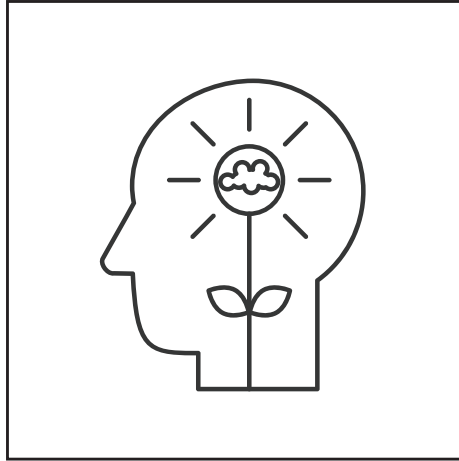


P R O C E S S N O T P E R F E C T I O N



Process four

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness has gotten a great deal of press in recent years. Twenty-Five years ago, most people outside the spheres of Buddhist or yoga communities hadn't even heard of this ancient practice. Now, it seems to be everywhere. In 2014, Time Magazine ran a piece called "The Mindfulness Revolution," complete with a front-page cover featuring a person looking like she was in total bliss. As nice as it is for mindfulness to go mainstream, some of the ways in which it is marketed are problematic. You may have seen that Time Magazine cover (easily available through an online search) or other images of mindfulness and immediately say, "That's not me! There's no way I'll ever be

able to be that calm.” Indeed, if you do a search engine exploration of the word *mindfulness*, several very clichéd images display. Often you will see a beautiful lotus flower, the pristine ripple on a pond, a rock formation, or a Zen garden with the sand perfectly combed. Or, you may be treated to more images like the Time Magazine cover: perfect looking people sitting in a state of bliss, usually on a beach or underneath a tree somewhere.

Not only do many of my clients and students roll their eyes when they see such imagery, I do too! I’ve practiced Eastern meditation in various systems for over a decade and I’ve practiced in contemplative Christian traditions for even longer. And yet, on most days my meditation, prayer, and yoga practices are still a struggle. If someone were to take my picture on any given day when I practice, they’d be more likely to encounter images of frustration and strain on my face. Trust me, I drop F-bombs and other expletives regularly when I stay in the moment with whatever life brings me. Most times I don’t like the (insert F-bomb) moment and the reality of living life on life’s terms. My practice has taught me to keep noticing without judgment, breathe as I stay grounded, and inevitably, whatever I’m experiencing will pass. Afterwards, when I step off the laboratory of my yoga mat or meditation cushion, I find myself better able to deal with whatever life throws my way.

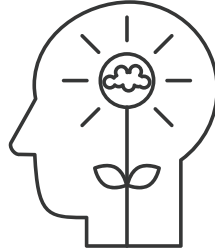
Mindfulness has been described by many scholars and practitioners as learning how to *respond* instead of react to stress. Mindfulness doesn’t make stress go away, rather, it teaches us how to better manage it or to roll with it. A common metaphor attributed to Jon Kabat-Zinn is that you *can’t stop the waves from coming, but you can learn how to surf*. Another variation on this age-old idea is encapsulated in the wisdom: *Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass; it’s about learning how to dance in the rain*. When you are suffering, these

meme-worthy sayings may seem beyond your capacity to actualize. However, through practice and time, my lived experience has taught me that they are very true. They speak to the essence of how deliberately practicing returning to the present while not pushing away our experiences of the moment can serve us in recovery and in life.

A major part of practicing mindfulness that we will explore fully in this process is to not judge yourself if you feel that you are failing at it. Yes, the process affords you several practices for learning to live in the moment, practices that are both traditional and more expressive. If you catch your attention wandering, simply bring your attention back to your intended point of focus. One of my favorite working definitions of mindfulness is drawn from the Sanskrit teaching and translation of the word—*the practice of coming back to awareness*. Awareness is our natural state, although we live in a world where we are constantly pulled away from awareness of the present moment. Moreover, our self-criticisms and judgments can keep us from out of the experience of living a life of awareness and consciousness.

So, if your protest going into this process is something like, “I can’t be mindful, I can’t sit still,” congratulations! You are in good company. Because, on many days I can’t sit still either. And when I first began studying mindfulness and yoga in earnest, it was even more of a struggle. I am not impressed if you can sit still for 25 minutes in perfect harmony with your breath. What I do honor is your willingness to approach each of the following practices with a sense of curiosity and openness. Know that even if your head wanders away from the practice ten times a minute, at any given time you have the power to return home to focus on the moment. Working on and developing this skill will serve you well as you enter into the deeper stages of your healing to follow.

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE ONE

DEEPENING THE BREATH WITH MINDFUL INTENTION

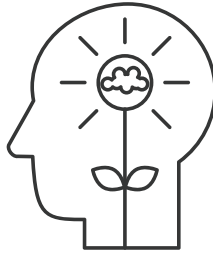
If you want to study mindful breathing with a perfect teacher, find an infant and watch them breathe. Babies naturally breathe with their bellies. Somewhere along the way as we grow up and become less mindful, this tendency to breathe with our natural state of awareness gets lost. Rapid, shallow breathing that originates in the chest can become the norm. In this practice, you are invited to explore the foundational breath of yoga: diaphragmatic breathing, sometimes called *belly breathing*. As with all elements of mindful breathing, belly breathing takes practice. If you tend to self-criticize for not “doing it right,” simply invite your breath pattern back to what seems like any natural beginning place. As the Catholic mystic St. Benedict taught (congruent with the Buddhist idea of beginner’s mind), *always we can begin again*. Here are some basic steps to begin the practice:

- Come into a comfortably seated position that you can sustain for the next few minutes. While you have the option to lay down, try the practice in a sitting position first.
- Put one or both hands on the upper area of your stomach so that you can pay attention to the motion of your diaphragm.
- As you inhale with your nose, allow your belly to expand outward as far as it will go.

- Exhale with your mouth, allowing the belly to pull back in.
- Continue this inhale-exhale pattern at your own pace, giving it at least 6–7 repetitions (about one minute) to find a rhythm and style that work for you.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ Start small—if the suggested number of repetitions/time length seems too overwhelming, begin with just one full breath, reevaluate, and then decide if you wish to continue with additional repetitions.
- ✓ If you feel awkward or in any way out of control with the suggested pattern, consider starting with an exhale instead of an inhale.
- ✓ After initially experimenting with the breath and finding the rhythm that works for you, considering puckering the mouth slightly, and exhaling as if you are blowing through a straw. For some people, the mouth pucker, combined with a longer exhale, enhances their experience of relaxation.
- ✓ If paying attention to the breath on its own is not working for you, consider adding a count to it (e.g., In “1” Out “1,” In “2” Out “2,” and continue until you get to 10, and then start again at 1). Using numbers as an anchor can help you stay focused on the task at hand: breathing. You can also add a word or a special phrase (e.g., “*Satnam*,” “Amen,” “Help me,” “As I breathe in, I know I am breathing in; as I breathe out, I know I am breathing out”).
- ✓ You can put something like a Beanie Baby or a flatter type of stuffed animal on your stomach so there is a focus point while you observe the rise and fall of the belly. This works especially well if you want to try the practice lying down.
- ✓ If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, a supplementary teaching is available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp



PRACTICE TWO

BREATHE WITH EXPRESSION

The classic breath techniques in yoga and other Eastern approaches to meditation begin with an inhale through the nose to allow for maximum benefit and flow of the breath. While many teachers and clinicians get into the conventional directive to “Inhale with the nose and exhale through the mouth,” there is a great deal of liberty with how you can expel the breath. In essence, the inhalation is standard (in through the nose as you expand the belly) while the exhalation affords us many options for expression! In this practice I will cover several yogic breath techniques aside from diaphragmatic breathing. However, practicing diaphragmatic breath first provides a solid foundation for deriving optimal benefit from this experience.

The modification notes for Practice 2 are written into the instructions for each specific type of breathing.

UJJAYI BREATH (OCEAN BREATHING OR “DARTH VADER” BREATHING)

- Pucker your mouth like you’re sucking through a straw or about to kiss someone. Attempt to contract the back of your throat so it feels slightly closed.
- Inhale with your nose; your belly ought to expand with this motion.
- Exhale with your nose. Try to keep the mouth closed and let the nose make the exhale.

- If your mouth is puckered and throat constricted, you ought to hear what sounds like the ocean within you.
- Attempt to keep your inhales and exhales even, especially while you're first learning this breath. Do not try more than five full repetitions during your first attempt. Starting slowly can be a valuable modification with all the breaths that have therapeutic benefit, and it's especially important with this very dynamic breath.
- It is completely normal if you feel somewhat light headed, but it should be a "good" light-headed. If it does not feel good, chances are you tried too many too soon, or your inhales and exhales were uneven.
- You can envision different characters with this breath, like Darth Vader, or a charging bull "huffing and puffing." Be open to whatever movie references or other creative anchors may come up for you.
- Get a mirror and see the steam of your breath on the surface (young people like this especially), attuning you to the idea of your breath as "the Force."
- You can visualize (on any breath) that you are breathing in a calming or soothing color and breathing out a color that represents stress. John Coffey from the movie *The Green Mile* is another favorite character that I like to intone when I do *ujjayi* breath with expression. In the film, every time he healed someone, he would raise his head and exhale (with sound) the pestilence or disease that he just took from the person he healed.
- If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, supplementary teachings are available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp

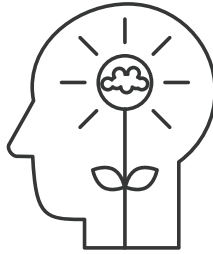
LION BREATHING

- Begin with a healthy inhale from the belly.
- Exhale vigorously, allowing the tongue to hang out. Feel the jaw and cheeks loosen. Open the eyes widely to help with this letting go. With your hands, make paws like a lion to complete the effect of a lion roaring.
- Try at least 5 full repetitions, although if one full breath is all you can manage at first that is okay.
- Consider how embodying the strength of a lion or enrolling in the character of a lion can help you breathe through a painful trigger with strength and confidence. For professionals, bringing in other expressive arts elements, like using a costume or acting out a scene, may help your client further develop the breath as a resource.
- If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, a supplementary teaching is available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp

BREATHING OUT THE DRAMA OR “SIGH OF RELIEF”

- The lion paws are a fun element well known to many practitioners, although how you express your arms and face when you exhale vigorously is completely up to you.
- On this next round of breathing, continue by inhaling with the nose and expanding the belly like usual.
- Allow the expressions your body and your face makes on the exhale to flow out naturally, making a sound if possible.
- Many people describe this breath as the “sigh of relief” or being “dramatic” on their exhale. While you can use these examples if they work for you, don’t let them limit you in keeping an open-mind and open heart to what the practice can reveal!

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE THREE

MINDFUL COLORING

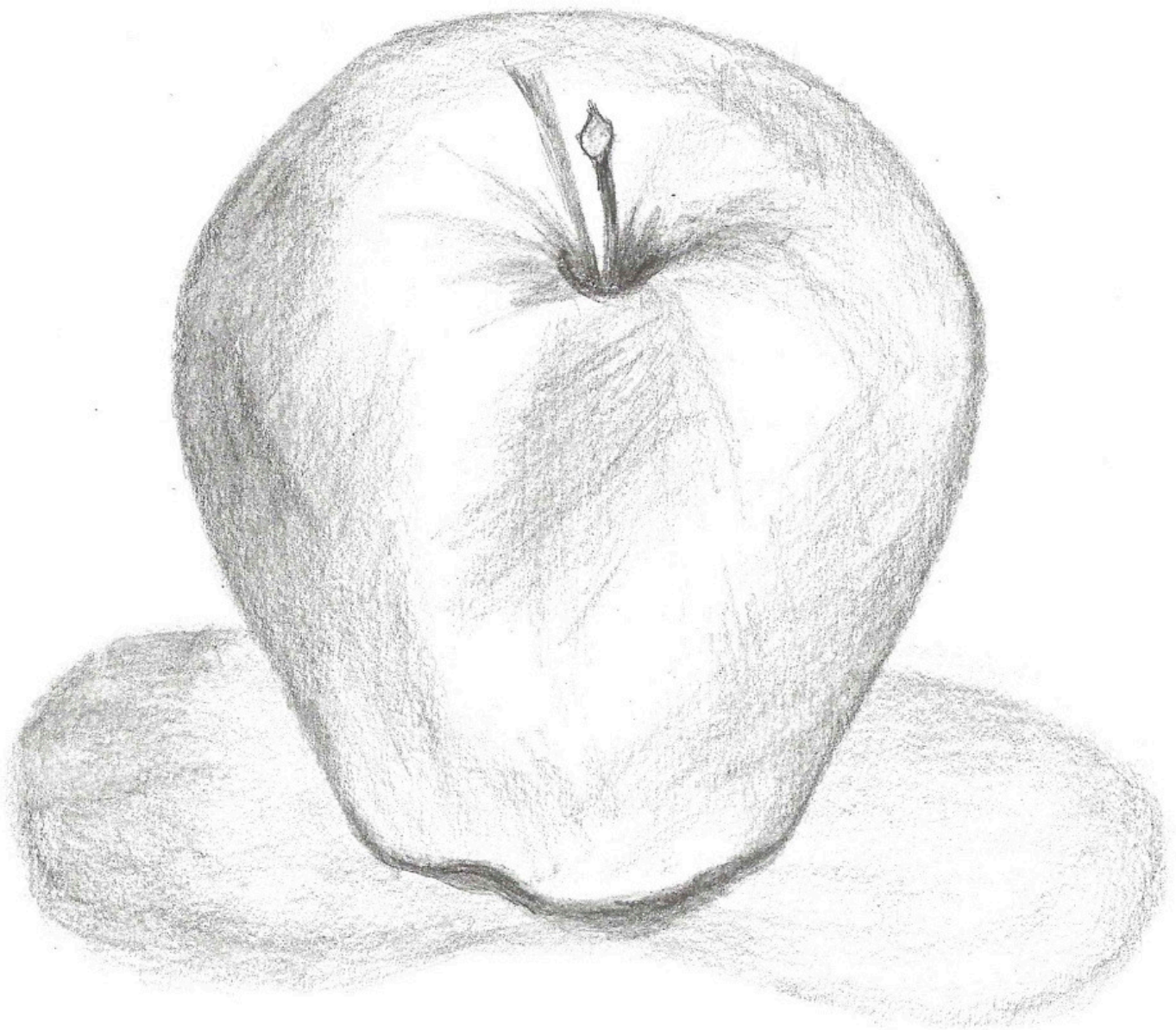
These practices are combined because part of my intention is for you to notice the similarities and the differences in creating through each form. What can having more containment and direction teach you about mindfulness and expression? What can the absence of containment and direction teach you about mindfulness and expression? These practices are designed to help you explore such questions. You are encouraged to set aside enough time to do both of these practices in the same sitting.

- The *adult coloring book movement* has become very popular as a stress relief activity in recent years. In this practice you are simply invited to color a page, either from a specialized book that you own, a source you find online (search “coloring pages” and millions will come up), or using a children’s coloring book. I’ve also provided three sample images (in the following pages) that you can use if you don’t have access to your own.
- You are encouraged to explore how engagement with coloring may help you to connect mindfully, especially with concentrated breath.
- Consider how such an exercise can be utilized as a containment strategy before moving into the more free-form gush art.

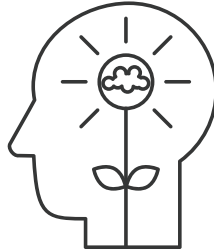


Coloring Page by ~ KATIE **GIFFORD**





Coloring Page by ~ KATIE **GIFFORD**



PRACTICE FOUR

GUSH ART

- As noted earlier, gush art is a term used in expressive arts therapy to suggest uncensored creation with art—think of what the word “gush” means for you and allow that to unfold on the page using the materials you have available to you (e.g., crayons, markers, pastels, paints, etc.). Gush art was a part of Process One: Grounding. You are encouraged to release that experience and focus on this new experience of gush art and notice what it reveals for you, especially after Mindful Coloring.
- Like with many forms of meditation, it can be useful to set a timer for the gush art practice. This helps keep the focus on the process of the experience. When the timer expires, check in and notice whatever it is you notice about the experience and/or move along to the next practice.
- Set a timer for gush art (10–15 minutes) to avoid being pulled in to overthinking or being fixated on the outcome.

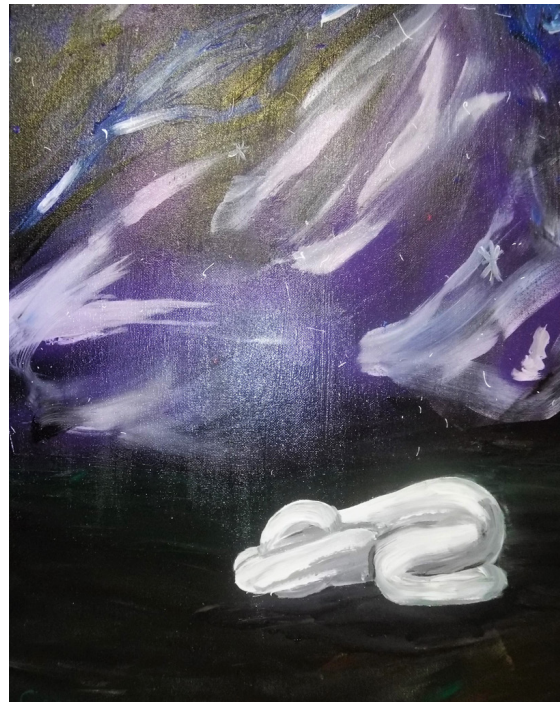
GUSH ART EXAMPLES



~ JENNIFER **HARWOOD**



~ TRACEE **MOSS**

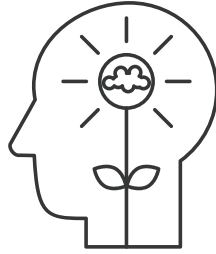


~ PEYTON MARNIE **CRAM**



~ KAMALA **TAHYI**

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE FIVE

EMBRACE-RELEASE-EMBRACE

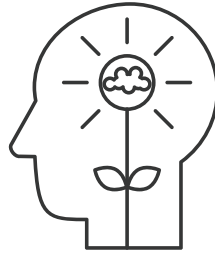
We can embrace the moment, embrace an emotion we are experiencing (whether it be challenging or pleasant), or embrace the pesky thoughts that pass through our rational mind. In this mindful movement practice we work with the idea of learning to embrace whatever life brings. All mindfulness practice and indeed all of life is a process of learning to embrace (instead of resist or shove away) whatever may come, then learning how to let go of what we can and need to at any given moment. This movement practice will give you a chance to explore this natural flow.

- Come into a gesture of embracing yourself, if this works for you today. You know, the good old “give yourself a hug” posture. Moving consciously while giving yourself this hug may allow you to embrace whatever the moment is sending your way. Sometimes what surfaces in the moment is challenging to embrace. Often this challenge is dancing with experience from the past or an old story about self that keeps us stuck in a proverbial rut.
- You have a choice with this practice. You can use the posture of embrace to physically support the practice of noticing and receiving the moment without judgment, or explore whether the dance allows you to loosen the embrace and release the arms freely.

- If you choose to let go of whatever you've been embracing, you can allow the universe, Mother Earth, the God of your understanding, or whatever seems organic to you in that moment to take that which you are letting go. Can you allow the process of letting go to transform what you are releasing into something beautiful? In the next moments of dance or perhaps during some other practice when you feel ready, embrace the transformations fully and without apology.
- If the metaphor of this practice seems too much to start with, simply work with the gesture pattern of embracing-releasing-embracing, putting on whatever music you prefer for the practice. Notice whatever it is you may notice and consider going to one of your other art forms to help you process whatever this movement practice may conjure up for you, or to hold the emotion of this practice in containment until you can consult with your therapist or a trusted support figure.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ This practice can be done in silence or with music. You may consider starting with silence to get the flow of the embrace-release-embrace pattern, and then putting on music of your choosing.
- ✓ If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, a supplementary teaching is available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp



PRACTICE SIX

TAKE IT TO THE PAGE (WRITTEN DIALOGUE EXPLORATION)

This process concludes with a written exploration that will hopefully help you to crystallize your experience. For this practice in taking it to the page, you will need to have your coloring page and your gush art handy. Take a few moments to breathe and sink into the moment before you begin.

- Take about 2 minutes to fully observe the page you colored. This is an exercise in observation, not judgment or scrutiny. Notice which element of the colored page most catches your attention. Maybe it's one petal of one flower. Perhaps it's the color blue. It could even be the white space around what you colored.
- Set your timer for 5 minutes. On a blank page or in your journal, spend the time writing *as* the element you just noticed. In expressive arts practices, this exercise commonly uses the lead-in: "I am (e.g., the color blue), I . . ." Allow your free writing to flow from there. If you need more inspiration, think about the message that the element (like the color blue) may have for you today and write from that place.
- After the timer rings, put your pen or writing implement down and then take a minute to breathe and reset.

- Now take about 2 minutes to fully observe your gush art. Remember, this is an exercise in observation, not judgment or scrutiny. Notice which element of the gush art catches your attention most.
- Set your timer for 5 minutes. On a blank page or in your journal, spend the time writing *as* the element you just noticed. You can also use the lead-in “I am (e.g., the color blue), I am the one who . . . ” for this part of the practice.
- After the time rings, put your pen or writing implement down and then take a minute to breathe and reset.
- For the final portion of this practice, you are invited to set the timer for 10 minutes and allow the two elements—the one from the coloring page and the one from the gush art—to interact with each other. You can write a short scene like a play, a poem, a short story, or any other presentation of the written word that makes sense to you.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ In trauma-focused practice the amount of time that you spend in a practice is always variable. If the parameters presented in this set up feel too long for you, consider shortening them. I’ve seen people do great things with this exercise writing for only 1–2 minutes in each portion.

GUSH ART AND WRITING RESPONSE EXAMPLE



I am water in the ocean
that creates a wave that is
intense, forceful & fierce.
I have the ability to soothe, to
provide fun, to carry, to be gentle –
and the capability to destroy,
to drown, to injure, to ruin, to
damage, to suffocate, &
to choke
It all depends on the conditions
in my environment that dictate
the waves created.
What will I produce next?

I am a seed
that is often buried
Invisible, laying in the
dark
The seed I am becomes
something more; a flower,
food, vegetables, grassy earth.
How exciting to know what
I, a seed, will become
once the darkness fades.

Seed: I know! I stand so tall &
strong – I have you to thank; for
without your care, guidance, and
reliability; I would not have thrived.

Water: Even though you are fully bloomed; I am by your side
to continue to nourish; during
your whole life cycle; I will always
provide.

(Hand in hand; flower and water sat in the sun talked, laughed
and “allowed each other to just be”)

~ TRACEE **MOSS**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOLLOWING MINDFULNESS

- Describe your personal experience with the process.
- What did you discover in your process?
- What did you learn about yourself in the process?
- What did you notice about judgment or self-criticism during the process?
- What role did the multi-modality of the art forms play in discovering what you discovered in your process?
- Which of the skills explored in this process can be applied to your overall trauma recovery or wellness plan?