

THIS IS BRIEF REVIEW OF  
UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA  
WHICH MAY VALIDATE  
WHAT YOU MAY BE  
EXPERIENCING

What can happen when someone has gone through an experience that was overwhelming, upsetting, or frightening?

- This experience is called trauma. A traumatic experience is known as a "whole-body experience".

When experiencing trauma in the moments it occurs, an individual's body goes into flight, fight, or freeze in order to survive what is happening to them. Some of the experience might be recalled, pop into a person's head, or some might not be remembered at all. Experiencing trauma can cause hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, and/or flashbacks.

- A person's body is responding to survive by going into flight, fight, or freeze during the traumatic event.

Traumatic experiences can occur one time or many times. It is said that living through a traumatic experience is a "whole-body experience" meaning that an individual experiences the trauma on the inside of their body and on the outside. Feelings of upset can occur after the assault is over such as nightmares, trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, feeling numb, and/or trouble concentrating to name a few. There are many others that survivors have described and research has shown too frequently occur.

- A person's senses are heightened, adrenaline surges, and the stress hormone, cortisol, floods the body in order to prepare for surviving.

In the moments of the traumatic experience an individual's heart rate increases, blood pressure rises, and the five senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste are acute. This information is important to understand because sometimes there are things that happen later, which may "trigger" or cue a person to feel overwhelmed and upset again. When there is a trigger, a person can go into flight, fight, or freeze. The physical sensations happen inside again. This is where we can learn to calm them down when we are aware and notice the cues of what is happening inside.

- Understanding the types of trauma reactions is important because sometimes there are things that happened which can "trigger" or cue a person to feel overwhelmed or upset again.

It is important to share the link between the mind-body connection so you may learn to calm down and manage through upsetting moments by using your "on purpose breathing" or intentional breath work. There are other centering activities that work with your body and the vagus nerve to bring regulation back to your parasympathetic nervous system. Intentional breathing, movement, and other activities can lower your heart rate, and help you to calm down inside.

# BRIEF INFO ABOUT EXPERIENCING TRAUMAS

## Some Tips for Learning Ways to Find Relief

### People who have experienced trauma scan for what can happen next

"An individual who experiences trauma, brain, is tuned too high alert, sensitive to the tiniest of triggers." \*

### Learn more about the vagus nerve and how you can calm your body down

"Breathing deeply, immediately relaxes the body because it stimulates the vagus nerve, which runs from the neck to the abdomen and is in charge of turning off the 'fight or flight reflex.'" \*\*\*

### "The vagus nerve is what relaxes us."

"The vagus nerve is basically listening to the way we breathe and it sends the brain and the heart whatever message our breath indicates.

Breathing slowly, for instance, reduces the oxygen demands of the heart muscle (the myocardium), and our heart rate drops." Relaxing us... \*\*

### Yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi

"Each of these awareness-based movement practices has been found to have positive effects on anxiety and depression levels when carried out on a regular basis.

In fact, any form of mild exercise will stimulate the vagus nerve leading to many general and physical benefits." \*\*\*\*

### Expressing your voice

"Letting your voice be heard, whether through singing, chanting, humming, or laughing will increase your heart rate variability and kickstart the vagus nerve so that it can send relaxing waves through your entire nervous system." \*\*\*\*

### References

- \*Peter Levine, Trauma Through A Child's Eyes (pg 361)
- \*\*Lucy Norcliffe-Kaufmann, Associate Professor of Neurology at NYU-Langone
- \*\*\*Katie Brindle Yang Sheng: The Art of Chinese Self-Healing
- \*\*\*\*Unlock The Power Of The Vagus Nerve To Reduce Chronic Stress 02/26/2018



### **Did you know that we breathe without even thinking about it?**

Over and over again, our brain tells our body to keep breathing. We use our lungs, nose, and mouth to bring oxygen into our bodies and out of our bodies.

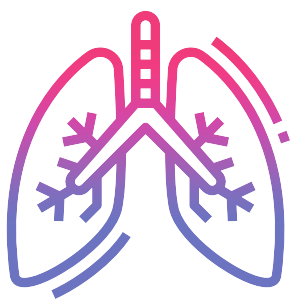
Sometimes when we are active, we might breathe faster so we can keep up, while other times when we are tired, we might yawn so we can wake up. Then there are times when we might shallow breathe because we might feel scared, worried, or upset. Shallow breathing means that we aren't taking deeper breaths in and out.



### **Did you know you could use your breathing to help you?**

It's true! You can use your breath, on purpose, like magic to help you when big feelings come up or if something happens that causes you to feel upset, worried, excited, or even sad. "On purpose breathing" helps to calm you on the inside by slowing you down.

### **What does "on purpose breathing" look like?**



"On purpose breathing" means you tell yourself to think about breathing in and out. Telling yourself to do this makes your breath help your body to feel calmer when big feelings come up or if something happens.

It works because you are paying attention to breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, repeating this 4 or 5 times in a row.

The next few pages give you some helpful ways to remember "on purpose breathing" like hand tracing breathing.



## **Tracing Hand Breathing**

**Trace your fingers, breathing in as you go up  
and breathing out as you  
go down. Go around your hand 3 to 5 times.**

# CALMING DOWN

USE THESE CALMING ACTIVITIES

## "On Purpose Breathing"

Breathe in through my nose to the count of 4  
Hold my breath for 2 seconds  
Exhale out my nose to the count of 5 or 6

Repeat over and over and over

## Grounding Myself with Mr Feet

Stand firmly with both feet on the ground  
Notice gravity and that it holds me safely  
Straighten my back  
Relax my shoulders  
Breathe in and breathe out  
Hum or sing a comforting song to myself  
Recall this feeling of feeling safer

## Wear Something That Anchors Me

Select or make a bracelet, ring, or wear a color that makes me feel safer. Touch the object if I begin to feel upset inside my body, bringing my attention back to my "on purpose breathing" in and out.

## "I am Okay"

Using each of my hands - touch my thumb to my pinky finger, then my thumb to my index, then my thumb to my middle finger, then my thumb to my ring finger. As I am doing this bi-lateral motion I am saying to myself, "I am OKAY", repeating this action 3- 5 times.

**When we feel stressed or nervous we might shallow breathe, which means our breaths are quick, short, and faster. This type of breathing can make our bodies feel more upset. It happens to all of us. Begin recognizing if you are shallow breathing.**

What can help is to use your voice, by signing or humming or saying to yourself, "I am breathing in and out and I am calming myself down".

Or try using the "I am Okay" mantra or use words that work for you.

