

Cape Cod Institute

June 26-30, 2017

9:00am-12:15pm

Bouncing Back:

Rewiring the Brain for Resilience and Well-Being

Tuesday, June 27

Somatic Intelligence

S-54 image of calm person

Learn more as we go through the week, to use mindfulness - awareness of experience and reactions to experience - and compassion - kindness toward self as experiencer of experience -to hold our experiences of rewiring the brain and become more likely to be successful in changing brain functioning. Those practices are running in the background, even as we begin by focusing on tools of somatic, body-based intelligence.

The brain changes through experience, and in all the exercises I will guide you in or describe, we'll be creating safety, coming into presence, focusing attention on experience, reflecting on experience, taking in the good of the experience as a resource,

learning to repeat the experience, little and often, to install it in neural circuitry.

In any exercise we practice, please stay within your own comfort zone, or slightly on the edge of it. Nothing we do in these trainings, is ever meant to re-trigger or re-traumatize.

S-55 Neuroception of Safety - Autonomic Nervous System

One of the first tasks we face in recovering our resilience and learning to create shift is to create the conditions of safety and trust within us that will help us stabilize our nervous system and prime the neuroplasticity of the brain, open the brain to learning and re-engagement with self and the world.

Dr. Stephen Porges, developed the polyvagal theory that increasingly informs our understanding of how our nervous systems work in relationship to other people, that theory is revolutionizing our thinking about how to work with the body-brain around human interactions, social engagement, attachment, and trauma.

Most of us have been taught to conceive of the autonomic nervous system, which regulates the homeostasis of the body and brain, and which operates always completely below the

level of awareness, as having two branches - 1) the sympathetic branch, which activates to mobilize us to move when conditions are safe, to play, explore the world, create and produce, really the basis of human civilization as we know it. We also know the over-activation of the SNS, where there is a perception of danger, can lead us into fight, flight, freeze in response to a dangerous situation or a toxic relationship. Chronic over-activation of the SNS leads to anxiety and stress.

2) The parasympathetic branch activates to calm us down, to demobilize when conditions are safe, to rest and digest, to take a nap on the beach or fall asleep after making love. When conditions are unsafe, however, the over-activation of the PNS in response to life threat can cause us to shut down, numb out, collapse, even faint, play dead so the lion won't eat you. Chronic over-activation of the PNS can lead to depression and dissociation.

(Sidebar: We can see that chronic hyperarousal of the SNS and the chronic hypo-arousal of the PNS lead to the hallmark symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.)

The pre-requisite of all resilience training and recovery from stress and trauma is to make sure we are in a state of physiological equilibrium known in the trauma field as the window of tolerance. (My clients refer to it as the range of resilience) A natural homeostasis in the body brain - not too revved up, not too shut down - where we can be regulated,

relational, rational, and reflective; the brain's neuroplasticity is available for learning and growth.

Goldilocks: red zone - too activated (too much SNS)
 Green zone - just right (window of tolerance)
 Range of resilience, well-being
 Blue zone - too shut down (too much PNS)

Dr. Porges sophisticates our understanding of the regulation of the autonomic nervous system through his research on the vagus nerve - a branch of the parasympathetic nervous system, which also operates completely below the level of conscious awareness, no conscious reflection or thought needed at all for the lower body-brain anchored in the brainstem to perceive and interpret signals of safety and danger.

S-56 Ventral Vagus Nerve - the “smart” vagus

Dr. Porges has found that we use the more recently evolved ventral vagus nerve, what he calls the “smart vagus” to engage our social engagement system and perceive a sense of safety (or not) in the eye contact, facial expressions, tone and prosody of voice of another human being.

Our nervous system reacts to signals of whether the other person is safe or not but also uses those signals to down regulate our own nervous system. In the presence of a safe other the ventral vagus acts as a vagal brake on the spikes of the SNS; we calm down and return to homeostasis in the window of tolerance. This process of regulating one's own nervous system by perceiving safety in the engagements with a safe other operates throughout a human lifetime. It is the foundation of secure attachment in our earliest relationships and operates in every other relationship for as long as we live.

Perhaps we experienced the operation of the smart vagus in our exercise yesterday of sharing moments of shifting perspective - the entrainment of the social engagement system - eye contact, kindness-acceptance in body language, facial expressions, tone and prosody of voice conveys to other people that they are safe, welcome, accepted with us.

Exercise: NO! Yes

S-57 Neurochemical synchrony

Barbara Fredrickson, a pioneering researcher in the behavioral science of positive psychology, suggests an analogous form of positive dyadic regulation in her book *Love 2.0*. Dr. Fredrickson discovered that when two people are:

- * in physical proximity to each other
- * making eye contact
- * sharing a positive emotional experience
- * experiencing a mutual care and concern for each other

the neurochemistry of the two people begins to sync up; the neurochemical synchrony generates a felt sense of shared resonance that can be characterized as a moment of love, certainly a state of safety. The relationship creates the conditions for harnessing the neuroplasticity of the brain and rewiring previous patterns of relating and coping.

Probably a significant contributor to that neurochemical synchrony is the release of oxytocin - the brain's hormone of safety and trust, bonding and belonging, of calm and connect.

We'll learn exercises this morning that will apply the social engagement system to strengthen our somatic intelligence.

S-58 Dorsal Vagus Nerve - the “dumb” vagus

Dr. Porges also discovered a more primitive branch of the vagus nerve, the dorsal vagus, which he calls the “dumb vagus”.

When the client has a neuroception of life threat (remember, this is all happening at a non-conscious level) and the social engagement system (dyadic regulation by the nervous system of another) is not enough to calm down the hyperarousal of the

SNS, the dumb vagus will trigger an over-activation of the PNS - a protective dorsal dive into numbing out, out of connection, out of awareness, shutting down, collapsing. Not even enough energy to flee the life threat. A withdrawal into powerlessness.

We have to work very hard, very quickly, very persistently, to climb out of the dorsal dive, out of the lethargy, isolation, passivity of this protective response to life threat. Re-engaging in experiences or interactions in the “in the moment, here and now” is often the most effective way to re-activate the nervous system again. (And we do know that we can roller coaster between sympathetic spikes and dorsal dives - hyperarousal and hypo-arousal, too much revving up, too much shutting down without ever finding a natural resting place in the sweet spot of the window of tolerance.)

One thing that does help us get the hang of regulating the surges of our nervous system is to normalize how normal our internal responses are to any external trigger, regardless of the trigger. Whatever we are experiencing in the body, to accept, be with, empathize with, validate the humanness of it, and then learn how to manage that reactivity skillfully.

“Given what has happened, of course you would be feeling as you do. That’s perfectly normal, very human, and totally understandable. We can work with that.”

Goal: Be in WOT, green zone, stay there, return there; practice waking up there.

Get older, more experience, stronger PFC, easier to do.

S- 59 Keep Calm and Carry On

Conditioning to rewire

The conditioning we want to rewire with tools of somatic intelligence is our automatic responses to the reactivity of the autonomic nervous system into fight-flight-freeze or numbing out, shutting down, collapsing. To be able to keep calm and carry on, which was the motto of the British government in World War II when London was being bombed every night by the German Luftwaffe in the “blitz.”

All of these reactions operating below the level of conscious awareness. We want to normalize responses to any trigger, then learn to manage and regulate. Not to avoid the storms but to anchor in ease and peacefulness in the midst of the storm.

All of these exercises, using conscious breath, touch, movement and even visualization, strengthen the capacities of the pre-frontal cortex to do that regulating.

Examples: Spider transport, mat under brake. Amygdala hijacks PFC, throws it offline. Even though feel adrenaline, PFC stays online and overrides.

Teaching story: master monk, bandit, run through with sword, could be run through with sword.

Somatic intelligence allows us to use the wisdom of the body to heal implicitly encoded attachment memories, any trauma memories held in the body, through breathing, touch, movement, visualizations, evoking a sense of safety and calm to prime the brain to feel safe and calm, open to learning and change.

Too often, many people are cut off from body or parts of body - trauma, heartache, don't want to go there, memories held in body. Essential for healing to be able to go there, nothing off limits to awareness, accepting, even embracing.

Whatever we're experiencing in the body, to accept, be with, empathize with, validate the humanness of it, and then learn how to manage our own reactivity and shift into self-regulation, self-responsivity, self-responsibility.

All of these: open, allowing, exploring, kind loving awareness interest and curiosity, even appreciation and gratitude. Content: sensations of breathing, standing, movement. Process of inhabiting experience with openness, kindness, even embracing.

Once brain is trained, don't need conscious processing to remember; procedural memory.

New Conditioning - Calming the SNS Spike

S-60 Affectionate Breathing

Find a comfortable position so that your body is supported and you don't need any effort to remain in that position for the entire meditation.

Close your eyes if you wish, or allow your eyes to soften their gaze.

Take a few slow, easy breaths to release any unnecessary tension.

Begin by listening mindfully to the sounds in the room.

Notice physical sensations in the body as they come and go.

Now focus your awareness on your breathing, noticing where you notice the breath most easily - through your nostrils, through your throat, through the rise and fall of your belly.

Let yourself notice the simple sensations of breathing; just feeling your breath for awhile.

See if you can orient toward yourself and your breathing as you might toward a new born child or beloved pet, with curiosity and tenderness.

If you notice any discomfort in your mind or body, see if you can allow the experience to be, soften toward it, accepting that this is so in this moment.

Bring a sense of kindness toward yourself.

Notice how your breathing nourishes your body even when you're not paying any attention to it.

See if you can feel your whole body breathing. See if you can let your body breathe you.

Give yourself over to the breath. Let yourself become the breath.

Allow your body to be rocked and caressed - internally caressed - by the breath.

And now, release your awareness on your breathing. Allow everything that comes to awareness to be just as it is, for now.

Appreciate your own intentions and effort in coming here. This is the beginning or deepening of your self-compassion practice.

When you're ready, open your eyes.

S-61 Soles of the Feet

1. Stand up and feel the soles of your feet on the floor. (Remove your shoes if you wish) Notice the sensations in your feet, feeling the floor or ground.
2. Rock back and forth a little, and side to side. Notice any changes or shifts in sensation. Make little circles with your knees, feeling the changes of sensation in the soles of the feet.
3. When your mind wanders, simply focus your attention on the soles of your feet again.
4. Begin to lift one foot up and place it back down; lift the other foot up and place it back down. Notice how the sensations in

your feet change as you lift and place in place. Notice that sensations may change in your entire body.

4. Begin to walk slowly, noticing the changing sensations in the soles of your feet. Notice the sensation of lifting a foot, stepping forward, and then placing the foot on the floor. Do the same with both feet while walking.

5. Return to standing, standing still. Notice the sensations in your feet, in your body now.

5. Notice how the small surface area of the feet supports your entire body. Perhaps allow a moment of appreciation or gratitude for the amazing work of your feet, all day long.

6. Return to standing, then return to sitting.

S-62 image of HOH

One of the very first exercises of **new conditioning for somatic intelligence** I always teach my clients is Hand of the Heart, which helps a client manage their sympathetic spikes and return to their window of tolerance. It is powerful enough to calm down a panic attack in less than a minute.

Simply place your own hand on your own heart, breathe gently, softly, deeply into your heart center. If you wish, breathe in a sense of ease or safety or goodness into your heart center. Then remember one moment, just one moment, when you felt safe, loved and cherished by another human being. Not the entire relationship, just one moment. This could be a partner or child, a friend or therapist or teacher; it could be a spiritual figure; it could be a pet. As you remember this moment of feeling safe and loved and cherished, let yourself feel the feeling of that moment, let the feeling wash through your body, and let yourself stay there for 20 or 30 seconds.

S-63 Hand on the Heart

When we do this Hand on the Heart exercise, the warm, safe touch of our hand on our heart center begins to activate the release of oxytocin, the brain's hormone of safety and trust, bonding and belonging, calm and connect. Warm, safe touch anywhere that feels comfortable on our body can release the oxytocin, but there are neural cells around the heart that communicate directly with the brain and more quickly begins the activation of the release.

Breathing deeply into the heart center activates the calming branch of the nervous system, the parasympathetic branch, and our body begins to relax. Breathing a sense of safety or ease or goodness or any positive emotion into the heart center puts the brakes on our very fast, very automatic survival responses of

fight-flight-freeze. Remembering a moment of feeling safe and loved and cherished with someone really activates the release of the oxytocin. Blood pressure goes down, heart rate stabilizes.

Oxytocin is body-brain's hormone of safety and trust, bonding and belonging, calm and connect. Body-brain's direct and immediate antidote to stress hormone cortisol. Cortisol kills brain cells (neurogenesis in hippocampus, structure we use to encode experiences into long-term memory. Stress - less memory, less learning. Oxytocin directly related to resilience.

As I said, this technique is powerful enough to calm down a panic attack in less than a minute.

And visualization is real to the brain. Imagined banana, real banana. Imagine people we feel safe with, we feel safe.

I suggest to my clients that they practice Hand on the Heart ANY time they experience a startle or an upset, to be able to back out of a difficult emotional reaction before it hijacks them. Or even just to practice it to train the brain to create this new response to any difficult moment even before the moment happens. Research has shown, oxytocin flowing through the body-brain can pre-empt the stress response altogether.

S-64 Touch

The fastest way to calm down the spikes of the sympathetic nervous system is through warm, safe touch. These practices can be cultivated as the new automatic responses to the stress response.

HOH, hand on cheek

Head rub, foot rubs, massage

Massage back of neck

One hand on forehead, one hand on back of neck

Hold thumb as “inner child”

Hugs - 20 seconds, full-bodied

Story Francis PN 30 seconds

Jim Coan research

James Coan

Of course, it's in relationship that the release of oxytocin is most easily activated. And when oxytocin is already flowing the body, it can provide a buffer against stress, even pre-empting the stress response altogether.

An excellent example of this kind of priming was reported in a study by James Coan at the Laboratory for Cognitive and

Affective Science at the University of Wisconsin. In the study, three groups of women subjects knew they were going to be administered a slight but unpleasant electric shock on their ankles. Their brain functions were monitored using an fMRI scanner.

The control group of women subjects, who were left alone in the scanner, registered anxiety before and pain during the test. Women holding the hand of a stranger (the lab technician) registered less anxiety and less pain. But the group of women holding the hands of their husbands registered the least anxiety and pain, in some case, no anxiety or pain at all. The pleasurable security of holding the hand of someone who loved them released oxytocin, reduced their stress, and overrode both anxiety and pain. These women instead reported experiencing peacefulness throughout the procedure. Holding hands with someone they felt safe with primed or conditioned their brains to remain in the calm and relaxed, yet engaged and alert, state of the window of tolerance. It turned off the threat switch in the brain and overrode anxiety and pain, even in a situation that was stressful to others.

RECONDITIONING

Reconditioning is the juxtaposition of one movement with another, or the experience of one memory with another, to light up the neurons in the brain holding a particular pattern so that a new pattern can rewire an old one.

Now using the **reconditioning of movement** to ground in the body and soothe nervous system, come to equilibrium of WOT, prime NP of brain

S-65 Reconditioning through Movement

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation - good to stop ruminating at night

Our bodies cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time. Progressive muscle relaxation helps a person relax their entire body, step by step, moving through the body either foot to head or head to foot. [These instructions are given foot to head.] The entire exercise takes about 7-10 minutes and can be done lying down or sitting.

Begin by curling the toes of the right foot, holding that muscle tension for the count of seven. Let the tensing go and count to 15. Then curl the entire arch of the right foot as though pointing the foot, holding that muscle tension for the count of seven. Let the tensing go and count to 15. Then flex the foot, toes back toward the leg, holding that muscle tension for the count of seven. Let the tensing to and count to 15.

Continue tensing and relaxing various points of the body as you count to seven and the 15. [The counting focuses attention. Breathing into the area of the body as we let go of the tension helps that area relax.] Tense the lower right leg, let that go; tense the upper thigh of the right leg, let that go. Tense the hip and buttocks muscles of the right leg; let that go. Repeat for the left leg.

Move through the torso of the body, tensing and relaxing parts of the torso in turn.

Tense the fingers of the right hand into a fist, then let that go, tense the forearm, the upper arm, the shoulder; repeat for the left hand and arm. Tense the muscles on the back, the neck, the facial muscles. End the session by blowing a nice raspberry; rest a full minute in a relaxed state.

As we become more comfortable with the sensations in our body, we can become less afraid of and more interested in the meaning of the sensations. As we move to the next exercise, rewiring those memories through movement, remember that all of this recovering resilience is small work, little and often. One moment of one memory, never to re-trigger or re-traumatize, never to overwhelm. Always to engender a sense of success at being with and moving through and releasing the body-based memories of the responses to an event.

S-66 Movement with Attention

My friend Anat Baniel, clinical psychologist and dancer, has developed a form of neuromovement therapy based on her years of study with Moshe Feldenkrais. Anat was Feldenkrais' protégé for many years and developed her own Anat Baniel Method based on her work with children with developmental and brain disorders.

Anat considers movement as the most fundamental language of the brain, and she uses movement to prime the brain to perceive differences in experiences, organize information differently, and thus encode new neural connections, i.e., “learn” new behaviors.

This helps a person move beyond brain-based limitations to greater brain integration, thus greater flexibility, strength, energy, and awareness in their bodies

I'm going to lead us in one of Anat's exercises from her book *Move into Life* called movement with attention, what Helen Lavretsky, whose research I summarized in the Yoga and the Brain article, calls mindful movement. I'm going to give the instructions, as Anat does, to lead you through the entire exercise on the right side only. Normally in yoga we balance every movement to the right with corresponding movement to the left. Anat suggests doing the entire exercise on one side, and waiting for an hour before you do the exercise on the other side,

so that you can experience the difference between one side and the other from doing the exercise; noticing the impact before balancing it out. So you may choose to do this exercise on the left side at lunch or later in the day.

1. Sit in the edge of the chair with both feet flat on the floor and a comfortable distance apart. Approximately the width of your pelvis is ideal. Rest your hands, fingers down, on the tops of your thighs. Call this your neutral position. Turn your head to look to the right. Do so easily, always within your comfort range, without forcing anything, straining nothing. Take note of how far you turn your head. You might want to spot a visual reference point you can use to measure changes as you go along. Now turn your head to the left and find a similar reference point.

2. While still sitting on the edge of the chair, place your right hand a few inches behind you on the seat of the chair and lean back on it so it's bearing some of your weight. Turn your head to the right and then turn your head back to look straight ahead of you. Make sure you move easily within your comfortable range of motion and notice how far to the right you see. Repeat this movement two or three times. Then come back to the middle, placing both your hands back on your thighs, stop, and rest for a moment.

3. Again, sit on the edge of your chair and place your right hand behind you and lean on it as before. Now lift your left arm, bend your elbow, and rest your chin on the back of your hand.

Gently turn your head and your arm together, as one unit to the right and then come back to center. As you turn, make sure that your chin is in contact with the back of your left hand all the time. Do this movement three or four times. Stop, come back to your neutral position, and rest for a moment. Notice if there are any changes in the way you are sitting or feeling.

4. Using the same position as above, with your chin on the back of your left hand, turn to the right as far as is comfortable for you and hold that position. Now gently move only your eyes to the right and to the left. Repeat the movement three or four times, then stop and rest in your neutral position.

5. In the same position as step 4, turn as far as you can to the right comfortable and stay there. Now lift your left buttock off the chair and inch or so and put it back down three or four times. Feel how your ribs move on your left side, coming closer together and then moving farther apart as you lift and lower your left buttock. Stop, come back to neutral, and notice if you are sitting differently on your right buttock compared to the left.

6. Once again, lean on your right hand behind you and turn your head to the right. Notice if your neck moves more easily and whether you see farther than before.

7. Now to back to your neutral position, with both hands palm down on the tops of your thighs. Gently turn your head to the

right, then to the left, and notice whether you turn your head more easily to the right than to the left. You have just experienced the power of your brain learning through movement with attention.

S-67 Rewiring through Movement

The body has its own wisdom and knows how it needs to move to “correct” something. You use this somatic wisdom intuitively when you take a break from working too long at your desk or from weeding too long in your garden and get up and stretch or go for a brisk walk around the block. We can access this intuitive body wisdom by letting the body move first, without thinking, and then reflecting on what the movement might mean. This exercise is a prime example of how we can use our body’s wisdom to rewire our brains from the bottom up.

The next exercise is **re-conditioning for somatic intelligence**, rewiring difficult, negative body-based experiences through movement. I first learned this tool of reconditioning from expressive arts therapist Natalie Rogers, Carl Rogers’ daughter.

We use the wisdom of changing our body posture to change our mood, to change our state of being, and from there we can change our choices of behavior. You can experience this shift even in a preliminary way, if you close your hand in a fist like this, and notice how you feel in your body, and then open your hands like this, and notice the shift in how you feel in your body.

Or you can hold a pencil between your upper lip and your nose like this, and notice if you feel a sense of frown in your body, or you can hold a pencil between your teeth like this, and notice if you feel a smile flowing through your body.

This exercise can be used to explore shifts of any agitation or shut down of the nervous system, any emotion of fear, anger, sadness, disgust, even nuances emotions of jealousy, resentment, disappointment, etc.

So take a moment to identify what specific emotion you want to explore and perhaps rewire through movement of the body.

And now you stand, and you let your body move into a posture that would inhabit or express that emotion. I can curl up here in the withdrawal and hiding of shame. (I demonstrate with shame because shame is one of the biggest derailers of our resilience.) Let your body assume or inhabit the posture of the emotion you are working with, and we'll stay here 30-40 seconds, to really let the neuroception of that feeling be strong. Then you let your body move, on its own, without thinking, without going to your head at all, to the opposite posture. Here I'm moving my torso and arms; I don't even have to know what this new posture, this new emotion is called. We simply stay here inhabiting this posture for 30-40 seconds. Then, let your body return to the original negative posture and we'll hold that for 20 seconds, then return to the second opposite posture again, and we'll hold that for 20 seconds, and now let your body come to something

integrative in the middle, and we'll hold this integrative posture for 30 seconds.

Then take a moment to pause and notice and reflect on the experience of doing this exercise, noticing any shifts or insights from doing the exercise.

The first time I used this technique with a client, he was exploring depression. He had assumed the posture opposite to depression would be one of happiness. To his surprise and to his learning, he realized the opposite of depression for him in that moment, was reverence. He had shifted his experience; he had learned from the intuitive wisdom of his own experience.

S-68 Power Posing

All of this now used in the technique of power posing. Many people have now learned of this technique - to shift the posture of the body to shift the physiological state of the body to shift the emotional state in the brain - through the TED talk of Amy Cuddy of the Harvard Business School, who teaches Power Posing to help her students feel strong and empowered before they face a difficult situation like a job interview or a business meeting or appearing in court.

[demonstrate power pose]

Amy shares her own very moving story of bouncing back from disaster in her TED talk, now the second most viewed talk in the history of TED. When we use the moving of our bodies to shift from one emotional state to another, we are training our brain the reconditioning or rewiring of our emotional experiences, using self-directed neuroplasticity to rewire our sense of ourselves.

We've looked at body-based techniques of new conditioning, through breathing, touch, movement, visualizations, and techniques of reconditioning through movement and visualizations.

To feel more at home in our bodies and more comfortable with the sensations in our bodies, we can practice the body scan exercise taught in MBSR, **de-conditioning for somatic intelligence**.

S-69 De-conditioning - Friendly Body Scan

1. Lie comfortably on your bed or on the floor. Feel the back of your head, your shoulders, your back, your hips, the backs of your legs, and your heels touch the ground. Let your body relax and sink into the ground supporting it.

2. Begin by bringing your awareness to your feet. Say hello to the big toe of your right foot, listening for any aches or pains in the toe, compassionately wishing it a sense of comfort and ease. Say hello to all the toes on your right foot, the arch, the ankle and heel, carefully noticing the sensations in each part of the foot. Do the same thing slowly for every part of body up through your torso, hands and arms, and every part of your face and head; to each ear, each eye, your nose, all the tender parts of your mouth; to the hair outside of your scalp and to the phenomenal brain inside your scalp that is allowing you to be mindful and compassionate in this moment. As you scan your body, bring a compassionate caring and acceptance to any part of it that needs comfort and ease. You can slow way down, mindfully notice, and send compassionate caring to each knuckle if you have arthritis, or to scars from an old football injury. The body scan is a practice to mindfully, lovingly inhabit all parts of you, to become safely aware of every experience of your entire body.

3. Practice being especially mindful and compassionate toward sensations in the belly, in the heart center, in the throat and jaw, and in the genitals, areas where we can hold unconscious somatic memories of tension, shame, anger, or fear. Use your mindfulness and compassionate acceptance now to hold any distressing sensations or memories. Say hello; listen for aches and pains, physical or psychological, and send care and the intention for comfort and ease to any troubled memories held in the body.

4. End this practice by becoming aware of the energy field of your body as a whole—your whole body breathing, in equanimity, alive, relaxed, and resilient. Creating a larger awareness and acceptance of your body creates a safe setting for working with any somatic memory that arises and then allowing it to dissolve and move through.

S-70 Equanimity for Two

Here's one more exercise of deconditioning that will help bring calm to the body and nervous system.

1. Have your partner lie down comfortably on the floor with eyes closed. Sit comfortably on the floor nearby. Come into a sense of presence, of being with this person, here and now. Place one hand on their hand or forearm, the other hand on the crown of their head. Your partner breathes slowly, deeply. Begin to synchronize your breathing with their breathing. Simply breathe together for two to three minutes, noticing the life force of the breath entering and leaving their body and yours. After two to three minutes you and your partner can switch roles. You are strengthening the capacities of your resonance circuit and dropping into a shared equilibrium, an equanimity for two.

One last visualization exercise to create more calm and safety in the body when we need to. And I'll say here that visualizations are a very powerful way to rewire the brain because whatever

we can visualize or imagine is real to the brain. The same neurons fire in the visual cortex when we imagine a banana as when we see a banana. So visualizations are real to the brain and can be used to rewire the brain.

The following exercise is a guided visualization that will help you cultivate a sense of refuge in a safe place, one that you can evoke in your imagination any time you need to.

S-71 Creating a Safe Place

1. Sit comfortably and quietly. When you are ready, imagine that you are standing in front of a gate. Imagine in rich detail how tall the gate is, how wide, how thick, what it's made of, what color it is. Make this gate as real as you can in your mind's eye.
2. Then imagine yourself opening the gate and walking through. When you are on the other side, visualize what lies ahead: a path, a hallway, a trail, or a street that will lead you to a place that is very special, just for you. This is your safe place.
3. Begin to walk along the path. As you walk, notice whatever you are seeing, hearing, smelling, or anything you are simply noticing.

4. After awhile, you come to a place that you know is your safe place. It may be a meadow, a cottage, a special room in a house, a beach, a garden courtyard, or anywhere that is a special place for you. Allow yourself to walk up to your safe place, and enter.

5. Take time to look around: notice all the things that help you feel safe and comfortable here. Relax and enjoy being here; feel the sense of confidence and inner strength your safe place gives you.

6. If you choose to, find a place to sit down. Add anything you want to this space to help you feel safer and more at ease. Remove anything you don't want. You can change anything you want. Then simply relax, feeling at ease, enjoying your safe place.

7. When it's time to leave, imagine standing up, leaving the safe place the same way you came in, walking back along the same path or walkway you took to get here, eventually passing through the gate, turning around, and closing it. Your safe place is on the other side, but you know you can return anytime you need to.

8. Practice evoking this safe place in ordinary, non-stressful moments so that it is available to you when the flak hits the fan. Recognize that you are using your brain's neuroplasticity to create a new and reliable resource of coping.

Integrating the Take Aways

What tools/exercises could you commit to practicing every day?

What obstacles might get in the way?

What resources could you draw on to overcome the obstacles?

Individual reflection, journaling, share in groups of three; large group Q&A