



Hands-on-Chest Grounding

A fast, discreet way to stabilise your nervous system

By Neal Glendenning

Contact: info@theneuroinclusionproject.co.uk

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Important note

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

Hands-on-chest grounding is one of the most reliable regulation tools for neurodivergent nervous systems.

It works because it:

- provides **direct physical reassurance**
- reduces threat signalling
- anchors attention in the body
- supports emotional containment without suppression

You don't need privacy.

You don't need silence.

You don't need to feel calm first.

What this grounding actually does

Placing a hand on the chest creates:

- gentle pressure over the heart and sternum
- warmth and proprioceptive input
- a clear signal of **self-presence**

For many people, this reduces:

- emotional flooding
- panic escalation
- dissociation
- shutdown onset
- internal urgency

It's not symbolic.

It's **physiological**.

When to use hands-on-chest grounding

This works particularly well when you notice:

- sudden emotional intensity
- tightness in the chest or throat
- urge to cry, flee, or shut down
- feeling "too much" or "not here"
- rising shame or self-attack

You can also use it **preventatively**, before stress peaks.

The basic practice (30–90 seconds)

1. Place one hand flat on the centre of your chest
(or both hands if that feels better)
2. Apply **gentle, steady pressure**
Not pushing... just contact
3. Let your shoulders soften if they can
No forcing
4. Stay here for **3–6 slow breaths**
You don't need to change your breathing

That's it.

Stopping early is fine.
Continuing longer is optional.

Optional internal cues (choose one)

Use **one phrase only**... repetition is regulating.

- "I'm here."
- "This will pass."
- "I'm safe enough right now."
- "Nothing else is required."

If words feel hard, skip this part.

Variations (choose what fits)

Both hands

- One hand over the heart
- One hand just below the collarbone
Good for intense emotion or panic.

Cross-body

- Right hand on left chest
- Left hand on right chest
Creates bilateral input... helpful for dissociation.

Subtle version (public spaces)

- One hand lightly touching the chest
- Or fingertips resting near the collarbone
Still effective, even if discreet.

What to expect

You may notice:

- a sigh or deeper breath
- a drop in intensity
- a sense of containment
- emotion settling without disappearing

You may also notice **nothing at first**.

That doesn't mean it isn't working... some systems respond gradually.

What not to do

Avoid:

- forcing calm
- deep breathing if it increases dizziness
- analysing whether it's "working"
- using it to suppress emotion

This tool **supports emotion**, it doesn't erase it.

Pairing with other tools

Hands-on-chest grounding pairs well with:

- meltdown / shutdown prevention
- sensory decompression breaks
- rhythm resets
- task entry rituals
- values-based micro-planning

It can be your **first step** before anything else.

For workplaces, schools, and public settings

This grounding method:

- does not draw attention
- does not require explanation
- does not interrupt activity
- does not look like “doing nothing”

It’s one of the most **socially safe regulation tools** available.

If touch feels uncomfortable

If placing a hand on your chest doesn’t feel right:

- place it on your upper arm
- rest it on your shoulder
- hold a firm object against your chest instead

The principle is **steady pressure + self-contact**, not location.

A simple script you can reuse

“I don’t need to fix this.
I just need to stay with myself.”

A final reminder

Hands-on-chest grounding is not a coping trick.

It’s a way of saying, **physically**:
“I am here with myself.”

For many neurodivergent people, that signal alone is enough to stop escalation and restore access.

Small.
Quiet.
Powerful.