

Sensory Toolkit

By Dr. Arielle Shwartz & Barb Maiberger

Too often when we feel overwhelmed or anxious, the very tools that we need to ground feel far away. These instructions provide guidance to help you develop your own, personalized grounding sensory toolkit. Your sensory toolkit will contain the very items that help settle your nervous system into a state of calm and centeredness. Sensory awareness helps you to feel connected to this moment in the here and now. Here are some items that I am suggesting for your toolkit. However, feel free to find items that work best for you, which might not even be on this list:

- Pick an item that you can hold in your hand. This might be a smooth stone that feels soothing, a fidget toy that you can move around with your fingers, or a stress ball that you can squeeze.
- Choose a scent that helps you feel grounded. This might be an essential oil that uplifts your senses, or you might prefer a small jar of spices. For example, one person chose oregano because it reminded her of her grandmother's spaghetti sauce.
- Keep a few items around to stimulate your sense of taste, such as a piece of gum, chocolate, or hard candy.
- Include several poems or quotes that connect you to your heart or help center your mind.
- Find some images that you find supportive. You can choose photos of people in your life or a beloved pet, images of spiritual or religious figures, or photos of places where you feel safe and relaxed.
- Choose some pieces of music that help you feel calm or safe. Keep a playlist on an iPod or smartphone so that you can listen to the music as needed.

I encourage you to add to your toolkit as needed. You can get creative about how you store these items. Some people create several boxes, one for the house and another for the car. Some people have created a small bag of tools to keep in a purse or a backpack. Ask yourself what approach will work best for you.