

Drop Anchor The ACE Formula

What is Dropping Anchor?

Dropping Anchor is a practical skill designed to help you steady yourself when you're caught in an emotional storm—overwhelmed by difficult thoughts, memories, or feelings. This mindfulness-based exercise helps you ground yourself in the present moment without trying to escape or distract from your inner experience.

The ACE Formula

A – **Acknowledge** your thoughts and feelings

Mindfully notice and name whatever is showing up inside you: thoughts, feelings, pain, discomfort, numbness, emotions, memories, sensations, or urges. Take the stance of a curious observer—no need to judge or change what's there. For example:

- “I’m noticing anxiety”
- “I’m having the thought that I can’t handle this.”

C – **Connect** with your body

Remain aware of your thoughts and feelings, continue to acknowledge their presence and at the same time, come back into and connect with your physical self. Try any of these actions:

- Press your feet slowly & firmly into the floor
- Cross your arms across your chest, slowly & gently tap your shoulders
- Use one hand to slowly massage your other hand or forearm
- Slowly stretch your arms or neck, or shrug your shoulders
- Slowly straighten your back and spine; if sitting, sit upright & forward in your chair
- To the extent that you are able, take a slow, deep breath

Note: The goal is not to avoid your feelings, but to expand your awareness to include your body, anchoring you in the present moment. During this process, you are broadening your focus – aware of your thoughts and feelings, and *simultaneously* aware of your body while actively moving it.

E – **Engage** in what you’re doing

Refocus your attention on the world around you and the activity at hand, all the while noticing and acknowledging your thoughts & feelings without judgement

- Examples:
 - Slowly look around the room and name 5 things you can see
 - Noticing 3 or 4 sounds you can hear around you
 - Sensing what you can smell, taste, or feel
 - Reminding yourself of what you’re doing right now
- Gently give your full attention to the present task or environment

Remember: *this is not a distraction technique*—you are learning to stay present with your experience, not run from it.

Why Practice Dropping Anchor?

- A. Gain more control over your physical actions
- B. Handle difficult thoughts, feelings, and memories more effectively
- C. Grounds and steadies you in overwhelming situations
- D. Disrupts rumination and auto-pilot reactions
- E. Cultivate focus and mindful presence
- F. Useful for managing flashbacks, panic, chronic pain, and emotional distress

Modify As Needed

If you're pressed for time, do a brief 30-second version: run through the ACE cycle once. If you're able to take your time, run through the ACE cycle several times – *s l o w l y* – for 5 to 10 minutes.

There are hundreds of ways to modify this exercise to accommodate your needs (e.g. flashbacks, physical pain, intrusive thoughts, etc.) or overcome any difficulties you may have with it. Please ask your counselor (🧐) how to modify this strategy in the specific conditions you have in mind.

Practice Often

You can practice these exercises anytime, anywhere. It's helpful to practice often in less challenging situations to build your skills. With regular practice, you will be able to mindfully apply this skill during more difficult situations.

Quick Reference: The ACE Steps

Step	What to Do	Example
Acknowledge	Notice and name your thoughts and feelings	"I'm noticing a feeling of anxiety."
Connect	Check in with your body using grounding actions	Press feet into floor, breathe slowly
Engage	Refocus on your surroundings and current activity	Name things you see, hear, or feel

