Dropping Anchor Script

Part 1. My storms and my anchors

I fill in this page with my counselor or therapist, so the script and my practice can use my own words.

Item	Entry
Name	
Counselor or therapist	
Date	

What shows up in my storms

Include: the thoughts, feelings, memories, body sensations and urges that sweep me away, in my own words.

When and where storms tend to hit

Include: places, times, people or reminders that often come just before a storm.

Ways I can come back into my body

Include: movements that feel right for me, such as pressing my feet down, sitting up straight or pressing my palms together, and any movement that hurts.

What I want to come back to

Include: the people, tasks and things that matter to me that a storm pulls me away from.

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Part 2. The full script

Read slowly, in a kind and steady voice, and leave about ten seconds after each instruction. Do each movement yourself as you say it. Where the client has named the storm in Part 1, use the client's own words.

1. Let's pause what we were talking about for a couple of minutes. Are you willing to try the anchor exercise with me? Your eyes can stay open the whole time, and you can stop at any point.
2. Check what is going on inside you right now. It might be a thought, a feeling, a memory, a sensation in your body or an urge.
3. Give it a short name, silently or out loud, using the words from your list if they fit, such as *the grief* or *the fear*.
4. Keep that name in mind, and plant both feet flat on the floor. Notice the weight of your legs.
5. Press your palms together, or open and close your hands a few times. Notice the muscles doing the work.
6. Lengthen your spine and sit tall in your seat.
7. Turn your head slowly to one side and then the other, as far as is comfortable.
8. Let your eyes rest on three things in the room, one at a time, and name their colors to yourself.
9. Find something you can touch, such as your sleeve or the arm of the chair, and notice how it feels under your fingers.
10. Take note of the room you are in and what we were doing before the storm came up.
11. Check in with the storm again, and name what is here now, even if it is the same as before. Is it okay to keep going?
12. Press your heels into the floor and stretch your arms out in front of you, or choose a smaller movement that suits your body today.
13. Look around once more, and find something you had not noticed before.
14. Hold all of it in view together: the storm, the floor under your feet and what you came here to do today.
15. When you're ready, let your attention settle on what we were doing, and we'll talk about what you noticed.

Repeat steps 11 to 14, with longer pauses and fewer words each time, until the client looks and sounds present and can talk with you.

Changes for this client

Include: the client's words for the storm, movements to leave out or add, and anything to say differently.

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Part 3. The short script and the debrief

Use the short script when the client drifts off for a moment in session, and teach it for practice between sessions. It can take as little as ten seconds.

1. Notice what has pulled you away, and name it to yourself.
2. Plant both feet firmly and sit up straight.
3. Look around, find what you were doing, and give it your attention again.

Debrief questions

- What stood out for you as we went through it?
- Compared with when we started, how caught up in the storm are you now?
- Is it easier to follow what we're doing and to talk with me?
- How much say do you have over what your arms and legs are doing right now?
- When might a storm hit this week, and where could you use this?

Do not ask whether the feeling has gone. If the client says it eased, accept that, and explain again that the aim is to stay steady and in charge of what you do while feelings come and go.

How present the client feels right now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not present at all										*Completely present*

How much control the client has over their movements right now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No control at all										*Complete control*

A rating of 7 or more usually means you can end the exercise. Below 7, keep going and add more movement, such as standing up and stretching.

What the client noticed

Include: what the client noticed in the room and in the body, in the client's own words.

Times and places for practice

Include: times of mild stress to practice the short script, and how often.

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Part 4. My practice log

I fill in one record each time I drop anchor during a storm. I can also use the short script for a few seconds whenever I notice I have drifted off.

If I am in crisis

If I am in danger or thinking about suicide or harming myself, I call 911 in the United States or Canada. Elsewhere, I call my local emergency number.

My emergency contacts

Include: 911 or my local emergency number, and the people I will call, with their numbers.

When and where I will practice

Include: times of mild stress for the short script, such as waiting in line or sitting in traffic.

Practice 1

Day and time	
What set off the storm, and what I noticed inside	

Before: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

After: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

What I did next

Include: what I turned my attention to, and what I did that mattered to me.

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Practice 2

Day and time	
What set off the storm, and what I noticed inside	

Before: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

After: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

What I did next

Include: what I turned my attention to, and what I did that mattered to me.

Practice 3

Day and time	
What set off the storm, and what I noticed inside	

Before: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

After: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

What I did next

Include: what I turned my attention to, and what I did that mattered to me.

What I want to talk about at my next session

Include: questions, hard moments and anything I want to change in my practice.

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Clinician guide: leading dropping anchor

- **When it fits.** Harris (2019) suggests teaching dropping anchor before any other mindfulness skill to clients with emotional dysregulation, overwhelming emotions, panic attacks, flashbacks, dissociation, extreme fusion, or impulsive or compulsive behavior. It also suits a client who is looking for an easy first mindfulness practice, or whose thoughts and feelings make it hard to take part in the session (Harris, 2019).
- **When grounding comes first.** If a client arrives overwhelmed, having flashbacks or at an extreme of arousal, put other tasks on hold and drop anchor first (Harris, 2021). If the client dissociates or cannot speak, skip the storm metaphor, ask for a nod or a tap of the foot, and start with small movements of the fingers, feet and head. For a flashback, name the experience as a memory and, once the client can speak, say what the memory is about (Harris, 2021).
- **Keep acknowledging.** Return to the thoughts and feelings in every round. Harris (2018) writes that the exercise is almost certain to become a form of distraction once the therapist no longer names the pain, and his debrief questions never ask whether the pain has gone.
- **Adapt the movements and the length.** Leave out any movement that worsens pain, and offer others, such as wriggling the toes, tapping the fingers or shrugging the shoulders (Harris, 2018). The exercise runs until the client is present, usually for one to three minutes, and Harris has needed ten to fifteen minutes with clients who were very overwhelmed or dissociated (Harris, 2019). On Harris's 0 to 10 scales for presence and control of movement, a rating of 7 or 8 usually means the exercise can end (Harris, 2021).
- **Plan practice and safety.** Ask the client to practice a few times each day, above all when stress is mild, so the skill is ready for bigger storms (Harris, 2021). Fill in the crisis section with the client before the first week of practice. Ask about thoughts of suicide as part of your usual assessment, and follow your setting's crisis protocol whenever a situation involves risk.

Based on dropping anchor as Harris (2018, 2019, 2021) describes it, including his 0 to 10 scales for presence and control of movement (Harris, 2021). The layout and wording, including both scripts, are original.

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Completed example: Farah (a fictional client)

Farah, 44, is a city planner in outpatient therapy for grief after her mother died in the spring. Her therapist, K.O., led the full script when a wave of grief hit Farah in her third session, on November 10, 2026, and taught her the short script. Farah kept the log until her fourth session on November 17, 2026. Farah, her therapist and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. My storms and my anchors

Item	Entry
Name	Farah
Counselor or therapist	K.O., therapist
Date	November 10, 2026

What shows up in my storms

Waves of sadness and guilt. The thought “I should have been there more.” A tight throat, a heavy chest and the urge to leave the room.

When and where storms tend to hit

Team meetings when someone talks about family plans. Cooking dinner, because Mom taught me her recipes. Sunday evenings.

Ways I can come back into my body

Pressing my feet into the floor. Sitting up straight. Pressing my palms together under the table, where nobody can see. No big arm stretches while my left shoulder heals.

What I want to come back to

Dinner with my two kids. Careful work for my team. Calling my brother, Sami, on Sundays.

Part 2. The full script

K.O. led the full script with Farah’s words, “the sadness” and “the guilt,” and left out the arm stretches. They went through four rounds in about four minutes.

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Part 3. The short script and the debrief

How present the client feels right now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**8**	9	10
Not present at all										*Completely present*

How much control the client has over their movements right now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	**9**	10
No control at all										*Complete control*

What the client noticed

The sadness was still there, and she could hear K.O. again and follow the conversation. Pressing her palms together helped most.

Times and places for practice

The short script at her desk at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., and the full script at home when a storm hits.

Part 4. My practice log

If I am in crisis

If I am in danger or thinking about suicide or harming myself, I call 911 in the United States or Canada. Elsewhere, I call my local emergency number.

My emergency contacts

Call 911. My brother, Sami, is my emergency contact.

When and where I will practice

The short script at my desk twice a day, and in the car before I go into the house after work.

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Practice 1

Day and time	Wednesday, November 11, 2:15 p.m.
What set off the storm, and what I noticed inside	A coworker talked about her mom visiting for Thanksgiving. Sadness, and the thought "I'll never call her again."

Before: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**8**	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

After: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	**4**	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

What I did next

Stayed in the meeting and gave my update on the bike lane study.

Practice 2

Day and time	Friday, November 13, 6:40 p.m.
What set off the storm, and what I noticed inside	Found Mom's soup recipe card while cooking. Tears, a tight throat and the urge to go lie down.

Before: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	**9**	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

After: how caught up in the storm I was

0	1	2	3	4	**5**	6	7	8	9	10
Not caught up at all										*Completely swept away*

What I did next

Made the soup with my daughter and told her where the recipe came from.

What I want to talk about at my next session

Sunday evenings are still the hardest. Can we plan for them?

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K.O. and Farah read the log at her fourth session. After each practice her rating dropped by about four points, and both times she went back to something she cared about. The sadness was still there afterward, and K.O. explained again that dropping anchor helps her stay steady while grief comes and goes. They planned a short round for Sunday evenings and kept the practice at her desk.

References and further reading

Books for clinicians

Harris, R. (2018). *ACT questions and answers: A practitioner's guide to 150 common sticking points in acceptance and commitment therapy*. Context Press. ISBN 978-1-68403-036-1.

Harris, R. (2019). *ACT made simple: An easy-to-read primer on acceptance and commitment therapy* (2nd ed.). New Harbinger Publications. ISBN 978-1-68403-301-0.

Harris, R. (2021). *Trauma-focused ACT: A practitioner's guide to working with mind, body, and emotion using acceptance and commitment therapy*. Context Press. ISBN 978-1-68403-821-3.

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-2894-3.

Research

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