

# Recovering Beyond Trauma

A Guide For

Fostering Awareness | Feeling Grounded | Finding Resources



**TRUENORTH MEDICAL CENTRES**

Resource Counsellors | Summer 2018

## A message from your resource counsellors...

We are students in the Addictions and Mental Health program at Humber College. Our positions as resource counsellors have given us the opportunity to help guide you to resources within the community and support you with your immediate needs.

Being a trauma informed practice means that we are aware of the prevalence of trauma in the lives of Canadians and keep it in consideration when providing care. With this, we know that it can sometimes be difficult to handle some of the things you go through on your own. We wanted to provide you with some information and tools that may be helpful when you are in need of support beyond our time at TrueNorth.



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*“One must still have chaos in oneself to be  
able to give birth to a dancing star.”*  
—Friedrich Nietzsche

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# Introduction

## What is Trauma?

“**Trauma**” refers to experiences or events that are overwhelming. These incidents are more than just stressful; they are shocking, terrifying and devastating, and can result in strong feelings of terror, shame, helplessness and powerlessness. It is not surprising then, how these traumatic experiences can compromise an individual’s ability to cope.

Trauma can result from an **event** or **experience** (i.e. being a victim of or witnessing trauma) or from the **impact** of the event or experience (i.e. the effect the incident has on the sense of self-agency, identity, safety, belonging and connection).

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*Trauma ultimately is the **sum** of the event, the experience of the event, and the effect that the event has on one’s life.*

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## Trauma and Identity

Identity and belonging are central to our well-being. For some people, the basis of their identity is what their experiences of trauma is linked to and therefore leads them to hide who they are. This feeling and inability to be their true self can be traumatizing in itself.

Addiction can often be linked to a lack of identity. It serves as a way of coping with the feelings of not knowing who you are or not being able to express your true self freely without the fear of oppression.

# Introduction

## Prevalence of Trauma in Canada

Experiences of trauma is very common within Canadian society. In fact, **76%** of Canadian adults report some form of trauma exposure in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

Research shows that **Adverse Childhood Experiences** (ACEs) are strongly related to the development and prevalence of a wide range of health problems, including substance abuse. ACEs are stressful or traumatic experiences such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction (e.g. witnessing domestic violence, or growing up with substance abuse, mental illness or crime in the home).

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***76%** of Canadian adults report some form of trauma exposure in their lifetime.*

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When children are exposed to chronic stressful events, neurodevelopment can be disrupted and their ability to cope with negative emotions can be compromised. One study showed that people with five or more ACEs were **seven to ten times more likely** to report illicit drug use problems and addiction than people who had no experience with ACEs.

Similarly, trauma survivors experience significantly more co-occurring mental health difficulties such as depression, sexual dysfunction, dissociation, anger, suicidality, self-harm.

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<sup>1</sup> Van Ameringen, M., et al., *Post-traumatic stress disorder in Canada*. CNS Neuroscience & Therapeutics, 2008. 14(3): p.171-181.

# Trauma & the Body

## How Trauma Affects the Body

The autonomic nervous system controls the glands and muscles of internal organs. It can be divided into two subsystems: the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic system. The **sympathetic** nervous system arouses the body whereas the **parasympathetic** nervous system calms the body.

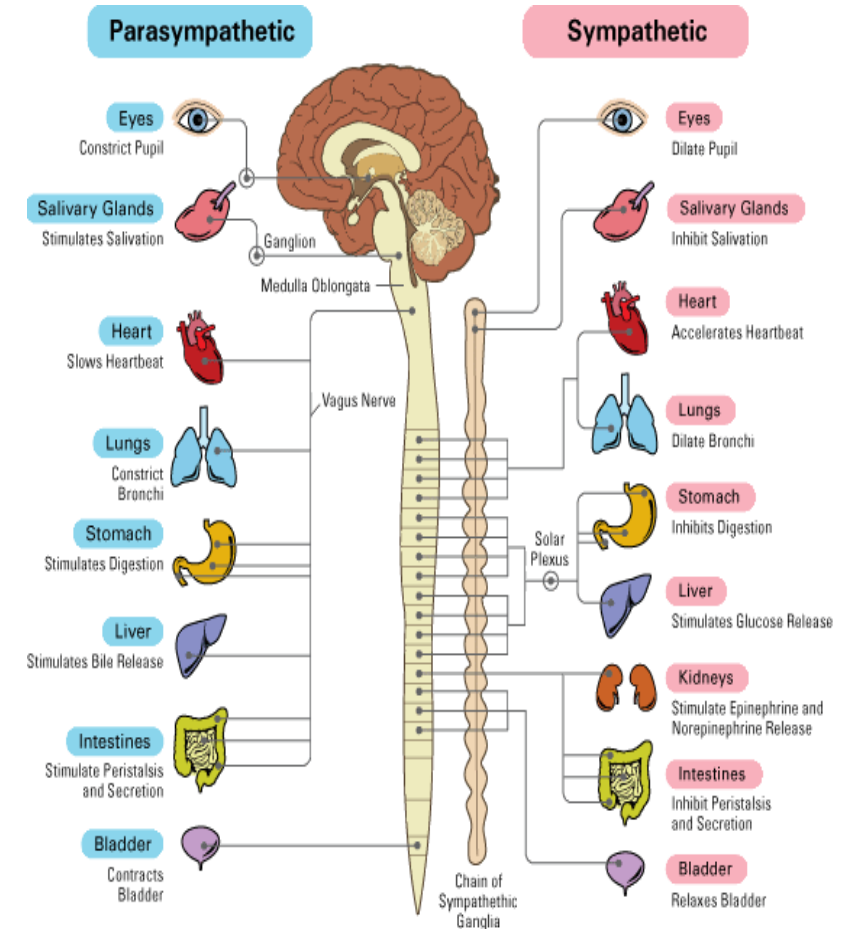
When there is something potentially threatening in our environment, our sympathetic nervous system is activated and our body prepares us for survival. Basically, our body prepares to **fight or flight**. This leads to increased heart rate, breathing and blood pressure.

Once the threat is gone, the parasympathetic system works to return the body to a state of calm by reversing the physical effects of the sympathetic nervous system. This calming process can take between **20 minutes to 60 minutes**.

When trauma becomes chronic (in other words, when a person experiences multiple or ongoing traumatic situations), our bodies remain in a **constant state of alertness** in order to be **ready** for threats. This ongoing activation of the sympathetic nervous system is very draining on the body and can lead to many health problems, such as a weaker immune system, frequent headaches, insomnia, depression and anxiety. In addition, this constant activation can also worsen a person's ability to tell the difference between threatening stimuli and harmless stimuli. **Fear** becomes the automatic response to **both** threatening and non-threatening stimuli.

# Trauma & the Body

## Sympathetic vs. Parasympathetic



Source: [www.majordifferences.com/2017/03/9-differences-between-sympathetic.html](http://www.majordifferences.com/2017/03/9-differences-between-sympathetic.html)

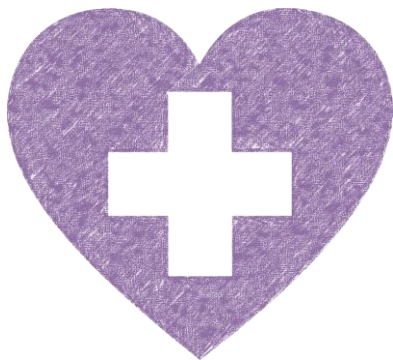
# Trauma & the Body

## Symptoms of Trauma

The impacts of trauma can vary and are unique to each person. In the same way, trauma symptoms can vary across individuals.

Some common trauma symptoms include:

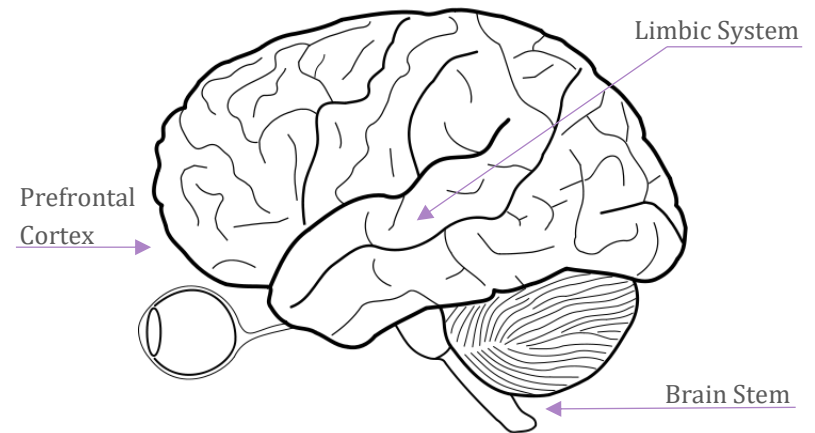
- Dissociation
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Changes in eating and sleeping
- Hyperarousal or hypoarousal
- Social withdrawal



# Trauma & the Brain

## Parts of the Brain

There are three parts of the brain that are relevant when understanding the impacts of trauma. These parts include the brain stem, the limbic system, and the prefrontal cortex. The **brain stem** is all about survival and controls things like breathing, circulation, arousal, and balance. The **limbic system** is made up of structures that deal with emotions (such as anger, happiness, and fear) as well as memories. The **prefrontal cortex** is our thinking brain and is responsible for language, awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive processing.

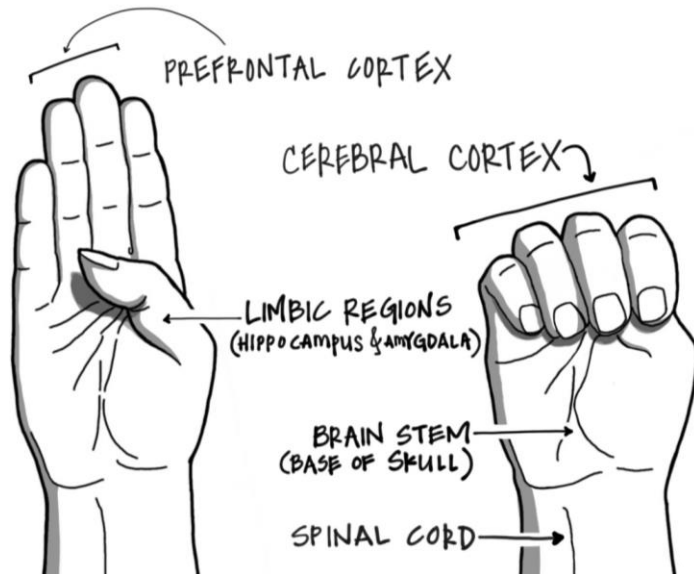


# Trauma & the Brain

## Hand Model of the Brain

Dr. Dan Siegel uses the hand model of the brain to explain how the brain works and reacts to traumatic experiences and events. This model can help us visualize the brain and in turn help us understand what is happening inside our brain and body. From there, we can work on reducing or preventing our automatic responses to stimuli and instead, react from a place of choice.

In this model, the three brain areas (the brain stem, the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex) correspond to three areas of your hand. Your **arm and wrist** represent the **spinal cord**. Your **palm** represents the **brain stem**, your **thumb** represents the **limbic system**, and your **fingers** represent the **prefrontal cortex**. You might find it easier to think of the model as being the brain stem palm, limbic thumb, and cortex fingers.



Source: © Mind Your Brain, Inc. 2018 [www.madeleineisiegel.org](http://www.madeleineisiegel.org)

# Trauma & the Brain

## “Flipping Your Lid”

During times of danger, or when your emotional buttons are pushed, the limbic thumb is put under pressure. This can cause you to “flip your lid.” “**Flipping the lid**” occurs when your limbic thumb is aroused and the fight or flight response is activated, pushing open your cortex fingers. Remember, the cortex is where your thinking happens. So, when you “flip your lid,” your thinking goes out the window. When this happens, you lose your balance and reasoning, and act in ways which may be unpleasant or extreme as a result of your emotions. The “flipping lid” is an unintentional reaction, you are not choosing to engage in a behaviour or “act out.”

You can use the Window of Tolerance exercise on page 12 or the Emotional Scaling exercise on page 14 in order to map out instances or situations when your emotions are rising out of your control. You can bring yourself back to a state of calm by using some grounding techniques on pages 15, 16 and 17.





# Trauma & the Brain

## Dr. Gabor Maté

Dr. Gabor Maté is an addiction expert, speaker and author. Having worked in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside with patients challenged by addiction, mental illness, and HIV for twelve years, Dr. Mate teaches that the source of addiction is not found within our genes but rather in the early childhood environment.

Addiction is often seen as a choice or an illness. Dr. Mate believes neither is true. **Addiction always serves a purpose**, whether that be stress relief, pleasure, or a distraction from physical and emotional pain.

*“The addiction is never the primary problem, the addiction is always an **attempt** on the individual's part to **solve the problem.**”*

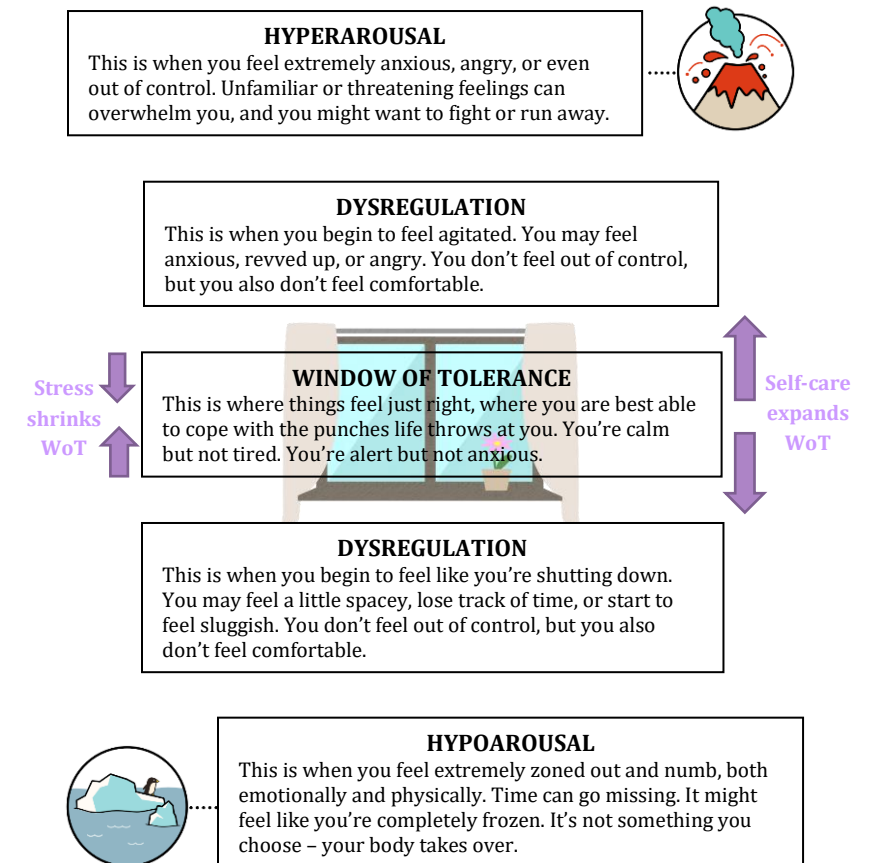
—Dr. Gabor Mate

Dr. Maté says the problem is “*Why am I in so much emotional pain? How come I don't know how to deal with the emotional pain?*” In this way, the addiction is not the problem, it is an attempt to find a solution to a problem. For example, one might try to cope with their mental health concerns through the use of drugs. In fact, trauma increases people's risk of developing an addiction. Trauma leads to emotional stress, and the addiction relieves this stress and pain or provides pleasure.

Source: Dr. Gabor Maté [www.drgabormate.com](http://www.drgabormate.com)

# Window of Tolerance

## Stress and Trauma Can Shrink Your WoT



Source: © The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioural Medicine 2017 [www.nicabm.com](http://www.nicabm.com)

# Window of Tolerance

## Window of Tolerance Exercise Instructions

You might find it helpful to fill out the Window of Tolerance tool (on the next page) to think about your own emotions and reactions that come up for you during times of stress. Use the steps below to guide yourself through the exercise in order to become more aware of when you are being triggered and leaving your comfort zone.

For each of the three states listed on the diagram, write down:

- Any **bodily sensations** you might feel that are associated with each of the states
- Any **emotions** or **feelings** that come up for you when you are within each of the states
- Any **behaviours** you engage in when you are within each of the states
- **Things you enjoy doing** that keep you in your Window of Tolerance or **things that have been helpful** to get you back to your Window of Tolerance

It may be helpful to use different coloured pens for each of the four components in order to easily differentiate between them.

Refer to this tool when you find yourself slipping out of your Window of Tolerance. Use any of the grounding techniques mentioned on pages 15, 16 and 17 to help you get back into your Window of Tolerance.

# Window of Tolerance

## Window of Tolerance Exercise

*Hyperarousal Zone*

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*Window of Tolerance*

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*Hypoarousal Zone*



# The Emotional Scale

## Emotional Scaling Exercise Instructions

Another exercise that you might find helpful is called Emotional Scaling. This may be a valuable exercise, as it will help you break down a specific emotion into 10 stages and identify a safe target. Use the steps below to guide yourself through the exercise (on the next page).

Begin by picking an **emotion** you would like to break down. Write it down on the space provided.

Pick a stage that you feel safe or contained. This will be your **Safe Target**. This is where you are able to manage your listed emotion and have a sense of control over your thoughts and behaviours.

For each of the ten stages listed on the diagram, write down:

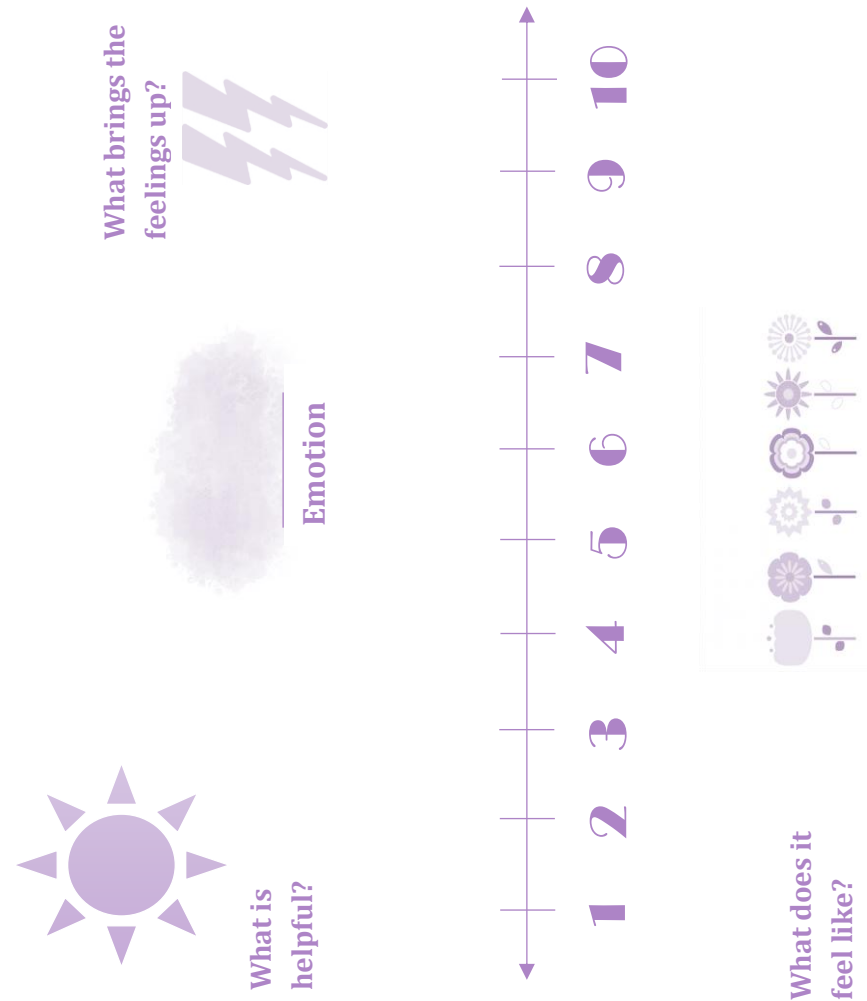
- What you **feel** at each stage. This can be your inner experiences or behaviours.
- What brings up this feeling? These are essentially your **“triggers.”**
- **What has been helpful** to get you back to your Safe Target?

It may be helpful to use different coloured pens for each of the three components in order to easily differentiate between them.

Refer to this tool when you feel your emotions are escalating and slipping out of your control. It may help you recognize warning signs and when you may need to take a moment to yourself. Use any of the grounding techniques mentioned later on pages 15, 16 and 17 to help you get back to your Safe Target.

# The Emotional Scale

## Emotional Scaling Exercise



# Back to Your Senses

## Grounding Techniques

Practicing grounding skills can help you “**come back to your senses.**” Once you have gone outside your Window of Tolerance, you need to find a way to recover. This is where grounding skills may be helpful.

Grounding skills can help you cope with flashbacks, overwhelming memories and feelings, flooded thoughts, or triggers to use substances. In moments of stress, anxiety, or triggered trauma, it is important to stay in the present moment to find relief for your symptoms. The grounding techniques described hereafter can help you or someone you know stay present, grounded and feeling safe.

## 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique

- **5:** Name **FIVE** things you can **SEE** around you (e.g. pencil, bird, a mark on the ceiling)
- **4:** Name **FOUR** things you can **TOUCH** around you (e.g. hair, ground, pillow)
- **3:** Name **THREE** things you can **HEAR**. Avoid focusing on your thoughts (e.g. ticking of the clock, traffic, a dog bark)
- **2:** Name **TWO** things you can **SMELL**. This one might be harder to sniff out. You may have to walk nearby to find a scent (e.g. soap, perfume or cologne, candle)
- **1:** Name **ONE** thing you can **TASTE**. What does the inside of your mouth taste like? (e.g. gum, coffee, sandwich from lunch)

# Back to Your Senses

## Breathing Exercise

- Sit or stand tall. Loosen your shoulders. Place your feet firmly on the ground.
- Feel the ground beneath your feet. Notice your feet connecting with the ground.
- Slowly take deep breaths, in and out. Try to breathe out longer. Continue for as long as you need to feel better.

## “Make It Rain” Exercise

- Stand tall. Loosen your shoulders, arms and hands. Slowly take deep breaths, in and out.
- Start rubbing your hands together. Continue for about 10 seconds.
- Snap your fingers. Continue for about 10 seconds.
- Clap your hands. Continue for about 10 seconds.
- Start tapping your body with your hands, starting with your shoulders and making your way down towards your feet. Now reverse it, tapping back up to your shoulders.
- Clap your hands. Continue for about 10 seconds.
- Snap your fingers. Continue for about 10 seconds.
- Rub your hands together. Continue for about 10 seconds.
- Stop and take a deep breath. Inhale for 5 seconds, hold for 1 second, and breathe out for 7 seconds.

# Back to Your Senses

## Other things to try:

- Go for a walk
- Call a friend you trust
- Listen to your favourite song
- Wash your face with cold water
- Name the things you can see around you
- Light a candle and enjoy the scent. Does it remind you of anything?
- Try doing push-ups against the wall
- Make hands into fists, hold the grip, and release and wiggle your fingers. Repeat this as many times as you feel.



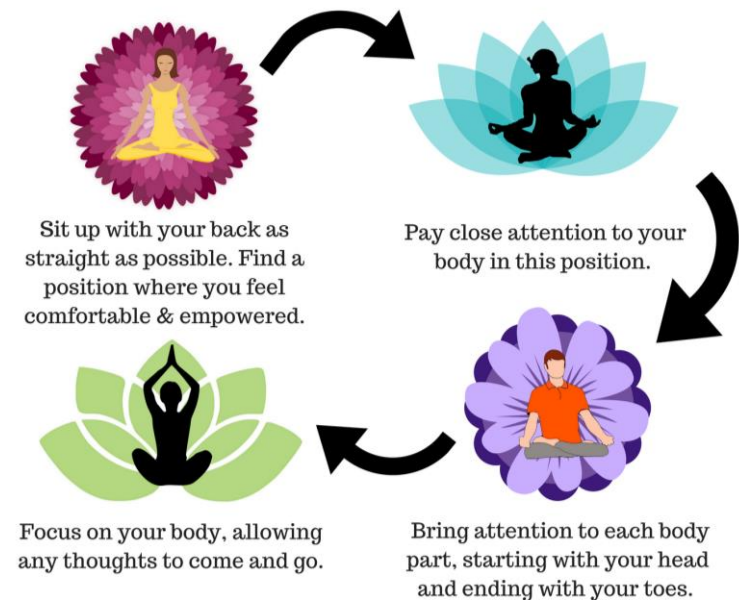
# Mindfulness

## Mind Full or Mindful?

Mindfulness is the practice of staying in the present moment. Mindfulness exercises can help to create feelings of safety when you experience flashbacks or are exposed to triggers that cause emotional dysregulation.

Try out the Body Scan Meditation exercise below. Only continue with this mindfulness activity if you are in safe space, both mentally and physically.

## Body Scan Meditation

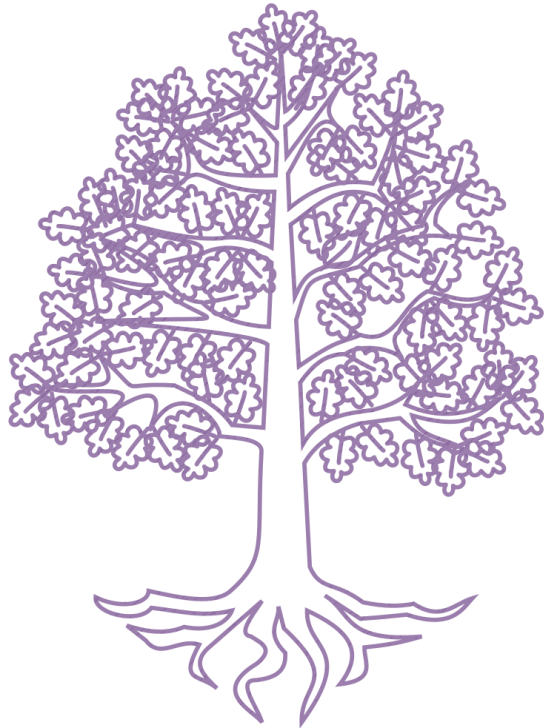


# Grounding vs. Mindfulness

## Is it time to ground or be mindful?

If you don't feel safe within your body, it is best to turn to grounding so you can shift your focus from what is distressing you onto external things. That way, you are not re-experiencing the trauma that is being triggered. Instead, you are reconnecting to the present time and place.

On the other hand, mindfulness involves being attuned to what is going on internally. Mindfulness involves acknowledging feelings and allowing them to be there, rather than pushing them away. Mindfulness should only be practiced during times when you feel safe and ready to sit with your feelings.



# Self-Care

## What is Self-Care?

Taking care of yourself in times of stress is important. **Self-care** involves any activities that we do for ourselves in order to maintain our physical and mental wellness. It is about naming your needs and taking steps to meet them. The first step to helping others is helping yourself.

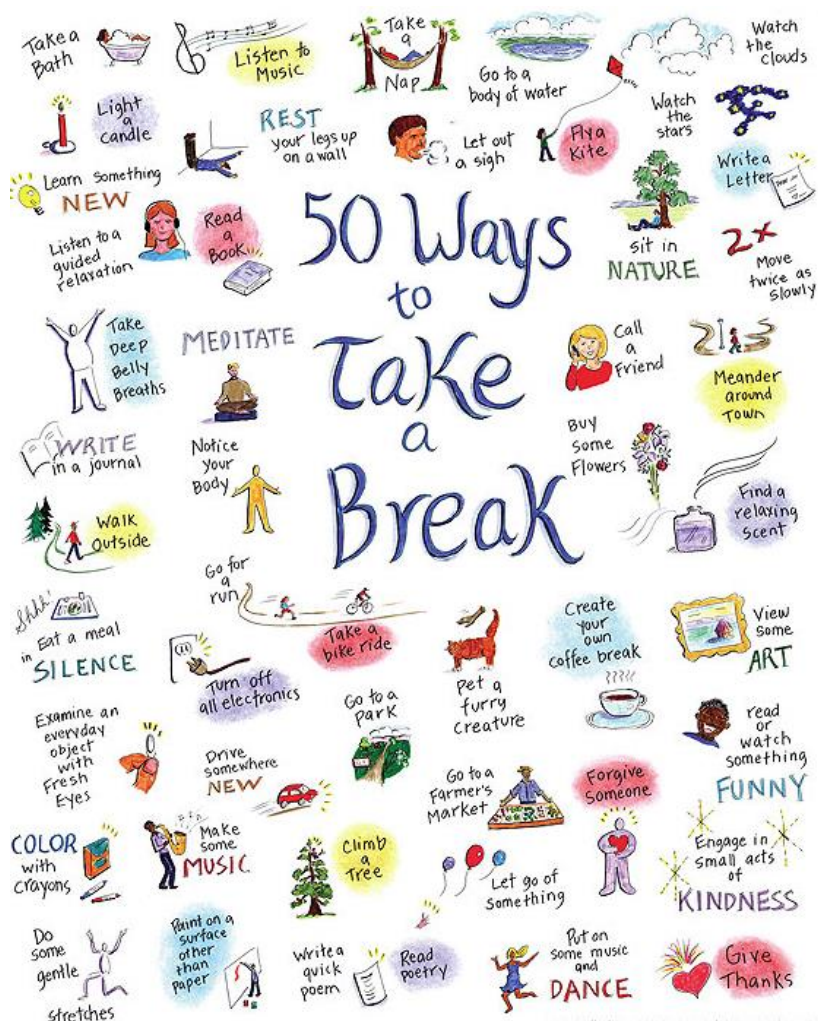
## Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Stress relief** involves specific things you can do in the here and now to relieve stress. For example, you might enjoy taking a bath, doing yoga or going for a run.
- **Stress reduction** involves things that are planned to prevent overall stress from building up. This may look like scheduling out how to manage your time, taking breaks, and seeking out social support.
- **Stress resiliency** includes day-to-day practices that you can make a habit of to cope with stress. For example, regular meditation, eating three meals a day or sticking to an exercise routine.



# Self-Care

Here are some ideas you can try!



Source: Karen Horeffer-Ginter [www.karenhg.com](http://www.karenhg.com)  
 Art by: Paula Hansen [www.chart-magic.com](http://www.chart-magic.com)

# Trauma Resources

## Trauma Specific Therapy

Trauma Specific Therapy is a therapeutic intervention that is provided by a counsellor who specializes in experiences of trauma. Counsellors may explore the details of a client's traumatic experiences with them in order to help them heal. This form of therapy should only be used when the client is ready to explore the details of their experiences.

## Community Resources: Therapy / Counselling

### Trauma Therapy Program

- **Where:** Women's College Hospital
- **Address:** 76 Greenville Street (7<sup>th</sup> floor), Toronto, M5S 1B2
- **Phone:** (416) 323-6230
- **Hours:** Monday-Friday 9AM-5PM
- This program only offers psychotherapy to women and men who have experienced childhood interpersonal trauma
- Physician referral required

### Mental Health Counselling

- **Where:** The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
- **Address:** 194 Jarvis Street (2<sup>nd</sup> floor), Toronto, M5B 2B7 (Main Office)
- **Phone:** (416) 363-1066
- This program includes assessments, counseling (individual, group and family), crisis intervention and referrals



# Trauma Resources

## Community Resources: Women

### Women and Trauma Service (Integrated Day Treatment Service)

- **Where:** CAMH – Queen Street Site
- **Address:** 100 Stokes Street (4<sup>th</sup> floor)
- **Phone:** (416) 535- 8501, press 2
- This program is intended for women struggling with the impact of trauma in their lives
- Physician referral required

### Trauma Services at The Jean Tweed Centre

- **Phone:** (416) 255-7359
- **Email:** info@jeantweed.com
- Offers multiple programs for women only, contact for more information

### YWCA Support Services

- **Where:** YWCA Toronto
- **Address:** 87 Elm Street, Toronto, M5G 0A8
- **Phone:** (416) 961-8100
- **Email:** info@ywcatoronto.org
- This organization offers various supports for women and girls healing from trauma or fleeing from violence. Programs include parenting after abuse, mental health counseling and healing through the arts programs.

# Trauma Resources

## Community Resources: Women

### Healing from Abuse and Trauma Services

- **Where:** Elizabeth Fry Society
- **Address:** 215 Wellesley Street E., Toronto, M4X 1G1
- **Phone:** (416) 924-3708 or Toll Free 1 (855) 924-3708
- **Email:** info@efrytoronto.org
- This program offers individualized counseling for women who have experienced abuse

## Community Resources: Men

### Canadian Centre for Men and Families (CCMF)

- **Address:** 152 Carlton Street, Unit 201, Toronto, M4Y 2J9
- **Phone:** 647-479-9611 or Toll Free 1 (844) 900-2263
- **Email:** info@menandfamilies.org
- Support for men who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault and all forms of trauma

## Community Resources: Men & Women

### Adult Support Programs

- **Where:** The Gatehouse
- **Address:** 3101 Lakeshore Blvd West, Toronto, M8V 3W8
- **Phone:** (416) 255-5900 (Main Phone Number) ext. 222 for information on Women's and Men's groups
- Offers support groups for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse



# Trauma Resources

## Community Resources: Family

### Family Service Toronto

- **Address:** 355 Church Street, Toronto, M5B 0B2
- **Phone:** (416) 595-9230 ext. 0 (Central Office)
- Offers various programs and services for different experiences of trauma

## Community Resources: Immigrants & Refugees

### Polycultural Immigrant & Community Services

- **Phone:** (416) 233-0055 ext. 1237
- Offers crisis counselling for newcomers and refugees

## Community Resources: Physical Injuries

### Beyond Surviving, to Thriving (My BeST): Trauma Survivors' Network

- **Where:** St. Michael's Hospital
- **Location:** Varies by meeting between Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute building and St. Michael's Hospital main building
- **Phone:** (416) 360-4000
- This program is a peer support group for survivors of traumatic injuries such as a car crash, fall, gunshot wound or work-related injury

# A moment of gratitude...

## TrueNorth Medical Centres

We would like to thank Dr. Chris Cavacuiti and his team of dedicated doctors for giving us the opportunity to be part of the TrueNorth team for our placement experience. Your knowledge and passion in the field of addiction has been truly inspiring to work alongside.

## Dalhousie Staff

We would like to thank our wonderful placement supervisor, Cassandra Siemens, for supporting, advising and encouraging our work every step of the way.

We would also like to thank the management and administrative staff of the clinic, Sabrina, Sajeda and Sana, for welcoming us to the TrueNorth family, guiding us and teaching us about their work.

## Humber Mentor

We would like to thank our Trauma Informed Practice and Seminar instructor, Kathryn Mettler, for giving us the foundational knowledge of trauma informed care that not only guided us through our interactions with clients but inspired us to create this handbook.

## TrueNorth Patients

We would like to thank everyone who sought support from us in accessing resources for their various needs. Words cannot describe how grateful we are for how much we learned through our interactions with each and every one of you. We wish you all the best in your journey.

—Your Resource Counsellors, Kristen & Dilini

