

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)

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 crises, 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 the key points, leader lessons, teaching examples, session scripts and activities for one session of a TARGET group. We have written the manual to suggest how you might conduct a group that runs on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for between 10 to 12 sessions. 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 management).

The manual has two sections. The section you are reading is the Leader's Guide. The section that is named Participant Handouts contains the reproducible handouts that are referenced in the Leader's Guide.

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 eleven sessions including a Graduation session. Each session includes a Leader's Lesson and a suggested Session script. 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. Sessions may be from 50 to 90 minutes long, based on the time available and the leader's judgment about the optimal length for sustaining participant involvement.

At the end of the manual, discussion of clinical practice guidelines and the evidence base for TARGET are presented.

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

TARGET: Skills for Dealing with Stress and Increasing Personal Control

Session 1



KEY POINTS, SESSION 1

TARGET teaches skills kids can use to deal with stress

Ground Rules

Normal Stress v. Extreme Stress

Overview of FREEDOM Steps

LEADER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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

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

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 coping. 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, it is possible to compare 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 less accessible because the brain's alarm pathways are strongly activated. Being in "alarm mode" is necessary in severe danger, 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. Sometimes 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 brains stuck in “alarm mode” often “overreact” to minor stressors, causing serious difficulties in their relationships and life activities. They’re not lacking in intelligence—they are just trapped in an “alarm state” that they don’t intend to be in!

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, but as a sample. As time passes, you will develop your own way of teaching TARGET. Consider these scripts as a guide only.

Introduction

This is a group for kids who have experienced difficult life experiences and want to learn ways to think clearly when they feel upset or stressed now. So really, it is a group that **every** kid can learn from.

In this group we’ll do some fun activities and games to get your brain in great shape. We won’t strain your brains, but we’ll give your brains a workout just like you do for your body in sports or dancing.

- [Discuss the plan for meeting: schedule/dates/times.] Review **Group Ground Rules**.

Do you have any questions? Okay, then let’s get started.

The Brain’s Alarm System

Did you know that your brain has an alarm system? It’s like the alarm on your clock that wakes you up in the morning or the fire alarm that tells us if we need to get out of a building that’s on fire.

[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.

Teaching Example: The Body’s Alarm System
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 put your backpack, or think of other places to look where you have left it before. But in an extreme stress reaction your heart might be pounding like it is going to jump out of your chest, your mouth may go dry; you might feel so scared or angry you can’t think straight. Now your brain’s alarm is telling you this is a crisis.

- [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 **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, 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**, where you can make a plan for how to solve the problem that's causing stress. We call this the **long loop** because your brain sends these messages around and around all of these areas of the brain. It may not seem long to you, but it is for your brain.

- [Review Handout –**Extreme Stress: The Non-Stop Life and Death Alarm.**]

What happens in extreme stress is that this nicely organized stress management system in the body and brain goes haywire. It's like a bolt of lightning that causes a sudden power surge and short-circuits a computer with a blast of electricity. Your brain gets all charged up and then shuts down totally!

In extreme stress, your brain's **computer** filing system gets *shut down* too because the **alarm** signal in your brain's alarm area is so strong. Your brain's **thinking center** gets a blast of alarm signals without an organized damage control report to help you figure out what the problem is. So you just know that you're really scared or angry or confused because something terrible is happening but you don't know what it is or what to do! We call this the short loop because it's just between the brain's alarm and the thinking center, so it's shorter than the long loop *because the computer filing center isn't included*.

So what you need to do is to *turn down the alarm*. To do this you have to **turn back on the brain's computer**. TARGET teaches skills for turning your brain's computer back on again.

- [**Exercise:** Have kids take turns being (a) a stressful experience, (b) the alarm, (c) the computer, and (d) the thinking center – first with normal stress, then with extreme stress where the alarm gets so turned on that it pushes the computer out of the loop. Help the kids have fun doing this without pushing too aggressively – if they get carried away, start teaching the SOS to slow them down.]

Conclusion

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. We learned a lot about how the brain works under stress and how the brain can be affected by extreme stress—when the brain's alarm center can get stuck on. Next session we'll show you how you're already using skills to turn down that alarm in your brain. And we'll begin working on the 7 FREEDOM steps which are the skills you'll learn in TARGET.

A Measure to Consider for Group Facilitators

Each participant 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 the First Step to Turning Getting the Brain's Alarm Unstuck: Focusing (SOS)

Session 2



KEY POINTS, SESSION 2

Extreme Stress Reactions are the brain's alarm getting stuck on
SOS is a way to start to turn down the alarm if it gets turned on

LEADER'S LESSON –

In this session, kids will learn to recognize some of the things that they are already doing to turn down their brain's "alarm". The non-judgmental message you want to convey is that each group member is doing the best s/he can to turn down the alarm in her/his brain, but that when these ways of coping don't work it's because they're actually getting stuck in extreme stress reactions which keep the alarm turned on. A way to begin to actually turn down the alarm is to FOCUS, which involves three simple steps: Slow Down, Orient Yourself, do a Self-Check (SOS).

Introduction

Does anyone have any comments or questions about stress and the brain's alarm? Has anyone had a situation since last group when their brain's alarm got turned on? What did you do to turn off your alarm?

- {Point out ways that the child was able to turn down the alarm that are examples of SOS.}
- [Briefly point to each handout in from last session and summarize the main points.]
- [Place FREEDOM Poster on the wall where kids can see it and you can refer to it often.]
- When extreme stress causes the brain's alarm system to stay turned on strong, you know it because you can't stop feeling scared, worried, confused, tense, angry, frustrated, spaced-out, helpless, overwhelmed, hopeless, or worthless. These bad feelings are just your brain's alarm getting stuck. I'll show you how that can happen using this alarm clock.

Teaching Example: Extreme Stress Reactions

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.

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

- **S**low Down
- **O**rient
- **S**elf-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. Now your brain is getting out of the short loop and starting to use the long loop again.

Orient means to pay attention to where you are, what you're doing, and whom you're with. Take a moment and notice how it feels to sit 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 computer in the brain also responsible for orienting you, so if we use it in a positive way to orient ourselves in the room we are getting our brains back into the long loop.

Self Check is checking in to see how you're feeling right now and help yourself feel safe and in control. To make the Self-Check easy and useful, we've created a thermometer that you can use to help your easily do a self check just like you would take your temperature.

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." If you feel a small amount of stress, it might be a 2 or 3. Feeling bad but not terrible might be a 4, 5, or 6. If you feel a lot of stress, it might be a 7 or 8. You'd save a "9" for time where you feel horrible but not quite as bad as the worst ever. What's your stress rating 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 extreme stress reactions, the scale is similar to the Stress scale. "10" would be the worst extreme stress reaction that you have ever felt. At the other end of the scale "1" would be no extreme stress reactions at all. What rating best describes your extreme stress right now?

The **focusing** (SOS) skill can be done in many ways. Each time you use the SOS, you are teaching your brain to turn down the alarm and turn on the computer filing system. 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. Let's look at the handouts that have 50 ways to Focus and ways to use every sense to Focus.

- 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.

Before we end today, let's practice doing another self check. [Put each 10-Point Scale on the Black/Whiteboard. Describe the Stress, Personal Control, and Extreme Stress Reaction 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 kid'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 Extreme Stress Reaction level right now?** [Comment on how using Control to deal with Stress can keep Extreme Stress Reactions from happening or help make them better by turning down the brain's alarm.]

The Lifeline

Session 3



KEY POINTS, SESSION 3

Making a Lifeline is a way of Focusing

Leader's Lesson- The Lifeline

TARGET teaches how the changes in the brain due to extreme stress can make it difficult to recall memories even when one wants to recall them. Reclaiming one's memory involves remembering whole experiences, 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 extreme stress. 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. Extreme stress 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. Extreme stress 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 an individualized 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 memories of extreme stress experiences.

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!

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

Today we'll do an exercise that involves each of you creating your own personal picture of your life. 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. You can put anything into this picture.

Teaching Example Alternatives to the Lifeline
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.

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 kids to record on their own logs too.]

The 2nd Step to FREEDOM: Recognizing Triggers

Session 4, Step 2



KEY POINTS, SESSION 4

Recognizing Triggers

Personal Lifeline

Recording SOS Self Checks

Recognizing Triggers

Today's step is **Recognizing Triggers** [point to FREEDOM poster]. Once you Focus doing an SOS, the next step is to recognize the specific things that trigger extreme stress reactions. These are "triggers."

The purpose of recognizing triggers is to give you control of your brain's alarm system by turning back on your brain's computer. Focusing begins to turn on the computer, and recognizing triggers really gets the brain's computer going strong.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

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. 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.

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 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 an extreme stress reaction, such as terrified or angry or frustrated or guilty or sad, or that you hate yourself or your life, or physical pain you can't get over. {Refer to two handouts on Triggers}

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. 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

Use the Graphic Figure on Triggers to illustrate all the sources from which triggers may come—and to comment that these same sources can cause positive feelings as well as being triggers. Have the group generate separate lists of possible positive triggers and possible extreme stress triggers on flip chart paper. Post 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's computer back in action 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 a good choice about how you will respond to the trigger, instead of just having automatic extreme stress reactions that keep your alarm turned on.

- What are 1 or 2 specific triggers that can set off the alarm in your brain?
- What can you do to increase your control and happiness when you have a trigger?

[Use Handouts on Happy Activities to refocus group members on feeling good and safe, and off of triggers.]

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, Control, and Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

Using the SOS and Recognizing Triggers for Personal Safety

Session 5



KEY POINTS, SESSION 5

Recognizing Safety and Support is a part of FREEDOM

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.

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 focuses on how you're not alone and because there are people that can support you if you're having difficult life experiences. It is important to think about safe places and to remember to reach out to support people if you're not feeling safe.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

Review Handouts and help kids complete each handout, in writing or drawing or by dictating to you as the "scribe." Discuss with group the handouts once they are completed, giving kids permission to share or not share what they've put on their handouts. Indicate that it is sometimes difficult to remember who all of one's support people and therefore it is important to take time out when not under stress to reflect on who one might contact when in need of support. Encourage group members to keep and use these handouts.

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 Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

The 3rd Step to FREEDOM: Emotion Awareness

Session 6, Step 3



KEY POINTS, SESSION 6

Reactive Emotions are Early Warning Signs

MAIN Emotions Are a Way to Focus

Introduction of Personal Practice Exercise Steps 1-3

Emotion Awareness and Recognizing Warning Signs

The goal of this session is to introduce the 3rd step to FREEDOM: Emotion Awareness. We'll look at how focusing on 1 or 2 MAIN emotions can help your brain turn down alarm and become more organized.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

Today we'll move on from Recognizing Triggers to the **early warning signs** that you are triggered—your emotions. Emotions are feelings like happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. There are many 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. Let's look at the first Handout and see what emotions each of the faces on the Handout may be showing.

Now let's talk about the kinds of emotions that tell you that something is triggering a stress reaction and your brain's organizing center is getting short-circuited. These are REACTIVE emotions [see Handout].

This step involves recognizing a small number of MAIN emotions so you get your brain back on the right track and turn down the alarm [see Handout, second column].

Emotion Awareness is an important step to help your brain get re-organized. If you can think of your MAIN emotion, your brain will start to turn on its computer filing system and this will turn down the alarm.

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 Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

The 4th Step to FREEDOM: Evaluating MAIN Thoughts

Session 7, Step 4



KEY POINTS, SESSION 7 - Step 4

Recognizing Reactive versus Main Thoughts

4th Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Evaluating Thoughts

In this session, we'll introduce you to the 4th step to FREEDOM: Evaluating Thoughts. Focusing in on MAIN thoughts helps your brain turn down the alarm and get better organized, even if the thoughts are negative.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

When extreme stress strikes, 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 extreme stress.

Unfortunately, if the alarm won't turn off afterwards, you're left with extreme stress reactions. This means you still aren't thinking as clearly as you are able to, because the brain's alarm is still on. 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. Then you keep feeling extreme stress reactions even if things are okay.

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 REACTIVE thoughts that really are just the alarm 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.

[Review Handout – **Recognizing Reactive Thoughts.**] Here's a list of First Reactions" that people often have when feeling triggered and in 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.

[Review Evaluating Thoughts handout.] Compare the Reactive Thoughts on the next Handout to the MAIN Thoughts which are more organized. Focusing on MAIN thoughts turns your brain's computer back on.

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.

Let's try to find the Reactive and MAIN thoughts in the list of stressful experiences on the next Handout.

Now let's get your brain's really organized and active by making some MAIN thoughts using Freestyle rap. [Use music and dance to engage the kids in freestyle rapping, distinguishing the reactive thoughts that reflect an alarm state from the organized focused MAIN thoughts that flow in Freestyle.]

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 Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

The 5th Step to FREEDOM: Defining MAIN Personal Goals

Session 8, Step 5



KEY POINTS, SESSION 8

Recognizing Reactive Goals versus MAIN Goals

Defining MAIN Personal Goals

In this session, we'll work on **Defining MAIN Personal Goals**. This may seem obvious, but think of 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?" Or even more important, "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 alarm and get better organized, even if things don'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 also important because your brain will not turn down the alarm signal as long if you're putting aside your goals to just try to get through each day. When you define your MAIN goals clearly in your mind, your brain turns on the computer and turns down the alarm.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

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 possible MAIN goals. What would you add or change in this list?

Let's do some more Freestyling, this time on your MAIN goals. [Refer to Handout.]

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 Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

The 6th Step to FREEDOM: Options

Session 9, Step 6



KEY POINTS, SESSION 9

Recognizing choices-Options- as small steps to improve life

Identifying options used even in the worst situations

LEADER'S LESSON –Options

The most important aspect of the step to identify positive options kids **ALREADY** are using to achieve their goals. Options are not always effective, but they are a step in the right direction. Options may be mixed in with bad choices and extreme stress reactions, but in this chaos there often are moments of clarity or an attempt to use a new way of coping – these are the nuggets of change that are crucial to help kids identify so they can see and build on their own strengths.

6th Step to FREEDOM: Options

In this session, we cover the next to last (6th) FREEDOM step – **Options**. An “**option**” is a choice you make that is a *small positive step* toward achieving your MAIN goals.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

Options are **choices**, and that's different from what we usually do when our brain's alarms are turned on. **OPTIONS** 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, 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. 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 doing that is effective because it shows what you really believe is right— even if it isn't perfect.

[Discuss values that each group member thinks are most important and the ways of acting that live up to those values and set a positive example. Help them to use the Handout to make a list of what works for them, such as treating each person with respect, telling the truth, protecting people from harm, etc.]

What are the positive options that people choose and then don't give themselves credit for? [Refer to handout **-Tips for Effective Options**.] 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 the past?

Now let's apply these options to a situation, on the next Handout. What are Pat's options? [Facilitate discussion and examples.]

Teaching Example: Options

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.

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 Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

The Final Step to FREEDOM: Making a Contribution

Session 10, Step 7



KEY POINTS, SESSION 10

Making a contribution completes the re-organizing of the brain

It is important to identify ways in which each of us already is making positive contributions

Remind about graduation next session, ask for permission to invite guests to the graduation portion of the session

LEADER'S LESSION –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.

Making a Positive Contribution

In this session, you'll see why it's important here is to be able to look back at what you actually did in stressful experiences to recognize how you actually made a positive difference even if you couldn't make everything work out right.

Sometimes experiencing extreme stress leaves you feeling negative about yourself and what you have to offer people. Recognizing the positive contributions you've made can help your brain turn down the alarm 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.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

Today brings us to the 7th 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.

Extreme stress can 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. The best way to deal with stress is by making the world a better place. Each person does this in her/his own unique way. The key 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 important ways when you use the FREEDOM skills and choose healthy Options.

Kids often don't give 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.

Teaching Example: Making a Contribution

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 kids have done throughout the course of the group that were helpful so that we can use specific examples for each member.

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?

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. We'll use the handout **Personal Practice Exercise** for this exercise.

Remember the 7 FREEDOM steps are designed to help you manage reactions to triggers 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:

1st you're helping your brain to turn down its alarm system and get its organizing center working again, so you don't have as many extreme stress reactions triggered in future situations;

2nd even if you still experience a lot of extreme stress reactions 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 reorganize your brain, body, and mind so that the reactions will go away faster or not be as bad.

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 Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

Next session is our final group session. 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.

Graduation



KEY POINTS
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

LEADER'S LESSON – Graduation

Graduation is a special time for both kids 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. 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 letters. Inviting guests such as other staff to witness the presentation of the certificates can be meaningful; some CEO's have even been invited! You may want to schedule some extra time for this session.

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.

Let's begin with an SOS to focus our minds. 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 Extreme Stress Reaction ratings. [Record each client's ratings in a Leader's SOS Group Log.]

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 for a very large job!

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 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.

Use Handout: **Preparing for Graduation.**

[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 kid in making a 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.]

Finally, let's close this group as we always do, but taking 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 Extreme Stress ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

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 DESNOS 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 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.