

Kick Trauma Out of Your Body

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Because of cellular memory, trauma settles not only into a person's psyche but also into their body. The body remembers traumatic experiences, but we can also use the body to get the trauma out! Consider these five ways:

1. Give traumatic material a language.

We bring trauma out of the abstract regions of our psyche and into centrality by giving it a language: talking and writing. Journal about your experience, in increasing amounts of time. Start with five minutes and then work up to longer times. By exposing ourselves to our own trauma, we can "talk it to death". Identify your feelings (see chart), because naming emotions gives a sense of control when feeling overwhelmed. Acknowledge and express your feelings in words, without judgement or over-connection, and then move on to a more relaxing activity. The more you process your trauma, the more your nervous system will habituate to the anxiety.

2. Do deep breathing.

The body needs to breathe and move to discharge trauma and bring resolution to the survival responses of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. It is theorized that you cannot experience symptoms of traumatic stress in a relaxed body. One of the fastest ways to calm the nervous system is by taking slow deep breaths from the belly. Commit five minutes a day to do diaphragmatic breathing. During this time you can enjoy silence, nature, or peaceful music. Try the smartphone app, Breathe2Relax, or the "Teaching Belly Breathing" YouTube video with Sesame Street's Elmo for children. Have a longer exhale than inhale. It's during the exhale that we get the relaxation response. If a five second inhale is comfortable, try a six to seven second exhale.

3. Look for a common theme in your triggers.

Allow your trauma triggers to serve as an opportunity or an indicator of what specific areas need attention. When triggered, do you routinely feel rejection, fear, lack of control, or shame? We can view our triggers with thankfulness, informing us of trauma messages that need to be evaluated and worked through. Take this awareness to your therapist as you process trauma and look for underlying sources of negative thoughts and feelings.

4. Exercise.

When animals experience trauma, they move the body, roar, shake, etc. to discharge the trauma. Humans can learn from animal kingdom here! Consider walking, running, dancing, yoga, kickboxing, lifting weights, tai chi, or qi gong. If energy is low, there are still options to move like chair yoga, stretching, or gentle flexion of muscles to remind yourself you still have strength.

5. Utilize spiritual interventions.

Implement faith-based activities consistent with your faith like prayer, scripture, meditation, spending time in nature, or taking communion. Visualize a strong and trusted spiritual figure as a healing ally who can love and strengthen you.

Torn

Guilty

Angry

Devastated

WHY???

used

Abandoned

Vulnerable

LOST

SCARED

Sad

Betrayed

OVERWHELMED

REGRET

REJECTED

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