

12 steps to

HEAL THE BODY FROM TRAUMA

From HEALING TRAUMA, by Peter A. Levine, Ph.D. (2008)

Illustrated by Hiroko Demichelis, RCC

Step 1



Our Skin Is Our First Defense

"The body is the container of all our sensations and feelings. It's also the boundary separating us from our environment and from others. This boundary gets ruptured in trauma. So we feel often raw and unprotected. To begin to feel your skin as the boundary that holds and contains your sensations and feelings, gently tap the palm of your left hand with the fingers of your right hand. Then stop and notice the sensations."

Say 'THIS IS MY HAND MY HAND IS A PART OF ME.'

(P. Levine, 2008)



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Step 1.2



String Boundary Exercise

"Take a ball of yarn or string and seat on the floor.

Focus on the front, sides and back of your body, paying attention to where your personal boundary is.

USE THE YARN TO MARK OUT WHAT YOU FEEL IS YOUR PERSONAL BOUNDARY."
(P. Levine, 2008)



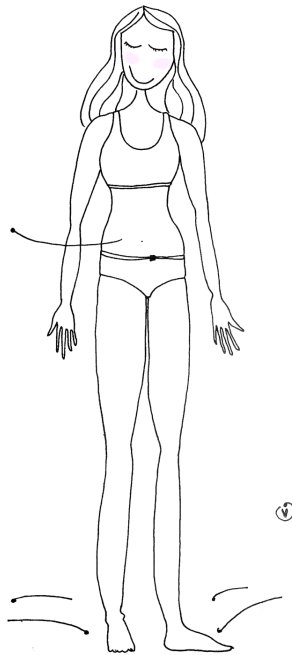
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Step 2



Grounding and Centering

"Trauma disconnects people from their bodies. In love we are "swept off our feet". In trauma, our legs are pulled out from under us. Grounding and centering reconnect you directly with resources available in our own body.

PRACTICE: stand and simply FEEL YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND (almost like suction cups). THEN SLOWLY SWAY FROM THE ANKLES, side to side and then forward and backward. This will help locate your centre of gravity, in the upper pelvic area."
(P. Levine, 2008)



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Step 3



Building Resources

"Everyone has resources. Resources can be anything or anyone that supports and nurtures a sense of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. When someone has been traumatized instinctive resources have been overwhelmed.

PRACTICE: take a piece of paper divide your page and LIST ON ONE SIDE YOUR INTERNAL RESOURCES (nature, friends, family, friends, dance...) and on the other side LIST THE INTERNAL RESOURCES (strength, agility, a spiritual practice)"

(P. Levine, 2008.)



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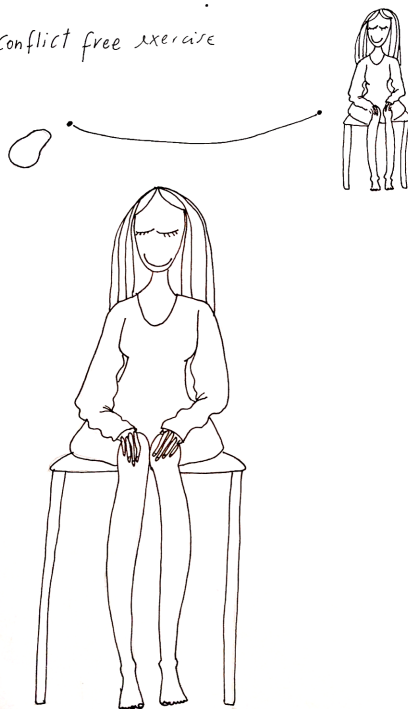
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Step 4

Conflict free exercise



Tracking Specific Sensations

"When you have been traumatized, the body does not feel like a safe place. It feels like a dangerous place. This exercise is designed to help you discover your own pacing and inner rhythms, and to trust in your own innate capacity to regulate and to heal. Find a comfortable place to sit, either a chair or on the floor.

BRING INTO YOUR SPACE SOMETHING THAT BRINGS YOU COMFORT OR IS SPECIAL TO YOU.

It could be a stone, a crystal, a flower, a pet, a photograph.

NOW TUNE INTO THE SENSATIONS YOUR BODY IS EXPERIENCING. FEEL HOW THE CHAIR OR FLOOR HOLDS YOUR WEIGHT. YOUR CLOTHING ON YOUR SKIN, YOUR MUSCLES UNDERNEATH YOUR SKIN, YOUR FEET grounded.

Try to feel this sense of groundedness with your whole body.

Now gaze at your object of safety, and slowly BRING your attention BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN YOUR BODY AND THE OBJECT IN FRONT OF YOU."

(P. Levine, 2008)



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Step 5



Tracking Activation

"When you are not able to recognize the thought as a thought, the unpleasant sensations the thought evoke may increase until you are feeling fear, anxiety or panic.

So: by bringing yourself back to the body you can notice the thought that you are having and you notice that it is a thought.

If you tighten up without noticing the thought that caused the tightening, your response will tend to be more catastrophic, leading you to believe that something bad is going to happen.

PRACTICE: SAY TO YOURSELF- "I JUST HAD A THOUGHT. WHAT DO I BEGIN TO NOTICE IN MY BODY NOW? Do it.

THEN PROCEED: follow the same procedure with any images that may arise as you practice the next phase. Do the same with anything visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory or tactile that you notice."

(P. Levine, 2008)



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Step 6



Pendulation: Rhythms of Expansion And Contraction

"Traumatized people (most of us?) tend to be riveted on their traumas ; new situations are constricted by the past event.

The KEY to dissolving this constriction is simply learning to stay with the sensation until it begins to change.

As you stay with it, the sensation may continue to get worse, then better, in a cycle of expansion and contraction.

It's called pendulation. Just observe it.

Once you learn to pendulate successfully, you will discover that your SEEMINGLY infinite emotional pain begins to feel manageable and finite.

PRACTICE: Recall an experience in which you felt mildly uncomfortable. Notice what you were experiencing.

Focus on the physical sensation until it begins to shift. Notice the rhythms of expansion and contraction."

(P. Levine, 2008)



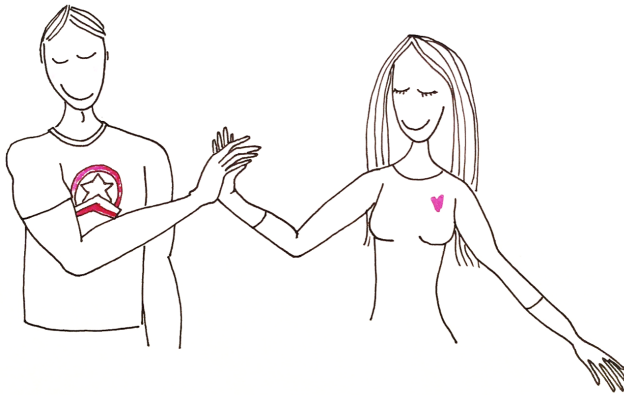
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Step 7



Fight Response:

Natural Aggression vs. Violence

"Aggression is an innate natural resource that protects us when we are threatened. It also (helps) us to action and propels us towards our desires and goals in life.

When people have been traumatized, THEY (we) ARE STUCK IN PARALYSIS. Because of this, they lack the healthy aggression that they need to carry out their lives effectively.

Often traumatized people either feel nothing or they feel rage. What is needed is a way to help establish feelings of healthy aggression and empowerment. A positive channel for emotions.

PRACTICE: ask a trusted friend to work with you.

Place the palm of one hand comfortably against the palm of your partner's hand. If you are the pusher, begin to feel strength and force arising in you.

Start slowly exerting pressure on the pushee. The pushee's job is simply to be there and to provide resistance necessary (...) mirroring the pusher's strength."

(P. Levine, 2008)



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Step 8



Natural Escape Versus Anxiety

"When we have been traumatized, it's often because we found ourselves in a situation from which we could not escape. This leads to a feeling of being stuck and frightened.

This sense of immobility can lead to a pervasive dread of the future.

On the other hand if you feel confident that YOU CAN ESCAPE when threatened, that feeling of dread can dissolve.

PRACTICE: sit in a comfortable chair with a sturdy foam pillow under your feet, and ground yourself.

Close your eyes and imagine that A FIERCE BABOON is chasing you. Feel the strength in your legs as you make RUNNING MOVEMENTS on the pillow.

Run until you reach a safe place (...). You have escaped. The baboon (...) winds away.

Sit on the warm rock and allow yourself to settle. Notice your breathing and heartbeat. If you begin to shake and tremble, simply allow it to happen.

Now imagine other situations. Repeat. Notice. Rest."

(P. Levine, 2008)



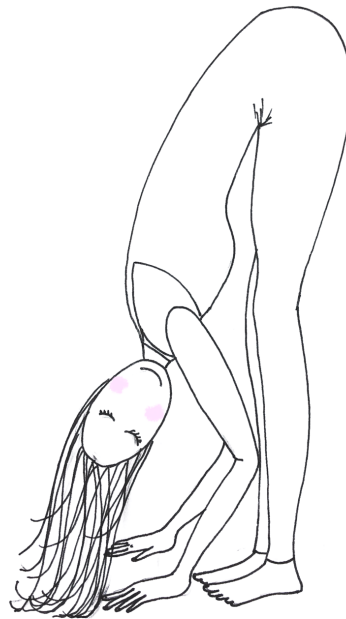
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Step 9



Strength and Resiliency versus Collapse and Defeat

"The feeling of collapse that traumatized people often experience in the face of life situations can be seen as incomplete response to threat.

By learning to complete this collapse response by going INTO and OUT of it you can begin to regain a sense of strength and resiliency in any challenging situation.

PRACTICE: allow your body to fall further into the collapse staying mindful all the time. Then when it feels that you have reached an end point, you are going to straighten back up."

(P. Levine, 2008)



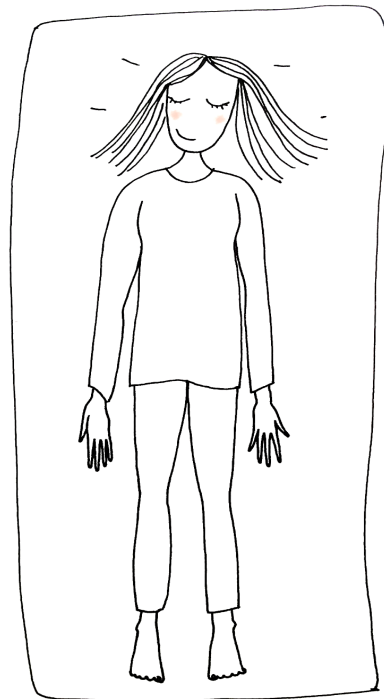
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Step 10



Uncoupling Fear From The Immobility Response

"When animals go into immobility because of threat, their response is time-limited. When they come out of immobility, the locked energy is available for either flight or counter-attack. As humans we often find that the energy locked in the immobility response is so strong that we are frightened by it. The key to completing this uncompleted immobility response lies in uncoupling our fear from the response itself. This allows the stuck energy to be freed up for use wherever it is needed within the body.

PRACTICE: when you feel immobile, notice the physical sensation without getting caught in the mind. Feel it as a physical sensation of immobility and stand still until it lessens and you start feeling the energy liberating."

(P. Levine, 2008).



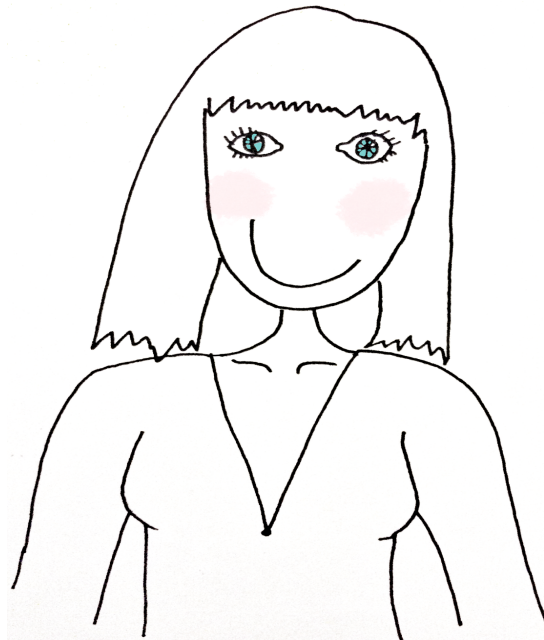
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Step 11



Completion: Returning to Equilibrium

"Now that we have discharged stuck energy using the previous group of exercises, we are able to return to equilibrium. (...).

As you feel equilibrium begin to return, I (Peter Levine) suggest you use this affirmation: simply say to yourself 2 or 3 times "home, home at last".

PRACTICE. Moving from internal to external environment. When we are in trauma, we are not able to be in the present- to see, hear, smell, and perceive our immediate environment fully.

As we come back into the outer world and YOUR EYES OPEN, Just Let Your Eyes do what they want to do, to look around, to orient. That's the basic nervous system organization that allows for interest, curiosity and exploration. It's also the antidote for the trauma response."

(P. Levine, 2008)



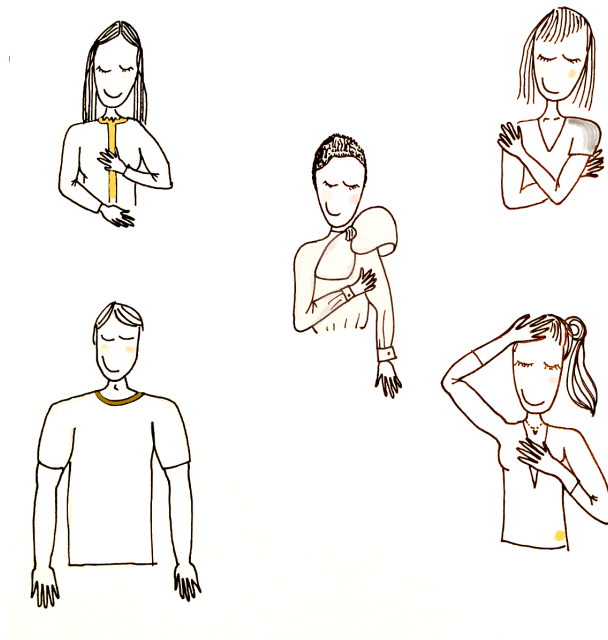
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Step 12



Settling and Integrating

"To self-regulate when hyper-activated or feeling dissociated from self or others" As (we) come out of trauma, (we) will need tools to help draw into a new sense of presence and calm.

The following exercises can be very helpful in helping to settle into your body and into the present moment. #practice: follow the sequence (...) staying in each pose for as long as it's comfortable for you to do so.

After each pose, allow time for settling. You can also use the postures (...) so that you can drift into a deeper sleep at night..."

(P. Levine, 2008).



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Bonus



The Self-Holding Pose

To self-regulate when hyper-activated or feeling dissociated from self or others.

(P. Levine, 2008)

