
Integrative Healing for Adult Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Healing Trauma through Yoga, Music, Art and Sisterhood



Objectives

- Participants will gain an understanding of the benefits of an integrative approach to healing for survivors of sexual abuse
- Participants will learn and practice specific interventions and activities
- Participants will learn how to implement these practices with their clients and groups

Presenters

Erika B. Brosig, CA, MS, LSW

Supervisor of Direct Services
Cambria County SART Coordinator
Reiki Master/Teacher
Victim Services Inc.
ebrosig@cambrasomersetvs.org



Rachel Allen, ERYT200

Trauma Sensitive Yoga Teacher
Certified Music Practitioner
Reiki Master/Teacher
Yoga Song
rachel@yogasong.net
www.yogasong.net



Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Program

- A collaboration between Victim Services Inc., Yoga Song, Women’s Help Center, and the Bottle Works Arts on 3rd Avenue
- Funded through grants, donations, and fundraisers
- Components
 - Support Group
 - Expression through Visual Art
 - Musical Expression Through Mantra
 - Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice
- Location
 - Neutral, safe, and confidential facility
 - Invites people to be part of a larger community
 - Participants come early to see the changing exhibits
 - 2 from our current group have signed up to volunteer



Programs

- Weekly trauma sensitive yoga classes for survivors
 - Started in Spring 2016
 - Free for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence
- 10-week program – adult women
 - Piloted in 2013
 - Weaves yoga philosophy into support group and yoga and mantra practice
 - Expressive art exercise at first and last session
 - Public art opening and traveling exhibit
 - Currently seeking funding

Why Use An Integrative Approach?

- Talk therapy/counseling only go so far – while an essential part of healing for many survivors, there are areas that cannot be reached with therapy/counseling alone
- Musical expression allows survivors to find their voice again after years of silence
- Expression through art accesses both hemispheres of the brain and for many survivors can become an additional coping skill





Neurobiology of Trauma

Effects of Trauma

- After effects of sexual trauma create disruptions in the physical body, in the nervous system and the emotions
- Freezing, muscle memory and body armor in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Reaction to trauma excludes us from having new experiences reach our inner world
- Survivors of trauma lose a sense of self (psychologically and physically)

Neurobiology of the Traumatized Brain

- In traumatized states, the language area of the brain shuts down and the ability to process verbally is challenged
- Brain areas associated with self regulation and planning are compromised
- Brain responses lose synchronicity with environment and daily rhythms (sleep, eating, social rhythms) are thrown off
- **The fundamental experience of trauma is not being able to be here in the present moment because in the neurobiology of the traumatized brain, the present moment is intolerable. The past and the trauma is the dominant reality (van der Kolk)**

• BARCC Yoga Program Manual

Neurobiology of the Traumatized Brain

- The experience of trauma lives and replays again and again in the primitive area of the brain, the limbic system
 - Neuroimaging studies
- When this experience is replaying, there is no pathway from the limbic system to the executive higher functioning area of the brain, the pre-frontal cortex, where planning and higher order thinking come into play
 - Brain-in-hand
- Survivors of trauma remain in the fight, flight, freeze, submit response of the limbic system. The self regulatory area of the brain, the Anterior Cingulate Cortex, the filter between the limbic and the prefrontal cortex is compromised

• BARCC Yoga Program Manual

Why isn't Therapy Enough?

- Talk therapy is important to relieve isolation and provide connection but does not address the physical need for rewiring the brain
- Talking can aid in processing trauma. But when talking about the event, survivors often go back to that traumatized state in their bodies. We cannot talk our way out of emotions

• BARCC Yoga Program Manual

Why isn't Therapy Enough?

- “We have discovered that helping victims of trauma find the words to describe what has happened to them is profoundly meaningful, but usually it is not enough. The act of telling the story doesn't necessarily alter the automatic physical and hormonal responses of bodies that remain hypervigilant, prepared to be assaulted or violated at any time. For real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present.”
 - Bessel van der Kolk, MD (The Body Keeps the Score)

Trauma, Neurobiology and Yoga

- Trauma treatment must include practices that bring survivors into the here and now, such as yoga
- There is a need for developing a strong frontal cortex to modulate limbic system feelings
- Yoga changes brain rhythms and allows survivors to engage self regulatory mechanisms in the brains arousal system

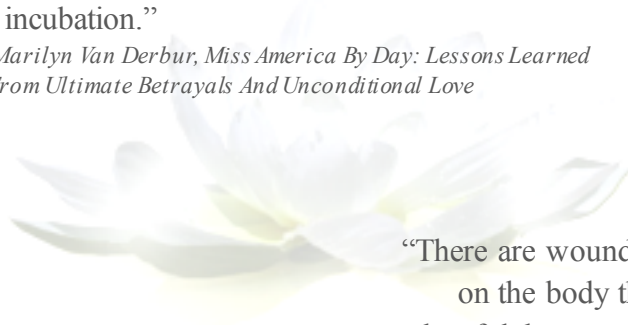
• BARCC Yoga Program Manual



Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

“All emotions, even those that are suppressed and unexpressed, have physical effects. Unexpressed emotions tend to stay in the body like small ticking time bombs—they are illnesses in incubation.”

- Marilyn Van Derbur, *Miss America By Day: Lessons Learned From Ultimate Betrayals And Unconditional Love*



“There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds.”

- Laurell K. Hamilton, *Mistral's Kiss*

Why Yoga?

- Yoga integrates the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual
- Grounds and stabilizes the central nervous system
- Growing research on the many benefits to physical, mental, and emotional health
- Yoga opens up new possibilities, facilitates unlocking and befriending the body and tolerating and in time, embracing new experiences

“Yoga has the best outcome measures in regards to managing stress and is a low cost, no side effect evidenced based intervention for physical and mental health.”

- Sat bir singh. Harvard medical school

Yoga: Listening to Body

- Move from repetitive anxious thinking to tuning into internal sensations and cues
- The ability to experience our visceral selves
 - To be able to feel our muscles contract or extend, or feel our feet on the ground
 - Neuroscience shows there are specific brain pathways that light up when we are aware of moving muscles in the present moment

"When I started this process, I didn't have much hope. The yoga helped me feel more connected to my body. I felt more relaxed and less depressed." Integrative Healing
Group participant

Interoception

- **Interoception** is the physiological condition of the entire body
- This system of interoception relates to how we perceive feelings from our bodies that determine our mood, sense of well being and emotions
 - Clare j. Fowler, 2002
- "Gut feeling"!

Interoception

Building a Relationship with the Body

- We come to the body, where trauma is experienced to reclaim the body. We come to embodied practices of mindfulness based movement to create the possibility of a safe space in one's own body
- The repeated acts of mindfulness based movement or yoga, build robust interoceptive pathways in the brain linking the limbic system, the regulatory system to the prefrontal cortex
- Embodied movement practices allow us to experience our body as a reasonably safe, predictable place so we can participate in healthy relationships with self and others

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

- There are many styles of yoga
 - Characteristics and qualities of some styles may lead to further triggering and dissociating from survivors
- Yoga as a Trauma-Informed Mindfulness Based Practice
 - Empowerment
 - Interoception
 - Relationship
 - Authentic experience

"I have learned to relax through the yoga, to ground, breathe through emotions, fears and problems. This has helped me deal with things with greater clarity and insight." Integrative Healing Group Participant

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

Four Elements of a Trauma-Informed Mindfulness Based Practice

- Language: Non directive. Invitational.
 - “When you come to your next inhale...”
 - “In your own time...”
 - “You might notice...”
- Pace: moving at a pace that allows for integration of the experience. The invitation to notice what is present in this moment. In this breath.
- Choice. Offering choice in breath and movement. Offering choice for stillness or flow. Offering simple, clear choices in every form.
- Timing: it can be exhausting to be continually oriented to the present moment especially if disassociation is a go to tool. Allow practices to be 10-15 minutes and possibly build from there.

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

- Specific elements of trauma-sensitive yoga:
 - Focus is present body awareness (Interoception)
 - Choice-based language (non directive)
 - No use of Guided Imagery in meditation which can elicit dissociation
 - No physical adjustments
 - Verbal cues with choices and options directed to whole class rather than correcting an individual
 - Option to keep eyes open in meditation
 - No dimming of lights in room
 - No use of potentially triggering props such straps
 - Class always begins in seated or up right position where participants can see surroundings rather than lying prone which can be triggering
 - Choice in form of rest as lying prone can be triggering
 - No use of yogic breathing techniques that are loud and audible as this may trigger survivors of rape and assault
 - No use of triggering language such as “relax”

Yoga and Research

- Yoga may elevate the brain's GABA (Gamma-amino butyric acid) levels. Low levels are associated with anxiety and depression (May 2007, August 2010/BU School of Medicine-McLean Hospital)
- Participants in Boston's Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Institute yoga curriculum in 2 controlled outcome studies achieved a 50% drop in severity of PTSD symptoms. Various studies at the Trauma Center are looking at yoga's ability to change the core measure of self regulation, Heart Rate Variability (HRV) (2008/Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute)
- Women who practiced yoga felt better about their bodies, had a better sense of what their bodies were feeling and had healthier attitudes towards food than women who did aerobics or ran (2005/Preventative Medicine Research Institute)



Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

And musical expression through mantra

Techniques to take with you

The Practices

- Trauma-Sensitive Breathwork
 - Breathing practices done in the context of a physical practice:
 - Awareness of breath
 - Breathing and moving
 - Add a little breath
 - Movement of breath
 - <http://youtu.be/fyodijfob0s>
- Basic Spinal Energizer
 - Moving the spine in six directions
 - Can be done seated or standing
 - Qualities: Grounding, Focusing, Calming
 - <http://youtu.be/-bqpyga9gjs>

The Practices

- Empowerment
 - Standing forms with breath, movement and sound
 - Qualities: Energizing, Grounding, Motivating
 - <http://youtu.be/aipxdteelo4>
- Balance
 - Standing balance forms with movement and stillness
 - Qualities: Focusing, Grounding, Empowering
 - <http://youtu.be/pfytskz5yyo>
- Release
 - Seated forms designed to release tension and unwind
 - Qualities: Grounding, Calming, Restorative
 - <http://youtu.be/mgrievikhts>

Specific Techniques

- Dissociation
 - Use calm, clear invitational, interoceptive language keeping a steady flow of moving and breathing, adding twists
- Hypo-arousal
 - Integrate breathing, moving gradually into more active forms to increase energy
- Hyper-arousal
 - Start active, gradually slowing to more grounding forms such as balance
- Working solo vs group. Kids yoga cards

Metta

May I be happy. May I be free from pain and anxiety. May I have peace.

May you be happy. May you be free from pain and anxiety. May you have peace.

May all be happy. May all be free from pain and anxiety. May all have peace.

May all beings be happy, be free from suffering, and have peace and may my thoughts, my words, and my actions contribute to the happiness, freedom from suffering and peace of all life.



Integrative Healing Group

10 Week Program



Integrative Healing Group

- 10 Sessions, 2.5 hours each
- Facilitators:
 - Therapist/Counselor with experience with adult survivors of sexual abuse
 - Registered Yoga Teacher with understanding of trauma sensitive yoga
- Participants:
 - 8-10 adult female survivors of sexual abuse

Outcome Measures

- **Painting** as a healing modality reflecting where participants were at the beginning and end of session in their healing journey. Artist statements were also utilized
- **Comment Cards** - Participants provided feedback after each session indicating what they liked and what could have been better about each group
- **Participant Survey** - Participants were given a survey at the end of the group to gauge their overall perspective on the helpfulness of the group
- **Adult Client Questionnaire (ACQ)** - given at the first, fifth and final sessions. The ACQ assesses trauma symptoms resulting from sexual violence. Possible scores range from 25-125 with higher scores indicating more challenging symptoms

Integrative Healing Group

- **Emotional Yoga: How the Body can Heal the Mind.** - Bija Bennett
 - Emotional Yoga engages and integrates the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual parts of us as human beings. The practice and engagement of emotional yoga is a journey towards healing and wholeness
 - This journey in our group was experienced at the individual and group level

"For the first time I have found that I am not alone." Integrative Healing Group Participant

Eight Limbed Path of Yoga

- **Allowance/Intention: Yamas:** (Nonviolence, truthfulness, nonstealing, moderation, nonhoarding)
- **Allegiance/Safety:** Niyamas: (Purity, contentment, discipline, self-study, surrender to Higher Power)
- **Will and Power/Mindfulness:** Asanas (Postures)
- **Love/Boundaries:** Pranayama (Mindful Breathing)
- **Harmony/Balance:** Pratyahara (Directing the senses inward)
- **Knowledge/Connection:** Dharana (Concentration)
- **Wisdom/Hope:** Dhyana: Meditation
- **Synergy/Integration:** Samadhi: Union of the self with the object of meditation

Session Format

- **10 minutes :** Get settled and check in
- **60 minutes:** Group discussion
 - One good thing that happened this week
 - Review and process quote (cards)
 - Review and discuss homework
 - Guided discussion on session topic
- **10 minutes:** Break, move into yoga practice
- **60 minutes:** Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice
 - Exploring creating sound in the body with humming and vowel sounds
 - Asana Practice
 - Meditation
 - Musical Expression Through Mantra Practice
- **10 minutes:** Check in and Closing
 - Comment Cards

Session 1 - Introduction

- Welcome and Review of Group Format
 - Housekeeping
 - Important Points to Review
- Group Introduction and Ice Breaker
 - Invitational Language
 - Participants share about themselves, not about their abuse
 - Participants share their feelings about coming into the group process
- Development of Community Agreements
 - Discussion - *What do you need to feel safe?*

Session 1 - Introduction

- Healing from Sexual Abuse...Why Yoga?
- Administer Pre-Intervention Symptom Measure(s)
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal - "Over the next ten weeks I hope to transform..."
- Introduction to Trauma-Sensitive Yoga
 - Demystify yoga
 - What is different about trauma-sensitive yoga?
- Pre-Intervention Art Expression Activity



Session 2 - Allowance / Intention

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Allowing yourself to connect with your feelings
 - Discussion - *What's your "go to" strategy for dealing with painful emotions?*
 - Telling your truth / creating space for healing
 - Participants speak about their symbolic objects and share their stories
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal
 - Worksheet - Creating Safety

Session 2 - Allowance / Intention

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

- Review Yamas
 - Tools for creating a healthy self
- Yoga Practice
 - Yoga forms always starting from where we already are with Sun Breaths
 - Forms and breath guided by tools of grounding, connecting to truth (feeling what is right in the gut and making choices in the forms) and compassion and connecting to self through present moment focus with verbal cues
- Mantra practice

Session 3 - Allegiance / Safety

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Allegiance
 - Joining together with something (yourself, your emotions, etc.)
 - Honoring yourself and making a commitment to healing
 - **Intention stones** – statement of allegiance to healing
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal
 - Worksheet - Creating Safe Spaces for Healing
 - Practice having a dialogue with your emotional self



Session 3 - Allegiance / Safety

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

- Review Niyamas
 - Tools for creating a healthy self
- Yoga Practice
 - Yoga forms always starting from where we already are with Sun Breaths
 - Yoga forms focusing on moving the spine in six directions for optimal health
 - Noticing where you are and what you need
 - Heart openers and lateral openers are stimulating, twists detox and allow to release stuck energy literally and metaphorically and forward folds and inversions calm and relax
- Mantra practice

Session 4 - Will & Power / Mindfulness

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Strengthening and rebuilding your will and power (how abuse affects will and power)
 - Discussion - *How has this impacted your life to this point? Where do you see a need for control manifesting in your life today?*
 - Cooperating within
 - Choosing to move forward
 - Leaning into your emotions/moving through
 - “Riding the Wave”
 - Mindfulness
 - Mindfulness activity with stones
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal (prompt)
 - Thank You Note to your body

Session 4 - Will & Power / Mindfulness

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

- Read and Reflect on Sutra
 - Asana - “Asana or posture is that which is stable and comfortable. When properly practiced, one is both alert and relaxed.”
 - Cooperating Within: The Body can change the mind
- Yoga Practice
 - Yoga forms always starting from where we already are with Sun Breaths
 - Focus on our core as not just the physical part of our body, but personal power, core beliefs and values
 - The Warrior Power forms and Blossoming Goddess with vocalizations introduced
- Mantra practice

Session 5 - Love / Boundaries

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Discerning the differences - Boundaries
 - Honoring the self
 - Discussion - *If there was nothing you needed to do, create, add to, or separate yourself from, who would you be?*
 - Connecting to and opening your heart
 - Discussion - Balancing openness with boundaries
 - Activity - Affirmations
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal
 - Worksheet - Boundaries
- Administer Mid-Intervention Symptom Measure(s)

Session 5 - Love / Boundaries

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

- Read and Reflect on Sutra
 - Pranayama – “Conscious breathing is the awareness, regulation, and modification of the various components of breathing.”
 - Honoring the Self: Connecting to and opening the heart through the breath
- Yoga Practice
 - Yoga forms always starting from where we already are with Sun Breaths
 - Focus on heart opening forms and choices to turn inward and nurture the self
 - Revisiting Power forms and Blossoming Goddess with vocalizations
- Mantra practice

Session 6 - Harmony / Balance

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Harmony
 - Bringing into balance and putting a problem into perspective
 - Directing your senses, developing perspective
 - Be Still and Know
 - Discussion - *What prevents you from stopping?* - stones
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal
 - Practice being still each time you see or touch your stone

Session 6 - Harmony / Balance

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

- Read and Reflect on Sutra
 - Pratyahara – *“When the senses disregard everything but the nature of the mind, one has complete control over sensory awareness.”*
 - Directing your senses, bringing perspective
- Yoga Practice
 - Yoga forms always starting from where we already are with Sun Breaths
 - Yoga forms noticing where heat is creating
 - Heating and cooling breaths
 - Reviewing previous forms
- Mantra practices

Session 7 - Knowledge / Connection

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Remembering the past / Building connections
 - We view every experience through the lens of our past impressions
 - Acknowledging and releasing negative beliefs
 - Discussion - *What negative beliefs do you carry with you because of the abuse?*
 - Self talk and building inner strength
 - Becoming aware of your self talk allows you to make changes
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal – think about your own healing ritual
 - Worksheet – Emptying the Archives
 - Bring a picture of yourself from the time in your life when the abuse was happening

Session 7 - Knowledge / Connection

Healing Ritual

- Symbolic Release
 - What is holding you back from healing?
 - Are you ready to let go?
- Reiki
- Drumming
 - Use stones
- Chant



Session 8 - Wisdom / Hope

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Expanding what's possible / Opening up to the future
 - Accepting the present
 - Acceptance is not avoidance - acceptance is an act of love
 - Learning to trust yourself
 - Discussion - Guilt and shame from abuse make it challenging to trust ourselves
 - Activity – Getting in touch with the child
 - Meditation
 - Activity – Hope Stones
- Homework for Next Week
 - Letter to myself

Session 8 - Wisdom / Hope

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

- Read and Reflect on Sutra
 - Dhyana – “*Continuing the state of attention causes an uninterrupted creative flow in relation to the idea or object.*”
 - Possibilities. Acceptance. Trusting Oneself
- Yoga Practice
 - Yoga forms always starting from where we already are with Sun Breaths
 - Inviting inquiry and clarity in forms that are rhythmic and flowing at participants own pace
 - Review of previous forms in flow
- Mantra practice

Session 9 - Synergy / Integration

Support Group

- Group Discussion on Chapter in *Emotional Yoga*
 - Returning to wholeness
 - Togetherness of all elements, the part and the whole
 - Moving through chaos
 - Chaos is just the motion of your system organizing itself into a new focus
 - Making life whole
 - Activity – Guided Imagery (holding stones)
- Homework for Next Week
 - Journal – *How will you integrate your past into who you are today?*
 - Check in with the little girl as often as it feels necessary

Session 9 - Synergy / Integration

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Practice

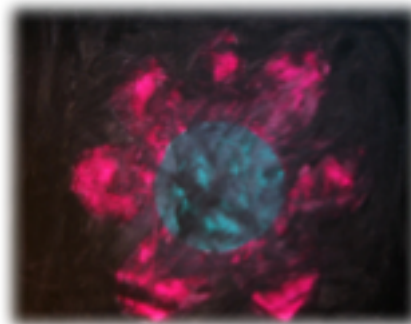
- Read and Reflect on Sutra
 - Samadhi – *“As one continues the state of attention and becomes deeply involved, the object of meditation stands by itself and nothing but comprehension of the object is know.”*
 - Return to wholeness
- Yoga Practice
 - Yoga forms always starting from where we already are with Sun Breaths
 - Flowing in rhythm at participants own pace
 - Choosing to respond to cues in own time
 - Bringing with verbal cues, parts of the body noticing with interoceptive cues how parts connect to the whole
- Mantra practice

Session 10 - Closing

- Reflection
 - Discussion – *What will you take with you?*
 - Holding onto your peace
- Administer Post-Intervention Symptom Measure(s)
- Group Closing Ceremony
 - Circle of affirmations
- Snacks!

Session 10 - Closing

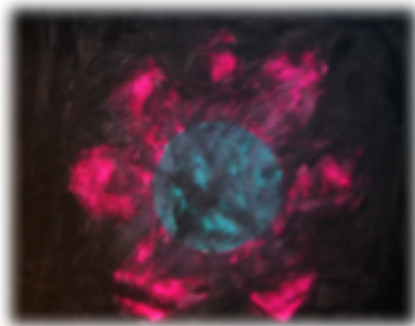
- Post-Intervention Art Expression Activity
- Brief Check In
- Administer Participant Survey





Outcomes

Paintings



Paintings



ACQ Scores

- Adult Client Questionnaire (ACQ) - Possible scores range from 25-125 with higher scores indicating more challenging symptoms
 - At the start of the group, the average ACQ score was 68.9 (range 49-94)
 - At the midpoint, the average ACQ score was 57.5
 - Scores dropped an average of 13.67 points
 - At the end of the group, the average ACQ score was 42.3
 - Scores dropped an average of 21.5 points

Blossoming Goddesses' Feedback

- *“Words cannot express how connected, happy and safe I felt with these women as we became close and I understood I was not alone.”*
- *“I have found a way through yoga to center myself and find my inner Goddess, who is actually rather nice! I have made lifelong friendships with a group of amazing women!”*
- *“I liked in the group today the compassion that was shown to each other. I feel after going through something only makes us stronger. We can help each other though no two situations are the same. We can pick and choose what we release.”*
- *“I like being me!”*
- *For the first time I have found that I am not alone. That the events that changed my life no longer control me. I have a new found freedom, which is full of peace, joy, love and hope.”*

Acknowledgements / Resources

- Yoga As Healing For Survivors Of Sexual Trauma
 - Zabie Yamasaki
 - www.zabieyamasaki.com
- BARCC Yoga Program For Healing Mind And Body
 - Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
- *The Body Keeps the Score*
 - Bessel A. van der Kolk, MD
 - www.traumacenter.org
- *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body*
 - David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper
- *Trauma-Sensitive Yoga in Therapy: Bringing the Body into Treatment*
 - David Emerson



Questions?

Thank you!

