



Trauma Stabilization and Grounding Exercises

Goals: calming/relaxation, talk about lowering amygdala activity so that we can make decisions with rest of brain especially PFC, lots of mindfulness and relaxation

1. Reflecting on resilience (Schwartz)
 - a. Take some time to reflect upon and write about your own resilience and post-traumatic growth. In what ways do you already feel capable of handling the challenges that you have faced in your life? Do you have a tendency to isolate or do you reach out when you feel vulnerable? Do you notice that you have difficulty maintaining a hopeful outlook in your life? Do you believe that your decisions and actions make a difference? What additional supports do you need to help you respond in a flexible or adaptive manner to the challenges in your life?
 - b. Resilience: ability to flexibly adapt to stressors, not a trait but a strategy
 - i. Physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual
 - ii. Engage in behaviors that support your wellbeing
2. Relating to change (Schwartz)
 - a. Take some time to reflect on your relationship to the concept of change. Can you identify changes that you would like to make? Are you aware of ways in which you are frightened of change? Can you identify the kind of support or resources that would help you feel safe enough to embrace change? What helps you to trust the unknown?
3. Mindfulness body scan exercise
 - a. Press toes into floor (makes you focus on doing that and nothing else), lift feet and circle ankles each way one at a time, leg out in front of you and put back down, up to torso: adjust posture, arms out and loosen it, shoulder roll, neck roll, massage jaw
 - i. Goal is to feel where tension is, try to relax body
 - b. Deep breaths from diaphragm, hold it, exhale
 - c. Tense everything for 30 seconds: goal is to feel what tension feels like
 - d. Release hands and arms one at a time, release legs, core, shoulders, neck, jaw
 - e. Deep breaths again
4. Grounding into the floor (Schwartz)

- a. Find a safe, calm environment to explore this practice of grounding. If you feel comfortable, explore this practice by lying down on the floor. Release your weight into the floor beneath you. Notice how it feels to relax into this support. If you notice that you are resisting letting go into this support, see if you can breathe into any tension in your muscles. Gently encourage yourself to let your weight rest heavy on the floor. What are you aware of as you explore this practice of grounding? Make space for any emotions that arise during this process.
 - i. Grounding: your ability to feel yourself in the here and now
 - ii. Bring attention to the body and what it is sensing
5. Mindfulness: building tolerance for emotions
 - a. Take some time to explore a mindfulness practice focused on riding the waves of change. On each inhale, allow yourself to notice your inner experience. What is the emotion or sensation that you are aware of right now? Honor whatever you are holding as if it is a precious gift. Imagine a wave rising up as you breathe fully into this moment, this experience. You might ask yourself if this emotion needs anything from you. How can you take care of yourself right now? On each exhale, imagine the wave receding as you release emotion and sensation. If it feels right, imagine giving anything that no longer serves you back to the universe. Continue as long as you like, allowing yourself to observe your inner experiences as they come and go. Complete the practice by extending appreciation for yourself, for both your willingness to hold on and the courage that it takes to let something go. Take a few minutes to think about your experience.
 - i. All experiences are meant to come and go like ocean waves
 - ii. Need to be able to let emotions come on without blocking their onset but also be able to let them go
6. Setting an intention (Schwartz)
 - a. What are you seeking to create more of in your life? Identify and write down an intention or set of intentions that support you in reaching these goals. You can choose to say this intention when you wake up in the morning and again before going to sleep at night. Or if you engage in a regular mindfulness practice, then you can say your intention to yourself or write it in a journal each time to begin your practice. It is also a powerful practice to share your intention with another person, as having a witness to your intention can help anchor it in the world. Remember, you do not need to hold your intention firmly or with effort. Explore what happens when you trust that you have set a process in motion. Surrender and see what you notice over time.
 - i. Setting an intention: putting your goals/hopes/dreams into words
 - ii. Serves as a reminder, not an aggressive course of action
 - iii. Can be word or short phrase (ex. "I am going to love/accept myself for who I am", "I want to honor my body's needs")
 - iv. Can change over time
7. Thought and Emotion Defusion (McKay)
 - a. Thought defusion: detach from thoughts and overwhelming emotions

- b. Visualize your thoughts and emotions either as pictures or words, harmlessly floating away from you, and without obsessing about them, analyzing them, or getting stuck on them
 - c. Ex.
 - i. Imagine sitting in a field watching your thoughts and emotions floating away on clouds.
 - ii. Picture yourself sitting near a stream watching your thoughts and emotions floating past on leaves.
 - iii. See your thoughts and emotions written in the sand, and then watch the waves wash them away.
 - iv. Imagine that you are sitting at a stopped train, watching your emotions roll by on the passing train cars.
 - d. Can start by using how you feel right now or by bringing up an emotional memory
 - e. Script: Picture yourself in the scenario that you chose to watch your thoughts come and go. Do your best to imagine yourself in that scene. (pause) After you do, also start to become aware of the thoughts that you're having. Start to observe the thoughts that are coming up, whatever they are. Don't try to stop your thoughts, and do your best not to criticize yourself for any of the thoughts. Just watch the thought arise, and then, using whatever technique you've chosen, watch the thoughts disappear. If any of your thoughts is a triggering thought from a difficult experience, just note to yourself that you're having a triggering thought, observe any emotion that it brings up, and then let the thought and emotion go past without getting stuck on them and without analyzing them. (pause for about a minute) Whatever the thought or emotion is, big or small, important or unimportant, watch it arise in your mind and then let it float away or disappear by whatever means you've chosen. (pause for a minute) Keep breathing slowly, in and out, as you watch your thoughts and emotions float away. When you notice distressing emotions arising in you because of your thoughts, let them float past in your imagination. (pause for a minute) Just continue to watch the thoughts and feelings arise and disappear. Do your best to watch the thoughts and related feelings arise and disappear without getting hooked into them and without criticizing yourself. (pause for a minute) When you've finished, take a few slow, long breaths, and then slowly open your eyes and return your focus to the room.
8. Compassion meditation (McKay)
- a. To begin, take a few slow, long breaths, and relax. Place one hand on your stomach. Now slowly breathe in through your nose and then slowly exhale through your mouth. Feel your stomach rise and fall as you breathe. Imagine your belly filling up with air like a balloon as you breathe in, and then feel it deflate as you breathe out. Feel the breath moving in across your nostrils, and then feel your breath blowing out across your lips. As you breathe, notice the sensations in your body. Feel your lungs fill up with air. Notice the weight of your body resting on whatever you're sitting. With each breath, notice how your body feels more and more relaxed. (pause for 30 seconds) Now, as you continue to breathe, begin counting your breaths, each time you exhale. You can count either

silently to yourself or aloud. Count each exhalation until you reach 4 and then begin counting at 1 again. To begin, breathe in slowly through your nose, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Count 1. Again, breathe in slowly through your nose and slowly out through your mouth. Count 2. Repeat, breathing in slowly through your nose, and then slowly exhale. Count 3. Last time-- breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Count 4. Now begin counting at 1 again. (pause for 30 seconds) Now bring your awareness inside your own body, noting the world of sensation there at this very moment. You live in this body: allow yourself to be aware of your breath, your life force. As you hold that awareness, mentally repeat the following phrases, letting them be a deep wish for yourself: "May I be peaceful. May I be safe. May I be healthy. May I be happy and free of suffering." Repeat the phrases two or three more times, allowing their meaning to deepen each time. Allow yourself to feel and accept your own sense of compassion toward yourself. (pause) When you are finished, take a few additional slow breaths, rest quietly, and savor your own sense of goodwill and compassion.

9. Ventral vagal anchor (Dana)
 - a. Autonomic system: your reactive system when something stressful happens
 - i. Dorsal vagal: immobilization, freezing response
 - ii. Sympathetic system: mobilization through fight or flight
 - iii. Ventral vagal: social engagement and connection
 - b. We want to find ways to use ventral vagus to help us adapt flexibly to challenging situations, use it to feel safe
 - c. We're going to create some anchors that remind us of safety and connection that we can use when we don't feel in control of our bodily response to stress
 - i. Who: Reflect on the people in your life and make a list of the ones who bring you a feeling of being safe and welcome. You might also have a pet who fills that role. First, identify a person or a pet who is present in your life. Then, if you wish, you can expand your search to also include people who are no longer living, people you haven't met, and spiritual figures.
 - ii. What: Think about what you do that brings your ventral vagal state alive. Look for small actions that feel nourishing and inviting of connection. Keep track of the things that bring moments of ventral vagal regulation.
 - iii. Where: Take a tour of your world and find the physical places that bring you cues of safety. Think of your home, your neighborhood, your community, your workplace, a place where you feel a spiritual connection. Bring to mind the everyday places you move through. Take note of the environments and name the ones that make you feel safe.
 - iv. When: Identify moments in time when you feel anchored in a ventral vagal state. Take a moment to go back and revisit those experiences. Bring them into conscious awareness and write them down.
 - d. Maybe do a mindfulness exercise: picture the anchor, think about how it makes you feel, let that anchor help you lose tension?

10. Creating if-then statements

- a. Way to translate goals into action: use after setting an intention
- b. Say when, where, and how you plan to respond to a situation
- c. Makes us aware of the link between cues and responses so we can recognize those situations and act accordingly
- d. Set goals for responding to cues from all three states: needing to freeze, take action, or connect with others
 - i. Be realistic, specific
 - ii. Start with small steps
- e. "If this happens, then I will"
 - i. Ex. if I notice I start to feel overwhelmed at work, I will take a five minute break to do some deep breathing.
- f. Statements for external cues (people, places, events) and internal cues (autonomic state changes)
- g. Read through your statements and make sure that your response moves you into safety (ventral vagus), not the other two states
- h. Use these in real life to see what happens, adjust if needed

List compiled by intern: Sarah Ramp

To be admitted into our Trauma Therapy Group please visit the website at <https://hope-centered.com/contact-us/> and complete a contact form.

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