

Trauma & Emotions from a Somatic Therapy Lens

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Grounding Practice: Weather Report

- Mind/Mental State
- Emotional State
- Physical State
- Energy State
- Nervous System State
- Spirit



Emotions

- At all times you have an emotional process and a nervous system process
- These are most often happening underneath conscious awareness



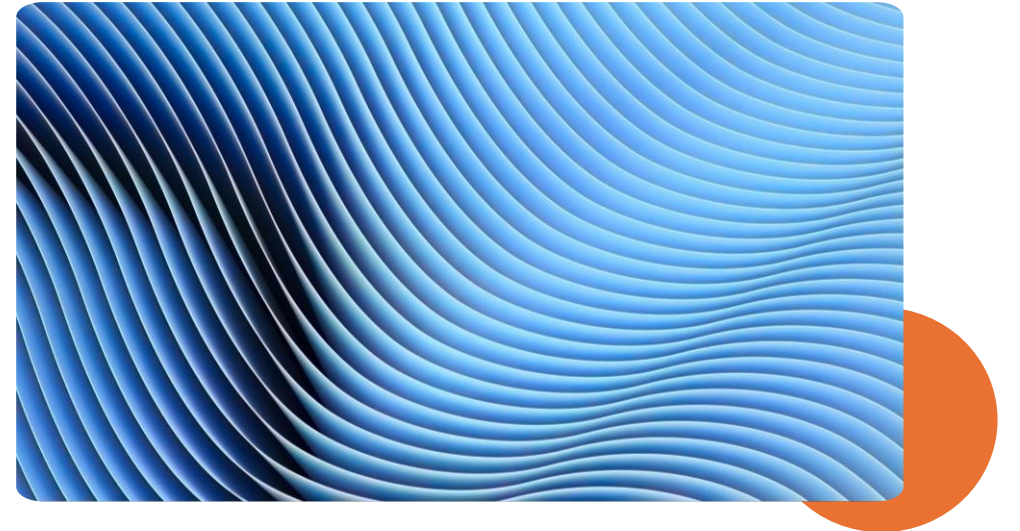
Emotions



Emotions = Energy + Motion,
or Energy in Motion

Emotions are part of your
humanity

Emotions provide us with
information, especially about
our needs



Emotions

- When we have capacity to feel an emotion in the body and nervous system, it comes in like a wave
- We feel the wave, make meaning of it, and the emotion leaves, helping us to understand our world and our needs in our world.
- The average emotion lasts 90 seconds (Dr. [Jill Bolte Taylor](#))
- An emotion is a physiological process, a body process, felt in the body



Emotion Expressions

- Heartbreak
- Light-hearted
- Cold-hearted
- Disheartened
- Kick in the stomach
- Stomach drop
- Gut punch





What is Trauma?

Any experience that we are unable to process through our body and nervous system.

“Any event that overwhelms the ordinary human adaptations to life, leaving us powerless, helpless, with losses of control, dignity, connection, sense of belonging, or meaning.” (Judith Herman)

“Too much, too soon, too fast for the nervous system to handle, especially if we can’t reach a successful resolution. Trauma is not an event, but the energy that gets locked in your body around real or perceived threat.” (Peter Levine)

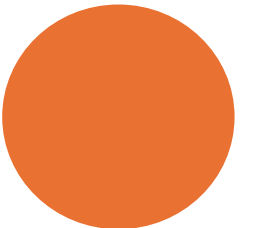
What is Trauma?

- “Trauma is not what happens to a person, it’s what happens within them. Trauma is an unhealed wound that a person is compelled to defend against by means of constricting his or her own ability to feel, be present, and respond flexibly to situations.” (Gabor Mate)



Working with Trauma

- To move through trauma, we have to engage the body (where the emotions are stuck)
- We also need the connection/capacity of another human being to help us hold the experience that has exceeded our own capacity. This is also called co-regulation.



Triggers in the workplace

Our emotional past can (and will) be brought up by our current lives, by our relationships, by things happening in the world around us.

Dysregulation refers to the state of our nervous system when we cannot move through the trauma running through/replaying in our system

Symptoms of Dysregulation

- Feeling removed, disinterested, burnt out
 - Exhaustion, fatigue
 - Isolation
 - Anxiety
 - Relationship distress
 - Physical symptoms/Pain
 - Difficulty concentrating
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- Difficulty with focus and attention
 - Brain fog
 - Negative thinking and mood
 - Changes in sleep, eating, hygiene

Grounding Practices:



Go Outside, Be in Nature



Movement: walk, dance, shake your body



Listen to a favorite song



Get a drink of water



Pet a beloved animal



Write in a journal



Using your 5 senses, take in your environment



Notice your Breathe

Somatic Exercises: Breathing Practice: The Physiological Sigh



- The physiological sigh or cyclic sighing: Take two sharp inhales of breath, typically through the nose, followed by an extended exhale through the nose or mouth (Del Negro, Funk, & Feldman, 2018, Ashad et al., 2022)

Somatic Exercises: Breathing Practice: Straw Breath

- Take a gentle but deep inhalation. Imagine having a straw in your mouth and purse your lips to exhale very slowly until your lungs are 80 % empty. Then, close your mouth and slowly exhale the last 20 % through your nose. Engage muscles of abdomen and diaphragm to expel all of your air. Allow a natural inhalation and take 3 regular breaths. Repeat the exercise 2 or 3 more times.



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Somatic Exercises: Practice: Self-Applied Touch/Self-Havening Touch (Truit, 2022)

- Touch Palms
- Moving hands downward from shoulders to elbows
- Hands to your forehead and smooth across top of your face from the center out to your temples
- Hands to hairline and stroke outward
- Hands to your cheeks and move them gently out towards your ears

Why these exercises?

Breathing: massages the vagus nerve (the regulating factor of our nervous system); expands and contracts space around the heart; increases and decreases blood pressure; rhythmic breathing creates a calm body and focused mind, which helps us stay present with the breath; breath is the fastest way to regulate the nervous system.

Touch has been shown to reduce heart rate and blood pressure, lower stress hormones in the body, increase cuddle hormone (oxytocin) and positive emotions, increase helpful neurotransmitters in the brain (Serotonin and GABA).

