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STORY JOURNEY MANUAL

Handbook with body mind techniques



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Project information

The objectives and the activities of this project are aimed at supporting young people with challenging behaviour in their social inclusion. Moreover, the development of narration storytelling tool and a tool with body-mind relaxation techniques will improve the capacity of the youth workers and educators and will support their work.

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Explanatory text

Welcome to YOUR Story Journey!

PSN (Personal Storytelling Narration) is a digital tool designed to help young people reflect on and narrate their life stories. It encourages users to think of their life as a book filled with different chapters, each contributing to their growth and character. The tool aids in exploring significant past events, helping individuals make peace with unresolved emotions and promoting mental health by reducing stress and enhancing clarity. Throughout the sessions, you will be offered a text and an audio file with the same content. If you are not able to follow the instructions, listen to the podcast.

PSN is offered in three formats:

1. Solo adventure:

- This format is for you if you feel overwhelmed or stressed with a particular feeling and are seeking support but believe that you can do it alone. Users explore their stories independently. In this path, users are guided in this order:

- Physical sensations (such as heat, cold, shivers, tremors, cramps; but also smells, odors, tastes, sounds, and visual flashes)

- Emotions (which include anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise)

- Memories

- Attention: your mind can create false memories sometimes. It's important to respect the stages of feeling—first physical sensations, then emotions, followed by mental images and memories.

Trust in your body! Even if the memories are too painful or emotions are too strong, return to your body sensations and simply feel them. This approach requires users to go at their own pace and be mindful of their body's responses.

2. 1-on-1 Journey:

- Users work with a youth worker for personalized guidance. This journey provides more safety and security, allowing for deeper work on painful physical and emotional aspects. The guide's abilities significantly impact the experience, making the path more flexible and supportive without needing strict instructions.

3. Group session:

- A trained youth worker facilitates sessions with a group of young people. In this case, 90% of the work is done by the group, and 10% by the facilitator. The facilitator's role is to stimulate discussion and maintain stability within the group. The collective energy and information shared by the group create a protective environment, enabling the expression of strong feelings and



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emotions. However, individual feelings are explored in relation to the group's shared experiences, rather than in isolation.

This tool empowers individuals by providing emotional release, fostering self-discovery, and enhancing mental well-being through the power of writing and reflection.



Solo adventure

Text for young person

A) Structure

You have chosen the “Solo adventure” protocol. The following explanation will give you better insight into what to expect.

This protocol is designed to help you explore your past experiences in a structured and supportive way. It is important to engage in this exercise when you feel calm and ready to delve into your memories. By following the steps outlined below, you can gain insights into your body sensations, emotional feelings, and memories in a safe and controlled manner.

The exercise consists of three main stages (each lasting 10-15 minutes):

1. **Body sensations**
2. **Emotional feelings**
3. **Memories**

Following this order is crucial because it helps you build a connection between your physical sensations and emotional experiences before delving into specific memories. This progression ensures a more grounded and manageable exploration of your past.

Attention!



By following this approach, you will always be secure in the here and now and only proceed when your body sensations, emotions, or mind have integrated the experience.

Before continuing with the protocol, preparation is important. Find a quiet and comfortable place where you won't be disturbed for 30 to 45 minutes. Ensure you have a notebook or a digital device to record your observations.

B) Managing emotional outbursts

It's natural to experience strong emotions during this exercise. If you feel overwhelmed at any point, take a break, and practice deep breathing. Remember, it's okay to feel emotional – this is part of the healing process.

Do not move from one stage to the next without first completing the necessary step. For example, only when you are certain of your physical sensations should you move on to listening to your emotions.

You can decide to stop at the stage you have reached if the progression is painful or generates unpleasant feelings or moods. For example, if the physical pain you feel is strong, stay with the sensation and do not proceed further.

The personal storytelling tool is designed to facilitate personal growth and self-reflection. It is intended for use as a supplementary resource and should not be considered a substitute for professional psychiatric or psychological treatment. This tool has not been clinically proven to treat or alleviate trauma, mental health disorders, or other psychological conditions. If you are experiencing significant emotional distress or mental health issues, we strongly recommend seeking help from a qualified mental health professional.

This exercise is designed to help you explore and understand the connections between your body sensations, emotions, and memories. By taking the time to reflect on your past in a structured way, you can gain valuable insights into your emotional health and well-being. Remember to approach this exercise with a sense of calm and readiness, and always follow the order of body sensations, emotional feelings, and memories to ensure a safe and productive experience.

You can look at the videos:

- How can I recognize my body feelings?
- How to recognize my emotions?
- How to delve into my emotions?



Body sensations

If the body sensation is too much for you to handle, do some relaxation technique and seek help from a mentor.

If the body sensation feels overwhelming or too intense, take a moment to pause and use a relaxation technique to help ground yourself.

Try focusing on your breathing: inhale slowly through your nose, hold for a few seconds, and exhale gently through your mouth. Repeat this until you feel more centered. You can also try grounding techniques like pressing your feet firmly into the floor or placing your hands on your lap, feeling the stability and support beneath you. Remember, it's okay to stop and take a break. If the sensations continue to feel unmanageable, consider reaching out to a mentor or trusted person who can provide additional support and guidance. Prioritizing your comfort and well-being is essential on this journey.

Describe your physical sensations

Take a moment to tune into and describe the physical sensations you're experiencing in your body. Notice any areas of tension, warmth, tingling, or relaxation, and observe these sensations without judgment. Understanding your body's sensations is crucial because they often serve as the starting point for emotional awareness and mental clarity. Our bodies can hold onto stress, memories, and emotions, even when we're not consciously aware of it. By becoming more attuned to these sensations, you create a foundation for deeper emotional understanding, helping you to connect physical feelings with emotions and thoughts that may be present. This awareness can guide you through the healing process, grounding you in the present moment and providing a bridge to understanding your inner experiences more fully.

Let's begin by finding a comfortable position and taking a few deep breaths to reach a pleasant state of relaxation while staying focused and attentive. Once you're relaxed, gently allow any sensations to emerge and flow through your body.

Start at the top of your head and slowly work your way down, paying attention to each part of your body. Notice any sensations that arise without judging or labeling them as pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly. Just observe them as a neutral observer.

For example, you might notice a tingling in your scalp, a tightness in your shoulders, or a warmth in your hands. Simply acknowledge these sensations without trying to change them.

As you tune into each part of your body, take a moment to write down what you feel. Be as specific and detailed as possible. Describe the location, intensity, and quality of each sensation. This



detailed awareness helps you connect more deeply with your physical state and prepares you for the next steps in our Focusing work.

Identify your emotions. Can you handle them?

After you have scanned your body, shift your focus to your emotions. Think about how you are feeling at this moment. Are you happy, sad, anxious, or calm?

When the body is relaxed, you can let your emotions emerge. Keep in mind:

- if emotions are too strong or painful, return to physical sensations;
- let emotions arise spontaneously, like bubbles from the bottom of a glass, and allow yourself to listen to them.

It can happen that emotions follow one another, accompanied by different physical sensations, tastes, or smells. It's OK: follow their flow without judging them.

It may happen that an emotion persists and is not what you expected. Again, don't force or change it. Allow that emotion to make its way and be heard.

Remember: your body is your port in the storm. Always return to your body and breath to catch your breath and avoid going beyond your limits.

Managing emotions

Emotions are natural responses to our experiences, shaped by how we perceive and interact with the world around us. They can range from joy, sadness, and fear to anger, surprise, and calmness, each providing valuable insights into our needs and reactions. Emotions often begin as physical sensations in the body, like a racing heart when we're anxious or a sense of warmth when we feel content. These sensations signal our brain, which interprets and labels them as specific emotions.

Understanding and naming our emotions—whether they feel positive or negative—can help us manage them more effectively. When we accurately identify our emotions, we gain clarity on what we're feeling and why. This process, called "*emotional labeling*" allows us to observe our feelings without judgment, giving us a greater sense of control and helping us respond in ways that are thoughtful rather than reactive. By learning to manage our emotions, we can navigate life's ups and downs with more balance and resilience.

Following the rhythm of your breathing, let emotions flow and emerge in your body.

Stay grounded in your breath rhythm and your body sensations. Recognize and name the emotions you are experiencing without judgment. Do not force: simply stay with what emerges and the effects on the body.



When emotions run high, breathe deeply. Inhale deeply through your nose, hold a little bit and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this several times until you feel more centered.

Allow yourself to fully experience your emotions without rushing to change them. Emotions, like waves, will rise and fall. Stay present with them. Find the origin of them in your body and the flow.

Try pressing your feet firmly into the ground, or your palms in your legs, focusing on the sensation. You can hold a comforting object paying attention to its texture and temperature. Stay connected to the here and now.

Be kind to yourself as you navigate your emotions. Remind yourself that it's okay to feel what you're feeling. Self-compassion involves treating yourself with the same kindness and understanding as you would a close friend.

After the emotional wave has passed, take some time to feel your breath and body. What triggered the emotion? How did you respond?

Record your observations

Write down the emotions you are experiencing and their corresponding body sensations (on your computer or on paper: you decide). This step helps you understand how your emotions manifest physically.

Writing is important because it allows everything that has emerged to be reconstructed in your document. At the same time, the rational part of your mind can sort out and put in order what your body, emotions, and memories have produced.

Write simply. After all, you are the recipient of this letter. Your present self writes for your future self. Write down everything that emerged, without judgment. On the contrary, the more precise you are in listing what you have experienced and seen, the more effective the exercise.

At the end, reread what you have written, possibly aloud. Keep your document carefully, ensuring it is not read by people you do not want to see it. You can also hand it over to your mentor. Alternatively, once you have read it, you can decide to erase or burn your writing.

Recall connected memories

When recalling connected memories, the goal is to let your body sensations and emotions guide you back to moments in your past. Start by finding a comfortable, quiet space where you feel



safe, and focus on the physical sensations you're currently experiencing. These sensations can act as a doorway, bringing up memories linked to similar feelings from the past. For instance, a feeling of warmth might bring up a memory of being with loved ones, while a feeling of tightness might lead to a memory of a stressful situation.

Memory is powerful—it doesn't just bring back images or events; it can also bring back the emotions associated with those experiences. Our minds can often immerse us in a memory as if we're back in that moment. What you feel now may be exactly what you felt back then, or it might be what you couldn't allow yourself to feel at the time. This can happen with both happy and painful memories, each one giving you a chance to understand and process those past emotions fully.

There's no need to be afraid of this experience. Although it may feel intense, these memories and emotions are safe to explore in the present moment. You are not reliving the event; you're observing it from a distance, with the safety and awareness you have now. This process of reconnecting allows you to honor and understand your past self, helping you make peace with these experiences and bring healing to your present.

Imagine being in a quiet and comfortable place where you feel safe and relaxed. Ensure this space is free from distractions and has items that bring you comfort.

Recall the body scanning technique. Focus on any sensations in your body and let these sensations guide you to a memory.

Pay attention to the emotions that arise from these sensations. Let these emotions naturally lead you to related memories.

Sensory cues like smells, sounds, or images can trigger memories. Imagine you are listening to a song, or looking at a photograph or a film. Be a spectator of what is happening.

As memories emerge, look at them like a photo or a film or as you are the public in a theater.

If it is possible, after watching and re-watching, write them down in detail. Describe not only the events but also the associated emotions and body sensations.

Stay present with your memories, even if they are challenging. Approach them with curiosity and compassion, rather than judgment. Remember, recalling memories is a process of understanding and healing, not reliving past traumas.

After recalling a memory, take some time to reflect on it. What does this memory reveal about your current emotions and behaviors? How can this understanding help you move forward?



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Can you see in the film of memory any episodes or attitudes that are repeated in the present? Remember: memory is never accurate and consistent with reality. Remain detached and observe the film.

Remember that those memories are part of your life, but in the past. Act like a spectator. Stay in the present moment.



1on1

Text for youth worker

Create a safe, welcoming, and confidential space for your partner. Ensure the environment is comfortable and free from distractions, which helps people feel secure and ready to share their experiences. Avoid perfumes or smells or sounds that could be triggering.

Begin with open-ended questions and active listening to show genuine interest in your partner's life and concerns. Simple questions like, "What brings you here today?" can open up dialogue and build trust.

Clearly explain that you are not a therapist but you are helping the person to express himself/herself. Explain the structure of sessions and the confidentiality of the dialogue. This transparency helps manage their expectations and reduces anxiety about the unknown aspects of protocol.

Work with your partner to identify their goals: they must be simple, small and easy to reach. Ask questions like, "What do you hope to achieve through our sessions?"

Put in evidence this collaborative approach that empowers the person and provides a clear direction for your work together.

Gauge your partner's readiness and motivation for protocol. Understand their level of commitment and any potential barriers can help tailor your approach.

Set clear boundaries regarding session times (45 max 60 minutes), communication methods, and your role as a facilitator. Boundaries help create a professional and safe framework for the therapeutic relationship, ensuring mutual respect and understanding.

Start with manageable tasks and small steps.

Small achievements early on can build confidence and momentum for the therapeutic journey.

If the person has difficulty relaxing, listen to the podcast on body relaxation and help him/her scan the various parts of the body. Help him/her feel the contact of clothes on the skin and of the body on the chair or mat.

If he has difficulty visualizing a goal or understanding what he wants to achieve from the process, ask him this simple question: "Imagine that a miracle happens during the night and tomorrow you



wake up and realize that your greatest wish has been granted. By what do you realize that it has been fulfilled?"

Start from this basis.

Take control of the course gently, but without forcing it.

Remember that the body is the base from which to start, then the emotions and then the memories. In case of difficulty, return to the physical sensations.

In a 1-on-1 journey, the youth worker provides personalized guidance and support to the young person as they explore their life story. This close and individualized approach allows for deeper work on physical and emotional aspects. Here is a detailed explanation of what is expected from the youth worker in a 1-on-1 journey.

1. Establishing trust and rapport

- Building connection: spend time getting to know the young person, building a trusting relationship that encourages openness and honesty.
- Consistent presence: be a consistent and reliable presence, showing genuine care and commitment to the young person's journey.
- Do not judge, do not give advice, do not give personal opinions or relate personal examples: the person only wishes to be heard in total absence of judgment

2. Creating a safe and supportive environment

- Confidentiality: ensure that everything shared in the sessions remains confidential, creating a safe space for the young person to express themselves freely.
- Comfortable setting: arrange a comfortable and private setting for sessions, whether in person or virtual, where the young person feels at ease.

3. Personalized guidance and support

- Tailored approach: adapt your guidance to the specific needs, personality, and pace of the young person. Use flexible strategies that suit their unique situation.
- Active listening: practice active listening, giving full attention to the young person's words and feelings, validating their experiences without judgment.
- Always help the person to follow the protocol: first the physical sensations; then, when relaxed and stabilized in the body, proceed with the emotions; last the memories.
- Always return to the body when you see the person in distress.



- Help the person to identify feelings and emotions, but do not make suggestions; for example: do not say 'Do you feel anger? It is fear that you feel. It is unpleasant, I know'; but rather say: 'What do you feel? Can you identify that feeling or emotion? How does it make you feel?'

4. Exploring deep emotional and physical aspects

- **Emotional support:** without judgment and suggestions, help the young person explore and process his/her painful emotions and experiences as they emerge.
- Provide comfort and reassurance during difficult moments. If the person accepts physical contact, a touch on a shoulder or the back of the hand is sufficient. Do not indulge in physical contact if the person withdraws because it could lead to physical violence. It is important to look into the person's eyes, but without forcing a mutual gaze and without staring for a long time. Eye contact and using short phrases such as:

- *I understand you*
- *I can understand your pain or difficulty*
- *I can feel within me what you feel*
- *trust my presence now, I am listening*
- *I am here to listen to whatever you can express*

We always use positive phrases that express empathy, sharing, and humanity. We do not pity.

Question n.1

"Why are we here? Do you have a specific memory you would like to explore further with me?"

This question is designed to open the conversation with curiosity, compassion, and a sense of partnership. The right attitude here is one of genuine interest and non-judgment, showing that you're ready to listen and support the other person wherever they need to go. By asking if there's a specific memory they'd like to explore, you're giving them the space to decide what feels most important to discuss, empowering them in the therapeutic process.

Examples of situations and responses

1. **Positive example:** the person shares a memory of feeling anxious during a family event.

Response: acknowledge their courage in sharing, and ask them to describe what stands out most about that memory. Encourage them to connect with how their body responds as they talk, which can lead to deeper understanding.



2. **Challenging example:** the person hesitates or says they don't know what they want to explore.

Response: reassure them that it's okay not to have a specific memory in mind. You could suggest starting with any recent situation that evoked strong feelings or ask if there are general themes or emotions they'd like to explore, such as stress, sadness, or joy.

3. Intense or painful memory: the person mentions a traumatic or very painful memory but becomes visibly uncomfortable.

Response: gently acknowledge their bravery and remind them they don't have to go into details right away. Guide them to focus on body sensations as they recall it, reinforcing that they can pause or redirect if it becomes overwhelming.

By responding with empathy and flexibility, you create a safe environment where they feel supported to explore at their own pace, ultimately empowering them in their journey of self-discovery and healing.

Question n.2

Establish a comfortable and confidential environment where your partner feel safe to share their stories. This safe space encourages openness and honesty, essential for effective narration.

Use open-ended questions to invite your partner to share their stories in their own words. Questions like, "*Can you tell me more about that experience?*" or "*What happened next?*" encourage detailed narration and deeper exploration.

Practice active listening by giving your full attention, maintaining eye contact, and using verbal and non-verbal cues to show empathy and understanding. Reflecting back what you hear can validate their experiences and encourage them to continue sharing.

Help the person to organize their thoughts by guiding the flow of the narrative. You can do this by summarizing key points, asking clarifying questions, and helping them connect different parts of their story.

Help the person drawing a line or putting a thread on the ground; this will be the thread of the narrative, with a well-defined beginning and an equally well-defined end. Invite the person to mark



the beginning and the end with an object or by drawing a symbol for the beginning and one for the end.

Place a stone or a well-defined sign on this line to indicate the moment or moments of difficulty and suffering; place a delicate object such as a flower or another well-defined sign to indicate the moment or moments of pleasure and success.

This structured approach can make the narration more coherent and meaningful.

Allow your partner to tell their stories at their own pace. Be patient and avoid rushing them or filling in gaps. A non-judgmental attitude fosters trust and encourages them to share more deeply.

Embrace moments of silence during the narration process. Silence gives people time to reflect and process their thoughts, leading to richer and more insightful storytelling. Resist the urge to fill the silence with immediate responses or questions.

Acknowledge and validate the emotions and experiences shared by your partner. Statements like, *"It sounds like that was really difficult for you"* or *"You showed a lot of courage in that situation"* can provide affirmation and support.

Question n.3

"Together we will create a timeline of what happened to you and what you want to talk about"

Creating a timeline is important because it helps organize memories and experiences in a clear, visual way. By mapping out events on a timeline, we can see how each moment fits into the larger picture of your life. This process makes it easier to approach each memory with a sense of structure and distance, which can be especially helpful when dealing with painful or intense moments.

This digital tool is designed to guide in bringing a "hot" memory—one that still feels vivid and emotionally charged—into a "cold" memory, where you can observe it with a calmer, more detached perspective.

Explain: *"Today, we'll revisit just one event from your timeline, allowing us to go through it slowly and with focus. If other memories come up, we can add them to the timeline and explore them one by one in future sessions"*.

This method allows for a controlled, manageable process, giving each experience the attention it deserves without overwhelming you.



Question n.4

"Read the text and add any kind of information you feel that is missing (should be maximum 5 min). This will be your text of this session of this particular outcome. So I will not read the additional text that you are adding. I will print it out, but it stays with you. If you lose the text, everything is lost, as we don't keep your data with us."

This step encourages to review the written account of your session and add any details you feel are important but may have been overlooked. Taking a few minutes to do this allows you to capture any final thoughts, reflections, or clarifications that might help you process the experience fully.

This process is designed to keep your reflections private and secure. The text is yours alone—your personal record of the session. The facilitator does not keep a copy or read your additions, ensuring your confidentiality and giving you full control over your written narrative. This privacy allows you to write freely and honestly, knowing that your thoughts are solely for your own use. If the document is lost, however, so is this record of your progress, as no backup is maintained by the facilitator. This reinforces the importance of carefully keeping it if you wish to refer back to it later.

Writing down the session is a vital part of processing your experience. For you, this text serves as a personal reflection tool that helps solidify the insights gained during the session. Writing allows you to organize your thoughts, revisit what emerged during the discussion, and observe any patterns or changes over time. For the facilitator, while they do not retain a copy, knowing you have this written account helps reinforce the structure and continuity of your therapeutic journey, allowing each session to build upon the last. This process creates a bridge between sessions, enhancing the effectiveness of the work and supporting long-term growth.

Managing resilience

Start by helping people to identify their inherent strengths and external resources. Ask questions: *"What past challenges have you overcome?"* or *"Who can you rely on for support?"* Recognizing these strengths and resources can boost confidence and resilience.

Collaboratively set short-term and long-term goals that are realistic and attainable. Break these goals into smaller, manageable steps. Achieving these milestones provides a sense of accomplishment and motivates patients to keep moving forward.



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Encourage people to adopt a growth mindset, which involves viewing challenges as opportunities for learning and growth. Discuss examples of how they have grown from past experiences and how they can apply this mindset to current and future challenges.

Work with people to develop effective coping strategies for managing stress and adversity. Tell them to write a diary or an agenda of success.

Help people to cultivate a sense of optimism by focusing on positive outcomes and possibilities. Encourage practices like gratitude journaling, as a ritual, where they can reflect on positive experiences and things they are thankful for.

Strong social connections are vital for resilience. Encourage people to build and maintain supportive relationships. Group sessions can also provide a sense of community and shared understanding.

Reflect on past successes and how they were achieved. Discuss what strategies worked and how these can be applied to current situations. This reflection reinforces their capability to overcome challenges.

Help people to practice self-compassion, especially when they encounter setbacks. Remind them that it's okay to make mistakes and that being kind to themselves is crucial for resilience and moving forward.

Encourage people to create a vision for their future. This could involve envisioning where they want to be in a year or what they want to achieve in their personal and professional lives. Having a clear vision can provide direction and motivation.

Reprocessing and integration

Your role in creating a supportive and non-judgmental space is crucial. People need to feel safe and understood to reprocess and integrate their experiences effectively. This environment encourages openness and vulnerability, and your contribution to it is invaluable.

Encourage people to reflect on their experiences by asking questions that promote deeper thinking. Use clear and simple questions, such as "How does this experience affect you now?" or "What new insights have you gained?" Help people explore the impact of their past on their present.



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Facilitate emotional expression: allowing people to express their emotions differently can enhance reprocessing and integration.

Help people make connections between their past experiences and current behaviors or feelings. Understanding these connections can lead to greater self-awareness and insight, which are critical for integration.

Help people remember effective coping strategies that they used in the past to manage distressing emotions or memories that arise during reprocessing. Looking at their success will affirm their resilience and survival force. Focus on building resilience and empowering people to take control of their healing journey. Highlight their strengths and past successes and encourage a growth mindset to foster a sense of agency and hope.

Encourage people to continuously integrate new insights into their daily lives, step by step. This ongoing commitment to growth and healing is vital to the therapeutic process. Tell them to write a diary where they can regularly review their progress, celebrate achievements, and adapt goals as needed to support their ongoing growth and healing.

We suggest adding some relaxing music at this point.



Group work

Explanation group work

In a group session, the youth worker plays a crucial role in facilitating a supportive and productive environment for young people to explore their life stories. Here's a detailed explanation of what is expected from you, as youth worker:

1. Create a safe space

Ensure the physical or virtual space is comfortable, welcoming, and free from distractions. Establish clear ground rules for respectful listening and confidentiality to create a sense of safety and trust among participants.

2. Stimulate discussion

Use prompts or questions to encourage participants to share their experiences and thoughts. These can be related to specific themes, such as overcoming challenges, personal growth, or happy memories.

Demonstrate active listening by acknowledging each participant's contributions and encouraging others to do the same.

Use a totem: a totem, traditionally understood, is a symbolic object or image that holds significant meaning and represents qualities, values, or aspects of identity for an individual or group. In a group a totem can serve as a powerful symbol of inner strength and resilience. Totem serves as a tangible affirmation of resilience and ability to cope with challenges. A totem can provide comfort and a sense of security. Use a physical object, such as a small stone, piece of jewelry, or another meaningful item, and pass it around so that the person holding it can speak. In order for another person to speak, the totem must be given to that person.

3. Maintain stability

Keep the discussion focused and on track. Gently guide conversations back to the main topic if they start to diverge. Be prepared to offer support if a participant becomes emotional or distressed. Provide reassurance and suggest a brief pause or a calming activity if needed.



4. Foster group dynamics

Ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak and contribute. Encourage quieter members to share their thoughts without pressuring them. Manage dominant voices in the group to ensure a balanced discussion where all perspectives are heard.

5. Build collective energy

Include activities that build a sense of community and shared purpose, such as group reflections, collaborative storytelling, rituals or creative exercises. Highlight common themes and experiences that emerge from the discussion, fostering a sense of connection and understanding among participants.

6. Handle sensitive topics

Approach sensitive topics with empathy and care. Be aware of potential triggers and be ready to intervene if the discussion becomes too intense. Have resources available for participants who may need additional support, such as contact information for counseling services or crisis hotlines.

7. Encourage reflection and growth

Ask questions that encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and what they have learned from the discussion. Empower participants by recognizing their strengths and the progress they have made in understanding their stories.

8. Facilitator self-care

Regularly reflect on your own experiences and emotions as a facilitator. Seek supervision or peer support if needed. Take care of your own mental and emotional well-being to remain an effective and supportive facilitator.



Group Work

Remember following things are expected by you: creating a safe space, stimulating discussion, maintaining stability, fostering group dynamics, building collective energy, handling sensitive topics, encouraging reflection and growth, facilitator self-care.

Question n.1

In a group setting, inviting each member to recall and share a particularly painful or bothersome event is a powerful way to begin building trust and creating a shared foundation for the group's journey. This approach allows everyone to recognize that others have also faced challenging experiences, creating a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding.

1. Setting the tone and guidelines

Begin by explaining that each person is invited to recall an event that was difficult or unsettling, but without sharing too many personal details. Mention that the goal is simply to identify a meaningful experience, not to dive into the specifics.

Set clear boundaries by emphasizing that everyone's experiences are valid and that the group's purpose is to provide a safe and supportive space.

2. Constructing the timeline

As each member briefly names their chosen event, note it on a collective timeline that is visible to the entire group. Each event can be represented by a neutral word or phrase, such as "family conflict" or "school struggle." Avoid writing anything highly personal or identifying, respecting each member's privacy.

3. Managing reactions and potential sabotage

Some members might feel discomfort or hesitation during this exercise, which is natural. Reassure the group that it's okay to feel this way and that they are not obligated to share if they're not ready.

If someone begins to go into too much detail or steer the discussion away from the collective exercise, gently guide them back by saying, *"Thank you for sharing; for now, let's keep it general and focus on creating our timeline together."*

If a participant tries to disrupt or dismiss the exercise, remain calm and address it kindly but firmly. For example, you might say, *"I understand this may feel*



uncomfortable or new, but our aim is to help each person feel supported. Let's respect each other's space."

4. Discouraging the use of alcohol, abusive language, or over-familiarity

Emphasize that the session should be a safe, respectful environment for everyone. Encourage members to avoid alcohol before sessions, as it can hinder emotional processing and self-control.

Establish ground rules around respectful language, reminding the group that abusive or overly casual language can disrupt the group's cohesion and make others feel unsafe.

Reinforce that this is a supportive, professional space, and that maintaining appropriate boundaries is essential for everyone's comfort and well-being.

Example scenarios and responses

- **Scenario 1:** a participant recalls "family conflict" as their painful event and begins to elaborate.

Response: gently guide them back by saying, *"Thank you for trusting us with that. Let's keep it short and simple for now to keep the timeline focused, but we can explore more in future sessions."*

- **Scenario 2:** a participant jokes about someone else's event on the timeline or uses dismissive language.

Response: address it immediately and kindly, saying, *"Let's remember that every experience here deserves respect. Our group works best when we all feel safe and understood."*

- **Scenario 3:** a member shows signs of discomfort or anxiety during the exercise.

Response: reassure them with a simple, *"You're welcome to share only what you're comfortable with, and it's perfectly fine to observe today if that feels best."*

By setting clear expectations and managing reactions with sensitivity, you help foster an atmosphere where everyone feels safe to contribute, making this collective timeline a powerful foundation for group support and shared healing.



Question n.2

After establishing the timeline of events, the next step is to facilitate a brief group discussion on common themes or emotions that emerged from those events. This discussion invites participants to reflect on connections between their experiences, helping them recognize shared feelings or challenges within the group. Ask, “*Do any of these events resonate with you or stand out?*” to encourage members to engage in open, honest sharing while maintaining the focus of the discussion.

Simple rules for group discussion

1. Active listening

Encourage all members to listen without interrupting. Remind everyone that respectful listening is key to creating a supportive environment.

You can say, “*Let’s take turns sharing so each voice is heard fully before responding.*”

2. Speak from personal experience

Ask participants to use “I” statements, such as “*I felt this way*” or “*I can relate because...*” This helps each person focus on their own emotions and responses rather than interpreting others’ experiences.

Explain that speaking from personal experience keeps the discussion centered on self-reflection, which strengthens the sense of safety in the group.

3. Respecting boundaries

Emphasize that no one is required to share if they don’t feel comfortable. Allow everyone the option to listen without participating verbally if that’s what feels right for them.

You might say, “*It’s okay to simply listen. Share only what feels comfortable for you today.*”

4. Avoid giving advice or judging

Remind the group that the purpose of this discussion is to explore shared themes and emotions, not to offer solutions or critiques.



You can mention, *"We're here to listen to each other's stories and emotions, not to give advice or judge anyone's experience."*

Staying within the process while allowing emotional expression

1. Gently guide the conversation back to themes

If someone starts to go off-topic, thank them for sharing, then steer the group back by saying, *"That's a powerful insight. Let's see if others have felt something similar or if there are other common themes we can explore together."*

2. Acknowledge and validate feelings without prolonging

When someone expresses a strong emotion, validate their feelings to show they're heard, but keep the focus on shared themes.

For instance, if someone becomes emotional discussing a memory, you might say, *"Thank you for sharing that with us. It sounds like there's a lot of strength in what you're feeling. Let's see if anyone else has experienced something similar."*

3. Encourage reflection rather than deep exploration

Remind the group that this discussion is about recognizing connections and themes rather than going deeply into individual events. This keeps the session focused and balanced.

You might say, *"For today, let's focus on identifying those shared experiences and emotions. Each of us can reflect on the specifics of our stories in a later session if needed."*

Example scenarios and responses

- **Scenario 1:** a participant shares that they resonate with feelings of isolation.

Response: acknowledge it and open the floor by saying, *"Thank you for sharing. Does anyone else feel that sense of isolation resonates with them?"*

- **Scenario 2:** a participant becomes deeply emotional and starts sharing specific details.

Response: gently bring them back with, *"Thank you for that honesty. It sounds like this is very meaningful for you. Let's see if there's a common feeling here that others might share."*



By maintaining these guidelines, you ensure the discussion is both meaningful and safe, allowing participants to express themselves freely while keeping the session focused on shared themes and experiences. This approach reinforces the group's sense of connection and understanding, helping each member feel supported and included.

Question n.3

This part of the group process invites each member to share their personal reactions to the events discussed, focusing on the physical sensations and emotions that arise. This reflection helps participants connect with their body's responses, enhancing their awareness of how certain memories or stories affect them. This exercise also fosters empathy and a sense of connection among group members, as they learn to recognize shared or similar reactions.

Encourage participants to listen attentively to others (about 70% of their focus) while also staying aware of their own physical and emotional responses (the remaining 30%). Explain that tuning into their own reactions can deepen their self-understanding, as they may find that other people's stories evoke meaningful personal responses. Ask questions such as, "As you listen to these stories, what physical sensations or emotions do you experience?"

Tips for helping group members express sensations and emotions

1. Guide with specific examples

Begin by explaining some common physical sensations (e.g., tightness in the chest, warmth in the stomach, tingling in the hands) and emotions (e.g., sadness, anxiety, calmness) that may arise. This helps participants identify their own sensations and emotions without feeling pressured to find the "right" words.

You might say, *"Sometimes, people feel a heaviness in their shoulders when listening to difficult stories, or a warmth in their chest when they connect with someone's experience. What do you notice in your body?"*

2. Use "I" language and encourage self-expression

Remind participants to use "I" language, focusing on their own experience, rather than analyzing or interpreting others' experiences. This helps keep the discussion personal and introspective.

For example, say, *"Speak from your own experience with phrases like, 'I feel...' or 'In my body, I notice...' This helps each person stay grounded in their own reactions."*



3. Support those who struggle to identify sensations

For participants who find it hard to express or even notice sensations, normalize this experience by saying that it's perfectly okay not to feel anything specific right away. Encourage them to focus on simple, physical grounding cues, like feeling the weight of their body on the chair or the sensation of their feet on the floor.

You could say, *"If you're not feeling much at the moment, that's okay. Just notice any small details, like the sensation of your feet on the ground or your hands in your lap. Even this can help us tune into our body's presence."*

4. Invite small observations

Encourage members to share even small or vague sensations they might notice. By normalizing subtle sensations, you make it easier for everyone to participate without pressure.

For example, suggest, *"Even noticing something as simple as a change in your breathing, or a slight tension in your neck, is helpful. These little sensations can tell us a lot about our reactions."*

5. Empathize with hesitancy

Acknowledge that discussing bodily sensations and emotions can feel unusual or challenging, especially in a group setting. Assure participants that they're not alone in feeling hesitant.

You might say, *"It can feel strange or uncomfortable to describe what's happening in our bodies. Just share whatever you're comfortable with—even if it's just a word or two about your experience."*

6. Encourage gentle exploration

For members who struggle with awareness of sensations, encourage them to observe what they feel as they sit and listen, without expecting any specific outcome. Suggest that they might try placing their hands on their stomach or chest to notice if any sensations arise.

For example, *"You might place a hand on your chest or your stomach and see if you feel any warmth, tension, or movement as you listen. There's no pressure—just observe what comes up."*



Example scenarios and responses

- **Scenario 1:** a member shares that they feel a “heavy weight” in their chest when they hear certain stories.

Response: validate their sharing with, *“Thank you for sharing. That heaviness you feel is a very real response, and it shows that something important is resonating with you. Does anyone else notice a similar sensation?”*

- **Scenario 2:** a participant expresses that they don’t feel any particular sensation and seem unsure of what to say.

Response: reassure them by saying, *“It’s completely normal if nothing specific comes up. Even noticing the feeling of your feet on the ground or the way you’re breathing can help you stay connected to your body.”*

- **Scenario 3:** another member shares they feel both sadness and tension but struggles to describe the physical sensation.

Response: encourage them with, *“That’s okay—sometimes emotions are easier to recognize than body sensations. Just stay with that feeling, and if anything changes in your body, you can share it whenever you’re ready.”*

By providing these gentle guidelines, you help group members feel comfortable and supported in expressing their sensations and emotions. This approach encourages a safe and inclusive environment where each participant can connect deeply with their inner experiences while listening empathically to others.

Group guided exploration of the events

In a group setting, the protocol can be a powerful tool to help participants explore and articulate their personal narratives.

Begin by creating a safe and supportive environment where each member feels comfortable sharing their experiences.

Start the session with a brief relaxation exercise to help everyone settle into a calm and attentive state. Use the relaxation techniques explained in this protocol or find the one that better suits the group.



Encourage participants to close their eyes, take deep breaths, and tune into their body sensations. Guide them to focus on a particular event or memory that they feel ready to explore.

As they connect with their sensations, prompt one of them to describe these feelings without judgment, simply observing what emerges. You can use the totem, in that case, to mark who is the storyteller. After, pass the totem to every individual who wants to support the discussion and give a contribution. It is very important that the storyteller should feel free to express sensations, emotions and memories.

Make sure it is not always the same people talking. That the narratives are consistent. But it also helps those who simply want to listen to feel respected in their silence. Indulge in promoting healthy discussion, but do not overdo it or force it.

Encourage the group to listen actively and empathetically, without interrupting or offering advice. This practice fosters a deep sense of understanding and connection among group members.

After each person shares, facilitate a reflective discussion where participants can express how the shared narratives resonated with them, promoting collective healing and insight.

Question n.4

After guiding the group through a deep exploration of their memories and experiences, it's crucial to assess whether these events have been sufficiently explored. It is just like closing the photo book of the storytellers.

This involves fostering group consensus on the completeness of the shared narratives.

Begin by prompting the group with a reflective question: "*Do we feel that these events have been explored sufficiently for now?*"

Encourage each member to tune into their body sensations and emotions, using the protocol to gauge their sense of closure or any lingering feelings. Allow space for everyone to express their final thoughts and feelings about the exploration process, ensuring that all voices are heard.

Facilitate a final discussion where the group can collectively decide if further exploration is needed or if they feel a sense of completeness.

This approach not only validates individual experiences but also strengthens the group's cohesion and mutual support. By regularly assessing memory completeness through group



consensus, you ensure that the process respects each member's journey, promoting a balanced and thorough exploration of their narratives.

Building group resilience and looking forward

Building resilience within a group setting is essential for empowering members to overcome challenges and look forward to a hopeful future.

Establish a safe, supportive space where group members feel valued and understood. Foster an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, encouraging open and honest communication.

Regularly highlight and celebrate the strengths and successes of group members. Acknowledge past achievements and the personal growth each member has experienced. This positive reinforcement builds confidence and resilience.

Facilitate discussions where members share their experiences of overcoming adversity. These shared narratives can inspire and strengthen the group, illustrating that resilience is possible even in the face of challenges.

Work with the group to develop and practice coping strategies that can be used individually and collectively. Techniques such as mindfulness, deep breathing, and positive self-talk can enhance resilience and provide tools for managing stress.

Encourage the group to set collaborative, realistic goals. These shared objectives can foster a sense of unity and purpose. Break down goals into manageable steps, celebrating progress along the way.

Instill a growth mindset within the group, emphasizing that challenges are opportunities for learning and development. Encourage members to view setbacks as temporary and surmountable, fostering a resilient outlook.

Strengthen the social connections within the group by promoting supportive interactions and encouraging members to build relationships outside of therapy sessions. A strong support network is a key component of resilience.

Guide the group in envisioning a positive future. Encourage members to articulate their hopes and aspirations, and discuss the steps needed to achieve these visions. This forward-looking approach can motivate and inspire the group.



Final feedback with relaxation

The final feedback with relaxation is a key part of the group process, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences, connect with each other, and leave the session feeling calm, grounded, and supported. This closing ritual reinforces a sense of unity and completion, helping everyone to process what they've shared and learned.

The final feedback session serves several purposes:

- emotional closure: after a session where challenging or emotional topics are discussed, relaxation and feedback allow participants to re-center and transition from introspection to a sense of calm;
- group connection: it fosters a feeling of togetherness, helping participants recognize shared themes and building a sense of mutual support;
- personal reflection: by reflecting on the session, participants can consolidate insights, making it easier to carry their learnings forward.

Begin by inviting everyone to share brief final reflections. Ask simple, grounding questions such as, *"What is one thing you're taking away from today's session?"* This helps participants verbalize their thoughts without diving too deeply into any unresolved feelings. Guide the group through a relaxation exercise, such as deep breathing or a body scan. Encourage participants to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and focus on releasing any tension they may still be carrying. You may choose to lead a short visualization, inviting the group to imagine a peaceful, comforting place. Conclude with a few affirmations, like, *"I am calm and at peace"* or *"I feel supported and connected."*

Here is an example:

Hello and welcome. Today, we'll be concluding our session with a short relaxation exercise to help you leave feeling calm and centered. Let's begin by making sure to be in a comfortable position. Sit back, relax, and close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so.

Start with a few deep breaths. Slowly inhale through your nose, feeling your lungs expand. Hold that breath for a moment, then gently exhale through your mouth. Let's repeat this a few times. Inhale deeply, hold, and exhale slowly. Each breath helps to release tension and bring you into a state of relaxation.

Now, let's move into a body scan. With your eyes still closed, bring your attention to the top of your head. Notice any sensations there, and as you exhale, let go of any tension. Gradually move your focus down to your forehead, your eyes, your cheeks, and your jaw. Feel each part of your body relax as you continue to breathe deeply.



Move your attention down to your neck and shoulders. Notice if there's any tightness, and with your next exhale, let that tension melt away. Continue this process, moving down through your arms, your chest, and your back. Pay attention to your stomach, your hips, and your legs, all the way down to your feet and toes. With each exhale, release any discomfort you find.

Now, I invite you to imagine a peaceful place where you feel safe and relaxed. This could be a serene beach, a quiet forest, or a cozy room. Picture yourself there, fully immersed in this calming environment. Notice the sights, the sounds, and the sensations. Feel the warmth of the sun, hear the gentle rustling of leaves, or smell the fresh, clean air. Allow this visualization to bring you a deep sense of peace and tranquility.

Silently repeat to yourself: "I am calm and at peace." Feel the truth of these words as you say them. Now, repeat: "I am strong and resilient." Let these affirmations sink in, reinforcing your positive mindset and inner strength.

Take one last deep breath, and when you're ready, gently open your eyes. Carry this sense of calm and resilience with you as you go about your day.

Thank you for participating in this relaxation exercise. Until next time, take care and stay mindful.

After the feedback session, ask if anyone noticed common themes or experiences. This can help members feel more connected, as they recognize shared struggles, triumphs, or emotions. Language that reinforces unity, such as "we" and "us," strengthens the sense of a collective journey. Phrases like *"We've each contributed to a meaningful session today"* highlight their mutual support. If possible, form a circle for the final exercise, where members can see each other and feel part of a united group. Physical proximity (if in person) can amplify this feeling of togetherness.

Thank the group for their openness and trust. Acknowledge the courage it takes to share and support each other. Encourage them to carry the calm, reflective state from the session into their day. Remind them of any next steps or upcoming sessions, reinforcing the continuity of the process. After the relaxation, allow for a few moments of quiet. This allows participants to transition out of the reflective space and prepare to leave.

If a participant approaches you afterward, listen briefly but avoid delving into new or unresolved topics. Gently redirect them to process within the group setting or save their thoughts for the next session. Suggest they write down any reflections or ideas that come up after the session. This gives them a productive way to engage with their thoughts without extending the session. If someone seems unsettled, suggest grounding techniques, or if appropriate, provide resources such as mental health contacts or relaxation tools.