

Welcome to STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 1: Introduction

What is STAIR?

- Skills Training in Affect and Interpersonal Regulation
- Program focus is learning skills to manage emotions and improve relationships

Goals of this group:

- Increase awareness of emotions
- Build coping skills to handle difficult emotions and distress
- Start to make decisions based on relationship/personal goals rather than feeling states
- Understand relationship patterns and create healthy alternatives to unhelpful patterns
- Review interpersonal skills to improve our relationships

Focus of today's session:

- Group rules/norms
- STAIR goals and format
- Trauma and PTSD
- Focused breathing skill

Suggested between session skill practice for this week:

- Practice Focused Breathing twice per day

Treatment Overview: What Is STAIR Therapy?

Skills Training in Affective and Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR), was originally designed for adults with a history of childhood abuse who suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and experience difficulties with emotion management and interpersonal relationships. Over time, it was broadened to apply to people with a range of traumatic experiences and symptoms.

Traumatic experiences overwhelm the emotional system, creating both emotional chaos and numbing, undermining our ability to think and act effectively, and disturbing our sense of self and our relationships. Research has shown that children growing up with repeated exposure to trauma often have difficulties in managing emotions and relationships as adults.

The coping and interpersonal skills developed in childhood might have been adaptive and necessary to survival at the time, but may no longer be adaptive in adult life. The skills training and practice introduced in this program are designed to help you leave behind old patterns and develop new interpersonal behaviors and emotion management skills more consistent with your current life goals.

OVERVIEW

This group is presented in eight weekly sessions. There will be time for discussion in addition to the presentation of materials. The topics are as follows:

Week 1: Introduction to Treatment

Week 2: Emotional Awareness

Week 3: Emotion Regulation

Week 4: Emotionally Engaged Living (Distress Tolerance)

Week 5: Recognizing Relationship Patterns

Week 6 & 7: Changing Relationship Patterns

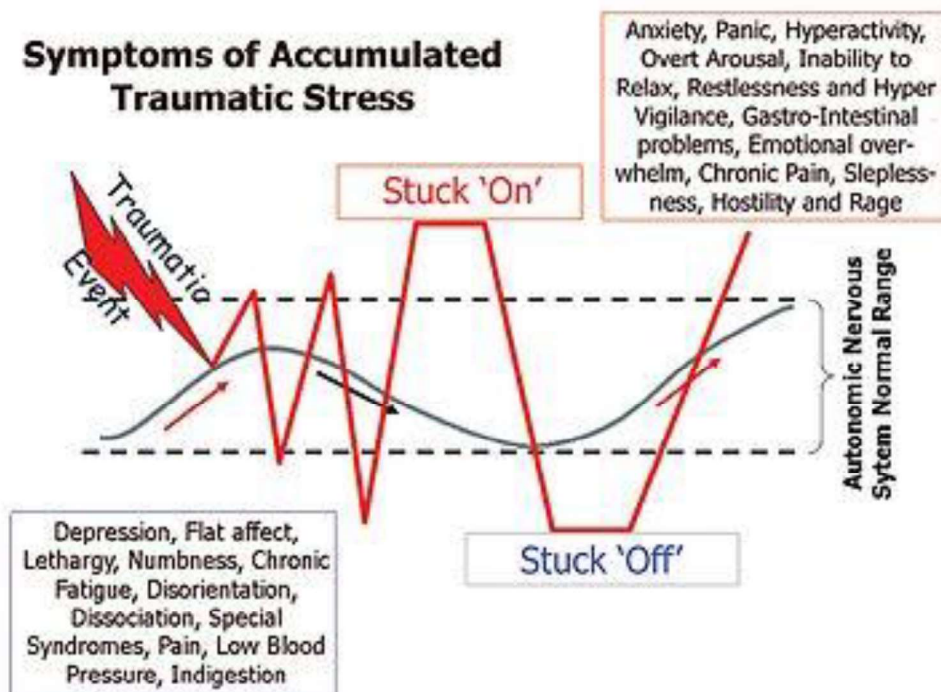
Week 8: Self Compassion and Group Review

There may be options for participating in additional trauma treatment groups following this series. For those who might be interested, please discuss current group offerings with your group or individual provider.

What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a syndrome that can develop after a person has been exposed to a traumatic event. A trauma is any situation that a person may perceive as horrifying or life-threatening. Examples of trauma include events as varied as combat, childhood abuse, rape, a terrorist attack, being in a car crash, or witnessing a murder. Sometimes PTSD develops soon after the trauma; sometimes it begins even years later. There are four groups of symptoms that comprise PTSD:

- Intrusion or reexperiencing which includes flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive memories, physical/emotional distress when reminded of the traumatic event(s)
- Avoidance of places, people, emotions, thoughts related to the event(s)
- Negative changes to cognitions including loss of memory of the events, self-blame, self-criticism, difficulty imagining the future, being unable to enjoy oneself or activities, disconnection from others
- Hyperarousal including hypervigilance, heightened startle response, irritability, impulsivity, difficulties with concentration and sleep



Instructions for Focused Breathing

RATIONALE

One way of dealing with distressing feelings involves decreasing your physiological arousal through a skill we call Focused Breathing. The aim is to slow down your breathing to decrease anxiety, breathlessness, and disorientation. In addition, the exercise is similar to meditation, in that it helps you reduce disorganized thinking or flooding by focusing on a single sensation and single task—namely, breathing.

Focused Breathing can be used to manage states of anxiety, irritation, or anger, and as a meditative tool for feeling calm and grounded. It is also an exercise that highlights the connection between the mind and the body. By clearing the mind of all thoughts and by directing your concentration toward regular breathing, you will experience the influence of mind over body. The relaxation of the body that comes from regular breathing will also reduce the flow of undirected, distracting thoughts, which completes the circle with the influence of body over mind.

Practicing Focused Breathing will help you experience the connectedness and integrity of the body and mind in a positive, healthy way. The ability to engage in Focused Breathing in a meditational fashion is a challenge and takes practice. So do not become discouraged. Practice regularly and with patience, and your skill will develop over time.

PROCEDURE FOR FOCUSED BREATHING

Getting Started

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Take a slow, deep breath, and pay attention to which hand moves. When you are breathing from your diaphragm, only the hand on the stomach should move up and down, with little movement coming from the chest. It may help to think of how babies sleep—how their stomachs quietly move up and down. Or you might imagine your stomach as a balloon, filling with air and expanding as you inhale, then letting out the air and shrinking as you exhale.

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Slow Down Your Rate of Breathing

Take in enough air to fill the space under the diaphragm, then let it out slowly. Sometimes breathing out through the nose is easier because your nostrils are smaller openings, which will help slow the rate of exhalation. Pause briefly after exhaling before inhaling again. Some people tend to hold their breath too long at first; the pause should be brief after exhaling. Imagery can be helpful in maintaining a slow and steady rhythm. For example, seeing your breath as a wave, following it as it ebbs and flows, can be a helpful image. Alternatively, imagine climbing up a slide (inhaling) and then sliding down (exhaling), and briefly pausing at the bottom before walking around and climbing up again.

Meditational Component

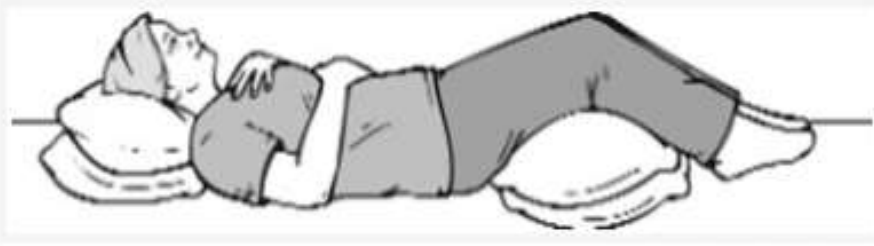
In order to help slow your thoughts and focus your attention on breathing, count your breaths as you inhale, and think “Relax,” “Calm,” or some similar thought as you exhale. Continue counting your breaths until you get to 10, and then start over at 1. It is perfectly natural for other thoughts to come into your mind. Try not to get angry or frustrated; just allow the thoughts to pass through your mind, and bring your attention back to counting as often as you need to. Some people find it helpful to concentrate mostly on the physical sensation of their breathing, others on the counting or “Relax” statement. Experiment with different methods, and do whatever works best for you.

Practice

Practice is essential to develop this skill, so that it becomes something you can use to decrease distress in stressful situations. It is best to practice Focused Breathing in a comfortable, quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Take a few seconds to relax, and then practice the breathing exercise for at least 5 minutes. Practicing at least twice a day is the goal. When you are beginning to learn this skill, it is best not to practice when you are already distressed. The idea is that if you practice the breathing when you are in a calm state, it will become a habit that you can then call upon more easily when you are distressed. As you become more skilled at it, you may begin practicing using it in mildly distressing situations, such as when you are feeling impatient while waiting in a line.

Diaphragmatic breathing technique

1. Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.



2. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.



3. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips (see "[Pursed Lip Breathing Technique](#)"). The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.



STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 2: Emotional Awareness

Focus of today's session:

- The impact of trauma on our emotional experience
- Describing the function of emotions and how we experience emotions
- Developing emotional awareness - identifying emotions, recognizing how emotions influence behaviors, sharing emotions
- Introduce the Feelings Monitoring Form

Suggested between session skill practice for this week:

- Complete Feelings Monitoring Form once per day
- Practice Focused Breathing twice per day

The Impact of Childhood Abuse and Neglect on Emotion Regulation

For many people, experiences of abuse and neglect in childhood have a powerful impact on emotional functioning in adulthood. Good parenting provides children with emotion regulation skills, which include the ability to identify feelings, understand their sources, and manage them for optimal functioning. Abuse and neglect elicit a range of powerful and confusing feelings. Often survivors of childhood abuse and neglect have been raised in a family context where caregivers offer poor soothing during times of distress and poor guidance in modulating feelings. Many survivors feel overwhelmed by their emotions, or, in contrast, feel numb and unable to experience many or all emotions.

TYPES OF EMOTION REGULATION DIFFICULTIES

Difficulties in emotion regulation vary by person and sometimes by situation. Some people have trouble labeling and identifying their feelings. They may feel either “bad” or “OK,” and have little sense of differences between their emotions (for example, anxiety vs. sadness). Other people lack an understanding of what triggers their feelings. It may seem that their emotions randomly come “out of the blue” and make no sense. Many people can learn to recognize a “triggering situation,” but will have more difficulty knowing what to do with the intense feelings that emerge. Such feelings may be experienced as overwhelming or even dangerous, and people often feel ill equipped to handle them.

THE ROLES OF FEELINGS

Learning how to modulate and attend to feelings is a critical skill, because feelings, once managed, serve important roles in effective living. One role of emotions is to serve as guides for action. For example, a feeling of fear can guide you to leave an unsafe situation and take steps to ensure safety. Anxiety can be adaptive, but when chronic and excessive, it floods the ability to differentiate feeling states. It causes people to overreact to

(continued)

The Impact of Childhood Abuse and Neglect on Emotion Regulation *(page 2 of 2)*

situations, or to underreact because they are trying so hard not to overreact.

Feelings also contribute to effectively communicating how you feel and what you need from others. Some people who have experienced trauma are chronically anxious, angry, or sad, or are so numbed that they cannot use this kind of information. By working on attending to your feelings and modulating them, you will be able to make better use of information from your feelings and to express them more effectively.

Lastly, feelings can be used to inform you about your preferences (likes and dislikes) and to help guide you in the selection of valued life goals. Awareness of feelings includes awareness of positive feelings and, in combination with emotion modulation skills, can enhance your experience of life, your creativity, and your appreciation of yourself.

FEELINGS MONITORING FORM

One way to begin learning how to identify feeling states and their triggers is to monitor your feelings in different situations. Using the Feelings Monitoring Form, you will practice labeling your feelings and identifying the situations and thoughts that trigger those feelings. With your therapist, you will review your completed copies of this form to increase your skills in identifying feelings and their triggers and to build your awareness of the patterns in your feelings. The completed copies of the form will also serve as important data for developing new coping strategies.

HANDOUT 11.2

Social Influences on Your Emotional Experiences

What are the messages you have received about emotions throughout your life?

	Growing Up (Examples: your family, teachers, friends)	Current Relationships (Examples: close friends, romantic partner)	Community/Society (Examples: military, culture, religious community)
Which emotions should you feel?			
How should you cope with emotions?			
How should you express your emotions?			

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HANDOUT 11.3

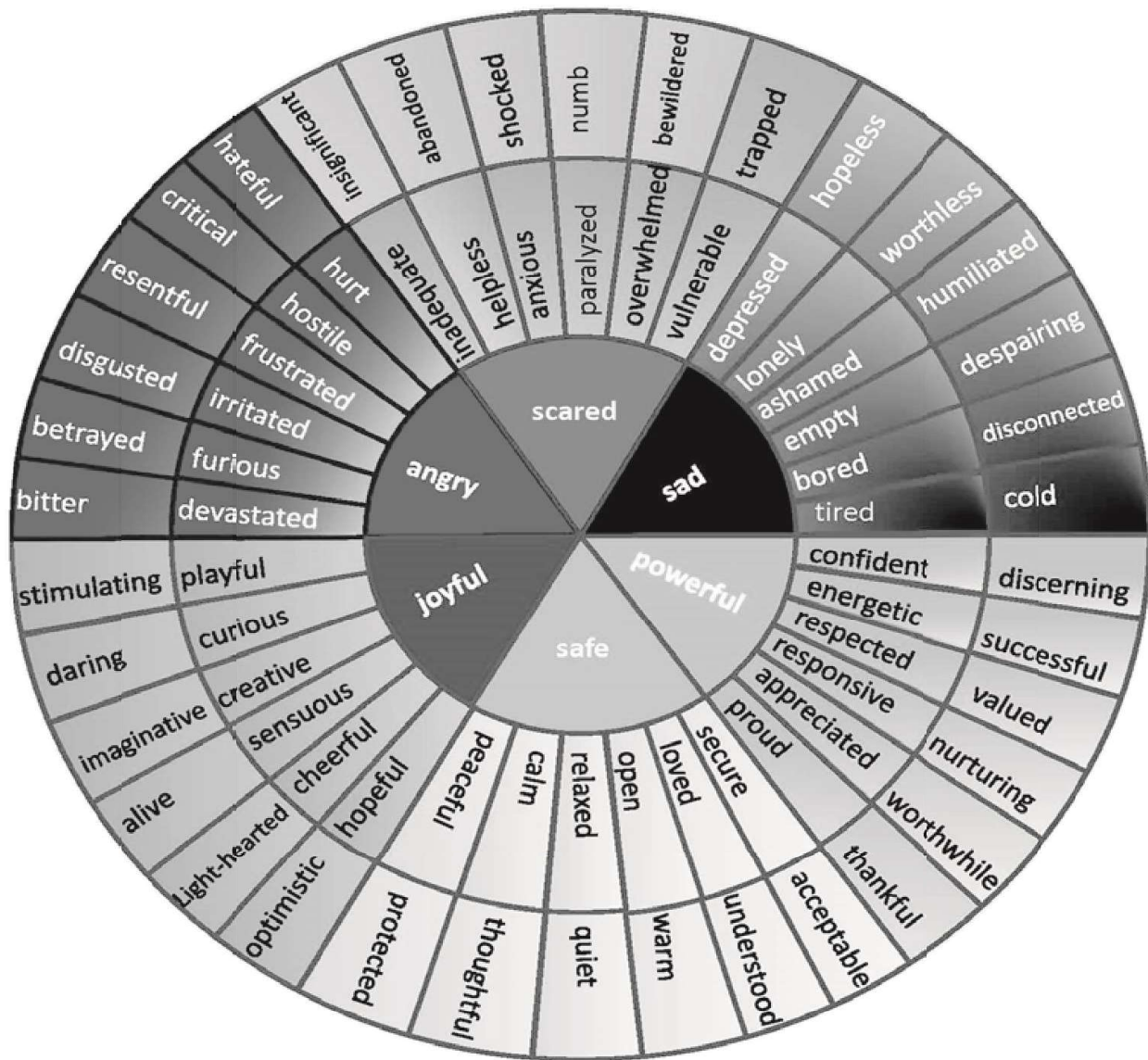
Negative and Positive Emotions as Messengers

Emotion	Purpose
Fear or anxiety	Keeps you safe.
Anger	Provides warning that action may be needed.
Sadness	Provides time to rest and reevaluate.
Guilt	Lets you review what has been done and make amends as appropriate.
Happiness	Reinforces certain actions and relationships; supports engagement in life.
Pride	Indicates a positive action or result; builds self- esteem/sense of worth.
Love	Helps maintain connection with others, even in times of conflict!

Feelings List

Affectionate	Glad	Relaxed
Afraid	Gloomy	Relieved
Amused	Grateful	Resentful
Angry	Great	Resigned
Annoyed	Guilt	Sad
Anxious	Happy	Safe
Apathetic	Hateful	Satisfied
Apprehensive	Helpless	Secure
Ashamed	Hopeless	Sexy
Bitter	Horried	Shy
Bored	Hostile	Silly
Calm	Impatient	Strong
Capable	Inadequate	Stubborn
Cheerful	Inhibited	Stuck
Comfortable	Irritated	Supportive
Competent	Isolated	Sympathetic
Concerned	Jealous	Tearful
Confident	Joyful	Tender
Confused	Lonely	Terrified
Contemptuous	Loved	Threatened
Controlled	Loving	Thrilled
Curious	Loyal	Touchy
Defeated	Manipulated	Trapped
Dejected	Manipulative	Troubled
Delighted	Melancholy	Unappreciated
Depressed	Miserable	Uncertain
Desirable	Misunderstood	Understood
Despairing	Muddled	Uneasy
Desperate	Needy	Unfulfilled
Determined	Nervous	Unimportant
Devastated	Numb	Unloved
Disappointed	Out of control	Upset
Discouraged	Outraged	Uptight
Disgusted	Overwhelmed	Used
Disillusioned	Panicky	Useless
Distrustful	Passionate	Victimized
Embarrassed	Peaceful	Violated
Enraged	Pessimistic	Vulnerable
Excited	Pleased	Withdrawn
Frantic	Powerful	Wonderful
Frightened	Prejudiced	Worn out
Frustrated	Pressured	Worried
Fulfilled	Proud	Worthwhile
Furious	Provoked	Wronged
Generous	Put down	Yearning

Feelings Wheel



Feelings Monitoring Form

Triggering Situation	Feeling	Intensity at Start (0–10)	Duration	Thoughts	Behavior	Intensity Afterward (0–10)	Effective?

Situation	Feelings	Thoughts	Behavior	Result
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BOX 11.3

Example: Petra's Completed Feelings Monitoring Form

Triggering Situation	Feeling	Intensity at Start (0-10)	Duration	Thoughts	Behavior	Intensity Afterward (0-10)	Effective?
Son didn't put his phone away at the table after I asked him to repeatedly.	Anger	10	Several hours	He doesn't respect me, and he thinks he can take advantage of me.	Eating a whole bag of candy	9	No
Same	Shame	10	Same	I'm a bad mother.	Same	10	No
Same	Sadness	7	Same	If he loved me, he would do what I ask, and would not want to upset me.	Same	7	No

Situation

Feelings

Thoughts

Behavior

Result

STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 3: Emotion Regulation

Focus of today's session:

- Introduce concept of the three channels of emotion
- Recognizing common coping styles related to trauma in each emotion channel
- Alternate options for coping related to each channel

Suggested between session skill practice for this week:

- Engage in one pleasant activity this week
- Choose one new coping strategy to try
- Continue to Practice Focused Breathing

Examples of Emotion Regulation Coping Skills for the Three Channels of Emotion

THREE CHANNELS OF EMOTION

To help us explore our feelings, we can think of our emotional experiences as expressed through three channels: body, thought, and behavior.

The “body channel” is what we feel physically in our bodies. For example, when we’re feeling anxious, we may notice that our breathing quickens, our heart rate increases, and we sweat or shake.

The “thought channel” includes what we say to ourselves, our beliefs, and the attributions we make. For example, when we’re feeling anxious, we may think to ourselves, “I’m such a loser,” or “I can’t trust anyone.” These thoughts contribute to and maintain distress.

Finally, the “behavior channel” consists of what we actually do in response to the distress. For example, when we’re feeling anxious, we may overeat, get into a fight with someone, or distract ourselves with another activity.

Of course, there are healthier ways to cope and experience emotion in each channel, and that’s what this treatment is all about!

EXAMPLES OF COPING SKILLS FOR EACH CHANNEL

Because these channels are interconnected, we can target interventions at any one channel. The bonus effect is that targeting one channel will have an impact on the other channels as well. People differ about which channel feels easiest to tackle first. Not all people feel relief from using each of these coping skills. By trying each one, you’ll find which skills work best for you!

In the body channel, Focused Breathing helps to reduce the bodily symptoms of distress. That’s why you have learned Focused Breathing first! Other relaxation techniques can also help in this way, so you don’t have to stop there.

Examples of Emotion Regulation Coping Skills for the Three Channels of Emotion (page 2 of 2)

In the thought channel, Thought Shifting can be effective. Examples of Thought Shifting include cleaning your home, calling a friend, planning a vacation, recalling pleasant past events, watching a funny movie, and counting backward by sevens. Positive Imagery can also intervene in the thought channel. This technique involves calling to mind a situation or setting (real or imagined) in which you feel calm and happy. To get the most benefit from Positive Imagery, you should make the image as clear as possible by imagining how the place looks, smells, feels, and so forth. Another thought channel skill is making Positive Self- Statements. When your thoughts are self-critical, it can be useful to weaken those negative thoughts by formulating positive responses. For example, in response to the thought “I’m a loser,” you may tell yourself, “I’m doing my best.”

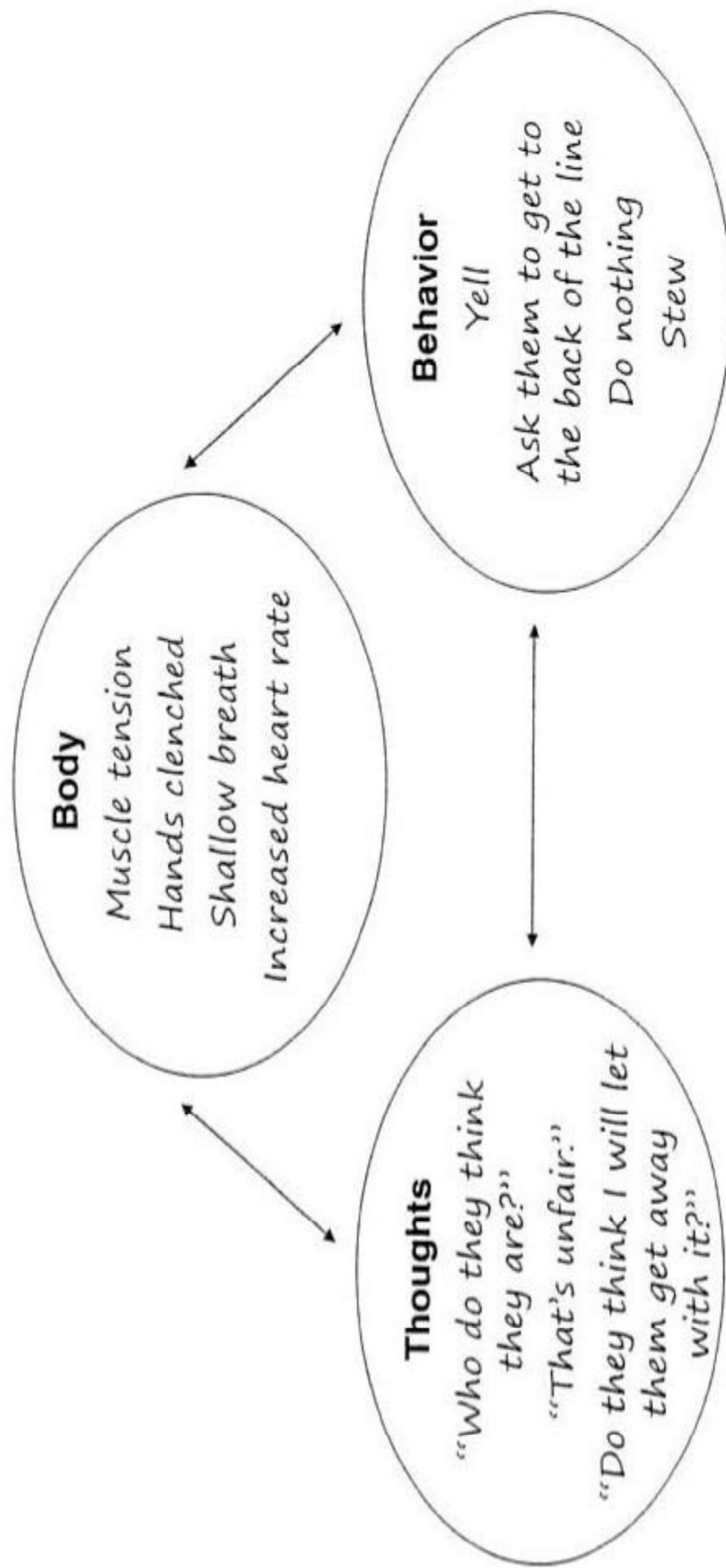
In the behavior channel, Take a Break/Time Out and Replacement Behaviors are helpful. Time Out involves leaving a difficult situation for a period of time to reduce your distress before responding. For example, if you’re having a fight with a friend, you can tell your friend that you will finish the discussion in an hour, and then go out for a walk to give yourself time to calm down. Engaging in Replacement Behaviors entails doing pleasurable or neutral activities to distract yourself from distress.

Note that these are all just examples of many options you can select in each of the channels. You and your therapist can select what you think works best for you and what might be appropriate for any given situation.

BOX 11.2

Introduction to the Three Channels of Emotion

EXAMPLE: A couple cuts in line at the supermarket ahead of you.



Three Channels Skills Graphic

Skills Practice

Check which of these skills you want to practice on your own. Remember, practicing helps you:

- Use the skill.
- Troubleshoot any problems with using it.
- Add it to your toolbox for when you need it most.

Body

- ☐ Focused Breathing
- ☐ Basic Self-Care
- ☐ Soothing the Senses
- ☐ Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- ☐ Other Mindfulness-Based Exercises for the Body

Thoughts

- ☐ Emotion Surfing
- ☐ Evidence Technique
- ☐ Thought Shifting
- ☐ Positive Imagery
- ☐ Reminders/Reframes
- ☐ Positive Self-Statements

Behavior

- ☐ Take a Break/Time Out or Slow Down
- ☐ Replacement Behaviors
- ☐ Opposite Action
- ☐ Ask for Help/Seek Support
- ☐ Plan Pleasurable Activities

Healthy and Unhealthy Ways to Cope on the Body Channel

Check any of the following if they seem familiar to your own experience. All of them are common among survivors of trauma.

UNHEALTHY EFFORTS TO COPE

- ☐ Poor sleep habits
- ☐ Poor diet (examples: fast food only, overeating, undereating)
- ☐ Use of harmful substances
- ☐ No or limited exercise
- ☐ Pushing your body too much or too much exercise
- ☐ Ignoring your body (examples: not treating illness, not visiting the doctor or dentist, ignoring physical discomfort like being too hot or too cold)
- ☐ Self-harm to cope with negative feelings or to help with numbness (examples: pinching yourself, cutting, burning, etc.)
- ☐ Poor hygiene (examples: not showering, not shaving, not combing your hair) Others?
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Check any of the following that you'd like to practice for coping better with your feelings.

HEALTHY EFFORTS TO COPE: BODY CHANNEL SKILLS

- ☐ Focused Breathing
- ☐ Basic Self-Care
- ☐ Soothing the Senses
- ☐ Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- ☐ Other mindfulness- based body exercises (sitting meditation, walking meditation, etc.) Others?
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- _____

Basics of Self-Care (A Body Channel Skill)

IMPROVING YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Your emotional health is like your physical health: It needs nurturing. When it does not get care, you begin to show more strain, and it has an impact on what triggers you, how you respond (thoughts/ feelings), and how you behave as a result.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO REFUEL YOUR EMOTIONAL TANK?

- **Meet your basic needs.**
 - *Stress and lack of attention to your body* (hunger, thirst, rest, illness, discomfort/pain, hygiene, and exercise) can influence your mood.
 - *Routinely refuel your body.* Treat your body well with a good diet, adequate sleep, regular exercise, and other healthy behaviors.
- **Exercise.** Take a walk, run, or stretch.
- **Improve your physical environment to make yourself feel comfortable.** When possible, notice your response to temperature, clothing, colors/textures, sounds/noise, and clutter. Small changes in your surroundings can increase serenity and positive emotions.
- **Create a Basic Self-Care health plan.** Make *one* commitment to do something to improve your physical health, starting today. Schedule and track your activities related to this commitment. You can use the Feelings Monitoring Form to track how specific Basic Self-Care practices you try out affect your mood, thoughts, and behavior.

Sleep _____

Eating _____

Exercise _____

Your environment _____

Soothing the Senses (A Body Channel Skill)

In addition to basic refueling and other aspects of self-care, you can learn skills for reducing stress. You have already learned the Focused Breathing exercise, which you should keep on using. The Soothing the Senses skill is about exploring ways that your bodily senses can help calm you. You can pick any or all of the sense experiences below to explore, but pick at least two. For your chosen senses, write down specific soothing examples that come to mind. It helps to choose ones that you can either imagine vividly or actually experience when you want to relax.

GET IN TOUCH WITH THE ENVIRONMENT, USING ALL FIVE SENSES

Sight

- What can you carry with you to **look** at that is soothing? _____

Sound

- What can you **listen** to that is soothing, or which person can you call? _____

Smell

- What can you **smell** that is soothing? _____

Taste

- What can you **taste** that is soothing? _____

Touch

- What can you **touch** that is soothing? _____

Try to target more than one sense at a time, to help you relax more quickly and effectively.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (A Body Channel Skill)

Brief description: You'll be alternately tensing and relaxing specific groups of muscles. After tension, a muscle will be more relaxed than it was before the tensing. Concentrate on the feel of the muscles—specifically, the contrast between tension and relaxation. In time, you will recognize tension in any specific muscle and will be able to reduce that tension. This exercise may be especially helpful for people with chronic pain and/or dissociation.

How often do you practice it? Do the entire sequence once a day if you can, until you feel you are able to control your muscle tensions.

Before the exercise: Sit in a comfortable chair or lie down on a bed. Get as comfortable as possible—no tight clothes, no shoes. Also, don't cross your legs.

Be careful: If you have problems with pulled muscles, broken bones, or any medical contraindication for physical activities, consult your doctor first. Don't do things that hurt. If you have pain in a specific area, skip that area.

Directions: Take a deep breath; let it out slowly. Again. Don't tense muscles other than the specific group at each step. Don't hold your breath, grit your teeth, or squint! Breathe slowly and evenly and think only about the tension–relaxation contrast.

- Each tensing is for 10 seconds; each relaxing is for 10 or 15 seconds. Count “one-one- thousand, two-one-thousand. . .” until you have a feel for the time span.
- Note that each step is really two steps: one cycle of tension–relaxation for each set of opposing muscles.
 1. Hands.
 2. Biceps and triceps.
 3. Shoulders.
 4. Neck
 5. Mouth.
 6. Tongue
 7. Eyes.
 8. Back.
 9. Butt.
 10. Thighs.
 11. Stomach.
 12. Calves and feet.
 13. Toes.

Typical Trauma- Related Thinking Patterns

Check which of these recurring thoughts are true for you:

- ☐ Assuming that you are not safe
- ☐ Assuming that no one is there for you or won't help you
- ☐ Avoiding thinking about your own negative emotions
- ☐ Refusing to trust others and/or yourself
- ☐ Tuning in the negative and tuning out the positive
- ☐ "Black-and-white" thinking (everything is either one way or the other; there are no in-betweens)
- ☐ "Doomsday" thinking ("What's the use?")
- ☐ Being tyrannized by the "shoulds" ("shoulda, woulda, coulda . . .")
- ☐ Avoiding thoughts and memories
- ☐ Thinking nonstop about problems; trying to prolong negative feelings
- ☐ "Blanking out" or dissociating

Thought Channel Skills for Emotion Regulation

- **Emotion Surfing**

- Imagine your emotions are waves in the ocean, rising and falling; notice how they change naturally over time.
- Be aware of your feelings, but just “ride on top” of them.

- **Evidence Technique**

- *What’s the proof?* List the evidence for and against the accuracy of a negative thought.
- *How strong is the proof?* Compare the evidence for and against the accuracy of the thought, to determine how realistic or valid it is.
- *What else could it be?* Consider alternatives; ask friends or people you trust for ideas.
- *Try it on for size.* Live with each alternative for a while, and consider the benefits.
- *Let go.* Be willing to let go of inaccurate or unhelpful automatic thoughts.

- **Thought Shifting**

- *Temporarily shift your attention*, rather than focusing on your worries, until your distress is down to a level where you can think clearly and act appropriately.
- *Shift to another thought*: Focus on something else in the room (e.g., colors, lights, smells), or replace your thought with another thought—a positive thought/statement, memory, or image.
- *Shift to a healthy activity*: To help change your focus, go for a walk, listen to music, watch a video, clean/organize, call a friend, or complete some easy tasks that remain unfinished.

- **Reminders/Reframes**

- These are predetermined positive interpretations. Especially good are ones about accepting your feelings, such as these:
 - “Feelings are just feelings, and thoughts are just thoughts; they are not facts, and they don’t have to control my behavior.”
 - “Feelings are short-term and will not be there forever.”
 - “Stuffing feelings inside only makes it harder.”

- **Positive Self-Statements**

- These are positive thoughts, mantras, or goals to repeat regularly and commit to practicing.

- **Positive Imagery**

- *Imagine/visualize a situation or setting* (real or imagined) where you feel calm and good.
- *Make that image as clear and vivid as possible* by imagining how the place looks, smells, sounds, etc.
- *Keep it handy.* Keep pictures or symbols to remind you of the image/memory (in your phone or wallet, or on a keychain) to help remind you of the positive setting when you’re distressed.

Emotion Surfing

1. Notice your emotion.
2. Notice how it feels in your body.
3. Notice your thoughts.
4. Notice your behavior.
5. Notice the intensity of the emotion.
6. Notice how the emotion crests, like a wave.
7. Notice how the emotion (body, thoughts, behavior) slowly changes and diminishes over time.

Examples of Positive Self- Statements (Affirmations)

- “I choose to LIVE!”
- “Excellence does not require perfection.”
- “I am letting my feelings drive my actions and beliefs. I don’t have to.”
- “If I try, I can succeed.”
- “I can ask for help.”
- “I am willing to forgive.”
- “I don’t have to act on this feeling. I can make choices about how I behave.”
- “The most common way people give up their power is thinking they don’t have any.”
- “This too shall pass.”
- “One day at a time.”
- “I write my own story.”

Your own personal mantra:

Typical Trauma- Related Behaviors

Check which of these behaviors are true for you:

- ☐ Avoiding necessary daily activities to avoid anxiety (example: not opening mail or paying bills because doing so feels like “too much”)
- ☐ Getting stuck in addictive behaviors: alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, pornography, shopping, video games
- ☐ Purposefully avoiding taking care of yourself: restricting food intake, stopping self-care
- ☐ Acting aggressively to distance others
- ☐ Avoiding family and friends
- ☐ Taking care of other people to avoid your own problems
- ☐ Avoiding having experiences that are positive or pleasurable
- ☐ Using controlling behavior to avoid feeling unsafe in situations and in relationships
- ☐ Treating people badly when you are struggling with negative feelings
- ☐ Other: _____

Behavior Channel Skills for Emotion Regulation

- **Take a Break/Time Out**
 - Take a Break/Time Out:
 - Remove yourself from the situation.
 - Identify and communicate (if possible) a time you will return.
- **Replacement Behaviors and Opposite Actions**
 - Replacement Behaviors:
 - Plan to do something as a replacement for a less helpful habit or addictive behavior.
 - Choose (ahead of time) options that are enjoyable.
 - Opposite Actions:
 - Don't give in automatically to your initial impulse when under stress.
 - Choose a healthy action to counter your emotional urge.
- **Ask for Help/Seek Support**
 - Call or text a friend/family member/sponsor/provider, and share your frustrations or ask for help.
 - Attend a meeting or group.
 - If in crisis, call a 24/7 hotline (identify your local number).
- **Plan Pleasurable Activities (see Handout 13.9, Pleasurable Activities List)**
 - Routinely engage in meaningful and pleasant activities to increase your enjoyment.
 - When distressed, use pleasant activities to improve your mood.

Time Out (A Behavior Channel Skill)

- **Goal:** Allowing yourself to take a break from a stressful situation until your emotional level has decreased and you are less upset. This is deliberately choosing to take a break, not avoidance that is automatic and unhelpful.
- **When to use it**
 - You are struggling with an automatic response that feels overwhelming.
 - You think you may make the situation worse.
 - You are so worked up that you cannot think clearly enough to be effective in the situation.
 - Example: You become very angry while arguing with a family member and think you may say hurtful things or become violent.
- **How to use it effectively**
 - **Simply stop** the discussion that is provoking your increased distress, and/or leave the situation that is causing your escalation.
 - **Communicate** to others what you are doing, why, and when you will be back.
 - **Example:** “I am feeling really angry, and I need a Time Out before I say or do something I will regret. I’m going to take the day to cool down. When I come back and you are willing, I would like to continue this conversation.”
 - **During Time Out:**
 - Do not try to purposefully hold on to the negative emotion, increase the emotion, or try to suppress/avoid it.
 - Notice the emotion and watch it slowly ebb away.
 - Engage in an activity (like a walk) or other coping strategies that will help you deescalate your distress. Time Out can also be used with other strategies, and you may want to think about activities that would best suit you and your needs.

Opposite Action (A Behavior Channel Skill)

Your Emotion	Your Urge	Opposite Action
Anxiety	Avoid	<input type="checkbox"/> Approach. <input type="checkbox"/> Do it anyway (repeatedly). <input type="checkbox"/> Start small.
Anger	Attack/punish	<input type="checkbox"/> Practice empathy and sympathy. <input type="checkbox"/> Do something nice. <input type="checkbox"/> Disengage from conflict or stressor.
Sadness	Isolate/withdraw	<input type="checkbox"/> Be active. <input type="checkbox"/> Do things that make you feel competent. <input type="checkbox"/> Do things that you enjoy.
Guilt	Hide/punish self or others	<input type="checkbox"/> Understand whether this feeling is justified or not. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify and repair wrong as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Commit to doing things differently in future, accept consequences, and let go.
Shame	Hide	<input type="checkbox"/> Understand whether this feeling is justified or not. <input type="checkbox"/> Accept and have compassion for self. <input type="checkbox"/> Commit to doing things differently in the future, accept consequences, and let go.
Feeling overwhelmed	Shut down/avoid	<input type="checkbox"/> Slow things down. <input type="checkbox"/> Be present in the current moment. <input type="checkbox"/> Make a list. <input type="checkbox"/> Start with small steps. <input type="checkbox"/> Do it anyway (repeatedly).
Hopelessness	Give up	<input type="checkbox"/> Do it anyway (repeatedly). <input type="checkbox"/> Start small.

Pleasurable Activities List

Arts and crafts	Listening to music
Bike riding	Meditating
Browsing in a bookstore	Painting
Camping	Pampering yourself (haircut, shave, manicure/ pedicure, facial, etc.)
Cooking	People watching
Dancing	Photography
Drawing	Playing music
Exercising	Playing board games/cards with friends or family
Fishing	Playing with pets or kids
Gardening	Reading a book
Getting a massage	Relaxing in the park
Going for a drive	Sitting in a coffee shop
Going hiking	Supporting a cause
Going on a picnic	Swimming
Going to church	Taking a long hot bath
Going to a library	Taking an interesting class
Going to a play or concert	Taking a walk
Going to a museum	Talking on the phone with a friend
Having lunch/dinner with a friend	Visiting friends
Hanging out with a good friend	Viewing beautiful scenery
Helping a friend	Volunteering
Jogging	Watching a game on TV
Journal writing	Watching a favorite movie
Lifting weights	
Others:	

Summary of Three Channels of Emotion Skills

Skills Practice

Check which of these skills you want to practice on your own. Remember, practicing helps you:

- Use the skill.
- Troubleshoot any problems with using it.
- Add it to your toolbox for when you need it most.

Body

- Focused Breathing
- Basic Self-Care
- Soothing the Senses
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Other Mindfulness-Based Exercises for the Body

Thoughts

- Emotion Surfing
- Evidence Technique
- Thought Shifting
- Positive Imagery
- Reminders/Reframes
- Positive Self-Statements

Behavior

- Take a Break/Time Out or Slow Down
- Replacement Behaviors
- Opposite Action
- Ask for Help/Seek Support
- Plan Pleasurable Activities

STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 4: Emotionally Engaged Living

Focus of today's session:

- Discussion of Distress Tolerance
- Using Distress Tolerance skills to meet personal goals

Suggested between session skill practice for this week:

- Complete a pro/con list for a personal goal
- Continue to practice Focused Breathing

What Is Distress Tolerance and Why Should I Do It?

Distress tolerance is . . .

- The ability to endure pain or hardship without resorting to unhelpful actions that are damaging to yourself or others.
- Distress tolerance is a necessary life skill that most of us practice daily.
- It requires us to weigh the **Pros and Cons** of tolerating stress when it's necessary to reach our goals.
- Examples:
 - Effectively controlling your anger when you feel a friend or family member has wronged you.
 - Managing anxiety when you are receiving a performance review from your work supervisor.
 - What are other examples?

Why tolerate unpleasant emotions? Because doing so . . .

- **Allows us to act in a crisis**, instead of giving up or freezing.
- **Frees up energy we use for avoidance**. Avoiding stress saps energy.
- **Enables us to make positive changes**. If you don't allow yourself to be in touch with distress, there'll be no motivation to make important changes. Distress can tell you that something is wrong, as well as which areas in your life you need to pay attention to and change.
- **Allows us to experience positive emotions**. Avoiding feelings means that most or many feelings are cut off, not just negative ones. Tolerating more difficult feelings has an important benefit: It allows us to be more open to having positive feelings as well.
- **Allows us to achieve goals**. It allows us to do difficult but worthwhile things (such as interviewing for a job). Preparing to make any major life change involves some anxiety and discomfort. By tolerating distress, we allow ourselves to achieve goals important to us.

Use your new skills to tolerate what you need to and live the life you want to live!

Using Three Channels of Emotion Skills to Reach Goals

Distress Tolerance

Check which of these skills you can use to tolerate distress. Remember to use skills when tolerating distress helps you:

- Reach your goals.
- Live your values.
- Improve your relationships (without causing undue harm to you!).

Body

- Focused Breathing
- Basic Self-Care
- Soothing the Senses
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Other Mindfulness-Based Exercises for the Body

Thoughts

- Emotion Surfing
- Evidence Technique
- Thought Shifting
- Positive Imagery
- Reminders/Reframes
- Positive Self-Statements

Behavior

- Take a Break/Time Out or Slow Down
- Replacement Behaviors
- Opposite Action
- Ask for Help/Seek Support
- Plan Pleasurable Activities

BOX 14.4
David's Pros and Cons List

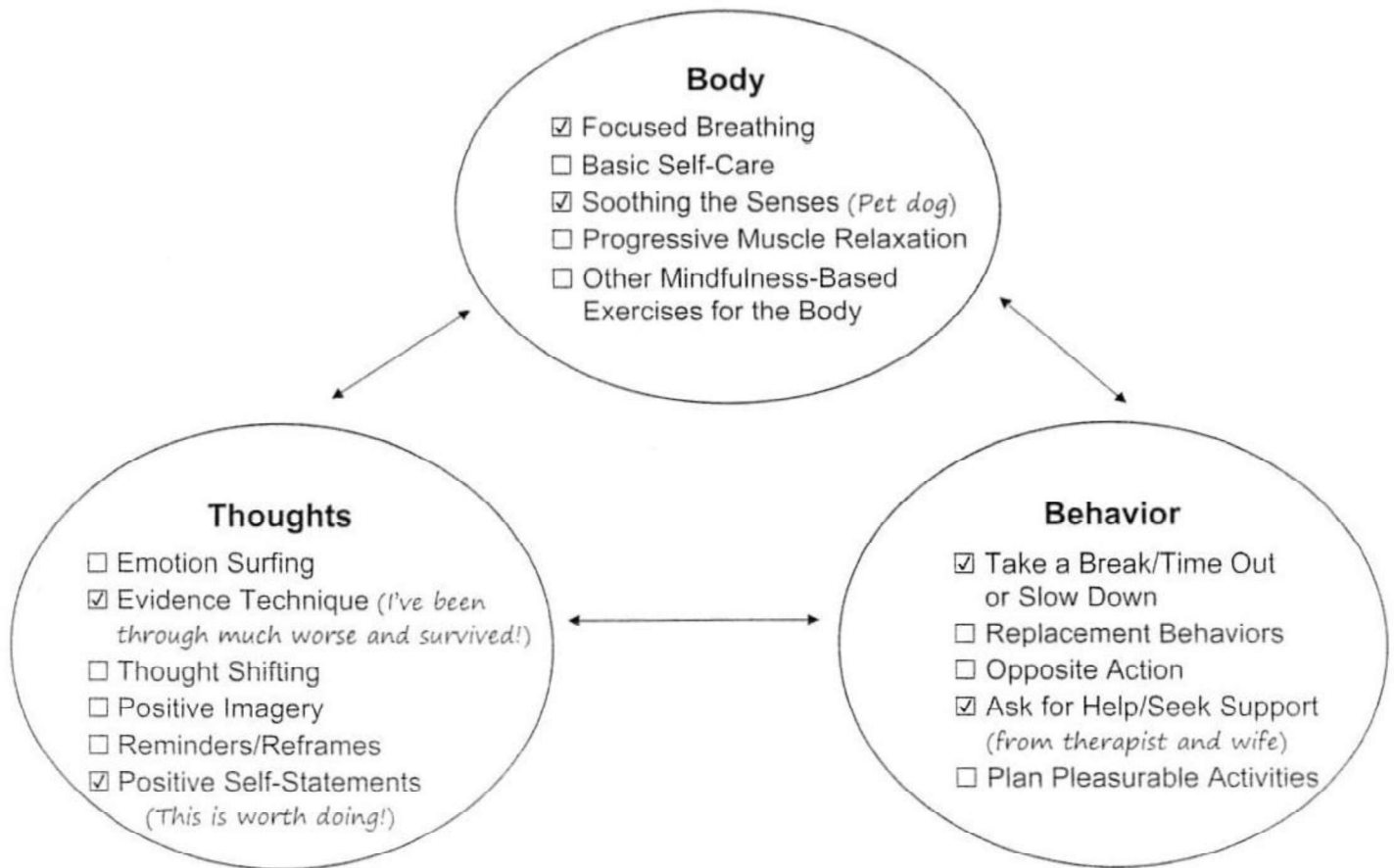
Goal: *Completing STAIR Narrative Therapy*

Pros

Make my wife happy
Share things with my wife
Increase emotional awareness
Get my PTSD under control so that I can:
 Be a good husband
 Get a job I like
 Enjoy doing fun things again
Feel better about myself

Cons

Feel overwhelmed by doing feelings monitoring
Fear of identifying feelings (and what I will find)



STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 5: Understanding Relationship Patterns

Focus of today's session:

- What are relationship models and how are they impacted by trauma
- Building awareness of our own relationship patterns

Suggested between session skill practice for this week:

- Complete relationship patterns worksheet one or more times this week
- Try a new coping skill from one of the three channels of emotion
- Continue to practice Focused Breathing

Relationship Models: Instruction Manuals for Relationships

WHAT DOES YOUR RELATIONSHIP INSTRUCTION MANUAL LOOK LIKE?

- **What are relationship models?** These are models we develop of relationships that act as “blueprints” or “instruction manuals.” They reflect our beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about how relationships work. They guide our expectations, feelings, and behaviors in relationships.
- **How are they created?** They are initially formed in our early environments, in the context of our relationships to caregivers and our experiences in our families. We learn to think, do, and feel *what allowed us to be successful or kept us safe* in those situations:
 - *We do what rewarded us then.* For example, being a nurturer led to love, or being distrustful/ keeping people at a distance led to safety.
 - *We don’t do what led to punishment/negative consequences then.* For example, trusting others or relaxing your guard led to abuse, or asserting your needs led to aggression, criticism, or danger.
- **How are they influenced by trauma?** Abusive or neglectful environments, or other traumatic experiences, affect how these models are developed and often result in negative beliefs about ourselves and expectations that others will view and treat us poorly.
 - Example: “I can’t trust others; other people will hurt me.”
- **How do they affect us now?** The relationship models we developed earlier in life continue to play a central role in shaping thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in ways that we may not be aware of or notice. We bring them into adulthood and apply them to current situations.
 - Example: “I still can’t trust others, even now.”
- **How do they become relationship patterns?** Relationship models can act as self- fulfilling prophecies, because they lead us to behave in ways that prepare us for what we expect will happen in relationships. Over time the relationship models we rely on become more generalized and ingrained, and form our relationship patterns. We don’t give ourselves opportunities for new experiences or look for evidence that might contradict our beliefs. Instead, we may continue to behave in ways we learned in early relationships, which may not be effective or helpful in current relationship situations.
 - Example: Shelby has a belief that no one will love him because he is unlovable. So he keeps others at a distance and isolates himself. Therefore, he misses opportunities for others to get to know him. He then uses the fact that he does not have close friends or a romantic partner as evidence that he must be unlovable.
- **The good news: Relationship patterns can be modified!** You can write a new instruction manual for yourself. This treatment will help you explore, identify, and change patterns to be more flexible and effective in your current and future relationships.

Common Relationship Beliefs among Survivors of Trauma

The first step to changing your relationship patterns is identifying them. Check the beliefs that you recognize in your life.

SAFETY

- ☐ If I let someone close to me, I may get hurt.
- ☐ The only way to stay safe is to keep others at a distance
- ☐ If I am alone, I can't take care of or protect myself.

TRUST/INTIMACY

- ☐ I can't trust my own judgment to stay safe, or I have bad judgment.
- ☐ No one can be trusted. I can't trust that others will keep me safe or have my best interests in mind.
- ☐ I can't trust anyone enough to share what happened to me.
 - ☐ Others cannot handle hearing my experiences.
 - ☐ They will judge/hate/disrespect me if they find out what has happened to me.

POWER/CONTROL

- ☐ I cannot control anything in my life. I am powerless to solve problems in my life.
- ☐ I cannot trust others to be in control.
- ☐ People who have power abuse it.
- ☐ Who has power is an either-or situation. Only one person can have power (either another person has it or I have it, but both of us cannot have power).

SELF-ESTEEM/NEEDS

- ☐ If I share my problems or disclose my feelings, I will not be respected or will be seen as weak.
- ☐ If I don't sacrifice my goals/needs in relationships, others will not love me.
- ☐ Others' needs are more important than my own.
- ☐ Asserting my needs will cause problems in my relationships.
- ☐ Only one person's needs can be met at a time.
- ☐ If I am not in a romantic relationship, something is wrong with me.
- ☐ I am broken/crazy/unlovable.

How to Complete Relationship Patterns Worksheet–1

- Take note when your interactions with others feel uncomfortable, confusing, or stressful, or lead to misunderstandings or conflicts.
- Notice your thoughts and emotions in these challenging interactions.
- Notice what your expectations of others are in these situations. Notice what you believe is going on for them (their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors) and your evidence for your expectations (is it “hard evidence,” or could you be “mind reading”?).
- You will summarize this by using two new tools called the Relationship Patterns Worksheets. Today we will introduce the first of these sheets, Relationship Patterns Worksheet–1.
- You will note that Relationship Patterns Worksheet–1 is just like the Feelings Monitoring Form, in that you will focus on situations, thoughts, and feelings. The only difference is that now it involves two people, and you will also focus on your beliefs about the other person’s feelings and thoughts about the situations.
- After you have completed describing the problematic situation, try to identify what relationship model or “blueprint” you may have been using in this situation.

Relationship Patterns Worksheet–1

Interpersonal situation	What did I feel and think about myself?		What were my expectations about the other person?	My resulting behavior
What happened?	My feelings	My thoughts	Their feelings	Their thoughts
				What did I do?

Relationship model: “If _____, then _____, then _____.”

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Maria's Relationship Patterns Worksheet-1

Interpersonal situation	What did I feel and think about myself?		What were my expectations about the other person?		My resulting behavior
	My feelings	My thoughts	Their feelings	Their thoughts	What did I do?
I had a fight with my sister. I thought about sharing it with Brian, but then I decided I shouldn't, that he didn't seem too interested.	Upset.	I am too emotional.	Annoyed.	She can't get along with anyone.	Didn't tell him about it, kept it to myself, shut him out.
	Stressed out.	I am weak.	Stressed out with work.		
	Alone.	People can see I am messed up.	Frustrated.	She is always making a big deal about things.	
	Worried about seeming negative.			Why do I bother with her?	

Relationship model: "If I share my feelings, then I will be abandoned."

STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 6: Changing Relationship Patterns Part 1

Focus of today's session:

- Discussion of communication styles and assertiveness
- Introduction of assertiveness skills

Suggested between session skill practice for this week:

- Complete Relationship Patterns Worksheet 2
- Try one of the assertiveness skills discussed today
- Continue to practice Focused Breathing

Understanding Assertiveness

- “Assertive behavior” means standing up for your legitimate rights and presenting your needs/wants in a way that is respectful of both yourself and others. Assertive behavior may lead you to feel confident, self-respecting, and good about yourself.
- “Nonassertive behavior” means ignoring or not expressing your own rights, needs, and desires. Nonassertive behavior may lead you to feel hurt, resentful, anxious, disappointed, and/or angry.
- “Aggressive behavior” means expressing your own rights at the expense of others through inappropriate outbursts or hostility. Aggressive behavior may lead you to feel angry, indignant, out of control, and/or guilty.

Basic Personal Rights

1. I have the right to ask for what I want.
2. I have the right to say no.
3. I have the right to feel and express my feelings, both positive and negative.
4. I have the right to make mistakes.
5. I have the right to have my own opinions, convictions, and values.
6. I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
7. I have the right to change my mind or decide on a different course of action.
8. I have the right to protest unfair treatment or criticism.
9. I have the right to expect honesty from others.
10. I have the right to be angry at someone I love.
11. I have the right to say, "I don't know."
12. I have the right to negotiate for change.
13. I have the right to be in a nonabusive environment.
14. I have the right to ask for help or emotional support.
15. I have the right to my own needs for personal space and time, even if others would prefer my company.
16. I have the right not to have to justify myself to others.
17. I have the right not to take responsibility for someone else's behavior, feelings, or problems.
18. I have the right not to have to anticipate others' needs and wishes.
19. I have the right not to have to worry all the time about the goodwill of others.
20. I have the right to choose not to respond to a situation.

“I Messages”

- Goal: To express hurt feelings or distress, or to give feedback about another’s behavior.
 - The key is to focus on the consequences you experience due to the other person’s troubling behavior, rather than focusing on the person themselves. Focusing on the consequences their behavior causes you makes it less likely that the person will feel attacked or criticized.
- Format: Situation (or Behavior) → Feeling → Consequence. • The following formula can be helpful: “When I [state observed behavior], I feel [state the feeling], because [state the consequence for you].” Example:
 - “When I had to wait longer to be picked up today, I was upset, because I did not have time to get all my errands done.”
- Success in this exercise means stating your concerns clearly and respectfully, not necessarily having the other person agree with you.

An “I Message” has three parts: a situation, a feeling, and a result.

1. **Situation:** What is happening around you? What is the other person doing?
2. **Feeling:** How does the person’s behavior make you feel?
3. **Consequence:** What happens as a result?

Use this structure for your sentence:

“When _____ [situation],
I feel _____ [feeling],
because _____ [result].”

Additional Assertiveness Skills

1. **Making Requests.** Be specific about what you want, and state it clearly and simply.
 - Couch your request as a sentence beginning with “I,” such as “I would like . . .”
 - State the positive consequences of the other’s following through with your request, and/or the negative consequences of the other’s lack of follow-through (an “I Message” may be helpful in this case).
 - Avoid making excuses, downplaying your request, or blaming the other person.
 - Delay the situation if the other person responds angrily or aggressively. Use a coping skill, if useful, to help you calm down before deciding your next step.
2. **Saying No.** The approach you choose depends on the kind of relationship and your interest in maintaining the relationship.
 - If you *do* want to maintain the relationship:
 - Acknowledge the other person’s request by repeating it (do this also to make sure you understand it).
 - Without apologizing, give a brief explanation of your reason for declining.
 - If appropriate, suggest an alternative plan in which both your needs and the other person’s will be met.
 - If Saying No is especially difficult, give yourself some time before responding to a request. You can try coping skills you’ve learned to ease your distress!
 - If you *do not* want to maintain the relationship:
 - Say, “No, thank you,” in a respectful but firm tone. You may still explain why if it will benefit you or ease the situation.
 - If the other person persists, repeat yourself while maintaining eye contact and slightly raising the tone of your voice.
 - Or use the Broken Record approach: Repeat a concise sentence over and over, without getting sidetracked by other issues.

Remember: Behaving assertively doesn’t guarantee that people will respond positively. Though you may sometimes receive negative or unhelpful responses to your assertive behaviors, you will generally, in the long run, be more successful in your interactions with other people.

Practicing Assertiveness to Improve Relationship Patterns

GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING BOTTOM HALF OF RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS WORKSHEET–2

1. Identify a positive goal for the relationship.
2. Identify a belief and feeling that supports the relationship goal. Ask your therapist or a friend for suggestions if you get stuck.
3. Imagine a response from the person that supports your goal. What could they be feeling and thinking? Ask for help if you get stuck.
4. Imagine actions that you can take to support the goal or maintain that goal if you reach it.
5. Try out the action you came up with, see if it works, and adjust your approach as needed.

OTHER ASSERTIVENESS PRACTICE SITUATIONS

- Ask a salesperson to help you find something.
- Call or text a friend you haven't seen in a while to schedule a time to catch up.
- Ask your therapist to explain a concept or skill again if you're having trouble understanding or remembering the details.
- Ask your therapist for additional copies of handouts if you need more or if you misplaced old ones.
- Ask the pharmacist for information on an over-the-counter drug.
- Ask for a substitution on the menu when ordering a meal.
- Ask coworkers or classmates to do a favor for you (for example, ask for them to get you a cup of coffee while they get their own).
- Disagree with someone's opinion politely but with confidence.
- Ask a friend for help in fixing something.
- Ask your landlord to fix a problem in your apartment.
- Ask a person to stop doing something that bothers you—a great opportunity to use an "I Message"!

Note. The majority of the other assertiveness practice situations are adapted from *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition* (p. 255), by Marsha M. Linehan. Copyright © 2015 Marsha M. Linehan. Additional ideas come from authors of this book.

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Relationship Patterns Worksheet–2

Interpersonal situation	What did I feel and think about myself?	What were my expectations about the other person?	My resulting behavior
What happened?	My feelings	My thoughts	Their feelings

Relationship model: “If _____, then _____.”

Interpersonal goals for situation	Alternative beliefs and feelings about myself: What else could I . . .	Alternative beliefs and feelings about the other person: What else could I expect the other person . . .	Alternative actions
What are my goals in this situation?	. . . feel about myself?	. . . to feel? . . . to think?	What else could I do? What else might they do?

Alternative relationship model: “If _____, then _____.”

Julie's Completed Relationship Patterns Worksheet-2

Interpersonal situation	What did I feel and think about myself?		What were my expectations about the other person?		My resulting behavior
	My feelings	My thoughts	Their feelings	Their thoughts	
My boyfriend snapped at me because I lost the car keys. He called me irresponsible.	Stupid. Ashamed. Angry at myself.	Why am I always losing things? I can never get it together. No point in explaining. He will just get more angry and insult me.	Enraged. Tired of me.	Thinks I am worthless and can't get anything done. Wishes he had a better girlfriend. Wants to get rid of me.	What did I do? Went into the other room until he left for work. Was upset most of the day.

Relationship model: "If I try to explain myself after an honest mistake has been made, then I will be punished, criticized, and insulted."

Interpersonal goals for situation	Alternative beliefs and feelings about myself: What else could I...		Alternative beliefs and feelings about the other person: What else could I expect the other person...		Alternative actions
	... feel about myself?	... think about myself?	... to feel?	... to think?	
To apologize, but also to improve communication. I would like him to respect my feelings, and I don't like being snapped at.	A little embarrassed. Compassion for myself. Hopeful he will listen to me.	I sometimes lose things, but I am not the only one. I can ask him to help develop a strategy to remember where the keys are.	Irritated.	That he would hear my apology without being rude. That he might apologize for snapping at me if he knew that it hurt my feelings. That he might want to problem-solve around the key problem.	What else could I do? What else might they do? Talk to him about it. If he is a jerk, end the conversation.

Alternative relationship model: "If I try to explain what happened after an honest mistake has been made then I will be given respect for my point of view and responded to without punishment (maybe even compassion)"

STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 7: Changing Relationship Patterns Part 2

Focus of today's session:

- Managing power balances in relationships
- Discussion of boundaries
- Guidelines to develop closeness in relationships

Suggested between session skill practice for this week:

- Complete Relationship Patterns Worksheet 2
- Try a new skill of your choice presented in today's lesson
- Continue to practice Focused Breathing

Power Balances in Relationships

There are three types of power balances in relationships:

Type I: You have equal power with a person (examples: someone who is your friend, sibling, coworker, partner, or team member).

Type II: You have less power than the other person (examples: someone who is your employer, supervisor, parent, teacher, or coach).

Type III: You have more power than the other person (examples: someone who is your child, employee, supervisee, student, or trainee).

Name people you interact with where each type of power balance exists:

I have equal power: _____

I have less power: _____

I have more power: _____

Impact of Trauma on Managing Power Balances

Type I: You have equal power (*examples:* friend, sibling, coworker, partner, team member).

Barriers: Although you are equal in power, there are problems. You may see yourself as having more or less power than you do. Related thoughts:

- Your work colleagues, peers/friends, or family members are threats or enemies.
- They will be aggressive, will be competitive with you, or will exploit you.
- You need to be vigilant and aggressive.
- You need to act like you have more power and authority than you actually have to protect yourself.
- You need to keep a safe distance from them, not trust them.

Type II: You have less power (*examples:* employee, supervisee, child, student, trainee).

Barriers: You have less power than someone else, and you expect them to take advantage of you. Related thoughts:

- The authority figure or boss is a threat or enemy.
- You feel anxious and worried that something bad will happen to you if they are displeased with you or they are in a bad mood.
- You may be too eager to please, may find it difficult to say no, or may not ask for the authority or resources you need or want, because you are afraid they will punish/hurt you.
- You become angry and accuse them of being exploitative when that might not be true, but you were too afraid to ask about things you were seeing going on and made your own interpretation.

Type III: You have more power (*examples:* parent, employer, supervisor, teacher, coach).

Barriers: You have more power than others, and this makes you very uncomfortable. Related thoughts:

- You cannot execute your authority, so you do a bad job (as a boss, parent, or leader).
- You are afraid that you will be abusive when you use your power, so you don't exert it at all.
- You feel taken advantage of by those under your authority.
- Sometimes you do exert your power, but the results are unsatisfactory.
- You feel mean/abusive, so you are apologetic and sometimes take back what you say
- You actually act mean/abusive, and then you feel bad.

Managing Power Balances with Respect

MANAGING DIFFERENT POWER BALANCES:

RESPECT IS A CONSTANT

While differences in power balances are a fact of life, respect for oneself and others should be a constant, no matter what a specific power balance is like. **When you have less power**, remember that you have a right to act in ways that respect yourself and your values (for example, politely express your point of view, but also remember also to express respect for those with more power, rather than mistrust or fear of abuse). When you interact with others with whom you have **more power**, remember to show respect for their personhood and express your power in a positive way, with confidence and warmth.

A SKILL FOR MANAGING POWER BALANCES:

BEGIN AND END WITH RESPECT

Skill: Select the power balance that causes you the greatest difficulty. Select a situation that you can also describe in the top portion of Relationship Patterns Worksheet–2. Formulate the point of view you want to express in a way that is open, direct, and clear (for example, use an “I Message”). But now begin and end what you want to say in a manner that acknowledges positive aspects of the person or relationship. This skill is called Respect Bookends.

- Begin with a statement that recognizes positive aspects or behaviors of the person.
- State your request, concern, decision, or point of view.
- End with a statement that again recognizes the person’s positive aspects or behaviors.

Example: Mother to child (mother has more power than child):

“I so enjoyed seeing you talk with your grandmom. She just lights up with you. I noticed she was in that hard-backed chair. What do you think of giving her the cushioned chair you usually sit on when she visits, as her back hurts and it’s the only one that is comfortable for her? [Discuss.] She’ll be coming by next week, and I am sure she will be much more comfortable with the cushy chair. Thanks so much for doing this. I know you want her to be happy by the way I see you pop up and get her the tea. This will definitely make her comfortable and happy as well.”

Try out this practice:

- Say what you plan to say aloud, remembering to use Respect Bookends.
- Your coach/therapist repeats what you plan to say. Now imagine yourself as the other person.
- How does it feel? What are your thoughts and reactions?
- Practice again, to maximize the chances that you will get a good response. Make adjustments as desired.

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Healthy Relationships = Healthy Boundaries

COMMON BOUNDARIES IN RELATIONSHIPS



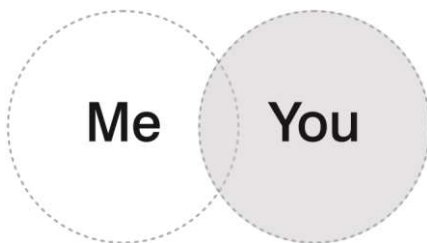
NOT CLOSE ENOUGH **Holding others at a distance**

Pros:

- Feel protected and safe
- Less or no conflict

Cons:

- Not connected
- Lonely
- Lack of support
- Too much self-reliance



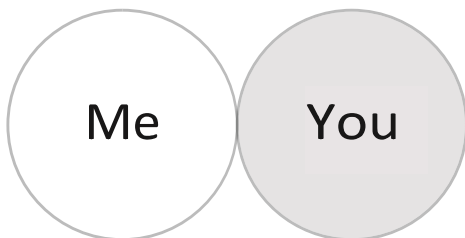
TOO CLOSE **Being "codependent"**

Pros:

- Feel connected and "in sync"
- May feel support sometimes

Cons:

- Lack of support for your own priorities
- Lose sense of unique identity
- Not getting your needs and/or goals met
- Not enough self-reliance

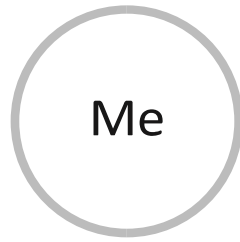


OPTIMAL **Healthy boundaries**

Pros:

- Feel connected
- Feel support
- Strong sense of individual identity
- Support of each other's goals and needs

What Creates Emotional Distance and Ruptures in Relationships?



What leads people to create emotional distance in relationships?

What specific behaviors create emotional distance?

Remember, no matter where your relationships are now, you can work to improve them and grow closer to people. Just take it one step at a time!

Relationship Guidelines to Enhance Intimacy and Closeness

How to increase social engagement:

1. Smile kindly at someone (a grocery clerk, a pharmacist, a neighbor walking down the street, etc.).
2. Say hello to someone.
3. Compliment someone on doing good work or being kind.
4. Make eye contact during these exchanges or other interactions.

How to start new relationships:

1. Initiate contact with small talk.
2. Get to know the other person, and identify common interests and/or values.
3. Make a point of acting respectfully and expressing positive emotions.
4. Initiate spending time together in low- effort ways (for example, coffee).
5. If things go well, start spending more time together (movies, hikes, etc.).

How to increase intimacy and reduce distance:

1. Ask about the other person's life, values, and interests.
2. Be willing to support them in their interests and activities.
3. Share your interests and opinions or recent life events.
4. Express positive emotions.
5. Address unresolved conflicts and issues respectfully.
6. Spend time together in enjoyable ways.
7. Express caring and respect.
8. Invite them to weigh in on your decision- making processes.
9. Be genuine and sincere.
10. Offer to help and/or ask for help and support when needed.

How to repair relationships after a fight or conflict:

1. Ask if the other person is willing to talk about what happened.
2. Acknowledge that the last contact did not go well.
3. Convey your respect and caring for the other person.
4. Acknowledge mistakes that you may have made and the hurt/damage that you think you caused.
5. Share your feelings and thoughts about your behavior and about the other person's behavior in a way that is respectful and minimizes the risk of the other person's feeling defensive. In other words, use "I Messages."
6. Ask how the other person felt about what happened.
7. Ask questions for clarification, and invite the other person to ask such questions.
8. Ask if you can make amends, or ask the other person to make amends, if appropriate.
9. Discuss how you can avoid similar situations in the future.

STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Week 8: Self Compassion, Summary and Endings

Focus of today's session:

- Developing Self Compassion
- Self-reflection on your group experience
- Discussion of possible next steps
- CONGRATULATIONS on completing the STAIR program!



Compassion: Recovery Is a Journey

Having compassion for yourself can be challenging, given the messages you may have gotten from others and the negative beliefs you may still hold about yourself. There are several benefits to self-compassion, however, including:

1. Compassion for yourself goes hand in hand with compassion for others. So self-compassion may lead to having more compassion for others and improving your relationships.
2. Having compassion for yourself also allows you to change and experiment with new ways of behaving and feeling, such as asking for help or being more assertive. You'll be able to practice your new skills without fear if you just have compassion for yourself as a person who is learning, growing, and changing.
3. Finally, compassion for yourself allows success in the journey of recovery. There will be lapses and challenges. But the more accepting you are of your shortcomings, the easier it will be for you to focus your efforts on change. The energy you used up criticizing or defending yourself before you started treatment can be channeled into the work needed to reach your goals.

Consider your successes in this work and accept them. Consider your challenges and limitations and accept them too. Continue to work toward your goals with compassion for your past and your continuing struggles.

SELF-COMPASSION MEDITATION EXERCISE

Take a moment to focus on your breathing. If it feels comfortable, close your eyes.

Now take a slow, deep breath. Exhale slowly, allowing all of the air to leave your lungs. Inhale. And exhale slowly.

Continue to breathe at this pace.

Now imagine yourself. See all the parts of yourself.

View the parts that represent some of the positive aspects of yourself, such as happiness, joy, pleasurable feelings, positive beliefs, and loving memories. What do you notice?

Now, take a moment to view the painful parts of yourself—those that represent your distressing emotions, fears, negative beliefs, and painful life experiences. What do you notice?

(continued)

Compassion: Recovery Is a Journey *(page 2 of 2)*

Now imagine that these different parts of yourself are struggling with each other. It's a long struggle that has been going on for many years. The painful parts are trying to find an advantage over the positive parts, while the positive parts desperately respond with all of their might to avoid being taken over and ignored. What do you notice?

Now imagine that instead of allowing the positive and painful parts of yourself to fight against each other, you allow them to exist together without needing to struggle. Rather than allowing the painful pieces to win and viewing yourself as all bad, worthless, or unlovable, allow yourself to hold all of these parts together with compassion. Imagine seeing yourself as a person with strengths and weaknesses, just like others, and at the same time seeing yourself as deserving love, respect, and compassion.

Focus on what this experience feels like. View all the parts of yourself as a whole, without judgment.

Now, return your focus to just noticing your breath . . . taking slow, deep breaths. And when you're ready, open your eyes, and slowly return your focus to the room around you.

Summary of Accomplishments (So far)

Let's review all the things you've learned and accomplished during this treatment!

- We discussed how trauma affects emotion and how it affected you.

Before STAIR, how did you experience your emotions?

- We then explored skills that could change how you coped with your emotions. Later today, we'll select the skills from the three channels of emotion (body, thought, behavior) that you want to continue practicing. For now, consider:

What are ways you're experiencing your emotions differently from before starting treatment?

- We also explored how trauma affects relationships, and we identified different ways to approach and manage relationships—with flexibility, assertiveness, power, intimacy, and compassion.

What are ways you're approaching relationships differently in what you believe, feel, and do?

(continued)

Summary of Accomplishments (So Far) *(page 2 of 2)*

- As you prepare to move on, let's reflect on the progress you've made.

<i>What are the most important lessons you've learned?</i>	
<i>What lessons felt most helpful?</i>	
<i>How have your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors changed?</i>	
<i>How will you continue to build on the progress you've made so far?</i>	

STAIR Skills for Continued Practice

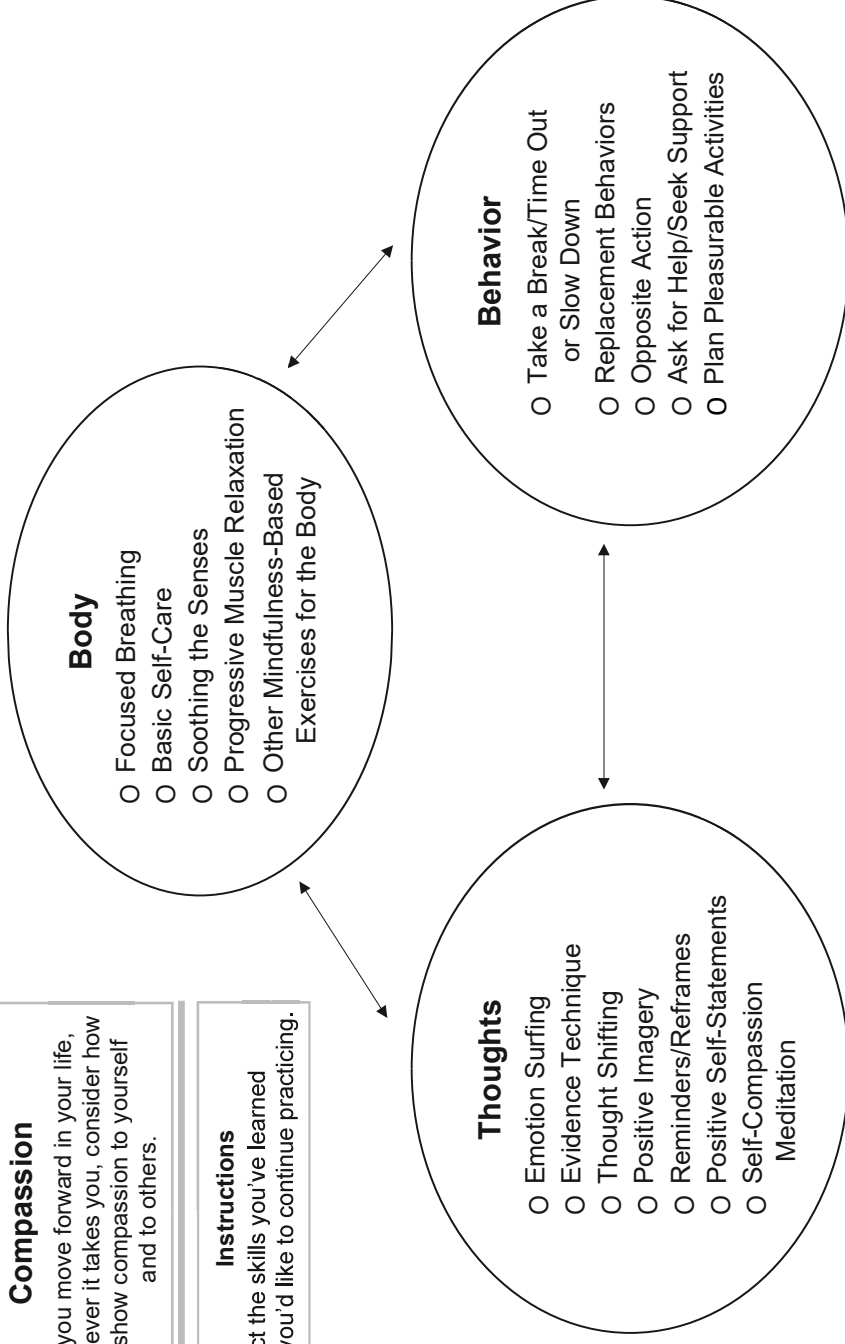
EMOTIONAL COPING

Compassion

As you move forward in your life, wherever it takes you, consider how to show compassion to yourself and to others.

Instructions

Select the skills you've learned that you'd like to continue practicing.



(continued)

STAIR Skills for Continued Practice (page 2 of 2)

Compassion

Just as it's important for your own emotional coping, compassion is a key part of creating the relationships you want in your life. Compassion for yourself and for other people will help you thrive. Make sure you don't neglect one for the other—everyone deserves compassion, especially you!

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Instructions: Below is a summary of the relationship skills you've learned about, organized by theme. Jot down some relationship goals you still want to work toward, and list the skills you think would be most helpful in meeting those goals.

<u>Assertiveness</u> "I Messages" Making Requests Saying No	<u>Power</u> Understanding Power Balances Respect Bookends	<u>Closeness and Intimacy</u> Increasing Social Engagement Starting New Relationships Reducing Emotional Distance Repairing Relationships after Conflict	<u>Flexibility</u> Self- Compassion Meditation Compassion for Others Distress Tolerance to Meet Goals Pros and Cons
Your Relationship Goals		Skills Useful to Meet Your Goals	

STAIR for Trauma Web Group

Additional Resources

National Hotlines

Veterans PTSD Hotline 1-877-717-7873

National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233

National Dating Violence Helpline 1-866-331-9474

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network Hotline 1-800-656-4673

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) 800-950-6264

Suicide Prevention/Crisis Hotline 800-273-TALK (8255) – veterans press 1

Name _____

Date _____

Distress Tolerance Activities

Body Moving Activities These activities encourage us to move our body to increase circulation, distract us from our worries, & burn off energy. They are most effective when we feel either agitated or lethargic.

- Bike ride
- Chop wood
- Clean
- Climb up and down stairs
- Dance
- Do yoga
- Gardening
- Go for a run
- Hit or throw a ball
- Kick something
- Play a sport
- Stretch your body
- Walk or hike
- Work out/Exercise
- Wrestle
- Yoga
- _____
- _____

Relaxing Activities These are activities that relax and calm our bodies.

- Breath deeply for 3, 5, or 10 breaths
- Exercise hard
- Go for a drive
- Hobbies
- Listen to a relaxation tape
- Massage
- Nap
- Play a game
- Progressive relaxation from toes to head
- Rock in a rocking chair
- Sit in the dark
- Sit in the sun
- Take a break from problem solving - come back to it later
- Visualize a mini-vacation
- Visualize a peaceful place
- Visualize a secret room
- _____
- _____

Emotional Expression Activities These activities get us in touch with our feelings and help us express them. Some activities require words but many are designed just to allow us to feel or see the extent of our distress.

- Bite something
- Break plates
- Cry
- Empty chair technique
- Grunt, stomp, shout
- Identify your feelings and underlying needs
- Journal or doodle
- Look for meaning & purpose in your struggle
- Pound a pillow with your fists
- Rip something
- Scream and/or swear while driving
- Squeeze a rubber ball
- Stir up emotion opposite your current feeling
- Talk in loving and helpful ways
- Use assertion to name feelings/needs
- Vesuvius release- boundaried expression
- Visualize a drain
- Write a letter expressing your feelings
- _____
- _____

Socializing Activities These activities engage us with others. They help us see that we are not alone.

- Ask for support
- Be with people you admire
- Call a friend or family member
- Give something to someone
- Go out of your way to be nice to others
- Go to a religious service or gathering
- Go to a support group
- Go to an event
- Help someone in need
- Listen to someone else's perspective
- Make eye contact and smile frequently at others
- Spend time with uplifting, positive people
- Visit with a friend or family member
- Volunteer
- _____
- _____

In the Moment Activities These activities bring our focus to making things better, as best we can, in the moment. Some activities are easy to do without any preparation, some set up for pleasurable experiences in the future, and others require that we prepare a space to make our situation different.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept (in this moment) what I cannot change • Affirm yourself • Buy or pick flowers • Compare • Create art • Distract yourself with entertainment • Imagine a wall • Imagine how someone you admire would be • Make an appointment for a massage • Make an appointment with a therapist • Make a reservation • Mantra • Name things for which you are grateful • Observe without judgement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Packaging - box up a thought & set it aside • Play with a craft • Practice relinquishment • Pray • Read uplifting material • Recall a past pleasant moment • Reward yourself for success • Shout "stop" • Sing or hum a joyous song • Smile • Speak up for yourself from your inner wisdom • _____ • _____ |
|--|--|

Sensation Focused Activities These activities take our attention to our senses. They stimulate sensory awareness and can be used as a distraction. Most are pleasurable but some are not. Never do anything harmful to your body.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burn incense • Cup of tea or coffee • Cold wash cloth on your face • Eat something tasty • File your nails • Five senses stimulation • Go out to eat • Hold an ice cube in your hand until it melts • Lay on a heating pad • Light a candle • Listen to music • Listen to sounds in nature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paint your fingernails • Physical sensations in the current moment • Put on lotion • Put on scented oils or perfume • Seek out something beautiful and get lost in it • Sex • Snap a rubber band on your wrist • Splash cold water on your face • Suck on hard candy • Take a hot bath or shower • _____ • _____ |
|---|---|

Thought Challenge Activities These activities take our minds to a task that requires thought or sharp focus. These actions help us steer our minds away from things that are troubling by giving us a problem to solve or question to ponder.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color name • Count backwards by 3's from 100 • Count things • Count to 10 slowly • Creative writing • Examine the pros and cons • Focus on what you like, not what you don't • Identify your thoughts • Mindfulness on one thing • Name "favorites" • Plan a joyous event for the future • Play a musical instrument | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read • Recite the Serenity Prayer • See current situation as an opportunity to learn • Sing something complex • Think of long term goals • Visualize success • Work • Work a puzzle • _____ • _____ |
|---|--|

NEUROPLASTICITY AND REWIRING THE BRAIN*

Severe childhood trauma can adversely affect the way in which the brain develops, leading to, for example, extremes in anxiety or great difficulty in controlling emotions. However, there has been exciting research conducted showing that the brain is able, under certain conditions, to 'rewire' itself, correcting its own faulty circuitry, and, thus, alleviating the behavioral and emotional problems caused by the original damage.

NEURONS THAT FIRE TOGETHER WIRE TOGETHER

- Neurons that fire at the same time repeatedly wire together through chemical changes that occur in both to create a bond making them connect more strongly
- Neurons that fire apart wire apart
- Neurons out of sync fail to link
- Brain maps work by spatially grouping together events that happen together
- Brain maps will grow as the skill is being learned
- After many repetitions, the skill is learned
- It takes fewer neurons within the area to perform the task
- The neurons became faster and more efficient, requiring less to keep the skill functioning

The adult brain is much more changeable and modifiable than had previously been believed. There is now a large amount of evidence to show that damaged neural (brain) circuitry resulting from severe childhood trauma can be corrected, reshaping our brain anatomy and consequent behavior, with the right kind of therapeutic interventions. In other words, it is now clear that brain architecture continues to change throughout adulthood, and this can be manipulated in highly beneficial directions.

Many people who suffer extreme childhood trauma go on to develop rigid, destructive behavioral patterns as adults. Research is now showing, however, that certain therapeutic interventions, due to neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to change itself), can change those behaviors to become more flexible and adaptive (helpful in creating a more successful life). The brain is arguably the most fascinating and impressive organ in the human body. Medical and scientific professionals alike are only beginning to mine its vast complexities. Of particular interest to those involved in the field of trauma recovery is the area of neuroplasticity. This refers to how the brain is wired and its extraordinary capacity to rewire neuro pathways. Here is how it works: as a young person, probably around the age of 15 or 16, you learned to drive a car; this took a great deal of intentional thought and effort. Remember how you gripped the steering wheel and carefully executed every action? Now, you hop into the driver's seat without giving it a second thought. This is because your brain laid down a neuro pathway for the completion of this task; from start to finish, a set of synapses occur to complete the action.

In trauma, a similar pathway is set down; it can even be additionally engrained due to shock or intensity. Therefore, when a single trigger or set of triggers occur, the emotions associated with the trauma are revisited. But, due to neuroplasticity, this does not always have to be the case. New pathways can be created through changes in behavior, environment and neuro

processes. Not only is the brain capable of creating new pathways, it is designed to do so. The brain is highly resilient and desires flexibility. The brain functions at its best when it is limber and rich with options. The incredible thing is that the human brain has a very real desire to heal itself. Creating new pathways necessitates a great deal of awareness, mindfulness and acknowledgment of the present. Yet, in time, these new pathways will eclipse the old, thus allowing trauma survivors to build new, healthy patterns of thoughts, emotions, and interactions.

REWIRING

Your brain is constantly adapting and rewiring itself. Your thoughts and behaviors influence this process. If certain thoughts and behaviors are repeated often enough, a strong connection, also known as a neural pathway, is created. Just think of your brain as a dynamic, connected power grid, with billions of roads and pathways lighting up every time you think, feel or do something. Some of these roads are well travelled. These are your habits- your established ways of thinking, feeling and doing. Every time you think in a certain way, practice a particular task, or feel a specific emotion, you strengthen this road, and it becomes easier for your brain to travel this pathway.

A ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

When you think about something differently, learn a new task, or choose a different emotion, you are carving out a new road. If you keep traveling that road, your brain begins to use this pathway more and adopts this new way of thinking. Feeling and doing becomes second nature. The old pathway becomes used less and less and it weakens. This process of rewiring your brain by forming new connections and weakening old ones is neuroplasticity in action.

One reason why it is so difficult to change the way you think, feel, and behave is that your beliefs and corresponding neural pathways have been formed early in life. They have been reinforced and strengthened, over and over again. In other words, your brain activity has carved out a deep and well-traveled road. If that road remains and no new roads are built and strengthened, it is very difficult to change your ways, and you will easily fall back into old patterns. Creating and strengthening new, positive neural pathways is an essential part of achieving lasting change.

The good news is that we all have the ability to learn and change by rewiring our brains. If you have ever changed a bad habit, or thought about something differently, you have carved a new pathway in your brain, experiencing neuroplasticity firsthand. With repeated and directed attention towards your desired change, you can effectively rewire your brain to move forward and live a healthy, abundant life.

“You must learn a new way to think before you can master a new way to be.”

–Marianne Williamson

*Article adapted from www.healingtraumacenter.com