

Best Somatic Psychotherapy Tools to Help Heal Trauma



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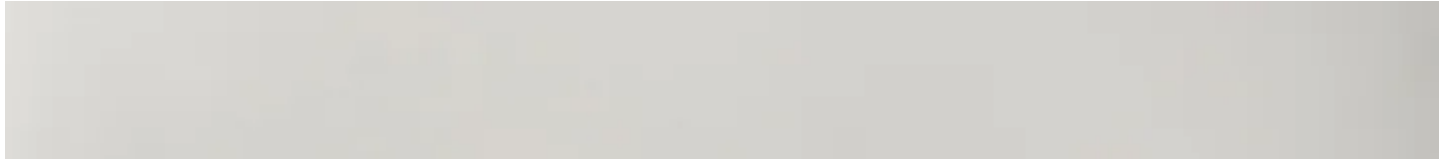
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Somatic psychology studies the link between physical matter and energy, the association of bodily structures and mental processes. It embraces therapeutic and holistic approaches to the body to recover the mind-body connection. Somatic psychology takes its roots from ancient mind-body practices and the Western science of psychology, biology and neuroscience. This therapy incorporates movements and various touching methods to activate the autonomic nervous system. While focusing on the body, the therapist and the client identify the places in the body where trauma is stored and find safe ways to release it.

Soma comes from the Greek word meaning “the living body”. According to somatic psychotherapists external forces promote splitting of the mind-body unity and this fragmentation harms the person’s health on a mental,

physiological, and relational level. Somatic psychotherapy adds the ‘body’ dimension to conventional verbal psychotherapy. In the beginning, somatic therapy mostly focused on trauma survivors with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) symptoms, but in the last couple of years helping clients find release through all kinds of stress related issues has been happening.



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When working with trauma, a session typically begins with facilitating a positive state and emphasising resourcing. After this initial state, the therapist carefully touches upon difficult events and feelings, making sure

that the pace is slow. Therapists try to elicit physical signs of bodily release such as “small shivers, deep breaths, hot or cold flashes”. After these signs are shown, the stage of reorientation of the body into the present time starts. The body digests traumatic elements so that the natural rhythm and flow can return. Body-mind can be influenced and mediated by respectful, mindful, and safe interpersonal interactions.

Let's go through some of the most important intervention tools somatic psychotherapy uses to achieve these goals:

Resourcing: This is the way clients strengthen the feelings of stability and safety in the world by identifying already established resources and coming up with new ones to promote feelings of peace and ease. Trauma survivors often lose the feeling of safety in their own skin and environment. Resourcing provides a tool to reintroduce self-soothing. Resources work as a safe haven in trauma work, a place where the person can return to reestablish states of calmness. These resources can be positive memories, loved ones, or anything the person values. The repertoire of various resources is expanded in somatic experiences. Resourcing is not only about visual imagery but it also entails a “visual kinesthetic sensory experience” where you establish feelings of safety in your body. This teaches the nervous system that after the experience of stress, calmness can follow.

Titration: Titration is also called slowing or portioning. It is the “process of experiencing small amounts of distress with the goal of relieving pain”. Trauma is experienced “too fast, too much, too soon” for the body to

handle. We lose our ability to process, integrate and digest when we experience an overload. Titration reverses that, as the aim is slowing down. The person is only exposed to a small load of trauma so that the body can tolerate it. If the trauma work goes too fast a client can get overwhelmed with the memories of trauma. To heal, the exposure needs to be gradual and slow-paced. You decide the pace and the amount of work you will deal with in titration. This gives you empowerment and enough space for healing to occur. While revisiting past experiences and traumas, the therapist tracks the bodily responses and how they are experienced.



Pendulation: “Pendulation is shifting your focus between stressful content and something completely non-stress related”. Pendulation is sometimes referred to as looping, as we loop between conflict-free states and trauma states. For a healthy person, the nervous system is in a continuous “state of expansion and contraction” which is called pendulation. The fluidity of the transition between alertness and calmness can be disrupted in trauma survivors, meaning they can get stuck in the state of action. Pendulation techniques emphasise consciously experiencing resourced states to support the nervous system’s loop of transition. After that, the bodily system can start moving between more and less-resourced phases. Somatherapy aims to help clients regain that flexibility. One way of achieving this is through circling between resources and small titrations. This loop starts the natural cycle of self-regulation in the nervous system.

Regaining pendulation also means regaining homeostasis which is the state where the body is in balance and has complete regulation. One simple technique of pendulation is paying attention to how your body feels. Identify where you feel the stress and try to actively experience this feeling. Scan your body again and this time find a place where you feel either natural or calm. After you find this place take a moment to experience this sensation as well. Keep this cycle going where you experience two different areas and the feelings these areas facilitate.

Overall, somatic therapy aims to guide clients to become aware of their bodies and adopt methods to release their tension. This therapy uses the fundamental functions of the nervous system. The most important tools

somatherapy uses are resourcing, pendulation and titration. Some of the methods used in these tools are breathing exercises, sensation awareness, physical exercise, massage, and grounding exercises. Somatherapy can be used to heal trauma and regain the balance of the body.

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