

Trauma Healing

Relational - Experiential - Systemic

1. Family Burning- It's not what it sounds like :) This experiential allows a family to burn material items that they want to move beyond and from. A powerful process of surrendering, grieving, and letting go. Items may be related to their own ego defenses, trauma related items, addiction objects, and so forth.
2. Biofeedback Experience- This can be facilitated with formal biofeedback equipment, a finger held thermometer, or by simply using mindfulness principles. Trauma can often create disconnect in mind, body and spirit. The reconnection of these components of self is a vital and powerful healing process, and biofeedback is a tangible and concrete intervention that can greatly assist the process.
3. Timelines- Family and/or individual - This allows the family to identify each person's journey within the family. For instance, one may identify their trauma and subsequent emotional events, then identify their addiction timeline and how it relates to the trauma - parents identify their PTSD timeline and compare it to other's timelines, and so forth.
4. Parents do a ritual of "I'll Keep You Safe"- an opportunity for parents to physically hold and express to their child (and perhaps each other) and share "safety" expressions with the caveat of "as long as you allow me to."
5. Family Revisiting Trauma Sites- Family, with/without a therapist, visit physical locations of trauma and process the pain, grief, hurt, sadness, etc. that spilled out from that event/location. Symbolic gestures of healing to leave at the site can include a flower(s), a letter written to the traumatic event, a release of a balloon, a white ribbon representing "peace" or "serenity", homemade cocoons (made ahead of time) and leave at location, and so forth. The family could also use a piece of chalk to draw a smiley face, a butterfly, or some other meaningful symbol. The family hugging/huddling and making commitments to each other in that location can also be powerful, validating and healing.
6. Solo- Trauma victim and/or family members creating a solo experience for purposes of doing identity work and connecting with higher-power & core meaning. These experiences can be processed and debriefed with family to deepen the bond with them regarding the influence of trauma on the development of Core Issues and what healthy Core Meanings are developed and/or committed to in the journey of healing.
7. Symbolic Transformation- Challenging the individual and their support system to identify and implement ways in which they can transform unhealthy, hurtful, painful or self-destructive symbols into new, healthy, empowering and healing symbols. Examples of symbolic transformation could include: Rearrange bedroom, re-painting/re-carpeting, redo wardrobe, new haircut, redecorating, increased self-care, etc. to symbolize the healing transformation. In essence, you can take the alcohol out of a bar, but it's still a bar. Doing this with family members facilitates a systemic journey of healing.
8. Reconnect to Innate Worth- Parents recount birth of child - shares joy of having the child and the experience of holding the child for the first time - explain the innate value and priceless nature of the child. This process enhances Core Meaning for the child by reiterating the child's natural state of innocence, worthiness, value and strength. The process also assists secondary victims in putting problematic trauma responses "in context" vs. inadvertently linking such to the identity of the victim.

9. Trauma Role-Play- Empower the individual and family by supporting their reenactment of aspects of the trauma to create a different outcome. Allow the family members to say and do things that were left unsaid or undone. Similar to Redecision Therapy (Bob & Mary Goulding) in re-experiencing yet with support of family creating a new decision about the event and subsequent journey. Be sensitive to timing and readiness in implementing this intervention. Due to the nature of some trauma experiences, not all trauma experiences are appropriate for this intervention.
10. Masks- Create a mask and artistically symbolize the internal and external impacts of the trauma. Have secondary victims, family members or other supports create their own masks regarding their responses to the trauma. Process and debrief. Create another mask doing the same in what healing/thriving will look like (creation of hope).
11. Body Tracing- Family members trace their body outlines and place them side by side. Inside the body tracing, use symbols, colors, words, etc. to communicate trauma and discuss healing. Utilize words, symbols, lines, etc. connecting family members together. Allows for non-verbal sharing, processing, validation and healing. Good for kinesthetically inclined systems.
12. Bodywork- Use bodywork (Bessel Van Der Kolk) to work-through muscle memory of trauma - recreate the trauma scenario (symbolically) and focus on physical/emotional response and means for creating new (empowering/protected) muscle memory and body experience. Utilize the familial system in healing process.
13. Roadmap- Assist the family to find their voice through artistic mediums for purpose of expressing their journey through trauma and healing. A simple way can be a poster-board sectioned into 4 quadrants identifying: where we are at, how did we get here, where we can go from here, and here's how we're going to do it.
14. Multi-Systemic Groups- Group work involving multiple families sharing trauma allows for shared meaning and empowerment. These groups are also powerful venues for providing validation, love, support, reiteration of core meaning, and celebration of successes.
15. Free-Writing- Free write rapidly about the trauma - dissect the words and emotions that come out of it - purge the soul - sit with emotion - assign responsibility to the ideas (what belongs to the victim vs. aggressor). This type of "soul purging" can be a powerful way to confront traumatic thoughts and feelings while simultaneously providing the victim a safe and healing relational experience with transparency and vulnerability.
16. Journaling- Journaling or creating collages as a way to communicate and address the trauma without having to talk about it allows for non-verbal processing and symbolic healing.
17. Sand Tray Therapy- Sand Tray work is a powerful, non-verbal medium for trauma recovery. A simple container with a variety of figurines and objects allows for recreation, exploration, expression, "witnessing," empowerment and healing. In addition to benefits attained consciously, sand tray therapy facilitates healing in the unconscious and subconscious levels. These sessions can be processed and debriefed if appropriate, but are often powerful when completed and witnessed in silence.
18. Healing the Home- When trauma has occurred within or been associated with the family's home, the therapist can accompany the family on a walkthrough of their home. The therapist can facilitate processing of various locations within the home where trauma has occurred, debrief the impact of the trauma, and facilitate new meaning for those areas through physical remodeling, putting up healing symbolic items, family planning and carrying out new and fun/playful activities, and so forth.

19. Music as a Trauma Medium: Listen to select songs (therapist choice or student/family choice) and use such to communicate and process trauma experience. Songs can be chosen due to their verbal content, their emotional content, etc. Music can be a powerful communicator, motivator, healer and reminder. Can be used at the geniuses of trauma treatment as an icebreaker to the topic, or to facilitate a deeper therapeutic level of work.
20. “Willow in the Wind” involves a group of safety people (family system or other support system) standing in a circle surrounding an individual person. The person in the middle wraps their own arms around themselves (self hug), and while standing with legs locked and stationary, allows the surrounding group of people to gently pass her/him back and forth around the circle. Facilitates experimentation with trust, self-care, reception of support/love, expression of support/love, etc.
21. Silence- Silence conveys deep respect and support, especially sitting next to or in close proximity to the individual working through trauma. Taking time as the provider/listener to respectfully place self in the shoes of the trauma victim, connect with them emotionally, and spiritually (heart-to-heart) witness their internal world. Situation dependent whether to have any physical contact with them, usually not (especially not when one-on-one).
22. Validation- Well-timed validation when using key words or sentences that can facilitate mindfulness, connection and validation can be a powerful support for an individual or family working through trauma. “It must be...very sad...to recall these experiences...though you’ve been able to...find within you...impressive strength to hold this sadness...and find each day an ability...to know you can endure it.”
23. Choco-therapy- Chocolate makes everything better! It’s incredible how it’s a point of relief after doing trauma work.
24. Humor- Laughing/humor, in its crucial and creative timing, can be an incredible healing component in trauma work. When you blow it, use humor. People are very forgiving when they’ve experienced having the therapist’s heart with them throughout the work. Humor also invites an individual to shift more fully the perspective of their work towards hope, healing, feeling supported, resolution, and experiencing progress. “Laughter the best medicine.” (Reader’s Digest)
25. Symbolic Letting Go- Helium balloons (go green with biodegradable balloons!) decorated symbolically with trauma symbols or symbols of hope, and then silently observed as they fade out of sight can be a powerful experience and resolution for a traumatized individual or family. Other mediums for letting go can include: bearing an object, tossing an object in the ocean, giving back or away an object, etc. Remember, be conscious of the environment (do no harm!).
26. Equine/Animal Assisted- Animals are a great medium for self-care and nurture work. Animal assisted therapy are especially helpful when working through unconscious or subconscious barriers, or when a trauma victim/system is not yet ready to trust a therapeutic process with a human. Equine-assisted therapy is particularly powerful due to the sensitive and emotionally intelligent nature of a horse. Equine and/or animal work can be an individual process or a family process.
27. Ropes Course- The use of a ropes course or other physically challenging/demanding tasks can be powerful symbolic means for making tangible things that often exist in an emotional or cognitive venue. Challenge tasks also facilitate feelings longed for by a trauma victim, such as empowerment, control, accomplishment, esteem, pride, strength, endurance, and so forth. Challenge tasks can be in the form of climbing to the top of a ridgeline, completing a ropes task, repelling from an intimidating height, making it through an obstacle course, competing in an event, etc. Ensure that the challenge fits the capability of the individual or family system you are engaging, otherwise the experience can be aversive.

28. Family Sculpting- Allow each family member to “sculpt” the other family members in a manner that symbolizes different experiences and/or events in the trauma/healing journey. An example is a young woman sculpting her parents to symbolically describe her experience of their venomous and volatile divorce. She shaped her parents facial features, body gestures, stance, distance/proximity, etc. to display the manner in which she experienced them during the time of trauma. She then positioned herself in the sculpture to symbolize her experience. This can be a great tool in creating empathy, validation, understanding, healing, etc.
29. Family Symbol- Support the family in choosing and/or creating a family symbol representing their trauma recovery and the accompanying commitments, and keep such in a prominent place in the house or on the person.
30. The Bouquet- Challenge the family to purchase faux roses, gem stones and a vase. For every choice a family member makes to honor their own trauma recovery by making a healthy choice for themselves, add a gem to the vase. Also add a gem to the vase for choices made in honor of supporting another family member. Add roses to the vase to symbolize very difficult or painful decisions made to benefit self and the family in trauma recovery.