CLIENT HANDOUT:
Dissociation: You're Grounded!

"Why would I want to be here; it sucks here!"
"It's scary here!"
" I hate being in my body! I prefer to be in my own little world!"

OK, but just a few questions before you leave . . .

- Is this strategy still helpful?
- Does it keep you safe? Does it let you live your life fully? What are the associated costs?
- Is it actually dangerous in the here and now?
- Did you know that use of dissociation to cope with present stressors usually brings up the same thoughts, feelings and body sensations that you had in the past, making it hard to know that things are different today?
- Do you have skills to deal with *scared body*?
- Did you know that dissociation and numbing necessarily obstruct problem-solving in the present?
- Did you know that staying focused on the past or spinning fearful future scenarios, you may not be able to tell the difference between what you are feeling and what is really happening?
- Did you know that when you use this coping strategy, you might not be able to remember that things are different now, e.g., that you have support and new resources?
- Did you know that shutting things out increases the traumatic stress responses you will have later?
- Did you know that dissociation keeps you emotionally trapped in the past; prevents emotional growth; and makes it nearly impossible to develop healthy relationships?

How do I know if I'm not grounded? How do I recognize the stress responses?

Dissociation: You're Grounded, Cont.

The Signs and Symptoms

- Purposeful dissociation and/or spontaneous trance may feel like you are disappearing (like you are checking out, zoning out, or like you've been drugged); depersonalizing (like you aren't real); or derealization (like the world isn't real).
- Switching may feel like something or someone else is taking over, like you are slipping away, or like some other part inside is in control now. Losing time — it may seem that there is a gap in what just happened or that you are filling in the blanks, or coming back in the middle of something.
- Age regression may make you feel as if you are getting smaller or feeling younger; like everything else is getting bigger; your clothes or your skin don't seem to fit; your hands may seem to be getting bigger; you may feel helpless, frozen, and unable to talk.
- Hypervigilance feels like being on guard, needing to keep track of everything going on around you, jumping at every sound, or watching for the threat that you feel is there. It makes you feel as if you are threatened, although you aren't.
- Numbing may make you feel like you are separated from your body, or as if you have no body and/or no feelings.
- Avoidance gets you away from something that feels overwhelming.
- Flashbacks may make you feel like you are experiencing some part of the trauma again. Initially, it is common to experience flashbacks as intense emotions, body sensations, or physical pains that are not connected to anything in the present. You may see or hear things related to trauma even though they aren't happening NOW.

Grounding and centering increases your awareness of what is actually going on presently — internally and externally. It involves skills that will keep you oriented times three. (In laymen terms, it will help you remember a few key truths):

1. Who you are — an adult in an adult body (person)
2. Where you are — location in the present (place)
3. When you are — the present day and date (time)

Answering these questions and connecting with the truth of those answers, will decrease the likelihood of your losing track of the differences between the past and the present, making it less likely that you'll experience the distress caused by the flashbacks and dissociative experiences. It is important to be able to focus on present reality no matter how you are feeling or what part of yourself is in control. In this way, you will be grounded throughout the range of emotions, moods, and identity states.

Dissociation: You're Grounded, Cont.

Grounding and Centering Exercises

Using Your Five Senses

- **Sight:** Lights on! Eyes open! Now, look around; identify, label, and describe what you see all around you, e.g., this picture is of my three nieces at Jimmy's party. Connect with the present, e.g., my sister's kids are big now, so I am an adult. That's my coat, size 10 long- an adult size coat.
- **Sound:** Listen up! Identify and label the sounds around you — sing, read aloud, pray, or listen to the comforting sound of your own adult voice.
- **Taste:** Suck on a mint; chew some peppermint gum; chew on a basil leaf; drink *grapefruit juice* (unless you're taking Wellbutrin), herbal tea, or coffee; use tastes that connect you with being not only safe, but also grown-up.
- **Smell:** Use scented hand lotion, body oil, a loved-one's perfume or aftershave on a piece of cloth or cotton ball, or scented candles, essential oils, or potpourri — anything that reminds you of the present.
- **Touch:** Find a transition object to keep with you at all times — rocks, medals, piece of cloth, or a blanket. Try to get one from a loved one or a support person to keep the connection to that person a bit more concrete. Feel the object's texture, bringing you back to the present. Animals are ideal for this sensory pleasure; pet a cat or dog connecting with its vital, loving presence connecting you back to the here and now.

Grounding and Centering (Sensory Suggestions)

Sight	Sound	Taste	Smell	Touch
Clock/Calendar	Soothing music	Altoids	Essential oils	Scented body lotion
Photographs (nature, family, friends, inspiration)	Nature sounds	Drop of clove oil or flavored toothpicks	Incense, Vick's Vapo-Rub, anything mentholated	A smooth/textured stone
Look outside, notice just what is there	Familiar sounds (save supportive voice mails, call and listen to a loved one's voicemail)	Grapefruit juiced (unless taking Wellbutrin)	Body lotion/ perfume	Ice cube
TV	Sing, read, or pray; Read/sing aloud	Basil or peppermint leaf	Clove/cinnamon, lemon	Blanket/cloth

The Relief Project

One type of response to traumatic experiences is avoidance of sensory stimuli (scents, tastes, sights, sounds, and textures) associated with the trauma. This reaction effectively limits painful sensory stimuli, but consequently deprives you of all sensory pleasure as well. Choosing to provide yourself with some positive sensory experiences can be not only enjoyable, but empowering. Visiting an arboretum or garden to smell the flowers, going to a petting zoo or a fabric store to touch something soft, enjoying the taste of a piece of ripe fruit, and listening to music are some examples of self-soothing activities that are directly linked to the senses. Because it isn't always possible to soothe yourself through actual life experiences, sometimes it is more convenient to use your imagination. You can use pictures to invoke imaginary sensations that help you shift from a state of distress to one of relative calm. In this way, you can provide yourself with a relaxing break during stressful or unpleasant periods.

In this art experience, you will compile a "relief book" of images to reduce distress by helping you to conjure up positive sensory experiences.

Time: The Relief Project will take about an hour.

Materials: a sketchbook or a copybook, some magazines, scissors and glue.

1. Make a list of experiences in each of the five senses that are (or have been in the past) pleasant for you, e.g., what is your favorite perfume? Comfort foods? Silk, satin or fleece? Waves? Classical music, a loved one's voice? Paintings, photos, sunsets?

   Sights:

   _____

   _____

   Sounds:

   _____

   _____

   Tastes:

   _____

   _____

   Scents:

   _____

   _____

Textures:

_____

_____

2. Look through magazines and cut out pictures of things that are soothing and/or enjoyable to you.
3. Glue each picture onto a separate page or make five separate collages for each of your senses.
4. Personalize your sketchbook/copybook cover in whatever style appeals.
5. Write about your process in your copybook
   a. First, describe any sensations, thoughts, and/or feelings you experienced while selecting the pictures for your book.
   b. For which of your sense(s) did you collect the most pictures? If you favored one or two over the rest, you may want to find ways to increase your actual exposure to those pleasant sensory experiences.
   c. Look through the book and choose one picture that is particularly soothing or pleasing. Spend a minute focusing on it. Then, if you are comfortable closing your eyes, do so and permit yourself to enter into the picture. Be in the experience allowing it to become as vivid as possible.
   d. Did anything surprise you during the exercise, the imagery or the reflection?
   e. When might you benefit from looking through your virtual sensory vacation?
   f. List some circumstances when you might experience some relief from using the book.
6. Recall and list three feelings or thoughts that let you know that you aren't grounded (e.g., staring off, feeling unreal or disconnected; hands appearing bigger; things getting smaller; voices sounding garbled or muffled).

_____

_____

_____

7. Recall and list three situations in the past two weeks where you knew that you were not grounded.

_____

_____

_____

Dissociation: You're Grounded, Cont.

8. Recall and list three situations in the past two weeks where you knew that you were grounded.

_____

_____

_____

9. Now, identify things that help you feel grounded (e.g., petting my dog keeps me present; I'm usually grounded at my desk at work).

_____

_____

_____

10. List some reasons why you think being grounded would be threatening (e.g., feelings are too much; I can't deal with being here).

_____

_____

_____

11. Do any of the reasons apply to your past? Do they still apply in the present, or are they for another time?

_____

_____

_____

Dissociation: You're Grounded, Cont.

Since getting grounded in the present may be unfamiliar, consider that some things are helpful; others not so much:

Helpful	Not so Helpful
Look around (what's really here in the present?)	Ruminating on or entertaining scary thoughts: anything that increases your fear, helplessness, hopelessness, or anxiety will increase the urge to dissociate
Breathe deeply	
Move around	Identify and avoid any repetitive behaviors like rocking, staring, humming, or anything else you have done in the past to "check out, go away," or dissociate.
Feel your arms and legs (rub or lightly massage)	
Say comforting, affirming things to yourself	
Remind yourself of safe and positive people, places, or things	

Dissociation: You're Grounded, Cont.

Grounding Exercise for Dissociation

Five Countdown

This is an exercise to practice staying present.

Count out five things you can touch. Get up and touch each one as you name it and count it off. Come back and write each one down.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Count out five things you can see. Look at each one as you name it and write it down.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Count out five things you can hear. Listen to each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Count out five things you can taste or smell. Taste/smell each one as you name it, write it and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Dissociation: You're Grounded, Cont.

Now . . .
Count off four things you can touch. Touch each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Count off four things you can see. Look at each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Count off four things you can hear. Listen to each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Count off four things you can taste or smell. Taste/smell each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Now. . .
Count off three things you can touch. Touch each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Count off three things you can see. Look at each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Dissociation: You're Grounded, Cont.

Count off three things you can hear. Listen to each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Count off three things you can taste or smell. Taste/smell each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now. . .
Count off two things you can touch. Touch each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____

Count off two things you can see. Look at each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____

Count off two things you can hear. Listen to each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____

Count off two things you can taste or smell. Taste/smell each one as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____
2. _____

Now. . .
Count off one thing you can touch. Touch it as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____

Count off one thing you can see. Look at it as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____

Count off one thing you can hear. Listen to it as you name it, write it, and count it off.

1. _____

Count off one thing you can taste or smell. Taste/smell it as you name it, write it down, and count it off.

1. _____