

*Soothing the
Nervous System:
Art and Somatic
Exercises to
counteract stress
and adversity in
the lives of Social
Care Workers*

Marian Connell TUD
Jennifer McGarr TUD





Aims of our Workshop:

- To acknowledge the lived experience of many social care workers in relation to early experiences of adversity.
- To recognise stress within the body and bring awareness to our embodied experience.
- To give participants tools/strategies that they can use to manage stress experienced within their professional and personal lives.



Trauma Informed care & practicing self –care strategies for Social Care Workers.

- As trauma- informed care has gained traction within social care work, workers have become more and more aware of the impact of their own lived experiences on their work with service users.
- Previous experiences of adversity can increase resilience and capacity for empathy and bring enhanced insights into one's practice (Newcombe 2016).
- However, the demands of working in social care settings can cause workers to become dysregulated or triggered by challenging situations within their work environment.
- Self-regulation is key to being a co-regulating presence. Having tools to support the nervous system is part of self-care.
- This workshop provides a time and space for you to experience taking care of yourself to sooth your nervous system

van der Kolk, 1994

- van der Kolk linked neuroscience and trauma and in 1994 wrote his paper 'The Body Keeps the Score' in the American Journal of Psychiatry. Armstrong (2013) cites Van der Kolk (1994, 2003) stating that:

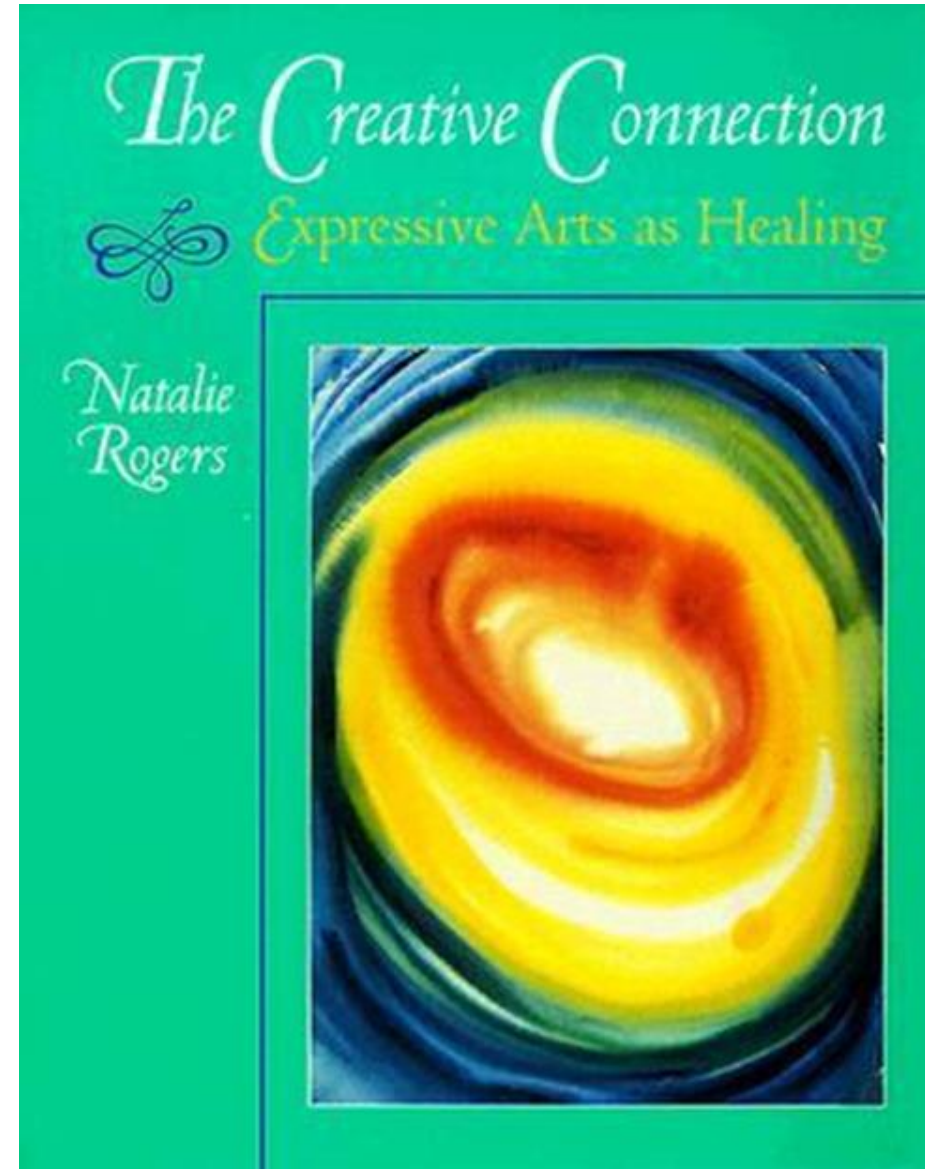
“Trauma memories are inaccessible to narrative because they are stored somatically as physical sensations and visual images and his work has been drawn on by art therapists as it advocates non-verbal methods to access them”.



Nathalie Rogers Contributions (2012)

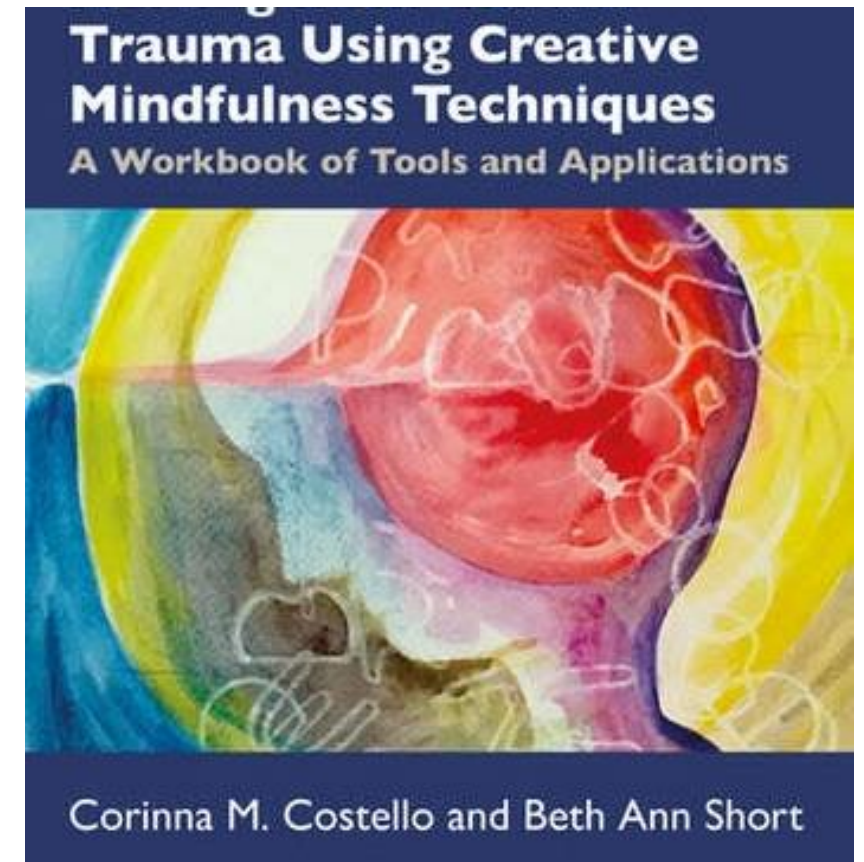
- ' We need to get people up out of their chairs and actively engaged in the creative process to experience it. We do not become more creative by talking about it. I may suggest to a client who is experiencing grief or fear to express their feelings in colour or clay or movement'
- To facilitate rather than direct a clients experience with the product created becoming part of the dialogue between client and therapist.

(Rogers, et al 2012, 35)



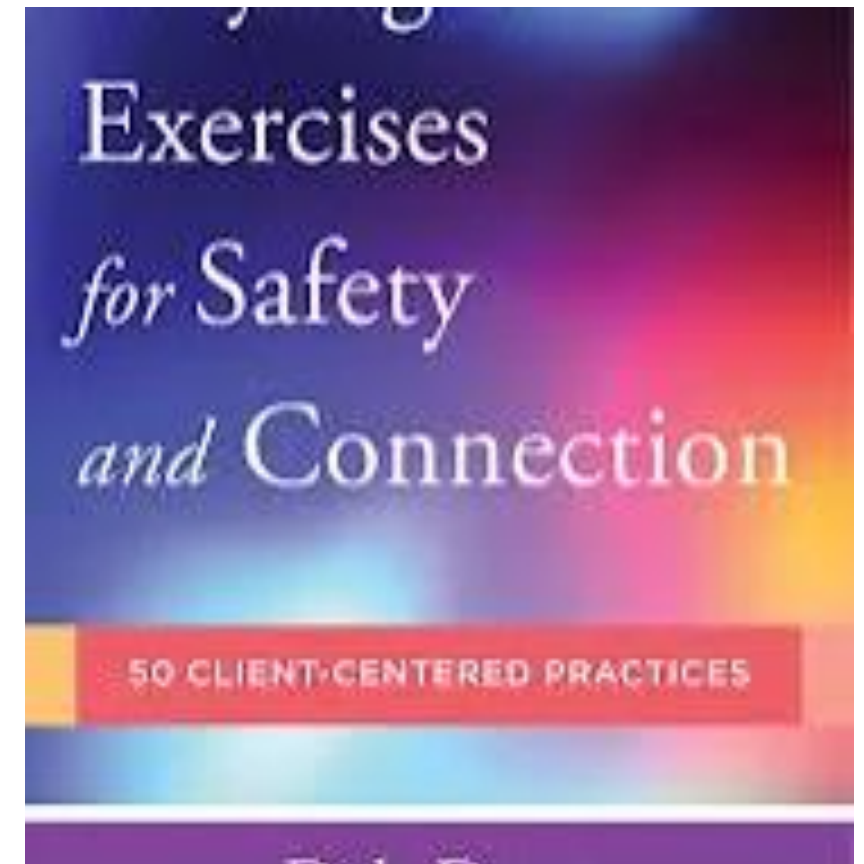
Outline of Workshop- Part 1-*Somatic and Expressive Art activity (45mins)*

- Participants will engage in a somatic and expressive arts activity to gain strategies to calm their nervous system and visualise their safe place.
- The participants will engage in a body scan followed by guided imagery exercise – a safe place in nature.
- Participants will be invited to draw out their image and time will be allocated after for participants to discuss important takeaways from these exercises.
- Participants will reflect on their body sensations before and after this exercise and become attuned to their states of being gaining greater awareness of their state of regulation and dysregulation.
- This exercise empowers participants to gain a deeper insight into their bodily reactions and make positive changes in their daily lives. (Costello, Short, 2022)



Outline of Workshop- Part 2- *Identify your 'Glimmers'* (25 mins)

- Drawing on Deb Dana's (2020) work, we will introduce the participants to the concept of 'glimmers'.
- Glimmers are a counter experience to triggers; triggers are cues from our experience/ environment that can move us into a state of dysregulation, whereas glimmers do the opposite.
- They act as anchors or supports that we can draw on to maintain regulation, or to return us to a regulated state when we experience stress, encounter situations that are triggering and so forth. This activity will guide participants to identify their own 'glimmers' which provide autonomic cues of safety during times of stress.
- This approach acknowledges the resilience and capacity that worker's draw on when dealing with the demands of modern living but also the specific challenges associated with working in social care contexts.



Outline of workshop – Part 3-*Wrap up and reflection (10 mins)*

- This part of the workshop will create space for participants to reflect on the above activities.
- Here participants can share their experiences of progressing through the creative and somatic exercises and consider how they might integrate these into their everyday life (both personally and professionally).
- Facilitators will introduce to Cathy Malchiodi's (2021) Circle of Capacity as a tool for expanding individual capacity and enhancing resilience during times of stress.



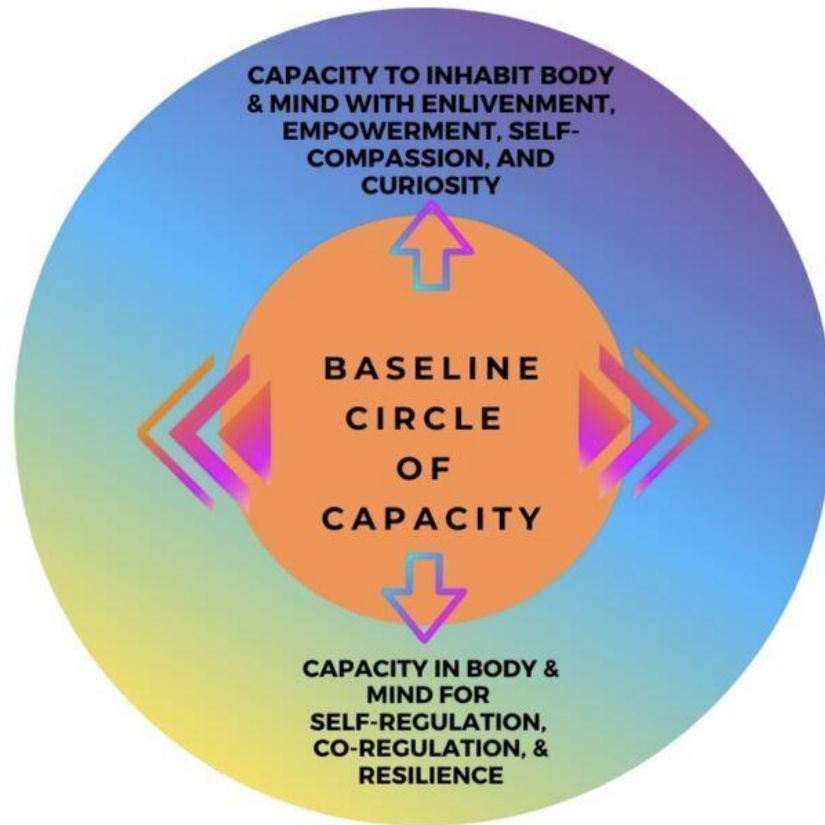
Resilience Fenton (2015)

- We are broken within the context of relationships, and we are healed within the scope of relationships.

(Nadjiwan, 2010:1)

- Being resilient is important in all areas of life and without it we can feel vulnerable and unable to cope on the demands made of us.
- Luthar et al (2000 pg., 543) has described resilience as a 'dynamic process of maintaining positive adaptation and effective coping strategies in the face of adversity'

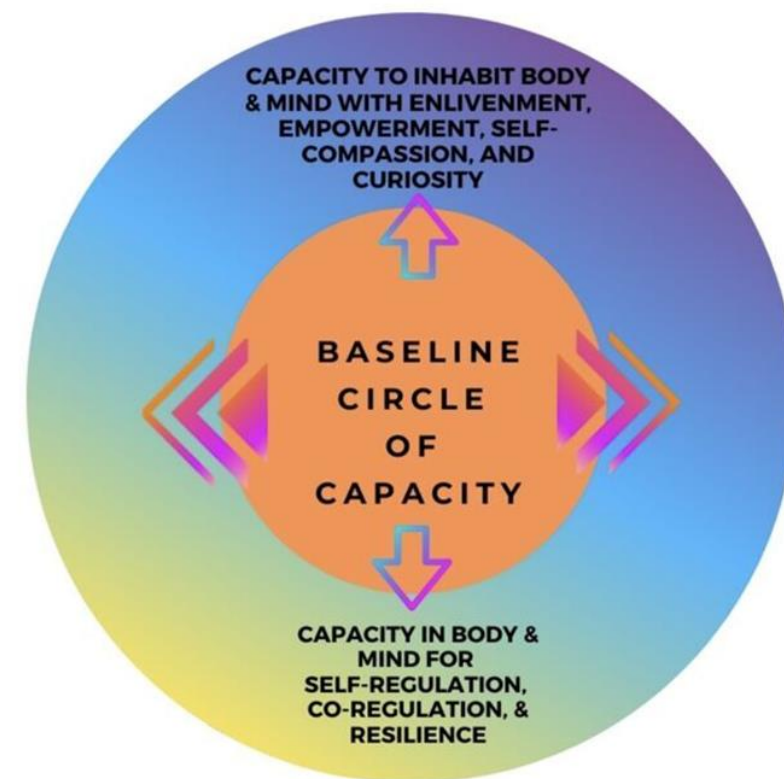
Circle of Capacity (Malchiodi, 2021, states)



Malchiodi 2021 states that individuals with complex trauma histories, including facing adversity in childhood can experience can be both immobilised (hypo-aroused) state and may also experience extreme tension, emotional reactivity, racing thoughts and hypervigilance.

What if (Malchiodi, 2021, states)

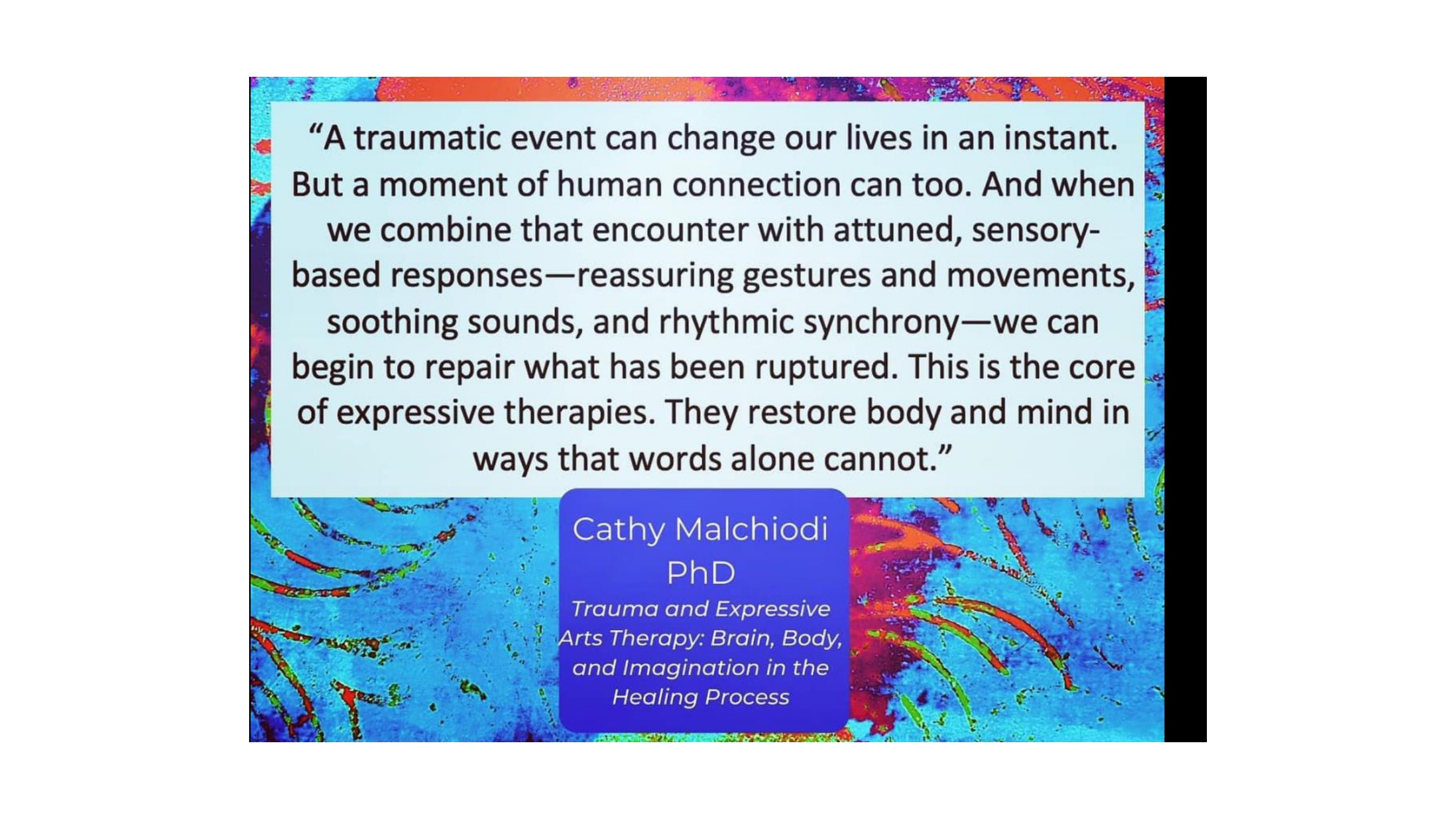
- What if increasing capacity became the dominant objective rather than simply expanding the ability to tolerate distressful reactions?
- As an expressive and experiential practitioner Malchiodi see's trauma repair and recovery through the exploration and discovery of capabilities in contrast to simply widening a window of tolerance.
- The self is not necessarily restored through increasing the ability to tolerate reactions, but through supporting tangible, sensory, and somatic experiences of efficacy, resourcing, and resilience. (Malchiodi, 2021, states)



Circle of Capacity (Malchiodi, 2021 states)

- The centre represents our baseline experience, an area that shrinks and expands in response to a variety of impacts including traumatic stress. The outer circle includes two general areas of body/mind capacity.
- One is the capacity for self-regulation, co-regulation, and resilience that modulate hyperarousal and over-activation.
- The second is the capacity to inhabit body and mind through resourcing enlivenment, empowerment, self-compassion, joy, playfulness, and curiosity.



The background of the slide is an abstract, colorful artwork. It features a mix of bright blue, red, orange, and purple hues. There are swirling, organic shapes and patterns that resemble marbled paper or a microscopic view of a biological structure. The colors are vibrant and contrast sharply against each other.

“A traumatic event can change our lives in an instant. But a moment of human connection can too. And when we combine that encounter with attuned, sensory-based responses—reassuring gestures and movements, soothing sounds, and rhythmic synchrony—we can begin to repair what has been ruptured. This is the core of expressive therapies. They restore body and mind in ways that words alone cannot.”

Cathy Malchiodi

PhD

*Trauma and Expressive
Arts Therapy: Brain, Body,
and Imagination in the
Healing Process*

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