Grounding Techniques for Dysregulated Clients

NAADAC Webinar
March 23, 2022
Intention of this class

❖ To educate clinicians about how trauma affects the nervous system

❖ To educate clinicians about how substance use disorder and process addictions are trauma responses

❖ To educate clinicians about the importance of warm up

❖ To share tools from a variety of somatic modalities to help clinicians help their clients be better regulated, so they are less at risk for self-harm and/or relapse
Intention of this class

Please note: I am a Psychodramatist, a Psychodramatic Bodywork trainer and a Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, but I am not a Somatic Experiencing trainer.

For training in SE, Contact Somatic Experiencing Training Institute (SETI) www.traumahealing.org for information on trainings and other resources.
Warm up

- Clients are not “Acting Out” or “Being Resistant”

- Lower anxiety/Raise spontaneity
  - A new response to an old situation
  - An adequate response to a new situation

- Warm them up to change
Trauma is anything that is...

- Too much
- Too fast
- Too soon

Resmaa Menakem
THREAT RESPONSE

• 1st line of defense is social engagement (connecting with others; using them to assess threat)

• If we assess that it’s not safe, we turn to fight or flight

• If we assess that fight or flight won’t keep us safe, we turn to freeze in order to survive
Orienting

- Exploratory orienting vs. defensive orienting

- VERY slowly turn head from one side to another, looking around and taking in surroundings.

- Can help to have specific goal
  Find 3 things that are blue, for example

- Orient to pleasure
Incomplete Self Protective Response

Shows up as
- Dissociation
- Avoidance
- Disconnection
- Substance Use Disorders
- Process Addictions
- Mental Illness
- Dysregulation
- Defensive Accommodations
Threat response cycle

- Completion is key
- Movement
- Creativity
- Breath
- Crying
Deb Dana, Polyvagal Theory in Therapy

Parasympathetic Nervous System
The “Brakes”

Sympathetic Nervous System
The “Gas”

Ventral vagal
- Feeling safe & connected with other people
- Calm, present & grounded

Sympathetic
- Fight or flight
- Overthinking & anxiety
- Stress, fear & anger

Dorsal vagal
- Numb & disconnected
- Shutdown & frozen
- Exhaustion & fatigue

Social Engagement
Sympathetic Nervous System engages so we can mobilize to fight or flight or just move our bodies forward

Parasympathetic Nervous System engages to help us calm down, settle, rest and digest and socially engage

Adapted from *Nurturing Resilience* by Kain and Terrell

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We turn to “defensive accommodations, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, shopping, etc” to help settle us, albeit artificially.

Goal is to **Build Capacity** so clients can tolerate discomfort, stay in recovery, and thrive

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**Sympathetic Nervous System** engages so we can mobilize to fight or flight or just move our bodies forward

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Adapted from *Nurturing Resilience* by Kain and Terrell
Freeze response

*Dissociation*

- Physiological - disconnected from body
- Psychological - disconnected from mind
Coming out of freeze

- Have to go through fight and flight
- Overwhelmed by feelings
- Limited capacity to tolerate discomfort
- High risk for relapse and/or self-harm
- Important to pendulate and titrate
Pendulation vs Titration

- Pendulation - going back and forth between the trauma vortex and countervortex (back and forth into and out of the trauma experience)

- Titration - stepping into the trauma a little bit at a time (without going into freeze) to build capacity, aka, expand the window of tolerance
Pendulating

Those in early recovery typically have high levels of anxiety in the body.

Sense into where anxiety is held in the body. Be with that as long as tolerable (without becoming highly dysregulated or overriding). Now, find somewhere in the body that is not anxious.

Pendulate back and forth and back and forth until anxious energy moves and/or diminishes, tracking energy as it leaves and/or dissipates.
Voo-ing For Calm

- Somatic Experiencing tool created by Dr. Peter Levine that helps downregulate nervous system

- Deep breath in; upon exhale, make Voo sound (low register, like a foghorn, and make it all the way through the breath).

- Go slowly and watch for dysregulation

- Imaging before doing
Coregulation

- Take a moment and feel someone else. Attune (align) your energy to theirs.

- Client gets to connect and attune at his/her/their level. Not overwhelmed.

- Client can “borrow” your energy to help calm their nervous system (co-regulation)
Discharging tension

- Soft tongue - gently drop jaw and soften tongue
- Loosens jaw, relieves tension, social engagement if done together
- Can help client let go of anger
Releasing Exercises

- Releasing or discharging pent up energy in the nervous system.

- Find an exit point in the body where anxiety can leave and use magnet or Roomba to collect and then clear out that energy, send into the earth.

- If too dysregulated, find an object outside self where anxiety can land and do collective and clearing and send there.
1. Feeling feet flat on ground
   - Fear is stored in kidneys and bladder
   - **Kidney 1 (one) Point** on bottom of feet helps with grounding
2. Right hand under left arm; left hand hugging right arm - Sense into containment
3. One hand on heart and one hand on bladder (located above pubic bone)
4. One hand on forehead and one hand on back of the neck
Ending the session

- Ensuring the client leaves in a regulated state

- Use of scarves, props, chairs, art, locations to leave what needs to be left in the session, to bookmark for next time

- Allows them to let go and leave energy behind

- Strengths, tools, naming support to be utilized
RITUALS

- Write down at least 2 things you did well today
- Gratitude list
- Meditation
- Vooing
- Attune with another person or animal
Resources


- Brauer, K. (March 6, 2018). Reduce stress - 2 minute Voo technique. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DeB_CGtOJM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DeB_CGtOJM)


- Levine, P.A. (June 2, 2017). Treating trauma: 2 ways to help clients feel safe. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7zAsealvFA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7zAsealvFA)