



***RECOVERING FROM NATURAL DISASTERS AND TRAUMA: EXPRESSIVE ARTS
ACTIVITIES FOR THERAPISTS TO CREATE REGULATION AND CONNECTION***

NCAMFT CONFERENCE

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Honoring Trauma, Pain & Destruction

- Honoring:

1. The Earth where we stand
2. The lives that we lost
3. The pain people suffer
4. The damage that happened to communities
5. The fear people lived
6. The destruction of the land

OBJECTIVES



Identify how Trauma and Stress are stored in the Body



Demonstrate Practical Expressive Arts Techniques



Discuss Self Care Strategies to Manage Stress Responses in Trauma Work

NATURAL DISASTERS AND TRAUMA

◦ Natural disasters and other traumatic events impact everyone:

- ❖ Clients
- ❖ Therapists
- ❖ Communities
- ❖ Environment
- ❖ Energy
- ❖ Strong Ones versus Weak
- ❖ Denying One's Experiences
- ❖ Validating feelings: See, Hear, Say, Feel

Impacting on Body: Somatic Experiencing

Trauma and
stress live in the
body

Overload on
the nervous
system

Leaving the
brain in a state
of fear

Often triggering
the Vagus
Nerve into
shutdown

Heal the Body,
Heal the Mind

Movement,
Dance in
Communities

Holding Each
Other

TRAUMA AND THE BODY

- **The Body Keeps the Score Concept**
- Trauma is not only remembered in the mind but also in the body
- If you help the body feel safe, the mind will too

- Bessel van der Kolk and his book *The Body Keeps the Score*
- Key points:
- Trauma can disrupt the nervous system.
- The body may stay in **survival mode** even after danger has passed.
- Sensations, posture, tension, and breathing patterns often reflect trauma.

Trauma

The Trauma itself

The Story we live and tell ourselves

Both dictate the outcome

Trauma like Grief brings other Trauma

Trauma Reactions & Symptoms

How Trauma Affects the Brain

Prefrontal Cortex—Helps control the amygdala and helps people learn

Hippo Campus-Involved in Learning and Memory

Amygdala-Our detector, senses, feels things, people or situations that are dangerous. It alerts us and can become hypersensitive

With ongoing Trauma there are physical and brain changes, smaller structures, lowers emotional control and creates an inability to process emotions

Source: <https://www.continued.com/early-childhood-education/ask-the-experts/does-trauma-affect-brain-23808>

How Safe are You Feeling?

- How do you Help Your Body feel Safe?
 - ...
 - ...
- How do you help Clients feel Safe in Your Presence?
 - ...
 - ...
- How do you nurture living in Your Body rather than Trauma living in your body?
- We learn to regulate through each other (Van Der Kolk)—
So Your Regulation matters for You and for Your clients!

- **Survival Responses (Fight / Flight / Freeze / Fawn)**
- Linked to the **autonomic nervous system**.

- **Polyvagal Theory** by Stephen Porges to help the Nervous System Regulate and Heal
- States:
 - Fight → tension, anger, clenched jaw
 - Flight → anxiety, restlessness
 - Freeze → numbness, shutdown
 - Fawn → people-pleasing

Nervous System Responses

How Trauma Shows Up in the Body

Physical:

- Chronic muscle tension
- Stomach issues
- Headaches
- Shallow breathing

Emotional/body signals:

- Hypervigilance
- Numbness
- Dissociation
- Startle response

Implicit Memory versus Explicit memory

Mindful Stress

- **Notice What You Notice:**

1. Breathing
2. Position
3. Body Awareness
4. Where do you hold tension?
5. How does your body feel when stressed?

EXPRESSIVE ARTS FOR THERAPISTS

- Guided Imagery/Visualization—**"The Safe Place" with Drawing**
- Steps:
 - Guide a short grounding breath
 - Ask participants to imagine a place where they feel safe and calm
 - Invite them to draw or collage that place
 - Breathe
- Reflection prompts:
 - What colors show safety?
 - What sensations exist there?
 - What part of your body relaxes there?
- Purpose:
Creates a **Regulation Resource** in your body so participants can return to later.
- DRAWING- A visual/auditory experience



Body Mapping—Brain-Body-Mind

- Materials:
 - Small or Large paper
 - Markers crayons, colored pencils
- Steps:
- Trace an outline of a body (or give template).
- What color areas do you feel:
 - Stress
 - Safety
 - Numbness
 - Energy
- Reflection:
- Where does your body hold tension?
- What colors represent different sensations?
- Purpose:
Helps people visually see **how emotions live in the body—Not in Your Mind.**

Vagus Nerve System Reset

Butterfly Tapping

Breathing and Humming

Massage behind the ear

Blowing

Havening Face and Arms

EFT Tapping

Sandtray Online



- **Sandtray Therapy** is an expressive, experiential therapy approach in which clients use **sand, miniature figures, and objects** to create scenes in a tray of sand that represent their inner world, experiences, emotions, or conflicts.
- Create a Picture of your World in the Sand
- Choose the figurines that represent what you need to create your world
- <https://onlinesandtray.com/>
- Tell me About Your World
- What stands out the most for you?
- What would you like to move?
- Let's Honor this World together. What is the Title of Your World?

Somatic Exercise--“Stress vs Safety” Movement Exercise

Create these Body Positions

- **Stress posture**
 - Shoulders tight
 - Fists clenched
 - Shallow breathing
- **Safety posture**
 - Shoulders relaxed
 - Longer breathing
 - Open chest

Discuss:

- What changed in your body?
- How did emotions shift?

Writing Spirals

- Writing Acitivity
- 2 Spirals Side by Side
- 1st Spiral, start from the outside of the spiral and write your way in stating what makes you feel stressed and where do you feel it in your body
- 2nd Spiral, star from the middle of the spiral and write your way out stating what would help you feel less stressed and how would your body feel
- NOTICE the different in how you Feel and Think about the situation



Calm Sacred Space

- *“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”* ~~ Mother Theresa
- List 3 things that would help you create a Calm Sacred in your Home/Office
 - ...
 - ...
 - ...

Rhythm Regulation Activity

- Uses:
 - drumming
 - tapping
 - clapping
- Rhythm can help regulate the nervous system.
- Participants:
 - Tap a slow rhythm together
 - Match breathing with rhythm
- Purpose:
Promotes **co-regulation** and grounding.

Color Breathing Art

- Choose:
 - A color for stress
 - A color for calm
- Draw breathing in calm color and breathing out stress color.
- Purpose:
Links **breathing + visual processing**.

- Materials:
- Clay or playdough
- Prompt:
“Shape what stress or trauma feels like in the body.”
- Then:
“Reshape it into something that represents safety or healing.”
- Reflection:
- What changed?
- What did your body feel during each step?
- Purpose:
Externalizes internal sensations.

Clay Emotion Exercise

Questions, Comments



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References

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