

#07



Understanding Dissociation

One of the most common ways a survivor's brain and body tries to protect them is through dissociation, a coping technique that employs feelings of numbness or disconnection from the present moment.



Each Saprea Support Group meeting begins with 'Group Leader A' reading the script while participants follow along. The script will be the same for every group meeting. **To find the script, visit saprea.org/support-groups.** Below are the additional meeting materials for this course.



To watch the intro video for this lesson, scan the QR code or go to <https://vimeo.com/showcase/10293739>.

Group Activity

MINDFUL EATING



For this activity, the group leader will need to provide snacks for participants to taste. This could be something as small as a single pack of crackers, raisins, or mints.

One way to help you feel more connected with your body is to mindfully observe your sensory responses in the present. This can be done with grounding techniques like 5-4-3-2-1, as well as by applying Mindfulness to everyday activities, like eating. Often, eating can become an automatic, mindless habit—eating because you have to, eating to escape from something, or eating simply because you're bored. In contrast, mindful eating is about feeling more connected to the present by directing your attention to the sensory responses your brain and body experience during a snack or meal.

To begin, all you need is a bit of curiosity and something to eat.

ACTIVITY STEPS

OPTION 1

01

As you accept the snack offered to you by the group leader, imagine you are discovering this food for the first time. If you feel comfortable, you can try closing your eyes and guessing what the group leader has brought based on how the snack feels, smells, and tastes.

- 02 Deliberately bring the food up to your mouth, making note of all the muscles you are using to do so. When you feel ready, take an intentional bite of your food.
- 03 Notice how your body responds to the food and allow yourself to explore flavors and savor the food before swallowing. For example, is the food hot or cold? Sweet or salty? Bland or spicy? Can you identify different flavors or just one?
- 04 As your attention wanders, gently redirect it back toward the food—perhaps even toward a specific detail you’ve noticed, such as the smell, texture, or how it makes you feel. With curiosity and kindness, notice any urges, memories, or thoughts that may have surfaced as you’ve been eating.
- 05 Check in with your body to see what it needs. For example, you might ask yourself: How does this food make me feel physically, emotionally, and mentally? How did being intentional about eating change the experience?
- 06 Finish with a moment of purposeful appreciation for the experience your mind and body had.

OPTION 2

Instead of connecting with your body through the physical sensation of taste, you could try mindfully observing the present through another sensation, such as sight or sound.

Look closely, what do you see?	Listen carefully, what do you hear?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With sight, take a moment to observe your surroundings, noting any details that stand out to you. Then, pick a specific object and focus on every detail you can glean from it based on sight alone—its color and size, its texture and weight, its function, any memories or thoughts you associate with it, why it stood out to you, etc. 2. Next, partner with another participant and have them guess what object you are thinking about based on the details you observed. You might try starting with the vaguest details first and then getting more specific as they continue to guess. 3. Once your partner has guessed the object you are thinking of, switch roles and try to guess what detail in the room they have selected. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participate in a game of call-and-response, with Group Leader A leading out by creating a simple rhythm by clapping their hands and slapping their thighs, and then inviting everyone to repeat the same rhythm in unison. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: Drum, clap, drum, drum, clap 2. After Group Leader A and the participants repeat this call-and-response several times, Group Leader B can start a new rhythm for the rest of the group to follow. 3. This back and forth can continue a few times, allowing anyone else who would like to set a new rhythm the chance to do so. 4. Afterwards, reflect on the physical sensations you experienced during the activity. How did mindfulness and intention factor into the game? What are other examples of anchoring to the present using the five senses?

Grounding Exercise

5-4-3-2-1

This simple exercise is an example of sensory grounding, which involves directing your attention toward one or more of your five senses.

So let's begin.

Activity Steps

- 01** Take a moment to get comfortable and focus on the setting around you.
- 02** Name 5 things you can see. As you do so, label each one in your head.
- 03** Name 4 things you can hear.
- 04** Name 3 things you can feel.
- 05** Name 2 things you can smell.
- 06** Name 1 thing you can taste. Some people will carry oils or a mint so they have them ready should they need to ground using their senses.
- 07** Finally, take a moment to notice any other details around you or sensations you might be experiencing in this moment. Take a few deep breaths and allow yourself to simply be.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

If you are interested in learning more, we invite you to explore the following articles in the Online Healing Resources section of our website at saprea.org.

- **DISSOCIATION**
- **MINDFULNESS AND ITS ROLE IN HEALING FROM CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**
- **MOVEMENT**

NEXT TOPIC:

#08



PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

As we practice Mindfulness, we can more easily feel connected to the present, observe our experiences without judgment, and cope with trauma symptoms like dissociation and triggers.