

# **TARGET-A**

## **Trauma Adaptive Recovery**

### **Group Education and Therapy**

**10+ Session Adolescent Version**



## **Facilitator Guide**

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# ***Trauma Adaptive Recovery Group Education and Therapy (TARGET)***

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# Trauma Adaptive Recovery Group Education and Therapy (TARGET)

## WHAT IS TARGET?

TARGET is a strength-based, present centered, biopsychosocial approach to teaching trauma and extreme stress survivors self-regulation skills. **TARGET** teaches a deceptively simple sequence of practical skills to enable trauma survivors from a variety of backgrounds and skill levels to safely process current stressful experiences. This can be accomplished without avoidance, hypervigilance, decompensation or acute crisis, and with control over emotional self-regulation and relational engagement.

## HOW DOES TARGET WORK?

**TARGET** does this by shifting the primary focus off past trauma. This is different from trauma therapies that emphasize intensive re-telling of trauma memories. Instead, **TARGET** re-focuses the youth's attention on gaining a sense of control and meaning in *current life* by making sense of traumatic stress **reactions**.

- ❖ Rather than attempting to “get in touch with and get over” trauma memories, the focus is on learning to recognize and consciously regulate (rather than avoiding and being controlled by) current post-traumatic **reactions**. This does not mean that reactions are completely eliminated or controlled, but that the youth can learn to change automatic stress **reactions** into conscious adaptive responses. As a result stress reactions become less troubling and more manageable.
- ❖ Post-traumatic stress reactions are explained caused by persistent but reversible **biological changes** (as opposed to “mental problems”) in the brain's **alarm and information processing systems** and the body's **stress response systems**. These changes are necessary to **survive** extremely difficult life experiences, but they interfere with ordinary living by keeping the person in a constant state of fear, anger, distrust, and isolation (post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD).
- ❖ Although some stress management skills can be helpful for trauma survivors, we have found that a different or modified set of skills is necessary in order to **re-set the brain's alarm** when PTSD is occurring. Before many trauma survivors can “relax” or “visualize a safe place” or challenge self-defeating beliefs or interact “assertively”, they need skills to turn down the alarm.
- ❖ TARGET teaches a sequence of 7 skills described by an easy-to-remember and meaningful mnemonic (**FREEDOM**) that provide youths with greater control over bodily alarm reactions. **Note:** No claim is made that the use of the FREEDOM skills causes structural reversal of biological changes in the brain, but each FREEDOM skill is designed to directly counteract the bodily reactivity, mental confusion, emotional distress, and social isolation caused by PTSD.
- ❖ Using the FREEDOM skills, youths are guided in clearly thinking about the meaning that they make of recent stressful experiences that trigger PTSD alarm reactions. Youths learn that with the FREEDOM skills they can use their minds to teach their bodies and emotions to be less reactive, and to create new memories that increase their self-esteem and personal control.

# How to Use the TARGET Manual

## Introduction

Each chapter describes key points, leader lessons, and teaching examples for one session of a TARGET group. One-page “session agendas” with suggested scripts for explaining key points and experiential exercises (adapted for ages 10-13 and 13-15) are provided separately. We have written the manual to suggest how you might conduct a group that runs on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for 10 sessions and an additional graduation meeting. However, it is possible to take separate sessions and use them as a freestanding set (for example, a 3-session introduction to TARGET, or 4 sessions on the “REED” steps in FREEDOM) or in another ongoing group (such as anger or stress management or life skills).

The manual has three sections. The section you are reading is the Leader's Guide. Session agendas and exercises are in the Group Agenda section. Reproducible handouts are in the Participant Handouts section.

## Teaching

Although each session contains a suggested script for you to use, we find that reviewing the material in the Leader's Guide prior to each session and then teaching from the handouts works very well. This method allows you to use your own style and to adapt materials to your specific client population.

We cannot stress the concept of “adapt” enough. For example, you should consider modifying or eliminating handouts that do not seem to be that helpful to your clients and instead teaching the material in a different way. The manual is set up to teach seven sequential skills, but if you find that it is more effective for your clients to learn the skills a bit out of order –go ahead!

## Structure

This manual is the adolescent version of the TARGET protocol. There are 10 sections and a Graduation session. Each section includes a Leader's Lesson, Session script, Agenda and Checklist. The leader's lesson is background for the concepts being discussed in the session. The session script is suggested way to present the session material. The agenda is an overview of activities and concepts that will be covered in the session. The checklist is to provided help you keep track of what you have and have not covered in each session. If material was not covered in a designated session, it can be covered at the beginning of the next session. While this manual covers the material in 10 sessions, 90 minutes per session, you may choose to schedule more sessions of a shorter duration or simply more sessions.

## Materials

There are some simple materials that will help you as you teach TARGET:

- Flip Chart
- Copies of the handouts needed for each session
- Pens/pencils
- Magazines (for the creative arts component)
- Blunt-end scissors
- Markers, crayons
- Glue or tape
- Crafts supplies (such as beads, bracelets, paper suitable for lamination)
- TARGET posters (FREEDOM, SOS) and wallet/key chain laminated cards (SOS)

# Understanding and Recovering from Trauma (Difficult Life Experiences) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD – Extreme Stress Reactions)

## Session 1



SESSION 1 Agenda Overview
Overview – Why TARGET is different and how it can help.
Ground Rules
What is PTSD?
Alarm Concept
Normal Stress v. PTSD/Extreme Stress
Overview of FREEDOM Steps

### LEADER'S LESSON –

The material in this section involves teaching from 5 handouts and can be divided in two sessions if youths in your group would benefit from more time to grasp these concepts. The Session Agenda provides additional Focusing and Experiential exercises that can be used in an added session.

In this and every session, we recommend that you focus first on making the session interesting and fun for kids (and for you), so that concepts and skills are taught as serious matters but in a playful and good-humored manner. Rather than asking yourself first, “what do I have to teach today,” ask instead, “what would these kids find interesting and helpful, and how can we have fun with this?” To do this, it often is important to have two or three key points that, if nothing else, you will help each youth in the group to experience as relevant and worth remembering.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 1

1. Everybody's brain has an alarm that protects you when you're in danger
2. When horrible things happen, the brain's alarm helps you survive but then can get stuck “on” so that you keep reacting to normal stresses as if something terrible is happening – these are “extreme stress reactions” or “post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)”
3. FREEDOM skills can help you re-set your brain's alarm so it helps you but isn't always on

## Trauma and the Brain

During times of normal stress, the body and brain work together to accomplish three main goals:

- **ATTACHMENT:** manage stress in a way that builds and keeps healthy relationships.
- **EMOTION REGULATION:** keeping emotions balanced (not too much, not too little)
- **INFORMATION PROCESSING:** pay attention, learn, think, remember, and use information to make good choices

When normal stressors occur (such as ordinary hassles like having a bee or bug in your house or even major life challenges like dealing with big conflicts in important relationships), areas in the brain are activated that enable a person to manage their feelings, think clearly, create options and make choices that reflect their goals and values and support good relationships while dealing with the stressor. In this case a person may get angry or upset at the stressor but not too angry or upset to be able to respond to the situation effectively. Under these conditions, areas in the brain that signal danger (alarm signal) are activated along with brain areas that help the person to stay calm, focused, and think clearly. While activated yet calm and focused, the brain compares the present situation to previous similar situations, and identifies options to respond effectively in the present.

When extreme stress or trauma occurs, however, the alarm signal in the brain becomes so highly activated that the areas of the brain necessary for focusing, using past learning, and identifying options are essentially not accessible. The extreme alarm signal in the brain interferes with the ability to access the other parts of the brain. Being in "alarm mode" often is necessary when severe danger occurs, so these changes in the brain's activation patterns are healthy if survival really is at stake. For example, if a stray lion walks in the room your brain does not need to consider previous times you have seen a lion it just needs to tell you to get to a safe place. Sometime during times of crisis or extreme stress people will get themselves to a safe place and not remember how they got there. This is the alarm center initiating primal survival skills.

Once the extreme stress or trauma is over, the brain does not always automatically "re-set" itself and return to normal stress management mode. The more severe the stress, the longer it lasts, or the more often it occurs, the more likely the brain's alarm is to stay set in "survival alarm mode". Whether a stressful situation is dangerous or benign, normal or extreme, a person stuck in "alarm mode" cannot access the brain's capacities for clear thinking, and therefore reacts to all types of stressors as survival threats. People with their brain stuck in "alarm mode" often overreact to minor stressors causing serious difficulties in their relationships and impairments in their lives.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder of the brain's alarm system. PTSD occurs when the brain tries protect the person by staying highly alert and ready to deal with threats to survival. Unfortunately, being in survival/alarm mode interferes with doing the ordinary things that we count upon our brains to do, like manage emotions, think clearly, and help us get along with other people. So recovery from PTSD means helping the brain to shift out of survival/alarm mode and back to ordinary living or stress management. The skills taught in TARGET are designed for that purpose.

## **Session Script**

We offer a session script, not as a way to prescribe how you must teach the session, but as a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.

## **Psychoeducation**

This is a 10-12-session group for adolescents who have experienced difficult life experiences/ trauma and want to deal with the negative effects of extreme stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The goal of the group is to enable you to begin using some essential skills that will help your body gain better control of stress reactions and your brain gain better control of its survival alarm system.

You may think that because this group is about managing extreme stress reactions that you're going to have to talk about your worst traumas or stressful memories. But that's NOT what we'll do because that's NOT what helps a person to recover from extreme stresses.

What DOES help is **learning skills** to deal with **stressors** in your current life **here-and-now**. In this program you'll learn how to apply 7 practical skills to dealing with managing stress and traumas without dredging up old bad memories of those events.

- Distribute handouts to each client that explain the main points we'll be covering in this education program.
- [Discuss the plan for meeting: schedule/dates/times.] Review **Group Ground Rules** in. Clarify that this is a psychoeducational program and not therapy.

Do you have any questions about this skill-building program? Let's get started.

## **What is Extreme Stress?**

Extreme stress is when something happens to you that is overwhelming and causes an extreme emotional reaction. Often people experience extreme stress reaction because they feel or are powerless to change a negative situation. Losing someone through death or separation can be overwhelming especially if it is sudden and unexpected. Being under constant threat of being abused or betrayed by a person that is caring for you is an extreme stress. Each time a person is exposed to these extremely stressful situations a survival alarm is set off in their brain that gears their brain up to react to this survival or stressor situation.

### **(Use the What is PTSD handout to explain it's definition if it is relevant to your group)**

When a person is exposed to many extreme stresses and their alarm is constantly going on because of the many stressors (or one major stress) they are exposed to, this alarm may eventually dysfunction and gets stuck on all the time leaving your brain and body in a constant state of threat. We refer to this as being stuck in the short loop of your brain in that you are using mostly the survival and reactive parts of your inner brain which are activated because you feel you are under threat even when you are not. This feeling of being constantly under threat, hyper aroused or hyper alert are all symptoms of PTSD. It is normal to react differently to extreme stress but when you react to normal stress with an extreme stress reaction this may be a symptom of PTSD.

[Review Handout - **Stress =The Body's Alarm System**] This handout shows how some of the normal stress reactions are compared to some of the extreme stress reactions.

<b>Teaching Example The Body's Alarm System</b>
An example of a normal stress response is not being able to find your backpack with your books, wallet and music in it, as you are ready to leave to catch the bus for school. Your heart rate may increase, you can feel your breath become rapid and shallow and perhaps your muscles are tense. But you are able to remain clear and calm enough to think about where you last placed your backpack, or think of an alternative places to look that you have left it before. Alternatively, when you have PTSD and therefore have an extreme stress reaction to the same situation your heart might be pounding like it is going to jump out of your chest, your mouth may go dry; you might feel what is commonly called an "adrenaline rush." You might feel terror, rage or numb and not be sure of what to do next. This is called an extreme stress reaction in this situation. These extreme reactions to small stressors often occur for people who have PTSD.

To really understand extreme stress reactions or PTSD, you need to know what changes in the body and brain as a result of exposure to extreme Stress. PTSD actually is a disorder of the brain and body, not a "mental" disorder. **PTSD happens when your body can't turn off the brain's alarm system.**

### **How does the brain's alarm system work and why can't your body turn it off if you have PTSD?**

[Review Handout—**Normal Stress: Body and Brain Working Effectively Together.**] When the Body and Brain are working effectively, the brain's alarm system helps the body stay alive and healthy by signaling if there is a danger that the body needs to avoid or escape. The body's nervous system deals with danger or stress by finding the right balance of speeding up or slowing down--like the accelerator, brakes, and gearshift of a car. The message first goes to a part of the brain that tells you something might be wrong (the amygdale or the alarm center)—it doesn't tell you what the problem is, you just might feel a little more alert or feel like something is not quite right. Then the message goes to another part of the brain close by (the hippocampus), which is like a computer that figures out what the problem is and creates a "damage control report." It sends the report to the brain's thinking center (frontal cortex), where you can make a plan for how to solve the problem that's causing stress. This process we refer to as the long loop in that you are accessing all the major parts of your brain to manage a stressful situation and respond effectively to it.

[Review Handout – **PTSD or Extreme Stress: The Never Ending Life and Death Alarm.**] What happens with PTSD or during an extreme stress reaction is that this nicely organized stress management system in the body and brain goes haywire. Trauma or extreme stress is so stressful that it is like a bolt of lightning that causes a sudden power surge and short-circuits a computer with a blast of electricity. What happens is that the nervous system gets supercharged ("adrenaline rush") and your body shuts down in exhaustion.

This strain on nervous system causes the brain's alarm system to be overly sensitive and go on for any and all stressors even if the threat is not real. The alarm is stuck in the on position so that any minor stress is registered as a major stressful event. When the alarm is stuck on like this it sends such a big message of "danger" that it short-circuits the brain's computer filing system. Therefore your thinking center in the brain receives a blast of alarm signals without an organized damage control report or understanding of exactly

what the problem is. This can result in you feeling overwhelmed and confused like when you are terribly unsafe and under threat! This may result in you reacting to a minor stressor as if it were a life threatening situation. The problem is that your body needs to learn how to turn off this alarm in your brain so that your brain can get its filing system hooked back up and working again. When the alarm is turned down or off the brain's filing system and thinking center can figure out how to respond to the stressor using all of the brain (the long loop) rather than react to the stressor using the survival area of the brain only (short loop).

It's like needing to fix a computer that isn't working because its hard drive got short circuited by a power surge. The power surge is all over but the computer needs to be fixed because of the damage caused by the power surge. Experiencing traumatic events cause these power surges on a nervous system that leave it needing to be rewired. The amazing positive thing about our brains is that this doesn't mean you have to replace the whole brain, like you might have to replace a computer's hard drive. If you can help your body and brain shift back to handling stress in a more self-regulated way again, your brain can fix itself!

### **Skills for Personal FREEDOM**

There are practical skills that you can use to help your body to get off the roller coaster of extreme stress reactions that being exposed to difficult life experiences can cause. We don't know if these skills actually change the way your brain works, but we do know that they help your brain to get its all-important computer filing system back in action. The skills are simple but they have to be practiced often in order to really get the brain's organizing center up and running again. When you use these skills you get your body's stress reactions and the brain's alarm system back to normal again—not all at once, but gradually, with practice. So you still are prepared if you need the alarm to deal with stress or danger, but the alarm won't be too strong all the time! Here **[Handouts]** is an overview showing how extreme stress or trauma can lead to unfinished emotional business, which can lead to feeling chronic stress or your brain being stuck in alarm mode. This in turn leads to the TRAPPED feelings listed on the handout. To avoid these feelings we are going to learn the FREEDOM steps to manage stressors. However if you do feel TRAPPED, you can use the FREEDOM steps to turn down the alarm center in your brain so that you can access all of your brain to respond rather than react to a stressful situation.

### **Conclusion**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. You learned a lot about how the brain works under stress and how the brain can be affected by extreme stress. You learned about the alarm center in the brain and that it gets stuck on sometime. In the next session we'll take a closer look at how we are already using some skills to turn down that alarm and don't even realize it. These are the 7 FREEDOM steps.

### **A Measure to Consider for Group Facilitators**

Each youth brings a different set of life experiences and a different level of emotional maturity. You may find it helpful to use this rating to chart the emotional maturity level of youths as they progress through TARGET. Please note that this is NOT a questionnaire for youths to complete, but a rating form that you or other adults who are working with or well acquainted with the youth can use to identify the youth's strengths and needs for change in the 3 areas addressed by TARGET: (1) getting along with other people and being in relationships (attachment), (2) emotion regulation, and (3) making sense of the world and thinking clearly (information processing). Ratings at the lower end of each scale reflect high levels of "survival alarm" reactivity, and higher ratings reflect increasing ability to manage the brain's alarm by using the kinds of skills which you will be teaching using the FREEDOM model.

## Emotional Maturity Rating Scales

### 1. Complexity of Representations of People.

- 1  Confuses own thoughts or feelings with those of others persons – to not view people as distinct individuals.
- 2  Describes people or emotions in vague all-or-nothing "split" categories, e.g., strong or weak, good or bad.
- 3  Views others in terms of surface appearances or unchanging traits empty of emotion or individuality.
- 4  Recognizes people's deeper, individually defining, and enduring needs, hopes, values, and emotions.
- 5  Understands how deeper – often unconscious or conflictual – needs & hopes fit into a complete personality.

### 2. Affect Tone of Relationship Paradigms.

- 1  Feels persecuted/annihilated by a malevolent malicious world; views people as victims or victimizers.
- 2  Views life as mostly negative (but not annihilating), feeling primarily alone, hurt, discouraged, or unsafe.
- 3  Sees some good and some bad in events, people or relationships, viewing life on balance as mildly negative.
- 4  Feels some love and caring from/for others – on balance feeling mixed or neutral about self, others, life.
- 5  Views relationships, life, and self on balance as definitely positive – predominantly caring, hopeful, happy.

### 3. Capacity for Emotional Investments.

- 1  Views people/relationships as tools, mirrors or obstacles for own use and gratification, with little or no emotional involvement.
- 2  Primarily concerned with avoiding harm or punishment and on engaging in parallel play rather than reciprocal exchange.
- 3  Primarily concerned with being liked, pleasing other people, and with scrupulously conforming to gain approval from others or from self.
- 4  Values committed relationships with emotional involvement that promotes own personal growth.
- 5  Values relationships founded on a shared valuing of mutual personal growth and actualization..

### 4. Understanding of Social Causality.

- 1  Sees no reasons for what own or others' thoughts/acts/feelings – events and actions viewed as random.
- 2  Views thoughts, feelings, and actions as simple reflex reactions to immediate physical or social stimuli.
- 3  Understands how to cope with immediate concerns, but not how to plan for or anticipate longterm goals.
- 4  Views thoughts, feelings, and actions as the result of inner desires, values, beliefs, or commitments which reflect longterm goals and plans – but which she is not able to clearly or completely understand or describe.
- 5  Actively reflects on and is able to make sense of own thought processes or feelings, and to understand and identify consistencies and conflicts which explain why he or other people do what they do.

### 5. Motivation for Social Connectedness.

- 1  Views self and others as completely isolated and prefers to remain isolated as a "loner."
- 2  Views self and others as largely isolated but feels discomfort about this; may desire or idealize being rescued or symbiotically attached.
- 3  Views relationships as "us or them," and desires involvement with a few trusted others primarily for assistance with solving problems.
- 4  Views relationships as a rewarding give and take to which each person must contribute responsibly, and values closeness and support.
- 5  Views relationships as an opportunity to nurture and support others with unconditional positive regard but also with personal limits.

### 6. Capacity for Emotional Awareness and Perspective Taking (Empathy).

- 1  Virtually unaware of own or others' emotions, with the possible exception of tension, frustration, impatience, boredom, or irritability.
- 2  Somewhat aware of but unconcerned with own or others' emotions – primarily focused on unreflectively meeting own needs.
- 3  Recognizes own and others' emotions as important but often confuses them or can't see the validity of others feelings or viewpoints.
- 4  Recognizes in principle that own and others' emotions are equally important and distinct due to different valid perspectives.
- 5  Actively takes other persons' perspectives to genuinely validate their emotions and to gain a deeper self-understanding.

### 7. Capacity for Guilt and Remorse

- 1  Actively seeks or enjoys causing harm to others who "deserve whatever they get" –OR– feels overwhelmed by diffuse guilt and remorse.
- 2  Acts genuinely or defensively unconcerned with others' troubles or suffering and with own actions that may cause or fail to prevent harm.
- 3  Feels mild or belated regret when causing or failing to prevent harm to others, passively wishing "it could have worked out differently."
- 4  Feels genuinely sad and responsible when unsuccessful despite actively trying to prevent harm and to avoid causing harm to others.
- 5  Actively reflects on personal actions and responsibilities in order to genuinely make amends for actions or mistakes that hurt others.

## Understanding Extreme Stress Reactions and Maladaptive Coping

### Session 2



#### SESSION 2 Agenda Overview

Coping Strategies – Adaptive and Maladaptive

Introduce Self-Check Ratings/Temperature Gauges

### LEADER'S LESSON –

The session covers the topic of coping mechanism. Group members will learn to recognize some of the things that they are already doing to calm down or turn off their “alarm”. Lists are provided so that people can recognize their coping mechanism without having to openly discuss them in group. It is not recommended that lengthy a discussion center around the negative coping mechanisms such as drugging or cutting. The non-judgmental message you want to convey is that each group member is using these coping mechanisms to turn down the alarm in their brain. The list of maladaptive coping can be used to stimulate appropriate educational conversation which can facilitate the group making a list of all of their coping mechanism together or have each group member write up their own list. The key to this group is to get members to identify to themselves what they use to self-soothe or turn down their alarm. After they have identified their coping mechanisms then have them examine whether or not those coping mechanisms are adaptive or maladaptive. To put it another way the group members will identify whether their coping mechanisms work and get them to their goals or whether they don't work (or only work for the moment) and ultimately interfere with or prevent them from getting to their goals.

In this session you will introduce a “self-check” to help kids assess their levels of stress, control and urges. There is a temperature gauge handout in this section as well as all of the following sections. In future sessions you will use the gauge to have the group members do a self-check at the beginning and end of each group. The most common clinical challenge is helping kids who feel highly stressed to scale back maximal (“10”) ratings to ratings lower on the scale. If this is the case for your group members you may need to spend time over the next few sessions teaching about the different levels of stress based on examples of the life experience that people have disclosed in

group that may have been a 10 and challenge them to compare them to those that they are reporting to be a 10 which may not be. This is a way of teaching them about alarm reactive thoughts as well. Not every thing is a 10 and we need to be honest about differentiating them so our brain can learn to react appropriately to major stressors versus minor stressors.

## **KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 2**

1. When the brain's alarm is on all the time, or goes on in emergency mode at small things, this interferes with every important area in life – that's why PTSD is such a problem.
2. Many ways that people try to turn off or turn down the brain's alarm are "maladaptive coping strategies"—ways of coping with stress that cause more problems than they solve.
3. FREEDOM skills can re-set your brain's alarm better than maladaptive coping strategies.

### **Session Script**

This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.

### **Psychoeducation**

Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered last session? [Briefly point to last sessions' handouts and summarize main points.] Place FREEDOM Poster on the wall and point it out.]

## **How does Extreme Stress Interfere with Normal Living?**

When extreme stress causes the brain's alarm system to stay turned on in emergency mode, this affects every area of life and results in feeling anxious, confused, tense, angry, frustrated, afraid, worried, spaced-out, helpless, overwhelmed, hopeless, or worthless. These overwhelming feelings may cause someone to seek out and use maladaptive coping strategies to find relief from these feelings and turn down the alarm in their brain. Using Maladaptive Coping Strategies (MCS) can lead to a vicious cycle of pain.

<b>Teaching Example Maladaptive Coping Strategies</b>
Adaptive coping strategies are the things we do to try and feel better. These coping strategies become maladaptive when they are no longer working or when they interfere in goal achievement. For example, exercise is generally a good thing, however when someone is exercising excessively to the extent it is interfering with their goal and or relationships, work, school or sleep this may now be a maladaptive way of dealing with an overly sensitive alarm in their brain that is constantly turning on.

[Review handout **Possible Maladaptive Coping Strategies.**] Can you think of others to add to this list?

When maladaptive coping is used to help you feel better it creates a vicious cycle of pain – MCS – more pain. The good news is that using the FREEDOM Skills help to break this vicious cycle.

## **Five Areas of Normal Living Affected by the Brain's Alarm being Stuck On**

The **first** area of normal living that is affected by the constant alarm being on in a person's brain is your ability to feel safe and in control. Being in a constant alarm state creates a strong feeling of danger and not being in control **even when you really ARE safe and in good personal control**. This also can lead a person to seek a substitute for being in control of their life by using some of the maladaptive coping strategies we already talked about, including, but not limited to alcohol, drugs, food, sex, gambling, toxic relationships, angry/rageful behavior, excessive exercise, always putting other people's needs ahead of your own as a caretaker or enabler, or either avoiding work or working too much. [Ask youths for examples from their own lives or that they have seen in other people's lives.]

The **second** area of normal living that the alarm state affects is mental concentration and judgment – thinking clearly. When the brain's survival alarms are constantly turned on, it's like trying to work or talk or even think clearly if you're in a building where the fire alarms are going off and won't stop. It doesn't take anyone long under those conditions to start to feel spacey, confused, as if the only thing you want to do is get out of that noise! Maladaptive coping strategies can be ways to distract yourself or to not notice your brain's alarm reactions when they get annoying. But if you don't think clearly, you can get into trouble and it's hard to succeed in life, especially if you're so wrapped up in maladaptive coping that you never notice what's happening to you and what your needs are! [Ask youths for examples from their own lives or that they have seen in other people's lives.]

### **Teaching Example Mental Concentration and Judgment**

A creative way of illustrating the impact of the non-stop alarm is to bring an alarm clock to group. Let the group know that you will activate the alarm, but keep talking. (We advise against setting the alarm to go off at some unknown time to the group). This allows clients to experience the distraction of the alarm and the difficulty paying attention while the alarm is going off.

The **third** area of normal living that the alarm state affects is keeping yourself safe. Extreme stress reactions can lead a person to stop paying attention to his or her own personal safety. This can happen because you just stop caring whether you get hurt any more or not or because you want to prove that you can handle terrible danger without getting hurt or killed. It can also happen because you feel you deserve to be hurt or to die. In any case, turning to those maladaptive coping strategies can be a way to expose yourself to danger- to live on the "wild side" or the "dark side of life"- even when you really want to make more adaptive choices. [Ask youths for examples from their own lives or that they have seen in other people's lives.]

The **fourth** area of normal living that the alarm state affects is your relationships. When your alarm is always or often turned on, it is hard to ever feel safe enough to trust anyone, and you can assume that you are powerless to change problems in relationships. Your maladaptive coping strategies may seem like the only friend that you can count on if you are feeling completely alienated and distrusting. Relationships can be frustrating or hurtful, and the TRAPPED feelings that are caused by the survival alarm can interfere with trust and make it very difficult to resolve the normal conflicts that occur in every friendship or family relationship. You may also feel that you have to just take care of other people and neglect your own needs because your PTSD unfinished emotional business includes feeling that you

don't deserve respect or love. [Ask youths for examples from their own lives or that they have seen in other people's lives.]

And **fifth**, being in the alarm state can make life seem hopeless, or lead to self-criticism and self-blame that destroys self-worth. Your maladaptive coping strategies can be a way to numb out and not face these scary feelings, or to escape from life and its responsibilities altogether. [Ask youths for examples from their own lives or that they have seen in other people's lives.]

We haven't talked specifically about several important areas in life, such as school and work, fun and recreation, and health – but you can probably see how being in an alarm state is going to get in the way of each of these important parts of a healthy life. Anyone have other personal examples?

In spite of having many areas of your life affected by extreme stress, there is hope. Next week we'll begin showing you the skills you can use to help you organize your brain and turn down the alarm.

### **Conclusion:**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Next session we'll move on to the 1<sup>st</sup> FREEDOM Focusing and show you a way to get a better look at your life with a creative exercise we call the **Lifeline**. [Review the plan for a next meeting.]

## The 1<sup>st</sup> Step to FREEDOM: Focusing

### Session 3



<b>SESSION 3 Agenda Overview</b>
Focusing and Self Check Practice
Introduction of Personal Lifeline
Recording Self Checks
Handouts

### LEADER'S LESSON: - Focusing with SOS and Self-Check Logs

In this session you begin keeping a leader log to record self-check ratings for each participant. Please record the self-check ratings twice, once at the beginning of the session and once at the end. This allows the leader to reflect back to members how they change from week-to-week. There is also a log that you can give to clients so they may keep track of their own scores.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 3

1. The first step to re-setting the brain's alarm is to Focus your mind, which involves three steps that are described by the universal signal for help--SOS. The first "S" is Slow Down
2. The "O" in SOS stands for Orient: pay close attention to what you feel in your body, where you are (and what you can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste), and who you're with.
3. The second "S" in SOS stands for Self-Check: make a rating between 1-10 for how much stress, personal control, and urge to use a maladaptive coping strategy you feel right now.

### Session Script

This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.

### Psychoeducation

In this session, we will introduce you to the first FREEDOM step Focusing, with three skills we call SOS.

- Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? [Briefly point to each handout from and summarize the main points.]
- Remember you can't go back and erase past traumas or extreme stresses, but you can help your body and mind learn how to manage stressful situations better now. The FREEDOM steps will help you turn down the alarm in the brain and refocus on your goals today rather

then on past traumas or stressors.

- Each time you use the FREEDOM steps you are teaching your brain how to put trauma memories safely in storage along with all of your other memories. This can help your body turn down the brain's alarm signals that can lead to PTSD, so that bad memories don't keep your brain's alarm system working overtime.

### **The First Step to FREEDOM: Focusing**

Now let's look carefully at the first FREEDOM skill, **focusing**, because that's exactly what helps when you feel so stressed out that you're starting to get on that awful roller coaster ride and your brain's alarm system is going wild. [Refer participants to handout- **Step 1 -Focusing Skills**]

Focusing involves **SOS**:

- **Slow Down**
- **Orient**
- **Self-Check**

**Slow Down** is to take a moment and help your mind and body get off the roller coaster. You can do this by sitting back for a moment, letting your mind relax and paying attention to the natural rhythm of your breathing. Remember the array of catastrophic interference we talked about last time? Slowing down helps turn down that interference and lets information pass through. We will teach a number of slowing down exercises and techniques throughout this group. Basically you are just doing manually what your brain is not doing on its own. You are manually telling your brain to slow down and turn down the alarm. If you did not do this your mind would continue to stay on the short loop.

**Orient** means to pay attention to where you are, what you're doing, and whom you're with. Sometimes when we get stress we forget that the people in the room are not necessarily connected to all of the extreme feelings we are feeling right now. Some of the extreme stress reaction is based on unfinished feelings from stressors from the past and we want to make sure we are anchored in the present before responding to a stressor or stressful situation. So just take a moment and notice how it feels to sit in your chair with your feet on the ground, and make yourself comfortable in your chair. Then look around and notice what the room that we're in looks like. By orienting ourselves in the room we also start to activate the part of our brain that get shut down during the short loop or extreme stress reaction. The hippocampus is the area of the brain that is often inaccessible during extreme stress reactions. The hippocampus is also responsible for orienting you so if we use it in a positive way to orient ourselves in the room we are priming our brains to get back on the long loop.

**Self Check** is checking in to see how you're feeling right now and help yourself feel safe and in control. If you are feeling any stress or uncomfortable feelings right now, you don't have to dwell on those feelings. If you are feeling like you're not quite as in control of your life as you'd like to be, you can work on gaining personal control by learning and using the FREEDOM steps. We will be using the self check to check in at the beginning and ending of every group.

To make the Self-Check easy and useful, we've created a thermometer that we can use to help us take our self check temperature.

**Teaching Example: Self Check**

Self checks help your brain build a “data base.” For example, you will begin to see and remember that there are times when your stress scale can be a “10” but you still can manage because your sense of personal control is also high. Or you will begin to see the relationship between a high stress level and a high urge. People often start out with lower numbers for self control then there stress number but as they learn to use the FREEDOM steps the self control number increases even when the stress is high. It is important to realize stress never goes away it is our job to learn to manage life stressors as best we can and the FREEDOM steps will help us do that. Introduce self checks using either the **Temperature Scale** or the **Self Check scale** which ever seems more appropriate for your group.

**Self Check/Temperature Scales:**

When you think about how much stress you're feeling, if you feel completely calm and no stress at all, that would be a “1.” At the other extreme, if you cannot imagine feeling worse that would be a “10.” Most times you'll feel some stress, more than a “1,” but not as much as the worst you can imagine, so you'll pick a number between “1” and “10.” If you felt a small amount of Stress, it might be a 2 or 3. If you felt enough stress to feel bad but not terrible, you might be a 4, 5, or 6. If you felt quite a bit of stress, really quite bad, it might be a 7 or 8. You'd save a “9” for time where you feel almost in a crisis, not quite as bad as the worst ever but definitely very serious and bad. Does this make sense? What rating best describes how much stress each of you is feeling right now?

When you think about how in control you feel, if you felt totally in control, like you can handle anything and everything just the way you want to in your life right now, that would be a “1.” If you felt in pretty good control, but not perfect, that would be a 2, 3, or 4. If you felt like you had some control but that you weren't in control in some important ways that would be a 6, 7 or 8. If you felt that you had very little control in your life that would be a 3 or a 2. And if you felt TOTALLY out of control, that would be a “10.” Does that make sense too? What rating best describes your level of personal control right now?

When you think about your urge to use your MCS, the scale is similar to the Stress scale. “10” would be the most intense urge to use MCS that you have ever felt. At the other end of the scale “1” would be no urge to use your MCS at all. Other times you may feel somewhere in between like a “5” where you would feel an urge to use that bothers you but you can manage or a “3” where you have an urge that is very mild and goes away quickly. What rating best describes your urge right now?

The **focusing** (SOS) skill can be done in many ways. Not only does focusing help you stay safe and deal with difficult situations or feelings, but it also does something very important to help you deal with trauma. Each time you use a **focusing** technique, you are teaching your mind to stop dwelling on past traumas and to move on with life. It takes practice before your mind can make this important shift, but **focusing** is a great way to start. The other TARGET skills will add to your ability, so you'll have several ways to effectively deal with trauma. In group we focus by slowing down, breathing, orienting and self-checks. There are other ways that help with focusing such as listening to music, taking a walk, playing video games, playing games or sports, journaling and warm shower. Provides a list of possible ways of focusing or self-soothing.

- What ways do you find helpful to get focused? [Elicit examples; make list on blackboard; separate approaches that are primarily beneficial from those that have serious downsides.]
- Have group members add their own ways of focusing on the handout.

To take the idea of focusing a step further, review handout - **A Personal Script of Focusing Skills** you will find a description of one TARGET group member's plan to for using the focusing skills.

- Each participant can then develop a personal focusing script.

### **Teaching Example** **Personal Focusing Script**

You may assign this as homework or complete in the group. If this is done as homework, review in the next session. It is important that this exercise **is not SKIPPED**. Once the script is completed, the client may share this with a therapist, case manager, mobile crisis team, family or put in an accessible place like on the nightstand or in a purse or pocket.

Before we end today, let's practice doing another self check. [Refer to handout- **Rating Scales for a Quick Accurate Self-Check.**] Let's try using three easy ways to make a number rating for a quick self-check. [Put each 10-Point Scale on the Black/Whiteboard. Describe the Stress, Urge Level, Personal Control Level scales, giving common examples for the lower, middle, and higher levels on each scale.]

**Let's go around and have each member tell what his or her stress level is right now.** [Comment that different ratings are expectable. Record each client's ratings in a Group Log that you keep.]

**And now what's your level of personal control, right now?** [Comment on how feeling in control takes work, and that the FREEDOM skills can help make this work more successful.]

**And what is your MCS urge level right now?** [Comment on how difficult it can be to admit when an urge level is high.]

### **Leader's Lesson- The Lifeline**

TARGET teaches how the changes in the brain that leads to PTSD cause a person to avoid remembering times of trauma, and make it difficult to recall memories from those times even if you want to recall them.

Reclaiming one's memory involves remembering the whole experience, not just the best or the worst moments. No one remembers everything about a past experience, but what we do remember is how one part of each experience led to the next part. This chain of events often is lost in memories of trauma or of times of a person's life when trauma was part of what was happening.

Reclaiming one's memory also involves choosing what to remember and how to take the different parts of a memory and combine them into a complete "story" of what happened. Trauma tends to lead to very fragmentary memories that don't fit into a "story" but instead seem like a blur or like flashes of awful events with big gaps in which nothing can be remembered. Trauma memories also tend to pop up suddenly and unexpectedly, instead of when a person chooses.

The **Lifeline** is a creative exercise that teaches through art work that it is possible to choose what you remember about your life, to find helpful reminders in your current life of what happened to you in the past, to arrange what you remember in a way that shows what you think, how you feel, what you are seeking in life, and who you are as a person. Practically, the exercise involves each group member selecting pictures from magazines and placing them on a large sheet of paper as a collage, as well as drawing or writing anything else the participant wants to include on that sheet of paper.

Thus, the **Lifeline** is each person's picture of her or his own life – past, present, and future – including important events, people, and issues that may have been positive, neutral, stressful, or even traumatic. This picture is created a little-bit-at-a-time in several sessions, to give each participant time to add to and change the Lifeline, as s/he feels ready. The goal is to enable the participant to see and share a complete picture of her or his life and self in a free-form manner.

Doing a **Lifeline** is consistent with the present-centered, strengths-based approach because it fosters a current synthesis of the person's thoughts and feelings about important experiences in life that have shaped who they are becoming as a person. **Lifelines** focus on current reconstruction of a whole life story via pictures and words, **not** on returning to and reviving trauma memories.

Most **TARGET** participants feel some reluctance initially to do the Lifeline because it goes against the habit of avoiding memories. If given support and permission to add only as much as they want and to put anything they want on the Lifeline –there are no right or wrong pictures or words – most participants end up feeling a sense of accomplishment: this is my life as I see it!

### **Introducing the Lifeline to the Group**

Now let's talk about an exercise we'll start next week that involves each of you creating your own personal picture of your life experiences and how you've been affected by these experiences. The picture is something you'll create a little bit at a time, because we'll do this exercise in every session after today. By the end of our group, you will have created a personal **lifeline** showing how your life has developed. Today we'll talk about what the lifeline is and how to get started, so you can be thinking about some ideas between now and our next session.

You'll use a sheet of paper like this [show sheet] to create your "**lifeline**," a picture of your life in any way you want to present it. Some people focus on representing past present and future, others focus on presenting coping mechanisms, and others focus on goals and future. We'll help each of you find a comfortable space in the room where you'll have some privacy to work, and we'll spend about 20 minutes on it in each session. You can put anything into this picture.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Teaching Example Alternatives to the Lifeline</b></p>
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<p>Other ways that have been used to do this exercise include giving each person a shoebox and have them decorate the outside with pictures that represent what they would like others to know about them immediately and inside the box are things that are shared by choice. A scrapbook may be used with each page representing a different time in life or if using large paper some have developed their lifeline freestyle, or used a 'road' or a clock. A large collage frame has been made with positive coping mechanisms around it and list of personal favorite focusing skills or poetry placed in the frame. Whatever is meaningful to the client is more important than how this exercise is achieved.</p>
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One way to do a **lifeline** is to just pick out pictures or words from the magazines that you think are interesting, and paste them anywhere you want on the **lifeline** paper. You don't have to remember anything in particular; you can just put anything you want on the **lifeline**. It's amazing how magazines have pictures that you like and that tell something about your life – you don't have to try to make them all fit, just pick out what you want and see what it looks like as you go along. If anyone has any particular magazines you would like to bring in next time, feel free to do so.

### **Conclusion**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Let's take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check right now. What is each of your Stress, Control, and MCS ratings? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log. Invite clients to record on their log].

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Step to FREEDOM: Recognizing Triggers

Session 4, Step 2



SESSION 4 Agenda Overview
Recognizing Triggers
Personal Lifeline
Recording Self Checks
Handouts

### LEADER'S LESSON: - Self-Check Logs

In this session you continue keeping a leader log to record the self-check ratings twice for each participant, once at the beginning of the session and once at the end. This allows the leader to reflect back to members how they change from week-to-week. There is also a log that you can give to clients so they may keep track of their own scores.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 4

1. Alarm/stress reactions happen because the brain recognizes something that seems to be dangerous—a “trigger.”
2. If you use your mind to recognize triggers on purpose, this helps your brain to recognize that you are in control and to not turn on the alarm so much or so strongly.
3. Knowing the kinds of stresses that are triggers for you can help you be prepared.

### Session Script

This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.

## Psychoeducation: Recognizing Triggers

Today's step is Recognizing Triggers. Once you FOCUS, the next step is to recognize the specific things that trigger the TRAPPED feelings. The purpose of recognizing triggers is to give you control of your brain's alarm system so you can use the alarm system if you really need it, instead of not being able to stop the alarm or turn it down when you don't really need it.

Let's begin with the first step, the **Focusing** skills—**SOS**—that we discussed last week. Take a moment right now and slow down your body and mind ... get yourself oriented by sitting comfortably and just paying attention to the room we're in, the people, and why you're here ... and do a self-check using the Stress, Personal Control and Urge to Use MCS ratings. [Help client(s) make the ratings and share their ratings. Record each client's ratings in a Group Log that you keep. Point out to client the self-check log Participant Handout page – which they may use for themselves.]

### Teaching Example

#### Self Check

Very often we hear from group leaders that self-checks take up too much time. The self-checks are meant to have clients practice in a non-judgmental or critical way to rate how they are feeling.

There does not need to be much (if any) discussion at this point. If a group member says their stress level is a "10" you might simply ask, "You can't imagine feeling any worse?" Sometimes the answer is yes and sometimes upon reflection a client might say – well yes I can, so maybe this is an 8 or 9. At the end of group when we are doing a self-check if there seems to be an increase in stress and urge we have a brief discussion on what may have triggered the increase and what the plan is after group.

The second skill for the FREEDOM steps —**Recognizing Triggers**—is another way to stop re-living unfinished emotional business from past trauma. When you recognize a **specific** trigger you are helping your brain use its organization center to zero-in on one thing that you can then begin to deal with—instead of feeling confused and overwhelmed because everything seems like a problem.

We all have certain things in life that trigger strong reactions. It can be a certain place, or time of year, or a look or tone of voice from someone else, a kind of TV show or movie, a song, or an activity. The common factor is: Triggers are reminders of unfinished emotional business--so you know when you're triggered when you feel one of the TRAPPED feelings.

The value of being able to recognize triggers is so that they do not take you by complete surprise each time. The best way to be able to recognize triggers when they happen is to look at some recent experiences and see as clearly as possible what was triggering you. We'll do that today.

So what are the **triggers** that can cause these extreme reactions? A trigger is anything that leads you to feel any of the TRAPPED feelings such as terrified or angry or frustrated or guilty or sad, or that you hate yourself or your life, or having physical pain you can't get over. {See cartoon in handout}

This can include anything that happens or that you see or hear or smell or taste in your environment which reminds you of a trauma experience. Triggers can also include times of the year or the day, particular "anniversary" dates, ways that people interact with you, things that you see or hear on TV, radio, the movies, or in magazines, books, or the paper. Sometime you can feel really sad or depressed at a specific time of year and not realize that that is the exact time something bad happened to you in the past. By not making a connection to a time of year being a trigger you may inappropriately apply those depressed feelings to your relationships or difficulties at the time. Understanding what triggers you and when you get triggered helps you to know when you need to use your focusing skills to stay in the long loop.

### Teaching Example

#### Recognizing Triggers

One way to introduce triggers is to explain that we are always receiving clues or triggers from our environment. It does not mean it is always negative. Have the group generate separate lists of possible positive triggers and possible negative triggers on flip chart paper. We hang these lists in the group room each week to make them easy reference points.

When you recognize 1 or 2 *specific* triggers instead of just feeling awful and not knowing why—or instead of trying to deal with everything all at once and getting overwhelmed—you are getting your brain organized and this starts to turn down the alarm signals in your brain.

Just figuring out the 1 or 2 triggers that are setting off your brain's alarms is the first, and often most important, step toward helping your brain get organized and take control of your body's alarm system. Recognizing when you are triggered can also help you make an informed or conscious choice about how you will respond to the trigger. As we mentioned before, triggers that lead to an extreme stress response can then lead to the use of MCS.

- On the handout- **PTSD and Extreme Stress Trigger** you will see a list of potential triggers, look over the list and see if there is anything you can relate to on it. Do any of these things remind you of things you have been triggered by in the past?

There are several different types of stress that can activate the extreme stress reaction or the brain's alarm system. **See Handout- Different Types of Stress That Impact the Mind and Body.** It is important to recognize all types of stress because each can be a trigger: Psychological/Emotional, Environmental, Physical Health, Biological/Chemical and Social Influences.

### Teaching Example

#### Different Types of Stress

This handout also may be used to help clients understand that by addressing the possible stressors that they have control over such as Nutrition, Hydration, Exercise and Sleep, they may respond better to stressors that are out of their control. If under nourished, dehydrated or lacking sleep the impact of stress can multiply and increase the likelihood of extreme reactions rather than normal responses to daily situations.

- What are 1 or 2 specific triggers that can set off the alarm in your brain?

Now let practice and get **Focused** by **Slowing** down what you're doing and thinking ... getting **Oriented** to where you are and who you're with right now ... and doing a Personal Stress and Control **Self-check**. Everyone do this for just a moment. [Use Pleasant activity sheet to refocus group on self-soothing and off of triggering situation. Discuss which options they would use of this sheet if they knew they were triggered or if they new they were going into a triggering situation such going home when you you're your parents will be fighting over bills]

There are no perfect solutions for extreme triggered reactions, but using the **focusing** and **recognizing triggers** skills can help you start on the right foot, and they help your brain turn down its alarm signals too. Just recognizing that you are triggered or may be triggered by something will help you respond differently in the situation.

Any questions or comments about the 2<sup>nd</sup> step to FREEDOM?

### **Continuing Your Personal Lifeline**

Now let's shift gears and go back to working on your personal **lifelines**.

[Give members their **lifelines**. Provide colored marker pens, scissors, glue, and photo magazines.]

Since we have been talking about thoughts today, you might want to add pictures or words that are your non-verbal representation of your thoughts.

You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you.

So, everyone find a comfortable space to work on your life line, and start putting pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. There is no right or wrong way, just whatever you feel is a good way to put your memories onto your lifeline. We'll do this for 15 minutes.

[Help each individual to find a good workspace with sufficient privacy. Help each individual begin to fill in their Life Line with drawings and photographs that appeal to them creatively, with no attempt to judge or direct what they choose. If a participant seems blocked, it helps to engage her/him nondirectively by looking through magazine photos/drawings together.]

[After 15 minutes, ask participants to begin to wrap up for this session, letting them know that you will keep their life lines safely and privately so that they can work on them again in many group meetings over the next several weeks – this is a “work in progress.”]

### **Conclusion:**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your focusing skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What is each of your STRESS, Urge, and Control ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

## Using the SOS and Recognizing Triggers to Be Safe

### Session 5



#### SESSION 5 Agenda Overview

Recognizing Safety and Support is needed for FREEDOM

Personal Lifeline

Handouts

### LEADER'S LESSON – Safety and Support for FREEDOM

This session was added to TARGET specifically for kids in dangerous living environments. This session gives a chance to recap or catch on all the information covered so far. This session will also focusing getting the group members to identify their support network and their personal safety plans. If the session is needed to review or catch up on other materials the safety and support handouts can be given as homework and reviewed at the beginning of the next session.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 5

1. When life is not safe, it helps to find or make safe places with safe people wherever you can.
2. If your alarm reaction makes you feel that you can't trust or count on anyone, use the SOS to focus on just one person who you like and feel safe with, even if you can't be with that person right now
3. If you don't feel safe, it helps to recognize a few KEY TRIGGERS and plan how to deal with them.

### Session Script

This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.

### Psychoeducation

Often when we experience difficult life events we are left feeling like we have to deal with the related feelings or emotions on our own. Today's group is to help us recognize that we are not alone and that there are people that can support us with our past difficult live experiences as well as future difficult life experiences. Each of these handouts is going to help us think about who we have in our life to support us and what skills we have ourselves that help us to help ourselves during hard times. One of the exercises involves writing about a safe place. This can be a place you have been that you feel good in are a place you would like to go or a place you imagined. It is important to think about safe places and support people

especially if we have experienced situations in our life that have made us feel unsafe. Sometimes when can generalize those experiences to assume that no place is safe and there is no support. This session will help us deal with those kind of thoughts.

Before we start on these handouts does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session?

[Briefly point to each handout from last session and summarize the main points.]

Review Handouts from this session with the group and have them complete each of the handouts. Discuss with group the handouts once they are completed. Indicate that it is sometimes difficult to remember who your all of you support people are and who people you can turn to in times of stress are therefore it is important to take time out when you are not under stress and reflect on who it is you might contact when in need of support. Encourage group members to take sheets with them and store them in a place that they will have easy access to in times of stress.

### **Continuing Your Personal Lifeline**

Now let's shift gears and go back to working on your personal **lifelines**.

[Give members their **lifelines**. Provide colored marker pens, scissors, glue, and photo magazines.]

Since we have been talking about thoughts today, you might want to add pictures or words that are your non-verbal representation of your thoughts.

You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you.

So, everyone find a comfortable space to work on your life line, and start putting pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. There is no right or wrong way, just whatever you feel is a good way to put your memories onto your lifeline. We'll do this for 15 minutes.

[Help each individual to find a good workspace with sufficient privacy. Help each individual begin to fill in their Life Line with drawings and photographs that appeal to them creatively, with no attempt to judge or direct what they choose. If a participant seems blocked, it helps to engage her/him nondirectively by looking through magazine photos/drawings together.]

[After 15 minutes, ask participants to begin to wrap up for this session, letting them know that you will keep their life lines safely and privately so that they can work on them again in many group meetings over the next several weeks – this is a “work in progress.”]

### **Conclusion:**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What is each of your STRESS, Urge, and Control ratings right now?

[Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

## The 3<sup>rd</sup> Step to FREEDOM: Emotion Awareness

### Session 6, Step 3



<b>SESSION 6 Step 3 Agenda Overview</b>
Recognizing First Reactions as Early Warning Signs
Identifying Core Emotions
Introduction of Personal Practice Exercise Steps 1-3
Beginning the Personal Lifeline (Materials needed; tape, blunt end scissors, markers, magazines, newsprint/flop chart paper)
Handouts

### LEADER LESSON: MAIN EMOTIONS

Emotions are both reactive—“early warning signs” of a stress reaction—and deeper personal experiences—“MAIN emotions.” Although it can help to be able to identify and label specific emotions, the most important aspect of emotion regulation is to be able to identify and distinguish between reactive and “main” emotions. This takes clear thinking, and does not require any particular final “result”—any emotion can be the “MAIN” emotion, but it is the shift from just reacting to calmly focusing on one or two “MAIN” emotions that tends to be soothing and grounding for kids (and adults) when they’re stressed.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 6

1. Emotions come in two types: Reactive and MAIN
2. Reactive emotions are “early warning signals” of an extreme stress reaction – if you catch them early and don’t let them control your thinking and behavior, you’re in control
3. MAIN emotions are the feelings that tell what you really care about – if you focus on one or two MAIN emotions you’re in control and taking care of yourself

### Session Script

*This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.*

The goal of this session is to introduce you to the 3<sup>rd</sup> step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Emotion Awareness. We'll look at how focusing on 1 or 2 specific emotions can help your brain turn down the PTSD survival alarms and become more organized, even if the emotions are unpleasant.

Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session?

[Briefly point to each handout from last session and summarize the main points.]

Let's begin today's session with the first step, the **Focusing** skills—**SOS**—that we have been practicing each week. Take a moment right now and slow down your body and mind ... get yourself oriented by sitting comfortably and just paying attention to the room we're in, the people, and why you're here ... and do a self-check using the Stress, Personal Control and Urge to Use MCS ratings. [Help client(s) make the ratings and share their ratings. Record each client's ratings in a Group Log that you keep. Point out to client the self-check log Participant Handout page – which they may use for themselves.]

### **Emotion Awareness and Recognizing Warning Signs**

Today we move from Recognizing Triggers to the **early warning signs** that you're triggered—emotions. Emotions are feelings like happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. But there are many other emotions, and every emotion comes in different varieties. For example, the emotion of anger may feel like frustration, annoyance, resentment, being irritable, or feeling intense rage. Each of us has many different emotions.

- For our focusing exercise today we labeled some emotions. Refer to labels on face sheet to identify positive and negative emotions

Now let's talk about the kinds of emotions that tell you that something may be triggering a stress go on non-stop while the brain's organizing center is getting short-circuited. So what you need is to slow down the flood of emotions to your brain and help your brain get re-organized.

This step involves recognizing a small number of basic emotions so you can select the key ones that are most important to you each time you're triggered. Like instead of feeling overwhelmed and confused (which are vague feelings), to be able to zero-in on specific feelings like scared or sad or excited.

Review handout– **Emotion Awareness/First Reactions/Underlying Emotions** you'll find a list of the kind of first reactions that are possible early warning signals that you are experiencing a stress trigger and potentially in the short loop. Sometimes you'll have these feelings simply because life is stressful. In that case you'll know because the feeling will pass before long and you'll be able to get back on the right track and move on without any lasting problem.

When an extreme stress reaction is happening, these normally short-lived feelings just won't let go, like a nagging cough or cold that you just can't seem to shake off. The unfinished emotional business of stress—the brain's alarm system not turning off—can make stress reactions keep going and get worse, so that the more you try to ignore or get rid of the stress reactions by using a maladaptive coping strategy - the worse they get.

The best solution to dealing with nagging stress reactions is to help your brain deal with the unfinished emotions. To do this, you have to take the vague negative feelings that often are the first reaction—like feeling confused, overwhelmed, shocked, or emotionally shutdown—and find an **underlying emotion** that best evaluates what you're truly feeling.

Why is this so hard to do? Partly because most of us aren't used to just calmly recognizing emotions and we may not even have learned the simple names that describe our basic emotions. But the main reason is that when your brain is not functioning normally because the alarm signal is such an interference that your brain's organizing center can't zero-in on one clear emotion.

Being aware of your emotions does NOT mean getting over-emotional or sharing all your emotions or confronting people with your emotions. Quite the opposite. It means sorting out the many feelings you are having. The best way to do this is just like what you do to recognize triggers –zero-in on 1 or 2 main emotions, instead of getting lost in a flood of dozens of vague feelings.

## **Recognizing Core Emotions**

Let's start by looking at how you can deal with some nagging negative feelings that are signs of being triggered. [Refer participants to handout **Recognizing Core Emotions**. Review each Early Warning Sign of Feeling Stressed and the immediate Surface Feeling(s) that can occur.

<b>Teaching Example Recognizing Core Emotions</b>
This handout is used to demonstrate how emotions can escalate if they are not attended to in the early stages. In the left column are the core positive emotions we all want to have access to – feelings like confidence and hopefulness. If we pay attention to the early warning signs (second column from the left) we have more access to the core positive emotions. If we wait until stage two we have less access and if we wait until stage three (TRAPPED) it is more difficult to access the core positive emotions.

In each of these situations, it's important to recognize the Early Warning Signs of feeling stressed so that you can prevent the Surface Feelings from building up and becoming an emotional explosion or meltdown.

Emotion Awareness is an important step to help your brain safely and effectively deal with some of the unfinished emotional business from this experience. Evaluate what is the single most important feeling of this experience? By sorting through the vague, reactive emotions to discover the one main, underlying emotion we are able to label our feelings related to this event, which helps to categorize it and allow it to be store away in our brain. Unfinished emotional business from past stressful event may not be labeled and categorized in this way making it hard for your brain to store it away.

## **Continuing Your Personal Lifeline**

Now let's shift gears and go back to working on your personal **lifelines**.

[Give members their **lifelines**. Provide colored marker pens, scissors, glue, and photo magazines.]

Since we have been talking about thoughts today, you might want to add pictures or words that are your non-verbal representation of your thoughts.

You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you.

So, everyone find a comfortable space to work on your life line, and start putting pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. There is no right or wrong way, just whatever you feel is a good way to put your memories onto your lifeline. We'll do this for 15 minutes.

[Help each individual to find a good workspace with sufficient privacy. Help each individual begin to fill in their Life Line with drawings and photographs that appeal to them creatively, with no attempt to judge or direct what they choose. If a participant seems blocked, it helps to engage her/him nondirectively by looking through magazine photos/drawings together.]

[After 15 minutes, ask participants to begin to wrap up for this session, letting them know that you will keep their life lines safely and privately so that they can work on them again in many group meetings over the next several weeks – this is a “work in progress.”]

### **Conclusion:**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What is each of your STRESS, Urge, and Control ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

## The 4<sup>th</sup> Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Evaluate Thoughts

### Session 7, Step 4



SESSION 7 - Step 4 Agenda Overview
Silent Alarm
Recognizing Shut Down Thought Patterns
Reactive v. Main Thoughts
Continuing the Personal Lifeline
Handouts

### LEADER LESSON: EVALUATE MAIN THOUGHTS

Thoughts, like emotions, are both reactive—“early warning signs” of a stress reaction—and also based on what a person really thinks and believes—“MAIN thoughts.” Although it can help to be able to identify and test specific thoughts, the most important aspect of clear thinking is to be able to identify and distinguish between reactive and “main” thoughts. Separating reactive thoughts from main thoughts helps a person think clearly, and does not require any particular final “result”—any thought can be the “MAIN” thought, but it is the shift from just reacting to calmly focusing on one or two “MAIN” thoughts that tends to be soothing and grounding for kids (and adults) when they’re stressed.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 7

- 1 Thoughts come in two types: Reactive and MAIN
- 2 Reactive thoughts are “early warning signals” of an extreme stress reaction – if you catch them early and don’t let them control your thinking and behavior, you’re in control
- 3 MAIN thoughts are what you REALLY believe and care about – if you focus on one or two MAIN thoughts you’re in control and thinking clearly enough to accomplish your goals.

### Session Script

*This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.*

In this session, we'll introduce you to the 4<sup>th</sup> step to FREEDOM from PTSD: **Evaluating Thoughts**.

We'll look at how focusing in on 1 or 2 specific thoughts can help your brain turn down the PTSD survival alarms and get better organized, even if the thoughts are negative.

We will also give you an opportunity to add important experiences that have shaped your basic beliefs about yourself and life to your personal **Lifeline**.

- Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? [Briefly point to each handout from last session and summarize the main points.]
- Or did anyone use the skills even if they did not write them down?

### **4th Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Evaluate Thoughts**

The 4th FREEDOM skill is **Evaluate** thoughts. When trauma or extreme stress strike, it's impossible to sort out all the complicated thoughts that go through your mind because it all happens too fast or you're so focused on just surviving that your brain can't register every important thought. Remember how hard it is to think clearly if a fire alarm is blaring, well that's what it's like when your brain's alarm signal is going non-stop to help you survive trauma.

Unfortunately, if the alarm won't turn off afterwards, you're left with PTSD. This means you still aren't thinking as clearly as you are able to, because the brain's alarms are interfering. Even when you don't feel stressed-out, your brain still hasn't regrouped completely because too much of its energy is being used up by a "silent" alarm that even you don't always know is going off. This is when you are always feeling on guard and unsafe and alert.

While this alarm is on you are flooded with too many thoughts to really sort out, and as a result stuck with very negative, hopeless, angry thoughts that really are just an expression of feeling frustrated because you can't turn down the alarm system in your brain! It may seem like life is constantly causing you problems—and that may partly be true—but the real problem is the interference in your thoughts that this constant alarm is causing.

The thoughts that get through the alarm are too extreme and too hopeless to reflect your true needs and beliefs. These extreme reactive thoughts are your mind's attempt to just shut down, kind of like trying to just hold your hands over your ears and making all kinds of noise to drown out an annoying fire alarm. Are these "shut down" thoughts familiar to you? [Refer participants to handout - **Recognizing "Shut Down" Thought Patterns**.]

To help your brain shift some of its resources to organizing and thinking clearly again, you need to pick out just 1 or 2 main thoughts that really capture what's important to you **right then**.

Review Handout - **Evaluating Main Thoughts/First Reactions/Main Thoughts** you'll find a list of the kinds of "First Reactions" that people often have when feeling triggered and TRAPPED/extreme stress. Are these familiar thoughts?

The problem with these first thoughts is that they are so extreme and negative that they tell your brain that there's still a terrible problem and that keeps the brain's alarm signal blaring! These first thoughts also are so vague and general that they keep your mind in a state of disorganization.

The list of "Main Thoughts" might not be exactly what you are really thinking, but they give you examples of thoughts that are not affected by unfinished emotions.

Remember, in many cases it's not what happens to you, but how you interpret it in your thoughts, that reinforce either positive emotions (feeling confident, interested, or happy) or negative emotions (feeling TRAPPED.)

Instead of being preoccupied with thinking that you're going to die or give up or blow up with anger, this step gives you the ability to focus on a clear simple thought such as "I want to make my life safe now." This cuts through the alarm signals and helps your brain start to re-group.

### **Continuing Your Personal Lifeline**

Now let's shift gears and go back to working on your personal **lifelines**.

[Give members their **lifelines**. Provide colored marker pens, scissors, glue, and photo magazines.]

Since we have been talking about thoughts today, you might want to add pictures or words that are your non-verbal representation of your thoughts.

You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you.

So, everyone find a comfortable space to work on your life line, and start putting pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. There is no right or wrong way, just whatever you feel is a good way to put your memories onto your lifeline. We'll do this for 15 minutes.

[Help each individual to find a good workspace with sufficient privacy. Help each individual begin to fill in their Life Line with drawings and photographs that appeal to them creatively, with no attempt to judge or direct what they choose. If a participant seems blocked, it helps to engage her/him nondirectively by looking through magazine photos/drawings together.]

[After 15 minutes, ask participants to begin to wrap up for this session, letting them know that you will keep their life lines safely and privately so that they can work on them again in many group meetings over the next several weeks – this is a "work in progress."]

### **Conclusion:**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What is each of your STRESS, Urge, and Control ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Defining Your Main Goal

### Session 8, Step 5



<b>SESSION 8 Step 5 Agenda Overview</b>
Recognizing Survival Goals v. Main Goals
Defining Goals
Continuing Personal Lifeline
Handouts

### LEADER LESSON: MAIN EMOTIONS

Emotions are both reactive—“early warning signs” of a stress reaction—and deeper personal experiences—“MAIN emotions.” Although it can help to be able to identify and label specific emotions, the most important aspect of emotion regulation is to be able to identify and distinguish between reactive and “main” emotions. This takes clear thinking, and does not require any particular final “result”—any emotion can be the “MAIN” emotion, but it is the shift from just reacting to calmly focusing on one or two “MAIN” emotions that tends to be soothing and grounding for kids (and adults) when they’re stressed.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 8

- 1 Goals come in two types: Reactive and MAIN
- 2 Reactive goals are “early warning signals” of an extreme stress reaction – if you catch them early and don’t let them control your choices and behavior, you’re in control
- 3 MAIN goals are what you want in life, the things that are really important to you – if you focus on one or two MAIN goals you’re in control and you can achieve those goals successfully

### Session Script

*This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.*

## Psychoeducation

In this session, we'll introduce you to the next step to FREEDOM from PTSD: **Define Goals**. This may seem obvious, but think of all the times when you've felt so stressed or pressured that you haven't felt able (or even remembered) to step back and ask yourself, "What do I really **want** in this situation?" On a larger scale, "What do I really want from life?"

We'll look at how honing in on 1 or 2 goals can help your brain turn down the PTSD survival alarm and get better organized, even if things didn't work out as you had hoped.

Personal goals are essential because if you don't know what you're aiming for in life you'll never hit the target. They are important because your brain will not turn down the alarm signal as long as you're just operating in survival mode and putting aside your goals to just try to get through each day. True, you can't always pay attention to your personal goals, because there are many times in life when we have to do whatever has to be done just to get through situations. However, if you don't take time to get your main goal clear in your mind, your brain never stops the alarm signals.

- Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? [Briefly point to each handout from last session and summarize the main points.]
- Did anyone use the skills even if they did not write them down?

### Next Steps to FREEDOM from PTSD: Define Goals

The 5<sup>th</sup> FREEDOM skill is **Define Goals**.

Review handout- **Defining Goals/Survival Goals vs. Main Goals** you'll find a list of the "Survival Goals" that often fill up our days and lives. Are these familiar goals? Do they help you make your life a good life?

The problem with survival goals is that they tell your brain that you're still facing a threat to your survival, and this keeps your brain's alarm signal blaring! They're also so vague and general that they keep your mind in a state of disorganization.

If PTSD keeps your brain's alarm signal going non-stop, the only need and goal is survival. Survival is not the only need or goal that is important, it's just the beginning.

If you can't move on from survival to meeting other needs and goals, then not only is your life unsatisfying and limited but you never recover from PTSD because your brain can never stop its survival alarms!

As with the previous FREEDOM steps, it's essential to define only 1 or 2 **specific** high priority goals in each situation. If you can define just 1 or 2 **really important** goals at-a-time, you'll feel more in control and more successful even if you can't always achieve those goals completely.

What are the most important needs and goals for a full life that's really worth living? [Refer to handout

**Define Your Goals.]** Here's a list of key needs and goals that people have shared. What would you add or change in this list – what are the **main** goals that are important to you?

<b>Teaching Example Immediate/Life Goals</b>
This might be a good time in the session to discuss and brain storm the difference between immediate goals and life goals. Have kids come up with some examples of immediate goals will have them see how what they do each day makes a difference.

## **Continuing Your Personal Lifeline**

Now let's shift gears and go back to working on your personal **lifelines**.

[Give members their **lifelines**. Provide colored marker pens, scissors, glue, and photo magazines.]

In addition to anything else that you want to add to your **lifeline**, today think about what you can add that shows the goals you have achieved in the past and what you would like to achieve in the future.

So, everyone find a comfortable space to work on your life line, and start putting pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. There is no right or wrong way, just whatever you feel is a good way to put your memories onto your lifeline. We'll do this for 15 minutes.

[Help each individual to find a good workspace with sufficient privacy. Help each individual begin to fill in their Life Line with drawings and photographs that appeal to them creatively, with no attempt to judge or direct what they choose. If a participant seems blocked, it helps to engage her/him nondirectively by looking through magazine photos/drawings together.]

[After 15 minutes, ask participants to begin to wrap up for this session, letting them know that you will keep their lifelines safely and privately so that they can work on them again in our group meeting next week – this is a “work in progress.”]

## **Conclusion:**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What are each of your Stress, Urge to use MCS, and Control ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

## The 6<sup>th</sup> Step to FREEDOM: Options

### Session 9, Step 6



<b>SESSION 9 Step 5 Agenda Overview</b>
Recognizing choices-Options- as small steps to improve life
Identifying options used even in the worst situations
Continuing the Personal Lifeline
Handouts

### LEADER LESSON: OPTIONS

“Options” are the choices we make. In order to make good choices, a youth (or adult) needs to be able to focus on the positive choices they already have made and are using to take small steps toward their MAIN goals. Options--even positive options--are not always the best choices or completely effective in how they are done or in their results, but when compared to maladaptive coping strategies they are **a step in the right direction**. Positive options often are preceded or followed by chaos and maladaptive coping, or may occur right in the middle of maladaptive coping – so the key to working with Options is to help each youth find the small choices (or large) that reflect the youth’s better judgment, a moment of clarity, or a well-intentioned (even if apparently unsuccessful) attempt to use a new way of coping – these are the nuggets of change that are crucial to help kids identify in their own behavior and to acknowledge and get acknowledgement for having done.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 9

- 1 Options are the choices you make – things you **already do** when you’re trying to achieve a goal.
- 2 Positive options are small steps toward your MAIN goals – just the opposite of maladaptive coping strategies because they are choices that show what you really believe in
- 3 Positive options don’t have to be perfect, and they almost always occur at the same time that you’re feeling stressed out and using (or thinking about using) maladaptive coping strategies – so the most important thing with options is to always find one or two positive ones in every situation

*This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.*

## **Psychoeducation**

In this session, we will talk about the next (6<sup>th</sup>) FREEDOM step – **Options**. An “**option**” is a choice you make about what to do in a situation. If you choose an effective option, you’ll meet your needs or goals, at least somewhat. We will also give you an opportunity to finish your personal lifeline.

- Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? [Briefly point to each handout from last session and summarize the main points.]
- Did anyone use the skills even if they did not write them down?

### **6<sup>th</sup> Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Options**

Options are **choices**, and that’s different from what we usually do when stressed or in survival mode, which is just to react without thinking.

We call these **OPTIONS** because they are choices you make which make your life a little better in small steps. When you’re dealing with a stress trigger or some unfinished emotional business in your life now, you will be most successful if you choose a few small **options** that make a real difference in how you feel and in achieving your personal goal.

Actually, every time you deal with a stress trigger or unfinished emotions, you **already are choosing** options that are effective without even recognizing it! So instead of trying to figure out a whole bunch of new choices or new things to do, the best thing you can do is practice paying attention to the options that you’re already choosing!

The best way to see the options that you are choosing now is to look more carefully at situations that involve stress or unfinished emotions. The things to look for are the actions that you take which show your **true values** and **set a positive example for other people or moves you toward your goals**. The best option is something you’re already doing that is effective because it shows what you really believe is right— even if it doesn’t seem to work or isn’t perfect.

- Discuss values that you think are most important and the ways of acting that live up to those values and set a positive example. [Help group members generate a list of values such as, treating each person with respect, telling the truth, protecting people from harm, etc.]

During trauma, and afterwards if PTSD keeps your brain’s alarm signal going non-stop, the only option you tend to notice is what you do automatically just to survive, but there’s always much more that you’re doing, and usually some of what you do is to find the best options in the bad situation.

If you don’t recognize the positive options you’ve chosen, not only is your life unsatisfying and limited but also you never recover from PTSD or extreme stress reactions because your brain can never stop its survival alarms!

As with the previous FREEDOM steps, it's essential to define only 1 or 2 **specific** options that you chose which were your way of making at least a small step to achieve your **main** need or goal.

What are positive options that people choose and then don't give themselves credit for? [Handout - **Options for Being effective as a Person.**] Here's a list of positive options that people have shared. What would you add or change in this list? What are **options** that you've chosen under stress?

In addition to identifying options you already have chosen, there are additional choices or options when faced with a situation. If you turn handout -**Options Framework** you will see that there could be times when you need to Do Something, Do Nothing or Postpone. [Facilitate discussion and examples]

<b>Teaching Example Options</b>
Depending on the group, it might be fun to do a traditional brainstorming exercise at this point. One of the most common ones is to take a simple household or office item, like a paperclip, and brainstorm all the possible uses. By doing this in a group it shows the value of more than one person attempting to solve a problem at the same time demonstrating that there is more than one way to look at a situation.

### Continuing Your Personal Lifeline

Now let's shift gears and go back to working on your personal **lifelines**.

[Give members their **lifelines**. Provide colored marker pens, scissors, glue, and photo magazines.]

In addition to anything else that you want to add to your **lifeline**, today think about what you can add that shows the important **positive options** you've chosen in the past and will choose in the future.

Everyone find a comfortable space to work on your life line, and start putting pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. There is no right or wrong way, just whatever you feel is a good way to put pictures onto your lifeline. We'll do this for 15 minutes.

[Help each individual to find a good workspace with sufficient privacy. Help each individual begin to fill in their Life Line with drawings and photographs that appeal to them creatively, with no attempt to judge or direct what they choose. If a participant seems blocked, it helps to engage her/him nondirectively by looking through magazine photos/drawings together.]

[After 15 minutes, ask participants to begin to wrap up for this session, letting them know that you will keep their lifelines safely and privately.]

### Conclusion:

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What are each of your Stress, Urge to use MCS, and Control ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

## The Final Step to FREEDOM: Make a Contribution

### Session 10, Step 7



SESSION 10 Step 7 Agenda Overview
Making a contribution is the moral and spiritual aspect of life
The best reward is to recognize the ways in which you already are making a positive contributions to people and to the world
Prepare for graduation next session, asking for permission to invite other key people to the graduation portion of the session
Handouts

### LEADER'S LESSON –Making a Contribution

Trauma and PTSD can cause survivors to question what life is all about, and why it's worth it to be alive. Further, trauma and PTSD can make anyone question whether anyone, including yourself, can be trusted to do what's right and good. So one of the hardest things for most trauma survivors to do is to **recognize** how they actually **are** doing the right thing and **making the world a better place**. The contributions made to yourself and others –that's what makes it possible to put bad memories to rest.

### KEY POINTS FOR SESSION 10

- 1 The best reward in life is to know you've done something that makes a contribution – that you've made someone else's life better or made the world a better place, even in small ways
- 2 Paying attention to how you make a contribution will not make you get a swelled head or think you're better than other people – it helps you know that you really are a good person
- 3 When you're stressed out, it's easy to overlook the options you chose that make a contribution -- that's important to do afterwards so that you focus on what's good about yourself and motivate yourself to do more good things that make a contribution

### Session Script

*This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.*

## Psychoeducation

In this session, we'll introduce you to the last step to FREEDOM from PTSD: **Making a contribution**. What's important here is to be able to look back at what you actually did in a stressful experience when you were feeling the TRAPPED feelings, and see how you actually made a positive difference even if you couldn't make everything work out right.

Sometimes experiencing extreme stressors in life leave you feeling negative about yourself and what you have to offer people. This group is to help you understand how you make a difference and a contribution in everything you do. The skill is to recognize the ways in which you already **Make a Contribution** by the options you choose. That's what we'll work on today.

Recognizing the positive contributions you've made can help your brain turn down the PTSD survival alarms and get better organized, even if things didn't work out as you had hoped. And then we'll take the rest of our group time today to review and practice all 7 of the FREEDOM skills you have learned.

- Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? [Briefly point to each handout from last session and summarize the main points.]
- Did anyone use the skills even if they did not write them down?

### Final Step to Freedom from PTSD: Making a Positive Contribution

Today brings us to the 7<sup>th</sup> FREEDOM skill, **Make a Contribution** by doing things that make the world a better—that is safer, more honest, fairer, more decent--place for everyone—not just yourself-- to live in.

Trauma and PTSD often make you feel like they don't really matter because life can be so terrible that there is nothing good that you can truly count on. But that is a recipe for depression because it makes life seem hopeless and pointless. The best way to recover from negative experiences is by making the world a better place. Each person does this in her/his own unique way. The key to recovery is NOT trying harder to be a good person or to do good deeds, but to be able to **recognize** the contribution that you're already making in small but significant ways when you use the other FREEDOM skills and choose healthy options that make small positive changes happen.

Many trauma survivors have difficulty giving themselves credit for doing good things, even though they can give other people lots of credit for doing good deeds—like for being a good role model by setting a positive example through their action; or for being a caring and supportive friend, family or group member; or, for protecting somebody who is vulnerable or is being hurt or treated unfairly.

<b>Teaching Example Make a Contribution</b>
<p>This is one of the harder steps for many kids. They find it difficult to see how some of the little things they may do makes the world or someone's life a bit better. We try to observe and remember things that clients do throughout the course of the group that were helpful so that we can use specific examples for each member.</p>

Why is it hard to give yourself credit **fairly** for the positive contributions that you are making to the people you care about and to the world? It's because of unfinished emotional business, in the form of thoughts that make you give up on yourself—like: "I don't deserve credit for doing anything good because I've done so many bad things" or "No one ever gave me credit or showed me appreciation for good things I did, so I don't know how to do this for myself" or "I'm scared that if I give myself credit I'll screw up and then I'll feel even worse."

These are some reasons to feel blocked about recognizing the value of the things you do, but NOT to just give up and let yourself continue to treat yourself unfairly when you deserve fair credit. And we're not talking about flattering or patting yourself on the back for every small thing you do—but about treating yourself with the same respect you'd show to anyone else, and **paying attention** to the small good things that you do which are your way of setting a positive example.

This may seem like a lot to do, and it is at first. However, the 7 FREEDOM skills actually work so well together that once you get the hang of using them as a 7-step sequence, they can become almost automatic. This takes careful study and dedicated practice at first, like any worthwhile skill.

- What are the contributions that you've made when under stress that makes this a better world? [Refer to handout **-Making the World a Better Place.**] Here's a list of contributions that people have shared. What would you add or change in this list – what contributions have you made under Stress in the past?

### **Group Exercise: Practicing the FREEDOM Skills**

Now we'll take the rest of this session and the first half of our final session next week to practice the 7 FREEDOM steps together. As we do this, we'll look at how it can help if you add making a positive contribution to the first 6 FREEDOM steps. We'll use the **Personal Practice Exercise** handout to do this.

Remember the 7 FREEDOM steps are designed to help you manage reactions to triggers and Stressors in your life right now. It's also important to remember that the FREEDOM skills mainly are a way to help your brain get reorganized. People often find that the FREEDOM skills are helpful for coping with immediate Stressful challenges, because they give you a thoughtful and efficient way to rapidly respond.

If you practice the FREEDOM skills as a way to safely and effectively re-play recent stressful experiences, you are preparing your brain (and body) to handle future stressful challenges in two ways:

1<sup>st</sup> you're helping your brain to turn down its alarm system and get its organizing center working again, so you don't have as much unfinished emotional business triggered in future situations;

2<sup>nd</sup> even if you still experience a lot of unfinished emotional business in a trigger situation (because it's not possible to eliminate all of these emotions), you can use the FREEDOM skills as a way to deal with that left over unfinished emotional business right at that moment so that your brain, body, and mind will have more strength and capacity available to deal with the immediate Stressor effectively.

It's like adding a very efficient software program to your computer so that your hard drive can operate more efficiently even if it needs to do a very large and draining operation!

## **Continuing Your Personal Lifeline**

Now let's shift gears and go back to working on your personal **lifelines**. Today is the last time we will be working on your lifelines. If you would like to bring this home to continue working on it, you may do so, but don't forget to bring them back next time for graduation!

[Give members their **lifelines**. Provide colored marker pens, scissors, glue, and photo magazines.]

In addition to anything else that you want to add to your **lifeline**, today think about ways you have made a contribution during your life, including the present.

So, everyone find a comfortable space to work on your life line, and start putting pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. There is no right or wrong way, just whatever you feel is a good way to put pictures onto your lifeline. We'll do this for 15 minutes.

[Help each individual to find a good workspace with sufficient privacy. Help each individual begin to fill in their Life Line with drawings and photographs that appeal to them creatively, with no attempt to judge or direct what they choose. If a participant seems blocked, it helps to engage her/him nondirectively by looking through magazine photos/drawings together.]

[After 15 minutes, ask participants to begin to wrap up for this session, letting them know that you will keep their lifelines safely and privately.]

## **Conclusion**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What are each of your Stress, Control and Urge to use MCS ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

Finally, please remember that the next session is our final group session. Next week, we'll take some more time to practice the 7 FREEDOM skills. And we'll share appreciation for each member's contribution to this group. Let's look at the **Preparation for Graduation** handout together. [If facilitators or group members would like to invite other people to attend the awarding of certificates in the next session, discuss who should be invited with the entire group.]

# Graduation



<b>Graduation Agenda Overview</b>
Personal Practice Steps 1-7
Invite agency staff to join graduation portion of the session
Each member shares about accomplishments, what they appreciate from the other group members and how they plan to use their skills
Group leaders summarize each member's accomplishments
Sharing of lifelines
Awarding of Certificates
Handouts

## **LEADER'S LESSON – Graduation**

Graduation is a special time for both clients and group leaders. The only limits on what you can do during this last session are the limits of your own creativity, time and budget, and of course the privacy and safety of the participants. Most groups have some type of food – this ranges from a snack to a potluck meal. Some groups have given each member a flower or an angel stone or a key chain with laminated FREEDOM or SOS letters. Inviting adults to witness the presentation of the certificates can be meaningful; although if parents are invited it is important to help kids whose parents don't attend to feel that adults care about and value them. You may want to schedule some extra time for this session.

## **KEY POINTS FOR GRADUATION**

- 1 Each youth has made a contribution by participating in group and choosing options in each session that have helped not only her/him but other group members take steps toward their MAIN goals
- 2 Every time the participants, or facilitators, take a moment and do an SOS to focus their mind, they are taking positive control in their life even if it seems like they haven't done anything special
- 3 Keep reminders of the SOS and the FREEDOM steps every place that you can – posters, wallet or purse cards, key chains, t-shirts, water mugs – and use the steps every day

## **Session Script**

*This is not a prescription for how you must teach the session, but a way to offer ideas on how to approach the concepts with clients. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching and processing, using the creative and therapeutic skills you already possess. Consider these scripts as a guide only.*

### **Psychoeducation**

In this closing session, we'll take the first part of our group time to continue reviewing and practicing all 7 of the FREEDOM skills you have learned. Then we'll celebrate your completion of this group by sharing your personal **Lifelines** and taking a few moments to share our appreciation with one another for what each of you has contributed to this group.

- Does anyone have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? [Briefly point to each handout from last session and summarize the main points.]
- Did anyone use the skills even if they did not write them down?

### **Group Exercise: Practicing the FREEDOM Skills**

Now let's take some time to continue practicing the 7 FREEDOM skills together. The more you practice these FREEDOM steps, the easier it will become to use them if you're stressed. We'll use the **Personal Practice Exercise** method.

If you practice the FREEDOM skills as a way to safely and effectively re-play recent stressful experiences, you are preparing your brain (and body) to handle future stressful challenges. It's like adding a very efficient software program to your computer so that your hard drive can operate more efficiently even if it needs to do a very large and draining operation!

### **Graduation and Closure**

Now we want to bring this group to closure in the same way, giving each of you a chance to share your thoughts about having participated in the group and about how you'll continue what you've worked so hard to start building by learning new ways of understanding and new skills for enhancing your life.

Although it can be embarrassing, we want to give each of you the opportunity to be in the spotlight now, to honor and celebrate your personal accomplishments in this group. We, your group leaders, will call on each of you, one-at-a-time, to say a few words about what you've accomplished, what you appreciate from the group and your co-members, and what you plan to do to build the skills and live the values that make a difference in your life. You can share your **Lifeline** as a way of showing what you've been through and what you've learned, if you'd like. Then one of us group leaders will say a few words to recognize the achievements that we've seen you make, and we'll open it up for other group members to briefly say anything they'd like to evaluate appreciation for what you've meant to them.

[Go around the group in an order that you've pre-determined, in order to:

1. Start with strong role model(s) who can set a positive tone and example
2. Help anxious members complete their statements without a long wait
3. End with strong role model(s) who can conclude the ceremony on a positive note.]

[Group leaders divide up responsibility for assisting each group member in making their personal

statement and sharing their **Lifeline**, and then make a brief—1 minute—acknowledgement of each member's accomplishments and contribution to the group and the other members. Present each member with a certificate of graduation, and then help her/him to make a personal statement.]

[Help each member and the group to contain their statements to 2-3 minutes per member.]

[Group leaders each make a brief closing summary highlighting the group's accomplishments and the positive plans members have for continuing to use and develop the skills learned in the group.]

[Group leaders invite the group to take turns reading out loud portions of the **Commitment to Recovery statement**.]

## Preventing and Handling Crises

### 1. Taking the “T” (Terror) Out of Trauma

The use of the term “trauma” often causes anxiety for youths, parents, and providers because it is associated with experiences that were terrifying at the time and that can seem terrifying to recall (for example, “When I start thinking about the abuse, I go to pieces or I become enraged.”)

Traumatic experiences are terrifying because the person does not understand what happened in her or his body and emotions at the time. The body’s survival reactions are incredibly strong, and when they occur the person experiences an “altered state of consciousness” that feels shockingly different from the way the person is used to feeling. For example, trauma survivors often describe their survival reactions as: “I didn’t know I could feel that scared/paralyzed/angry, it was like I was a completely different person,” or “I spaced/blanked out—I was there physically but it was like I was outside my body watching it happen to someone else; or I remember everything that happened all too clearly, but I felt nothing in my body or emotionally, like I was numb or dead.”

The best way to make trauma less terrifying *now* is to help people understand that these **survival reactions are healthy under the circumstances**, despite the fact that they **do not feel “normal”** when they first occur because they are such a major change in how the body is operating – like taking a car that is driving along smoothly at 40 miles an hour and then suddenly changing to alternating rapidly between accelerating to 120 miles an hour and slamming on the brakes to stop instantly. The body’s survival reaction has elements of both extreme acceleration (for example, the heart pounding, head spinning, and feeling as if you have to do something instantly or else you or someone else will die) and braking (for example, the mind going blank, feeling paralyzed and numb, and feeling as if time slows down or speeds up drastically). In TARGET, this is explained by teaching about the **brain and body’s alarm system**: trauma causes the brain and body to turn on an automatic alarm that feels terrifying but actually enables the person to survive.

Trauma does not always lead to lasting problems like PTSD, but it **always changes the brain and body’s alarm system**. The change is that the **alarm system becomes more easily triggered by a wide range of stressors** than it was before the person’s survival was threatened. Our brains appear to be hardwired to pay very close attention to threats to our survival, so that once survival has been threatened the brain is extremely alert to the possibility of further survival threats. This is not a problem if the brain is able to re-set its alarm so that only major threats trigger a reaction, but this “re-setting of the alarm” often does not occur automatically. This is like a house or fire alarm that has been activated and needs to be “re-programmed” so that it doesn’t keep signaling that an intruder is in the house or a fire is occurring. The best way to re-set the brain’s alarm is to think in ways that enable the brain to resume its normal operations – **using the mind to re-set the alarm**.

So, the key to taking the terror out of trauma is knowing how to think in ways that enable the brain to turn off (or re-set) its alarm system. When the brain’s alarm is no longer being triggered by minor stressors in current life, then the person can feel safe enough to start once again to feel, act, and interact in ways that are normal for her or him. The FREEDOM skills are designed to harness the power of the mind in order to re-set the brain’s alarm. Just knowing that the lasting terror caused by trauma actually is a reversible change in a healthy system of the brain, can make trauma much less terrifying to deal with – as long as the traumatic events actually are no longer happening.

## 2. Helping Youths Deal with Crises and Manage Emotional Flooding

Youths often experience personal crises in their daily lives, because even under the best of circumstances their lives are stressful and their bodies and brains are rapidly changing.

What can change these normal stress reactions into a crisis is if the youth becomes emotionally flooded (for example, panic-stricken, agitated and confused, enraged and aggressive). Sometimes being emotionally flooded takes the opposite form, where the youth appears completely shut-down because the emotional flooding overwhelms the youth's ability to deal with emotions (for example, severe depression, spacing out and "dissociating," or becoming withdrawn and uncommunicative).

Youths who have experienced trauma are more likely to become emotionally flooded than youths who are fortunate enough not to have experienced trauma – simply because trauma makes the brain's alarm system highly reactive, so that apparently minor stressors trigger major reactivity. Of course, youths who have not experienced trauma also can become emotionally flooded too, so the steps recommended below are applicable to **any youth who is emotionally flooded**, regardless of whether that youth has had, or is known to have had, traumatic experiences.

- a) Calmly keep talking directly to the youth; use your voice to communicate concern and confidence.
- b) Occasionally gently offer a reminder that "we'll get through this together" and "what we're doing now is figuring out how to make this safe for you and how to help you get back your focus."
- c) Occasionally pause to give the youth a chance to re-group, but don't let long silences drag on.
- d) Help the youth to regain the ability to think more clearly and feel normal, using the **SOS** skills:

**Slow down:** "let's see if we can help your body and emotions begin to slow down just a little, so that you can figure out what you need in order to make things better right now."

**Orient:** Paying attention to the physical feelings in different parts of the body ("focus on paying attention to how your legs or back feel sitting in the chair, or on allowing your body to relax the tension you're feeling in your shoulders or neck, or your stomach")

Paced breathing ("focus on the healthy rhythm of your breathing, as you breathe in healthy oxygen with each breath and as you exhale stress with each breath")

Shifting attention from inner memories to current environment (e.g., "Notice what you can see when you look around the room. And if you find yourself having trouble seeing this room, just allow your sight to return here as you can.").

Gentle reminders of who you are, who other persons present are, and where you all are now ("if you can, pay attention for a moment to the other people who are here, and remember that we're here because each of us has a commitment to making things better in our lives and to support one another in being safe and succeeding").

**Self Check:** Use Stress Thermometer and Personal Control ratings to help the youth to do a self-check rating – if the youth gives an off-scale rating (e.g., 100), help her/him decide if this is the worst ever and if not to select a high rating within the 1-10 range that can reduce anxiety by more accurately reflecting her/his current state.

e) Use any or all of the remaining FREEDOM steps to help the youth shift from being in reactive “survival mode” to thinking more clearly, feeling safer and more hopeful, and having more control. (Note that these steps do **not** have to be used in any pre-set order or all used in the same situation; instead, the FREEDOM steps should be **flexibly deployed** when and if useful for the particular youth/situation):

**R:** Validate the importance and difficulty of dealing with triggers and provide gentle reminders that this can be done safely using the skills being introduced in this education (“you’re feeling really triggered right now, and we can figure out what exactly triggered you and what you need to do—or what you may already be doing—to deal effectively with the situation so that your brain can turn down the alarm you’re feeling now”).

**R:** Help the youth to shift from feeling diffusely upset or preoccupied with an unsolvable problem, to paying attention to her or his current safety and needs by recognizing 1-2 specific triggers that may have set off her/his alarm (“you’re angry that you had your privileges taken away this evening, so let’s figure out exactly what about that was the main trigger for you—maybe something you really wanted to do tonight that now you can’t? or maybe the way the staff person told you that you lost the privileges? Or maybe it was something else specific that we need to figure out to help turn down your alarm”).

**E1:** Help the youth shift from reactive emotional distress to identifying 1-2 primary emotions (“I can see that your alarm reaction is a lot of anger that you’re directing at other people/ yourself. That may be your main emotion right now, but it also may be mainly your brain’s alarm telling you to protect yourself by getting mad. We’ve talked about a lot of other emotions that also can be important, and that can get covered up by anger. Like feeling sad because you really hoped that no one would break a promise again and now that looks like what’s happened. So you may be angry and need to use that anger to figure out what you can do to make this all work out, but you may also feel some sadness and if you don’t pay attention to the sadness it can become a feeling of hopelessness that can prevent you from following-through and figuring this situation out constructively).

**E2:** Draw out, clarify, and summarize 1-2 key thoughts being evaluated (e.g., “You really wanted to get out of that place but you didn’t know how.” “You were doing your best but you couldn’t make it all and you’re not sure if other people know how hard you tried”).

**D:** Summarize 1-2 key goals that may help the youth to re-orient from a reactive stance to a focus on positive goals that s/he has developed for her/himself: (“You were standing up for yourself so that you didn’t get mistreated” “You were trying to protect your friend when you felt she was being treated unfairly or disrespectfully” “You were trying to get prepared for court, so that you would be able to get your life back on track”).

**O:** Validate coping intentions and actions (“You were doing everything you could to protect yourself and your family, and even though that didn’t make it all better it may have made a real difference because you were doing what you believed was right” “You went and talked with a friend after you blew up, and then you came to talk with me—so even though your alarm reaction led you to react with anger, you remembered to get support to help you work things out in a responsible manner”)

**M:** Comment on how the youth’s positive goals and options make a difference in her/his own life and as a role model, inspiration, or support for other people.

### 3. Handling Anger

In most cases anger can be discussed and managed using the approach described above for handling emotional flooding. However, if a youth acts out angrily in a way that is threatening or disrespectful (e.g., criticism, discounting), it is important that the provider/staff set limits by:

**a)** Firmly asserting that physical pushing, hitting, etc. is not permitted.

Challenging assertively (but without escalating the situation) this behavior: "Any kind of threatening or disrespectful behavior is not okay in this group. I need to ask you to slow down and stop yourself right now. You'll need to look at the effect of what you're doing/saying, because this behavior can make a class unsafe not just for other clients but also for you."

Asking each client (not just the angry one) to state a commitment to 4 ground rules:

1. Although disagreements are expectable, each youth must agree to not vent anger or attack others;
2. Each person has a right to be treated with respect at all times;
3. Each person has the right to share as much as they feel ready to share, but not to have to share anything if they choose to keep private, and to not be criticized or attacked for their choices;
4. Each person has the right to not be the target of anger or personal devaluation.

**b)** Asking any youth who persists in aggressive or disrespectful behavior to take a time out, according to the usual procedures for the facility or milieu. The goal of this is to enable the youth to regain perspective and return to usual activities, including being willing to meet with a provider or staff member to create a plan for handling anger effectively and safely in the future.

**c)** On some occasions you can use the SOS or FREEDOM steps as a structure for initiating and making productive use of time outs. This will allow both the youth and other youths in the setting to see how focusing and self-regulation can de-escalate a potentially dangerous or problematic anger reaction. This provides a verbal/psychological alternative to restraints in many (although not necessarily all) anger situations, and leads to learning rather than simply a temporary de-escalation of chronic anger.

**d)** Asking the angry youth to subsequently take responsibility for having treated other(s) in a way that was not safe and respectful, by acknowledging this and affirming a commitment to the ground rules of the facility/milieu. This should not be done to punish or "shame" the youth, but as a way for the youth to gain self-respect and the respect of others by taking responsibility for having reduced the physical and/or psychological safety of the setting for her/himself and others by her/his anger-related behavior and for increasing the safety of the setting by making a commitment to handling similar triggers using the SOS/FREEDOM approach in the future.

## BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Strengthening TARGET via Milieu or Individual Therapy, Counseling, or Mentoring

SOS/FREEDOM are best learned if they are reinforced by all providers/staff in the facility/milieu, in daily interactions beyond the specific groups or classes in which TARGET is taught.

Youths need to have secure individual relationships with adults who they trust and to whom they can disclose current or past experiences that trouble them. This need not be therapy or counseling, but certainly can occur in therapy or counseling. It also need not be a formally-established mentor, but when an adult provides a supportive relationship for a youth this is a vital form of mentoring.

Regardless of whether on a milieu or individual basis, the key to strengthening the learning of SOS and FREEDOM skills is that adults do NOT dredge up past painful or traumatic memories, but instead are respectfully responsive to the youth's current concerns, goals, and successes as well as problems. Having one adult to whom s/he can turn can make the difference for troubled youths.

### 2. Building TARGET into Existing Services: SOS/FREEDOM as A Universal Precaution

SOS/FREEDOM can be taught in **any** group or class, if adapted to fit the other material taught in that group/class. Rather than creating freestanding TARGET groups, we recommend whenever possible that TARGET materials/skills be woven into existing groups. This reduces or eliminates the focus on "trauma": (unless the existing group is already focused on trauma), and emphasizes the utility of the SOS/FREEDOM skills for any youth (or adult) who experiences stress reactions.

A colleague suggested to us that SOS/FREEDOM could be considered a "**universal precaution**," that is, a way to enhance youth safety for all youths, not just those with specific trauma issues.

### 3. Gender, Cultural, and Developmental Sensitivity

We recommend that TARGET always be adapted to be sensitive to different needs/perspectives of girls and boys, and of youths of different ethnocultural backgrounds and differing developmental phases. This involves using examples and exercises that fit with the differing interests, strengths, and needs of **each youth** without making stereotypic assumptions that "girls/boys" or "youths of \_\_\_ ethnocultural background," or "\_\_\_ year old youths" always have a certain interest or need. It also means being aware of frequent differences based on gender, ethnocultural background, and age, and tailoring the amount and format of information provided to be respectful and meaningful.

While there are exceptions, we have observed that it often is easier, psychologically safer, and more productive to teach and use TARGET in settings or groups that are **gender or age specific** (for example, different groups for girls and boys, or for youths ages 10-13 versus 14-16—although the ages are not hard and fast, and developmental level often is more crucial than age *per se*). With regard to ethnocultural background, we have observed that working with naturally-occurring cohorts of youths tends to be best received by youths and most productive, rather than creating artificially segregated groups based on ethnicity or culture. When each youth's ethnicity, culture, and language is given a place of respect in a facility/group, youths learn that SOS/FREEDOM are a way to master stress reactions that can be adapted by people of very different backgrounds, with each person's background deserving respect and providing unique opportunities for growth.

The gender of providers/staff also warrants careful consideration. Opposite gender providers/staff can put girls in particular and some boys in the situation of having to at least symbolically facing a perpetrator of trauma. This is not limited to gender, however. Therefore, if providers/staff are sensitive to ways in which they may unintentionally be a trigger for alarm reactions based upon not only gender but also other personal characteristics that may remind different youths of past (or current) problem relationships or traumas, the specific characteristics of the provider/staff are less the issue than their ability to help youths understand and manage triggered reactions. However, it is interesting to note that in the later development stages of some groups, group members have requested opposite gender co-leaders for occasional sessions in order to facilitate their recovery.

Provider/staff gender also may be important developmentally, such that youths have an opportunity to experience safe and supportive relationships with adults of each gender which also provide the youths with an opportunity to achieve important developmental attainments. For example, girls benefit from having female staff/providers in order to experience positive role modeling for how to become a woman who is not only caring and nurturing, but also strong, intelligent, assertive, and valued for her many strengths.

#### **4. Provider/Staff Self-Care**

Working with youths utilizes a great deal of energy. When these youths often have experienced trauma and often display "alarm reactions," this can be triggering for providers/staff. This does NOT mean that traumatized youths traumatize other people! Instead, it simply is a recognition that being with youths (who are reactive generally based on their transitional developmental phase) of all kinds can be stressful, and that youths (or adults) who have frequent intense alarm reactions (whether tending toward agitation and distress or toward depression and dissociation) naturally creates stress reactions by the adult(s) involved. Adults who teach SOS/FREEDOM should adapt and use these skills in any way that is helpful to them as professionals and personally, thus providing not only a positive role model for the youths ("do as I do, not just as I say") but also a basis for good self-care.

#### **5. Mandated Services/External Reporting**

In some settings, youths are required to attend services as a condition of detention, probation, parole or family court involvement. We recommend that if youths are mandated to participate in groups, classes, or milieus in which SOS/FREEDOM are taught, that these skills should be taught as a basis for accomplishing the goals that the youth has and not simply to meet system mandates. We also recommend that external reporting (such as to probation/parole, court, or child protection officers) be focused on the youth's positive attainments in learning/using SOS/FREEDOM, as a counterbalance to the usual focus on the youth's general progress or "failures" in socially responsible behavior and attitudes.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q:** What if a youth starts talking about a trauma memory?

**A:** If a youth spontaneously recalls and disclose a memory of trauma, the provider/staff can assist her/him in applying the FREEDOM skills, preferably beginning with the SOS and then:

- (1) identifying current/recent triggers/emotions/thoughts/goals that have brought up the memory, so that the youth stays grounded in the present and does not dissociate (“Now that you’ve taken a moment to focus with the SOS, let’s start by talking about what’s happening in your life right now that may be making this memory feel important to deal with”).
- (2) Identifying the current main life goals that the youth has which make discussing the memory important (“So you’re working on how to get along with your father without feeling so scared and angry because of experiences like this memory where he was physically violent toward you and your mother and sisters – and maybe talking about this memory can help you focus on the triggers or your reactive emotions and thoughts that get in the way of this when you are around your father these days”).
- (3) Identifying the youth’s main goals and positive options and accomplishments that s/he couldn’t see in the midst of the past difficult life experience (“You felt scared and angry because you wanted to make your father stop hurting you or other family members, and you couldn’t figure out a way to make him stop at the time. But I also notice that you did a lot of things to help your mother and your sisters to get out of the way, even if that meant that you were the one who was the main target for your father’s anger. You probably didn’t think about it at the time, but maybe you were doing the best that you could to protect them and to try to show your father that violence was a bad thing—which is something you’ve tried to teach your friends and the other kids here, too”).

**Q:** Is TARGET adaptable for different purposes, settings, or groups?

**A:** TARGET has been adapted in many ways:

- a) To serve as the guide and materials for groups that are not specifically focused on trauma recovery, such as **anger management, anxiety/stress management, pain management, interpersonal skills, orientation for new clients, and general support groups.**
- b) Adults in the wake of acute traumatic violence, accidents, or disaster, including emergency responders and disaster recovery/relief workers (**TARGET-AT**).
- c) Adults in outpatient or residential/inpatient treatment for acute or chronic mental illness (**TARGET-RMI**).
- d) Adults in recovery from chronic substance abuse or addiction (**TARGET-AR**).
- e) Adults in recovery from domestic violence (**TARGET-DV**).
- f) Parents whose children have experienced acute or chronic traumatic stress (**TARGET- P**).
- g) Adolescent trauma survivors with behavioral, psychosocial, or addiction problems (**TARGET-T**).
- h) **TARGET** has been translated into *Spanish and Dutch*, and has been adapted and successfully used by and for *deaf* individuals.

**Q:** Are there standard inclusion/exclusion criteria for identifying with whom **TARGET** can be used?

**A:** No, there are not any standard inclusion/exclusion criteria for identifying youths who can safely benefit from the SOS/FREEDOM skills taught by **TARGET**. Unlike many PTSD treatments, **TARGET** neither limits participants to youths with known trauma histories or PTSD nor requires or encourages the recalling or re-telling of past trauma memories. Therefore, the SOS/FREEDOM concepts and skills can be utilized in any phase of services with any youth—of course, tailoring the amount of information and the mode of teaching to fit the youth's developmental and psychological competences or limitations. **TARGET** can be used as a part of the initial engagement/orientation for youths who are acutely detained/incarcerated, hospitalized or entering placement or counseling due to abuse or neglect, emotional distress, behavioral disorders, suicidality, or substance abuse. **TARGET** is not a substitute for acute stabilization procedures, but can serve as a way to help acutely distressed youths to feel safer, more in control, and better informed about the nature of their current distress and how they can begin immediately to make their lives more manageable.

**Q:** Are there standard screening or assessment tools that are recommended for use in **TARGET**?

**A:** Yes, among the evidence-based screening and assessment tools that we have found helpful when beginning **TARGET** and to evaluate the outcomes of **TARGET** include:

- a) Clinician Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-IV for Children/Adolescents (CAPS-CA)
- b) Traumatic Events Screening Instrument (TESI)
- c) UCLA PTSD Reaction Index (PTSD-RI)
- d) UCLA Traumatic Grief Inventory (TGI)
- e) Post Traumatic Cognitions Inventory (PCTI)
- f) Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC)
- g) Hope Scale

**Q:** Can **TARGET** help with youths who are, or are at risk for, being re-traumatized in the current lives?

**A:** First, if a traumatic event happens in a youth's immediate daily life, you can talk the youth through the experience using any parts of FREEDOM that are helpful in focusing her on the main specific triggers. By doing this she will not have to just recall the experience as diffusely awful, but can pay attention to the more subtle things like a mean look in an attacker's eyes or a smell or sound that sticks in her mind. This helps to "scale down" the trauma from global unmanageable events to specific triggers that she can see make sense as disturbing. **The only instance in which TARGET directly suggests to youths that they re-tell a traumatic experience is when trauma has just happened or has happened in the past 2-3 months.** In this case, **TARGET** still can be used to focus on other stressful recent experiences, but often the primary source of distress for a recently traumatized youth is the recent trauma event, and the "spillover" of stress reactivity from that recent event can best be addressed by using the FREEDOM steps to help the youth organize the memory of that recent traumatic event in a way that reduces her/his current alarm state.

When trauma occurred recently or is ongoing, youths seem to benefit most by focusing on the middle FREEDOM steps (main emotion, thought, goal, options) – not to make the experience okay but to shift the focus from the external uncontrollable trauma to internal experience and strengths. Affirming that the choices the youth made were good ones based on meaningful main goals helps the youth to recognize that despite feeling helpless s/he was able to think and act effectively—s/he

was simply too busy surviving and coping to be fully aware of this under the circumstances. In traumatic situations, small choices and actions usually are the best ones, but they often seem to be unimportant or ineffective until a person looks back and “unravels” the experience carefully.

If a traumatic experience is disclosed in a group or milieu activity with other youths, it is important to talk with all of the youths who are present about how hearing of this bad experience has affected them. This can be a valuable way to teach the youths several important lessons:

- (1) Each person's difficult life experiences, and their alarm reactions and emotions, have an effect on other people, both because other people often feel caring and concern, and because each person's alarm can be triggered by *someone else's* stress or bad experiences;
- (2) Hearing another person speak honestly about difficult life experiences and emotions also can be a positive inspiration for other people—showing that even when bad things happen people have the courage and honesty to deal with the stress and not just let stress control their lives.
- (3) When a person shares a difficult life experience in the spirit of seeking the personal meaning of that experience, that is a big contribution to the whole group – showing that it is possible to not just try to put bad memories out of your mind, but instead to have the courage to face them.

If a youth is continuing to experience ongoing traumatic events (or threats from a perpetrator of former abuse), help her or him define the beginning and end point for the most recent event (particularly, “how and when did you know it was over?”). In this way s/he will have a “frame” around each event, be reminded that horrible experiences do come to an end, and regain some capacity to step back, reconnect with the staff/provider, and make meaning of the experience.

## **DISTINGUISHING TARGET FROM OTHER TRAUMA TREATMENT MODELS**

### **1. Focus on Learning Skills to Recognize and Find Meaning and Opportunities in Current PTSD Symptoms and Complex Sequelae of Trauma Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified(DESNOS):**

Unlike the “exposure-based” treatment models for PTSD (e.g., prolonged exposure, flooding, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, EMDR; Foa et al., 1999), **TARGET** does not involve repeated detailed recollection and disclosure of specific trauma memories. Based on the findings of a recently completed randomized controlled trial (McDonagh-Coyle et al., 1999) of treatment for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (many of whom were in recovery from substance abuse), TARGET adopts a “present-centered” approach which assists participants in identifying current trauma-related “triggers” (Najavits et al., 1998; Sharkansky et al., 1999), coping patterns (Najavits et al., 1998; Stewart et al., 1998; Triffleman et al., 1999), and core themes of self-development and interpersonal relatedness (Ford et al., 1997; Harris, 1998; Harvey, 1995; McCann & Pearlman, 1990). The study by McDonagh-Coyle and colleagues (1999) found that completion rates were substantially higher and dropout rates significantly lower (i.e., <10% vs. >40%) in a present-centered therapy than in prolonged exposure therapy, suggesting that a present-centered approach may be optimal for maintaining trust and engagement in the treatment of chronic post-traumatic impairment.

Recent approaches to the understanding of post-traumatic biopsychosocial impairment have identified complex sequelae that previously were marginalized as indications of Axis II

“characterological” or “personality” disorders (Herman, 1992; Ford, 1999; Roth et al., 1997; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Research and clinical evidence suggests that severe problems with the dysregulation of emotion, impulse control, consciousness (i.e., dissociation), bodily integrity, sense of self, and interpersonal trust and intimacy are “disorders of extreme Stress” (DESNOS)—sequelae of developmentally-adverse interpersonal trauma (Ford, 1999) that must be addressed therapeutically in effective treatment of trauma survivors (Ford & Kidd, 1998).

**TARGET** addresses DESNOS simultaneously with PTSD symptoms, enabling therapists to address DESNOS within the context of teaching practical ways of understanding, managing, and recovering the full range of symptoms—rather than as an aberration reflecting fundamental damage or fault in the client’s character or personality.

## 2. Systematic Skills Training:

### Exposure Therapies

Exposure therapies for PTSD tend to rely upon a small set of techniques for managing intense anxiety and instructing every client to apply these techniques in a standardized manner with minimal individualization (e.g., progressive muscle relaxation, breathing retraining, thought stopping, self-talk). These anxiety management techniques usually are rehearsed in a few early sessions until the client appears comfortable and familiar with their application. The client then is expected to utilize the techniques relatively automatically whenever recalling trauma memories or experiencing anxiety. “Emotion processing” often is said to occur as a byproduct of this rote repetition of standardized techniques while recalling trauma memories (Foa et al., 1997).

**TARGET** instead provides a specific pedagogical structure to teach a psychobiologically and developmentally-based sequence of specific behavioral skills for processing emotionally-charged somatic and cognitive information by successive approximations.

By using **a)** a simple acronym as a mnemonic guide (FREEDOM), **b)** a simple but research-grounded explanatory model of the biology PTSD, and **c)** personal practice exercise forms as a vehicle for both in-session and between-session practice and coaching, clients acquire and individualize a hierarchical sequence of apparently simple but highly sophisticated steps to interrupt automatic PTSD reactions and activate genuine biopsychosocial emotion processing.

### Psychoeducation Models

Similarly, even purposively skills-based psychoeducation models for complex mental health and addictive disorders often teach “skills” in clusters without providing a systematic paradigm for the integrated application of the skills. For example, the Dialectic Behavior Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993) “skills” of mindfulness, stress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness actually are collections of loosely associated tactics for managing extreme agitation, dysphoria, or risky impulses. While often highly effective in addressing specific crises, these are not so much skills as maneuvers, because they do not provide a systematic step-by-step model for deploying the general strategies or specific tactics.

**TARGET** specifies a 7-step sequence that incorporates these strategies and tactics in a complete and integrated response that is easily learned and remembered, and that can be applied to not

only crises or trauma-related stress but also to understanding and managing any important experience in life.

### **Thematically Organized Approaches**

Thematically-organized supportive approaches to psychoeducation and psychotherapy for trauma survivors (e.g., Harris, 1998; Najavits et al., 1998; Rosenbloom & Williams, 1999; Saakvitne et al., 2000) identify and discuss the role of trauma and PTSD in key personal and interpersonal issues such as safety, control, anger, guilt, loss, interpersonal conflict, self-image, intimacy, and trust.

**TARGET** provides clients with guidance in not simply discussing these issues and the impact of trauma, but in **applying the focal (FREEDOM) skill set to coping with and reducing the intrusion of PTSD (and DESNOS) symptoms in each of these critical areas of self- and relational-development.**

### **Narrative Approaches**

“Narrative” approaches to trauma psychoeducation and psychotherapy encourage clients to reflect on, disclose, and develop an autobiographical summary (“personal story”) of specific trauma experiences or other life-changing events (Harris, 1998; Pennebaker, 2000) and their role in the survivors’ overall development of self and relationships (Harvey, 1995; Rosenbloom & Williams, 2000). Verbal disclosure typically is the primary modality to such “narrative reconstruction,” and when nonverbal approaches are used they tend to be done sporadically without a cumulative autobiographical result. Despite every effort to provide a safe context for therapeutic autobiographical recall, the result can be an alternation of flooding and disintegration, avoidance and dissociation. **TARGET** instead uses the **FREEDOM skills as a basis for safely accessing and containing emotionally charged autobiographical recollection.** This is done by using nonverbal creative arts modalities (Johnson, 1999) within an incremental longitudinal model of narrative reconstruction (i.e., the “Personal Lifeline”; Ford & Stewart, 1999). Each client’s emergent “personal story” is re-constructed within a growing context of personal efficacy, autonomy, relatedness, and safety that can contain the previously fragmented and overwhelming memories of trauma and other important life experiences.

Important (positive or negative) personal memories are not devalued in **TARGET**, but are considered too valuable and too sensitive to be explored without careful preparation. Too many times trauma survivors “tell their story” and feel worse (or dissociated), and find that memories never change and continue to “flare up” when current stressors or reminders throw the person off balance in daily life. **TARGET** teaches a skill set that prepares people to re-view and find personal meaning in memories of all kinds. Then, if trauma survivors feel it will help re-examine or share trauma memories, they can do so safely, fully, and with the benefit of discovering what they need to learn from these memories (rather than just re-playing incomplete fragments of memories and reinforcing a sense of worthlessness, powerlessness, and hopelessness).

## **3. Recovery and Resilience Focus**

Although most approaches to PTSD treatment endorse recovery as a general goal and personal resilience as a basic value and building block, their emphasis in practice tends to be on identifying and correcting dysfunctional thinking or behavior. Even when a strengths-based approach is taken, e.g., reframing “cognitive restructuring” as “rethinking” (Najavits et al., 1998), the focus tends to be more on the correction or remediation of pathology than on recovery.

As a model of **recovery**, **TARGET** focuses each participant's attention on the core values and hopes that have been the basis for her or his lifelong project of evolving a personal identity (i.e., self-definition, self-esteem, and self-efficacy) and meaningful and worthwhile relationships. Unwanted trauma memories are reframed as occurring not because the survivor could not cope with trauma but because the trauma caused the survivor to put aside (or lose track of) her or his personal and interpersonal development. Therefore, rather than attempting to become desensitized to the fear or other intensely negative emotions caused by trauma, or trying to get over or re-think the immediate negative thoughts triggered by trauma reminders or hypervigilance, the goal of treatment is to pay attention to trauma reminders (internal and external) and to find the "unfinished emotional business" that needs further attention and that can be a guide for making decisions about how to live life now.

As a model of **resilience**, **TARGET** focuses each participant's attention on their worthwhile hopes and intentions, as well as the potentially productive personal skills and accomplishments that can be found within each PTSD and DESSOS symptom. Each symptom involves effort (even if it seems to be automatic), and skillful planning and action (even if it has become an impulsive reaction). The goal of treatment is to re-discover the personal ability that has been lost in the symptom – not to "get rid of" the symptom, nor to "substitute" more adaptive ways of coping, but to find and rebuild adaptive skills that each survivor possesses and values within her/himself.

#### 4. Creative Arts Component: the "Lifeline"

**TARGET** is designed to help trauma survivors re-claim "mastery of their memories" (Harvey, 1995), rather than as a way to "erase" or otherwise eliminate memories of traumatic experiences. To master one's memory is to be able to think back on one's life and select the experiences that are helpful and meaningful in terms of current life challenges and events – and to be able to reflect on what has been learned from past experiences that has usefulness in current life.

As clients gradually acquire the ability to use the FREEDOM skills, they repeatedly are given the opportunity to creatively reflect on and evaluate an evolving view of their life experiences. Each client has an opportunity to create a visual "personal lifeline" that is the medium and repository for this emerging self-awareness. Critical personal issues such as safety, loss, guilt, addiction, trust, and faith are first reflected upon using the FREEDOM skill sequence, and then evaluated on the Lifeline. The goal is to enhance the client's resilience while reducing the interference caused by PTSD symptoms, by integrating personal meaning-making with skill-based self-efficacy--rather than a deficit-based model of correcting or coping with personal damage, dysfunction, or deficits.

## 5. Evidence Base and Applications

Unlike many other models for treatment of chronic PTSD (e.g., Ford et al., 1997; Johnson et al., 1998; Perconte et al., 1988), **TARGET** does not involve hospitalization or residential treatment or frequent (e.g., two or three times weekly) sessions. **TARGET** is designed for weekly 60-90minute sessions within an outpatient community Behavioral Health treatment setting. **TARGET** is adaptable and flexible to the needs of the agency or practice, the session structure in this manual is offered as a guide.

**TARGET** is designed to complement and extend evidence-based rehabilitation approaches such as Dialectic Behavior Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993), Structured Interpersonal Living Skills (SILS; Liberman, 1999), Cognitive Behavior Therapy, and Substance Abuse Harm Reduction, and Relapse Prevention. In order to maximize client safety and minimize the clinician burden caused by acute crises, **TARGET** incorporates basic safety and self-management skills (e.g., Najavits et al.'s 1998 "grounding" skills) in a teaching sequence that begins with these skills before doing trauma-related emotion processing and autobiographical reconstruction (Cloitre, 2000).

**TARGET** incorporates individual therapy into the treatment model without hindering therapeutic flexibility, by including individual therapists, counselors, and case managers in a weekly consultation group in which the **TARGET** sessions are reviewed (i.e., educational content, skill-training exercise, individual client responses) and the group leaders and therapists develop collaborative treatment plans for each client. Trauma treatment thus is fully incorporated into ongoing psychotherapy rather than treated as a separate "intensive" or purely "trauma focused" intervention to be added on to or replace ongoing therapy.

Results of a randomized controlled effectiveness study of **TARGET** compared to trauma-informed outpatient addiction treatment have been reported most recently at the 2003 American Public Health meeting (see [www.ptsdfreedom.org](http://www.ptsdfreedom.org) for presentation summary) and are being prepared for publication by the study principal investigator, Dr. Linda Frisman. The findings indicated that **TARGET** and trauma informed usual services were equivalent in achieving reductions in depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, post-traumatic cognitions, and substance use which were sustained at an assessment 12-months following entry to the study, and **TARGET** was superior to trauma informed usual care in sustaining participants' self-efficacy related to addiction recovery. Open trials of **TARGET** with women in parenting, correctional diversion, residential addictions treatment, and outpatient psychiatry and community mental health programs, and with youths in juvenile justice programs, are ongoing. In field trials of 4 groups with 33 low-income women in residential, intensive outpatient, or criminal justice diversion treatment for substance abuse disorders or domestic violence (80% Black or Latina), **50%** reported symptoms sufficient to warrant a diagnosis of PTSD prior to **TARGET**, but **following 10 TARGET group sessions** only **20%** continued to warrant a PTSD diagnosis. PTSD **symptom severity levels dropped 33%**, from an average of 48 (Standard Deviation = 19) on the PTSD Checklist before **TARGET** to an average of 32 (Standard Deviation = 15) after **TARGET**, a statistically significant reduction ( $F = 11.6, p < .005$ ) and a clinically significant reduction from symptoms averaging at a moderate level (near the cut-off for classifying PTSD=51) to an average of mild level symptoms.