



Somatic Experiencing® Handout

George Laws Social Work Services LLC

Somatic Experiencing® (SE) for Healing Trauma

“Even though animals in the wild have their lives threatened routinely, why don't they show the symptoms of traumatization?” Dr. Peter Levine learned answers to his question and established the method of Somatic Experiencing®. The SE approach perceives trauma as a natural, normal part of life. It is not an aberration or a mistake. Trauma ruptures a felt sphere of safety. The traumatic results occur because one was under-resourced and thereby overwhelmed during a traumatic event. Also, extended durations of neglect can be overwhelming and traumatic. If adequate resources were present and employed the threat would have been mastered, digested, and eliminated, discharging the survival energies aroused for the defensive mechanisms at the time of threat. However, unless discharged the survival energy stays frozen and locked in the body. Therefore, as one becomes resourced one can strengthen their healing state and safely discharge the traumatic stress.

Symptoms indicate stored survival energies, as well as energy costs compromised to maintain compensatory mechanisms which aim to balance the intensity of the survival energy and ultimately to de-activate the locked survival energy remaining from the original traumatic event.

With every action there is an opposite, equal action. Therefore, when trauma occurs healing is made available and is occurring too. SE works to resource the healing energies through psychological and somatic channels, then titrates the traumatic materials of events such as the sensations, images, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The stress is managed to provide neurological discharge without overwhelm. **Symptoms are not seen as problems but rather as reservoirs of stored energy that seek release and to be restored to the organism, thus providing rejuvenation and resiliency.**

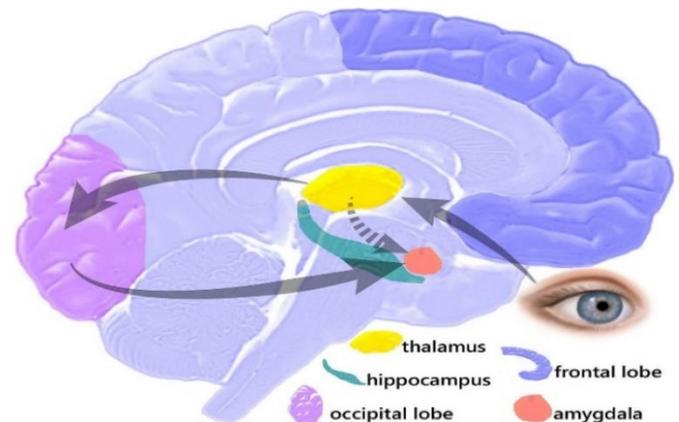
Traumatic Stress Response - What's Happening?

Normally, the body manages new information from your usual experiences without you being aware of it. However, a sudden overwhelming event such as a car accident; or when one is

repeatedly subjected to childhood neglect; or emotional abuse in a significant relationship, are not “usual”. These traumas overload your physical, mental and emotional systems' abilities for; generating, organizing, processing and healing. These systems become unable to digest and eliminate the toxic elements of those past experiences.

Traumatic stress is caused by unresolved disturbing experiences overloading your biosystems, which can further establish patterns of disordered and dysfunctional qualities in your health. These symptomatic patterns happen simply because, they remain “unprocessed”, stuck in your bodily tissues and brain. As well, the energies of traumatic memories of a specific event are maintained in your brain's limbic system, within an isolated memory network that is associated with emotions and physical sensations, which are disconnected from the brain's cortex, where we use language to store memories.

The limbic system's isolated and charged traumatic memories can be continually triggering your (amygdala) overriding similar present events in your life causing difficulties for you and perhaps those you relate with. Often the memory itself is long forgotten (suppressed), but the suffering and painful feelings (symptoms) persist, such as anxiety, panic, anger, judgement, jealousy, confusion or despair; loaded, ready to be triggered. Your capacity and ability to be fully present and learn from new experiences can therefore become filtered, shadowed by the past. Your past becomes pasted upon the present and future.



These fixated traumatic memories are also distributed throughout your anatomy in the tissues (dhatus) of your body and govern the quality (doshas) of your life, your consciousness, your levels of clarity, coherence, and zest (gunas) in living.

These suppressed and unprocessed memories are existing 24/7/365 as “living” images of sensing, feeling, thinking, emoting, reasoning, wanting, intending, recognizing, and identifying (Attendriya) with what was heard, touched, seen, tasted and smelled. The images of these recollections are stored in your biosystems in a “raw” form. These images need understanding, processing, and healing actions. SE helps create the connections between you, your brain's memory networks, your mind, your body, and your environment to process the traumatic memory in a very natural way.

The Client

The client's individual innate intelligence knows how to heal the overwhelm of the traumatic event just like the animals in the wild. *What is needed is for the person, their mind, and their body to join with that innate healing intelligence* and not merge with their programmed beliefs and emotional conditioning regarding the elements of the traumatic event and the fixations of their past individual traumas and social traumas.

What is important in the process of trauma-healing is to alleviate and appease the emotional and mental mindsets of the conditioned self (neocortical). The Somatic Experiencing® approach to self-healing is based upon individual innate biological capacities for generating self-organization and self-regulation to digest and eliminate traumatic stress. The energy-body-mind is designed to heal intense, extreme, and overwhelming experiences. Trauma does not need to create permanent mental and emotional damage.

The Practitioner

The **Somatic Experiencing Practitioner®** (SEP) is to support and assist the sufferer, to allow and access their own natural intelligences to resolve the elements of the traumatic or neglectful event that are associated with their traumatization.

The practitioner clarifies for the client, that their body knows how to heal intrinsically and, as they allow themselves to become aware of what makes them feel comfortable, and resourced, they can expand their choices in healing. These self-caring skills are powerful throughout a lifetime.

The practitioner checks in and asks the client about what they are and are not comfortable with, in their personal exchange with them, in their self-healing.

The practitioner makes it clear that they are in charge and it is their choice to do what is right for themselves, in the moment. (However, should they become incapable in the moment, due to overwhelm, The practitioner lets them know that everything that can be done to help them, will be done, until they are settled and safe again, consciously knowing they are ok again.

The practitioner assists the client with the process of feeling, tracking, and reporting in real time about the physical sensations, behaviors, and experiences occurring in their body about the trauma. Including the associated images, memories, thoughts, and emotions that come to their mind and are felt in their body.

The practitioner uses the content and the context of the traumatic event for tracking the traumatic activation rather than to get a "story". The "story" is what needs to be processed and digested, bit by bit, incrementally in order to be eliminated, successfully. Then the sufferer can heal and move on from the story by resourcing and remastering those events.

Together

Before working with any traumatic material. the practitioner and client, access and stabilize a safe space, a steady state, known as a healing vortex. In collaboration, we develop a sphere of safety for the client and their work by generating and

supporting the recognition and expansion of their own internal and external resources. Understanding is used a resource to empower and expand choices in healing trauma.



Once the somatic foundation of the healing vortex is established, we approach the trauma peripherally rather than chronologically, to diffuse the traumatic charge of survival energy, that is locked in and about the event. The highest intensity of the traumatic overwhelm or impact point of the trauma is known as T-zero. Our work carefully and methodically re-associates the client into functioning in the present moment from the past aroused energies that spiked into their defensive systems (flight/fight/freeze) to defend against the threat. This will facilitate a regeneration and re-regulation of the client's autonomic nervous system and restore resiliency.

So how is this done? This occurs by the client tracking their bodily sensations while tending to what rises in their consciousness, the practitioner focuses upon their behaviors, actions and content to aid in a gentle pendulation between their sympathetic, parasympathetic and social nervous systems in the aim to assist them in renegotiating and sequencing the traumata for the healthy discharging of associated biological and psychological energies.

We work to uncouple the somatic alarms that trigger activations of psychological beliefs and emotional fears from the autonomic defensive mechanisms of fight, flight, and freeze.

The release of activation must be managed incrementally by titrating the highly charged traumatic materials, while modulating the increase of arousal, so as not to overwhelm the client. But rather, to process the event's energies and eliminate the lingering aspects of the experience and its memories.

In addition, this work includes completing otherwise prevented defensive orientating responses (fight, flight, and freeze) aroused by the threat, but not completed or performed, so that

SE can be used to treat the following:

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| Traumas | Anxieties | Depression |
| PTSD | Panic attacks | Complicated Grief |
| Addictions | Phobias | Anger |
| Self-esteem | Mood Disorders | Pain Conditions |
| Phantom pain | Sleep problems | Vicarious Trauma |
| Dissociative disorders | Stress Related Conditions | Somatic Conditions |

the individual's natural exploratory orienting function can be reset and restored. Restoring this function result in such qualities as a sense of openness, a desire to engage with life, and returned curiosity about one's environment.

In summary, the practitioner needs to be gentle, patient and wise in working with just enough activation, within the client's range of comfort and resilience, in order to allow for; actual discharge of traumatic stress, completion of a successful defensive strategy, and integration of the past memory. This will bring a renewed vitality of resilience, a presence of being alive and a transcendence of the traumatic event. The client needs be gentle, patient, and wise with themselves knowing that they can understand and heal their past.

Healing

Healing is supported through increasing one's ability to recognize and expand internal and external resources.

Healing is regulated by involuntary and voluntary life-force energies including somatic neuro-mechanisms and psychological potencies of the mind.

Healing occurs through discharging the stored and braced survival energy, by pendulating between the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the nervous system, which may involve trembling, shaking and involuntary actions. These behaviors are normal expressions of discharging the trapped survival energies that were originally generated in defending against the trauma.

Healing occurs through titrating the integration and level of disturbance and "charge" of the traumatic elements. Forcing or pushing a healing can be re-traumatizing to the body, leaving it either supercharged (hyper-activated) or undercharged (hypo-activated) or both (irregular).

Healing allows for a pacing and synchronizing of the triune brain to regulate, re-regulate and negotiate the systemic demands during the healing process.

The healing process in SE is to resource, titrate and discharge the traumatic stress. This requires patience and trust knowing the body/mind is making progress fundamentally, slowly, deeply, and powerfully. "Easy does it" and "Less is more", are two significant principles of SE.

Healing is learning the ability to be focusing "sensing deeply", being receptive from the still center of one's consciousness, listening deeply, touching deeply, seeing deeply, tasting deeply, smelling deeply. Focusing deeply provides clarity, without labelling or judging the image, object or material sensed. But rather experiencing the images without prejudice, as though it were for the first time, now time.

How long does treatment take?

SE can be brief focused treatment or part of a longer self-improvement program. SE sessions can be for 60 to 90 minutes. Regular treatments are advised, preferably weekly or fortnightly. However, more frequent sessions can be appropriate as its value is in discharging traumatic energies in a titrated fashion and is suitable for clients who are traveling in

from long distances for their healing sessions. As usual treatment is based on an individual need basis and protocol will be established by the SE Practitioner to not overwhelm the client support their own self-healing processes.

What types of trauma can SE treat?

Global High Intensity Trauma i.e. electrocution, hallucinogens, drowning, suffocation, strangulation fetal distress (hypoxia/hypercarbia), traumatic birth, intrauterine stress, invasive procedures in utero.

Inescapable Attack i.e. by wild animals, rape, war, bombings, physical abuse, mugging rape, incest, molestation.



Physical Injury i.e. surgery, anesthesia, burns, poisoning, hospitalizations, stabbing, gunshot wounds.

Failure of Physical Defense i.e. falls, high impact accidents, head injury.

Emotional Trauma i.e. severe neglect and abandonment, severe loss, ongoing abuse.

Natural Disasters i.e. earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, floods, social dislocation from the natural world and community.

Horror i.e. seeing an accident (especially with blood, gore), watching someone else be abused, raped, killed, or tortured, and hurting or killing someone yourself.

Torture and Systematic Abuse i.e. war torture, rape in war, concentration camps, and systematic abuse (sometimes with the person drugged).

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