BODY HACKS FOR TRAUMATIC STRESS MANAGEMENT

SHAKE IT OFF – LITERALLY
How do you let go of stress in little bits throughout your day or after stressful interactions? Shake it off! Stand with both feet grounded and shake from the knees, either from side to side, or up and down with small bounces. Notice your breath and feel your body release tension. This can be done in a bathroom stall or other private space, and can make a huge difference within just a minute of doing it.

PRACTICE BOUNDARIES BY TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF YOUR ARMS AND LEGS
Feeling the strength in your arms and legs, while holding space away from your body, can help diminish a sense of helplessness that can be triggered by stress. Stand a couple feet away from a wall and actively press your hands into the wall and feet into the ground. Find length in your neck and a broadness in your shoulders while noticing your breath. This posture can elicit a feeling of power in the body and help you feel more resourced and able to deal with whatever challenges are in front of you.

PAT YOURSELF DOWN WHEN YOU FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM YOUR BODY
Patting yourself down to bring life and awareness back into the edges of your bodies can help bring us out of ‘monkey mind’. Taking a couple minutes each day to gently pat your body down from head to toe will help remind us that our emotional container is much bigger than what’s on top of our necks. Bringing sensation back into our bodies gently and repeatedly throughout our day will help break cycles of numbing out.

CREATE AN EMBODIED BUBBLE TO ENHANCE A SENSE OF SAFETY OUT IN THE WORLD
Sit or stand and focus on channeling your energy into the ground through your feet. Start to tune into any sensations in your belly and notice your breath. Visualize a bubble around you and try to feel its edges with your hands. Visualize the bubble full of powerful light that surrounds you. See if you can feel the warmth or coolness of this light on your skin and maybe even in your body. Stay with this feeling of separate and safe for as long as you can. Then visualize someone sitting across from you who crosses boundaries with you whether it’s actually into your physical space or psychic emotional space. Imagine they are trying to get past the edges of your bubble but the bubble gently keeps them at a distance, or if necessary, pushes them off you more firmly. Further enhance your sense of safety by putting your hands up or saying out loud words like “no” or “not mine” or “my space”.

PLACE A WEIGHT ON YOUR BELLY TO SOOTHE YOUR AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM
An 8 to 10lb bag of rice can do wonders for soothing your body and mind. Lying on your back with a weight on your belly is similar to the feeling that babies experience during swaddling. Using weight on the body is often very helpful for sleep issues as well. Applying a gentle pressure on the skin can mimic safe human touch, a much needed intervention for people lacking in safe attachment or co-regulation in present day. This practice of weighted pressure will communicate to the mind, through the body, that we are here now and we are safe.

LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE AND HEART RATE BY PUTTING LEGS UP THE WALL
Trying to calm our minds with our rational brain is often a fruitless endeavor for many people living with higher levels of chronic or traumatic stress in the body. Elevating the legs by extending them up the wall can help lower blood pressure and heart rate and interrupt a full blown panic attack if caught on time. A great activity to do before bed as well to help encourage both the body and mind to rest.
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MASSAGE THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET TO STAY GROUNDED AND WITHIN YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
There are many sensory receptors on the soles of your feet that when triggered with self-massage can help you re-connect with your body and come back into the present moment. While using a massage ball (Yoga Tune Up therapy balls recommended) to gently roll out the underside of your feet follow your breath as it travels throughout your body. This is a great way to bring awareness back into your body while finding a neutral sensation that isn’t associated with a traumatic memory, chronic physical pain or story on repeat in your mind. By bridging exteroception and interoception together you can tap back into the executive functioning of the brain and stay more regulated in your autonomic nervous system.

ORIENT WITH YOUR SURROUNDINGS WHEN THE ANXIETY CREEPS IN
Bring all of your awareness back to the present moment through your senses. Notice the texture of objects around you, colours, sounds, the sensation of air on your skin, temperature, light, etc. By taking stock of your surroundings you can orient yourself away from your inner sensations of distress and acknowledge that you are generally safe in the present moment.

NOTICE YOUR BREATH BEFORE YOU CHANGE IT
Give your breath a chance to change on its own simply by closing your mouth and breathing softly through your nose. Mouth breathing can keep us stuck in hypervigilance through hyperventilation. You want to turn your diaphragm into a soft jelly fish that floats easily down on the inhale and up on the exhale; a fluid motion, not rigid or mechanical. You can get back into your body and the present moment simply by noticing where you feel the breath the most in your body. Place your hand on this area to bolster the grounding. Trying to force a deep breath into a rigid container will only fuel more dysfunctional breathing patterns. It will also reinforce a striving mindset, that is, "now I'm going to breathe well" instead of "I'm going to breathe with whatever is coming up right now in my body."

GET UP AND MOVE THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY
Daily movement practices that calm and regulate your nervous system will help you tolerate stress better. Sitting for prolonged periods in our day has been linked to increased anxiety. As we sit through stress cycles, instead of moving through them, the levels of cortisol and adrenaline will build and accumulate in the body through each successive cycle. When psychological stress hits, our bodies are still programed to perceive this as a threat to physical safety and be in a state of readiness for movement. When the mobilization doesn't happen, that's when the stress gets lodged in our bodies.

FIND BALANCE BY PRACTICING BALANCE ACTIVITIES
One of the best ways to "flip your lid" back on, or bring your prefrontal cortex back on line into executive functioning, is to bring proprioception and interoception together. That means, doing something that forces you to coordinate your body while paying attention to what’s going on inside your body. Simple activities like standing on one leg, on a balance board or BOSU and noticing your breath will help bring you out of mental time travel and back into the present. By getting grounded in your body every day, as often as possible, you can train your brain to be less reactive over time.