



Refugee Services

National Partnership
for Community Training

Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services

Stress Reduction Techniques

Building Awareness, Skills & Knowledge:
A Community Response to the Torture Survivor Experience

Nancy Murakami, LCSW
Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture

Objectives

1. To recognize the value of effective stress reduction techniques
2. To learn and practice stress reduction techniques
3. To improve skills in talking about, teaching, and promoting the use of stress reduction techniques for torture survivors
4. To share techniques with peers

Small Group Exercise: Our Clients' Stress Reduction Techniques

- Collectively list 10-20 observed or reported stress reduction techniques of your clients
- Note a possible function of each technique (e.g. relaxing the body)
- Note any additional themes across the techniques (e.g. involve community, require no money)
- Big Group: report out
- NEXT STEP: Write down 2 techniques you heard that you want to teach to your clients. Write down 2 techniques that you want to try yourself.

Displaced Persons: Stressors & the Stress Responses

- Compounded pre-flight, flight, and post-flight stressors
- Intention of many torture techniques is to increase distress but these clients survived
- Frequent internal and external triggers/reminders keeping the stress responses active
- Former techniques for stress reduction may not be accessible in new context
- Impacting physical health, mental health, interpersonal health
- Impacting engagement in services

Stress Reduction Skills: A Basic Need

- Of parallel importance to food, water, shelter and safety
- Impacting all clients and services providers
- Stress accumulates, so need to monitor and regulate
- Skills can prevent and treat stress
- Easily learned by children and adults
- More effectively learned when stress is low
- Often, no external resources needed
- Important: Can be uncomfortable, dis-regulating, and destabilizing for individuals enduring chronic stress and hypervigilance, so sense of safety in the environment is necessary before engaging in practice

Stress Reduction Skills: The golden ticket

- Brief, effective skills easily incorporated into the day
- Many techniques we do naturally, automatically, and with little effort
- Let's give these habitual techniques recognition & a name
- Let's acknowledge what clients do successfully already
- Let's empower our clients to implement them when needed
- Let's broaden their collection of techniques
- Let's deepen their implementation of the techniques
- Let's utilize them ourselves

Large Group Exercise: 4 Elements

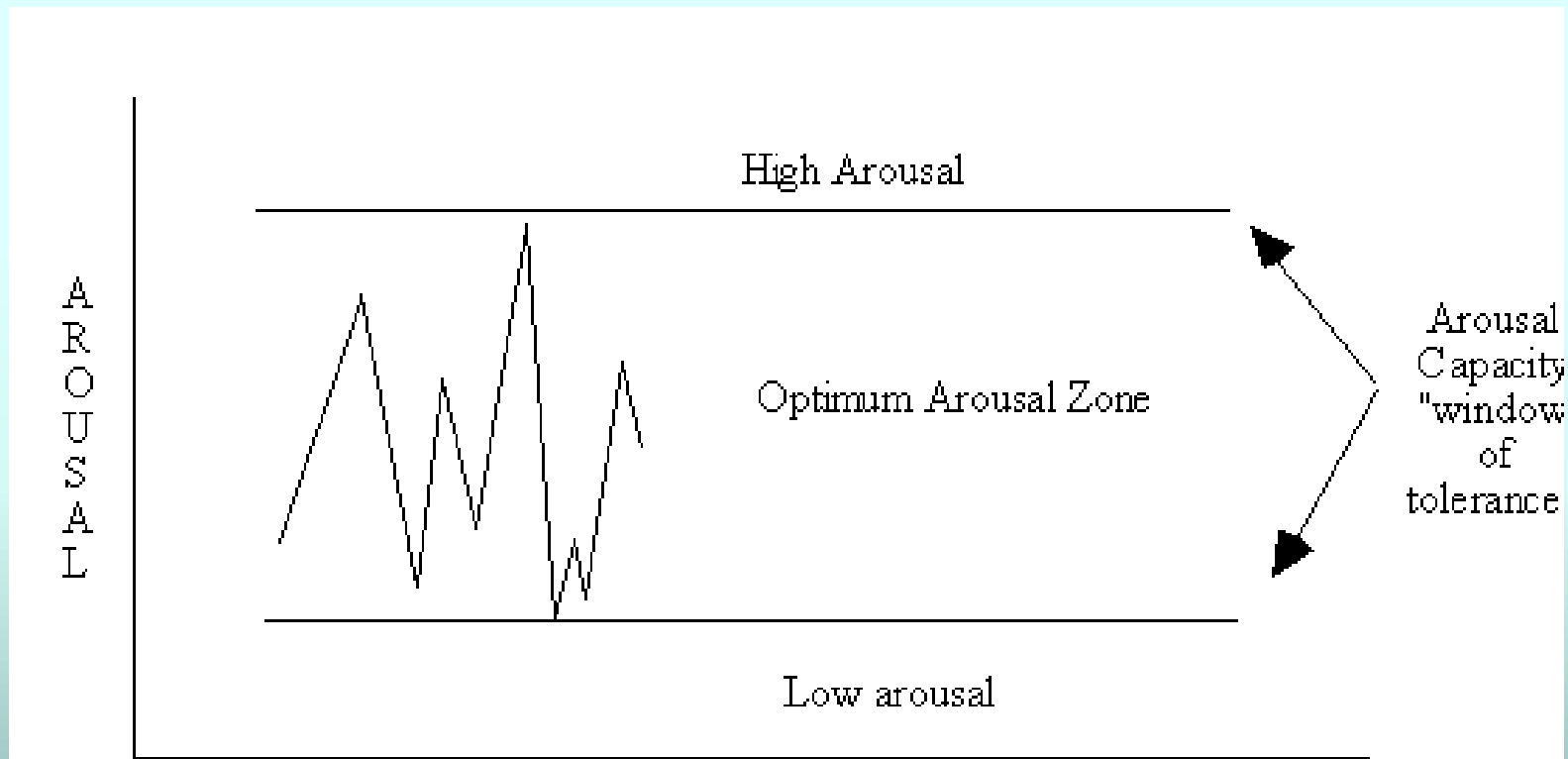
- Learn and practice PSOT's 4 Elements for Stress Reduction
- Earth: Grounding, safety in the present reality
- Air: Breathing for centering
- Water: Safe and controlled – the relaxation response
- Fire: Light up the path of your imagination and hope
- Remember to use!
- NEXT STEP: Write down the name of one person you will guide through the 4 Elements Stress Reduction Activity

Psycho-Education Tools #3: The Backpack/Container of Techniques



- Cognitive Techniques
 - Behavioral Techniques
 - Sensorimotor Techniques
 - Interpersonal Techniques
 - Spiritual Techniques
 - Many more
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- What is already in your backpack/container of strategies?

Psycho-Education Tool #4: “Window of Tolerance”



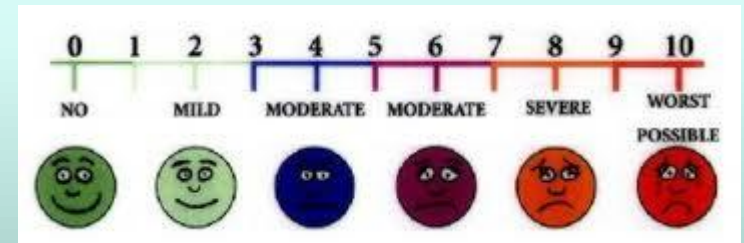
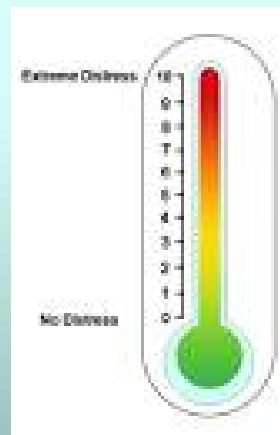
Stress Reduction techniques can bring a person back into the “window of tolerance” and they can help widen a person’s “window of tolerance”

Who should teach & guide the techniques

- Immigration attorneys preparing a client to testify in her asylum hearing
- Medical specialist examining the scars resulting from a client's torture
- A school social worker whose student describes regularly waking from the nightly screams of his father who has nightmares
- A therapist whose client often begins talking about his torture experience but becomes overwhelmed every time he recounts it
- A caseworker whose client reports feeling overwhelmed by navigating so many systems that can't provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services
- An administrator whose staff is reporting increased vicarious trauma in the workplace
- A religious leader offering support to a refugee who just learned that her mother died back home
- A supervisor whose intern has been coming late to work and is reporting that the intensity of the work is getting to him

Psycho-Education Tool #5: Subjective Unit of Distress Scale (SUDS)

- Your 0-10 intensity scale (0 not at all, 10 greatest you can imagine)
- Note the intensity of your distress (or intensity of a particular emotion) before and after practicing the technique
- How to know the technique is working: reduction in number



Incorporate Techniques into your Work

- Explore client's current stress management techniques
- Assess the need for additional skills (e.g. if client has a narrow window of tolerance then more skills are needed)
- Demonstrate and Teach
- Practice
- Discuss barriers to implementation
- Inquire about use between encounters
- Encourage client to teach friends and family in order to increase mastery
- Encourage use in your encounters when needed (often provider-identified initially and then client-identified) and integrate as component of every session
- **NEXT STEP:** Write down 1-2 ways that you can immediately incorporate use of stress reduction techniques into your work

Small Group Exercise: Sharing Techniques

- 2-3 people guide the group through a technique that members can use themselves and/or teach to their clients
- In large group, report out/demonstrate some techniques practiced in the small groups
- **NEXT STEP:** This evening, every person completes a “Stress Reduction Technique Form.” They will be compiled and disseminated to participants after the training

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