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*Therapy for Adaptive Relationships, Growth,
& Empowerment after Traumatic Stress*

12 Session – Individual Version
*MOMS (Mothers Overcoming and
Managing Stress) Study*



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Therapy for Adaptive Relationships, Growth, & Empowerment after Traumatic Stress (TARGETS)

OVERVIEW

TARGETS is an approach to *personal counseling* for people who have had experiences at some point in their lives that caused them to feel their physical or emotional *survival was uncertain* – or the survival of people to whom they felt emotionally close or for whom they felt responsible.

If a person feels that her or his *survival currently is threatened*, **TARGETS** can be used as an approach to *crisis intervention* until sufficient safety has been re-established to permit the client and counselor to begin (or resume) using **TARGETS** in counseling.

When **TARGETS** is done as an approach to counseling, the counselor's role is to be a supportive and respectful listener as the client shares how she or he is dealing with *current stressful experiences that trigger extreme stress reactions* and therefore *interfere with important relationships or personal growth and empowerment*. The goal of counseling with **TARGETS** is to enable the client to use 7 skills—each skill beginning with a letter in the word **FREEDOM**--to *be able to think clearly when under stress* so that they can prevent or effectively recover from extreme stress reactions such as panic, anxiety, depression, rage, emotional shut-down, or extreme grief.

TARGETS also can be helpful to youths or adults who have not experienced threats to their survival but have difficulties with major illness, stress, anger, anxiety, loss or grief, depression, attention or concentration, impulse control, indecisiveness, or disrupted interpersonal relationships. Many types of *difficult life experiences* can lead a person to have extreme stress reactions, not just life and death violence, abuse, or other traumatic experiences. **TARGETS** can be useful for anyone who is having *problems in their current daily life as a result of having had past difficult life experiences*.

HOW?

TARGETS does this by shifting the focus *off of past experiences* and re-focusing on skills for *thinking clearly under stress* and *re-organizing today's memories* to enhance personal effectiveness and well-being.

Each of the **7 FREEDOM** skills is a way of thinking clearly by focusing off of *reactive responses* and focusing on the *main stress triggers, feelings, thoughts, and personal goals and choices* that **really matter** to the person (which often get lost or overlooked because of extreme stress reactions).

The **7 FREEDOM** skills are a way to stop automatic stress reactions before they cause a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness which can lead to confusion and bad choices even by very intelligent and otherwise highly effective people. Most children and adults who are troubled by extreme stress reactions actually are very resilient, resourceful, and intelligent—but the stress reactions interfere with their ability to think clearly, make good choices, and accomplish what they are capable of.

KEY FEATURES

- ❖ **TARGETS** focuses on learning to recognize and consciously regulate (rather than avoiding and being controlled by) current extreme stress reactions -- NOT on attempting to “get in touch with and get over” memories of past terrible experiences. This does not mean that stress reactions can be completely eliminated or controlled, but that the person can learn to *change automatic stress reactions* into *conscious adaptive responses*. As a result stress reactions become less troubling and more preventable and manageable.
- ❖ **TARGETS** explains extreme stress reactions as the product of an extreme but reversible **biological change** (not a purely “mental dysfunction”) in the *brain’s alarm* and *thinking systems* and the *body’s stress response systems*. The change was necessary and adaptive for survival but that doesn’t feel “normal” because it creates “*unfinished emotional business*.”
- ❖ 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 recognize and regulate *extreme* stress reactions. Before it is possible to “relax” or “visualize a safe place” or challenge self-defeating beliefs or interact “assertively” instead of aggressively, angrily, or submissively, when a person is experiencing an *extreme* stress reaction she or he needs to be able to gain control over the brain’s survival alarm. **TARGETS** therefore teaches the **7 FREEDOM** skills for dealing effectively with extreme stress reactions.
- ❖ Using **FREEDOM** skills, clients are guided by the counselor as they safely reflect on and modify the meaning that they make of current and past experiences that were not survival threats but that caused an *extreme* stress reaction. We do not have scientific proof that this changes the brain’s alarm and thinking processes, but both adults and children who have used the skills tell us that they are able to *prevent or reduce* the severity of most stress reactions so that these reactions are manageable and no longer extreme.
- ❖ The **FREEDOM** skills can be used, once well-learned and practiced in daily life as well as in counseling, to safely and helpfully recall and share memories of survival-threatening or traumatic past experiences – if the person feels that this would be helpful to do. We have found that adults and children are able to *make a choice* about whether (and when, and how, and with whom) they want to think about or share personal memories with *greater confidence and more benefit* if they have learned and are regularly using **FREEDOM** skills to prevent current stress reactions from becoming, or persisting as, extreme.

<p>DISTINGUISHING TARGETS FROM OTHER THERAPIES</p>

1. *Skills for Self-Regulation:* The **FREEDOM** skills are similar to cognitive, behavioral, problem solving, emotion regulation, and relational skills taught in other therapies such as CBT, DBT, EFT, IPT, SFT, but the focus is on:

- (a) recognizing how these skills *ALREADY are being used* (rather than assuming the person has a “deficit” and needs to stop doing things that are dysfunctional and change to using only the “correct” skills) and finding ways to build on these strengths,
- (b) learning how to use each skill to get to *ONE MAIN trigger, feeling, thought, goal, and choice* that is based on the person’s core personal and relational goals and needs *instead of on stress reactions*,
- (c) using each **FREEDOM** skill as a potential way of getting focused, so that each skill will be more or less useful for different people and in different situations, but the goal always is to become focused and the skills provide an easily remembered “menu” that can be used rapidly when under stress (before stress reactions become extreme),
- (d) using several or all of the **FREEDOM** skills to “debrief” after extreme stress reactions have occurred, in order to be prepared and to possibly prevent stress reactions from becoming extreme in future situations,
- (e) using the **FREEDOM** skills to at least briefly interrupt automatic stress responses, just long enough to enable the person to become sufficiently self-regulated to remember and use other personal skills (such as anger management, relaxation, problem solving, assertive communication, relapse prevention, impulse control, sleep hygiene).

2. *Ending the Secrecy and Telling One’s Story*

TARGETS draws on the valuable lessons from “narrative” approaches to therapy which assist clients in reflecting on, disclose, and develop an autobiography (“personal story”) that includes life-changing events but:

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- (a) emphasizes empowering the person by helping her or him to find safe ways to bear witness to (not keep secrets about) those events,
 - (b) helping the person to develop a strong and positive sense of personal identity based on her or his whole life
 - (c) using the *FREEDOM* skills as a way for clients to find their own meaning (instead of feeling trapped by extreme stress reactions) when they remember and share their life experiences, and
 - (d) using a “Personal Life book” creative nonverbal process for clients to re-discover (or discover for the first time) that their lives make sense, healthy relationships are possible (but can be disrupted if extreme stress reactions are not dealt with), and that they make a positive difference in their own and other people’s lives.
3. $(R\&R)^2$ = Moving from a *Survival-Driven Life* to a *Purpose-Driven Life*:
 $(R\&R)_1$ = Regulation makes healthy Relationships possible – plus,
 $(R\&R)_2$ = healthy Relationships and promote self-Regulation
- (a) Self-Regulation is necessary before a person can think clearly enough to know and be guided by their core life purposes, and thus to participate safely and effectively in any relationship.
 - (b) TARGETS therefore provides support and coaching to enable clients to self-regulate by using the *FREEDOM* skills to focus on core purposes instead of being driven by extreme stress reactions.
 - (c) TARGETS addresses the first “R” in (R&R) but does not automatically address the second “R” and therefore must be done using a relational, gender-sensitive, culturally-sensitive, and developmentally-informed approach to counseling.

How to Use the TARGETS Manual

Introduction

The **TARGETS** manual has been written in a user-friendly style. Each chapter identifies key points, leader lessons, teaching examples, session scripts and activities.

The manual is separated into two sections, the Counselor’s Guide and the Participant Handouts.

Beginning Each Session: Listening/Engagement

Each session begins with a “check-in” in which the counselor should invite the client to discuss any current stressor (e.g., conflicts, problems, life changes, positive experiences) that is of immediate concern to the client, especially if the client is experiencing or did experience an extreme stress reaction during or after these stressors. This can be done in any manner that is consistent with the counselor’s preferred style and that fits with the client’s personal style and preferences.

During the check-in, the counselor’s responsibilities are to (a) listen carefully and respectfully, (b) identify, and briefly acknowledge (but not dwell upon—unless the client chooses to do so) the elements in the **FREEDOM** model that the client’s spontaneous sharing illustrates, and (c) suggest how the rest of the session can help the client to deal with the stressors using **FREEDOM** skills.

Structuring/Teaching/Coaching

The second phase of each session involves structuring the dialogue in order to teach the client the **FREEDOM** skills and to coach the client in using the skills in counseling and independently in both stressful and non-stressful (practice or self-enhancement) situations. The goal is to help the client to pause from her or his usual automatic ways of reacting, feeling, thinking, and behaving just long enough so that clients can *observe their own reactions, feelings, thoughts, and choices*. **TARGETS** is designed to enable people to become what Harry Stack Sullivan called “participant-observers” rather than being so caught up in experiences and reactions that they can’t really reflect and make choices.

Although counseling may take fewer or more sessions to be fully effective, we have set up this manual to describe how a counselor might cover the key information in **TARGETS** in twelve 50-minute sessions. It is not necessary to stick strictly to 12 sessions, but in many cases (including research studies) it is necessary to limit the time or number of sessions, and we have found that 12 sessions often are both necessary and sufficient to enable clients to learn and become skilled at independently using the **FREEDOM** skills to self-regulate and prevent extreme stress reactions.

The content of each session is organized to support counselors in teaching and clients in gradually learning and internalizing the **FREEDOM** skills. However, we cannot stress the concept of “adapt” enough. For example, eliminate handouts that do not seem to be that helpful to your clients and instead teach the material in a different way. The manual is set up to teach seven sequential skills, but if you find that it more effective for your clients to learn the skills in a different order –go ahead!

Materials

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

- Magnetic photo album (the ones with the sticky pages) or scrapbook
- Copies of the handouts needed for each session
- Pens/pencils
- Magazines (for the creative arts component)
- Blunt-end scissors
- Markers, crayons
- Glue or tape

SPECIAL CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Helping Clients Manage Anxiety related to having Bad Memories

The **FREEDOM** skills can be used to help clients recognize and contain distress or anxiety:

- a)* Acknowledge that anxiety is expectable and unpleasant, but potentially manageable and possibly even preventable or reducible if handled with new skills
- b)* Anticipate the fear that counseling will cause a flood of bad memories and feelings.
- c)* Reassure the client that the goal is to help her/him begin to learn skills for handling or preventing this “flood” of unfinished emotions from past extreme stress experiences.
- d)* Emphasize that counseling does NOT have to involve dredging up and going over the details of memories of specific past traumas, because learning to deal with the current “unfinished” feelings is the way to defuse or prevent extreme stress reactions.
- e)* Emphasize that the **FREEDOM** skills actually enable survivors to deal with bad memories in a new, safer, and more effective way—so the only time that bad memories need to be the focus is if the client feels a need to share the memory safely using the new skills in order to deal with unfinished feelings, NOT to dwell on the bad memory.

2. Helping Clients Manage Emotional Flooding

Discussion of stress reactions and recovery skills can inadvertently trigger stress reactions. Key signs of such emotional flooding include: ruminating about or compulsively sharing extended descriptions of bad memories; pressured speech; extreme tension or restlessness/fidgeting; confusion or disorientation; appearing stunned, like a “deer frozen in the headlights;” repetitive body movements; staring off into space; noticeably discontinuing usual eye contact; regressed (childlike) speech or behavior; sudden intense or explosive anger; or, intense crying.

If a client shows signs of emotional flooding, the clinician/educator should:

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- a) Calmly talk directly to the client; using 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.”
- c) Occasionally pause to give the client a chance to re-group, but don’t let long silences drag on.
- d) Help the client slow down and address extreme stress reactions by using to the SOS skills for **Focusing** and any of the **FREEDOM** skills that are applicable in this situation for this client, including gently but firmly and consistently helping the client to:
 - Pay attention to the physical feelings in different parts of the body, e.g., how her/his legs or back feel sitting in the chair
 - Breathe in a rhythmic and focused, comfortable but neither extremely deep or shallow, manner
 - Shift 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.”)
 - Remember who she/he is, who other persons present are, and where she/he is now;
 - Use the SOS self-check ratings – if the client 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.
 - Feel validated that dealing with unfinished emotional business is hard work, and remember that this is what the **FREEDOM** skills from this counseling will help her/him to do.
 - **F**ocus attention on her or his current safety and needs, helping the client recognize 1-2 specific triggers that may have brought up unfinished emotions.
 - **R**ecognize 1-2 **M**AIN stress triggers (e.g., certain words, voice tones, facial expressions, noises)
 - Identify 1-2 **M**AIN **E**motions (e.g., scared, mixed up, alone, angry, hurt).
 - Draw out, clarify, and summarize 1-2 **M**AIN thoughts to **E**valuate (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 work out, so you really want to make things work out differently now.”)
 - **D**efine 1-2 **M**AIN goals (e.g., overcoming feeling betrayed, trapped, shocked, or hopeless; also being able to feeling caring, determined, successful, compassionate, and self-esteem)
 - Identify 1-2 **M**AIN **O**ptions (choices and behaviors) that she or he actually used in the situation which were positive steps (e.g., “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.”).
 - Think about how she or he **M**ade a positive contribution to other people’s lives and to making the world safer or better by choosing those positive options and sticking with her/his goals.
 - Guide the client in paying attention to key turning points (e.g., “Let’s focus for just a moment on what you were thinking and doing when you saw that you were alone again. Then we’ll look at what happened next, but we’ll do it **one step at a time so you can** begin to sort this out.”)
 - Gently support the client in making her/himself safe now (e.g., “You couldn’t slow things down or make yourself safe then, but we’re doing that together now. That’s what helps the brain turn down its PTSD alarm signals: by dealing with the unfinished emotions effectively.”)

Understanding and Recovering from Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Session 1



KEY POINTS

Overview: **Why TARGET is different and how it can help.**

Engagement: **Relating client issues/goals to stress reactions**

Teaching/Skills: **Stress and Brain Systems**

Attendance/Scheduling/Closure

Before You Start the First Session – A Primer on Extreme Stress and the Brain

It is helpful for you as the therapist to understand how trauma affects the brain. Clients consistently report that realizing that extreme stress reactions have a biological base and **this is a freeing concept** – “*You mean I am not crazy?! When I ‘over-react’ or shut-down and isolate, this is my brain and body trying to protect me? I never knew that!*” When you teach clients about stress and the brain, you won’t necessarily use technical terms to describe the brain; instead, **TARGETS** gives you practical descriptions that you can share with your client (using examples and language that comes from your client’s life) to paint a verbal and visual picture of how extreme stress affects the brain and what to do about it.

Ok – here we go. During times of normal stress the body and the brain work together to accomplish three main goals: (1. **EMOTION REGULATION**): keeping emotions balanced (not too much, not too little) so that you (2. **INFORMATION PROCESSING**) can pay attention, learn, think, remember, develop a realistic and positive self-image, and make good choices, and (3. **ATTACHMENT**) build and keep healthy relationships. Keep these three core biopsychosocial functions in mind as you work with each client.

When stressors occur such as ordinary hassles or even major life challenges (e.g., doing well in difficult classes at school, dealing with big conflicts in important relationships), areas in the brain are activated that enable a person to manage their feelings (even when the feelings are very strong or upsetting), think clearly, make choices that reflect their goals and values and support good relationships – for example, getting angry but not too angry to be able to develop an assertive strategy for dealing with the situation effectively. Under these conditions, areas in the brain that signal danger (the “amygdala”) and

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problems (the “anterior cingulate”) are activated along with brain areas that help the person to stay calm, focused, and think clearly by comparing the present situation to past experiences and using past experiences to make sound current choices (the “prefrontal cortex” and “hippocampus”). See Figure 1 for a diagram showing where these areas are located in the brain and Table 1 for how they may contribute to the ability to form/sustain attachments, regulate emotion, and process information.

When extreme stress occurs, however, the alarm area (“amygdala”) becomes so highly activated that areas necessary for focusing, using past learning, and identifying the actual problem (“hippocampus”, “anterior cingulate,” “prefrontal cortex,”) are pushed off the field and on to the sidelines. Automatic stress reactions tend to take over, activated by the alarm area and lower brain areas (“midbrain,” “brainstem”), instead of thoughtful and balanced responses (which require the higher brain areas such as the prefrontal cortex). Being in “*alarm mode*” often is necessary when severe danger occurs, so these changes in the brain’s activation patterns are healthy *if survival really is at stake*. However, once the danger ends, the brain does not automatically “re-set” itself and return to normal stress management mode. It is not entirely clear why sometimes the brain does re-set itself and sometimes it does not, but this appears to differ based on the individual’s unique personality, biology, and social support system as well as based on the severity, duration, and sense of personal violation caused by extreme stressors. More severe and long lasting extreme stressors (often for many months or years, such as violence or abuse during much of a person’s childhood or in a domestic violence relationship), the more likely the brain’s alarm is to stay set in “survival alarm” mode.

Thus, extreme stress reactions (for example, post-traumatic stress disorder) really are a disorder of the brain’s alarm system, but they are usually NOT caused by brain damage or by a defective brain. Instead, extreme stress reactions are the result of a brain that is trying to protect the individual by staying highly alert and ready to deal with threats to survival which could happen again at any moment—even when objectively the person’s life is not that dangerous. Once the brain’s alarm has been locked in survival mode, the objective danger in a person’s life is not the main factor in causing extreme stress reactions – the alarm system reacts to even apparently minor stressors or changes as if a catastrophe is happening. This also is not the result of “irrational thinking,” although a person whose brain’s alarm system is locked in survival model often tends to develop beliefs that seem irrational—but which make sense to the person because her or his brain and body are signaling that something terrible is or is about to happen.

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 extreme stress means helping the brain to shift out of survival/alarm mode and back into ordinary living or stress management mode. That is the goal of *TARGETS* and the *FREEDOM* skills taught by *TARGETS*.

The first step in helping your client to recognize, understand, and change her or his brain’s alarm reactions is for you to understand and communicate this dilemma:

1. It makes sense and is survival-adaptive for the brain and body to go into survival/alarm mode when in danger
2. Extreme stress reactions triggered in subsequent lower-danger situations are the

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- result of a brain locked in alarm mode, which can persist for months or years
3. The way to re-set the brain's alarm is **NOT** to try to ignore or get rid of the alarm, but instead to engage the brain's thinking system, because the way that the brain re-sets or turns off its alarm system is simply by thinking clearly about the situation
 4. Not just any kind of thinking will enable the brain to re-set its alarm, because most thoughts really are the result of *stress reactions* and not the product of clear thinking
 5. The steps to thinking clearly are difficult to learn and take a lot of practice, but they can be easily described and remembered using the seven letters in a single word to describe seven basic skills for clear thinking and stress management: **FREEDOM**
 6. By learning and practicing each of the seven **FREEDOM** skills, it is possible to help the brain to naturally readjust itself from alarm/survival mode to ordinary living.

10 Minutes **Beginning the First Session: Introductions, Overview**

After greeting the client by name and share your name: “This 12-session counseling program and research study is for women who have experienced difficult life experiences and want to deal with the extreme stress reactions that can continue for a long time after those kinds of experiences. We will be meeting for 12 sessions, but will not meet for any longer than 24 weeks. You have already met with the research interviewer to sign consent forms and complete an initial assessment. The interviewer gave me a brief summary of what you and she discussed so that you don't have to repeat anything from that interview and the questionnaires unless you would like to. I know that you have experienced (*briefly summarize potentially traumatic experiences and persistent stress reactions in layperson's language, e.g., unwanted sexual contacts and violence in your family while you were growing up; feeling depressed and using alcohol to cope with those feelings*) and we will work on ways to help you understand and deal now with these stress reactions in new ways that build on your personal strengths and will help you to achieve your personal goals. Is there anything from the interview or questionnaires that you would like to tell me about or ask me about?”

The goal of this therapy is to enable you to begin using some essential skills that will help your body gain better control of stress reactions and your brain better control its alarm system. I'll tell you about the brain's alarm system and the skills for adjusting the alarm system later this session.

You may think that because this is counseling that you're going to have to talk about your worst memories. But that's **NOT** what we'll do because that's often **NOT** the best way to deal with stress reactions. What **DOES** help is **learning skills** to deal with **extreme stress reactions** in your current life **here-and-now**. In this program you'll learn how to apply 7 practical skills to dealing with extreme stress reactions without dredging up old memories. You will be able to use those skills to deal with bad memories too, but our focus will be on your life right now.

The best way to deal with, and sometimes even prevent, extreme stress reactions is to help your body turn down an alarm signal in the brain. The way to do this is to use your brain in a natural way that is how each of us is able to **think clearly**. It seems easy to say, “think clearly,” but this can be very hard to do, especially under stress. I will teach you seven skills, each one represented by a letter in the word *FREEDOM*. I'll teach you how this works and how it can work for you.

How does this sound to you? Would you like to learn more about the alarm in your brain and what you can do to keep that alarm from going off when you don't really need it?

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20 Minutes **Engagement: Listen to the Client’s Concerns/Goals and Introduce the Client to the Focus of TARGETS (Skills for Dealing with Stress)**

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on in this counseling? What do you hope to accomplish through this counseling?

[Validate the client’s feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., “wanting to get out of my marriage” could be validated and re-framed as “you have serious concerns about your marriage and are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about”]

[Relate the client’s concerns and goals to stress reactions, and suggest that counseling may be able to help the client deal with the stress reactions, e.g., “that can be very stressful, and we’ll see if the skills in this counseling can help you deal with the stress so that you can make the best choices for you and for the people you care about”]

[Relate the client’s stress reactions to the body’s stress system, the brain’s alarm, filing, and thinking systems, with brief comments and using Handouts to briefly show the client in pictorial form how the brain deals with stress and extreme stress. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

15 minutes **Teaching Summary-Handouts/Skills**

- [Give PARTICIPANT GUIDE or Session 1 handouts to the client.] Here is your copy of a Participant Guide/ some handouts, which explain the main points we’ll be covering in counseling. We’ve started to discuss the difference between ordinary and extreme stress, and how the body and brain react differently to them.

Teaching Example
Ordinary versus Extreme Stress Reactions
<p>An example of an ordinary stress response is not being able to find your car keys as you are ready to leave for the day. Your heart rate may increase, you can feel your breath become rapid and shallow and perhaps your muscles are tense. But you are able to remain clear and calm enough to think about where you last placed your keys, or think of an alternative plan.</p> <p>An extreme stress reaction is much more intense, for example what you might feel if you hear the screech of a car’s brakes and tires behind you. Your heart might be pounding, your mouth goes dry, you might feel what is commonly called an “adrenaline rush.” You might feel terrified and be confused about what to do next. .</p>

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Teaching Example

Body and Brain's Role in Ordinary Stress Reactions

- 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 gear shift of a car. The message first goes to a part of the brain that tells you something might be wrong—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.

Teaching Example

Body and Brain's Role in Extreme Stress Reactions

- With extreme stress reactions is that this very nicely organized stress management system in the body and brain goes haywire. Extreme stress is like a bolt of lightning that causes a sudden power surge that short circuits a computer with a blast of electricity. What happens is that the nervous system gets supercharged ("adrenaline rush") and then your body shuts down in exhaustion. Then your body starts alternating between being supercharged and exhausted, like on a roller coaster. The nervous system's roller coaster ride causes the brain's alarm system to go on without ever stopping. And it sends such a big message of "danger" that it short-circuits the brain's computer filing system. So your thinking center in the brain receives a blast of alarm signals without an organized damage control report.
- In other words, that's why you might feel overwhelmed and confused like you are terribly unsafe even though you can't figure out exactly why or what to do about it! The problem is that your body needs to get off the roller coaster so that your brain can turn the alarm system down and get its filing system hooked back up and working again. It's like needing to fix a computer that isn't working because its hard drive got short circuited by a power surge. The power surge is all over—just like a trauma that happened in the past and not now—but the computer needs to be fixed because of the damage caused by the power surge.
- The amazing positive thing about our brains is that this doesn't mean you have to replace the whole brain, like you might have to replace a computer's hard drive. If you can help your body and brain shift back to handling stress the normal way again, your brain can fix itself! There are some simple skills I will be teaching you to help you manage the nervous system's roller coaster.

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Skills: SO in Focusing's SOS

Although we will not begin an in-depth discussion of the **FREEDOM** skills until later sessions, I am going to teach you “Slow Down” and “Orient” that is a part of the Focusing (“F” in FREEDOM) in Step 1. This will give you something to practice until we meet again.

Slowing down is exactly that - taking a moment to help your mind and body **Slow Down**. You can do this by sitting back for a moment, letting your mind relax and paying attention to the natural rhythm of your breathing. When you allow your mind and body to slow down even for a brief moment, this helps you to re-charge yourself physically and mentally so that you are not only more relaxed but also more ready to deal with whatever you need to more effectively.

Orienting means paying attention to where you are, what you’re doing, and whom you’re with. So just take a moment and notice how it feels to sit in your chair with your feet comfortably on the ground, and make yourself comfortable in your chair. Then look around and notice what the room that we’re in looks like, and anything else you can see or hear. You can remind yourself that you’re here to continue your positive work on personal recovery. And that counseling will be a safe place to learn skills for dealing with stress effectively in your life now.

5 Minutes **Concluding the Session**

We’re coming to the end of today’s meeting. Until we meet again try to can practice “Slow Down” and “Orient”. You do not have to wait until you feel stressed to practice, practice at anytime. In the next session we’ll talk about how to organize the unfinished emotional business that extreme stress can cause, and how that is the first step to helping the alarm in your brain to be more in your control and less in control of you.

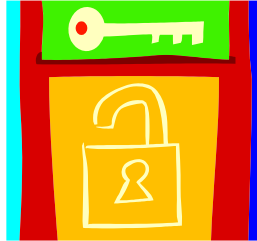
Is there anything else you’d like me to remember for our next session, or that you’d like to ask me about this counseling and **TARGETS**?

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

[Review the date and time for the next meeting.]

Beginning to Organize the Life Experiences Closet

Session 2



KEY POINTS
Check-In/Engagement
Teaching/Skills: The Life Experiences Closet
Closure: Safe Place and SO skills

15 Minutes **Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions**

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's concerns and goals to stress reactions, and suggest that counseling may be able to help the client deal with the stress reactions, e.g., "that can be very stressful, and we'll see if the skills in this counseling can help you deal with the stress so that you can make the best choices for you and for the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's stress reactions to the body's stress system, the brain's alarm, filing, and thinking systems, with brief comments and using last session's Handouts to briefly show the client in pictorial form how the brain deals with stress and extreme stress. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

[Ask if the client was able to use the "SO" skills both in stressful situations or afterward, or to practice the skills when stressful experiences weren't happening at that moment]

30 minutes Teaching Summary-Handouts

Today we'll look at what happens when trauma creates the extreme stress reactions that keep the brain's survival alarm going off - you end up feeling confused, frustrated and overwhelmed—this is the unfinished emotional business that causes extreme stress reactions like _____.

The body and mind absorb many kinds of stress. Where does stress go when the body absorbs it? It doesn't just vanish. Often it becomes unfinished emotional business. Even when it seems to have gone away with the passage of time, it comes when you have an extreme stress reaction.

What happens is that the mind puts stress's unfinished emotional business in a storage place that is like the messiest most disorganized closet you've ever seen. This closet mainly is in the brain, but the mess spills out into every part of the body – your mind can't think clearly, you feel like you're always on-guard and on-edge, your head aches, your muscles are tense and tired, your skin breaks out, your stomach aches, your back hurts, and so forth.

When you're experiencing extreme stress reactions and the brain's survival alarm won't stop everything that you're thinking and feeling gets very confused and disorganized. Remember, this happens not because you're doing something wrong or not trying hard enough, but because your brain's alarm system won't shut off! When the brain's alarm is going full tilt, no one can deal with all the emotions they're feeling because the alarms interfere with your brain's filing and thinking systems. So you end up with a bunch of vague and extremely upsetting feelings stuck in your brain. That's the "unfinished emotional business" that is caused by extreme stress reactions.

If you don't deal with the unfinished emotions, where do they go? They don't just vanish into thin air, unfortunately. They get left in your brain's alarm center like a smoking fire that keeps the alarms from ever turning off. Or another way to look at it is that they create an area in your brain that's like a closet where all the garbage that you don't want but haven't been able to throw away gets dumped. That's why it's so often hard to feel happy or safe or good about yourself and your life—because your mind gets all cluttered up with **reactive feelings**, like feeling scared, angry, or hopeless even when things are going okay and you're feeling good, or even when you're remembering a good safe time from the past.

All those negative feelings are really just the result of the brain's alarm system continuing to signal that something bad is still happening. When the alarm system gets turned down, the brain isn't so stressed and it can start sorting out what's really happening in your life. When the brain isn't on red alert because of the survival alarm, it can send helpful reports to the thinking part of your mind. As a result, you start to feel calmer and you can deal with what you're feeling because it isn't so overwhelming. The "Slow Down" and "Orient" skills we talked about last time and you have been practicing is one way of beginning to turn down the alarm system.

When the brain's alarm system keeps going off, the brain can't do anything except just try to react and survive whatever is causing you to be in danger. You end up acting like you're always just trying to survive each moment, and like everything in life is a horrible life-threatening problem. You're reacting because your brain's alarm system is telling you that you should feel scared and angry, and because your brain's filing system can't sort out what's actually happening.

Under these circumstances you do not deal with what you're feeling, you just keep reacting and

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trying to survive. Your feelings have to go somewhere, however. Where they go is into what we call your brain's "**life experiences closet.**" This isn't a real closet, but it's the brain's way of dumping all the junk that piles up when you keep feeling scared and angry and guilty and depressed because your brain's alarm keeps going off. All those negative feelings aren't getting filed appropriately by the brain's filing system, so the brain has to just dump them into "temporary storage," and that fills up and messes up your mind's life experiences closet.

Another way to look at this is that it's like getting so frustrated because you keep tripping over things in your house that you end up throwing every piece of furniture, all your clothes, and everything else into one big closet. Sometimes you throw stuff you really don't need or want into the closet, like old junk or trash. Other times you throw things that you really *do* need into the closet, like a chair you could relax on or clothes you need or pictures that you like to look at. The closet gets so full that you can never find anything you need when you look in it. Any good stuff just gets mixed in with junk, so it seems like everything in your mind—even the good feelings and memories—is just junk even if it's not. So you end up with a closet full of memories in your mind that aren't all bad but that all seem terrible because they're all mixed up in a mess of unfinished reactive feelings. And that can make you feel like just giving up, like you're powerless, like you're a bad person, and like your relationships always fail.

So it's important to organize the feelings and thoughts and memories in your **Life Experiences Closet**. To do this you have to make room for new feelings and memories that aren't about trauma—the every day **life experiences** that we each deal with all the time. But how do you actually make this change in your brain? The answer is by doing what the mind does best—organizing your thoughts and feelings carefully every day. The **FREEDOM** skills are exactly how the mind **gradually** cleans out and re-organizes the brain's Life Experiences Closet. This does **not** involve dwelling on past memories, but **re-organizing here-and-now experiences every day**. Each time you use the **FREEDOM** skills; you take a stressful current experience and re-organize it so that it fits where it belongs in your brain. This changes the mistake that we all make without even knowing it, which is to just let every new experience get dumped automatically into your brain and add to the mess rather than making your Life Experiences Closet organized and useful.

It's important to start with **small safe steps**. We've found that trying to remember your worst past traumas is NOT the best way to deal with left over feelings. Instead, what helps is to organize what you're putting into that closet NOW. If you have a closet with a bunch of furniture and household stuff in it, you wouldn't try to drag out the biggest table or chair or bed first, because that's too bulky and heavy to move until you have cleared out some of the smaller stuff! The smaller stuff is what happens EVERY DAY. If you start to organize your thoughts and feelings about every day experiences, you'll be creating a more organized space in your mind and then the big trauma memories can fall into place without even having to be dragged out of the closet – and without spilling out because they're in such a mess! But once you clear out the smaller stuff, you have the choice of either carefully pulling out the big heavy items or you can just move those items around in the closet and safely leave them there if that's the best idea.

So today, let's start with one ordinary memory from this week in which you felt a mild amount of stress. Every experience has a beginning, middle, and an end. When trauma's unfinished emotions get in the way, the mind loses track of this basic information and experiences seem like a ball of confusion that don't have a clear beginning and end. So the way to help your mind get organized is to take ordinary experiences and make sure your mind organizes and clearly

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describes the beginning, middle, and end. First let's start by taking a moment to practice the "SO" skill for focusing: Slow down your mind ... Orient yourself to how your body feels, where you are, and what you see and hear around you ... Now let's start organizing part of your mind's life experiences closet, taking one of the experiences you just told me about from this week.

BEGINNING: When and Where did this happen, and Who was involved?

[Help the client develop a brief clear answer focused on one specific event.] If there is no clear ending, help the participant to decide when s/he felt that enough had changed so that a new experience was starting, even if there is some overlap.]

MIDDLE: What Did You Think and Do?

Think for a moment about how you responded. Think about what thoughts went through your mind and what feelings you had, as well as what actions you actually took. And think about what you wanted to do, even if you didn't or couldn't do that.

[Help the client identify their main actions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings—including those that are implied by what they say, as well as what they are consciously aware of. Briefly say how each of these actions, reactions, thoughts, or feelings makes sense under the circumstances.]

Now let's answer the final question, which is:

END: How Did It End?

Think about the situation for a moment, and decide when you think it ended ... and **how** it ended. [If s/he has difficulty picking an ending, or pick an ending far in the future, help identify an intermediate partial ending.]

Sometimes it's very clear when a situation ends, like if you are having an argument and you and the other person stop talking and just walk away from each other. Even in these situations you might feel that it didn't really end because you're left with upset feelings and you know you'll need to find a way to work things out with that person in the future. That's an example of how there might not be a clear endpoint. The best way to pick an ending is to think of the point in the situation when you felt different – like if you felt relieved to not be directly arguing any more, or if you felt just safe enough to know that you were out of immediate danger.

Notice how every situation actually can have many endings, even if most of them are only partial.

Teaching the mind to focus may seem very simple but it's actually not. Extreme stress reactions make it very hard to focus and think carefully, so it's important to help your mind to turn down and gain control of the brain's alarm. The way to do this is **not** by dwelling on past memories of trauma. That just makes the brain's alarm signals get stronger and more out of control!

When you practice thinking carefully about ordinary daily experiences, you're doing more to help your mind and body recover from trauma than anything else you possibly can do. Thinking carefully gives your mind a way to turn down its alarm and to jump start the organized thinking

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that extreme stress reactions mess up. Then your body can respond to stress more effectively without extreme alarm reactions. That's what helps the body and brain get back to normal again!

This may seem very simple and basic, but actually it takes careful thought and concentration. Most important, we don't usually take the few moments required to do this with most of our experiences – so they just get dumped into the brain's trauma closet and cause more clutter. When you do this with ordinary experiences, it helps your mind be organized so your memory becomes a helpful and manageable part of your **Life Experiences Closet**.

5 Minutes **Closure and Homework**

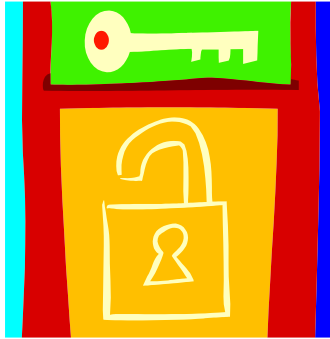
We're coming to the end of today's meeting. However before we close, an important concept in stress management is **safety**. We will create safety in these sessions and help you create a safety plan for your life. We've put a special place in the Life Experiences Closet called "**My Safe Place**" that can be used to reinforce the idea of safety. As you go through the week, if you have any disturbing memories, thoughts or feelings that feel overwhelming, you can jot them down in the "Unfinished Emotional Business" box and deal with them whenever you choose later.

This week's homework is to take the Life Experiences Closet handout from your **Participant Guide** and add one ordinary experience that happened either recently or in the past. Answer each of the 3 questions briefly and remember, take an **ordinary** experience, not a major stressor!

And tell me, when are good times to practice "Slow Down" and "Orient" as your focusing skills?

Moving from Stress to *FREEDOM*

Session 3



KEY POINTS

Check-In/Engagement

Teaching/Skills: <i>FREEDOM</i> skills, Maladaptive Coping Strategies
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Closure: SO and Life Experiences Closet
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15 Minutes Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

[Relate the client's stress reactions to the body's stress system, the brain's alarm, filing, and thinking systems, with brief comments and using last session's Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how she is organizing her life experiences closet. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

[Ask if the client was able to use the "SO" skills both in stressful situations or afterward, or to practice the skills when stressful experiences weren't happening at that moment]

30 minutes **Teaching Summary-Handouts**

- Today we'll go over all seven **FREEDOM** skills briefly, using the situations you're telling me about to illustrate how extreme stress reactions can short-circuit each **FREEDOM** step but also how using the **FREEDOM** steps can help you handle extreme stress reactions.
- Read and briefly describe each of the **FREEDOM Steps**: emphasize how each step differs from stress reactions by being a way the person can FOCUS on MAIN triggers, emotions, thoughts, goals, and choices that what makes the situation really important to her.
- Extreme stress reactions can lead anyone to lose track of these ordinary ways of thinking clearly and instead use automatic **Maladaptive Coping Strategies**. Can you think of others to add to this list?
- When maladaptive coping strategies are used, they create a vicious cycle: (1) fear/pain/anger – > (2) MCS –> (3) more fear/pain.
- The good news is that the FREEDOM Skills can help you to break this vicious cycle.
- Highlight how the client already was using some of the **FREEDOM** skills without even knowing it, and how by paying conscious attention to this she may be able to remember and use each skill in future stressful experiences. Also help the client to slow down in discussing situation(s) and focus on how paying attention to each **FREEDOM** can create a positive feeling of calm energized hopefulness or empowerment.

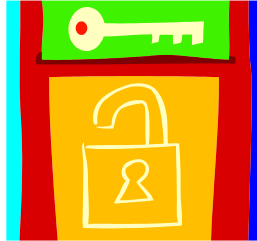
5 Minutes **Closure and Homework**

We're coming to the end of today's meeting. In the next session we'll work on FOCUSING by adding the second "S" (which stands for do a Self-check).

In the meantime, continue to practice "Slow Down" and "Orient". Also take the Life Experiences Closet in your **Participant Guide** and add one ordinary experience that happened either recently [point to boxes for "Experiences as an Adult"] or when you were "Growing Up" [point to those boxes on the form]. Answer each of the 3 questions briefly and remember, take an **ordinary** experience, not a major or extreme stressor!

The First Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Focus

Session 4



KEY POINTS
Check-In/Engagement
Teaching/Skills: <i>Focusing SOS</i> skills
Closure: SOS Daily Record Form

20 Minutes **Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions**

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

[Relate the client's stress reactions to Maladaptive Coping Strategies using last session's Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how MCS occur automatically. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

[Ask if the client was able to use the "SO" skills both in stressful situations or afterward, or to practice the skills when stressful experiences weren't happening at that moment]

20 minutes **Teaching Summary-Handout**

We have spent the first 4 sessions talking about the causes and impact of PTSD. Today we will begin learning the FREEDOM steps. The first step is – **F**ocus .

Focusing involves **SOS**:

- **S**low Down
- **O**rient
- **S**elf-Check

Slow Down means taking a moment and help your mind and body get off the roller coaster. You can do this by pausing for a moment, letting your mind relax, and paying attention to the natural rhythm of your breathing. Slowing down helps your mind and body re-charge.

Orient means to pay attention to where you are, what you're doing, and who you're with. So just take a moment and notice how it feels to sit in your chair with your feet on the ground, and make yourself comfortable in your chair. Then look around and notice what the room that we're in looks like, what you can hear, and remind yourself that you're here to continue your positive work on personal recovery.

Self Check is a quick way to see how you're feeling right now and help yourself feel safe and in control. If you are feeling any stress or uncomfortable feelings right now, you don't have to dwell on those feelings. If you are feeling like you're not quite as in control of your life as you'd like to be, you can work on gaining personal control. Try telling yourself: "Even though I'm not feeling great right now, I am safe and I will be all right."

And you might be feeling some positive feelings too, like happy and more confident in yourself because that you're taking this positive step of being involved in counseling, or interested in what you'll learn and how you'll grow as a result of being in counseling.

To make the Self-Check easy and useful, we've created three numerical ratings that look like this.

Teaching Example Self Check

Draw the Personal Stress, Personal Control and Urge to Use Maladaptive Coping Strategies (MCS) on 10-point scales on a piece of paper. Self-checks help your brain build a "data base." For example, you will begin to see and remember that there are times when your stress scale can be a "10" but you still can manage because your sense of personal control is also high. Or you will begin to see the relationship between a high stress level and a high urge. level.

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Personal Stress Right now I feel ... Completely Calm 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Most Stressed Ever

Personal Control Right Now I am.. Completely In Control 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Totally Out of Control

Urge to use MCS Right Now I am ... Most Intense Urge to use MCS 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 No urge

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

When you think about how in **control** you feel, the scale is similar but it goes in the other direction. So 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 "10." If you felt in pretty good control, but not perfect, that would be a 9, 8, or 7. If you felt like you had some control but that you weren't in control in some important ways that would be a 6, 5 or 4. 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 "1." Does that make sense too? What rating best describes your level of personal control right now?

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

Teaching Example: Self Check Rating Scales

The Stress and Control self-check rating scales are in opposite order because stress and control are different and they interact with each other. If stress or urge levels are high, this can be managed increasing your control level. However, if your stress level is high and your control level is low, that usually results in a high urge. For example, someone may be stressed because of relationship problems and rate themselves an "8" on stress. When considering their personal control they feel they have something like a "5" but that does not quite counteract the Stress of the "8". This may result in an urge of 6 or 7 to use a MCS to compensate for their lower personal control level. If however, the person raises her control level and reduces her stress level by using the **FREEDOM** focusing skill, the urge to use a MCS may drop much lower, even as low as a 2 or 3.

The **focusing** (SOS) skill can be done in many ways. Not only does focusing help you stay safe and deal with difficult situations or feelings, but it also does something very important to help you deal with trauma. Each time you use a **focusing** technique, you are teaching your mind to

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stop dwelling on past traumas and to move on with life. It takes practice before your mind can make this important shift, but **focusing** is a great way to start. The other TARGET skills will add to your ability, so you'll have several ways to effectively deal with trauma. In these sessions we focus by slowing down, breathing, orienting and self-checks. There are other ways that help with focusing such as a walk, mindful exercise and warm shower. One person we know finds that washing dishes by hand helps her focus. What ways do you find helpful to get focused? [Elicit examples; make list; separate approaches that are primarily beneficial from those that have serious downsides.] Have the client add his/her own ways of focusing on the handout.

To take the idea of focusing a step further, on the next page of your handout, - **A Personal Script of Focusing Skills** you will find a description of one person's script to help her use her focusing skills. Can you think of a script that would help you to remember to focus yourself?

10 Minutes **Closure**

Before we end today, let's practice doing another self check, using the **Rating Scales for a Quick Accurate Self-Check**. Let's try using three easy ways to make a number rating for a quick self-check of how much stress, control, and urge to use MCS you're feeling right now.

Stress Level (I feel ...)

- 10 The worst I've ever felt in my life
- 9
- 8
- 7
- 6
- 5 Some tension or Stress but not
not terrible or overwhelming
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 The best I've ever felt in my life

Personal Control (I am ...)

- 10 In complete control of my life
- 9
- 8
- 7
- 6
- 5 Partly in control of my life but
not in control in some ways
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 Totally out of control

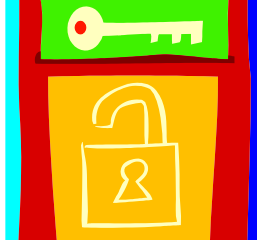
Urge to Use MCS (Right now I feel ...)

- 10 The most intense urge to use that I've ever felt
- 9
- 8 An urge that I'm afraid I can't manage and that takes great effort to manage
- 7
- 6
- 5 An urge to use that bothers me but I can manage with some effort
- 4
- 3 An urge that is very mild and goes away quickly
- 2
- 1 No urge to use at all

In your handouts you'll find a Daily Self-Check Record form that you can use to do a self-check anytime during the day, every day of the week. This week see if you can write down your self-check ratings at least three times in the morning, three times mid-day, and three times at night.

Life is More than Survival. The 2nd Step to **FREEDOM:** Recognizing Triggers

SESSION 5



KEY POINTS
Check-In/Engagement
Teaching/Skills: FREEDOM Step 2- Recognizing Triggers
Closure: SOS Daily Record Form

25 Minutes **Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions**

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check.
[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

[Relate the client's stress reactions to Maladaptive Coping Strategies using prior Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how MCS occur automatically. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

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20 minutes **Teaching Summary-Handout**

- Were you able to use SOS during the week? [Help the client identify any attempt to use SOS, even if it was not successful]
- Do you have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session?
- A further illustration of what we have been discussing the past two sessions can be seen on the handout **Extreme Stress Symptoms**. As you can see, there are many different ways that extreme stress can show up in your life.
- Each time you use the **FREEDOM** skills you are teaching your brain how to put organize your life experiences closet and to get focused. This can help your body turn down the brain's alarm signals, so that both bad memories and current stresses don't keep your brain's alarm system working overtime.
- Today's step is Recognizing Triggers. Once you FOCUS, the next step is to recognize the specific things that trigger the TRAPPED feelings. The purpose of recognizing triggers is to give you control of your brain's alarm system so you can use the alarm system if you really need it, instead of not being able to stop the alarm or turn it down when you don't really need it.
- Let's begin with the first step, the **Focusing** skills—**SOS**—that we discussed last week. Take a moment right now and slow down your body and mind ... get yourself oriented by sitting comfortably and just paying attention to the room we're in, the people, and why you're here ... and do a self-check using the Stress, Personal Control and Urge to Use MCS ratings. [Help client make the ratings and share with you. Record the rating on the Log that you keep.]

Teaching Example <u>Self Check</u>
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Very often we hear that self-checks take up too much time. The self-checks are meant to have clients practice in a non-judgmental or critical way to rate how they are feeling. There does not need to be much (if any) discussion at this point. If a client 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 the session when you 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 session.
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The second skill for FREEDOM from PTSD—**Recognizing Triggers**—is another way to stop re-living unfinished emotional business from difficult past life experiences. When you recognize a **specific** trigger you are helping your brain use its filing and thinking centers to zero in on one thing that you can then begin to deal with—instead of feeling confused and overwhelmed because everything seems like a problem.

The value of being able to recognize triggers is 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 extreme stress reactions? A trigger is anything that leads you to feel any of the TRAPPED feelings such as terrified or angry or frustrated or guilty or sad, or like you hate yourself or your life, or having physical pain you can't get over.

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

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. It also can include times of the year or the day, particular "anniversary" dates, or ways that people interact with you. And also things that you see or hear on TV, radio, the movies, or in magazines, books, or the paper.

Teaching Example Recognizing Triggers

One way to introduce triggers is to explain that we are always receiving clues or triggers from our environment. Triggers are not always negative, because sometimes a positive event or change can be stressful, frightening, or sad. It might be easier to have the client identify positive triggers before moving on to "negative" triggers.

Let's take each of the unfinished emotions from PTSD—the TRAPPED feelings—and look at how you can recognize specific triggers that can set off these feelings in your life today. [Refer client to **Recognizing PTSD Triggers** and review the highlighted list of potential triggers.]

When you recognize 1 or 2 **specific** triggers instead of just feeling awful and not knowing why—or instead of trying to deal with everything all at once and getting overwhelmed--you are getting your brain organized and this starts to turn down the alarm signals in your brain. Just figuring out the 1 or 2 triggers that are setting off your brain's alarms is the first, and often most important, step toward helping your brain get organized and take control of your body's alarm system. Recognizing when you are triggered can also help you make an informed or conscious choice about how you will respond to the trigger. As we mentioned before, triggers that lead to an extreme stress response can then lead to the use of MCS.

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On the handout **Extreme Stress Reactions Can Trigger Urges to Use MCS** you'll see a list of the TRAPPED feelings. Take a moment now and let's talk about in a time when you used a MCS to cope with some of these feelings, and a time when you instead you used an adaptive strategy.

Now let's practice using the FREEDOM skills to deal with triggers. Think of just one event in the past few days that was ordinarily but **not extremely**, stressful. Good or bad, just not extremely bad! (No higher than a 7 on the stress scale)

First get **Focused** by **Slowing** down what you're doing and thinking ... getting **Oriented** to where you are and who you're with right now ... and doing a Personal Stress and Control **Self-check**. What are your Stress and Control ratings? [Record ratings on the SOS Record Form.]

Okay, the 2nd FREEDOM skill is to **Recognize Triggers**. What are the specific triggers for you in this situation? Let's get very specific about the triggers. [List on blackboard.] Now let's think of one or two adaptive strategies that you can plan on using if each of these triggers happens again – or better yet, **BEFORE** each trigger happens in situations where they're likely to happen.

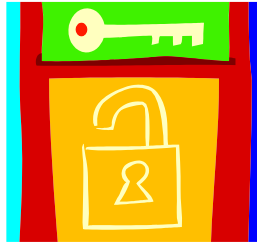
So now you know **two skills** for dealing with the brain's emotional reactivity. See if you can identify other specific triggers this week, and if recognizing them helps you deal with them better or even to be prepared for them in advance. Any questions or comments about the 2nd step to FREEDOM?

5 Minutes **Conclusion and Homework**

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. What are your Stress, Control, and MCS ratings? For homework you can continue to use your Daily-self check log and add the triggers that you identify during this week as well as your SOS ratings.

The 3rd Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Emotion Awareness

SESSION 6



KEY POINTS
Check-In/Engagement
Teaching/Skills: FREEDOM Step 3-Emotion Awareness
Exercise: the Personal Life Book
Closure: SOS Daily Record Form

20 Minutes **Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions**

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check.

[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

[Relate the client's stress reactions to triggers using prior Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how unrecognized triggers lead to MCS occur automatically. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

15 minutes Teaching Summary-Handout

- Were you able to use SOS during the week? [Help the client identify any attempt to use SOS, even if it was not successful]
- Do you have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session?
- Review homework from last session.
- 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. But there are many other emotions, each 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.
- [Generate an emotion list with the client with positive and negative emotions.]
- Now let's talk about the kinds of emotions that tell you that something may be triggering a stress reaction. These are your **reactive emotions**. Extreme stress reactions flood your brain with emotions because they causes your brain's alarm center to go non-stop while the brain's organizing center is getting short-circuited. So what you need is to slow down the flood of emotions to your brain and help your brain get re-organized.
- This step involves identifying a small number of **MAIN emotions** so you can select the key ones that are most important to you each time you're triggered. Like instead of feeling overwhelmed and confused (which are reactive emotions), to be able to zero-in on your **MAIN emotions**, like scared or sad or excited. *Each time you start by identifying your reactive emotions and then focus on your MAIN emotions you are helping your brain to know that you are in control, and this turns down the brain's alarm system!*

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

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

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

Why is this so hard to do? Partly because most of us aren't used to just calmly recognizing emotions and we may not even have learned the simple names that describe our basic emotions. But the main reason is that when your brain is not functioning normally because of extreme

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stress reactions, the alarm signal is such interference that your brain's organizing center can't zero-in on one clear emotion.

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

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

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

15 Minutes **Exercise: Introducing the “Personal Life Book”**

TARGETS teaches how the changes in the brain that leads to extreme stress reactions cause a person to avoid memories and to make it difficult to recall memories even when one wants to recall them. Reclaiming one's memory involves remembering the whole experience, not just the best or the worst moments. No one remembers everything about a past experience, but what we do remember is how one part of each experience led to the next part. This chain of events often is lost in memories of bad experiences or memories of times in a person's life when bad things were happening. Reclaiming one's memory also involves choosing what to remember and how to take the different parts of a memory and combine them into a complete “story” of what happened. Extreme stress reactions 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. Such memories also tend to pop up suddenly and unexpectedly – to be “intrusive”--instead of when a person chooses.

The **Life Book** 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 client 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 **Life Book** 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 Life book, as s/he feels

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ready. The goal is to enable the participant to see and share a complete picture of her or his life and self in a free-form manner. Doing a **Life Book** 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. **Life books** focus on current reconstruction of a whole life story via pictures and words, **not** on returning to and reviving trauma memories.

Most **TARGETS** participants feel some reluctance initially to do the Life Book 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 Life book –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!

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

You'll use a scrapbook to create your "**life book,**" a picture of your life in the past, present, and future. We'll about 20 minutes on it in each session. You can put anything into this picture that you want to describe what you've been through, what you've seen and done, what's important to you in life, where you're at now in your life, what you've felt and what you are feeling now, and where you're heading in your life.

If you have any particular magazines you would like to bring in next time, feel free to do so.

5 Minutes **Conclusion and Homework**

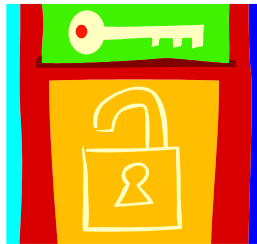
We're coming to the end of today's meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What are each of your Stress, Control and Urge to use MCS ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

Next session we'll move on to the 4th FREEDOM step, the second "E"--**Evaluating** your thoughts--so that, just like you're doing with triggers and emotions, you can zero in on one or two specific main thoughts that are important to you when you feel triggered by the PTSD alarms in your brain. [Review plan for the next session briefly.]

During the next week continue to record your daily self-checks.

The 4th Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Evaluating Thoughts

SESSION 7



KEY POINTS
Check-in and Engagement
Silent Alarm and Hypervigilance
Recognizing Shut Down Thought Patterns
Reactive v. Main Thoughts
Personal Practice Exercise Steps 1-4
Continuing the Personal Life Book (Materials needed: tape, blunt end scissors, markers, magazines, scrapbook from previous week)
Closure

15 Minutes Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check.
[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

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[Relate the client's stress reactions to Reactive Emotions using prior Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how reactive emotions occur automatically. Help the client focus in on one or two MAIN emotions that are grounding for her. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

[This is the halfway point of the 12 sessions. At this point review with the client what is going well, what is not working, how they feel about the program and their progress.]

In this session I will introduce you to the 4th step to **FREEDOM: Evaluating Thoughts**. We'll look at how focusing in on 1 or 2 **MAIN thoughts** can help your brain turn down the brain's survival alarm and get better organized, even if you feel stressed and your thoughts are negative.

And we'll give you an opportunity to add important experiences that have shaped your basic beliefs about yourself and life to your personal **Life Book**.

Do you have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? Were you able to keep your daily self-checks during the past week? Did you use the SOS Focusing skill or any of the other **FREEDOM** skills even if they did not write them down? *[Review main points from last session, focusing on how moving from reactive emotions (early warning signs) to MAIN emotions can help turn down the brain's alarm system and improve the ability to think clearly. Discuss what the client's self-checks during the week show about how she is (1) more aware of stress reactions than in the past, (2) better able to recover when stress reactions are extreme, (3) able to reduce the level of stress and MCS urges and increase her sense of personal control, overall, even if she has had the expectable ups and downs in stress/urges/control during the week.]*

10 minutes TEACHING/SKILLS: FREEDOM Step 4--Evaluating Thoughts

The 4th **FREEDOM** skill is **Evaluate** thoughts. This does NOT mean judging and criticizing your thoughts, because every thought has a purpose and makes sense if you just get to the heart of it—no matter how extreme or even “irrational” it may seem at first. Evaluating means a very simple but difficult way of getting to the heart of what you really are thinking. Just like we did with emotions, in this **FREEDOM** step the important thing is to first *identify reactive thoughts* which are the product of extreme stress alarm reactions, and then secondly to *focus on MAIN thoughts* that are the true ideas, beliefs, and thoughts that are hidden in your reactive thoughts.

So evaluating thoughts is like organizing your life experiences closet. When you put the reactive thoughts in a separate place, just like you put your “unfinished emotional business” in a separate part of your life experiences closet, then you can focus on your **MAIN** thoughts—just like you focused on your **MAIN** life experiences in order to organize your life experiences closet.

So evaluating thoughts involves identifying a small number of **MAIN thoughts** so you can select the key ones that are most important to you each time you're triggered. Like instead of getting stuck on extreme or shut-down thoughts [show client **Shut Down Thoughts handout**], you can teach your brain to zero-in on your **MAIN thoughts**, what you're really thinking once you step aside from the extreme or shut-down reactive thoughts that occur when an extreme stress reaction occurs. *Each time you start by identifying your reactive or shut-down*

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thoughts and then focus on your MAIN thoughts you are helping your brain to know that you are in control, and this turns down the brain's alarm system!

Teaching Example Shut Down Thought Patterns

It might be helpful here to borrow a concept from relapse prevention when explaining shut down thoughts. Once someone shuts down it paves the way for use of a MCS. If you can help clients identify the last thing they say to themselves (last thought) before using a MCS, you have found the personalized way a client “shuts down”.

When difficult life experiences occur, it's impossible to sort out all the reactive 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 your MAIN thoughts. 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.

One way that reactive thoughts can take control of your thinking is what we call the “silent” alarm—also called **hypervigilance**. Does you know what this is? [Build on client's input to describe hypervigilance.] When you never really let down your guard, never fully relax, never really sleep deeply because part of your brain is still pulling guard duty. This “hypervigilance” saps your energy and keeps your brain from devoting energy to getting re-organized.

Teaching Example Hypervigilance

When is hypervigilance important and when is it not? There may be times when is it a coping skill to be hypervigilant or at least vigilant. This is another way of explaining how it is important to choose when to activate the alarm.

The result is that you are likely to be flooded with reactive thoughts, including not just negative but shut-down thoughts that really are just an expression of feeling unsafe because you can't turn down the alarm system in your brain! It may seem like life is constantly dangerous—and that may partly be true—but a big part of the problem is that your brain's alarm is controlling your thinking rather than your thinking controlling your brain's alarm!

And it's **not** because you're crazy, because this is the opposite of being crazy. It's very sane to try to protect yourself from harm, that's not crazy. It's just too exhausting physically and mentally to always keep on red alert, so you end up not thinking as clearly as your capable of. And the solution is not to criticize yourself or give up, but these are tempting options when you feel emotionally and physically exhausted and overwhelmed.

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

In your **Participant Guide Evaluating Main Thoughts/First Reactions/Main Thoughts** you'll find a list of the kinds of "First Reactions" that people often have when feeling triggered and TRAPPED/extreme stress. Are these familiar thoughts? [Facilitate discussion.]

The problem with these reactive 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 blaring! Reactive thoughts are so vague and general that they keep your mind in a state of disorganization.

The list of "Main Thoughts" might not be exactly what you are really thinking, but they give you examples of thoughts that are not affected by unfinished emotions. Remember, in many cases it's not what happens to you but how you interpret it in your thoughts that reinforce either positive emotions (like feeling confident, interested, or happy) or negative emotions (like feeling TRAPPED.) Can anyone give an example of a situation where your first thought was not accurate and led you astray into unnecessary negative emotions? [Facilitate brief discussion.]

Instead of being preoccupied with thinking that you're going to die or give up or blow up with anger, to be able to focus on a MAIN thought: "I want to make my life safe now." That kind of clear MAIN thought cuts through the alarm signals and helps your brain start to re-group.

15 minutes **Introduction of Personal Practice Exercise**

Last session we talked through a recent experience when you felt trapped or extreme stress. This week we are introducing the personal practice exercise method of working through the FREEDOM steps. Today we will practice the first 3 steps and we will add to this each week until we have completed all seven of the FREEDOM steps.

Now let's apply this Emotion Awareness method to another experience where you felt TRAPPED. [*Refer participants to Participant Guide -**Personal Practice Exercise**. Walk through the steps while the client records their answers briefly on the Personal Practice Exercise form. Alternatively you can serve as a scribe to help clients who have difficulty with reading or writing.* Note: *There is a simplified version of the Personal Practice Exercise at the end of the Handouts that simply lists all of the steps. Use this if it seems a better fit for a particular client*]

We call this a **Personal Practice Exercise** because it is a way of practicing the FREEDOM steps that we'll use in these sessions and you also can use if you choose between sessions. If you do a Personal Practice Exercise between sessions, be sure to follow every step. It is very important to do this only in a safe quiet place. It's also important to plan a reward for yourself for doing the exercise, some activity you enjoy that you can do right after you do the exercise. It might be having something to eat or drink that you really enjoy – as long as it's healthy and fits with your personal recovery plan. Or taking a pleasant walk, having a relaxing bath, watching a favorite TV show or movie, listening to music, or doing something you enjoy with a friend you really like. This helps orient your brain by focusing on things you can safely look forward to. It's also important to have someone you can talk to if you need to during or afterwards. You may

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not feel stressed or need to talk, but sometimes you will feel that way. So it's good to pick a close friend or family member or someone else with whom you feel safe sharing what you're feeling. You don't ever HAVE TO do this exercise outside of our sessions; it's just an option.

So let's do **Step 1** by Focusing[pause to slow down and orient] and have you fill in the self-checks on the three scales –stress, personal control and urge to use MCS.

Step 2 is Recognizing Triggers by thinking about one time when you felt extreme stress or TRAPPED, but not higher than a 7 on the stress scale. Just take one recent (within the past 2 weeks) experience, don't try to do several at once or go too far in the past. If other memories come to mind, the best way to keep focused is to put those other memories in a safe place where you can get back to them one-at-a-time when, and if, you are ready.

Now let's answer 4 simple but important questions.

When did it happen?
What happened?
What did you think and do?
How did it end?

Sometimes it's very clear when a situation ends, like an argument where you and the other person stop talking and just walk away from each other. But even then you might feel that it didn't really end because you're left with upset feelings and you know you'll need to find a way to work things out with that person in the future. That's an example of how there might not be a clear endpoint. The best way to pick an ending is to think of the point in the situation when you felt different—like if you felt you had completed the activity, or when it was time to stop and go on to something else, or when you felt you had gotten through the worst of the experience. Notice how every situation actually can have many endings, even if most of them are only partial. It still helps to decide on an endpoint so that you are teaching your brain that every experience has an ending, even if it leaves you with unfinished feelings.

Now let's identify the MAIN Trigger in this situation. What was the one moment when you really started to feel reactive emotions or to think reactive thoughts? What was happening at that moment, or just before, that might have seemed small (or large) and that might have signaled to your brain that you weren't safe or that something bad was happening? Now you can see that while the whole situation was stressful, this trigger is what you really need to focus on in order to help your brain's alarm know that you have figured out what the danger was. Even if it wasn't really a dangerous thing, the trigger was something that told your brain that you might be in danger or that something really bad was happening or might happen. If you know that, then you're already telling your brain that you're more in control, and therefore safer.

Let's do another check of your Stress, Control and Urge self-ratings. This is important so that you can see how you're feeling after you've dealt with a memory. You may feel better or worse - hopefully better, but even if you feel worse it's probably because you've been working on a tough memory and that is a positive accomplishment even if it is stressful. [Ask the client to describe the current Stress, Urge to use MCS, and Control ratings. If Stress or Urge to use MCS levels are **8 or higher** help the client to take a part of the memory/experience that is not the worst part, so that their Stress and Urge to use MCS levels are **7 or lower**. Do problem solving as needed to help the client get very low Control ratings up to **at least a 3** right now.]

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Step 3 is Emotion Awareness to help your brain safely and effectively deal with some of the unfinished emotional business from this experience. What were your reactive emotions? What were your one or two MAIN emotions?

Step 4 is Evaluating Thoughts, again to help your brain get organized and deal with unfinished emotional business from the experience. What were your reactive thoughts? What were your one or two MAIN thoughts?

Now do another self-check by rating your Stress, Control, and Urge to use MCS.

We'll use this **Personal Practice Exercise** form in each of the next sessions, and we'll add **FREEDOM** skills each session so that you can practice using them one step at a time.

10 Minutes **Personal Life Book Exercise**

Now let's shift gears and take 10 minutes to go back to working on your personal **Life Book**. Since we have been talking about thoughts today, you might want to add pictures or words that are your non-verbal representation of your thoughts. You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you. So, take a few minutes to put pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. If you'd like to talk as you do this, that's fine, or I can just sit with you while you work on your Life Book quietly. We don't have as long to do this today as we did last week, but it's a good way to close our session and to help you focus in on your MAIN thoughts, since that was today's **FREEDOM** skill.

[Help the client add a few elements to her Life Book with drawings and photographs or writings. After 10 minutes, wrap up for this session, letting your client know that you will keep her life book safely and privately so it will be a "work in progress."]

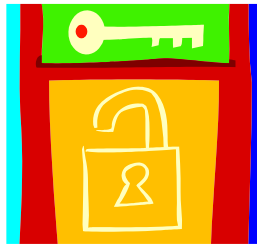
5 Minutes **Conclusion and Homework:**

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

Next session we'll move on to the 5th FREEDOM step, the "D"—**Defining your main** personal need or goal in Stressful situations--in the meantime, continue your daily self-checks. If you want to, and plan carefully to do this safely, you can use the **Personal Practice Exercise** record form to work on the first 4 FREEDOM skills again during the week. If you do this, pick a time and place, and have the right support people available. Then pick an experience where you felt triggered—not a terrible trauma, but a Stressful experience that causes you to feel medium-high Stress or Urge to use MCS levels, but no higher than a **6 or a 7!** Then follow the steps on the **Personal Practice Exercise** form carefully, and bring it back in next session for us to discuss.

The 5th Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Define Goals

SESSION 8



KEY POINTS
Check-in and Engagement
Recognizing Survival Goals v. Main Goals
Personal Practice Exercise Steps 1-5
Continuing Personal Life Book (Materials needed; tape, blunt end scissors, markers, magazines, newsprint/flip chart paper, life books from previous week)
Closure and Check-out

20 Minutes **Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions**

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check.
[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

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[Relate the client's stress reactions to Reactive Thoughts using prior Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how reactive emotions occur automatically. Help the client focus in on one or two MAIN thoughts that are grounding for her. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

In this session I will introduce you to the 5th step to **FREEDOM: Defining Goals**. We'll look at how focusing in on 1 or 2 **MAIN goals** can help your brain turn down the survival alarm and get better organized, even if you feel stressed and you aren't sure you can achieve your goals.

And we'll give you an opportunity to add important experiences that have shaped your MAIN goals for yourself and your life to your personal **Life Book**.

Do you have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? Were you able to keep your daily self-checks during the past week? Did you use the SOS Focusing skill or any of the other **FREEDOM** skills even if they did not write them down? Did you do a **Personal Practice Exercise** during the week? [Briefly review each step with the client, to validate their work and check that they did the exercise safely and effectively.] *[Review main points from last session, focusing on how moving from reactive shut-down thoughts to MAIN thoughts can help turn down the brain's alarm system and improve the ability to think clearly. Discuss what the client's self-checks during the week show about how she is (1) more aware of stress reactions than in the past, (2) better able to recover when stress reactions are extreme, (3) able to reduce the level of stress and MCS urges and increase her sense of personal control, overall, even if she has had the expectable ups and downs in stress/urges/control during the week.]*

20 minutes TEACHING/SKILLS: FREEDOM Step 5—Defining Goals

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

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

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

And we'll give you an opportunity to add important experiences that have shaped your basic beliefs about yourself and life to your personal **Life book**.

In your **Participant Guide Defining Goals/Survival Goals vs. Main Goals** you'll find a list

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of the “Survival Goals” that often fill up our days and lives. Are these familiar goals? Do they help you make your life a good life? [Facilitate discussion.]

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

Teaching Example Define Goals
Life can be pretty chaotic for many clients, so in using this handout it might be helpful to acknowledge that sometimes survival goals are the most appropriate in a given situation. For example, in a domestic violence situation, not becoming a target might be more helpful than standing up for yourself. Once the situation dissipates someone might choose a different goal, however at that moment survival is most important.

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

So what are the most important needs and goals for a full life that’s really worth living? [Refer to **Participant Guide–Define Your Goals.**] Here’s a list of key needs and goals that people have shared. What would you add or change in this list – what are the **main** goals for you?

Teaching Example Immediate/Life Goals
This might be a good time in the session to discuss and brain storm the difference between immediate goals and life goals. On the handout are examples of longer term life goals, having clients come up with some examples of immediate goals will have them see how what they do each day makes a difference.

Now let’s look at how it can help if you add defining a goal to the first 4 FREEDOM steps. We’ll use the **Personal Practice Exercise** method with a handout in the **Participant Guide**. Have the client complete the personal practice exercise as you talk them through the process.

So let’s do **Step 1** by Focusing[pause to slow down and orient] and have you fill in the self-checks on the three scales –stress, personal control and urge to use MCS.

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Step 2 is Recognizing Triggers by thinking about one time when you felt extreme stress or TRAPPED, but not higher than a 7 on the stress scale. Just take one recent experience, don't try to do several at once or go too far in the past. If other memories come to mind, the best way to keep focused is to put those other memories in a safe place in your Life Experiences Closet where you can get back to them one-at-a-time when, and if, you are ready.

Now let's answer 4 simple but important questions.

When did it happen?
What happened?
What did you think and do?
How did it end?

Now identify the Main Trigger in this situation.

Let's do another check of your Stress, Control and Urge self-ratings. This is important so that you can see how you're feeling after you've dealt with a memory. You may feel better or worse - hopefully better, but even if you feel worse it's probably because you've been working on a tough memory and that is a positive accomplishment even if it is stressful. [Ask the client to describe the current Stress, Urge to use MCS, and Control ratings. If Stress or Urge to use MCS levels are **8 or higher** help the client to take a part of the memory/experience that is not the worst part, so that their Stress and Urge to use MCS levels are **7 or lower** Do problem solving as needed to help the client get very low Control ratings up to **at least a 3** right now.]

Step 3 is Emotion Awareness to help your brain safely and effectively deal with some of the unfinished emotional business from this experience. What were your reactive emotions? What were your one or two MAIN emotions?

Step 4 is Evaluating Thoughts, again to help your brain get organized and deal with unfinished emotional business from the experience. What were your reactive thoughts? What were your one or two MAIN thoughts?

Step 5 is Defining Goals. What was the single most important thing that you needed in this experience? What was your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on that one MAIN goal in the midst of feeling stressed, but let's capture that thought now. [Help client hone in on one key personal goal in that situation.]

Notice that as you hone in on your MAIN goal, you reduce the reactive emotions and “shut down” thoughts that can make you feel TRAPPED. Defining MAIN goals doesn't solve every problem, but it is a key step toward turning down your brain's alarm so you can think clearly and feel better. You may know when you've found the MAIN goal because you'll feel a sense of something wrong being better or falling into place – what we sometimes call the “A ha!” feeling.

Notice also that there is no right or wrong need or goal—it's just that only a few goals are what you really care most about. Every goal deserves to be taken seriously, but you are going to be helping your brain recover best if you can zero-in on just your MAIN goals.

Now do another self-check by rating your Stress, Control, and Urge to use MCS. [Ask client to share the ratings, and record them and in your Log.]

10 Minutes **Continuing the Personal Life Book**

Now let's shift gears and take 10 minutes to go back to working on your personal **Life Book**. Since we have been talking about goals today, you might want to add pictures or words that show your MAIN life goals. You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you. So, take a few minutes to put pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. If you'd like to talk as you do this, that's fine, or I can just sit with you while you work on your Life Book quietly. Today again we don't have a lot of time to do to the **Life Book**, but it's a good way to close our session and to help you focus in on your MAIN goals, since that was today's **FREEDOM** skill.

[Help the client add a few elements to her Life Book with drawings and photographs or writings. After 10 minutes, wrap up for this session, letting your client know that you will keep her life book safely and privately so it will be a "work in progress."]

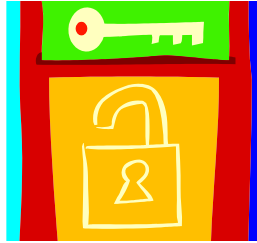
5 Minutes **Conclusion and Homework:**

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

Next session we'll move on to the 6th FREEDOM step, the "O"—**O**ptions you are using to take a step toward your MAIN goals in stressful situations--in the meantime, continue your daily self-checks. If you want to, and plan carefully to do this safely, you can use the **Personal Practice Exercise** record form to work on the first 5 FREEDOM skills again during the week. If you do this, pick a time and place, and have the right support people available. Then pick an experience where you felt triggered—not a terrible trauma, but a Stressful experience that causes you to feel medium-high Stress or Urge to use MCS levels, but no higher than a **6 or a 7!** Then follow the steps on the **Personal Practice Exercise** form carefully, and bring it back in next session for us to discuss.

The 6th Step to FREEDOM from PTSD: Options

SESSION 9



KEY POINTS
Check-in and Engagement
Identifying positive Options already being used under stress
Personal Practice Exercise Steps 1-6
Continuing the Personal Life Book (Materials needed; tape, blunt end scissors, markers, magazines, newsprint/flip chart paper, life books from previous week)
Closure

20 Minutes **Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions**

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check.
[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

[Relate the client's stress reactions to Reactive goals using prior Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how reactive emotions occur automatically. Help the client focus

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in on one or two MAIN goals that are grounding for her. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

In this session I will introduce you to the 6th step to **FREEDOM: Options**. We'll look at how focusing in on ways you're already taking positive steps toward your MAIN goals can help your brain turn down the survival alarm and get better organized, even if you feel stressed and you aren't sure you can actually achieve your goals. And we'll give you an opportunity to add important experiences that have shaped your Options to your personal **Life Book**.

Do you have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? Were you able to keep your daily self-checks during the past week? Did you use the SOS Focusing skill or any of the other **FREEDOM** skills even if they did not write them down? Did you do a **Personal Practice Exercise** during the week? [Briefly review each step with the client, to validate their work and check that they did the exercise safely and effectively.] [**Review main points from last session, focusing on how moving from reactive goals to MAIN goals can help turn down the brain's alarm system and improve the ability to think clearly. Discuss what the client's self-checks during the week show about how she is (1) more aware of stress reactions than in the past, (2) better able to recover when stress reactions are extreme, (3) able to reduce the level of stress and MCS urges and increase her sense of personal control, overall, even if she has had the expectable ups and downs in stress/urges/control during the week.**]

20 minutes **TEACHING/SKILLS: FREEDOM Step 6—Options**

An “**option**” is a choice you make about what to do in a situation. If you choose an effective option, you'll meet your needs or goals, at least somewhat. Options are **choices**, and that's different from what we usually do when stressed or in survival mode, which is just to react without choosing.

We call these **OPTIONS** because they are choices you make which make your life a little better in small steps. This is like the “options” you can choose if you're buying a car, to really make it the right car for you. The main cost is the car itself. Then you might also want to choose an option like a radio or air conditioning, which aren't cheap but also don't cost as much as the car. And those options make the car what you really want, so they can make a big difference. If you're dealing with a stress trigger or unfinished emotional business in your life now, you will be most successful if you choose a few small **options** that make a real difference in how you feel and in achieving your personal goal.

Actually, every time you deal with a stress trigger or unfinished emotions, you **already are choosing** options that are effective without even recognizing it! So instead of trying to figure out a whole bunch of new choices or new things to do, the best thing you can do is practice ***paying attention to the positive or effective options that you're already choosing!*** The best way to see the options that you are choosing now is to look more carefully at situations that involve stress or unfinished emotions. The things to look for are the actions that you take which show your **true values** and **set a positive example for other people or moves you toward your goals**. The best option is something you're already doing that is effective because it shows what you really believe is right—even if it doesn't seem to work or isn't perfect.

[Make a list with the client of values that are most important to her and the ways of acting

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that live up to those values and set a positive example, e.g., treating people with respect, telling the truth, protecting people from harm, paying attention to consequences, etc.]

During difficult life experiences, and during extreme stress reactions afterwards, the brain's alarm goes non-stop, and the only option you tend to notice is what you do automatically just to survive or to protect other people. But there's always much more that you're doing, and usually **some of what you do is to find the best options in the bad situation**. If you don't recognize the positive options you've chosen, not only is your life unsatisfying and limited but also you never show your brain that you really are in control and that it can turn down its survival alarm!

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

So what are the positive options that people choose and then don't give themselves credit for? [Refer to **Participant Guide-Options for Being effective as a Person**.] Here's a list of positive options that people have shared. What would you add or change in this list – what are **options** that you've chosen under stress in the past? In addition to identifying options you already have chosen, there are additional choices or options when faced with a situation. The **Options Framework** gives you a way of thinking about options in advance, organizing them into three main categories: Do Something, Do Nothing, or Postpone. [Facilitate discussion and examples]

Teaching Example Options
Depending on the client, 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 together it shows the value of more than one person attempting to solve a problem at the same time and demonstrates that there is more than one way to look at a situation.

Now let's look at how it can help if you add positive **Options** to the first 5 **FREEDOM** steps. We'll use the **Personal Practice Exercise** method in your **Participant Guide**. Have the client complete the personal practice exercise as you talk them through the process.

So let's do **Step 1** by Focusing [Pause to slow down and orient] and have you fill in the self-checks on the three scales –stress, personal control and urge to use MCS.

Step 2 is Recognizing Triggers by thinking about one time when you felt extreme stress or TRAPPED, but not higher than a 7 on the stress scale. Just take one recent experience, don't try to do several at once or go too far in the past. If other memories come to mind, the best way to keep focused is to put those other memories in a safe place in your Life Experiences Closet where you can get back to them one-at-a-time when, and if, you are ready.

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Now let's answer 4 simple but important questions.

When did it happen?
What happened?
What did you think and do?
How did it end?

Now identify the Main Trigger in this situation.

Let's do another check of your Stress, Control and Urge self-ratings. This is important so that you can see how you're feeling after you've dealt with a memory. You may feel better or worse - hopefully better, but even if you feel worse it's probably because you've been working on a tough memory and that is a positive accomplishment even if it is stressful. [Ask the client to describe the current Stress, Urge to use MCS, and Control ratings. If Stress or Urge to use MCS levels are **8 or higher** help the client to take a part of the memory/experience that is not the worst part, so that their Stress and Urge to use MCS levels are **7 or lower** Do problem solving as needed to help the client get very low Control ratings up to **at least a 3** right now.]

Step 3 is Emotion Awareness to help your brain safely and effectively deal with some of the unfinished emotional business from this experience. What were your reactive emotions? What were your one or two MAIN emotions?

Step 4 is Evaluating Thoughts, again to help your brain get organized and deal with unfinished emotional business from the experience. What were your reactive thoughts? What were your one or two MAIN thoughts?

Step 5 is Defining Goals. What was the single most important thing that you needed in this experience? What was your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on that one thought in the midst of feeling Stressed, but let's capture that thought now. [Help participants hone in on one key personal need or goal.]

Step 6 is Options. What choices did you make that were at least a small step toward your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on those choices in the midst of feeling stressed, but let's capture what you did that was a step toward your MAIN goals right now. [Help client hone in on 1-2 positive choices she made.]

Notice that as you hone in on your positive Options, you reduce the reactive emotions and "shut down" thoughts that can make you feel TRAPPED. Identifying positive Options doesn't mean that you completely solved the problem or handled the situation perfectly, but it is a key step toward turning down your brain's alarm so you can think clearly and feel better. You may know when you've identified a positive Option because you'll feel a sense of something wrong being better or falling into place – what we sometimes call the "A ha!" feeling.

Notice also that there is no right or wrong Option—every choice you make deserves to be taken seriously, because each choice can be a step toward your MAIN goals. Even if you think you could have handled it better, you made some positive choices during or after the situation and your brain needs to focus on this in order to feel safe enough to start shutting down the alarm.

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Now do another self-check by rating your Stress, Control, and Urge to use MCS. [Ask client to share the ratings, and record them and in your Log.]

10 Minutes Continuing the Personal Life Book

Now let's shift gears and take 10 minutes to go back to working on your personal **Life Book**. Since we have been talking about Options today, you might want to add pictures or words that show things you do that are positive choices. You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you. So, take a few minutes to put pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. If you'd like to talk as you do this, that's fine, or I can just sit with you while you work on your Life Book quietly. Today again we don't have a lot of time do to the **Life Book**, but it's a good way to close our session and to help you focus in on your positive choices or Options, since that was today's **FREEDOM** skill.

[Help the client add a few elements to her Life Book with drawings and photographs or writings. After 10 minutes, wrap up for this session, letting your client know that you will keep her life book safely and privately so it will be a "work in progress."]

5 Minutes Conclusion and Homework:

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

Next session we'll move on to the 7th FREEDOM step, the "M"—**Making a Contribution** to make the world a better place. In the meantime, continue your daily self-checks. If you want to, and plan carefully to do this safely, you can use the **Personal Practice Exercise** record form to work on the first 6 FREEDOM skills again during the week. If you do this, pick a time and place, and have the right support people available. Then pick an experience where you felt triggered—not a terrible trauma, but a Stressful experience that causes you to feel medium-high Stress or Urge to use MCS levels, but no higher than a **6 or a 7!** Then follow the steps on the **Personal Practice Exercise** form carefully, and bring it back in next session for us to discuss.

The Seventh FREEDOM Step: Making a Contribution

Session 10



KEY POINTS
Check-in and Engagement
Recognizing the ways in which the client already is Making positive contributions to the world
Personal Practice Exercise Steps 1-7
Continuing the Personal Life Book (Materials needed; tape, blunt end scissors, markers, magazines, newsprint/flip chart paper, life books from previous week)
Closure and Check-out

20 Minutes Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check.
[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]

What are the situations and issues that you want to work on today in counseling? Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that you'd like to talk about with me?

[Validate the client's feelings and concerns, re-framing them with positive goals as helpful or necessary, e.g., "getting laid off from work" could be validated and re-framed as "finding that you didn't have a job was very stressful, and you are deciding what you need to do and what is best for you and the people you care about"]

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying."]

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[Relate the client's stress reactions to positive Options using prior Handouts to show the client in pictorial form how positive choices can get lost in the reactivity. Help the client focus in on one or two Options she's already used when under stress recently. Keep your focus on active listening and validation, use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

In this session I will introduce you to the 7th step to **FREEDOM: Making a Contribution**. We'll look at how focusing in on ways you're already making life safer or better for others can help your brain turn down the survival alarm and get better organized, even if you feel stressed and you aren't sure you feel self-worth or self-esteem. And we'll give you an opportunity to add important experiences that have shaped your life contributions to your personal **Life Book**.

Do you have any comments or questions about what we covered in our last session? Were you able to keep your daily self-checks during the past week? Did you use the SOS Focusing skill or any of the other **FREEDOM** skills even if they did not write them down? Did you do a **Personal Practice Exercise** during the week? [Briefly review each step with the client, to validate their work and check that they did the exercise safely and effectively.] *[Review main points from last session, focusing on how identifying positive choices—Options--can help turn down the brain's alarm system and improve the ability to think clearly. Discuss what the client's self-checks during the week show about how she is (1) more aware of stress reactions than in the past, (2) better able to recover when stress reactions are extreme, (3) able to reduce the level of stress and MCS urges and increase her sense of personal control, overall, even if she has had the expectable ups and downs in stress/urges/control during the week.]*

20 minutes **TEACHING/SKILLS: FREEDOM Step 7—Making a Contribution**

[It's not enough for most trauma survivors to just take care of themselves, although that is important. Trauma can cause survivors to question what life is all about, and why it's worth it to be alive. Further, trauma can make anyone question whether anyone, including oneself, 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 ways that they actually are doing the right thing and making the world a better place. For therapists doing this work, it can be hard to listen and know about clients' trauma histories and stress reactions, and you may also have the same spiritual/moral questions as your clients. Be aware of this and ensure that you have good supervision, consultation and colleague support.]

This session, I'll introduce you to the 7th **FREEDOM** skill: **M**aking a contribution. What's important here is to be able to look back at what you actually did in a stressful experience when you were feeling the TRAPPED, and see how **you actually made a positive difference** even if you couldn't make everything work out all right.

Most people who have been through difficult life experiences really want to feel that they are making a contribution to the world, not just taking up space. But they often are the last ones to give themselves fair credit when they do something that sets a good example, lives up to a positive value, or helps someone else who is vulnerable, hurting, or in need. The skill is to recognize the ways in which you *already* **M**ake a Contribution by the Options you choose. That's what we'll work on today.

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Recognizing the positive contributions you've made can help your brain turn down the survival alarms and get better organized, even if things didn't work out as you had hoped.

Making a Contribution means 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. This is the spiritual and moral aspect of recovery from extreme stress. You don't have to agree with any particular religious or spiritual beliefs, or even believe in God or a higher power, to benefit from working on your own personal spiritual renewal.

Extreme stress makes the basic ingredients in spirituality and morality—hope, trust, compassion, and faith—hard to believe in, like they don't really matter because life can be so terrible that nothing good can be counted on. But this is a recipe for depression and bad choices, because it makes life seem hopeless and pointless. One way to include spiritual recovery in counseling is to get back to the basic human need and goal that is the core of every person's spiritual inner life: knowing that our lives have counted for something--that we're not just taking up space or taking from others without giving back—by making the world a better place.

Each person does this in her/his own unique way. The key to recovery is NOT trying harder to be a good person or to do good deeds, but to be able to **recognize** the contribution that you're already making in small but significant ways when you use the other **FREEDOM** skills and choose options that make positive changes happen. Many people have difficulty giving themselves credit for doing good things, even though they can give other people lots of credit for doing good deeds—like for being a good role model by setting a positive example through their action; or for being a caring and supportive friend, family or group client; or, for protecting somebody who is vulnerable or is being hurt or treated unfairly.

Teaching Example Make a Contribution
This is one of the harder but also most rewarding steps for many clients. 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. Counselors should observe and remember things that clients have shared in previous sessions that can demonstrate this step.

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

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

This may seem like a lot to do, and it is at first. But the 7 **FREEDOM** skills actually work so well together that once you get the hang of using them as a 7-step sequence, they can become almost automatic. This takes careful study and dedicated practice at first, like any worthwhile skill. Rome was not built in a day, and **FREEDOM** takes time to learn and achieve. But each step can be done in a matter of a few moments or even seconds, if you remember to use it!

Now let's look at how it can help if you add **Making a Contribution** to the first 6 **FREEDOM** steps. We'll use the **Personal Practice Exercise** method in your **Participant Guide**. Have the client complete the personal practice exercise as you talk them through the process.

So let's do **Step 1** by Focusing [Pause to slow down and orient] and have you fill in the self-checks on the three scales—stress, personal control and urge to use MCS.

Step 2 is Recognizing Triggers by thinking about one time when you felt extreme stress or TRAPPED, but not higher than a 7 on the stress scale. Just take one recent experience, don't try to do several at once or go too far in the past. If other memories come to mind, the best way to keep focused is to put those other memories in a safe place in your Life Experiences Closet where you can get back to them one-at-a-time when, and if, you are ready.

Now let's answer 4 simple but important questions.

When did it happen?
What happened?
What did you think and do?
How did it end?

Now identify the Main Trigger in this situation.

Let's do another check of your Stress, Control and Urge self-ratings. This is important so that you can see how you're feeling after you've dealt with a memory. You may feel better or worse - hopefully better, but even if you feel worse it's probably because you've been working on a tough memory and that is a positive accomplishment even if it is stressful. [Ask the client to describe the current Stress, Urge to use MCS, and Control ratings. If Stress or Urge to use MCS levels are **8 or higher** help the client to take a part of the memory/experience that is not the worst part, so that their Stress and Urge to use MCS levels are **7 or lower** Do problem solving as needed to help the client get very low Control ratings up to **at least a 3** right now.]

Step 3 is Emotion Awareness to help your brain safely and effectively deal with some of the unfinished emotional business from this experience. What were your reactive emotions? What were your one or two MAIN emotions?

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Step 4 is Evaluating Thoughts, again to help your brain get organized and deal with unfinished emotional business from the experience. What were your reactive thoughts? What were your one or two MAIN thoughts?

Step 5 is **Defining Goals**. What was the single most important thing that you needed in this experience? What was your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on that one thought in the midst of feeling Stressed, but let's capture that thought now. [Help participants hone in on one key personal need or goal.]

Step 6 is **Options**. What choices did you make that were at least a small step toward your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on those choices in the midst of feeling stressed, but let's capture what you did that was a step toward your MAIN goals right now. [Help client hone in on 1-2 positive choices she made.]

Step 7 is **Making a Contribution**. What positive contribution did you make? What was the single most important thing that you did in this experience? How did this choice make a positive contribution to *not only you but to other people or the world?* You may not have succeeded, but you shouldn't lose credit for setting a positive example or showing courage or being caring—even if some of your choices under those circumstances were not the ones you feel are best. [Help client hone in on one positive contribution she made in the situation.]

Notice that as you identify positive contributions, you are reducing the reactive emotions and “shut down” thoughts that keep your feeling TRAPPED and prevent you from seeing the value of your choices. When you focus on your positive contributions, you aren't giving yourself too much credit, you're just putting aside your stress reactions and taking a fair look at what you bring to the people you care about and to the world by your positive choices. As this exercise shows, it's important to recognize your positive contributions in order to build a genuine sense of your own true worth – and this takes time and many repetitions. This only works if you've already done the first 6 **FREEDOM** steps so that you are not just patting yourself on the back. Here too, you may also feel that sense that something that's been wrong is finally falling into place – what we sometimes call the “A ha!” feeling.

Now let's do another self-check by rating your Stress, Control, and Urge to use MCS. [Ask client to share the ratings, and record them and in your Log.]

10 Minutes **Continuing the Personal Life Book**

Now let's shift gears and take 10 minutes to go back to working on your personal **Life Book**. Since we have been talking about Making a contribution today, you might want to add pictures or words that show things you do that are positive contributions to the world and to the people who you care about. You are also free to add anything else that is important or meaningful to you. So, take a few minutes to put pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. If you'd like to talk as you do this, that's fine, or I can just sit with you while you work on your Life Book quietly. Today again we don't have a lot of time to do to the **Life Book**, but it's a good way to close our session and to help you focus in on your contributions to others and to the world, since that was today's **FREEDOM** skill.

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[Help the client add a few elements to her Life Book with drawings and photographs or writings. After 10 minutes, wrap up for this session, letting your client know that you will keep her life book safely and privately so it will be a “work in progress.”]

5 Minutes **Conclusion and Homework:**

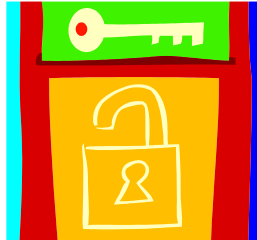
We’re coming to the end of today’s meeting. Take a moment and use your **focusing** skills to slow down, get oriented, and do a self-check. What is each of your STRESS, Urge, and Control ratings right now? [Record on blackboard and in your Leader Log.]

Next session we’ll look at how you can use all of the **FREEDOM** steps every day in your life, so that you can take the work we’ve done together and our counseling relationship with you wherever you go and whatever you have to deal with in life. In the meantime, continue your daily self-checks. If you want to, and plan carefully to do this safely, you can use the **Personal Practice Exercise** record form to work on the **FREEDOM** skills again during the week. If you do this, pick a time and place, and have the right support people available. Then pick an experience where you felt triggered—not a terrible trauma, but a Stressful experience that causes you to feel medium-high Stress or Urge to use MCS levels, but no higher than a **6 or a 7!** Then follow the steps on the **Personal Practice Exercise** form carefully, and bring it back in next session for us to discuss.

Next session is our next-to-last session, so we’ll focus on how you can take these skills and the confidence that you’ve been gaining as we’ve worked together into every aspect of your daily life. Our sessions may come to an end in a couple of weeks, but our counseling relationship will continue for the rest of your life if you take the **FREEDOM** skills with you every day.

Making **FREEDOM** Your Way of Life

Session 11



KEY POINTS
Check-in and Engagement
Barriers to Using FREEDOM in daily life
Personal Practice Exercise Steps 1-7
Continuing the Personal Life Book (Materials needed; tape, blunt end scissors, markers, magazines, newsprint/flip chart paper, life books from previous week)
Closure and Check-out

20 Minutes Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check. *[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]*

Today, since this is our next-to-last session, let's focus on how you are using the **FREEDOM** steps in your life and where you are encountering barriers or having difficulty using these skills. Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that we can talk about which show how you're using **FREEDOM** or how you're having difficulty using the skills?

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps, e.g., "When you felt a flash of anger, that was your reactive Emotion, and it sounds like the MAIN trigger may have been that person telling you that you had to wait. Your reactive thought was to just leave and blow off the appointment, but you were able to remember your MAIN goal of getting that job and you chose the option of staying." Keep your focus on active listening and validation, particularly highlighting how the client is using the FREEDOM skills in ways that she hadn't recognized and the benefits that she may not have noticed. Use teaching comments and materials sparingly]

10 Minutes **Overcoming Barriers to Using FREEDOM in Daily Life**

The best way to live is to use **FREEDOM** every day. But that takes a lot of focusing and can be hard to do if you're under stress. Let's take one recent experience, or an experience that you think might happen in the future, where you just didn't think you could use **FREEDOM** or that those skills would be helpful, or where you were so stressed that you didn't even remember to use any of the **FREEDOM** skills. Let's do this as a **Personal Practice Exercise**.

So let's do **Step 1** by Focusing [Pause to slow down and orient] and have you fill in the self-checks on the three scales –stress, personal control and urge to use MCS.

Step 2 is Recognizing Triggers by thinking about one time when you felt extreme stress or TRAPPED, but not higher than a 7 on the stress scale. Just take one recent experience, don't try to do several at once or go too far in the past. If other memories come to mind, the best way to keep focused is to put those other memories in a safe place in your Life Experiences Closet where you can get back to them one-at-a-time when, and if, you are ready.

Now let's answer 4 simple but important questions.

When did it happen?
What happened?
What did you think and do?
How did it end?

Now identify the Main Trigger in this situation.

Let's do another check of your Stress, Control and Urge self-ratings. This is important so that you can see how you're feeling after you've dealt with a memory. You may feel better or worse - hopefully better, but even if you feel worse it's probably because you've been working on a tough memory and that is a positive accomplishment even if it is stressful. [Ask the client to describe the current Stress, Urge to use MCS, and Control ratings. If Stress or Urge to use MCS levels are **8 or higher** help the client to take a part of the memory/experience that is not the worst part, so that their Stress and Urge to use MCS levels are **7 or lower** Do problem solving as needed to help the client get very low Control ratings up to **at least a 3** right now.]

Step 3 is Emotion Awareness to help your brain safely and effectively deal with some of the unfinished emotional business from this experience. What were your reactive emotions? What were your one or two MAIN emotions?

Step 4 is Evaluating Thoughts, again to help your brain get organized and deal with unfinished emotional business from the experience. What were your reactive thoughts? What were your one or two MAIN thoughts?

Step 5 is Defining Goals. What was the single most important thing that you needed in this experience? What was your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on that one thought in the midst of feeling Stressed, but let's capture that thought now. [Help participants hone in on one key personal need or goal.]

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Step 6 is **Options**. What choices did you make that were at least a small step toward your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on those choices in the midst of feeling stressed, but let’s capture what you did that was a step toward your MAIN goals right now. [Help client hone in on 1-2 positive choices she made.]

Step 7 is **Making a Contribution**. What positive contribution did you make? What was the single most important thing that you did in this experience? How did this choice make a positive contribution to *not only you but to other people or the world*? You may not have succeeded, but you shouldn’t lose credit for setting a positive example or showing courage or being caring—even if some of your choices under those circumstances were not the ones you feel are best. [Help client hone in on one positive contribution she made in the situation.]

So that’s an example of how you can find **FREEDOM** if you work hard enough and use the steps, even when it didn’t seem possible or worthwhile to try when your brain’s alarm was telling you to react instead of to focus. Now let’s do another self-check by rating your Stress, Control, and Urge to use MCS. [Ask client to share the ratings, and record them and in your Log.]

20 Minutes **Continuing the Personal Life Book**

Now let’s shift gears and take 20 minutes to go back to working on your personal **Life Book**. This is a good time to add anything that is important or meaningful to you, and that shows how you’re finding **FREEDOM** in your life now. So, take a few minutes to put pictures or drawings or writings wherever you think they belong. If you’d like to talk as you do this, that’s fine, or I can just sit with you while you work on your Life Book quietly.

[Help the client add a few elements to her Life Book with drawings and photographs or writings. After 20 minutes, wrap up for this session, letting your client know that you will keep her life book safely and privately so it will be a “work in progress” that she can take with her after she graduates from this counseling next week.]

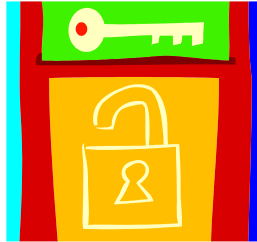
5 Minutes **Conclusion and Homework:**

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

Next session we’ll look at how you can use all of the **FREEDOM** steps every day in your life, so that you can take the work we’ve done together and our counseling relationship with you wherever you go and whatever you have to deal with in life. In the meantime, continue your daily self-checks. If you want to, and plan carefully to do this safely, you can use the **Personal Practice Exercise** record form to work on the **FREEDOM** skills again during the week. If you do this, pick a time and place, and have the right support people available. Then pick an experience where you felt triggered—not a terrible trauma, but a Stressful experience that causes you to feel medium-high Stress or Urge to use MCS levels, but no higher than a **6 or a 7!** Then follow the steps on the **Personal Practice Exercise** form carefully, and bring it back in next session for us to discuss. Next week will be our last session, and your **FREEDOM** graduation!

Graduation

Session 12



KEY POINTS, SESSION 12
Check-in and Engagement
Personal Practice Steps 1-7
Counselor summarize client's accomplishments
Client shares her successes using her Life Book
Awarding of Certificates
Commitment to recovery
Closure and Check-out

25 Minutes **Check-In/Engagement: Listen to the Client's Concerns/Goals and Frame as Difficult Life Experiences and Ordinary/Extreme Stress Reactions**

Let's start today by taking a couple of minutes to focus together, including doing a self-check.
[Record client's self-ratings on a SOS Record Form that you will add to at the beginning, middle, and end of every session. As you note changes over time, including from the beginning to end of sessions or changes across sessions, discuss these with your client.]

Today, since this is our last session, let's focus on how you are using the **FREEDOM** steps in your life and what you've gained—and will continue to gain—by doing this. Have you had some stressful experiences in the past week that we can talk about which show how you're using **FREEDOM** or how you want to use **FREEDOM** skills in the future?

[Relate the client's reactions in and after stressful experiences to the FREEDOM steps]
Let's do this as a final **Personal Practice Exercise**.

We've begun by Focusing on you here-and-now, so now let's focus on a particular experience.

**When did it happen?
What happened?
What did you think and do?
How did it end?**

Step 2 is recognizing the Main Trigger for you in this situation.

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Let's do another check of your Stress, Control and Urge self-ratings. [If Stress or Urge to use MCS levels are **8 or higher** help the client to take a part of the memory/experience that is not the worst part, so that their Stress and Urge to use MCS levels are **7 or lower** Do problem solving as needed to help the client get very low Control ratings up to **at least a 3** right now.]

Step 3 is Emotion Awareness to help your brain safely and effectively deal with some of the unfinished emotional business from this experience. What were your reactive emotions? What were your one or two MAIN emotions?

Step 4 is Evaluating Thoughts, again to help your brain get organized and deal with unfinished emotional business from the experience. What were your reactive thoughts? What were your one or two MAIN thoughts?

Step 5 is Defining Goals. What was the single most important thing that you needed in this experience? What was your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on that one thought in the midst of feeling Stressed, but let's capture that thought now. [Help participants hone in on one key personal need or goal.]

Step 6 is Options. What choices did you make that were at least a small step toward your one MAIN goal—what you **really** wanted to make happen? You may not have been able to focus on those choices in the midst of feeling stressed, but let's capture what you did that was a step toward your MAIN goals right now. [Help client hone in on 1-2 positive choices she made.]

Step 7 is Making a Contribution. What positive contribution did you make? What was the single most important thing that you did in this experience? How did this choice make a positive contribution to *not only you but to other people or the world*? You may not have succeeded, but you shouldn't lose credit for setting a positive example or showing courage or being caring—even if some of your choices under those circumstances were not the ones you feel are best. [Help client hone in on one positive contribution she made in the situation.]

So that's an example of how you can find **FREEDOM** if you work hard enough and use the steps, even when it didn't seem possible or worthwhile to try when your brain's alarm was telling you to react instead of to focus. Now let's do another self-check by rating your Stress, Control, and Urge to use MCS. [Ask client to share the ratings, and record them and in your Log.]

10 Minutes **Counselor Summarizes the Client's Gains**

This example and many others that you've shared during our sessions show how you are using **FREEDOM** every day. Let me tell you some of the best examples that I can remember of times where you've used each of the FREEDOM skills while we've been working together. ***[Give examples from client's disclosures or client's actual in-counseling behavior that reflect the use of each FREEDOM skill, in that order and focusing on each skill/letter.]***

20 Minutes **Client Describes Her Gains Using Her Personal Life Book**

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Now let's shift gears and take 20 minutes to look through your personal **Life Book**, and add anything you'd like to add, while you tell me how this book shows what you've accomplished in your life and in this counseling.

[Help the client describe the meaning to her of the elements to her Life Book and to add any additional elements she feels would express her thoughts and feelings at this graduation session.]

10 Minutes **Certificate of Completion and Closure**

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

Here is a Certificate of Completion that I hope you will put in a special place because it is an important reminder of your accomplishments in this counseling. Let's read together the Personal Commitment to **FREEDOM**. Congratulations!

I hope that as you use the **FREEDOM** steps every day in your life, you will remember the great work we've done together and bring our counseling relationship with you wherever you go in life. Don't forget to use the SOS Focusing skill and keep doing your daily self-checks. If you want to, and plan carefully to do this safely, you can use the **Personal Practice Exercise** record form to work on the **FREEDOM** skills at any time—to practice and keep your skills strong, or to think through a difficult life experience and get your brain re-focused and your alarm re-set.

Thank you for all the courage and dedication you've brought to our counseling. Although our meetings officially are ending, I'd be glad to hear from you – good news or bad news – if you'd like to give me a call any time in the future. Do you have any parting thoughts?