

LECTURE 1

WHAT IS THERAPEUTIC GROUNDING?

A Clinical Definition of Grounding

- Defining therapeutic grounding is difficult because it remains clinically uncharted territory
 - “Grounding techniques have yet to be subjected to formal empirical investigation; to date, no study has established efficacy in support of this commonly used intervention. A primary obstacle to the study of the efficacy of grounding techniques is a lack of consensus regarding an operational definition, which impedes uniform empirical investigation.”¹ – Hammond and Brown
 - “While widely used and referenced, ‘therapeutic grounding’ remains an amorphous and elusive construct”² – Hammond and Brown
- After searching what included more than 1,890 resources that yielded no consensus regarding any measurable operational definition, Hammond and Brown offer this definition for the therapeutic grounding:
 - “A constellation of techniques that engage one or more of the five basic human senses to return an individual to a state of physiological equilibrium.”³ – Hammond and Brown
 - “A...broad constellation of therapeutic tools used to help calm individuals and reorient them to the present. Asking questions to reorient an individual to the present or directing them to touch a sensory object amid a panic attack are common examples of these techniques. The purpose is to help individuals self-soothe, and begin the process of regulating their emotions. Essentially, these techniques calm and distract an individual from the experience of emotion dysregulation and subsequent dissociation.”⁴ – Hammond and Brown

¹ Joshua Hammond and Wilson J. Brown, “Building an Operational Definition of Grounding,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, June 27, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380251343189>, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

- Alexander Lowen (1910-2008), the initial architect of therapeutic grounding, developed the language, conceptually, from one's physical contact with the ground.
 - "A third major area of interaction is in a person's relationship to the ground. Every position we take, every step we make involves this relationship. Unlike the birds or the fish, we are most at home on terra firma. And unlike the other mammals, we stand and move on two legs... We are interested here in the relations of the functions of the lower extremities to personality as they are reflected in our body language."⁵

The Criteria for Therapeutic Grounding

1. The goals.
 - To alter one's bodily members
 - To bring about a state of physiological equilibrium
 - To produce a feeling of safety or security
 - To avoid, interrupt, or attenuate various presenting features of dissociation
2. The context.
 - In a counseling setting or situation
 - In response to psychological, mental, or emotional distress
3. The means.
 - Dependence on what can be seen
 - Reliance on what can be experienced via one of the basic five senses

Some Questions about Therapeutic Grounding

1. Is therapeutic grounding a counseling method?
 - a. Alexander Lowen considered therapeutic grounding a partial solution for those experiencing personality dysfunction.
 - "I have treated many depressed patients, since that is one of the most common problems that brings people to therapy. After listening to a person's story, reviewing his history and evaluating his condition, I try to help him build up his energy. The most immediate way to do this is to increase his oxygen intake—that is, to get him to breathe more deeply and fully... It may not take more than twenty minutes to accomplish this change and for the patient to feel 'lifted up.' He *has* been lifted out of his depressive state temporarily."⁶

⁵ Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 94.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

- b. The clinical world considers therapeutic grounding a counseling method.
 - “Amid a therapy session, a client can experience numerous possible reactions to potential adverse or painful stimuli encountered in self-exploration. Among the most severe client reactions exhibited in a session is dissociation... Grounding techniques are postulated to interrupt dissociation through reintroduction of external stimuli. Attention to physical surroundings broadens awareness and redirects attention away from intense internal experiences (e.g., flashbacks, emotions, physiological sensations).”⁷ – Hammond and Brown
- c. Biblical counselors have considered this a part of biblical counseling.
 - “The most direct way to activate the PNS [parasympathetic nervous system] is through the senses. Engaging the senses is a means of grounding a person. Grounding involves helping them reconnect with the present moment and their surroundings. This is done to help someone feel less overwhelmed. Trauma can cause a person to detach from the circumstance as a means of survival. This detachment may be mental, emotional, or physical, or a combination of all three. The detachment may have been needed in the moment of trauma to survive but can inhibit processing afterward. Grounding aims to add a sense of stability and control, counteracting the effects of trauma and allowing a person to better process what happened. One of the most effective ways to help ground a person is through engaging the senses.”⁸ – Eliza Huie

2. Is utilizing the five senses in counseling the same as therapeutic grounding?
 - a. Consider God’s Word (Prov. 1:8, 20-21; 2:2; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7)
 - b. Consider your own experience
3. Can we use creation in counseling?
 - a. Consider God’s Word (Ps. 119:89-96; Prov. 6:6-11; Matt. 6:25-34)
 - b. Consider your own experience

⁷ Hammond and Brown, “Building an Operational Definition of Grounding,” 1.

⁸ Eliza Huie, *Trauma Aware: A Christian’s Guide to Providing Help and Care* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2025), 86.