

Autism Grounding Toolkit for Caregivers and Individuals

Written from the perspective of a mother who has seen this firsthand Sandy Moats owner and CEO of Life After ABA Classroom

What This Toolkit Is For

When an autistic individual becomes overwhelmed, anxious, or triggered, their mind may disconnect from the moment. This can look like:

- Staring into space
- Losing track of time
- Confusion (“Where did I go?”)
- Emotional shutdown
- Switching into a different emotional state
- Feeling far away or foggy
- Going quiet or scripting
- Anxiety symptoms (pale face, sweating, fast breathing)

This toolkit provides simple, predictable grounding activities that help reconnect the mind and body safely.

Before You Begin: Key Reminders

- Move slowly.
- Speak in short sentences.
- Keep tone low and calm.
- Reduce sensory overload (lights, noise, crowds).
- Do not pressure them to “snap out of it.”
- Offer, don’t force.

Step 1: Sensory-Friendly Grounding Phrases

Speak one sentence at a time. Give pauses for processing.

Caregiver Phrases

- “You’re safe.”
- “I’m here.”
- “Breathe with me.”
- “You didn’t do anything wrong.”
- “We can take our time.”

- “Your body is okay.”
- “You can come back when you’re ready.”

Self-Phrases (for older or verbal individuals)

- “I am safe.”
 - “I am in my house.”
 - “This is my calm body.”
 - “I am coming back.”
-

Step 2: Breathing for Autism

Many autistic individuals respond better to visual or physical breathing cues rather than verbal instructions.

1. Hand Press Breathing

Place both hands together and gently press.

Press + inhale

Release + exhale

2. Object Breathing

Hold a stress ball, fidget, soft cloth, or weighted beanbag.

Squeeze while inhaling → release while exhaling.

3. Structured Counting

“Breathe in... 1...2...”

“Breathe out...1...2...3...”

Shorter counts work best.

Step 3: Physical (Body) Grounding

These help reconnect the individual to their body.

- Hold a cold object (ice pack, cold can, metal)
 - Put hands under cool water
 - Deep pressure: weighted blanket or shoulder pressure
 - Sit on the floor with back against a wall
 - Wrap in a soft blanket
 - Rock gently side to side
 - Walk barefoot on different textures
-

Step 4: Sensory Reconnection

Use sensory input to bring awareness back into the present moment.

Tactile

- Rub a textured object (fabric, brush, slime)
- Hold something fuzzy
- Tap fingertips together

Visual

- Identify 3 items in the room
- Look at twinkle lights or a calm light source
- Watch slow-moving visuals (lava lamp, glitter jar)

Auditory

- Calm humming
- Singing one line of a familiar song
- Listening to soft rain sounds

Proprioceptive / Deep Sensory

- Push palms into the wall
- Hug a weighted stuffed animal
- Apply gentle cheek pressure

Step 5: Cognitive Grounding (Autism-Friendly)

Avoid open-ended questions. Use short, structured prompts.

The Five Senses Method (Modified for Autism)

- I see: (name 2 things)
- I hear: (name 1 sound)
- I feel: (name 1 texture or sensation)

Keep it simple to avoid overwhelm.

Orientation Prompts

- “Today is Monday.”
- “We are at home.”
- “It is morning/afternoon.”

Say one at a time.

Step 6: Tapping (EFT) for Dissociation

Tapping is extremely effective for autistic individuals.

Use gentle tapping on:

- Side of hand

- Collarbone
- Upper arm
- Knees
- Back of hands

Pair with calm phrases:

- “Safe now.”
- “Here with you.”
- “Slow body.”

⚡ Step 7: Aftercare (The Most Important Step)

After grounding, the nervous system is still fragile.

Keep the environment:

- Quiet
- Dim
- Predictable
- Low demand

Offer:

- Water
- Soft blanket
- Preferred show
- Gentle activity (drawing, fidgeting, rocking)

Reassure:

- “You did a good job.”
- “You’re okay.”
- “I’m proud of how you came back.”

Caregiver Notes Section (Printable Box)

Use this area to track patterns.

Date:

Time:

What was happening before the dissociation?

What grounding worked best?

How long did it last?

Any physical signs? (pale, sweating, fast heart, shaking, nausea)

Triggers noticed?

Plan for next time:

♥ Final Reminder

Autistic individuals with trauma are not “acting”—they are surviving.
Grounding gives them a way to safely return to themselves with compassion, patience, and predictability.

