Dropping Anchor

Anxiety: A Grounding Script for Emotional Storms

Dropping anchor is a short grounding exercise that helps you stay steady when strong thoughts and feelings sweep in. Russ Harris, a medical doctor and trainer in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), developed it. It has three steps that spell ACE: Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, Come back into your body, and Engage in what you are doing. Read the script slowly, out loud or in your head, or ask someone you trust to read it to you.

A — Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

Take a moment to notice what is showing up inside you right now. There might be thoughts, memories, feelings, or sensations in your body. Name them silently and kindly, the way a curious scientist would. You might say to yourself, "I'm noticing anxiety," or "Here is a painful memory," or "My heart is racing." You do not need to push anything away or make it change. ***(About 30 seconds)***

C — Come back into your body

Keep noticing those thoughts and feelings, and at the same time, connect with your body. Slowly push your feet into the floor. Sit up straight in your chair. Press your fingertips together. Roll your shoulders or stretch your arms. The feelings may stay for now, and that is okay. This step reminds you that you have a body you can move and control, even while the storm is here. ***(About 30 seconds)***

E — Engage in what you are doing

Now look around you. Notice five things you can see and three things you can hear. Notice where you are and what you were doing before the storm arrived. There is a storm inside you, and there is also a whole world around you. Bring your attention back to the task or the person in front of you. ***(About 30 seconds)***

Then go back to A and run through the whole cycle slowly, three or four times. Some days the feelings ease and some days they stay. Either way, you are likely to feel steadier and more able to choose what to do next.

Why does this work? *When a boat drops anchor in a storm, the wind keeps blowing, and the anchor holds the boat in place until the weather passes. Strong emotions are hard to control directly, but you can almost always control what your arms, legs, and attention are doing. Taking charge of those gives you a foothold, so the feelings have less power to push you around.*

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.

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Make it your own

Write down the words, movements, and details that work best for you, so they are ready when you need them.

A: Words I can use to name what I am feeling:

Example: Here is fear again. I'm noticing a tight chest.

C: Ways I can move or press to feel my body:

Example: Push my heels into the floor and press my palms together

E: Things around me I can tune in to:

Example: The hum of the fridge, the light on the wall, my dog's breathing

Practice log

Practice when you are calm first, so the steps feel familiar when a storm hits. Before and after, rate how much the storm is pushing you around, from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely).

Date	What showed up	Before	Cycles	After	What I noticed
Tue 3 Nov	*Panic before a work meeting*	*8*	*4*	*5*	*I could hear my coworker again*

Dropping anchor can help during panic or a flashback, and it works best once you have practiced it, ideally with a therapist. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the US, or call your local emergency number.

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