Befriending Your Triggered Body

Embodied Practices Training Handout

One of the most painful possibilities for trauma survivors is to be triggered -- to go from living in this body, in this experience, in this present moment, to suddenly finding themselves catapulted into fear, terror, numbness, or panic. What might have felt steady now feels enormously disruptive. It can seem like being thrown into another life.

Key to healing is learning about what your triggers are, when you’re triggered, and how best to be with them. Sometimes that means managing them, sometimes it means processing them. Perhaps the most important thing to know is that if the experience you’re in feels too big to handle right now then mostly likely you are having a triggered reaction.

At any point in your healing journey you will find yourself triggered. Unfortunately, that is one thing you can count on. There’s always this hope and dream that we can somehow eradicate ever getting triggered again.

What we can learn to do is live in this moment. We have to separate the past from the present. The past is where the undigested feelings and body sensations are. When those feelings and/or sensations intrude into the present they come through in the un-metabolized form when they were encoded. The rawness of the experience can be extraordinarily hard to bear. This is where having an Embodied Practice helps tremendously.

The Becoming Safely Embodied Skills are oriented to help people deal with triggers from a psychological perspective.

This program on Embodied Practices come from a different place, one where we drop the content of the experience and stay just with the body. With practice you’ll learn to live as close to the moment as possible. The astounding benefit is you can experience yourself and life without the cloud of protection. Practicing is what makes it possible, one moment at a time.

When you feel the huge fullness of the trigger it might mean you need to take one breath at a time. I can remember times when I had to focus my mind so strongly to be in this present moment even as I could feel the pull of the past trying to intrude. I had to learn to focus my mind, training myself to stay here in this moment.

From the vantage point of training and focusing your mind to be right here you will come to know a spaciousness so vast that the triggered body experience is held in a larger field. To do that means you need to let the stories and interpretations and associations that pepper the
pure moment go. When you do you’ll find yourself in the moment, the past easing back and giving you room to be present.

Bringing traumatic material into the current moment creates a ripe field for getting triggered. The truth is, you’ll get triggered no matter what happens. That’s part of not only healing trauma but living life. Our task really is to learn how to deal with the many tiny and very large triggers that happens.

Using the Embodied Practices you can slow down what happens and decrease your reactivity. That will help you learn the basic skills of what happens in your body which opens the door to being able to work with triggers more effectively.

If you find you’re getting triggered a lot and it starts feeling too big, make sure you are keeping notes to bring in to your therapist. Having a therapist who is well versed in trauma/attachment treatment is essential. My best suggestion is to take notes of when you get triggered and the context in which the trigger happens. Bring the information in to your therapist to rework the content since that is something that the Embodied Practices doesn’t work with.