

Trigger Processing Exercise

How to orient you to your body:

- **What does your posture feel like?** are you slumped, rigid, or have a flexibility to your stance?
- **What's your natural heart rate?** Quick, slow?
- **Where do you carry tension?** does it present as a knot in your stomach, neck/back pain, a headache, a tingling in your fingers or twitching of your eye?
- **What external or internal elements offer a sense of calm?** A favorite sweater, drink, place (beach, sofa), or experience with a loved one?
- **What external stimuli often trigger you?** loud sounds, dark at night, social interactions?

Begin asking yourself these questions to increase your somatic, mind- body awareness.

When you're healing from anxiety, trauma or are experiencing emotional triggers, it can be difficult to feel like your body is *supporting* you.

However, an important element in healing and getting stronger is inviting your body to help you, to be a *resource*.

As Babette Rothschild, Trauma Specialist, suggests learning to engage with your body as a DIARY. Begin taking "notes" from what your body is expressing by *tuning inward*.

Rothschild writes in her book, *The Body Remembers*,

"It is through sensory storage and messaging that the body communicates. It holds many keys that help in identifying, accessing and resolving traumatic experiences" (Rothschild, 2000).

According to Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, a somatic, body-focused therapy, everything we experience and all the sensations felt on and in the body are **forms of communication needing to be expressed**. Think of your triggers as a google translate to knowing what is happening on the inside. In order to offer relief, we want to *notice* what is happening, and then process and release the experience on a mind and body level (Sensorimotor Psychotherapy: Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006).

Next time you feel triggered, practice this 6 step somatic exercise to help you process through the experience and experience relief. Practicing this may also help you identify the stimuli that contributed to the change in "homeostasis" so that you can have awareness for the future.

A 6-step somatic exercise:

1. Notice.

Inhale and exhale. Notice what you feel *on*, *in* and *around* your body. Speed of breath, heart rate and body temperature.

2. Think back to safety.

Think back to at a recent moment you felt most calm, safe and most like your “self”.

3. Identify.

Identify at what point in time and/or which part of your body began experiencing disturbance or stress.

4. Replay.

Replay the scenario from calm state to stressed state, in slow motion (as if watching a slow movie). Identify people, conversations, objects or behaviors that may have made you stressed, uncomfortable or that stand out to you as you're replaying the recent event(s).

5. Tune in.

Tune in to your body sensations as you recall the event(s) and slow down and notice if there is any shift in your body, a sensation of tingling, tensing, warming, numbing or cooling in your chest, arms, legs, face or an overall change in body temperature.

6. Healing hands.

Place your hand on the area that has experienced a shift or change, and breathe deeply. If it's an overall feeling, you can simply place your hands on your heart.

Doing this allows the body to process the *somatic experience*, and creates a passageway to release the tension.

Notice if something comes up, an image, sensation, awareness or understanding that offers clarity to the situation. If nothing comes up, that's ok. Simply slowing down, pacing your breath and raising awareness is progress and helpful in itself.

I encourage you to practice this after an upsetting experience, to allow your body to process the emotions and communications of your body. You may also choose to practice this before a stressful situation so that you can identify potential triggers and plan ahead ways to support yourself. As you go about your day, I encourage you to tune in to your body.