

The aim is for clients to develop and expand their skills in:

- self-regulation of stress, hyperarousal, anxiety and other difficult distress states common in PTSD, Depression, Anxiety, etc that occur after adverse and traumatic experiences.
- mindfulness - ability to be present, self aware and self compassionate
- somatic awareness of the body and inter-connection with life
- confident application of learned self regulation skills in everyday life resulting in an increasingly comfortable and safe sense of connection with their whole self and their broader life in the whole Te Whare Tapa Wha sense.

Efficacy of Mind-Body skills of self regulation for reducing trauma symptoms and building resiliency:

Research studies related to trauma treatment are increasingly showing that body-based approaches such as mindfulness, paced breathing and sensory awareness are effective in reducing the triggering, hyper-arousal and distress states often experienced after traumatic events as well as burnout, overwhelm, chronic stress and general life stress. Talk therapy is shown to be more effective for trauma recovery when combined with mind-body practices (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Scaer, 2014; Van der Kolk, 2014)

Van der Kolk and others go further in saying their studies and experience show that talk therapy alone, although helpful, does not always undo the neurological brain changes of trauma and in some cases can amplify symptoms when there is repeated cognitive focus on the trauma narrative whether in therapy or in the rumination pattern that often occurs in clinical depression. Neurologist Robert Scaer describes this amplifying effect in detail, a neurological process called 'kindling'. (Scaer)

Neuroscientists' understanding of neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to change itself (Doidge, 2007), underpins the research showing that mind-body approaches can resolve this triggering alarm system in the limbic system of the brain, a process called 'depotentialisation' which incidentally also happens in dream sleep. (Levine, 2011; Ruden, 2014; Walker, 2017)

These practices can also retrain new neural pathways of perceiving and experiencing the world as safe most of the time, effectively building resiliency to life stress in general along with more inclination to self care in the form of healthy boundaries and needs awareness. (Hassed & McKenzie 2012; Levine; Nottingham Trent University Study 2022)

Along with hyper-arousal symptoms already mentioned, other common effects of trauma are shallow breathing and breath-holding patterns which keep the nervous system in a perpetual state of Sympathetic arousal and amplifying fearful and racing thinking patterns. Retraining breathing patterns can be very effective in calming the body and mind so including breathing exercises such as mindful breathing, paced breathing, etc is also advantageous. (Kabat-Zinn; Levine; Scaer; Van der Kolk)

Teaching a range of mind-body self regulation skills creates a kete of many tools. Having a wide skill set has the advantage of more flexibility in meeting the variety of challenges in daily life by being able to call on something to suit different settings – public, private, working, driving, doing

chores, gardening, sports, shopping, ordinary days, occasional emergencies - therefore increasing resiliency. (Hassed & McKenzie 2012; Kabat-Zinn; Van der Kolk)

Mind-Body skills included in these sessions:

Mindfulness - awareness of breathing, sensation, listening to sounds, the senses, slow walking. (Kabat-Zinn; Hassed & McKenzie)

A range of slow breathing techniques in order to tailor to individuals' unique preferences - Mindful breathing; Paced Breathing and breathing with visualisation. (Kabat-Zinn; Nestor 2020)

Sensory self-soothing techniques of self-tapping on acupressure points (Van der Kolk) and Self-Havening® – self applied soothing touch to palms of hands or soft material (or a pet when at home) (Nottingham University Study, March 2022; Ruden, 2014);

Guided relaxation such as yoga nidra (Van der Kolk) and trauma recovery exercise TRE (Berceli; Scaer); Guided visualisation of safe, pleasant place and regenerative resourcing (Van der Kolk; Ruden);

Coaching throughout in self awareness, self compassion and self regulation so the window of tolerance is expanded, overwhelm is mitigated. This allows reintegration where trauma has created a split between body and mind – a common effect of trauma.

Encouragement to notice which methods help them feel better, calmer and which do not and to choose to practice only those that benefit them and they like. This acknowledges we are all unique and self-observation is key to developing self regulation tailored to their own needs and way of being in the world.

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Biography:

Kathy Hughes is a counsellor and group facilitator and has been in private practice since 2011. She is of Whakatohea, Celtic and English descent. Kathy has trained in mind-body self-regulation practices such as Mindfulness 2010 and 2013, Tension/Trauma Recovery Exercise 2011, Havening Techniques® 2020 and Trauma Tapping Technique 2020 which she integrates into her counselling practice and her own life. She has also been facilitating mind-body classes for several years - previously for NGOs Mental Health Advocacy & Peer Support (MHAPS) and Thorpe House residential detox, and currently community classes based at Avebury House and online when necessary for Covid protection.

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