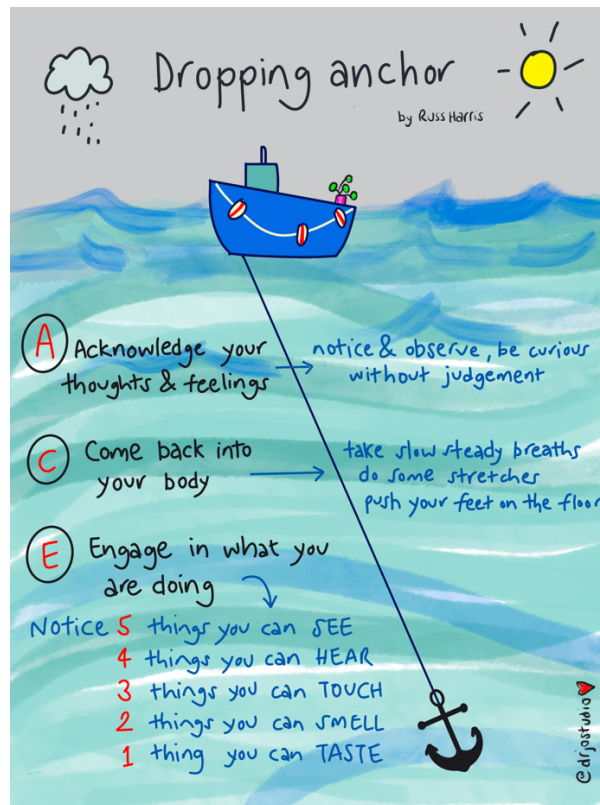


DROPPING ANCHOR (by Russ Harris)



Dropping Anchor is an excellent resource and strategy that can help bring us back to the present when we are experiencing things like difficult sensations, memories, thoughts, flashbacks, panic attacks, urges and emotions. It can be helpful in numerous situations and can act as a 'circuit breaker' to help you notice and observe and come back to the present.

You can be flexible with your own script but here is an outline that can help you do this exercise yourself, with others, or with clients if you are a therapist.



Imagine you were on a boat in a harbour, in the middle of a storm. The storm is thrashing you about all over the place, the waves are huge, and it feels like it's never going to end. What would you do in that storm to help keep you safe and in one place in that harbour?

You'd drop your anchor.

You'd throw your anchor over the side of the boat, it would dig into the sea bed and it would help keep your boat steadier and stay in one place. Dropping the anchor doesn't make the storm magically stop suddenly though, you'd still be unsteady on your feet, but at least you'd know that you and your boat aren't going to get pulled out further into sea.

We can all experience emotional storms too that can feel just like real life storms. And just like how we can drop a real anchor into the sea, we can drop our own anchor when we experience an emotional storm.

HOW DO I PRACTICE DROPPING ANCHOR?

There are 3 simple steps to dropping anchor and these can easily be remembered with the acronym 'ACE'.

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings.

Step back and notice and observe these with curiosity.

As well as noticing, it can be helpful to name e.g., 'I am noticing I'm feeling anxious', 'I am noticing I'm feeling scared', 'I'm having the thought that...'

Noticing and naming your emotions, thoughts and sensations can be helpful to move from being all caught up in your experience, to just observing it.

Notice any negative judgements you may have, and tune into simply observing.... and noticing.

C = Come back into your body

Whilst still acknowledging your thoughts and feelings, connecting with your body can be helpful to bring yourself back to the here and now and can help you remember that you are a person, in a body, and not just a mind.

Connect with your body by doing some slow... deep... breaths from your diaphragm. Breathe in... and breathe back out again.

Push your feet into the floor just like they are an anchor... wiggle your toes... stretch your legs out...

Do some gentle stretches of your arms...

Push your hands together...

Roll your shoulders up and down...

And breathe in... and out....

You aren't aiming to get rid of your thoughts or feelings, instead you can notice and sit with them and continue to acknowledge their presence while also connecting with your body.

E = Engage in what you are doing

Just take a moment to bring your attention to right here, right now.
Have a look around the space you're in and bring your attention to the present.
Be right here, right now, and notice:

5. Five things you can see
4. Four things you can hear
3. Three things you can touch
2. Two things you can smell
1. One thing you can taste.

It doesn't need to be in that order, and it doesn't have to be those numbers. The main thing is to bring your attention back to the present, to be right here, right now... contacting the present moment and gently bringing yourself back.

It can be helpful go through all the ACE steps a few times at your own pace and it's OK if it takes a bit of time to settle back to the here and now. It can also be helpful to practice this exercise regularly so it becomes part of your routine and is easier to remember at times when you may need it. Saving the illustration of Dropping Anchor to your phone can also be an easy and helpful way to remember the steps. No one will even be aware that you are dropping anchor, and the beauty of this exercise is that you can practice it anytime and anywhere.

(Dropping Anchor is an exercise in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy by Dr Russ Harris, international author of 'The Happiness Trap', 'ACT Made Simple' and many other books where this exercise is outlined. Thank you to Russ for giving me permission to outline a version of his Dropping Anchor exercise and to provide an accompanying illustration.)