

HEALING FROM TRAUMA: OWNING YOURSELF

Trauma robs you of the feeling that you are in charge of yourself
↳ self-leadership

Re-establish ownership of your mind & body: feeling free to know what you know & feel what you feel without becoming overwhelmed, ashamed, or collapsed.

Not having to keep secrets from yourself - including secrets about the ways that you have managed to survive.

Finding a way to be fully alive in the present & engaged with the people around you

Finding a way to become calm & focused.
Learning to maintain that calm in response to images, thoughts, sounds, or physical sensations that remind you of the past

Sooner or later you need to confront what has happened to you, but only after you feel safe and will not be re-traumatized by it.

FIRST STEP: Find ways to cope with feeling overwhelmed by the sensations and emotions associated with the past

The engines of post-traumatic stress are in the **EMOTIONAL BRAIN** which manifests in physical reactions → gut-wrenching sensations, heart pounding, fast/shallow breathing, feelings of heartbreak, speaking with an upright & reedy voice, and the characteristic body movements that signify collapse, rigidity, rage, or defensiveness.

* The **RATIONAL, EXECUTIVE BRAIN** is good at helping us understand where feelings come from - however, it can not abolish emotions, sensations, or thoughts (understanding why you feel a certain way does not change how you feel) - but it can keep you from surrendering to intense reactions

hyper- or hypoaousal = pushed outside of "window of tolerance"
↳ reactive, disorganized: filters stop working - sounds and lights bother us, unwanted images from the past intrude on our minds, and we panic or fly into rages.
↳ shut down = numb in body & mind

also: cannot learn from experiences in these states

LYMBIC SYSTEM THERAPY: repairing faulty alarm systems & restoring the emotional brain to its ordinary job of quiet background presence (housekeeping of body) ARC

The only way we can consciously access the emotional brain is through **SELF-AWARENESS** (activating the medial prefrontal cortex)

↳ the part of the brain that notices what is going on inside us and thus allows us to feel what we're feeling (INTEROCEPTION)

★ To change how we feel, we must become aware of our inner experience & learn to befriend what is going on inside ourselves.

DEALING WITH HYPERAROUSAL

Some 80% of the fibers of the vagus nerve (which connects the brain with many internal organs) are afferent - they run from the body to the brain

↳ This means we can directly train our arousal system by the way we breathe, chant, and move (a principle that has been utilized since time immemorial in places like China/India, and in nearly every religious practice - yet is still eyed as "alternative" in mainstream culture)

Learning how to breathe calmly & remain in a state of relative physical relaxation, even while accessing painful & horrifying memories, is an essential tool for healing

↳ slow, deep breaths → parasympathetic brake on your arousal

★ emotion regulation is the critical issue in managing the effects of trauma

↳ SELF-MANAGEMENT

Other traditions from around the world rely on: mindfulness, movement, rhythms, and action (in contrast to Western reliance on drugs & verbal therapies)

Yoga in India	tai chi & qigong in China	rhythmical drumming in parts of Africa	martial arts in Japan & Korea	- aikido, judo, taekwon do, kendo, jujitsu (capoeira in Brazil)	★ PHYSICAL MOVEMENT ★ BREATHING ★ MEDITATION
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NO MIND WITHOUT MINDFULNESS

At the core of recovery is self-awareness (Notice that & what happens next?)

★ Traumatized people live with seemingly unbearable sensations

↳ Simply noticing immediately helps shift our perspective & opens up new options other than our automatic, habitual reactions

◦ Pay attention → recognize ebb & flow → gain control

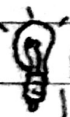
Traumatized people are often afraid of feeling → physical sensations become the enemy and **EMOTIONAL BRAIN** keeps generating sensations that make the sufferer feel scared & helpless.

FIRST STEP: open yourself up to your inner experience.

1. Allow mind to focus on sensations
2. Notice how, in contrast to the timeless, ever-present experience of trauma, physical sensations are **TRANSIENT** and respond to: shifts in body position, changes in breathing, & shifts in thinking
3. Label physical sensations

"WHEN I FEEL ANXIOUS I FEEL A CRUSHING SENSATION IN MY CHEST."

→ Focus on that sensation & see how it changes when you take a deep breath out, or when you tap your chest below your collarbone, or when you allow yourself to cry."



Practicing mindfulness calms down the sympathetic nervous system; Learning to observe & tolerate your physical reactions is a prerequisite for safely revisiting the past. If you can't tolerate what you feel, opening up the past will only compound the misery & retraumatize you further.

★ We can tolerate a great deal of discomfort as long as we stay conscious of the fact that the body's sensations constantly shift

FURTHER STEP: Observe the interplay between thoughts & physical sensations

★ Becoming aware of how your body organizes particular emotions or memories opens up the possibility of releasing sensations or impulses you once blocked in order to survive.

MINDFULNESS = aligns - taking scattered & reactive energies of your mind and focusing them into a coherent source of energy for living/problem solving/healing

RELATIONSHIPS

Good support network = single most powerful protection against becoming traumatized

After an acute trauma, survivors require: presence of familiar people, faces, & voices; physical contact; food; shelter & a safe place; time to sleep

★ Our attachment bonds are our greatest protection against threat

Recovery from trauma involves (re)connecting with our fellow human beings

↳ This is why trauma that has occurred within relationships is generally more difficult to treat than trauma resulting from car accidents or hurricanes

IF THE PEOPLE WHOM YOU NATURALLY TURN TO FOR CARE & PROTECTION TERRIFY OR REJECT YOU, YOU LEARN TO SHUT DOWN & IGNORE WHAT YOU FEEL

↳ relief does not come until they are able to acknowledge what has happened & recognize the invisible demons they are struggling with.

Post-traumatic reactions STARTED OFF as efforts to save your life.

You will need help facing your inner music (or cacophony)

↳ Find someone you trust enough to accompany you, to safely hold your feelings & help you listen to the painful messages from your emotional brain (most traumatized individuals need an anchor)

★ Working with trauma is as much about remembering how we survived as it is about what is broken

"CAN YOU THINK OF ANY PERSON YOU FELT SAFE WITH GROWING UP?"

If so, start there.

If not, animals may be much safer than dealing with human beings

→ CHOOSING A THERAPIST ★

- ① Stabilize & calm patients down
- ② Help to lay traumatic memories & re-enactments to rest
- ③ Reconnect patients with other people

THERE IS NO ONE TREATMENT OF CHOICE!

Your therapist should find out who you are & what you are - not some generic PTSD patient

COMMUNAL RHYTHMS AND SYNCHRONY

From the moment of our birth, our relationships are embodied in responsive faces, gestures, and touch (foundations of attachment)

* TRAUMA = breakdown of attuned physical synchrony

Singing, moving, dancing → people coming back to life; faces becoming attuned; vitality returning to bodies

Much success exists with juvenile offenders and at-risk foster kids
↳ gradually learning to work together and to depend on one another (theater, drama, etc.)

* When we play together, we feel physically attuned and experience a sense of connection & joy.

GETTING IN TOUCH

Medications have increasingly taken the place of helping people to deal with their sensory world. However, the most natural way that we humans calm down distress is by: being touched, hugged, or rocked.

* YOU CAN'T FULLY RECOVER IF YOU DON'T FEEL SAFE IN YOUR SKIN.

Helps with excessive arousal & makes us feel intact, safe, protected, and in charge.

"People who are terrified need to get a sense of where their bodies are in space and of their boundaries."

TAKING ACTION

Body responds to extreme experiences → secreting stress hormones
• Meant to give us strength & endurance

* People who actively DO something to deal with a disaster utilize their stress hormones for their proper purpose & are at a much lower risk of becoming traumatized. > Everyone has their breaking point *

Helplessness and immobilization keep people from utilizing stress hormones
↳ Hormones are pumped out, but no action takes place
↳ Activation patterns meant for coping BACKFIRE & now keep fueling inappropriate flight/fight/freeze responses

- ★ Before plunging into a full-fledged exploration of the trauma itself, patients should be helped to build internal resources that foster safe access to sensations & emotions that overwhelmed them at the time of the trauma
 - ↳ gradually expand window of tolerance

FURTHER STEP: | Once patients can tolerate being aware of their trauma-based physical experiences, they may discover powerful physical impulses that arose during the trauma, but were suppressed in order to survive.

- ↳ manifested in "subtle body movements" (twitching, turning, backing away)
- ↳ amplifying movements & experimenting with modifying them begins the process of bringing the INCOMPLETE, TRAUMA-RELATED 'ACTION TENDENCIES' to completion

- ★ His healing to feel (physically experience) what it would have been like to fight back or run away → feeling the pleasure of taking EFFECTIVE ACTION restores a sense of agency & a sense of being able to actively defend & protect themselves.

When people are FORCED to submit to an overwhelming power, they often survive with resigned compliance.

- ↳ Overcome by: restoring physical capacity to engage & defend.

★ It is possible to be de-skilled by FEAR |

- ↳ frontal lobes go offline & freeze

- ↳ Overcome by: many repetitions of being placed in the "zero hour" (precise moment of attack)