



animal is. Frequently, traumatized people have pets for exactly that reason.

You may also wish to work more closely with an animal, by placing your hands on its body or your head upon its chest. Notice the calmness in the animal. Listen to its heartbeat and feel its breathing. Feel yourself settle in to the animal's own natural rhythms. You may try this for as long as feels comfortable for both you and the animal. As little as a few minutes may have a noticeable effect.

Phase 3 — Building Resources

Preparation

Everybody has resources. It can also be said that every *body* has resources. What are resources and where do they come from? Resources can be anything or anyone that supports and nurtures a sense of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. They can be obvious or hidden. They can be active or forgotten. They can be external, internal, or both. Simple examples of external resources might be: nature, friends, family, animals, athletics, dance, music, and other expressive arts. Examples of internal

resources might be: strength, agility, intelligence, a spiritual practice, inherent talents, instinctual wisdom, and a resilient nervous system.

When a person has been traumatized, instinctive resources for successful protection and self-defense have been overwhelmed in part or in whole. Resources can be lost or forgotten after even one traumatizing event. If trauma began during the formative years of infancy and early childhood, few resources may have been available from the beginning.

During this resource-building exercise, you will recover some of your body's innate resources and perhaps even discover new ones.

For this exercise, you'll need paper and pen.

Practice

Take a piece of paper. Or you can use a page from your journal, if you have one. Divide your page vertically in half so that you have two columns. In one column, begin a list of your external resources; in the other column, list your internal resources.

LISTEN TO TRACK THREE
Building Resources



Over time, you can continue to add to each list. If you find that you are lacking resources you wish you had, such as people and physical exercise, you might decide to join a Tai Chi class or find a walking buddy to help you move out of isolation into both more activity and connectedness.

As we move into the second group of exercises (Tracking), you will discover how to more fully embody the resources from your lists that bring you comfort and safety.

If you have difficulty beginning your list, take some time to recall what got you through your trauma. How did you cope? What helped you the

most to get to the place you are now? What inner strengths did you bring to bear in your struggle to go on with life? If you suffered early abuse, who or what helped you to survive your childhood trauma? Take a few moments to imagine or feel possible resources, even if they seem distant, vague, or weak. Little by little, you will notice emergent resources that have been lost, find new ones, and strengthen those that are weak.

SECOND GROUP: TRACKING SKILLS

In the first group of phases, you learned to contain sensations and feelings, restore a sense of center, and begin to restore your body boundaries. After the three phases, you will begin to feel less betrayed and more supported by your body.

In the next three phases, you'll begin to learn the language of inner bodily experiences. Perhaps your body has felt frozen or paralyzed by fear, or collapsed in shame or helplessness. During these next phases, you'll be able to feel where you've collapsed, where the body is tensed or constricted, and begin to normalize that sensation through feeling and movement.

These phases are tools to feel into your body, sense what parts of the body have too much or not enough energy, and begin to create conduits for stuck energy to flow. When you find the places you're stuck, you're ready to become unstuck, because each of these places is a movement and energy ready to be continued and completed.

Phase 4 — From "Felt Sense" to Tracking Specific Sensations

Preparation

Before beginning the exercises in this section, it's important that you fully understand the key concept of *felt sense*. According to Eugene Gendlin, the author of the seminal book *Focusing*, who has coined the term *felt sense*: "A felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one. *Physical*.

A bodily awareness of a situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time."

The felt sense can be said to be the medium through which we experience the totality of sensation. Every event can be experienced both as individual parts and as a unified whole. To harness the instincts necessary to heal trauma, we must be able to identify and employ the indicators of trauma that are made available to us through the felt sense.

Being consciously aware of your body and its sensations makes any experience more intense. It is important to recognize that the experience of comfort, for example, comes from your felt sense of comfort and not from the chair, the sofa, or whatever surface you are sitting on. As a visit to any furniture store will soon reveal, you can't know that a chair is comfortable until you sit on it and get a bodily sense of what it feels like.

The felt sense blends together most of the information that forms your experience. Even when you are not consciously aware of it, the felt sense is telling you where you are and how you feel at any given moment. It is relaying the overall experience of the organism, rather than interpreting what is happening from the standpoint of the individual parts. Perhaps the best way to describe the felt sense is to say that it is the experience of being in a living body that understands the nuances of its environment by way of its responses to that environment.

In many ways, the felt sense is like a stream moving through an ever-changing landscape. It alters its character in resonance with its surroundings. When the land is rugged and steep, the stream moves with vigor and energy, swirling and bubbling as it crashes over rocks and debris. Out on the plains, the stream meanders so slowly that one might

wonder whether it is moving at all. In the same way, once the setting has been interpreted and defined by the felt sense, we blend into whatever conditions we find ourselves placed in. Like the stream, this amazing sense shapes itself to those environments.

The physical (external) senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste are elements that contribute only a portion of the information that builds the foundation for the felt sense. Other important data are derived from our body's internal awareness — the positions it takes, the tensions it has, the movements it makes, its temperature, etc. The felt sense can be influenced, even changed by our thought. Yet it's not a thought; rather, it's something we feel.

Emotions contribute to the felt sense, but they play a less important role than most people believe. Emotions such as sorrow, anger, fear, disgust, and joy are intense and direct. There are a limited variety of these types of feelings, and they are easily recognized and named. This is not so with the felt sense.

The felt sense encompasses a complex array of ever-shifting nuances. The feelings we experience are typically much more subtle, complex, and intricate than what we can convey in language.

As you read the following phrases, imagine how much more you might feel, experiencing these things, than can possibly be expressed in words:

- Looking at a mountain peak bathed in an alpine glow
- Seeing a blue summer sky dotted with soft white clouds
- Going to a ball game and dripping mustard on your shirt
- Feeling the ocean spray as the surf crashes onto rock and cliff

- Touching an opening rose or a blade of grass topped with a drop of morning dew
- Listening to a Brahms concerto
- Watching a group of brightly dressed children singing ethnic folk songs
- Walking along a country road
- Enjoying conversation with a friend

You can imagine going through a day without emotion, but to live in the absence of the felt sense is not just unthinkable; it is impossible. To live without the felt sense violates the most basic experience of being alive.

The felt sense is sometimes vague, often complex, and ever-changing. It moves, shifts, and transforms constantly. It can vary in intensity and clarity, enabling us to shift our perceptions. It does this by giving us the process as well as what is needed for change. Through the felt sense we are able to move, to acquire new information, to interrelate with one another and, ultimately, to know who we are. It is so integral to our experience of being human that we take it for granted, sometimes to the point of not even realizing that it exists until we deliberately attend to it. To the degree that you experience the felt sense as ever-shifting and are able to embrace this constant flow, then you will be moving out of trauma into life.

Describing and Tracking Sensation. Before you begin working with the exercises on Track Four, I'd like you give some thought to the words that you use to describe how you feel. This process will help you better acquaint

yourself with identifying and describing your physical sensations.

When someone asks you how you're doing, you may typically answer in a vague way, such as, "okay" or "not so good."

But try asking yourself, "What sensation in my body tells me that I'm feeling okay?" You may well get some more information: "My head feels heavy. My left shoulder is tingly. And my hand is warm."

Fear might be experienced as a rapid heartbeat or a knot in the gut. You see how much more specific that description is, how much more connected to your body? This may feel like a different language to you at first, but with practice, it will become easier.

Below is a list of terms you may find helpful to get you started with describing your bodily sensations:

Dense	Thick	Flowing
Breathless	Fluttery	Nervous
Queasy	Expanded	Floating
Heavy	Tingly	Electric
Fluid	Numb	Wooden
Dizzy	Full	Congested
Spacey	Trembly	Twitchy
Tight	Hot	Bubbly
Achy	Wobbly	Calm
Suffocating	Buzzy	Energized
Tremulous	Constricted	Warm
Knotted	Icy	Light
Blocked	Hollow	Cold
Disconnected	Sweaty	Streaming

The way that you distinguish a sensation from an emotion and from a thought is by being able to locate it in your body and experience it in a direct physical way. For example, if you're experiencing anxiety, the next question to ask would be: "When I feel anxious, how do I know that I am feeling anxious?" In other words, *where* in your body do you feel it, and exactly what is the physical sensation? Is it tightness? Is it constriction? Is it a knot? Or, is it a fluttery feeling? Is it your heart palpitating? What is your breathing like? Are there butterflies in your stomach? All of these sensations might be called "anxiety." The trick in dealing with and finding a sensation is to realize that it has to have a location in the body. It can have a size. It frequently has a shape. And it has a specific physical quality, such as tightness, spaciousness, constriction, heat, cold, vibration, or tingling.

Now you're ready to proceed with Phase 4.

Practice

NOTE: For the following exercise, you'll need an object (or even a person—or image of them) that is special to you. This object will serve as the focus of the exercise.

LISTEN TO TRACK FOUR
From "Felt Sense" to Tracking
Specific Sensations



When we have been traumatized, the body doesn't feel like a safe place. It feels like a dangerous place. This exercise is designed to help you discover your own pacing and inner rhythms, and to trust in your own innate capacity to regulate and to heal. It will help you begin to find islands of relative safety or ease within your body.

Find a comfortable place to sit, either in a chair or on the floor. I prefer that you start by sitting rather than lying down, because sometimes when