

Calming the Nervous System and Healing Trauma through Somatic Experiencing

Stephen Michael Tumolo, M.A., S.E.P.

The Center for Receptive Communication

www.receptivecommunication.com



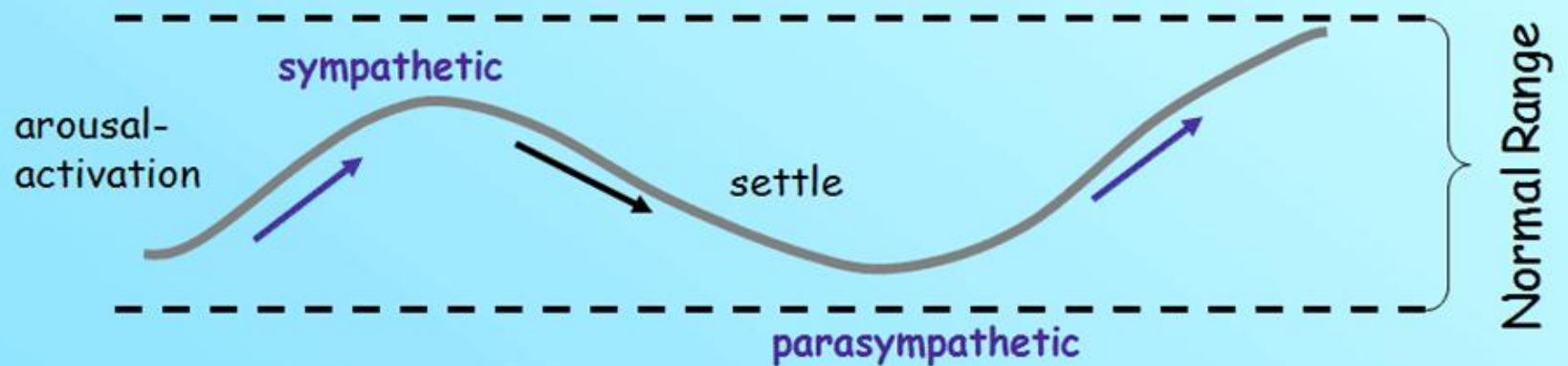
Naturally healthy nervous systems have the capacity to handle stress and heal from trauma.

Humans are created to support the experience of a wide-range of emotions.

A person with a healthy nervous system experiences an ebb and flow of activation and settling throughout a day.



A Healthy Nervous System



**When my Nervous System is balanced
and my activation is low
I feel:**

Open, curious

Relaxed yet alert

Embodied

Appropriately reactive

Available for connection

Able to be present

Fluid, resilient

Emotionally stable

Competent - a sense of mastery

Healthy - symptoms are manageable

I have choices and options

I recognize when I am moving out of my functional range
and have tools to return to stability and stabilization

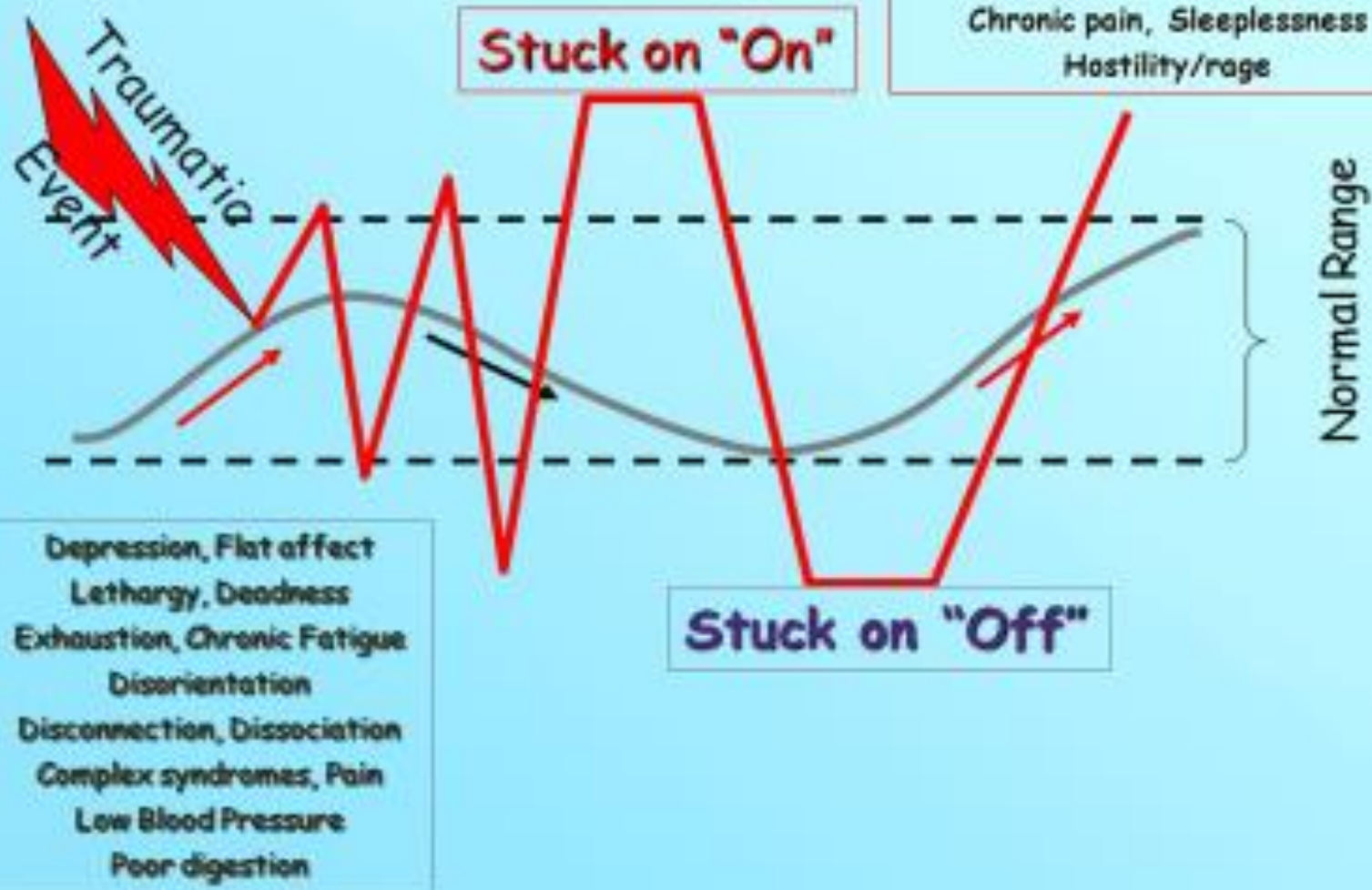
I know when to reach out for support
when I can't do it on my own

Activation without Completion of the Defensive Response

A healthy nervous system can be disrupted when an event cannot be fully experienced. This can begin when a person perceives a sense of threat to their safety or well-being. The nervous system reacts and triggers a spike up in activation. The body is now ready for fight or flight as defensive responses.

The body and its nervous system, do not know experience a successful completion of the defensive response. The body continues to signal that the threat has not diminished. The nervous system can then get stuck on “On,” and remain highly activated. Similarly, the nervous system may get stuck on “Off,” and remain at a low or depressed levels.

Symptoms of Un-Discharged Traumatic Stress



Trauma as an Event in the Nervous System

Trauma may be best understood as an event in the nervous system, not an external event. An external event may trigger a traumatic reaction in one person, but not in another.

Trauma is,

“An event in the nervous system caused when the body’s natural defensive responses are activated...

...and the defensive response is not completed successfully.”

Hope for Healing

This definition of trauma is hopeful. We don't have to "heal the past," or heal past events.

What needs healing are own nervous systems, which are present and accessible.

This is hopeful because we have access at all times to the present moment and to our nervous systems in the present. This is what's needed for healing.



An Empowering Understanding of Trauma

Trauma is **an inner event**
– not something that
“happened to me” but
something that
“happened within me.”

Our inner life is always
accessible and not static.

Being Present

A key to healing trauma and settling our nervous systems is being present.

The power of presence releases a naturally healing and restorative movement within the body.

Peter Levine, in developing Somatic Experience, suggests 5 doorways to presence. These are 5 aspects of our inner life to which we can attune.

Doorways to the Inner Life

The acronym SIBAM identifies 5 entry points for the awareness that fosters presence:

S - Sensation (physical sensation)

I - Image (an image / metaphor)

B - Behavior

A - Affect (feelings, emotions)

M - Meaning (thoughts, meaning that we make)

Awareness of Physical Sensation (S)

In bringing attention to the body and scanning the body we can look for:

- Temperature: a sense of warmth or cool in certain areas of the body;
- Density: Tightness or Looseness; Expansion or Constriction; and,
- The movement of energy in our body, or Stillness
- The physical sensations connected to a need or heart's desire

SIBAM in HD

A 6th point of entry for our awareness is the Heart's Desires, or Values, or Needs that live in us and motivate us to action.

These God-given desires that are commonly held by humans and not tied to one way of having them satisfied.

Examples of these Heart's Desires (HD) are our desires for love, freedom, creativity, belonging, acceptance, and to know we matter.

Healing Presence: The company of another

Our capacity to be present to ourselves may be under developed or compromised.

The presence of another can support us in being present to ourselves. Through this accompaniment, we can grow in the ability to be present to ourselves.



The Body as Resource, The Body as Home

With practice, our bodies experience a growing sense of safety, calm, and being at home.

Through attending to physical sensations, along with the other elements of SIBAM-HD, we experience ourselves as more grounded, relaxed, alive, resilient, at ease, and stable.

As we establish the norm of ease and presence in the body a sense of grounded presence becomes “home.” With our settled body as a resource, we can journey from home and “visit” parts of the body that are holding tension or constriction. In doing so, we are more able to be with emotions such as sadness, anxiousness or fear. This growing capacity to be with a wide range of emotions is called affect tolerance.

“The glory of God
is the human person, fully alive”

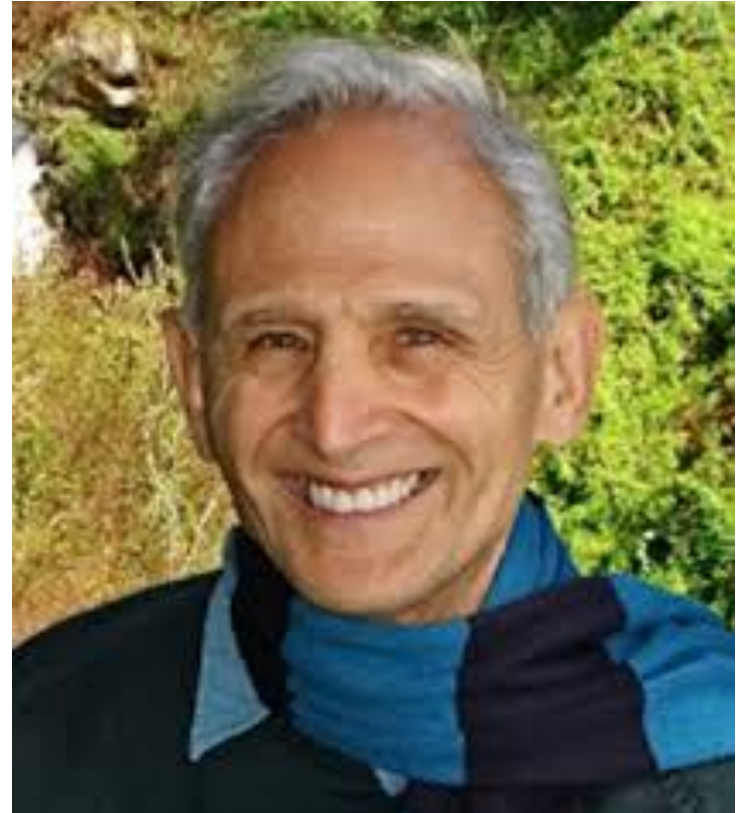
Irenaeus



Somatic Experiencing

This presentation is informed by Dr. Peter Levine, founder of the Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute.

<https://traumahealing.org>



Additional Resources: Books

Radical Wholeness: The Embodied Present and the Ordinary Grace of Being, Philip Shepherd

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma, Bessel van der Kolk, MD

In a Hidden Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness, Peter Levine

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, Marshall Rosenberg

Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror, Judith Lewis Herman

The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, Laura Davis and Ellen Bass

Victims No Longer: The Classic Guide for Men Recovering from Sexual Child Abuse, Mike Lew

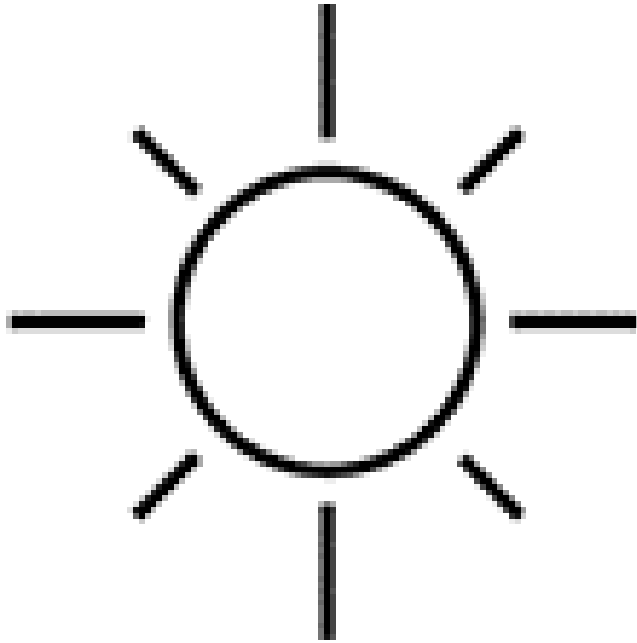
Crash Course: A Self-Healing Guide to Auto Accident Trauma and Recovery, Diane Poole Heller and Laurence S. Heller

Additional Resources: Websites

MaleSurvivor www.malesurvivor.org/

Center for Nonviolent Communication www.cnvc.org

Center for Living Compassion www.living-compassion.org



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P. O. Box 170003; Boston, MA 02117

rock@receptivecommunication.com

receptivecommunication.com