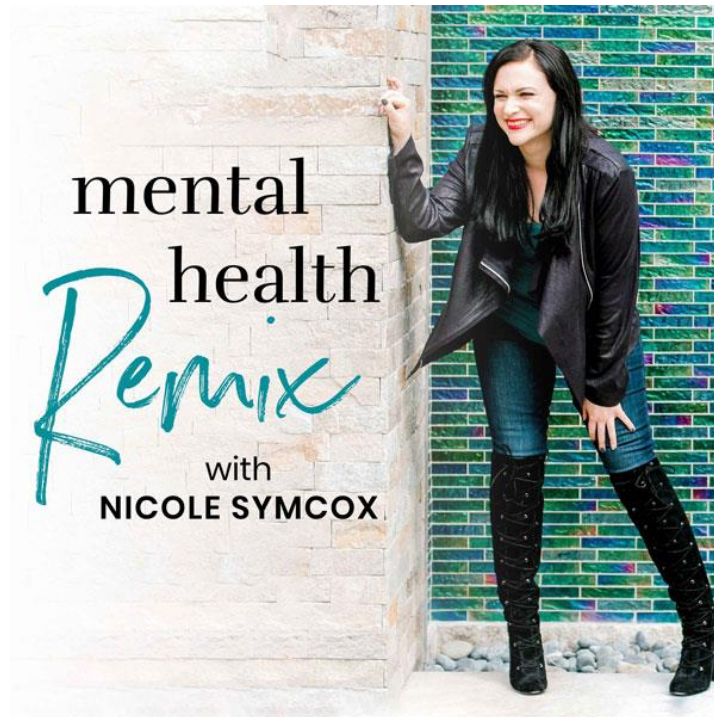


# Ep #46: Grounding Yourself when Anxiety Takes Over



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Nicole Symcox**

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## Ep #46: Grounding Yourself when Anxiety Takes Over

We can make smart decisions today that maybe impact the future. But again, that's being focused on making choices today. That's being in the present moment, which is the main thing that you have control over.

Welcome to *Mental Health Remix*, a show for ambitious humans who are ready to feel, think, and be different. If you want to stop struggling with perfectionism, build better relationships, and connect with yourself and your potential, this is the place for you...

Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox.

Hey, hey, everyone. Welcome to episode 46. So, in the midst of all of this stress and overwhelm that I am continuously hearing from people, and experiencing even just on my own level, especially as we kind of recover from these fires and trying to get back to baseline, whatever the fuck that is, right?

But let's talk about this idea of trying to maintain a healthy baseline of stress. And when things are constantly coming at you, it's important to learn how to ground yourself in stressful moments. And so, grounding is probably something you've heard many therapists describe. Like, this is one of our favorite things to talk about, like most therapists talk about this.

So, it's probably not your first time hearing another therapist talking about grounding. But it's always your first step, before you go any further, when you're feeling stressed out, anxious, dissociated. It's good to pause and ground yourself in the present moment. And so, I'm going to talk about a couple of techniques that you can use to ground yourself when you are feeling triggered, anxious, stressed, overwhelmed, whatever it may be.

And so, here's why grounding is important. When we have anxious brains, or if you have a PTSD brain, the fear centers in our brains can overwork and they can trigger our imagination and we can start imagining some

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pretty horrible things. And when we start getting into this anxiety cycle, we're usually rooted in the past or we're rooted in the future.

And so, by nature, this puts us in a powerless position, which is only going to feed anxiety. If you start to focus on the past or you start focusing on the future, and that triggers a powerless response, a story is going to start up in your mind, "I don't have any choices. I don't have any options. I feel scared. I feel overwhelmed. I don't know what to do." And it starts screaming at you because you can't come up with the solutions, because we're not in the past and we're not in the future.

So, this is why this cycle starts going and it starts just running off. A lot of us that have anxiety feel like your brains and your emotions just run away. It gets darker. It gets more intense and you feel super-overwhelmed. And so, this is why we want to intervene, because if you don't intervene those thought processes, if you don't intervene those bodily responses, it only continues. Because your brain is looking for a solution that can be found, right? It's looking for how to control the future.

And if you're trying to control the future, you're not in the present. Or if you're spending a lot of time in regret or pain of the past, that's another thing. We cannot go back in time and change the way things turned out. We can only heal from the pain it created and learn how to empower ourselves in new ways.

So, there's hope and technique on both sides. But if we don't make some conscious interventions, our brains will just get the best of us, and I don't want that for you because when we get stuck in the future, it's just not a healthy place to be because there is nothing about the future that we can tangibly control today.

We can make smart decisions today that maybe impact the future. But again, that's being focused on making choices today. That's being in the present moment, which is the main thing that you have control over. You

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have control over today. You have control over this hour, this moment in time. But we cannot predict the future.

And 2020 has kicked all of our asses in that. If there is one message that 2020 is absolutely trying to get through to us, it's living in the present moment.

So, when you think about this and look at it from an empowerment standpoint, when you think about the fact that you have tons of control over this moment because you're living, breathing, and existing in it, the reason you don't have power in the future is because you're not living, breathing, or existing in the future yet. And the past is over. And this is tricky for PTSD brains. That's part of the disorder. That's part of the treatment process, is teaching your brain that the story of the past has ended.

And that is a process, okay. I want you to set realistic expectations for yourself because, by far, too many people to me and they are hurt and wounded by friends or family members or other people in their life that have an unruly expectation that you should just get over it and move on. PTSD doesn't work that way. Your brain literally is stuck in the past and it replays it. And that is why it's so painful.

Okay, so have grace and compassion for yourself, meaning go to therapy, work through those memories, you know. Use EMDR. Find an EMDR therapist, find an art therapist. Find a therapist that is trauma-informed. But gets someone that knows how to work with the painful stories of your past, so they stop repeating in your present.

So, I want to call out that disclaimer because it is really, really wrong when people tell people with PTSD to just get over it and stop thinking about it. It's the same thing with anxiety. When people get anxious, they're constantly told to calm down and just stop thinking about it.

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And it's kind of like, if they could stop thinking about it, they would. Therapy wouldn't be a thing. We wouldn't have, you know, thousands of tools to use to manage our minds and emotions. So, we need to have more grace and compassion for how we respond to people.

So, anxiety tends to give us a lot of future-tripping, as we call it, right? Like, you start tripping over the future and worrying about all the pitfalls and all the things that could go wrong and making sure you can be prepared.

And because we don't have control over the future, we only have control over now, we have to make really smart good decisions now. And that is the best you can do. And you have to leave it at that. And you have to trust that in the moment, should something else arise, that you are going to be resilient and you are going to be resourceful and you are going to ask for help.

Doing life alone is not a great strategy, right? So, keeping in mind, that's why we talk about things like I want you to identify, who are your support people? Where are your safe people? Who's your community that you can go to? And this is where learning mental health tools and strategies come in as being helpful because it means, when things come up, we handle it.

It doesn't mean it's not painful. It doesn't mean that it's not a struggle. But it means we rise to the occasion and we do the best we know how to do. And if we get beyond ourselves, we ask for help.

So, talking about the present moment, this is why mindfulness is such a powerful tool. Mindfulness is about bringing – well, there's a lot of things into mindfulness. But for today, what I'm talking about is grounding. And when we talk about grounding, grounding is about coming back to center, coming back into your body and getting grounded and rooted in the present moment.

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So, one of the techniques that is widely talked about – and you can use this when you are feeling anxious, if you feel like you're dissociating and you need to come back into your body. And for those of you that don't know what dissociation is, dissociation is a trauma response where a person feels like they have left their body, and so they don't tend to feel a whole lot in their body and they don't really feel like they're here. They feel like they're somewhere else. And that's a real simplified version of what dissociation is. And in future episodes, I'll get into more depth around that.

But for right now, talking about grounding, if you are feeling like you're dissociating or you're anxious or you're stressed, you want to come back into the present moment and try to ground yourself. And so, you can do this in a couple of ways, but one of the most widely used is the five, four, three, two, one technique.

And how this technique works is it's based on your five senses because when we focus on our senses, we are able to come back into our bodies and be in the present moment. So, you want to use your senses as a way to come back to center.

So, five, so remember, this is called five, four, three, two, one. So, the first part is you're going to describe five things you can see within the room that you are in, or out of the window, wherever you are. But I want you to identify five things that you can see.

The whole time you're doing this, you are trying to just breathe. I want you to focus on your breath. Make sure you are breathing. When you are anxious, when you're triggered, when you're dissociated, don't take your breathing for granted. Don't assume you're breathing.

It's interesting because I think we all think, "Of course I'm breathing. I have to breathe to live." But a lot of times, when we're anxious or triggered, our breathing gets really short and that only exacerbates the anxiety

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symptoms. And so, we want to make sure that we're breathing as we are coming back to center.

And the four is four things you can feel. This can be your skin. You can rub your arm. This can be the chair you're sitting in. This can be a pillow. It can be your jeans. Anything that has a texture or a feeling to it. And you just really focus on the texture.

So, if you are wearing jeans and you don't really have a whole lot else, you would just kind of touch your jeans and just kind of notice where it feels rough. Notice how there's fabric lines. You take really strong notice of all of the feelings. And you do this slowly.

So, don't race through this. Anxiety is going to be like, "Okay, five things I can see. I can see a tree, I can see a rock, I can see a cloud, I can see the sun..." Okay, slow down. Five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear.

This can be traffic. This can be birds. This can be the coffee maker if it's on. This can be the wind. It doesn't really matter. But three things you can hear in the present moment.

Then two things you can smell. Hopefully it's not terrible, right? But, like, if there's nothing, notice that there's nothing. Smelling, like, I notice that I don't smell anything, the air feels clear. But just kind of notice your breathing here and notice what you can smell.

And then one thing you can taste. So, this is where you can actually, once you get to this point, you could put a little piece of chocolate in your mouth or a little bite of a cracker. You could just put some tiny thing in your mouth where you just notice the taste. It's a slow enjoyment of just noticing a flavor in your mouth. So, you're not full-blown eating. You're savoring a flavor.

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And so, when we do these things, by the time you're getting to one and you're opening your eyes, you should feel a little bit more grounded in your body. And at that moment, you just want to breathe and you can come back to whatever the problem is you were trying to solve. But don't get yourself all riled up again.

But this is an example, and there's many other grounding techniques. I mean, there's tons of them. But this is the most commonly used, especially for dissociation and feeling really stressed and anxious. This is one of the main ones because it has some tangible to-dos while you breathe, while you get your body focused again in the present moment.

And you have to train your brain, as it wants to jump into the future, you need to stay present in today and ask yourself, what do I have control over in this moment and where can I put my energy that would feel beneficial in this moment?

You have to keep in mind, the future is made up of choices we make today. So, the more present we are, the more we go into our future in healthy ways. At least that's the intention, right? And so, none of this is a perfect science. None of this is guaranteed. But it's an important practice because your brain will always want to default to the past or the future. And bringing it back to the present is where you can find your calm, find your center, and ground yourself before you move forward.

Alright, my friends. I hope you found this technique helpful to you and a good reminder to ground yourself. When you're feeling anxious, it's not good to continuously push yourself. It usually exacerbates anxiety. Usually, you need to take a minute to chill. Just take a minute to ground yourself. But you can't just tell yourself to chill. You have to do a technique or a strategy or use a tool to make that happen.

And if string emotions came up for you when you were listening to this podcast, or any of the podcast episodes, please take it as information that

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something in your internal world needs support. And there is never shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence. It is probably the best thing that you can do for yourself. And especially with grounding, if you're not able to get yourself grounded on your own, that is something that is excellent to talk about with your therapist and to figure out, is there a trigger? Is there something else that's coming up for me? Is there a memory?

Start just getting curious and asking questions. Don't go the shame route where you get mad at yourself and you're like, "Oh, I just can't even do any of this stuff." Like, again, that's what I mean by take it as information. If you have a hard time doing grounding exercises, work with your therapist on that and figure out why.

Alright, my friends, and if you enjoyed today's episode, please leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. It helps other people find the podcast and get this kind of info. Alright, I will see you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to [nicolesymcox.com](http://nicolesymcox.com).

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