

Somatic healing exercises soothe your nervous system during a period of arousal associated with a trauma. If you are dedicated in using these practices, your nervous system will eventually rebalance.

BREAKING EXPERIENCE INTO PARTS

For traumatic experiences that are highly intense, it can be too difficult to process through the experience as a whole. If this is that case, make a list of the different aspects of the experience and indicate your response to each of these aspects (i.e. panic, terror, anger, feeling paralyzed). Your responses may be similar or different, depending on the aspect. When you use the following exercises, consider only one aspect of the traumatic experience if considering the whole is too overwhelming.

SLOWING DOWN THE MOTION

Choose one of the aspects of your trauma and consider your response to it. With your eyes closed, imagine where your response exists in your body. It might be in one place or multiple. Imagine its movement (i.e. back and forth, a wave, pulsing). Extend your arm beside you and move your arm in a way that matches the movement of your response (i.e. panic). Gradually slow your arm down while also visualizing the your “response” slowing down. Notice any shifts in your body or thinking.

BILATERAL BODY MOVEMENTS

Bilateral movement mean moving both sides of your body. When practiced, they soothe your nervous system. Try any of the following movements to see which ones leave your feeling the calmest. Jump rope, jumping jacks, tap your right shoulder with your left hand and then tap your left shoulder with your right hand, hop from one foot to the other, throw a ball against the wall and catch it with both hands, swim, bike, go up and down stairs, rock climb, move your arms or legs in figure eights, one at a time.

TRANSFORMING A VISUAL SYMBOL

Choose one of the aspects of your trauma and consider your response to it. With your eyes closed, imagine where your response exists in your body. It might be in one place or multiple. Imagine the response has a particular form or shape. Imagine it has a particular color(s). You can imagine this form in the specific area(s) of your body or not. Ask yourself, “What does this form need to transform into to be healed and balanced?” Breathe deeply, and with each breath, imagine the form transforming into the healed version of itself. Notice any shifts in your body or thinking.

PENDULUM TECHNIQUE

Consider three things that bring calmness to your mind and body. This might be a place, a person, a pet, something spiritual, a safety affirmation, or a self-compassion affirmation. With your eyes closed, consider one of the aspects of your trauma and your response. Notice what physical sensations this brings up in your body and what visual images it brings up in your mind. Then move your attention to the first calming item. Visualize yourself in this place or with this person. Feel the emotions you feel when you think of this place or say the affirmation. Notice what physical sensations you feel. Allow your breath to support feelings of calmness and stability. Then move your attention back to the aspect of your trauma and your response. And repeat from the top until you have pendulumed back and forth between all three of your calming items.