The CTARI Institute™


YOGA
A Therapeutic Strategy in Trauma Treatment

Dr. Debra Ruisard  DSW, LCSW, LCADC
Project Director, SAMHSA-NCTSN Grant
Senior Trainer at The CTARI Institute
RYT500

The training and consulting division of
Why Yoga?

“We try to help people use insight and understanding to manage their behavior. However, neuroscience research shows us that very few psychological problems are the result of defects in understanding; most originate in pressures from deeper regions in the brain that drive our perception and attention. When the alarm bell of the emotional brain keeps signaling that you are in danger, no amount of insight will silence it”

van der Kolk, 2014, p. 64
Symptoms of Trauma

- Depression
- Irritability
- Decreased concentration
- Loss of interest
- Numbing
- Headaches; chronic pain
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Emotional overwhelm
- Hypervigilance
- Hopelessness about future
- Panic attacks
- Nightmares
- Increased substance use
- Shame, worthlessness
- Flashbacks
- Eating disorders
- Self harm
Trauma and stress are stored in the body

- Traumatic experiences are recorded in our nervous systems; chronic stress keeps the body on high alert and has a negative affect on our bodies.
- When triggered, the traumatized body re-experiences terror, rage and helplessness—prompting instinctual survival responses, such as fight, flight and freeze.
- When under stress, the body reacts: muscle tension, pain, disrupted sleep, eating issues, exhaustion and agitation.
- Strategies involving breath, movement and touch are effective ways to help people to calm the nervous system and increase their ability to manage their stress responses.

- Bessel van der Kolk, 2015
8 Limbs of Yoga

• *Asana* (physical practice)
• Meditation
• Breath work
• Ethics
• Self-care
• Service to others
• Concepts of consciousness
• Personal spiritual development
Promising Research

• A randomized controlled trial (RCT) indicated that adult participants with PTSD who completed an eight-session *Kundalini* yoga treatment exhibited significant improvement in PTSD symptomatology and greater changes in perceived stress, anxiety and resilience. (Jindani, et al, 2015)

• Results of an RCT for a Trauma Sensitive Yoga Program indicated that 64 participants who completed the ten-week yoga program were more likely to no longer to meet the criteria for PTSD and exhibited significant decreases in tension and depression. (van der Kolk, et al, 2014)

• Multiple smaller research studies have demonstrated the benefits of yoga on PTSD, depression, anxiety, immunity issues, eating disorders, ADHD, schizophrenia, well being and mood. (Caplan, 2018)
The benefits of yoga

- Improves flexibility, muscle tone, strength and balance
- Reduces stress
- Improves heart rate variability
- Promotes emotional regulation
- Promotes body awareness
- Calms the nervous system
Warning: Yoga can be triggering for trauma survivors

• Trauma survivors can experience shame
• Trauma survivors can be triggered in regular yoga classes by hands on adjustments, suggestions from the teacher, use of props (i.e., straps)
• Certain poses can be triggering to sexual abuse survivors (i.e., poses that open the heart and hip area, “Happy Baby,” restorative back bend, etc.)
Trauma Sensitive Yoga
David Emerson

• Very similar to a “regular” yoga practice, but how the material is presented is different
• Use of the word “form” rather than “pose”
• Emphasis is not on doing the form correctly
• Use of yoga forms to increase body awareness/interoception
• No prescribed way to breathe—participants experiment with their breath with no expectations
• Language is invitational not directive
Trauma Sensitive Yoga

• Does not attempt to make meaning out of the body’s experience
  • Participants have and notice the body experience right now; choose what to do with it once it is felt; take action based on their choice

• Does not “process” the emotional content of trauma
  • Instead of making meaning out of the experience, participants are having a body experience that they notice and interact with
Forward Bends
Calming to our systems, reduces anxiety
Twists
Calming, stimulates the stomach area of the *vagus* nerve
Backbends: energizing, helpful for depression
Mountain Pose: grounding; builds confidence
Deep Pressure Touch
Yoga for Clients

• Do gentle yoga stretching in session with clients
• Ten minutes a day of gentle yoga home practice
  • Yoga with Adriene (YouTube)
• Clients with trauma histories
  • Trauma-informed yoga classes
• Encourage them to try various types of yoga
Restorative Yoga

• In restorative yoga, props (i.e., bolsters, blankets, blocks) are used to completely support the body in poses held for up to 10 minutes.

• The focus is on softening and relaxing, not muscular effort or flexibility

• Relaxes the body by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system
Yin Yoga

- Yin Yoga is a slow, meditative, quiet practice of yoga, poses are held for 1-5 minutes with little or no muscular effort
- Targets the Yin tissues of the body, including connective tissue, fascia, tendons and ligaments
- Increases flexibility, not strength
- Targets the organs and organ meridians (Traditional Chinese Medicine)
Yoga Nidra

• Yoga Nidra is a yoga based guided meditation technique that brings the individual into a deep state of relaxation.
• Found to be effective with PTSD.
• Best used grounded clients, able to attune to body sensations without getting triggered.
• iRest.org – Integrated Restoration, Richard Miller
• Insight Timer, YouTube
“No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster recovery, no matter how much it appears to be in her (his) immediate best interest.”

-Judith Lewis Herman
I invite you to join me...

Trauma Sensitive Chair Yoga Sequence
References

• *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk, 2014

• *Yoga and Psyche*, Mariana Caplan, 2018


Resources

- *Trauma Sensitive Yoga in Therapy*, David Emerson, 2015
- *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman, 1992
- *When the Body Says No: Exploring the Stress-Disease Connection*, Gabor Mate
- *Sensory Enhance Yoga for Self Regulation and Trauma Healing*, Lynn Stoller
The CTARI Institute is elevating and optimizing SEL with proven methodologies for creating attuned cultures and resilient communities.

For more information on CTARI’s professional trainings & consulting, please contact:

Pam DeLuca at The CTARI Institute™ at pdeluca@cge-nj.org or visit www.ctari-institute.org.