



CULTIVATING SAFETY IN THE BODY AFTER TRAUMA

Strategies for feeling safe, and in control of your own body - that you can cultivate for yourself.

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A TRAUMATIC EVENT CAN BE ANYTHING THAT TRIGGERS A SENSE OF DANGER AND A PROTECTIVE SURVIVAL RESPONSE.

Trauma can occur with any situation that leaves a person feeling unsafe and unable to change or escape it. When something feels dangerous, and this danger seems overwhelming or unavoidable, a person's nervous system remains prepared for danger. The threat-response system led by the amygdala becomes more highly sensitive after trauma, than for people who haven't experienced trauma.

A trauma survivor may have a much stronger or more sensitive reaction to a sense of danger. The amygdala is like the fire alarm of the brain; it is wired to alert the entire nervous system at the first inkling that a change may bring risk. If the mind and body can't process what happened to feel safe afterward, it re-activates sooner or to slighter perceptions of change.



When we experience trauma, the brain often cannot process it and the body “stores it”. The body gets stuck in a state of hyper alertness, and the mind gets stuck in a state of hyper-alertness and/or disassociation as a coping mechanism.

Trauma response is not typically a rational process, it speaks to the irrational part of the brain and your body gets locked into a place of constantly reacting as if you’re in a sense of danger.

One of the most tragic results of trauma is people try to shut the feeling down and end up shutting down their ability to feel - or they turn to drugs, alcohol, and pharmaceuticals

Your body has to feel safe and be present to heal trauma. Once your body feels safe, you can allow yourself to slowly go to experiences from the past that caused the body to be put into a traumatic state. This is best facilitated by a trained trauma-informed professional.





**SO WHAT ARE SOME
STRATEGIES THAT CAN
HELP YOU TO FEEL SAFE IN
YOUR BODY - THAT YOU CAN
CULTIVATE FOR YOURSELF?**

TAKE THREE DEEP BREATHS.

Take long, slow, deep breaths that fill your diaphragm (otherwise known as belly breathing). Breathe slowly in through your nose, out through your mouth with an audible sigh. You can learn to use breathing exercises to shift your focus away from stress or pain. The human mind processes one thing at a time. If you focus on the rhythm of your breathing, you're not focused on the stressor.



CONNECT TO YOUR SENSES.

Anchor yourself by connecting with your senses to bring you into the present moment.

Sight is the most prominent to connect to. What do you see? Name a few objects around you; what colour and shape do they take. Feel your feet planted on the earth. Take a sip of water (even this simple act helps to bring your pre-frontal cortex online and ground you).



THE POWER OF THE VAGUS NERVE.

Connect to the vagus nerve to activate your parasympathetic nervous system. Any time your brain perceives a threat, due to the sympathetic nervous system, it triggers the fight or flight response. The parasympathetic nervous system does the opposite—it calms you. The easiest way to stimulate the vagus nerve is by humming, singing or gargling. "OM" chanting is a helpful connection to the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve is the body's superpower and it's used to counteract your fight/flight system. It's how you develop a healthy stress response and become resilient. When stimulated, you feel calmer, more compassionate, and clearer.





MINDFULNESS.

Meditation and mindfulness are fantastic ways to calm your nervous system. There are many free gentle meditations available online that calm and promote comfort and safety in the body. Find one that works for you and have the link saved/handy when you need it. Connecting regularly to meditation and mindfulness practices help to rewire the neural pathways in the brain to a calmer way of operating over time.

THIS PRESENT MOMENT.

Connect to your body through movement, stretching, yoga and/or massage. Stretching out your muscles, giving yourself a firm foot massage, or intentional movement practices help you to connect to your body in the here and now.



GROUND YOURSELF.

Take your shoes off, go outside and feel your feet on the earth. Breathe in the fresh air. Feel the breeze on your skin, and if the sun is out soak up those warm rays of vitamin D. What can you observe in your current environment?

What sounds can you hear? Now connect to the energy of a tree by taking a few minutes to stand like a tree. Stand with your feet parallel and at least shoulder's width apart. Keep your head floating above your body, chin tucked, and spine straight. Rest your hands at your side or place them over your navel. Sink all of your body's weight and tension into your feet (without collapsing your posture), allowing it to be absorbed into the ground. To support this grounding process, imagine roots growing out the bottom of your feet, extending deep into the ground beneath you.



THESE ARE HELPFUL TIPS ONLY

Always seek the guidance of your doctor or other qualified health professional with any questions you may have regarding your health or a medical condition.



HEALING IS NOT LINEAR.

Healing is an ongoing practice, which is not once and done, it's an ongoing practice you have to choose.

ACCEPT SUPPORT.

Getting past trauma is to *want* to heal and be willing to accept help and support.

Every single person is worthy and deserving of access to support.



Aloe vera plant background

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Slow, deep breathing
is important... It's like
an anchor in the midst
of an emotional storm:
the anchor won't get
rid of the storm, but it
will hold you steady
until it passes.

-
Russ Harris, 2008



THESE ARE SIMPLE STRATEGIES FOR SELF SOOTHING

These simple tips are for your personal education and informational purposes, but does not constitute a recommendation for medical care, nor does it make a warranty of any kind in terms of the information's appropriateness for individual online users. This is not intended to be a substitute for professional psychological, psychiatric or medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

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