

ORIENTING TO SAFETY

Information sheet

Often we get stuck in a startle and defensive orienting state. This means our organism has trouble feeling safe because it is stuck in believing there is a threat around us or about to happen. This is normal with unresolved traumatic response. And it can be different. We can learn to feel safe in our environment when it is safe to do so, we can learn to relax and feel okay and if an actual threat arises in our world we can rise to meet the challenge and regroup after the challenge passes.

One way of helping yourself shift this pattern of fear is to let yourself scan your environment for safety.

How?

1. Choose an environment you know is safe (your home, a beloved place). Let your eyes wander around the place you are in and see if your body registers any actual threat in the here and now. Really let yourself look for something that might actually be scary.
2. Notice what happens as your eyes do this scan: what do they see? Is there anything to actually be afraid of right now?
3. Sometimes you might notice that your mind is saying, “but I feel something scary so there must be something scary” and you might fixate on an object that brings up feelings of fear. It is really important to check it for *actual* threat, not just a story of fear.
4. It can be helpful to ask yourself: is there anything in this environment that is wanting to hurt me right now, is there anything to actually be afraid of other than what my body and mind makes of it.
5. When you notice that there is nothing to be actually scared of see what happens in your system. If there is something to be concerned about (and it is rare that there is) then see what your physical impulse is: get away, move forward to fix/attend, reach out for help. And notice how you deal with this and when you know it is over.



By doing this practice we begin to allow our body to register the difference between memories and stories about fear and what is happening in the here and now. We support our system to come out of the defensive orienting and startle response and back into healthy relationship with our environment.

By healthy, I simply mean: appropriate to the situation: if there is a tiger in your loungeroom I want you to run, but if it is just your cat and they are not trying to scratch you to bits, I want you to see them as just your cat.

