

Trauma-Informed Yoga Nidra for Clinical Use

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The *yoga nidra* meditation itself is approximately 20-25 minutes. The entire script guidance, which accounts for therapeutic set-up and closure, will take about 30 minutes to deliver.

Feel free to modify as therapeutically appropriate.

Stage 1: Preparation

- 1.) Introduce the concept of *intention* as it is used in yoga nidra. An intention is a seed that you plant, not an outcome that you force. Work with the client to develop a primary intention, a secondary intention or both, directly connected to your clinical work in that session or related to their treatment plan overall. Although you can guide them, their own wording is preferred.
 - Primary intentions are generally positive, *I am* statements about the self (e.g., “I am Divine Light”, “I am worthy”, “I am whole”).
 - Secondary intentions are positive statements about action or behavior (e.g., “I trust the process”, “I can show my emotions”, “I am creating safety within”).

- 2.) Invite the client to position themselves in a place that they choose and believe they can sustain for the next 20-25 minutes.
 - If client chooses to lay down, make sure that they get what they need to feel comfortable, including, but not limited to: a pillow (advise that they not prop their head too high), a blanket, a soft surface to rest on. If delivering the yoga nidra via telehealth, make sure the camera is positioned so that you can maintain visual contact with them.
 - Sitting down against a wall or other hard surface; a cushion to sit on or a blanket for covering may also be helpful. Body temperature may drop during yoga nidra.
 - Sitting in their chair as usual for a session, although using any available assists like pillow or blankets to improve comfort is welcome.

3.) Once the client is in their chosen position, invite them to move organically for a few moments with the physical body, as if they're stretching naturally or taking a big yawn. Sound is welcome. Some lines you may use:

- *"Take a few moments to stretch or wiggle around to work out any tension before we come into a place of stillness."*
- *"Let your body move naturally, like it may when you first wake up."*
- *"Think about how a baby, a dog, or a cat moves, not afraid of what anyone else may think."*
- *"Take any movements you need over the next 30 seconds or so, in order to more fully sink into the stillness."*

4.) Once they are settled, open with an initial grounding and centering. Some lines you may use (in any combination):

- *"You are now invited to close your eyes as we begin our yoga nidra meditation."*
- *"If closing the eyes doesn't feel quite right to you today, you may keep them open, although consider a soft gaze. If they happen to close naturally on their own throughout the meditation, you always have permission to open them again if you feel unsteady, lost, or ungrounded."*
- *"Spend a few moments to notice your physical body making contact with the _____ (e.g., floor, chair, wall, couch). As you breathe naturally, really let your self sink into this connection."*
- *"Notice the breath as it naturally flows through the body, without forcing or striving."*
- *"Let the mind begin to settle."*
- *"Remember that you cannot do anything wrong in this process."*
- *"Call upon your Higher Power/Inner Power" to be with you in this practice. If willing, surrender yourself to that Power."* [you may adjust or omit altogether depending on client's belief system]
- *"You are invited to fully spend some time with (e.g., embrace, embody, etc.) your natural state of being."*

5.) Invite a deepened series of approximately 3 breaths. Some lines you may use (in any combination):

- *"Without forcing or striving, take a nice deep breath in with the nose... and then let it go naturally with the mouth."*

- *“You are always invited to make a sound of letting go as you exhale.”*
- *“Follow this flow two more times, making a deliberate intention to let go of any holding with each exhale.”*
- *“Let these organic breaths allow you to deepen into our process.”*
- *“As I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. As I breathe out, I know I am breathing out.”*
- *“Your breath is your life force dancing through you; let it flow.”*
- *“Make friends with your breath and let it take you deeper into meditation.”*

6.) Invite the client to bring their intention into full awareness. Some lines you may use (in any combination):

- *“Bring your intention into full awareness.”*
- *“I now invite you to bring the intention that you developed during our work together into your full awareness. Please say it to yourself three times.”*
- *“If you did not develop a clear intention today, that’s okay. We’ll take a few moments here and see what may develop naturally.”*
- *“If a specific intention does not come up, that’s okay. Be open to what may be revealed naturally as we continue with yoga nidra.”*

(NOTE: At this point you can make a suggestion for an intention such as *“I can deeply rest”*, or *“I am worthy of the peace I seek”* depending on your assessment of the client’s needs. If suggesting an intention, let them know that it is their right to accept it or not. They do not have to indicate their choice aloud.)

7.) Begin the process of the deliberate “Clench and Release” series. Caution the client that if they cannot have undue pressure on their head for any reason (e.g., glaucoma, hypertension), to be mindful not to engage in the clenches too tightly and to keep the breath flowing evenly during the clench (you may also establish or “frontload” this before the formal yoga nidra begins). Please follow this order, although you may alter the language for developmental or contextual appropriateness:

- *“We will now transition into the practice of deliberate Clench and Release. To begin, make fists if that is available to you and squeeze them tightly. Now hold the fists in this clench position for a few moments...tighten them... hold... hold... and then let go, release!”*
- *“Following this release, continue to breathe and really notice the sense of letting go with each exhale.” [pause to allow for several breaths]*
- *“Now I will invite you to clench the entire upper body. On your next inhale, clench and tighten the fists, the arms, the shoulders, the face, the chest, the stomach...tighten them all...hold...hold...clench... and then let go, release!”*
- *“Now continue to breathe and notice the sense of letting go with each exhale.” [pause to allow for several breaths]*
- *“Now I will invite you to clench the entire lower body. On your next inhale, clench and tighten the buttocks, the hips, the legs, the feet... clench them all...hold...hold...squeeze... and then let go, let go fully and completely!”*
- *“Now fully allow yourself to experience the physical sensation of release. Continuing to breathe, continuing to notice. Remember that you cannot do this wrong.” [pause to allow for several breaths]*

Transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2

- 1.) Invite the client to make any final modifications or adjustments that they may need to make to their position before continuing. Some lines you may use (in any combination):
 - *“As we deepen our practice, take a moment to notice your body.”*
 - *“Are there any final adjustments you may need to make in order to be fully comfortable as we continue with yoga nidra?”*
 - *“If you need to make any adjustments in your position, make them mindfully and deliberately. Let it all be part of the meditation.”*
 - *“In yoga nidra, you are invited to let go of all forcing, striving, and doing.”*
 - *“Allow yourself to shift into a state of effortless being.”*
 - *“In yoga nidra, we are encouraged to claim our birthright as human beings, not human doings.”*

2.) Once the client seems as settled as possible if they chose to make any adjustments, transition into the following breath practice(s). This first breath (straw breathing) is highly recommended. Only if you have time, you can add in backward counting yogic breath (#3). Please follow this order, although you may alter the language for developmental or contextual appropriateness:

- *“Now draw your full attention to the breath once more.”*
- *“With every inhale, notice an expansion around the center of your body.”* [pause to allow for a few breaths of exploration]
- *“Now on your next natural exhale, pucker your lips as if you are about to exhale through a straw.”*
- *“Allow the breath to slowly release through these pursed lips.”*
- *“Continue with this straw breathing for a few more sets, allowing the breath to release slowly and steadily.”* [pause to allow for a few breaths of exploration]
- *“Notice that sensation of exhale.”* [pause]
- *“Now release the pucker of your mouth and resume normal breathing.”* [pause]
- *“Notice whatever you notice.”*

3.) *Continue with this second breath if time allows.* You may skip to Pause (#4) if time is limited. Please follow this order, although you may alter the language for developmental or contextual appropriateness:

- *“On your next inhale, feel an expansion around the center of the body, and continue to notice that expansion up through the ribs and chest.”*
- *“Let go naturally on the exhale when it feels appropriate.”* [pause to allow for a few breaths of exploration]
- *“On the next inhale, say the number ‘5’ to yourself... and on the exhale, also say the number 5 silently.”* [pause to allow time]
- *“On the next inhale, say the number ‘4’ to yourself... and on the exhale, also say the number 4 silently.”* [pause to allow time]
- *“Continue counting down at your own pace. If you lose count, return again to 5 and begin again.”* [pause to allow adequate time for exploration]
- *“Wherever you’re at, resume breathing naturally, release any counts or special patterns.”*

- *“Take a few moments to just notice... to be with the sensation of breath.”*
 - *“Let the breath be what it will be.”*
- 4.) Pause: Allow a silent pause (4-5 breaths) between the last exercise and the body scan (#5).
- 5.) Body scanning: please follow this order and these instructions, although you may alter the language or omit focus on certain body parts based on developmental or contextual appropriateness. After you say each body part, you are recommended to count 2, 3, 4 to yourself before continuing to the next body part to allow for optimal pacing.
- *“To further deepen our meditation, I will ask you to scan the body. As I say the name of each body part, simply bring your full attention and awareness to that part of the body.”* [pause for 1-2 breaths]
 - *“Top of the head...back of the head...face...back of the neck...chest...(both) arms...stomach...back...waist...hips...(both) legs...both feet.”*
 - *“Now notice your entire body together as one...from the top of the head, down to the bottom of your feet.”* [pause for 2-3 breaths]

Stage 2: Deepening & Integrating

- 1.) Noticing practice. Please follow this order, although you may alter the language for developmental or contextual appropriateness:
- *“As you spend this time with your body, notice if there are any areas of holding or tension, anxiety or strain that seem to be calling your attention.”* [pause]
 - *“Now after your next inhale, make a deliberate intention to visualize your breath flowing to that part or area of your body.”*
 - *“Continue with this pattern over the next several breaths. Allow your breath to fully move through the body to the places, parts, and areas that need the breath the most.”*
 - *“As the breath continues to work its natural wonders in your body, allow any of this holding or tension, anxiety or strain to loosen... to dissolve... to let go.”* [pause to allow for several breaths of exploration]

2.) Invitation to integration. Some lines you may use (in any combination):

- *“Here you can let go of all doing—all forcing—all striving.”*
- *“In this place of deep silence and stillness, connect to the truth that being is your birthright.”*
- *“Rest into the Divine essence of being.”*
- *“You are pure awareness, pure light.”*

3.) Pause: Allow a silent pause (6-8 breaths) between the last exercise (#2) and resting in intention (#4).

4.) Resting in intention. Some lines you may use (in any combination):

- *“In this place of deep, resting awareness, you are now invited to notice your intention once again.”*
- *“Repeat your intention to yourself slowly and deliberately.”*
- *“Embracing the fullness of your intention, repeat it to yourself several times, as if you are whispering a prayer.”*
- *“Cradle this intention in your awareness.”*
- *“Hold it in the deepest center of your being.”*
- *“Rest into this sacred knowing.”*
- *“Breathe into the fullness of this intention.”*

[pause an additional 2-3 breaths or longer depending on time]

Transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3

1.) Final invitation, which is essentially a call to passively work with any unfinished business while still in the meditation. Some lines you may use (in any combination):

- *“If there is an area in your life that needs to experience a sense of healing right now, notice that.”*
- *“Send the healing power of your breath, working together with your intention, to that area of unfinished business.”*
- *“Know that when it comes to deep healing, you do not have to force or strive.”*
- *“Let the natural wisdom of the body and the breath guide you where you need to go.”*

- *“You may call in your Higher Power or any of your ancestors or guides to assist you in this healing process.”*
- *“Notice whatever you are noticing...and then go with that.”*
- *“Trust the process.”*
- *“Hold steady in the awareness and the knowing that you are cared for.”*

2.) Awakening process; be mindful that some clients may require longer than others to safely transition from the practice and back into the fullness of the physical body. Please follow this order, although you may alter the language for developmental or contextual appropriateness:

- *“Now we will prepare to transition from our formal meditation.”*
- *“Begin to invite gentle, small movements into the physical body, perhaps wiggling your fingers and your toes.”*
- *“From those small movements, begin to explore some larger movements or stretches that feel natural and organic to help you fully awaken.”*
- *“As you move, bring up your intention once more. Notice what it feels like to pair this internalized intention together with movement.”*
- If laying down: *“Now roll on to the side that feels most appropriate in your body today and then hold there for a moment before propping yourself up to a sitting position.”*
- If sitting down: *“Continue to move in a way that feels healthy and nourishing in your body, perhaps twisting side to side.”*
- *“Now begin to open your eyes. Take your time with this transition. Blink them very gently to adjust back to the light in the space. Do not rush.”*

Stage 3: Closure & Reintegration

- 1.) Invite the client to take any additional movements or grounding exercises that you’ve already established in the therapeutic process to transition from the yoga nidra to your formal session closure.
- 2.) Ringing a bell (*tingshas*, *singing bowl*) or chanting the sound of “Om” (if that client is willing) can also assist with the formal transition.

- 3.) Debrief with the client in a way that is appropriate to their treatment plan and goals. Make an effort to re-connect their intention to therapeutic goals. Perhaps issue a challenge or set a therapeutic assignment to connect with that intention on a daily basis in some way as part of their in-between session linking.
- 4.) Prepare to answer any questions that the client may have before the session formally concludes.