



with Heather Demetrios

January 2023 Quarterly Gathering

Creating a Safe Container for Writing Trauma



This workshop is presented in collaboration with Rebecca Dykes Writers, a resource and support system for writers in the kidlit space writing about violence against women and girls. Find out more about our work at www.rebeccadykeswriters.org.

Access all recordings for our quarterly Gathering, workshop notes, and downloads on the Lotus & Pen Perks Page (plus lots of other goodies).

Questions? Feedback? Want to work 1-on-1? :: heatherdemetrios@gmail.com

Not a newsletter subscriber? Join here: <http://bit.ly/give-me-flow>



This workshop is free for all, but we would be super grateful for donations in any amount to the Rebecca Dykes Writing Scholarship to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

[You can donate here.](#)

Don't turn away.
Keep your eye on the damaged place.
That's where the light enters you.

Rumi

"We have to belong to ourselves as much as we need to belong to others.
Any belonging that asks us to betray ourselves is not true belonging."

Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*

The Internal Container

R.A.I.N.

Focus on the physical sensation of emotion in your body. Drop the story and get curious, using the physical sensation as your object of meditation. Sit with it for as long as you wish, noting changes to its intensity. When you're ready, end with some self-soothing nurture. **If you become more dysregulated, discontinue the practice and focus only on nurture.**

Recognize (notice that you're feeling an emotion and name it – "There is sadness in me.")

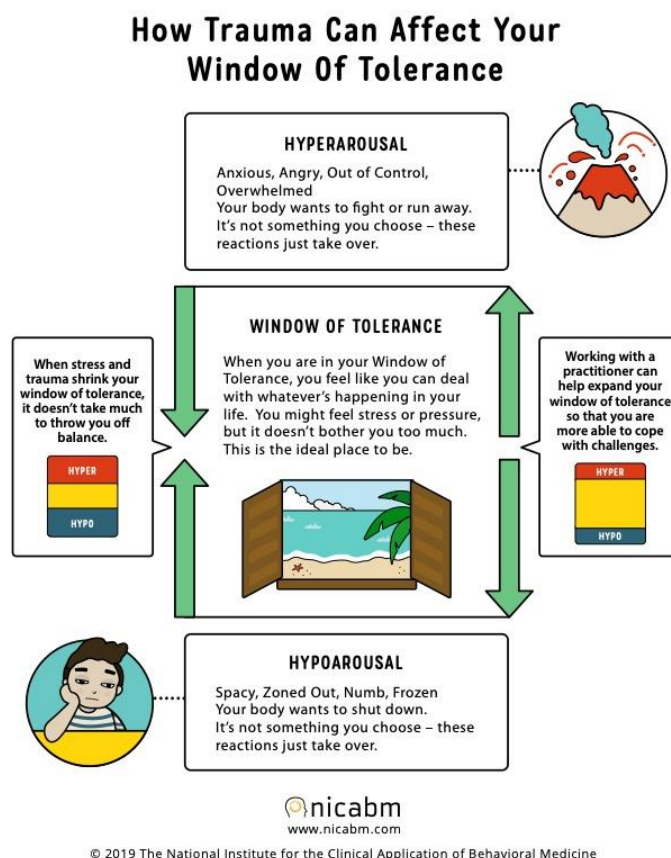
Allow (just be with this emotion – don't push it away, because it's your body communicating to you)

Investigate (stay with the *physical* sensation, drop all story, return to physical sensation when story arises)

Nurture (hand on heart / lovingkindness / affirmation / a smile / a prayer...whatever!)

Window of Tolerance

- See <https://www.nicabm.com/trauma-how-to-help-your-clients-understand-their-window-of-tolerance/>
- When we're aware of our window of tolerance and what helps us stay in it, we're better able to catch when we're dysregulated before it becomes too difficult.
- Build a toolbox that helps you stay in your window of tolerance
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Physiological (Health of body), Safety, Love-Belonging, Esteem (or, as I like to call it, "positive self-regard"), Self-Actualization



Wound / Scar

Avoid sharing your words from the wound, but we want to edit – and share – from the scar (wound writing is best shared with someone who is NOT critiquing the work, but taking it in and holding space for it).

Scar writing is writing that comes from the other side of the pain, with wisdom and medicine to offer. It also keeps you from anxiety and regret and fear – or at least helps with those – because you are sharing from a place of discernment.

More on the concept here: <https://heatherdemetrius.com/blog/write-from-the-wound-edit-from-the-scar>

Inner Critic / Perfectionist Work

- Much to say here! See my blog for lots of posts on how to find an approach that works for you: <https://heatherdemetrius.com/blog-posts>

Centered, Outward Approach

- What is your Writer's Artist Statement?
- Who is your Reader Avatar?
- What is your mission for this book? What is the medicine you want to bring into the world?

We do this work in this post: <https://heatherdemetrius.com/blog/befriending-your-perfectionist>

The External Container

Somatic Approaches

- RAIN is an example of using a somatic approach to work with trauma
- Meditation (see my resource page: <https://heatherdemetrius.com/mindfulness>) I have a Mindfulness for Writers handbook on my subscriber portal, as well.
- See The Embody Lab: <https://www.theembodilab.com>
- Write in a space that nurtures your body. Consider privacy, temperature, seating, light, scent,
- Is there room to stretch out, lay down, get cozy?
- Is this a book that wants to be written on the floor, while laying down, in bed, at a desk? How does your body want to occupy space while you're working on this book?
- How will you break the stress cycle? (See *Burnout* by the Nagoski sisters)

- Where will you get dopamine hits? Are you exercising after working on the book, taking a walk, playing with an animal?
- Qi Gong: a good place to start is <https://www.udemy.com/course/qi-gong-30-day-challenge-with-lee-holden>
- Consider what you're putting in your body as you write stressful material: avoid alcohol, sugar, etc.
- Sleep! Sleep! Sleep! See: *Why We Sleep* (Matthew Walker)

Boundaries

- Avoid sharing work with people who are not going to be FULLY supportive and nurturing.
- Determine if you're in a place to share your work publicly, even in a small group setting.
- "Boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously." – Prentis Hemphill
- This blog post shares more: <https://heatherdemetrios.com/blog/the-definition-of-boundaries-youve-been-looking-for>
- The Greek Chorus: Critics, family, friends, people you're writing about = not allowed in the writing space!

Physical Writing Space

- Does this book want to be written at home, at a café, in a quiet place, in a loud place?
- What time of day does it want to be written in?
- Do you need to be totally alone, or have a door that shuts (and maybe locks?)
- Is there a playful space, like a standing desk filled with art supplies, a stack of tarot cards, a mindful coloring book, embroidery?
- Do you have a vision board with inspiring quotes?
- Do you have go-to sources of light? A poem that reminds you why you're writing this? Words of encouragement to yourself?
- Do you have a writer's grimoire to turn to when you're having a tough time? (see my blog)

Writing Community

- Are you part of a supportive writing community?
- Who is your writing buddy?

Journal Exploration:

- Who is on your team? Who is not (toxic, unsafe, judgmental, etc.)
- If you don't have a writer's artist statement, reader avatar, or book mission – work on those!
- Who are you afraid will see these words?
- Who do you want to see these words?
- What is at stake if you don't write this book?
- How is this book medicine?

Recommended Reading / Research

The Art of Memoir (Mary Karr)

The Body Keeps the Score (Bessel van der Kolk)

The Red Tree (Shaun Tan)

Things To Look Forward To (Sophie Blackall)

You Belong (Sebene Selassie)

Atlas of the Heart (Brené Brown)

Wintering (Katherine May)

Eff This! Meditation (Liza Kindred)

Resources

Rebecca Dykes Writers: <https://www.rebeccadykeswriters.org/>

My newsletters! <http://bit.ly/give-me-flow>

My blog posts! <https://heatherdemetrios.com/blog-posts>