

Strategies for Safety & Stabilisation



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Safety

Working through traumatic experiences is unhelpful if you aren't feeling safe and grounded. Being overwhelmed is not conducive to healing, and it's difficult to teach yourself how to feel safe when you have little experience of this.

So before we get started, let's take a look at some of the ways you can hold yourself and stay grounded throughout this process. This work is hard but what you've experienced on the way here has been much harder. Let's walk through this together, holding each others' hands as well as our own, and start to build a pathway to peace that was probably not sufficiently formed in childhood.

We can start by remembering that grief and trauma are not pathology, they are creative ways of surviving abnormal and overwhelming difficulties. Your tenacity and resilience are something we can celebrate and focus on to emphasise the strong, creative, incredibly resourceful part of you that is more in control of your destiny than you realise.



Grounding

When you're doing shadow work, unpleasant emotions and sensations will come up. These are signposts in the dark, pointing you to the treasure you left there a long time ago.

They are not dangerous but they might feel threatening. Our aim is to try to let these signposts be here and get curious about them.

One way to do this is through grounding, a process that helps you be aware of your body in the here-and-now. This prepares you for past memories embodied in your body that may come up in the present.

Your body is a wise organism that knows exactly what it needs to do, but it's important to move slowly so our mind isn't overwhelmed in the process.

Grounding

Some examples of grounding include:

- Sighing or taking a deep breath
- Changing position – eg. slowly putting your arms up in the air or bending to the side
- Noticing your feet on the ground and how they feel
- Touching cold objects such as a rock, an ice cube, a crystal
- Looking around the room and noticing what's familiar, naming them aloud
- Drinking a cup of your favourite tea
- Stroking your pet.

Grounding

While you're doing these things, you're letting your nervous system know that it has many ways to manage difficult feelings.

You're allowing it to settle without doing anything to make it happen, other than getting out of your body's way and letting it do what it was designed to do.

As you do this, you let your body know that it can trust you, that you will let it attend to your highest good without your mind trying to interfere.



Coping Statements

Create a list of ways you can reframe the responses you've had in the past to anxiety and stress. See if you can elaborate a more helpful present-oriented way of looking at these feelings and behaviours. For example:

- ***Hyper alertness:***

- "I learned to watch out for myself because no-one else protected me".

- ***Addiction:***

- "I learned to numb my feelings of loneliness, hopelessness and overwhelm by using a substance that made my experience of these feelings more bearable".

- ***Isolating:***

- "I learned to be self-sufficient and keep to myself to avoid being hurt by others because that was all I knew of human connection."

- ***Promiscuity:***

- "I learned how to have power over men because they always had power over me."

- ***Mistrust:***

- "I learned that it was safer to expect the worst in people so I wouldn't be disappointed."

- ***Self-loathing:***

- "I found a way to protect others and feel in control by blaming myself."

A Survival Kit



This kit is a collection of things that are resources for you, things you can draw on to help you soothe and regulate your nervous system when you start to feel overwhelmed. It might include items such as:

- a card or note written by someone meaningful, such as a close friend, family member or teacher
- a favourite affirmation(s)
- a list of things you could do that bring you joy
- a photograph of someone or something special
- a talisman like a crystal or some other item with special meaning
- a transitional object like a teddy bear
- a list of people you could call or message, including those in our group
- images of things you would like to give to your inner child.

Dissociation

You may have been using dissociation as a means of regulating your nervous system when you feel overwhelmed. This is one strategy for surviving and returning to a feeling of safety, however we are aiming to do this a different way here by helping you stay present with the sensations and emotions as they arise so they can move through you and discharge naturally.

Before starting a prompt, notice the degree to which you feel grounded. Ask yourself: "How fully present in my body do I feel right now? 50%? 20%? 75%?"

It's unlikely you'll be fully present as most of us aren't and don't need to be. If you feel like you're less than 60% present with your body though, think about activities that will help you increase this.



Dissociation

Activities that are useful include movement, for example it's much harder to dissociate when you're standing or walking

You can also engage the more intellectual part of the brain by doing things like writing lists and schedules. Some questions to explore:

- Does it help to change position, get up and move around the room, or sit somewhere else?
- Does it help to breathe more deeply into my diaphragm?
- Does it help to read the latest weather report, make a shopping list, write my goals for the year or check out the latest book I'd like to read?
- Does it help to do something creative like colouring in or working with clay?

Stay in the present

It's important that you be in the here-and-now of life while doing this work, so do the things that bring you back to yourself in 2020.

- Go to work
- Attend social events
- Go outside
- Play with your pets
- Garden, cook, make art
- Reach out to friends, the group, your therapist.

These things are particularly important when you're feeling vulnerable or overwhelmed. Remember: stay active and engage in activities that keep you connected to the here-and-now.



Summary

We are putting safety nets under you because this work does not always feel pleasant. When learning how to correctly interpret the ways messages from the past are being expressed in the present, there will be triggers that feel threatening because they bring up emotions that make you feel unsafe. Notice that you ARE safe even if you don't always feel it, and remind yourself of this by using these safety nets at least daily.

- Do grounding activities
- Read over your list of coping strategies for when you're being hard on yourself
- Use your survival kit
- Reduce dissociation
- Try to stay connected to the present and to other people.

For today, make a list of the statements and activities you'll include in your safety nets. Share some of them with us in the private group if it feels right. Let's commit to supporting each other through this process by reminding each other to use our safety nets and sharing what we put into them.

If you have any questions or you need extra support with feelings that come up for you, please [contact me](#).

Thank You



Thank you for doing the work and honouring yourself and the world with the truth of who you are. I hope you'll keep choosing to live from a place of authenticity as you allow the wisdom of your heart, body and spirit to emerge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leanne Matton

I'm a registered psychologist and certified art therapist and life coach living and working on Queensland's Gold Coast. I spent years searching for ways to heal from childhood trauma, recover my creativity, and reconnect with my dreams.

Along the way I became a therapist committed to going beyond intellectual processes to a deeper level of nervous system repair and creative and spiritual healing. For the last 23 years I've been helping people recover from the impact of childhood abuse and neglect. That journey is so filled with wrong turns and dead ends and nobody should have to walk it alone.

