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# What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do

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## Dealing with Trauma



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**Virginia Counselor Association**

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Jon is a psychotherapist, author, consultant, and lecturer. He is recognized for his practical and sensitive approach to counseling. Educated at the University of Florida, where he got his Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, he is a Licensed Professional Counselor, a Licensed Substance Abuse Practitioner, and is a certified EMDR Therapist and is trained in Somatic Experiencing. He has been in private practice for over thirty-five years and has been a clinician and consultant in addictions and mental health for over forty years. He has supervised over 30 counselors for licensure.

Jon has given many workshops statewide, nationally, and internationally on addiction, trauma, and clinical practices. In 2012 he conducted a 3-day workshop in Mauritania, Africa sponsored by the U.S. State Department on the topic of "High Risk Youth and Resiliency." He is the author of ***Getting Unstuck: Practical Guidance for Counselors: What to Do When You Do Not Know What to Do***. Most recently he has developed the ***DAAC Deck***®, an innovative way to do SUD intakes/evaluations.

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# Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...

Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or  
Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...

Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or  
Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever...

Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or  
Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you often feel that ...

No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or  
Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you often feel that ...

You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or  
Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did your mother or stepmother:

Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or  
Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or  
Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did a household member go to prison?

Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Now add up your "Yes" answers: \_\_\_\_\_ This is your ACE Score

## THERAPY GOALS

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree that I am willing to participate in counseling and work on the following goal(s):

Please state goals:

1. In a positive way, i.e., what you will do and not what you won't do. For example, a positive goal would be, "I want to be positive and strategic in my interactions with my children," instead of "I need to quit yelling at my children."
2. That state the action that you need to take, not what others need to do. For example, "Get my spouse off my back," would not be something you could do, but to state the goal as, "I need to detach myself from my spouse's complaining" would be something you could do.
3. That are specific. For example, "I want to develop a positive attitude towards myself and my family," is better than "I want to be happy."
4. Apply to some time, place or circumstance. For example, "I need to express to my father know the next time I see him what he said that hurt me so much."

### EXAMPLES:

I want to stop drinking all alcohol by the end of the week.

I want to learn how to manage my anger when I don't get what I want from my parents.

I want to be self-confident when I talk to my boss about my work.

I want to tell about and overcome the childhood trauma I experienced when I was seven.

I want to let go of the shame I have about my behavior when I was first experimenting with drugs and sex.

My goals are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Quieting

Assume a comfortable position with your arms by your side or hands in your lap. Keep the body still and close your eyes.

**Now focus on the breath.** Take 5 slow full breaths exhaling and inhaling through both nostrils, filling the lungs from the bottom, to the center, and then to the top of the chest.

When you finish, begin equalized or even breathing. Exhale and inhale through both nostrils slowly and smoothly with no pause between exhalations and inhalations. Concentrate attention on the breath past the space just within the nostrils. Be aware of the air coming in and going out, coming in and going out. Imagine you're breathing in a sense of calmness and the air coming in is light and peaceful. Now imagine you're breathing out tension and stress and the air going out is dark and full of stress. Continue for several minutes breathing slowly and smoothly.

Now forget the breathing entirely and focus attention on the exercises for quieting the body, emotions and mind.

**Now quiet the body.** Take time to visualize imagine and feel the relaxation of each part of the body as you silently repeat these phrases to yourself, then just let it happen

I feel quite quiet...I am beginning to feel more relaxed...

My toes and feet are warm and relaxed...

My ankles and lower legs feel relaxed and heavy...

My knees and upper legs feel calm and comfortable...

My fingers and hands are warm and relaxed...

My wrist and forearms are heavy and comfortable...

My elbows and upper arms are relaxed and quiet...

My shoulders and shoulder blades are heavy and calm...

My buttocks and hips are relaxed and comfortable...

My stomach and abdominal area are calm and comfortable...

My heart, chest, and lungs are relaxed and calm...

My back and vertebrae are heavy and relaxed...

My neck and throat are relaxed and quiet...

My jaws, lips, and tongue are quiet and relaxed...

My nose and cheeks feel smooth and relaxed...

My eyes, eyelids, and eyebrows are heavy and relaxed...

My scalp and forehead are smooth and comfortable...

My whole body is relaxed, calm and comfortable...

**Now quiet the emotions.** As you remain comfortable and relaxed, silently repeat these phrases visualizing, imagining, and feeling the warmth

My arms and hands are heavy and warm...I feel quiet...My arms and hands are relaxed...relaxed and warm...warmth is flowing into my hands...they're warm...my hands are warm... relaxed and warm.

**Now quiet the mind.** Turn your attention inward. On each phrase imagine and feel the quietness and the withdrawal of the attention inward.

I feel quite quiet...my mind is quiet... I withdraw my thoughts from the surroundings, and I feel serene and still...Deep with myself I can visualize and experience myself as relaxed, comfortable, and still... I am alert but in an easy quiet, inward-turning way...My mind is calm and quiet... as I move into a deeper silence

Now move into the silence, following the breath, listening to the music or simply letting the silence be. At the end as I slowly count to ten, bring your attention back into the room maintaining the same sense of calmness that you now feel with your eyes closed only with your eyes open.

## Blocking Beliefs Questionnaire

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Problem I want to solve** \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 “feels completely untrue” and 7 “feels completely true.”

1.	I'm embarrassed I have this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	I'm not sure I want to get over this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	If I solve this problem, I will feel deprived.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I don't have the strength or willpower to get over this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	If I really talk about this problem, something bad will happen.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	This is only a problem that can be solved by someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	If I ever solve this problem, I will lose part of who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I don't want to think about this problem anymore.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	I should solve this problem, but I don't always do what I should.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	I like people who have this problem better than people who don't.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	It could be dangerous for me to overcome this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	When I try to think about this problem, I can't keep my mind on it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	I say I want to solve this problem. but I never do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	It could be bad for someone else for me to get over this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	If I get over this problem, I can never go back to having it again.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	I don't deserve to overcome this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	This problem is bigger than I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	If I get over this problem, it would go against my values.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	Someone in my life hates this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20.	I'm not sure the benefits of giving up this problem outweigh the benefits of continuing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21.	Frankly, I really don't think it is a problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.	I've had this problem so long, I could never completely solve it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23.	I have to wait to solve this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24.	If I solve this problem, it will be mainly for someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25.	Solving this problem takes more effort than I am willing to make.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26.	Deep down I really don't believe I can overcome this problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Helpful and Unhelpful Thinking

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A wise Greek philosopher once said, "I have noticed that people are not disturbed so much by things as by their opinions about those things." (Epictetus) This means that what bothers us is really our own thoughts, not what happens to us. Our opinions, or our own thoughts sometimes stop being our servants and become our masters. The job of thinking is to make us capable and confident.

**When our thoughts make us feel miserable, it is time to put those thoughts in their place. When you find you feel miserable for long periods of time, it is a certain sign your thoughts are no longer serving you. They have taken on a life of their own. Misery is a signal to change something. Listen to the signal.**

Misery can include anger, jealousy, fear, and many other unpleasant feelings. All of these feelings are normal and natural, when they last a short time. Children experience bad feelings but naturally drop negative thoughts and recover quickly. They know something we have forgotten. Thoughts are supposed to be temporary. If they last a long time, then the feeling is being produced by thoughts that run through your mind over and over. This kind of thinking is called rumination. If you ruminate on a memory about a bad event or thought or experience, you will continue to feel the same bad feeling.

"But how do I stop ruminating about an event or memory? Are you telling me to stop thinking about it?"

Oddly enough, if you try to make yourself stop thinking about something (like, telling yourself, "Stop thinking about that!") the attention you give the thought when trying to stop it actually empowers that thought. It comes back more and more. Thoughts survive and grow when we give them energy and attention. Being upset at a thought makes it come back more and more.

Instead, we detach from the thought. We look at it with impartiality. Maybe it is just a negative thought and doesn't really mean anything. We lose interest when we see something as useless or irrelevant. When we lose interest in something, it stops occurring to us. We teach ourselves that the thought is not useful or important, and it gradually withers away. If you lose interest in upsetting thoughts they will wither away.

Step 1 DECISION: Analyze the thought in a completely new way. Most people want to decide whether the thought is true or false. This is not the point. Thoughts are only helpful or unhelpful. You need to look at the pros and cons of thinking that thought. Does it help you? Does it give you a clear head? A peaceful heart? Does it help you feel confident and calm and relaxed? After all, we all know we function at our best when we feel good, do we not? Are you ready to feel better? Are you ready to see that peace is more important than 'being right' no matter how upset we are? Commit yourself to supporting thoughts that support a peaceful heart.

Step 2 ACTION: If you decide you are ruminating on a thought, that it is not helpful, and you would be better off personally if you could drop that thought, then begin the detachment process:

A. SELF-AWARENESS: Notice when you are feeling the negative emotion most strongly. Track down the thought that is giving you that feeling. Identify the thought. It is usually a thought about yourself or someone else that is judgmental and negative.

B. INSIGHT: Realize that thought gives you the bad feeling. Become aware that it is not the situation that is now affecting you, it is just the thought that is in your head. The thought is not serving you. It is controlling you. This point is very important. You need to recognize it is not the situation that causes you to feel bad, it is your own thinking.

C. DETACHMENT: Now comment on the thought: "That thought is not helpful. I don't have to think it. It is not useful. I am not obligated to pay attention to it." When the thought bounces back, just gently tell yourself, "I find that thought useless. I don't have to pay attention to it." (If you are upset or angry with yourself, it will just give the thought more energy and it will come back more and more. It is important to be gentle and respectful to yourself.)

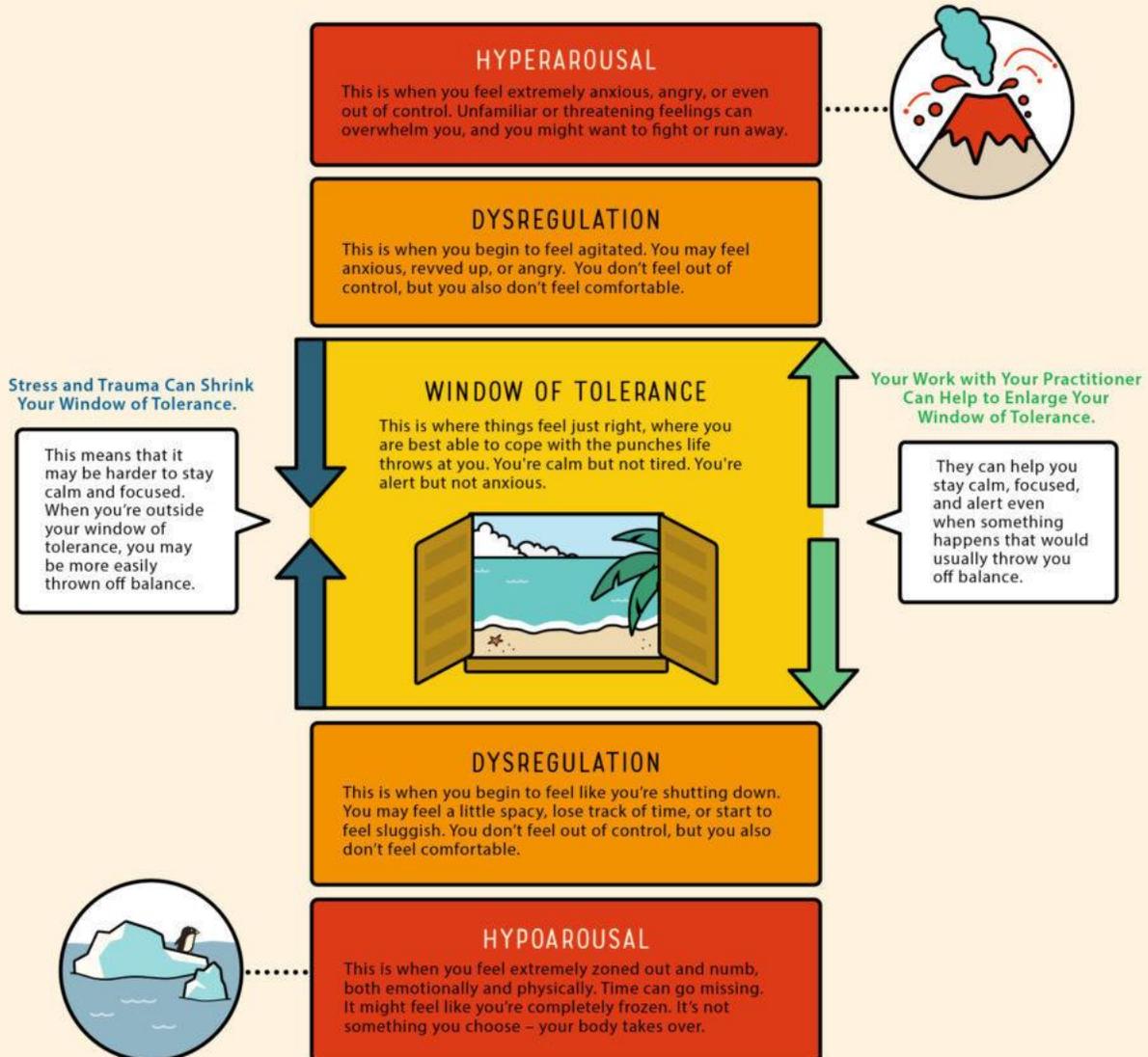
D. REFOCUS: Do something positive and pleasant. Reward yourself for dealing with that thought. Keep a list of small positive things you can do that will raise your spirits, such as a walk with a dog, work in the garden, and so on.

E. PATIENCE & APPRECIATION: Eventually the thought will fade, and you will feel more peaceful. Now appreciate that feeling. It is important to show some gratitude and appreciation for good feelings. Pay attention to good feelings, and just notice briefly when you have bad feelings. Never analyze bad feelings because that just gives them more power.

Step 3 MAINTAIN YOUR GAINS: Whenever the thought reoccurs you will notice it has less and less emotional impact on you. Sincere appreciation to yourself helps. Your mind is detoxifying the thought, without you even having to know about it. Take some pleasure and satisfaction in noticing how your mind heals old wounds when you stop ruminating.

Our minds are made to function with curiosity, openness, constant learning, and even love and joy. When those are present, we are in a state of high functioning. We do things for the sheer joy of it. Our ordinary tasks seem interesting, just as when we were innocent children, and each task, from washing dishes to watching ants, seemed endlessly entertaining. When we are at peace, we rediscover that deep inner state of perfect mental health. It is always there, just waiting for our negative thoughts to quiet down and get out of the way. May you discover your own perfect mental health today!

# How Trauma Can Affect Your Window of Tolerance



## **Dealing With Trauma**

### **VCA Conference 2019**

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