

# OUTLINE FOR SOMATIC RESILIENCE WORKSHOP

## RESILIENCE THROUGH SOMATIC AWARENESS:

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“This service is invaluable to frontline workers in organisations who reach out to those affected by trauma and disasters.”

- DOMINO FOUNDATION, South Africa -

### 1 RATIONALE & OBJECTIVES

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The rationale for these workshops is rooted in the recognition of the significant challenges faced by those at the forefront of addressing issues such as domestic violence, war, sexual exploitation, assault, and poverty-related stress and trauma that affect individuals and families. These dedicated professionals operate in high-stress environments, regularly exposed to traumatic stories and prolonged or consistently intense experiences. What follows is a brief explanation of how exposure to trauma stories in the workplace affects the physical and mental well-being of those who are on the frontline of social support, and how somatic practices can alleviate symptoms and prevent secondary traumatic stress from occurring.

The link between exposure to traumatic material through working with traumatised populations and physical and mental distress is well documented. Studies show that the effects of secondary exposure to trauma can include changes to neurological, emotional, mental, cognitive, sexual and spiritual aspects of one's life [1]. Furthermore, it has been well established that symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be found in those who are exposed to the trauma of others, but who are not traumatised directly themselves [2, 3]. In other words, it is possible to suffer from PTSD without having experienced a personal trauma. Symptoms include change of worldview, hypervigilance/anxiety, depression, exhaustion and nightmares, as well as a host of physiological symptoms with no medical explanation such as chronic pain, nausea, dizziness, and difficulty breathing. With a 38% rise in stress-related work absences reported in 2023 [8]. The call for effective strategies to combat the impact of chronic stress on workers has never been more important and Somatic Experiencing® is a proven intervention for these issues [4-6]

The best defence against secondary trauma is awareness, not just cognitively, but in the physical responses to the material one is exposed to [7]. Somatic Experiencing®, upon which these workshops is based, has been shown to be an effective strategy for the treatment and prevention of secondary traumatic exposure [4]. The desired outcome of the workshop is, therefore, to equip workers with an understanding of Somatic Experiencing, stress management tools, and resilience-building strategies, and to positively impact the work environment, leading to increased job satisfaction, enhanced coping mechanisms, and a lasting positive influence on the mental health and effectiveness of the participants.

## 2 WHAT IS SOMATIC EXPERIENCING

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Somatic Resilience is based on the principles of the life's work of Dr Peter Levine, the originator of Somatic Experiencing® (SE). SE focuses on addressing and resolving trauma-related symptoms by engaging the body's natural self regulating mechanisms. It encourages the exploration of stress related sensation through the language of the body, recognising that stress and trauma symptomology is largely physical. By acknowledging and paying attention to these physical sensations, one can allow the symptoms to resolve and help build resilience to future stressors. In the context of other cultures, where traditions often involve a holistic approach to well-being, SE can be seen as a way to honor the body's wisdom in the healing process. It aligns with the belief that healing involves not only addressing the mind but also acknowledging the profound connection between the physical and spiritual aspects of oneself.

## 3 WORKSHOP ONE: PRINCIPLES OF SOMATIC RESILIENCE; HELPING THE HELPERS

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- Develop a working understanding of the differences between, and associated symptoms of burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary stress disorders and vicarious trauma.
- A foundational introduction to Somatic Experiencing®, exploring its principles and application in trauma resolution, emphasizing the physiological aspects of exposure and healing.
- Cultivate awareness of the nervous system's structure and functions in response to threat.
- Acquire the ability to identify signs of stress and secondary trauma, enabling participants to proactively manage their well-being and recognize potential challenges in others.
- Identifying resources that can be deployed in the service of sustained well-being
- Equip participants with practical tools and strategies for resourcing<sup>1</sup>
- How helping oneself can lead to the wellbeing of those you work with; an introduction to workshop two.

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<sup>1</sup> Resourcing refers to the process of helping individuals build and strengthen their their capacity to calm their nervous system. Resourcing may involve accessing positive memories, experiences, or sensations, engaging in grounding exercises, establishing a felt sense of safety, or fostering a sense of connection and support.

## 4 LOGISTICS

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### Target group

As stress exists in all areas of life, and because we are all traumatised to a degree but what we see and hear in the world, this workshop will benefit participants from any area of the organisation.

Workshop numbers: Minimum 8; Maximum 15

### Training method

The focus will be on delivering key concepts and practical tools through a live presentation, brief exercises, and facilitated discussions to maximize engagement and understanding. Emphasis will be placed on essential aspects of SE, such as somatic awareness, resourcing, and basic titration practices.

## 5 WORKSHOP TWO: SOMATIC TRAINING PROGRAMME

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Once participants have attended the principles of somatic resilience and have a good understanding of their own nervous systems and how to regulate themselves at work, the Somatic Training Programme offers an opportunity, through specific training and experiential practice, to learn how to implement somatic strategies in their work with clients or communities.

The objectives of this workshop include:

- A recap of the principles of Somatic Experiencing® and how they are designed to regulate the nervous system.
- Learning how to identify dysregulation in others.
- When red flags and butterflies all feel the same, what does safety look like?
- Experiential exercises to practice using strategies that regulate the nervous system on someone else. Teaching and experiential learning includes:
  - Active Listening Skills
  - Orienting
  - Grounding/Presence
  - Somatic Tracking
  - Somatic First Aid (Crisis strategies – panic attacks, overwhelm and other trauma responses)
  - Preparing someone to go back into a traumatic environment
  - Group Discussion and Q & A



Greg James is a dedicated Somatic Experiencing® Practitioner and psychotherapist specialising in the resolution of trauma. With a Master's degree in counselling and psychotherapy, he has immersed himself in the field of trauma, becoming a passionate advocate for trauma training, particularly emphasising somatic awareness. Greg recognizes the critical role of somatic experiencing® (SE in preventing burnout and chronic stress, especially for individuals working in the helping professions. This commitment extends beyond his private practice where he volunteers for the Somatic Experiencing® Committee for Humanitarian Response; a global initiative to bring relief and build resilience within the helping professions. Within this role, Greg leads the subcommittee for Africa, where he organises and facilitates somatic workshops for non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

His expertise is evident not only in his clinical work but also in his contributions to published journal articles, in the British Psychotherapy Journal and the International Body Psychotherapy journal. Greg is deeply invested in improving mental health and well-being on both an individual and societal level and believes in shaping a future where somatic practices and a physiological understanding of the impact of trauma are integral to the training landscape, ensuring a more resilient and compassionate approach for those working within the helping professions.

For more information contact Greg: [therapy@gregjames.co.uk](mailto:therapy@gregjames.co.uk)

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