

WHY THE FELT SENSE?

Information sheet

*We cannot think our way out of trauma
We cannot think our way into wellbeing*

In Somatic Experiencing we talk a lot about tracking the felt sense. This is because our body is an immense source of information and wisdom. Checking in with our felt sense gets us out of our head, out of our story, and helps us connect with the body in a way that allows our organism and nervous system to find its way back to balance.

We often think there is a lot we need to think about or do to process a situation and come back to a sense of calm or equilibrium. However, a lot of the ways our systems rebalance is through being connected in mind and body and to our environment. Tracking our felt sense helps us access these natural ways of rebalancing. In contrast our mind often creates a story around a situation that quickly becomes 'the definitive story' of the event and we get trapped by it. Dropping out of the story allows our bodies to take charge and help us integrate what happened in a way that lets the past be past and for us to feel alive and present and engaged with the here and now.

This focus is also important because healing and renegotiating trauma happens largely at the nervous system level. We can only access that through our felt sense. It is that which tells us where we are and what we need.

When we begin to notice our felt sense we are also standing in an 'observer self' role. This is crucial to healing our trauma. Trauma, by its very nature is an overwhelm of our nervous system. In overwhelm we are caught up in biological processes that are swamping us. Having an observer self on line gives a sense of safety, of being able to ride through, to name, to have some containment to what is happening; we are not caught in panic or overwhelm.



Peter Levine, the founder of SE, says, “curiosity is the cure for trauma”. When we can be curious about what is happening we are already out of a trauma state, we are breaking the cycle, we are giving our organism the opportunity to show the way to healing.

None of this means that there is no place for the thinking mind in SE. We are always dancing between the internal felt sense, naming emotions, making (good) sense of events and experiences, using our imagination and other senses to enhance either the integration of past events or the integration of new states of being. However, tracking our felt sense is often the least well-developed part of modern western human beings and it is central to our being alive to who we truly are, what we most need, and what we really want to do.



The next information sheet on **practicing presence** is designed to help you start to inhabit your body in ways that support your capacity to hold a witness space, enjoy the felt sense of being in your body, and support nervous system regulation.

This information sheet was prepared by Chantal Jackson, February 2018.
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