



This article contains general information dealing with health and wellness. It does not constitute medical advice and should not be relied on for diagnosing or treating any illness, injury or disease.

May 29, 2024

Healing Trauma Through Body Work

In June, members will receive an invitation to complete the **BCPVPA Violence and Trauma At Work Survey**. The critical data that we will collect from our members will help inform us and our sector colleagues about the experiences of our members, and the supports that are needed to keep members safe and healthy. ***Please take 20 minutes to complete this very important survey.***

Trauma Therapies

Experiencing trauma, either directly or indirectly, does not just impact our mind, emotions, and cognition. The impact is physical, and can permeate to a cellular level. Recovering from trauma takes time, and involves working to release where the trauma resides within your body. Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), which can be a beneficial approach to addressing depression and anxiety, may be limited when it comes to processing trauma because CBT engages the mind and not the body.

There are different types of therapies that are used to help individuals process trauma to aid their recovery. Below is a sample of available treatments; however, there are others. As we are each unique in our traumas, our coping, and the impact, different types of treatments will work better for different people:

- EMDR – Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing
- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy
- Exposure Therapy
- Cognitive Processing Therapy
- Somatic Therapy

This week's ReFresh introduces **somatic therapy**.

What is Somatic Therapy

Somatic therapy is a treatment that focuses on the body, and how emotions appear within the body. The premise of somatic therapy is that our body holds and expresses experiences and emotions, and that these traumatic events or unresolved emotional issues become 'trapped' inside. Somatic therapy practitioners use mind-body exercises and other physical techniques to help release the pent-up tension that negatively affects an individual's physical and emotional well-being.

Although treating the mind-body connection is a relatively new concept in Western medicine (in the West, the mind and body are often treated separately), this concept has long been recognized in Eastern medicine and philosophies.

Emotions that arise from trauma may show up in our bodies in debilitating ways. Somatic therapy works to drain those emotions of their power and, ideally, relieve pain and other manifestations of stress, that can include disturbed sleep, inability to concentrate, emotional dysregulation, even physical symptoms. These types of emotions may arise from a variety of circumstances and conditions including:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Complicated grief
- Vicarious trauma
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Trust and intimacy issues
- Self-esteem problems
- Chronic pain

How does Somatic Therapy Work?

Unlike standard mental health therapy, such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) that focuses prominently on the mind, somatic therapy incorporates body-oriented modalities to support mental healing. Somatic therapy sessions include talk therapy and mind-body exercises. It is a type of therapy that may be useful when an individual feels they have stalled in their recovery using talk therapy alone.

The most common and straightforward form of somatic therapy is when an individual discusses their problems, similar to other forms of mental wellness therapies. The somatic therapist then guides the person to focus on their body, or revive memories of traumatic experiences, and pays attention to any physical responses they express once the emotion is experienced or the memory is recovered. By focusing on both

the physical sensations in your body and the discussion of your problems, the therapy encompasses your full well-being.

Somatic therapies vary between practitioners. Somatic therapy techniques include:

- Developing more awareness of your body and its sensations
- Calling upon emotional resources
- Grounding
- Encouraging detailed descriptions
- Movement, including acting out of physical feelings
- Learning tools to calm oneself
- Alternating focus between something stressful and something not stressful to help release tension
- Replaying past situations with new physical tools
- Emotional release
- Strengthening boundaries

Other treatment techniques may involve deep breathing, relaxation exercises, and meditation to help relieve symptoms. Adjunctive physical techniques that may be used with somatic therapy include dance, exercise, yoga, vocal work, and 'bodywork' similar to massage or physical therapy. Patients may be able to access treatments in either individual or group therapy settings.

Somatic therapy is focused on helping patients develop resources within themselves to self-regulate their emotions, or to move out of the fight/flight/freeze response and into a higher-functioning mode where they can think more clearly. The therapy helps them develop an awareness of the mind-body connection by using specific interventions to release tension, anger, frustration, and other emotions that remain in the body from past negative experiences. The goal is to help free the individual from what is preventing them from fully engaging in their lives.

Finding a Somatic Therapist

Not all therapists incorporate somatic therapy in their practice. To find a somatic therapist near you:

- [Go to Psychology Today Find a Therapist](#)
- Enter your postal code

- Click the blue window that says *All Filters*
- Scroll down to Types of Therapy and click the square beside Somatic.

Finding Relief

It's possible that the shoulder ache that won't ease, that tight stomach, or those regular headaches are trapped emotions or experiences that need to release. A mind-body solution such as somatic therapy could may be that next step in treatment that will take you to a deeper level, and set you on a track to feeling like yourself again!

Sources

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-somatic-therapy-5190064>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapy-types/somatic-therapy>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-somatic-therapy-202307072951#:~:text=%22It's%20a%20treatment%20focusing%20on,become%20'trapped'%20inside.%22>

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-somatic-therapy-can-help-patients-suffering-from-psychological-trauma>



Rochelle Morandini

Member Health & Well-Being, Director

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.