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The Body, Mind, and Trauma: A Case for Trauma-Sensitive Somatic Mindfulness

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Acknowledgments

I dedicate this work to ending suffering for trauma survivors – May it help transform difficulty into ease, tightness into lightness, and be of great benefit to all.

To my dearest loved ones, my husband, Tom Neufeld, and my best friend and sister, Cathy Kading – Thank you for your unwavering support, warmth, and encouragement (and for talking me off the ledge the countless times I wanted to give up). You are my biggest source of support, and your love has sustained me on my path to healing.

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Abstract

This thesis comprises a rationale paper and a creative project advocating for an integrated approach to mindfulness for trauma survivors that prioritizes trauma sensitivity and body-oriented somatic practices. It is important because trauma is a pervasive social issue with profound psychophysiological impacts on survivors, and current mindfulness offerings often fail to adequately address their needs, causing confusion or possibly re-traumatization. The literature indicates somatic and mindfulness-based interventions show promise for trauma recovery; however, research is limited. The findings reveal gaps between trauma-informed care and mindfulness-based approaches due to inconsistent application of trauma-sensitive techniques, a disconnect between somatic and mindfulness-based approaches to trauma recovery, and accessibility and safety concerns for trauma survivors attempting mindfulness. Opportunities include standardizing trauma-sensitive mindfulness implementations, integrating somatic-focused approaches into mindfulness interventions, and developing an accessible resource to empower trauma survivors to engage safely with mindfulness. The creative project, "The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness," addresses the last of these challenges by explaining the role of mindfulness in trauma recovery, identifying trauma-sensitive mindfulness practices, and providing tools to adapt the practices to the needs of trauma survivors, helping them make informed decisions about how to approach mindfulness.

Keywords: trauma, trauma survivors, trauma-informed, trauma-sensitive, somatic, somatic-based interventions (SBIs), mindfulness, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), body-oriented practices, psychophysiological

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The Body, Mind, and Trauma: A Case for Trauma-Sensitive Somatic Mindfulness

Trauma is a pervasive social issue that has profound psychological and physiological impacts on survivors, severely affecting their health, well-being, and life span. The research shows mindfulness has significant benefits for trauma survivors, but despite those benefits, some survivors can be discouraged from practicing mindfulness. A common misperception of mindfulness is that it is about "clearing your mind of thoughts" or is predominantly mind-focused; this presents a barrier for trauma survivors who can have a difficult time with the content of their thoughts. Body-oriented practices are an integral part of mindfulness and particularly valuable for those who may find mind-focused practices inaccessible, as is the case for trauma survivors; however, some mindfulness offerings fail to prioritize these practices. Trauma survivors who attempt to practice mindfulness may become overwhelmed due to a lack of trauma-informed guidance, support, or practitioner education. The challenges trauma survivors face when starting a mindfulness practice highlight significant opportunities for improvement in the field.

A review of the literature shows promising results using somatic-based (body-focused) and mindfulness-based interventions as complementary treatments for trauma recovery. Somatic-based interventions (SBIs), such as Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP), Somatic Experiencing (SE), and Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY), help release trapped survival energy, restore nervous system regulation, and increase body awareness. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC), and Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM), can rewire the brain, reduce inflammatory responses, and increase empathy and self-awareness. These approaches,

when implemented with trauma-informed principles or trauma-sensitive methods, offer a more holistic process for addressing the complex needs of trauma survivors.

Despite positive research findings, a significant gap remains in how mindfulness practices are presented and implemented for trauma survivors. Some mindfulness offerings fail to include body-oriented practices properly, include them without proper trauma-informed context, or cannot communicate the value and importance of these practices. In some cases, when body-based phenomena or sensory activation arise during mindfulness practice, trauma survivors can be dismissed or inadequately addressed, potentially leaving them feeling invalidated, unsupported, or unsafe (Cooper et al., 2021). This gap between trauma-informed care and mainstream modern mindfulness presents both challenges and opportunities in the field.

This paper explores the intersection of trauma, somatic practices, and mindfulness, focusing on developing an accessible pathway for trauma survivors interested in mindfulness. The central research question guiding this exploration is: *How can mindfulness practices be adapted to incorporate trauma-sensitive and somatic-based approaches that better support trauma survivors in their recovery?* The hypothesis this paper supports is that a more integrated approach to mindfulness for trauma survivors is needed, one that prioritizes trauma sensitivity with a strong emphasis on body-oriented somatic practices. This integrated approach provides a more holistic and complete path to healing, addressing both the psychological and physiological aspects of trauma more completely.

This paper examines the current landscape of trauma treatment, including traditional, somatic, and mindfulness-based interventions and their intersections, to determine if an integrated approach is warranted. It proposes potential solutions to the challenges faced by trauma survivors in accessing safe and effective mindfulness practices. Finally, it introduces a

creative project called "The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness," a text-based guide aiming to bridge the gap between trauma-informed care and somatic-based mindfulness practice.

Understanding Trauma

What is Trauma

The concept of trauma continues to evolve, with experts in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and mental health having iterated the definition of trauma over many decades. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines trauma as resulting from "an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing." (Fleitas, 2019; SAMHSA, 2014). This definition implies that trauma is the lasting impact on the mental and emotional well-being left by a deeply distressing or overwhelming event; put another way, trauma is not the traumatic event itself but rather the resulting damage to the mind and body that occurs from the distressing event.

Clinical definitions of trauma, such as in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed., text rev.; DSM-5tr; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022), focus on specific types of traumatic events, like exposure to actual harm or threats of death, serious injury, or sexual violence. While this clinical definition is helpful and essential for diagnosing and treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it does not encompass the full range of traumatic experiences (van der Kolk, 2014). Trauma experts Peter A. Levine, psychotherapist, and Bessel van der Kolk, psychiatrist, propose a broader view, recognizing trauma as a subjective experience that can result from a wide range of distressing events or ongoing, chronic circumstances, such as living in a dangerous environment, experiencing neglect or abuse, or

battling a life-threatening illness, which the clinical definitions fail to specify (van der Kolk, 2014). While the definitions of trauma and traumatic events may vary, they all emphasize the lasting and profound impact of trauma on the psychology (mind) and physiology (body) of survivors (Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 2014).

A comprehensive understanding of trauma should consider not only the clinical criteria but also the broader psychological and experiential aspects. This inclusive approach can lead to more effective and comprehensive strategies for preventing, assessing, and treating trauma (Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 2014).

While trauma has a variety of specific subtypes that vary in severity and impact, their study and treatment are remarkably similar, so for the sake of simplicity, the terms "PTSD" and "trauma" are interchangeable throughout this paper.

Prevalence of Trauma

Trauma is a pervasive social issue that impacts a significant amount of the global population; however, because no single mechanism exists for measuring trauma, it is difficult to accurately quantify the number of people who have experienced trauma in the United States (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], 2024). In the U.S., an estimated 6-9% of the population experiences PTSD at some point in their lives, with approximately 70% of adults experiencing at least one traumatic event, with 20% of those developing PTSD (Kearney et al., 2012; Kilpatrick et al., 2013; National Institute of Mental Health, 2019; VA, 2024). About 5% of adults have active PTSD annually, translating to approximately 13 million diagnosed adults in 2020 (VA, 2024).

Globally, the number of people impacted by trauma is equally, if not harder, to quantify due to social stigma, lack of reporting, and lack of awareness; despite this, trauma is reported as

the leading cause of death for ages 5-29 (Rossiter, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 3.6% of the world's population has suffered from PTSD in the previous year, with rates varying by country, from 0.2% in China to 6.1% in New Zealand (Koenen et al., 2017).

Certain demographic groups have higher rates of PTSD, such as women, combat veterans, and refugees. Women experience PTSD at twice the rate of men (8% vs. 4%), and 20-30% of returning combat veterans are diagnosed with PTSD (National Institute of Mental Health, 2019; VA, 2024). Estimates show that 5-30% of refugees and asylum seekers have experienced severe traumatic events, with one study finding that 11% of foreign-born patients treated in a U.S. urban primary care center have a history of experiencing torture (Grodin et al., 2008).

Impact of Trauma

The psychophysiological symptoms of trauma significantly impact the health, well-being, and lifespan of survivors and persist for decades beyond the traumatic event. To better understand the impact of trauma, it is helpful to understand what is happening to the mind and body during a traumatic event. On a physiological level, if the natural defensive responses, such as fight or flight, are thwarted during a traumatic event, the nervous system is deprived of its natural output, so the stress response cycle turns inward, accumulating as an increased allostatic load (Levine, 1997; McEwen & Norton Lasley, 2002). Allostatic load is the body's internal 'wear and tear' that accumulates with exposure to repeated or chronic stress (McEwen & Norton Lasley, 2002). From a psychophysiological perspective, somatization is a body-mind process that takes the psychological effects of trauma or chronic stress and manifests them as physical symptoms in the body. Many trauma symptoms stem from incomplete processing of cognitive,

emotional, or physical responses that are somaticized in the body (Grodin et al., 2008; van der Kolk, 2014).

Trauma-induced stress can lead to anxiety disorders, depression, impaired immune function, and chronic diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, and cancer (Chow et al., 2011). Common PTSD-related symptoms include sleep difficulties, anxiety, avoidant behavior, disconnection from bodily awareness, somatic symptoms, increased self-criticism, thought suppression, and rumination (Karakasidou & Stalikas, 2017; Reb et al., 2017; Tesh et al., 2013; Valdez & Lilly, 2015). Trauma also impacts neurophysiological processes, altering central, autonomic, and neuroendocrine systems crucial for regulating nervous system arousal (Kelly & Garland, 2016).

From a psychological perspective, trauma entails the loss or alteration to one's sense of self-efficacy, way of life, or relationships, resulting in feelings of fear and grief that become inseparable from memories of the traumatic event (Kelly & Garland, 2016). Trauma survivors often engage in self-blame and other negative attributions, such as low self-esteem, high self-criticism, and increased shame, contributing to increased psychological distress and exacerbating stress-related symptoms (McLean et al., 2018; Tesh et al., 2013). This negative self-perception (i.e., viewing the self as inherently and fundamentally flawed, damaged, helpless, and otherwise deserving of mistreatment) can significantly hinder self-acceptance and perpetuate the internal stress reactions of self-criticism, self-isolation, and self-absorption (McLean et al., 2018).

Trauma-Informed & Trauma-Sensitive

While the terms "trauma-informed" and "trauma-sensitive" are often used interchangeably, there can be slight differences in their application and emphasis.

Trauma-informed typically refers to a comprehensive approach to understanding and responding to the impact of trauma on individuals, families, and communities. It involves recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma, responding appropriately, and actively working to prevent re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014). Fundamental principles outlined by SAMHSA in their 2014 publication "SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach" (2014) guide trauma-informed practices.

The fundamental principles of trauma-informed care outlined by the 2014 SAMHSA guide are (SAMHSA, 2014):

- **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety for both staff and the individuals they serve.
- **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Building and maintaining trust through open and honest communication and transparent decision-making.
- **Peer Support:** Promoting the role of peer support and mutual self-help in the healing process.
- **Collaboration and Mutuality:** Emphasizing partnership and leveling power differences between staff and clients, as well as among organizational staff.
- **Empowerment, Voice, and Choice:** Recognizing and building upon individuals' strengths and experiences and supporting their ability to make choices and have a voice in their care.
- **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:** Actively moving past cultural stereotypes and biases, offering gender-responsive services, leveraging the healing value of traditional cultural connections, and recognizing and addressing historical trauma.

Trauma-sensitive is typically used to describe environments or practices that are aware of and sensitive to the needs of trauma survivors but may not necessarily encompass the full range of trauma-informed principles. Trauma-sensitive approaches often focus on creating a safe and supportive environment, avoiding triggers, and promoting resilience (Cole et al., 2013). Trauma-sensitive approaches are more commonly used in specific settings, such as schools and healthcare facilities, or related to offerings, such as TSY or TSM.

Regardless of the term used, both approaches aim to create a supportive environment that promotes healing and prevents re-traumatization for individuals who have experienced trauma (Cole et al., 2013; SAMHSA, 2014). For this paper, trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive are synonymous and interchangeable.

Treating Trauma

Trauma is costly, complex, and time-consuming to treat. Many treatment approaches exist, from standard cognitive-based approaches involving medications and psychotherapy to somatic-based interventions involving body-oriented techniques, movement, and nervous system regulation and mindfulness-based interventions involving meditation, body awareness, and present-moment focus. Two broad categories of processing styles encompass these treatment approaches: top-down and bottom-up.

Top-down processing refers to cognitive approaches that start with higher-level mental processes and work downward (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006). Traditional treatments for trauma, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and medication management, often employ this approach. In contrast, bottom-up processing involves body-based approaches that begin with sensory input and physical sensations and work upward to more complex cognitive processes

(Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006). Somatic-based interventions typically utilize this bottom-up approach.

Growing dissatisfaction with traditional interventions and increased interest in holistic approaches have led to the increased use of complementary treatments for trauma, including mindfulness-based and somatic-based approaches (Kearney et al., 2012). These alternative approaches often integrate elements of both top-down and bottom-up processing, offering a more holistic treatment approach that addresses both the psychological and physiological aspects of trauma.

Traditional Interventions

Traditional treatment interventions for trauma primarily consist of pharmacological and psychotherapeutic (e.g., talk therapy) approaches (Kearney et al., 2012). Pharmacological interventions typically involve medications such as selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors. Psychotherapeutic approaches include several effective treatments for PTSD, such as Cognitive Processing Therapy, Exposure Therapy, Stress Management Skills Training, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing, and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT) (Irons & Sunil Lad, 2019; Kearney et al., 2012). These approaches are primarily cognitive-based, focusing on mental, emotional, and behavioral aspects of trauma symptomology through verbal processing.

Traditional treatment approaches face challenges with adoption, adherence, and approach. For example, CBT, a widely used intervention, aims to break the cycle of avoidance and maladaptive beliefs by using cognitive restructuring techniques to help renegotiate thought patterns (Valdez & Lilly, 2015). However, despite its effectiveness, CBT has high dropout rates (22.1%), potentially due to difficulty tolerating trauma exposures, overwhelming anxiety, and challenges with tolerating distress (Valdez & Lilly, 2015). Additionally, CBT may have limited

efficacy for individuals with emotional numbing or entrenched self-criticism and shame, symptoms common in trauma survivors (Valdez & Lilly, 2015). Furthermore, changing a conditioned response, which is central to treating PTSD, is complicated by the impact of trauma on brain regions responsible for emotion modulation, decision-making, and memory consolidation, making behavior change difficult (van der Kolk, 2014). These challenges highlight the complexity of treating trauma and underscore the need for diverse and complementary treatment approaches to address the varied needs of trauma survivors.

Somatic-Based Interventions (SBIs)

Somatic-based interventions (SBIs) are a diverse group of practices that focus on the interconnection between the body and mind in treating trauma. These interventions recognize that trauma is both a psychological and physiological phenomenon, deeply encoded in the body at cognitive, emotional, and sensorimotor levels (Ogden et al., 2006; van der Kolk, 2014). Traditional cognitive interventions like talk therapy often fail to fully address the trauma symptoms driven by dysregulated autonomic arousal in the body (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006).

Prominent SBIs include Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP), Somatic Experiencing (SE), and trauma-sensitive variants like Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY) (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Fisher, 2019; Levine et al., 2018; Ogden & Fisher, 2015). SBIs aim to address the implicit, unconscious elements of trauma stored in the body, including those that were established and persist non-verbally (Fisher, 2019; Levine et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2006; Payne et al., 2015). By focusing on bodily sensations, movements, and experiences, SBIs offer a unique perspective on how trauma is stored, manifests, and resolves in the body. These interventions combine top-down and bottom-up processing to facilitate healing and behavior change, potentially

alleviating the psychosomatic and psychophysiological symptoms common in trauma while addressing the limitations of using cognitive interventions alone (Fisher, 2019; Kuhfuß et al., 2021; Levine et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2006; Payne et al., 2015; Shapiro, 2020).

Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs)

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are a group of practices that cultivate present-moment awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance of experiences. These interventions are grounded in mindfulness, defined by Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145) as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment." MBIs recognize that trauma impacts psychological and physiological aspects of an individual's experience, affecting cognitive processes, emotional regulation, and bodily sensations (Thompson et al., 2011; van der Kolk, 2014). By emphasizing the development of mindfulness skills, MBIs indirectly aim to address the avoidant behavior, hyperarousal, and emotional dysregulation commonly associated with trauma (Goldsmith et al., 2014; Vujanovic et al., 2011).

Prominent MBIs include Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC), and trauma-sensitive variants like Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM) (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Neff & Germer, 2013; Treleaven, 2018). These interventions combine meditation, body awareness techniques, and psychoeducation to help trauma survivors develop a new relationship with their thoughts, emotions, and bodily experiences. By integrating mindfulness practices with traditional trauma treatments, MBIs offer a complementary approach that addresses both the cognitive and physiological aspects of trauma recovery (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014; Follette et al., 2006; Hölzel et al., 2011; Lang et al., 2012).

There is growing interest in complementary treatments that address the limitations of traditional interventions and offer a more comprehensive approach to treating the complex impact of trauma on the mind and body (Kearney et al., 2012). By integrating top-down and bottom-up processing, these alternative approaches provide a holistic strategy that addresses the psychophysiological aspects of trauma, potentially leading to more effective trauma recovery (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006; van der Kolk, 2014). The literature highlights the benefits and limitations of these alternative interventions.

Literature Review

The literature demonstrates promising outcomes and several limitations for using somatic-based and mindfulness-based interventions as adjunct therapies for healing and recovery from trauma.

Somatic-Based Interventions

Somatic-based interventions (SBIs) are diverse practices focusing on the interconnection between the body and mind.

Somatic Approaches

A wide array of somatic approaches exist, from common practices like yoga to clinical frameworks, yet all incorporate embodiment and movement techniques to varying degrees. Somatic psychology, pioneered by Dr. Christine Caldwell, is the foundation for many somatic approaches. Somatic psychology draws upon diverse fields (e.g., somatic practices, talk therapy, neuroscience, attachment theory, and trauma healing) to facilitate behavior change, viewing thoughts, emotions, life experiences, the unconscious, and somatic awareness as intricately interwoven, underscoring the body-mind connection (Shapiro, 2020). In general, somatic approaches fall into three main categories, with significant overlap between them:

1. **Somatic practices:** Use movement and meditation techniques to cultivate deep internal awareness, interoception (i.e., awareness of internal sensations), proprioception (i.e., sense of one's body in space), and embodiment (Shapiro, 2020). Examples include QiGong, yoga, and body-based forms of mindfulness.
2. **Somatic therapy:** Uses body-mind techniques to address primarily physical issues while also impacting emotional and psychological well-being (Shapiro, 2020). Examples include clinical somatics, Rolfing structural integration, Body-Mind Centering, and the Feldenkrais Method.
3. **Somatic psychotherapy:** Aims to heal psychological, emotional, relational, and developmental challenges by working directly with the body and nervous system (Levine et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2006; Shapiro, 2020). Examples include Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP), and Somatic Experiencing (SE).

Prominent SBIs for Trauma

Three prominent SBIs for trauma treatment are:

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP). A somatic psychotherapy method developed by Dr. Pat Ogden, SP integrates somatic interventions, a proprietary form of mindfulness called Embedded Relational Mindfulness (ERM), and cognitive and emotional processing to treat trauma and attachment issues (Ogden & Fisher, 2015; Ogden & Minton, 2000). It asserts that physical patterns in the body (e.g.muscle tension, posture, and respiration) play a crucial role in perpetuating trauma responses (Ogden et al., 2006; Ogden, 2017). It builds on the body's natural survival skills (i.e., innate somatic survival resources) to restore resilience (Buckley et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2006; Ogden, 2017).

Somatic Experiencing (SE). A somatic psychotherapy method created by Dr. Peter A. Levine, SE focuses on resolving trauma through bodily sensations and experiences (Levine, 1997; Payne et al., 2015). It aims to complete trapped defensive responses (e.g., fight, flight, freeze) held in the body, resolving trauma-related activation (Levine et al., 2018; Payne et al., 2015).

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY). A somatic therapy practice developed by David Emerson and colleagues, TSY is a modified form of yoga designed to help trauma survivors reconnect with their bodies, manage trauma-related symptoms, minimize the risk of re-traumatization, and foster a sense of agency and self-regulation (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). It emphasizes creating a safe, supportive, and empowering environment that promotes healing and resilience (Emerson & Hopper, 2011).

These SBIs share common principles such as body awareness, self-regulation, and the completion of thwarted defensive responses. They aim to access and resolve somatic trauma memories, restore nervous system regulation, and promote a sense of safety and stability (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Levine et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2006).

Ultimately, engaging in ongoing somatic practices in any form can support embodiment while providing physical, emotional, and mental benefits (Fisher, 2019; Levine et al., 2018; Ogden, 2017; van der Kolk, 2014). By recognizing the interconnectedness of the body and mind and working from the bottom up, SBIs offer a holistic approach to healing that may be more effective than top-down approaches for some individuals (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006).

SBIs Research

This section examines the combined research outcomes for three prominent SBIs and their efficacy for use with trauma survivors:

Mechanisms of Change

Somatic-based interventions (SBIs) operate through several key mechanisms to address trauma, ranging from physiological regulation to cognitive integration and embodied awareness.

Somatic Awareness and Regulation. SBIs emphasize the development of body awareness and self-regulation skills by directing attention to bodily sensations, movements, and impulses. These interventions help trauma survivors reconnect with their physical experiences and develop greater control over their physiological states, promoting self-regulation and resilience (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Levine, 1997; Ogden & Fisher, 2015).

Completion of Defensive Responses. SBIs facilitate the completion of thwarted defensive responses (e.g., fight, flight, or freeze) that may have been interrupted during the traumatic event. This process aims to release trapped energy and restore the body's natural equilibrium (Levine et al., 2018; Ogden & Minton, 2000).

Nervous System Regulation. SBIs target the autonomic nervous system directly, aiming to reduce hyperarousal and promote a sense of ease and calm in the nervous system. Techniques such as gradual exposure to traumatic material (i.e., titration), the cultivation of resources to help manage trauma-related activation (i.e., resources), and working within an individual's capacity for tolerance (i.e., pendulation) in SE help develop tolerance for nervous system arousal and promote balanced autonomic nervous system responses (Payne et al., 2015; Ogden, 2017).

Integration of Implicit and Explicit Memories. SBIs facilitate the integration of fragmented traumatic memories by addressing both cognitive and somatic aspects of trauma. This process helps create a more coherent internal narrative and sense of self (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006).

Interoceptive and Proprioceptive Awareness. SBIs enhance internal body awareness (i.e., interoception) and the sense of one's body in space (i.e., proprioception). Increased bodily awareness can help reduce dissociation and improve overall self-regulation (Price et al., 2019; van der Kolk et al., 2014).

While these mechanisms sound promising, it is important to note that the studies on SBIs are limited, so more rigorous research is needed to validate the mechanisms of action.

Key Findings

Research on SBIs for trauma survivors has shown promising results across multiple domains, from symptom reduction to improvements in body awareness and overall functioning.

Symptom Reduction. Studies have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of SBIs, particularly SP and SE, in reducing PTSD symptoms, anxiety, depression, and dissociation (Brom et al., 2017; Classen et al., 2020; Leitch et al., 2009). TSY has demonstrated significant reductions in trauma symptoms for individuals with chronic or treatment-resistant PTSD (Price et al., 2019; van der Kolk et al., 2014).

Body Awareness and Self-Regulation. Studies show that SBIs improve body awareness and self-regulation skills. Participants in SP studies reported increased body awareness, improved self-regulation, and reduced anxiety (Langmuir et al., 2012). SE has been demonstrated to enhance interoceptive awareness and promote a sense of safety, stability, and vitality (Leitch et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2015). TSY studies have shown improvements in body awareness and self-regulation (Price et al., 2019; West et al., 2017).

Functional Improvements. SBIs have demonstrated positive effects on overall functioning and well-being. Studies on SP and SE report improvements in daily functioning and quality of life for trauma survivors (Gene-Cos et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2008). TSY has

facilitated improvements in coping skills and interpersonal relationships (Nguyen-Feng et al., 2019).

Effectiveness Across Trauma Types. SBIs have shown potential benefits for various trauma populations, including those with complex trauma, disaster survivors, and individuals with chronic pain, suggesting that they may be adaptable to different types of trauma experiences and demographics (Almeida et al., 2020; Kuhfuß et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2014).

Long-Term Effects. Some studies have found that participants maintained improvements from SBIs post-treatment for a short period. Improvements from TSY were observed to persist at follow-up periods ranging from 1 to 2 months (Jindani et al., 2015; Price et al., 2019).

Complementary Approach. Studies suggest that SBIs can be valuable as complementary treatments alongside traditional psychotherapy for trauma. Integrating body-oriented approaches with cognitive and emotional processing may offer a more comprehensive treatment approach (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Fisher, 2019).

While these findings are encouraging, it is important to note that the studies on SBIs are limited, and more rigorous research is needed to establish their efficacy fully.

Limitations

While research on SBIs for trauma survivors is promising, several limitations must be considered when evaluating their efficacy and applicability.

Methodological Weaknesses. Many studies on SBIs suffer from small sample sizes, lack of active control groups, limited participant diversity, and absence of long-term follow-up data. These factors make it challenging to determine the durability of treatment gains and

generalize findings to broader populations (Almeida et al., 2020; Classen et al., 2020; Fisher, 2019; Kuhfuß et al., 2021; Langmuir et al., 2012; Ogden et al., 2006; Payne et al., 2015).

Lack of Comparative Studies. More high-quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are needed to establish the efficacy of SBIs and compare them to other evidence-based treatments for trauma (Almeida et al., 2020; Price et al., 2019).

Unvalidated Mechanisms of Change. While theoretical frameworks exist for SBIs, many of the proposed mechanisms of change lack empirical validation. More research is needed to directly test these mechanisms and determine their relative contributions to symptom reduction (Fisher, 2019; Levine et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2006; Payne et al., 2015).

Reliance on Self-Report Measures. Many studies on SBIs rely heavily on self-reported symptom measures, which can be subject to bias. There is a need for more objective measures of treatment outcomes to complement self-report data (Payne et al., 2015).

Variability in Intervention Implementation. There is often high variability in how SBIs are implemented across studies, making it difficult to compare results and draw definitive conclusions about their efficacy (Kuhfuß et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2015).

Generalizability Concerns. The applicability of SBIs to diverse populations and more complex trauma types requires further investigation. Many studies have focused on specific trauma populations, so it is unclear how these interventions may work for individuals with different trauma experiences or cultural backgrounds (Kuhfuß et al., 2021).

While the research for SBIs shows promise when used as interventions for trauma survivors, more rigorous study is needed to address the limitations and establish their efficacy, optimal implementation, and long-term outcomes. Future studies should focus on larger, more

diverse samples, include appropriate control groups, employ more extended follow-up periods, and directly compare SBIs to other evidence-based trauma treatments.

Trauma-Informed Nature of SBIs

Somatic-based interventions (SBIs) are inherently trauma-informed because they recognize the interconnected impact of trauma on both body and mind (Levine, 1997; Ogden & Fisher, 2015; Payne et al., 2015). SP and SE aim to address trauma holistically by integrating body-based techniques with cognitive processing, restoring balance to the nervous system, and developing embodied self-regulation skills (Levine et al., 2018; Ogden, 2017). Their trauma-informed nature is evident in their emphasis on safety, titration of traumatic material, and pendulation between traumatic activation and resourcing techniques (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006; Payne et al., 2015).

Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs)

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are a group of practices that use mindfulness to cultivate present-moment awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance of experiences.

Prominent MBIs for Trauma

Three prominent MBIs for trauma treatment are:

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). An 8-week mindfulness program developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, MBSR is a group intervention that combines guided meditation, gentle yoga, mindful movement, and body awareness techniques that aim to cultivate mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). MBSR's practice techniques help develop present-moment nonjudgmental awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC). An 8-week group program developed by Dr. Kristin Neff and Dr. Christopher Germer that focuses on cultivating mindfulness and self-compassion

skills (Neff & Germer, 2013). The program aims to enhance emotional well-being by teaching participants to treat themselves with kindness, care, and understanding during difficult times. MSC incorporates guided meditations, experiential exercises (like letter writing), and group discussions to develop self-compassion (i.e., self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) (Neff & Germer, 2013).

Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM). A framework developed by David Treleaven, TSM adapts mindfulness practices to the needs of trauma survivors, emphasizing safety, choice, and control (Treleaven, 2018). It can be integrated into existing mindfulness programs to increase their relative safety for trauma survivors. TSM recognizes the potential challenges and risks for trauma survivors practicing mindfulness and provides a framework for making mindfulness practices more accessible and safe (Treleaven, 2018). Key principles of TSM include understanding the prevalence and impact of trauma, offering choice and flexibility in mindfulness practices, prioritizing stabilization and grounding techniques, and acknowledging the role social context and positionality play in shaping trauma experiences (Treleaven, 2018).

These MBIs share common goals of reducing stress symptoms, improving emotional regulation, increasing self-awareness, and enhancing participants' overall well-being, including trauma survivors (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2013; Neff & Germer, 2013; Treleaven, 2018). They can be integrated alongside traditional top-down interventions to enhance treatment efficacy and offer a more comprehensive approach to trauma recovery through the body-mind connection (Follette et al., 2006; Hölzel et al., 2011; Lang et al., 2012; van der Kolk, 2014).

MBIs Research

This section examines the combined research outcomes for three prominent MBIs and their efficacy for use with trauma survivors:

Mechanisms of Change

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) reduce trauma symptoms through several mechanisms, ranging from mental and emotional processing to physiological regulation and social engagement.

Mental Processes. MBIs promote changes in mental processing, including increased mindfulness and acceptance, which may counteract avoidant behavior and rumination commonly associated with PTSD (Thompson et al., 2011). They also enhance the ability to shift attention and perceptions and improve self-efficacy (Goldsmith et al., 2014). These cognitive changes allow trauma survivors to relate to their experiences in new, more adaptive ways.

Emotional Regulation. MBIs enhance the ability to tolerate difficult experiences, reducing emotional reactivity and distress (Goldsmith et al., 2014; Vujanovic et al., 2011). They also promote self-acceptance and self-compassion, directly countering the shame and self-criticism that often accompany trauma (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Neff & Germer, 2013).

Physiological Changes. MBIs reduce physiological arousal, shown in changes in biological markers (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014), alterations in brain function (Hölzel et al., 2011), and activation of the relaxation response (Goldsmith et al., 2014). These physiological shifts may contribute to a sense of safety and calm in the body.

Interoceptive Awareness. MBIs increase body awareness and can reduce symptoms of dissociation and somatization (Treleaven, 2018). This enhanced connection with bodily sensations can help trauma survivors feel more grounded and present.

Psychosocial Factors. MBIs can increase social connectedness (Neff & McGehee, 2010), enhance resilience (Neff & Germer, 2013; Vettese et al., 2011), and foster a sense of

agency and choice (Herman, 2015; Treleaven, 2018). These factors contribute to overall well-being and can support long-term recovery from trauma.

Trauma-Specific Techniques. Trauma-specific techniques incorporated in some MBIs, like TSM, provide additional mechanisms for change, including grounding techniques for safety and stability, gentle movement, and body scans for self-regulation (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Treleaven, 2018; van der Kolk, 2015).

While these mechanisms work together to address various aspects of trauma, more research is needed to fully understand the relative contributions of each mechanism and their interactions in trauma recovery.

Key Findings

Research on MBIs for trauma survivors has demonstrated promising results across multiple domains, from symptom reduction to psychological improvements, with long-term results largely maintained with minimal adverse effects.

Symptom Reduction. Studies have consistently shown moderate to significant effects in decreasing PTSD symptoms, depression, anxiety, shame, emotional dysregulation, and avoidant behaviors (Banks et al., 2015; Gallegos et al., 2020; Goldsmith et al., 2014; Hopwood & Schutte, 2017; Liu et al., 2022; Marchand et al., 2021).

Psychological and Cognitive Improvements. Studies show psychological and cognitive improvements, including enhanced mindfulness, acceptance, attentional control, and emotional regulation (Gallegos et al., 2020; Hopwood & Schutte, 2017; Liu et al., 2022). Studies on MSC for trauma survivors reported increased self-compassion and significantly reduced self-blame and self-criticism (Au et al., 2017; Hoffart et al., 2015; Valdez & Lilly, 2015). These findings

emphasize the importance of reducing shame and increasing acceptance in trauma recovery (Goldsmith et al., 2014).

Effectiveness and Long-Term Impact. Intervention improvements were sustained at follow-up periods ranging from 1 to 7 months (Goldsmith et al., 2014; Hopwood & Schutte, 2017). The efficacy of MBIs is dose-dependent, with longer practice times associated with more durable results. Studies found a positive correlation between the amount of mindfulness practice and beneficial outcomes, including more significant symptom reduction and improved emotional acceptance (Goldsmith et al., 2014; Hopwood & Schutte, 2017).

Safety and Adverse Effects. Minimal to no adverse effects were reported in the studies (Banks et al., 2015; Marchand et al., 2021). While no adverse effects were reported, some researchers have advised against using MBSR for PTSD because mindfulness practice could theoretically exacerbate trauma symptoms (Goldsmith et al., 2014).

Trauma-Specific Intervention Outcomes. Interventions that used an adapted TSM framework show promise; however, not many of these studies exist. An RCT of a trauma-informed MBSR program using TSM principles demonstrated significant reductions in PTSD symptoms and anxious attachment for trauma survivors (Kelly & Garland, 2016).

Collectively, these findings support the use of MBIs as effective treatments for reducing PTSD symptoms and related difficulties for trauma survivors. The consistent positive outcomes across various studies suggest that MBIs may be adaptable and beneficial for a wide range of trauma experiences and demographics. However, further research is needed to establish these interventions' long-term efficacy and optimal implementation.

Limitations

While the research on MBIs for trauma survivors is promising, there are several limitations to consider.

Methodological Weaknesses. Most studies suffered from small sample sizes, limited diversity of study participants, lack of control groups, lack of long-term follow-ups, and uncontrolled concurrent interventions, making it difficult to determine the durability of treatment gains (Banks et al., 2015; Gallegos et al., 2020; Goldsmith et al., 2014; Hopwood & Schutte, 2017; Liu et al., 2022; Marchand et al., 2021). There is a need for more high-quality RCTs to establish the efficacy of MBIs compared to other evidence-based trauma treatments.

Trauma-Specific Protocols. There is a lack of research on trauma-specific protocols like TSM) and a potential for adverse effects if MBIs are not delivered by adequately trained facilitators in a controlled manner, representing significant gaps in the literature (Treleaven, 2018).

Adverse Effects and Safety Concerns. While some studies reported minimal to no adverse effects (Banks et al., 2015; Marchand et al., 2021), the potential for mindfulness practices to exacerbate trauma symptoms remains a concern (Goldsmith et al., 2014). This discrepancy highlights a significant limitation in the understanding of the safety profile of MBIs for trauma survivors. Further research is needed to identify potential risks, develop appropriate screening protocols, and establish guidelines for the safe implementation of MBIs in trauma-informed contexts (Treleaven, 2018; Emerson & Hopper, 2011).

Difficult to Isolate. The multi-component nature of MBI interventions makes it challenging to isolate the specific effects of individual components and determine which aspects are most responsible for observed benefits (Treleavan, 2018).

While MBIs show tremendous promise as effective interventions for trauma survivors, further research is needed to address these limitations and optimize their safety, effectiveness, and viability.

Trauma-Informed Nature of MBIs

While MBSR and MSC are not trauma-specific interventions, they incorporate elements that can be beneficial for trauma survivors and have some trauma-informed characteristics; however, they may require adaptations for optimal safety and effectiveness. Trauma-sensitive adaptations like TSM aim to address this gap by prioritizing trauma-informed principles.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) acknowledges the somatic components of trauma through a combination of psychoeducation, mindfulness practice, and group dialogue (Treleaven, 2018). Participants are encouraged to observe their bodily sensations with curiosity and acceptance rather than trying to change or suppress them (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Trauma-sensitive practices in MBSR may include grounding techniques, trauma-sensitive language, and self-compassion practices. Grounding techniques (e.g., feeling the weight of the body on the chair) help participants stay present and regulated when trauma-related sensations arise (Treleaven, 2018). MBSR instructors may use trauma-sensitive language, such as invitational and choice-based instructions, to minimize the risk of triggering or re-traumatizing participants (Treleaven, 2018). However, it is essential to adapt practices to individual needs, as some trauma survivors may find focusing on specific body parts triggering (Emerson & Hopper, 2011).

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) acknowledges that trauma survivors may have difficult or painful somatic experiences, such as hyperarousal or dissociation (Neff & Germer, 2018). The MSC program incorporates some trauma-informed elements by including education about

the impact of trauma on the body and the common somatic symptoms that may arise (Neff & Germer, 2013), which can help normalize participants' experiences and reduce shame or self-blame. Participants are encouraged to bring mindful, compassionate awareness to their body sensations, even when uncomfortable or distressed, which can help reduce avoidant behavior and promote self-regulation (Neff & Germer, 2013). Additionally, MSC guides participants to respond to difficult somatic experiences with kindness, understanding, and compassion rather than judgment or criticism, which can help counteract the shame and self-blame that often accompany trauma-related body sensations (Neff & Germer, 2013).

While MBIs incorporate body-based practices and demonstrate some trauma-informed elements, they may benefit from specific trauma-informed adaptations, such as consistently including grounding techniques, choice-based language, and self-compassion practices to ensure safety and effectiveness for trauma survivors.

Body-Mind Connection

The integration of SBIs and MBIs in trauma treatment reflects a growing recognition of the intricate connection between body and mind in trauma recovery. This section explores how prominent SBIs incorporate mindfulness principles and how MBIs integrate body-oriented practices. Exploring this intersection highlights how these interventions overlap and complement one another and where they differ or are gaps.

SBIs and Mindfulness

Somatic-based interventions (SBIs) such as SP, SE, and TSY incorporate mindfulness principles in their approaches to trauma treatment, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis and application.

In SP, mindfulness plays an essential role in building resilience and treating trauma. The SP approach emphasizes present-moment awareness by directing clients to focus on their current sensations, impulses, breath, posture, and movement (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006; Ogden, 2017). SP employs a proprietary form of mindfulness called Embedded Relational Mindfulness (ERM), where the therapist guides the client's attention to track specific present-moment experiences (Ogden & Fisher, 2015; Ogden & Goldstein, 2017). ERM integrates principles from mindfulness and SE within a relational context of therapy and is used primarily to help clients regulate their nervous systems and process trauma more effectively (Ogden & Goldstein, 2017).

In SE, mindfulness plays a complementary, not explicit, role. However, similar to MBIs, SE emphasizes developing interoceptive awareness, which is crucial for processing and resolving trauma-related experiences (Payne et al., 2015). It also prioritizes present-moment focus, body awareness, and compassionate attention toward one's self, all common principles found in MBIs (Brom et al., 2017; Levine, 2010; Payne et al., 2015). Mindfulness practices in SE can enhance self-regulation while supporting the somatic processing and discharge of traumatic activation.

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY) promotes mindfulness, self-regulation, and self-acceptance by focusing on present-moment experiences and bodily sensations, helping trauma survivors cultivate a non-judgmental attitude toward their thoughts and emotions (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk et al., 2014). This mindfulness-based approach can help reduce symptoms of PTSD, such as intrusive thoughts, avoidant behavior, and hypervigilance (Price et al., 2019). Additionally, TSY fosters a sense of self-efficacy and empowerment, which can contribute to overall psychological well-being (West et al., 2017).

All SBIs use mindfulness in some form to help regulate the autonomic nervous system and promote a sense of calm and stability. In SP, clients cultivate mindfulness by simultaneously

attending to traumatic activation and the relative safety of the present moment through dual awareness (Fisher, 2019; Ogden et al., 2006; Ogden & Fisher, 2015). Similarly, in SE and TSY, mindfulness practices help individuals develop the capacity to observe and tolerate difficult body sensations and emotions (Payne et al., 2015; van der Kolk et al., 2014).

The integration of mindfulness with somatic techniques in SBIs offers a comprehensive approach to trauma treatment, addressing both the cognitive and physiological aspects of trauma. While they may differ in their explicit emphasis and method of including mindfulness, all three approaches recognize the value of mindfulness in trauma treatment, particularly for cultivating body awareness, promoting self-regulation, and facilitating the processing of traumatic experiences. SBIs are a hybrid method including both bottom-up (body) and top-down (mind) techniques, making them an excellent intervention for trauma survivors; however, the balance between the two leans more toward the body.

MBIs and the Body

While MBIs tend to be more mind-focused, many incorporate body-based practices as components of their frameworks. These body-based practices aim to develop awareness, acceptance, and self-regulation, which is particularly beneficial for trauma survivors.

In MBSR, the body is the focus of several mindfulness practices, including body scans, gentle yoga, and mindful movement. The body scan can help trauma survivors reconnect with bodily sensations, reduce avoidant behavior, and promote relaxation (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Gentle yoga can help regulate the autonomic nervous system, reduce hyperarousal, and promote a sense of safety and control over one's body (van der Kolk et al., 2014). Mindful movement like walking meditation can help counteract feelings of numbness, disconnection, or immobilization that often accompany trauma (Emerson & Hopper, 2011).

While MSC is not explicitly body-focused, it acknowledges the importance of bringing compassionate awareness to the body. MSC offers body-focused practices that can be particularly helpful for trauma survivors, including the compassionate body scan, soothing touch, and mindfulness of emotions in the body (Neff & Germer, 2013). The compassionate body scan is a modified version of a traditional mindfulness body scan, guiding participants to bring kind, loving, and compassionate awareness to different body parts (Neff & Germer, 2013, 2018). Soothing touch is a compassion-based self-touch technique where participants use physical touch to comfort, soothe, and ground themselves (such as placing a hand on the heart) when trauma-related symptoms arise (Neff & Germer, 2013, 2018). This self-touch practice can benefit trauma survivors by promoting the ability to self-soothe and increase a sense of safety and containment (Treleaven, 2018). These body-oriented practices can be particularly healing for trauma survivors who may have experienced touch as threatening or violating, helping them to develop a more accepting, compassionate relationship with the emotional experiences felt in the body (Rothschild, 2010; van der Kolk, 2014).

Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM) emphasizes the importance of body-oriented practices in trauma healing, recognizing that trauma can lead to a disconnection between mind and body (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Treleaven, 2018). It incorporates trauma-sensitive adaptations of body-oriented practices such as body scans, mindful movement, breath awareness, and grounding techniques. These practices are introduced gradually, with sensitivity to individual needs and boundaries, to avoid potential re-traumatization (Treleaven, 2018). Gentle movement practices (like yoga, Tai Chi, or QiGong) can help trauma survivors develop greater body awareness, self-regulation, and self-compassion (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Nguyen-Feng et al., 2019). Breath awareness is used to help regulate the autonomic nervous system and

promote a sense of calm (Treleaven, 2018). Grounding techniques, focusing on physical sensations, help survivors feel more connected and secure (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). By addressing the physical aspects of trauma, TSM aims to help survivors develop greater self-awareness, self-regulation, and resilience (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Treleaven, 2018). This approach aligns with other somatic-based methods.

The integration of somatic or body-oriented practices with mindfulness in MBIs offers a more comprehensive approach to trauma treatment, addressing both the cognitive and physiological aspects of trauma. While they may differ in their explicit emphasis and method of including somatic practices, all three approaches appear to recognize the value of including body-focused practices in trauma treatment, particularly for cultivating body awareness, promoting self-regulation, and enhancing self-awareness and self-regulation. MBIs are a hybrid method including both bottom-up (body) and top-down (mind) techniques, making them a comprehensive intervention for trauma survivors; however, the balance between the two leans more toward the mind.

Body-Mind Integration

The inclusion of somatic and mindfulness practices in alternative trauma interventions emphasizes the importance of addressing both the physical and mental aspects of trauma recovery. SBIs' incorporation of mindfulness-based practices and MBIs' integration of body-oriented practices together highlight a shared understanding that effective trauma recovery requires attention to both the body and mind. This integrated approach offers trauma survivors a comprehensive pathway to reconnect with their bodies, regulate their nervous systems, and develop greater self-awareness and self-compassion. The intersection between somatic and mindfulness interventions holds promise for more effective, holistic approaches to trauma

healing that honor the intricate connection between physical sensations, mental cognitions, and emotions in the trauma recovery process (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Treleaven, 2018; van der Kolk, 2015).

Challenges & Opportunities

The growing body of research on SBIs and MBIs as trauma interventions reveals both promising outcomes and significant challenges. After reviewing the literature while considering this exploration's central question and hypothesis, three fundamental challenges emerge facing trauma survivors when approaching mindfulness. This section elaborates on those challenges and proposes solutions as opportunities to address the gaps.

Challenge: Inconsistent Trauma-Informed Approaches in MBIs

Despite the increasing popularity of MBIs in trauma treatment, not all are inherently trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive. This inconsistency can potentially lead to inadvertent re-traumatization or ineffective treatment for trauma survivors (Treleaven, 2018). The lack of implementing a standardized trauma-sensitive approach in MBIs not only presents a significant challenge in ensuring safe and effective mindfulness practices but may also deter trauma survivors from seeking out these practices.

Opportunity: Standardization of Trauma-Sensitive Frameworks

Trauma-sensitive frameworks, such as TSM, should become the standard for MBIs as, given the prevalence of trauma, it is safe to assume that any mindfulness program will include trauma survivors among the participants. Consistently implementing trauma-informed principles across mindfulness interventions could provide a more reliable and safe approach for trauma survivors engaging in mindfulness. In addition, MBIs should establish consistent training standards and a clear labeling structure for trauma-sensitive mindfulness offerings. This

standardization would help trauma survivors more easily identify safe and appropriate mindfulness resources and reduce the risk of exclusion or discouragement. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for more rigorous and extensive research on trauma-sensitive adaptations of MBIs to establish their efficacy and refine best practices.

Challenge: Disconnect Between SBIs and MBIs

While SBIs include elements of mindfulness and MBIs incorporate some somatic components, these two approaches to trauma treatment often remain distinct and separate. This separation may limit the potential benefits that a more integrated approach could offer trauma survivors, especially given the growing understanding of the intricate connection between body and mind in trauma experiences and recovery (van der Kolk, 2014). Modern mindfulness tends to favor a top-down approach, often prioritizing mind-focused practices over body-oriented practices. This balance means that when body-based phenomena or somatic experiences occur in the context of mindfulness practice, teachers and retreat centers may inadvertently dismiss or inadequately address the meditator's experience, potentially leaving them disempowered. This dismissal can be particularly harmful to trauma survivors, as it may mirror past experiences of invalidation or neglect. It is important to recognize that both trauma-sensitive interventions and somatic-based practices are integral parts of trauma healing, yet their integration into MBIs and mindfulness practices is often lacking.

Opportunity: Integration of Trauma-Sensitive and Somatic-Focused Approaches

Create an integrated approach that includes trauma-sensitive, somatic-focused, and mindfulness-based practice in MBI frameworks. Such interventions should prioritize trauma sensitivity first and foremost while emphasizing body-focused mindfulness (i.e., somatic awareness) practices second. This integration would allow for a more holistic approach to

trauma treatment, addressing both the psychological (top-down) and physiological (bottom-up) aspects of trauma more completely. By integrating trauma-sensitive and somatic-based practices into mindfulness interventions, the challenges trauma survivors face could be addressed more effectively, providing significant benefits and empowering them in their recovery.

Challenge: Accessibility and Safety Concerns for Trauma Survivors

The current landscape of mindfulness offerings is vast and often lacks consistent oversight or standardized training. This variability, combined with the fact that not all mindfulness practices are trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive, can make it challenging for trauma survivors to find safe and appropriate mindfulness resources. This lack of consistency and clear guidance can overwhelm trauma survivors and leave them feeling uncertain, potentially discouraging them from engaging with mindfulness practices altogether.

Opportunity: Development of The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

Develop a comprehensive resource to address accessibility and safety concerns for trauma survivors interested in mindfulness. The guide, named "The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness," would serve as a resource to help trauma survivors navigate the complex landscape of mindfulness offerings, understand what to look for in trauma-sensitive practices, and learn how to engage with mindfulness techniques safely.

The guide would address several key areas:

1. **Understanding trauma:** Communicate the impact of trauma and the value of trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches.
2. **Basics of mindfulness:** Explain mindfulness and its potential role in trauma recovery.

3. **Importance of somatic awareness:** Highlight the importance of incorporating bodily experiences in mindfulness practice for trauma survivors.
4. **Types of mindfulness practices:** Outline common mindfulness techniques and their potential impact on trauma survivors.
5. **Finding trauma-sensitive resources:** Provide guidance for locating and evaluating trauma-sensitive mindfulness offerings, including specific phrases to look for and additional resources.
6. **Adapting mindfulness practices:** Offer strategies for modifying mindfulness techniques to suit individual needs and comfort levels, including handling challenging experiences that may arise during practice.

This guide would provide trauma survivors with relevant and valuable information, empowering them to make informed decisions about their mindfulness practice. The guide will help them understand what elements of mindfulness may help or hinder their healing process. By providing clear information for evaluating mindfulness offerings through a trauma-informed lens, the guide would address the gap in accessible, trauma-sensitive, and somatic-focused mindfulness resources. Importantly, it would empower trauma survivors to safely explore and modify mindfulness practices to suit their individual needs, promoting a sense of agency in their healing process.

These challenges and opportunities underscore the need for a more integrated, standardized, and trauma-sensitive approach to mindfulness practices in trauma treatment. By addressing these issues through the proposed solutions – standardizing trauma-sensitive frameworks, integrating somatic-focused approaches, and developing comprehensive resources for trauma survivors – MBIs and mindfulness practices overall can move towards more effective,

safe, and accessible methods for trauma survivors. Future research should focus on evaluating the efficacy of the proposed integrated approach and refining best practices for trauma-sensitive, somatic-based mindfulness interventions. Ultimately, these efforts aim to ensure that trauma survivors can safely and effectively benefit from mindfulness practices without risk of exclusion, disempowerment, or inadvertent re-traumatization.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this paper was to explore the question: *How can mindfulness practices be adapted to incorporate trauma-sensitive and somatic-based approaches to better support trauma survivors in their recovery?* The secondary aim was to explore the hypothesis that a more integrated approach to mindfulness for trauma survivors is needed, one that prioritizes trauma sensitivity with a strong emphasis on body-focused somatic practices. A comprehensive review of alternative trauma interventions, like SBIs and MBIs, supports the need for an integrated approach that prioritizes trauma sensitivity with a strong emphasis on body-focused somatic awareness. This exploration has elucidated potential benefits, limitations, and opportunities for improvement for these approaches to make them more safe and accessible for trauma survivors.

The research revealed that while both SBIs and MBIs show promise in addressing the complex needs of trauma survivors, there are significant gaps in their implementation and integration. Somatic approaches, while effective in addressing the physiological aspects of trauma, may not fully incorporate the benefits of mindfulness, and mindfulness approaches may not effectively prioritize the physiological aspects. In addition, MBIs often lack trauma-sensitive components, potentially risking re-traumatization or exclusion of trauma survivors. This paper

proposed that an integrated approach could provide a more holistic and effective path to healing for trauma survivors.

This paper proposes several solutions to address the challenges, including inconsistent trauma-informed approaches in MBIs, the disconnect between MBIs and SBIs, and accessibility concerns for trauma survivors, including standardizing trauma-sensitive frameworks across mindfulness interventions, integrating somatic-focused approaches into MBIs, and developing a comprehensive resource guide (i.e., "The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness"). By implementing these recommendations, MBIs can move towards offering more effective, safe, and accessible mindfulness practices for trauma survivors. This integrated approach has the potential to revolutionize alternative trauma treatment by addressing both the psychological and physiological aspects of trauma more completely and empowering survivors in their recovery.

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The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

by April T. Neufeld

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

A Personal Note

Dear Reader,

I created this guide to help fellow trauma survivors safely explore mindfulness. If you feel wired and tired, that you have to go it alone, or that you're surviving but perhaps not yet thriving – this guide is my gift to you.

I stumbled into meditation in 1994 through the yogic path. Yoga was the first time in my life that I felt a sense of ease and calm. Back then, I gave full credit to these feelings to the physical practice of asana. It was only many years later that I came to understand the benefits of meditation and mindfulness practice. For three decades, I have continued on the path to trauma healing via mindfulness and mind-body practices. Walking this path did not come easily or quickly to me. I tend towards skepticism and shy away from anything that requires faith in things that aren't easily quantifiable, yet these practices drew me back time and again. Over the past three decades, science has begun to study how mindfulness and other mind-body practices work, attempting to quantify what these healing practices rooted in ancient traditions seemed to know already. Mindfulness, meditation, and mind-body practices have positively impacted my life and helped advance my trauma recovery. I hope this guide provides you with the information, motivation, and confidence to try mindfulness for yourself.

May this work help offer you the time, space, and support you need to heal.

With deep gratitude,
April N.

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

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Part 1: Who, What, & Why

Setting the Context

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

Setting the Context

Welcome to the Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

With so many mindfulness offerings available these days, it can be challenging to know where to begin. If you've experienced trauma and are curious about mindfulness, or maybe you tried mindfulness in the past and felt it wasn't for you, but you weren't sure why – you're in the right place! This guide is designed especially for you, a trauma survivor who wants to explore mindfulness but isn't sure where to start or how to approach it safely. As a fellow trauma survivor, I wish that I had a guide like this when I first started practicing mindfulness many years ago.

Why This Guide Matters

Mindfulness can be a powerful tool for healing and growth, particularly for trauma survivors, but you might have some questions like:

- Is mindfulness safe for me?
- How do I know which practices are helpful and which might not be?
- Where can I find support if I need it?

These are understandable questions, and that's precisely why this guide exists. I want to empower you with knowledge and tools to make mindfulness work for you on your terms.

Your Journey, Your Pace

Remember, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to mindfulness or trauma recovery. This guide provides information and options, but you're the expert of your experience. As you explore this guide, take your time, skim it, and return to sections that pique your interest for a deeper dive – take what resonates with you and leave the rest. Go at your own pace, and always prioritize your safety and comfort.

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

Inside The Guide

What You'll Find Inside

This guide will help you:

- Recognize the impact of trauma and what it means to be trauma-informed
- Understand the basics of mindfulness and how it relates to trauma recovery
- Explore body-based (somatic) practices that can support your healing
- Learn about different types of mindfulness practices and how they might affect you
- Find resources and support for your mindfulness journey
- Learn how to adapt practices to suit your needs and comfort level

Whether you're brand new to mindfulness or have some experience, I hope this guide will be a helpful companion on your journey. I'm cheering you on!

Part 2: Practice Domains

Trauma, Mindfulness, & Somatics

Trauma

What is Trauma?

As a trauma survivor, it can be difficult to encapsulate what trauma is, especially when the word "trauma" is used casually on social media. So, it's valuable to clarify what trauma is. Trauma is not just about a difficult event that happened to you; it's about how that event affected you—how it impacted your mind, body, and emotions. Trauma occurs when something happens that is so overwhelming that it is too hard to cope with or make sense of at the time.

For a formal definition of trauma, we turn to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which defines trauma as:

> *"An event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing." (SAMHSA, 2024).*

This definition highlights that trauma can come from a single event or an ongoing experience that is harmful or threatening and has a lasting impact. In this guide, I use "trauma" as a broad term with no specific focus on the type of trauma diagnosis, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Trauma can come from many different experiences, including:

- A one-time event, like an accident or assault
- Ongoing stress, like living in a dangerous place or systemic oppression
- Childhood experiences of neglect or abuse
- A severe or chronic illness or a medical event

While there are universally traumatizing experiences, it's helpful to remember that everyone experiences and reacts to a traumatic event differently. What is traumatic for one person might not be for another.

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

Impact of Trauma

Traumatic events can affect how you feel, think, and relate to the people and world around you. They can impact your mental health, physical well-being, relationships, emotions, or spiritual beliefs. It's important to know that trauma is not your fault or a deficiency; in fact, trauma is a normal response to abnormal situations, and yet it can have a lasting impact. Here are some of the ways trauma can affect your life:

⚠️ **Trauma can impact**	
Thoughts & Feelings (mental & emotional): • Anxiety and depression • Intense fear or grief • Negative self-image and low self-acceptance • Difficulty managing emotions • Shame and self-blame • Emotional numbness	Body & Brain (physical & cognitive): • Sleep problems • Weakened immune system • Increased risk of chronic diseases • Changes in nervous system functioning • Increased muscle tension • Altered posture and movement • Changes in how the brain processes emotions and memories
Actions & Reactions (behavioral): • Avoiding certain situations or memories • Difficulty being aware of body sensations (body awareness) • Overthinking, ruminating, or suppressing thoughts • Isolating oneself • Feeling unable to cope with daily challenges • Difficulty making decisions	Relationships & Daily Life (social & relational): • Struggles in personal relationships • Feeling disconnected from others • Lower quality of life and overall life satisfaction • Difficulties at work or school

Everyone experiences trauma differently, so you might relate to some of the items on this list but not others, and that's okay. Understanding the potential impact of trauma and reflecting on what is relevant to you can be valuable in determining the best approach for you. It is helpful not to try to go it alone; instead, seek appropriate support and guidance from a professional trained in treating trauma survivors.

Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Sensitive

You may have heard the terms "trauma-informed" or "trauma-sensitive" used to describe mindfulness, yoga, or other healing practices. Although these terms differ, they both refer to approaches that deeply understand how trauma affects people and communities. It's about recognizing the signs of trauma, responding in helpful ways, and trying to avoid making things worse.

Both trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches aim to:

1. Understand the impact of trauma
2. Recognize the signs of trauma
3. Respond in a supportive, helpful, and sensitive way
4. Avoid further harm or retraumatization

Key Principles

Organizations, practitioners, and programs that are trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive follow some or all of the guidelines set forth by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The fundamental principles are:

- **Safety:** Making sure everyone feels physically and emotionally safe.
- **Trust & Transparency:** Being open and honest in communication and decision-making.
- **Peer Support:** Encouraging people to help and support each other.
- **Collaboration & Mutuality:** Working together as partners, not as "experts" and "patients," removing power dynamics.
- **Empowerment, Voice, & Choice:** Recognizing people's strengths and supporting the ability to make choices and express opinions.
- **Cultural Awareness:** Respecting different cultures, seeking to move beyond biases, and addressing historical traumas.

You might encounter trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches in various settings, such as schools, psychotherapy, and healthcare facilities, or in specific practices like Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY) or Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM).

Two Terms, Same Goal

Whether called "trauma-informed" or "trauma-sensitive," the ultimate goal is the same: to create supportive environments that support healing and avoid causing further harm. In this guide, I'll use these terms interchangeably.

💡 *Trauma-Informed Tip*

As you explore mindfulness practices, look for practitioners trained in trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive approaches or practices and programs that specifically address how they will ensure you feel safe, respected, and in control of your experience. Remember, you're the expert on your needs and comfort levels.

Key Takeaways

Understanding trauma is crucial for navigating your approach to mindfulness as part of your healing journey. Some key points to remember:

- Trauma is a normal response to an abnormal situation(s) that has a lasting impact on the mind, body, and emotions.
- Trauma affects everyone differently, influencing thoughts, feelings, physical health, behaviors, and relationships.
- Trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches prioritize safety, trust, and empowerment in healing practices.

By recognizing the effects of trauma, knowing what to look for, and seeking appropriate support, you can be more equipped to add mindfulness practices to your life.

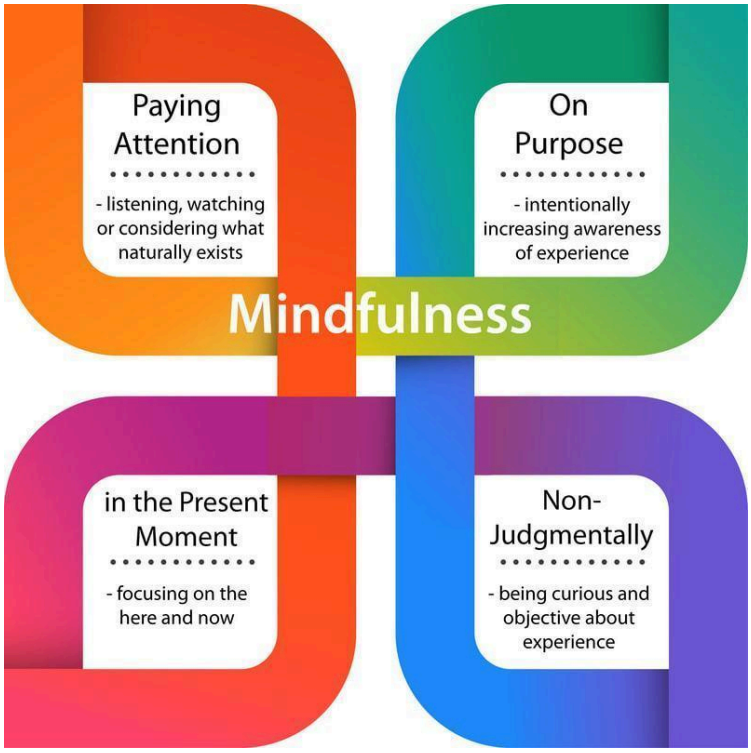
Mindfulness

When you hear the word mindfulness, the image that comes to mind might be a serene-looking younger woman sitting cross-legged peacefully in nature with her eyes closed. Or you may have heard that mindfulness is clearing your mind of thoughts—like a blank screen. Neither of these is an accurate representation of what mindfulness is. So what, then, is mindfulness? Let's explore together.

Defining Modern Mindfulness

Jon Kabat-Zinn, the creator of the seminal mindfulness program Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), defines mindfulness as:

> *"Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. I then sometimes add, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom."*



[image source: Living More Fully]

According to the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, practicing mindfulness cultivates a moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment through a gentle, nurturing lens. Unpacking these definitions, we see that mindfulness is a way of being, not a "doing," although practices like meditation help create conditions that support mindfulness.

Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness and meditation are closely related practices that focus on training the mind and directing and sustaining attention in a nonjudgmental way. The terms are often used interchangeably, and I will use them as such in this guide; however, they do have some distinguishing characteristics.

Meditation is a broad term that encompasses a range of mind and body practices aimed at enhancing specific qualities such as promoting relaxation, consolidating energy, or developing compassion. Meditation often involves a deliberate practice with specific instructions to sustain attention on an object, thought, or activity. Examples of meditation practices include loving-kindness practice, walking meditation, and even religious deity practice or chanting.

Mindfulness is a type of meditation practice. Mindfulness aims to focus awareness on present-moment experiences or, put more simply, paying attention to the present moment on purpose. Mindfulness is practiced informally by being present with your sensations in the here and now (as in being present while drinking a cup of coffee) or formally through a specific set of meditation instructions (as in being present during walking meditation). You can practice mindfulness for short periods throughout the day or as part of a formal mindfulness-based program like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

Mindfulness is a form of meditation, but not all meditation is mindfulness. This guide uses both terms as appropriate.

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

Clarifying Mindfulness

Mindfulness has become increasingly popular in recent years, though the details can become confusing with anything that rises in popularity. The table below offers a perspective on what mindfulness is and is not.

✔️ **Mindfulness is**	❌ **Mindfulness is not**
Seeing your thoughts clearly	The absence of thought (clearing your mind)
Non-judgmental & objective	Judgmental or critical
Paying attention on purpose	Relaxing, escaping, or checking out
Present-moment focused	Thinking about the past or future
A consistent & committed practice	A quick fix or a panacea
A state or way of being	Obtaining a goal (doing a task)
A relaxed & alert awareness	Pursuit of perfection or effort-laden
A practice that helps one be with difficulty	Toxic positivity or emotional bypassing
A practice that cultivates self-awareness	A substitute for therapy or medical treatment
A secular practice*	Religious or requiring a change of faith

**Mindfulness is Buddhist in origin but not always offered in a Buddhist context and does not require one to become Buddhist to practice mindfulness. This secular practice can sit alongside any faith, religion, or belief system.*

Traditional Mindfulness

Traditional mindfulness is rooted in ancient Buddhist traditions as a practice to cultivate awareness and insight. These ancient practices have evolved over thousands of years and continue to do so in modern contexts like healthcare and psychology. Today, mindfulness is widely recognized as a valuable practice for reducing stress, improving well-being, and supporting mental health. While many modern mindfulness practices you may encounter will

not mention the traditional Buddhist origins of the practice, it is important to remember that the traditional form still exists. Even today, you can learn mindfulness from Buddhist monks, authorized Buddhist lineage holders, or student teachers trained in traditional forms. However, these traditional Buddhist forms of mindfulness may not be explicitly trauma-sensitive. In addition, for those who have experienced religious trauma, a traditional Buddhist path may not be the best place to start, given its religious/spiritual/cosmological origins.

Types of Modern Mindfulness Practices

Modern mindfulness practices come in various forms, catering to different needs and preferences. Popular approaches include app-based services, which offer guided practices accessible from anywhere. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) are two structured programs that combine meditation, body awareness, and group discussions. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) integrates mindfulness practices with cognitive therapy techniques and is particularly helpful for those dealing with recurrent depression. Movement-based mindfulness practices, such as Yoga or Tai Chi, combine physical activity with present-moment body awareness. Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM) adapts mindfulness practices to be more accessible and safe for trauma survivors. You can engage with mindfulness in a group format, online or in person through local community groups, or attend retreats for more immersive experiences. While these approaches differ in their delivery and focus, they all share a common goal of cultivating present-moment awareness and self-regulation skills, which can be particularly beneficial for trauma survivors.

Highlights of Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness practices can be powerful tools for enhancing overall well-being, especially for those dealing with trauma or chronic stress. Including these practices in your daily life helps to foster the following:

Present Moment Awareness

Focusing on the here and now reduces anxiety about the future or dwelling on the past. By being present with your current sensations, you are training your mind to be with what is here now and not to time travel back to the past or into the future. This presence helps to avoid

ruminating or getting stuck in old stories or projections. Specifically, the body is always in the present moment and can't time travel, but your mind can, so the goal is to help the mind stay with the body.

Emotional Regulation

Observing thoughts and feelings without judgment helps manage difficult emotions more effectively. Our bodies and minds don't understand the difference between a current emotional circumstance or thinking about one from the past. We can literally think ourselves into an emotional state. However, all emotions pass – you won't stay angry, sad, or even happy forever. Emotions are information that helps you to know something is or was important. They are little pieces of energy that move through us. Emotions come and go, and mindfulness can help us notice those comings and goings so as not to get so caught up in the content of our emotions or the thought that they will last forever.

Self-Compassion

Mindfulness practices often incorporate elements of self-kindness and self-acceptance. You might have a strong critical voice inside that is harsher towards you than you would ever be to another person. Self-criticism and feelings of shame or guilt are very common inner narratives for many people, especially trauma survivors. You will never hear anyone's voice more than your own, so how you speak to yourself matters. Mindful self-compassion and self-acceptance can help defuse the inner critic and shift your internal narrative toward a gentler, more accepting voice. When we are harsh to ourselves, we can stay stuck in the traumatic stories and events of the past. Treating yourself with kindness can feel foreign at first, but it is a powerful tool in helping trauma symptoms to subside.

Stress Reduction

Practicing mindfulness lowers stress levels, reduces muscle tension, and promotes relaxation. A lot of stress symptoms stem from traumatic events that are effectively "stuck" in the body and mind. Our nervous system wants to keep us safe, so it holds onto the content of those stories to keep our stress response on alert for the future. We may lament the past or wish for the present to be different than it is; these thoughts keep the stress response activated. With mindfulness, we can gently release those stories and longings, which relaxes the mind and, in turn, the body.

How Mindfulness Practice Helps

Because mindfulness has become ubiquitous, it is often presented as a cure-all for anything that ails you, so it can be confusing what the benefits are. While mindfulness is not a magic cure, it can help enhance your overall well-being in many ways. Research has shown that practicing mindfulness can have positive effects on both mental and physical health, helping manage stress, anxiety, and depression more effectively. Studies have consistently demonstrated that mindfulness-based programs can improve emotional regulation, enhance relationships, and support overall health and resilience. Here are some of the ways that mindfulness might be beneficial:

Benefits

⬇️ **Mindfulness has been shown to reduce or decrease:**	⬆️ **Mindfulness has been shown to improve or increase:**
Thoughts & Feelings (mental & emotional): ● Stress and worry ● Anxiety ● Depression and negative moods ● Overthinking (rumination) and excessive worrying ● Strong emotional reactions and reactivity ● Feeling disconnected from yourself (dissociation) ● Emotional distress ● Feelings of shame ● Being overly critical of yourself (self-criticism) ● Blaming yourself unfairly (self-blame) ● Fear of being kind to yourself (self-compassion)	Thoughts & Feelings (mental & emotional): ● Positive mood, emotions, and happiness ● Empathy and compassion for others ● Self-awareness ● Ability to manage emotions (emotional regulation) ● Kindness towards self (self-compassion) ● Self-esteem and self-acceptance ● Flexibility in thinking and coping ● Tolerance for difficulty (acceptance of others and difficult situations) ● Ability to handle challenging emotions ● Bouncing back from challenges (resilience) ● Sense of safety & stability ● Sense of agency & empowerment ● Ability to cope with stress (coping strategies)
Body & Brain (physical & cognitive): ● Muscle tension ● Feeling on edge (hyperarousal) ● Inflammation in the body ● High blood pressure ● Stress hormones in the blood ● Digestive problems	Body & Brain (physical & cognitive): ● Balance in the nervous system (nervous system regulation) ● Awareness of internal body sensations (interoception) ● Quality of sleep ● Ability to manage pain (pain tolerance) ● Management of chronic illness symptoms ● Ability to focus and pay attention

⬇️ **Mindfulness has been shown to reduce or decrease:**	⬆️ **Mindfulness has been shown to improve or increase:**
Actions & Reactions (behavioral): ● Avoiding difficult situations, feelings, or memories (avoidant behavior) ● Reacting too quickly to emotions	Actions & Reactions (behavioral): ● Self-control and making thoughtful choices (self-regulation) ● Handling daily tasks and responsibilities
Relationships & Daily Life (social & relational): ● Feelings of isolation or disconnection (loneliness) ● Difficulties managing emotions in daily life	Relationships & Daily Life (social & relational): ● Feelings of connection with others ● Satisfaction in relationships ● Positive interactions and trust with others ● Engaging with people and surroundings (social engagement)

Considerations

While mindfulness has many benefits, it also has limitations and potential risks that are important to consider. Mindfulness is not a cure-all and shouldn't be the sole intervention for treating serious conditions like depression or trauma. It's also worth noting that trauma survivors should approach mindfulness with particular care. Some studies suggest certain mindfulness practices could potentially intensify trauma symptoms or bring up challenging emotions and memories. Some people may experience increased anxiety or feelings of disconnection when practicing mindfulness. Trauma-sensitive approaches to mindfulness, emphasizing safety, choice, and control, address some of these concerns. Everyone's experience with mindfulness is unique, and what works for one person may not work for another. If you're considering incorporating mindfulness practice into your life, discussing it with a professional who can provide personalized guidance is best.

Key Takeaways

Mindfulness practices offer valuable tools for trauma survivors with their focus on fostering present-moment awareness and navigating emotional reactivity. Some key points to remember:

- Mindfulness is about present-moment awareness, not emptying your mind or achieving a particular state.
- Regular practice can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression while improving emotional regulation and self-compassion.
- Even though mindfulness has many benefits, trauma survivors should approach starting a practice carefully.

By incorporating mindfulness practices into your daily life, you can develop greater awareness, resilience, and overall well-being on your path to trauma recovery.

Somatics

Somatic Awareness

Somatic Awareness is a category of mindfulness practices focusing on the connection between the body and mind. While many mindfulness techniques and programs involve the body and mind, the focus on the body-mind connection is more explicit with somatic-based practices. Somatic-based practices have grown in popularity in recent years, but as with mindfulness, somatic work can be tricky to understand, so it can be helpful to break it down further.

What is "Somatic"?

The word "somatic" comes from the Greek word "soma," which means "body." When used in mindfulness and therapy, "soma" refers to your living, breathing body and the inherent "wisdom" it holds. In this context, wisdom is the non-cognitive actions, behaviors, and sensations that naturally emerge from the body. Your body isn't just a physical shell—it's an intelligent system constantly sending and receiving information. Yet, we often ignore it while favoring our minds as the sole source of intelligence and wisdom.

What are Somatic Practices?

Somatic or body-based practices help you become more aware of your body sensations. These practices can involve various aspects of body awareness. You might focus on noticing how your body feels in different positions; this awareness is called proprioception (your sense of your body in space). You might also pay attention to internal sensations like hunger, tension, or relaxation; this awareness is called interoception (your sense of what's happening inside your body). Somatic practices often use meditation, touch, or subtle movement techniques to deepen your body awareness. By engaging in somatic practices, you can develop a more nuanced understanding of your physical self and how it relates to your thoughts and emotions – or, more simply, how your mind and body connect.

Why Focus on the Body?

Trauma leaves a lasting impact on the body, affecting how we feel, move, and respond to stress, so including body-based practices is a powerful addition for trauma survivors. Somatic (body-based) practices, when combined with mindfulness and other techniques, offer powerful benefits by directly addressing the physical impact of trauma. Unlike cognitive approaches that start with thoughts (top-down), somatic practices work from the body (bottom-up), helping you reconnect with your physical self and develop a greater sense of safety and control. By directly addressing the physical aspects of trauma, somatic practices offer a powerful complement to traditional mindfulness, providing a more holistic path to overall well-being.

Somatic practices can help you feel more "embodied" – a sense of presence and connection to your physical self that's the opposite of feeling disconnected, dissociated, or "out of body." Becoming more embodied, you become more aware of your body's sensations, both pleasant and unpleasant. While it may seem daunting at first to experience unpleasant or unexpected sensations and feelings, somatic practices can help you stay grounded when strong emotions arise. For example, you might notice your heart racing with anxiety, but at the same time, you can direct attention toward the feeling of your feet on the ground. Being with both the sensation of anxiety and your grounded feet helps keep your awareness in the present moment, providing more flexibility, resilience, and choice. Over time, these practices can help release stored tension and rebuild a sense of safety and connection with your body, which are crucial elements for healing from trauma.

Types of Somatic Practices

Somatic practices come in various forms, from everyday mindfulness techniques to more structured therapeutic approaches. An accessible form of somatic practice is somatic awareness or body-based mindfulness practices like body scans and mindful walking. Somatic awareness mindfulness practices are found in mindfulness programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM), and Yoga or Tai Chi when practiced with body awareness. Another type of somatic practice is somatic therapy, which uses movement and breathwork to address physical issues. Feldenkrais Method (FM) and Body-Mind Centering (BMC) are somatic therapy systems. A more clinical therapeutic

approach to somatic practices is through somatic psychotherapy, which utilizes body awareness to heal the emotional and psychological impact of trauma. Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP), Somatic Experiencing (SE), and Hakomi Mindfulness are somatic psychotherapy systems that incorporate mindfulness with body-centered therapy. While each approach has its unique focus, all somatic practices aim to deepen your body-mind connection and support overall well-being.

Highlights of Somatic Practices

Somatic awareness practices can be a powerful tool for healing, especially for trauma survivors. Including these body-based practices helps to foster:

- **Mind-Body Connection:** How we feel in our bodies is closely tied to our thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Tuning into your physical sensations can give you insights into your emotional state.
- **Grounding in the Present:** Focusing on bodily sensations can help anchor you in the present moment, which can be helpful when dealing with anxiety or traumatic memories.
- **Releasing Stored Tension:** Trauma can often get "stuck" in the body. Somatic practices help release this stored tension and foster relaxation.
- **Building a Sense of Safety:** Learning to listen to and trust your body's signals can help you develop a greater sense of safety and control.

How Somatic Practice Helps

Somatic practices have unique benefits, particularly for trauma survivors. Research has shown that these practices offer unique advantages for mental and physical well-being and support healing and resilience. What sets somatic practices apart is their significant impact on the nervous system. By focusing on the body-mind connection, these techniques help regulate the nervous system and resolve the lingering effects of chronic stress or trauma in ways that other mindfulness practices may not directly address, making them of great benefit to trauma survivors. While each person's experience is unique, these practices can enhance body awareness, improve emotional regulation, and foster a more profound sense of safety and stability. Let's explore some of the specific benefits of somatic practices.

Benefits

⬇️ **Somatic practices reduce or decrease:**	⬆️ **Somatic practices improve or increase:**
Thoughts & Feelings (mental & emotional): • Stress • Anxiety • Depression and negative moods • Difficulty managing emotions (overwhelm, dysregulation & reactivity) • Negative self-image (thoughts and self-talk) • Limiting beliefs • Feeling disconnected from oneself (dissociation) • Shame and self-blame • PTSD symptoms	Thoughts & Feelings (mental & emotional): • Emotional strength and flexibility (emotional resilience) • Sense of safety & stability • Overall well-being • Self-awareness and mindful attention • Self-compassion • Sense of agency and empowerment • Ability to cope with challenges and stress (coping strategies) • Ability to calm oneself (self-soothing) • Integration and processing of difficult or traumatic memories
Body & Brain (physical & cognitive): • Overactive nervous system • Ongoing muscle tension • Restricted breathing • Long-term (chronic) pain • Digestive problems • Breathing difficulties • Unhelpful movement patterns • Stored tension from stressful experiences (trapped survival energy)	Body & Brain (physical & cognitive): • Awareness of one's body (body awareness) • Healthy posture and movement patterns • Nervous system balance (regulation) • Awareness of internal body sensations (interoception) • Sense of body position and movement (proprioception)

⬇️ **Somatic practices reduce or decrease:**	⬆️ **Somatic practices improve or increase:**
Actions & Reactions (behavioral): ● Avoiding difficult situations, feelings, or memories (avoidant behavior) ● Unhelpful coping strategies	Actions & Reactions (behavioral): ● Ability to handle daily tasks and challenges ● Bouncing back from challenges (resilience) ● Helpful and adaptive ways of coping (coping behaviors) ● Using the body to manage emotions and stress (embodied self-regulation)
Relationships & Daily Life (social & relational): ● Difficulties in personal relationships	Relationships & Daily Life (social & relational): ● Feelings of connection with others ● Satisfaction in relationships ● Positive interactions and trust with others ● Engaging with people and your surroundings (social engagement)

Considerations

Somatic practices show promise in helping trauma survivors reconnect with their bodies and manage symptoms; however, it's essential to understand that research in this area is still developing. While many find these practices helpful, they may not work for everyone. When starting with somatic practices, some people might experience increased anxiety or unexpected emotions when focusing on body sensations. Somatic approaches are often most effective when used alongside other treatments or practices, not as a standalone solution. It's crucial to work with a qualified, trauma-informed practitioner who can guide you safely through these practices, determine which somatic approach is most suitable for your circumstances, and how to incorporate them into your life.

Key Takeaways

With their explicit focus on the body-mind connection, somatic practices can be powerful tools for trauma survivors. Some key points to remember:

- Somatic practices focus on the body-mind connection, helping you become more aware of your physical sensations and experiences in the present moment.
- Somatic practices can help reduce stress, anxiety, and trauma symptoms while improving emotional regulation and overall well-being.
- Approach somatic practices with care, ideally under the guidance of a qualified, trauma-informed practitioner.

Incorporating somatic practices into your mindfulness journey can help you develop a more holistic approach to healing and personal growth.

Part 3: The Practices

Breaking Down Types of Mindfulness Practices

General Practice Guidance

Mindfulness practices are everywhere these days, from apps to local groups, which is an amazing thing! However, as a trauma survivor, it's important to know that not all of these offerings are designed with your needs in mind. Some may not be trauma-sensitive, while others might not include body-focused (somatic) practices. As mentioned earlier in this guide, both trauma-sensitive approaches and body-based mindfulness practices play an essential role in recovering from trauma. That's why it's crucial for you, as a trauma survivor, to know what to look for when choosing a mindfulness practice and how to modify a given practice to suit your needs. In this next section, I'll break down several types of mindfulness practices to help you make an informed decision about what might work best for you.

A Few Disclaimers

Before we get into it, here are a few necessary disclaimers to keep in mind:

The Teacher Matters

The type of guidance you receive when practicing mindfulness can make a big difference. A skilled, trauma-informed teacher can help you navigate challenges and tailor practices to your needs. However, finding such teachers can be challenging. Many mindfulness instructors, while well-intentioned, may not have specific training in working with trauma survivors. It's okay to ask about a teacher's background and approach, hear from others who have practiced with them, and ask for a sample mindfulness session before committing to practicing with them. You must feel safe and comfortable with any teacher you practice with. For more information on how to find a qualified teacher, see the Resources section at the end of the guide.

Lack of Standards

There is no single universally recognized certification for mindfulness teachers. Unlike some professions, no governing body oversees mindfulness instruction, meaning the quality and approach can vary widely between teachers and programs, making it very hard to assess and compare. When exploring mindfulness options, looking for teachers with reputable training and

experience can be helpful, especially in trauma-informed approaches. A qualified teacher should be able to answer questions about the type of mindfulness they teach, who they learned it from, how long they have been practicing, and how trauma-sensitive their approach is.

Evolving and Changing Field

The mindfulness, somatics, and trauma research fields are constantly growing and changing. New studies and approaches emerge regularly, adding to our collective understanding of these practices and their effects. While this guide aims to provide helpful information, it can't cover everything in these rapidly evolving (and sometimes overwhelming) fields. When you find a mindfulness practice type that suits you best, you can delve deeper into the information, research, and approaches as they evolve and emerge.

Seeking Support

While this guide aims to empower you with knowledge about mindfulness domains and practices, it is not a replacement for professional guidance. Practicing mindfulness, especially as a trauma survivor, can bring up unexpected feelings or experiences that may be difficult to navigate on your own or, worse, totally dissuade you from practicing mindfulness altogether. As I have said many times throughout this guide, having a qualified, trauma-informed teacher or therapist to support you can make a big difference in your mindfulness journey. They can help you navigate challenges, answer questions, and tailor practices to your specific needs. The goal is to have appropriate support. This guide is here to help you make informed choices about mindfulness practices and how to evaluate them as a trauma survivor, but working with a knowledgeable professional can provide the personalized guidance and safety that's so important in trauma recovery. You don't have to — and shouldn't have to — go it alone.

Mindfulness Postures

Mindfulness can be practiced in many different positions, allowing you to choose what feels most comfortable and safe. You can practice seated in a chair or on a cushion, standing, walking, lying down, or even moving gently. Your eyes can be open or closed, depending on what helps you feel most at ease. Remember, there's no "right" way to practice mindfulness –

it's about finding what works best for you and your body at any moment. There is no pressure to pick a "perfect posture," and you can choose to make a change at any time during the practice. You do not need to sit perfectly still! Even if you practice in a group setting and the teacher guides you toward a particular posture, you can choose something else that works for you. Consider the posture cues from the teacher as offerings, not commands or demands; ultimately, you are in charge.

Practice Breakdowns

Types of Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness comes in many forms, each offering unique approaches to cultivating present-moment awareness. Here are some common types of mindfulness practices:

1. **Concentration (Focused Attention) Practice:** Involves focusing attention on a single point, like your breath or a mantra, to develop sustained focus and attention.
2. **Open Awareness (Open Monitoring) Practice:** Encourages observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they come and go without getting caught up in them.
3. **Compassion Practice:** Focuses on developing kindness and goodwill toward yourself and others, often through supportive phrases or visualization.
4. **Somatic Awareness (Body-Based Mindfulness) Practice:** Emphasizes tuning into bodily sensations and internal states to anchor awareness in the present moment.
5. **Movement Meditation Practice:** Combines gentle physical movement with mindful awareness, such as walking meditation or gentle yoga.
6. **Visualization Meditation Practice:** Involves creating and focusing on mental images for relaxation or personal growth.
7. **Transcendental/Mantra Practice:** Involves repeating a sound, word, or phrase to help focus the mind and induce a calm state.

You can tailor these practices to your personal needs and comfort level. As a trauma survivor, it's important to choose approaches that feel safe and empowering to you. To help you, this portion of the guide will break down the top five practice types: concentration, open awareness, compassion, somatic awareness, and movement meditation.

Understanding the Practice Breakdowns

In the following sections, we'll explore the top five types of mindfulness practices in more detail. You'll find an overview with highlights and a trauma-sensitive rating for each practice. This rating provides a scannable reference for how suitable the practice is for trauma survivors.

The Overall Trauma-Sensitive Rating includes three components:

- **Trauma-Informed Score (1-5):** This score indicates how well the practice aligns with trauma-informed principles. A higher score means the practice is more adaptable for trauma survivors.
- **Somatic-Based Score (1-5):** This score shows how much the practice focuses on body awareness. A higher score means more emphasis on physical sensations and experiences.
- **Overall Score (1-5):** This score combines the above scores to give an overall rating of how suitable the practice might be for trauma survivors.

**Note: These ratings are general guidelines based on current understanding, standards, and research.*

The practice breakdowns also include common variations of the practice type, where to find them, how to integrate the practice into your life, and trauma-informed considerations that will help you modify the practice to suit your needs.

Remember, when testing out new practices, start slowly, listen to your body, and, if possible, work with a trauma-informed professional. As you read through each practice breakdown, pause and consider how it might feel to try it out for yourself – your initial reaction is usually a good guide!

Use these practice breakdowns as a starting point for understanding the different approaches for each practice type, but remember that your comfort and safety are the most important factors in choosing a practice.

Concentration (Focused Attention) Practice

Overview

Concentration practice, also known as "focused attention" or "focused awareness" practice, is a form of meditation that focuses on developing the ability to maintain a single point of attention. The practice involves choosing a single object of focus and gently bringing your attention back to it whenever your mind wanders. Many objects can become the focus of concentration practice — you might focus on your breath, a specific area of your body, or silently repeat a phrase. The key principles of concentration practice include sustaining attention, developing a calm and steady mind, cultivating clarity in perception, maintaining a balanced state, and gradually building skills over time. While concentration practice can be powerful on its own, it's also used alongside other forms of meditation.

Highlights

- **Primary focus:** Developing single-pointed concentration by focusing on a single chosen object, such as the breath, a mantra, or a visual point
- **Applications:** Improving focus, reducing mind-wandering, preparing for other practices
- **Benefits:** Enhanced attention, reduced stress, improved cognitive performance

Trauma-Sensitive Rating

Trauma-Informed	3 out of 5	It can be adapted but not inherently trauma-informed
Somatic-Based	3 out of 5	It can be body-focused (e.g., breath) but not always
Overall Score	3 out of 5	Neutral - it sits in the middle of the trauma-informed and somatic-based scales.

Typical Concentration Practices

- **Breath focus:** Focusing attention on breath awareness by attending to sensations of breathing at the nostrils, chest, or abdomen.
- **Bodily focus:** Sequentially focusing attention toward sensations of the body by concentrating on a specific body part or physical sensation.
- **Mantra repetition:** Focusing attention on a mantra by silently or outwardly repeating a word, phrase, or sound.
- **Visual focus:** Focusing attention on an external object, image, or mental object, such as a visualization. Examples include gazing at a candle flame or focusing on a pleasant (non-moving) object in the room.

Finding Concentration Practices

Concentration practices are found in traditional and modern formats and often appear as part of apps, services, or clinical frameworks (e.g., Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction). Here are some helpful terms to guide your search for concentration mindfulness practices.

🔍 **In mindfulness apps or when searching for resources, look for phrases like:**	🔎 **When asking professionals or looking for classes, inquire about:**
• "Single-pointed meditation" • "Focused attention practices" • "Concentration meditation" • "Anchoring techniques" (for practices that use a specific focus point) • "Shamatha practice" (a Buddhist term for concentration meditation)	• Beginner-friendly concentration exercises • Trauma-sensitive focused attention practices • Grounding techniques involving sustained focus • Guided concentration meditations for anxiety, trauma, or PTSD

Integrating Concentration Practices

Integrating concentration practices into daily life can involve more formal meditation or informal focus on daily life practices. Even practices that don't overtly appear to be mindfulness or

meditation can be forms of concentration practice, such as attention training exercises using digital apps (e.g., Lumosity, Peak), using the Pomodoro Technique to train attention in intervals (i.e., alternating working blocks and break time), or "deep working" sessions with focused attention on single tasks.

Here are some examples of how to integrate concentration practice into your daily life:

- **Micro-practices:** Brief moments of focused attention throughout the day. *Example: Pausing to focus your awareness on one single breath*
- **Task focus:** Applying concentration skills to daily tasks. *Example: Holding your attention on the act of folding laundry*
- **Mindful listening:** Bring your full attention and presence when in conversation with others. *Example: Focusing on listening and understanding to the words the other person is saying*
- **Sensory awareness:** Focusing on sensory experiences in daily activities. *Example: Focusing on the sensations of brushing your teeth*
- **Stress management:** Using focused attention to center yourself in stressful situations. *Example: Focusing on the sensations of your feet on the ground*

Trauma-Informed Considerations

For trauma survivors, concentration practice can be a helpful tool for improving focus, reducing stress, and enhancing overall well-being. However, it's essential to approach this practice gently and at your own pace. If you find the practice challenging or difficult emotions arise, take breaks or seek guidance from a qualified practitioner or therapist.

🚦 Things to Keep in Mind	💡 Trauma-Informed Tips
Can be intense Concentration practices focus your awareness on one object, providing a sense of control and predictability. This deep form of concentration can be comforting and grounding, or it could trigger anxiety. It's important to know that both are possible.	**Start slow** It is essential to begin with short sessions to see how the practice feels for you. Please know that what feels tolerable could be different each time you practice. If discomfort arises, ending the session or switching to a different form of practice can be helpful.
Can be structured Concentration practices tend toward a structured format and typically follow a set pattern of instructions. This structure can feel safe because it's predictable, or it can feel confining. The experience can also vary by the object you choose to focus on for the session.	**Modify as needed** You should feel empowered to modify the technique to suit your needs. Consider the instructions as a suggestion or starting place and not a demand. From there, you can experiment with alternatives that work better for you, such as practicing with your eyes open or choosing a different object to focus on.
Can be demanding Concentration practice often requires sustained focus, which can be mentally demanding. This demand and focus can be a double-edged sword. While these practices can be calming at times (or at first), they can also become overwhelming or turn towards hyper-focus.	**Change the duration or focus** Longer sessions may not be beneficial. Respect the pace that feels best for you, no matter the length. Giving yourself breaks from the practice or changing your focus is essential. Experiment with alternating your focus from an internal object (mental or bodily sensation) to an external object (candle flame or pleasant-looking object) and see what feels best for you.

Open Awareness (Open Monitoring) Practice

Overview

Open Awareness practice, also known as "open monitoring" or "choiceless awareness," is a form of meditation that focuses on non-judgmental observation of all present-moment experiences. The practice involves observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise without attaching to or judging them. Many aspects of experience can become the focus of open awareness practice — you might observe your thoughts, bodily sensations, emotions, or environmental stimuli such as sounds. The key principles of open awareness practice include present-moment awareness, non-judgmental attitude, acceptance of what is present at any given moment, and not becoming attached to your thoughts. The main idea is to be aware of your experiences without getting caught up in them. This practice can help you better understand your thoughts and feelings, including how your mind reacts when you're happy or stressed. While you can practice Open Awareness on its own, combining it with other meditation types, like concentration practice, can be helpful. Because observing your thoughts can sometimes feel overwhelming, I recommend having the support of a teacher, especially in the beginning.

Highlights

- **Primary focus:** Non-judgmental observation of experiences in the present moment by observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment or attachment
- **Applications:** Developing insight [footnote], emotional regulation, stress management
- **Benefits:** Increased self-awareness, improved emotional regulation, reduced reactivity

Trauma-Sensitive Rating

Trauma-Informed	3 out of 5	It empowers choice, but for trauma survivors, it needs careful introduction. Its potential to trigger means trauma-informed modifications are often necessary.

Somatic-Based	4 out of 5	It often involves significant body awareness, though not exclusively.
Overall Score	3.5 out of 5	Moderately trauma-informed and somatic-based but may require support.

Typical Open Awareness Practices

Typical open awareness practices include:

- **Open monitoring:** Observing whatever arises in consciousness without fixating on any one thing
- **Choiceless awareness:** Allowing the attention to move naturally without directed focus
- **Mindful inquiry:** Exploring the nature of thoughts, emotions, and sensations as they occur
- **Noting practice:** Mentally labeling experiences as they arise (e.g., "thinking," "hearing")
- **Body scan:** Systematically moving attention through the body, noticing sensations

As you can see from this list, open awareness practice can be more abstract. Of these examples, being with the changing bodily sensations of a body scan and noting practices are the least abstract.

Finding Open Awareness Practices

Like concentration practices, open awareness practices are found in traditional and modern formats and often appear as part of apps, services, or clinical frameworks (e.g., Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction). Here are some helpful terms to guide your search for open-awareness mindfulness practices.

🔍 **In mindfulness apps or when searching for resources, look for phrases like:**	🔎 **When asking professionals or looking for classes, inquire about:**
● "Open awareness meditation" ● "Open monitoring meditation" ● "Gentle awareness practice" ● "Noting practice" ● "Mindfulness of thoughts and emotions" ● "Gentle awareness practice" ● "Trauma-sensitive open awareness" ● "Non-judgmental awareness practice" ● "Vipassana meditation" (a Buddhist term for insight meditation)	● Beginner-friendly open awareness exercises ● Trauma-informed open awareness exercises ● Trauma-sensitive mindfulness practices ● Guided awareness practices for anxiety, trauma, or PTSD ● Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programs

Integrating Open Awareness Practices

Integrating open awareness practices into daily life can involve formal meditation sessions or informal mindfulness in daily activities. Even practices that don't overtly appear to be meditation can be forms of open awareness practice, such as mindful journaling or free writing, expressive arts like intuitive dance, or noting the sensory experience of being with nature.

Here are some examples of how to integrate open awareness practice into your daily life:

- **Micro-practices:** Brief moments of open awareness throughout the day. *Example: Pausing to notice your current thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations in the moment*
- **Mindful activities:** Applying open awareness to daily tasks. *Example: Noticing all sensations while washing dishes, including thoughts that arise and where your mind goes*
- **Mindful listening:** Bring your full attention and presence when in conversation with others. *Example: Noticing your thoughts and reactions to what the other person is saying without judgment*
- **Environmental awareness:** Tuning into your surroundings with all senses. *Example: Taking a mindful walk while noticing sights, sounds, smells, and bodily sensations*

- **Emotional check-ins:** Regularly pausing to observe your emotional state without trying to change it. *Example: Noticing you feel angry and what that emotion feels like in your body*

Trauma-Informed Considerations

As a trauma survivor, open awareness practice can help you relate differently to your thoughts and feelings. It allows you to notice what's happening in your mind and body without getting caught up in it, potentially loosening the hold of trauma-related experiences. While this can be very helpful, unexpected memories or sensations might arise due to the less structured nature of this practice. Remember, you're in charge of your practice. Go at your own pace, be kind to yourself, and consider working with a trauma-informed mindfulness teacher or therapist for guidance.

Here are some key points to keep in mind as you practice open awareness:

🚦 **Things to Keep in Mind**	💡 **Trauma-Informed Tips**
Less structured nature Open awareness practices tend to be less structured than other mindfulness techniques. This openness can feel liberating because it's flexible, but it can also feel unsettling for some trauma survivors.	**Modify as needed** Feel empowered to adjust the practice to suit your needs. Consider having a "home base" (like your breath or a physical object) to return to if the openness becomes overwhelming. You can also practice with eyes open or incorporate gentle movement.

🚦 Things to Keep in Mind	💡 Trauma-Informed Tips
Unexpected Triggers Open awareness can sometimes bring up difficult memories, thoughts, emotions, or body sensations without warning. While challenging experiences are expected during practice, they can still take you by surprise due to this technique's open nature.	**Go to Grounding** Keep grounding techniques handy (methods to help you feel more present and connected to your surroundings), like focusing on your breath or a comforting object. Remember, you're in control - if things get overwhelming, it's okay to pause, switch to a different activity, or use a grounding method. Be kind to yourself if difficult experiences arise, and don't hesitate to seek support from a trauma-informed teacher or therapist.
Emotional Waves Open awareness might bring up a range of intense emotions as you practice. It's important to be mindful of what feels tolerable in the moment.	**Navigating Your Emotions** Allow yourself to notice emotions without getting caught up in them. If feelings become too intense, gently shift your attention to something neutral and steady, like your breath or a calm spot in the room (such as a peaceful picture or plant). It's okay to pause or adjust your practice as needed. Remember, you're in control of your experience and can always return to a more comfortable state.

Compassion Practice

Overview

Compassion Practice is a meditation technique that develops kindness and goodwill towards yourself and others. It includes techniques like Loving-Kindness Meditation, where you practice sending positive thoughts to various groups of people in your life. In these practices, you might direct kind wishes to yourself, loved ones, people you don't know well or find difficult, and all beings (those outside your circle). Key principles include being compassionate to yourself (self-compassion), understanding how we're all connected, fostering a desire to help others, developing kindness for everyone (universal compassion), and maintaining a sense of calm and balance (equanimity). It can help improve your relationships, reduce stress, and increase your sense of connection with others. Compassion practice is powerful on its own or alongside other forms of meditation.

Highlights

- **Primary focus:** Developing compassion and kindness towards yourself and others by generating positive thoughts and well-wishes
- **Applications:** Building empathy, developing emotional resilience, improving relationships, and reducing self-criticism
- **Benefits:** Increased understanding of others, better management of emotions, stronger connections with people, and potential reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety

Trauma-Sensitive Rating

Trauma-Informed	4 out of 5	It can be highly beneficial for trauma survivors but requires careful introduction and adaptation
Somatic-Based	2 out of 5	While it can involve bodily sensations, it's primarily a mental/emotional practice

Overall Score	3 out of 5	Moderately trauma-informed and somewhat somatic-based, with significant potential benefits for trauma survivors

Typical Compassion Practices

Typical compassion practices include:

- **Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta):** Repeating phrases of goodwill towards oneself and others
- **Self-Compassion exercises:** Treating oneself with kindness and understanding, especially during difficult times
- **Compassionate imagery:** Visualizing compassionate figures or oneself as a source of compassion
- **Karuna meditation:** A Buddhist practice focused on growing kindness, specifically cultivating compassion
- **Tonglen meditation:** A Tibetan Buddhist practice of "giving and taking," imagining taking in others' suffering and sending out relief and comfort

Finding Compassion Practices

Compassion practices are found in traditional and modern formats, often appearing in apps, services, or clinical frameworks.

Here are some helpful terms to guide your search for compassion practices:

🔍 **In mindfulness apps or when searching for resources, look for phrases like:**	🔎 **When asking professionals or looking for classes, inquire about:**
● "Loving-Kindness Meditation" ● "Metta Meditation" ● "Self-Compassion exercises" ● "Compassion Cultivation Training" ● "Mindful Self-Compassion" ● "Tonglen practice" ● "Karuna meditation"	● Trauma-sensitive compassion practices ● Guided Loving-Kindness meditation for beginners ● Self-compassion workshops or courses ● Compassion-based therapy or counseling ● Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) ● Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)

Integrating Compassion Practices

Integrating compassion practices into daily life can involve formal or informal meditation sessions. Many everyday activities can be compassion practices, such as actively listening to a friend, offering a kind word to a stranger, or taking a moment to appreciate someone's efforts. These small acts of kindness, often already part of our daily lives, can be mindfully expanded upon. While it might initially feel unfamiliar, many people find that regular practice helps them feel more emotionally resilient and empathetic. Remember, there's no "perfect" way to do this - it's about finding what works for you.

Here are some examples of how to integrate compassion practice into your daily life:

- **Micro-practices:** Brief moments of sending kind wishes to yourself or others throughout the day. *Example: Silently wishing "May you be happy" to people you pass on the street*
- **Self-compassion breaks:** Pausing to offer yourself kindness during stressful moments. *Example: Taking a deep breath and saying to yourself, "This is a moment of difficulty. May I be kind to myself" when facing a challenge*
- **Compassionate listening:** Bringing a compassionate attitude to listening with kindness in conversations. *Example: Focusing fully on a friend's words without interrupting and responding with empathy rather than judgment*
- **Gratitude practice:** Regularly acknowledge and appreciate the kindness of others. *Example: Writing down three things you're grateful for each evening, focusing on kind actions from others*

- **Random acts of kindness:** Intentionally performing small acts of compassion for others. *Example: Leaving a positive note for a family member to find or holding a door for a stranger*

Trauma-Informed Considerations

As a trauma survivor, compassion practices can be powerful tools for healing, though you should approach these practices with care and sensitivity. These practices can help grow self-kindness and reduce self-criticism, which are often challenges for trauma survivors. However, they may also bring up difficult emotions or memories, so exploring what feels right for you is important.

Here are some key points to keep in mind as you practice compassion:

🚦 **Things to Keep in Mind**	💡 **Trauma-Informed Tips**
Self-compassion difficulties Directing compassion toward yourself can be profoundly beneficial, but it may initially feel new or awkward. It could also bring up feelings of guilt, shame, or self-blame that often accompany trauma.	**Begin with an easier target** Start by directing compassion towards a different group that may feel easier to generate loving feelings for, like a loved one or a pet. Gradually work towards self-compassion as you feel more comfortable and secure in the practice.
Emotional intensity Compassion practices can bring up intense emotions, both positive and negative. While it may seem that generating kindness might lead to experiencing positive emotions, know that you might experience both positive and negative feelings during compassion practices.	**Use grounding techniques** Have grounding techniques ready, such as focusing on your breath or physical sensations. It's okay to pause or stop the practice if it becomes overwhelming. The important thing is to know when to end the practice or switch to an easier group to send compassion toward, like a pet or loved one.

🚦 Things to Keep in Mind	💡 Trauma-Informed Tips
Challenges with forgiveness Some practices may involve extending compassion to difficult people. Generating compassion for difficult people can feel liberating for some but particularly challenging for others. Know that it is perfectly normal to feel challenged by or unwilling to send compassion to people who are difficult or who have hurt you.	**Adapt the practice** It's perfectly acceptable to focus only on yourself or loved ones – in fact, some teachers encourage staying here for long periods (e.g., a whole year) before moving on to other groups. Extending compassion to difficult people is optional and should only be attempted when you feel ready and safe. When you feel ready to bring a difficult person into the practice, begin with a mildly difficult person (think more annoyance than anger) and not the most difficult.
Visualization difficulties Compassion practice involves bringing images of people or beings to mind. Some find holding a visual image easier; for others, holding the visualization can be more challenging. Holding the mental image of a difficult person in your mind may be extra challenging (or undesirable), and it could bring intrusive memories, intense emotions, or even dissociation.	**Explore alternative methods** Instead of visualization, you can focus on physical sensations of warmth or kindness in your body or simply repeat compassionate phrases silently or aloud.

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

Somatic Awareness (Body-Based Mindfulness) Practice

Overview

Somatic Awareness practice, also known as "body-based mindfulness," is a form of meditation that focuses on developing conscious attention to bodily sensations, movements, and internal states. Simply put, it's about tuning into what's happening in your body right now. The practice involves intentionally directing your attention to various physical experiences in your body, such as your breath, heartbeat, muscle tension, or other internal sensations (also known as interoception). Key principles include present-moment awareness of bodily sensations, non-judgmental observation of physical experiences, and recognizing the mind-body connection. While Somatic Awareness is powerful, it is particularly valuable in trauma-informed approaches to mindfulness and therapeutic adaptations such as Somatic Experiencing (SE) or Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP).

Highlights

- **Primary focus:** Cultivating awareness of internal bodily sensations and processes to anchor attention in the present moment because the body is always in the present
- **Applications:** Improving interoceptive awareness, emotional regulation, stress management, and reconnecting with the body
- **Benefits:** Enhanced body awareness, better emotional regulation, potential reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression, improved stress management

Trauma-Sensitive Rating

Trauma-Informed	5 out of 5	Highly adaptable and can be easily modified for trauma survivors
Somatic-Based	5 out of 5	Inherently focused on bodily sensations and experiences
Overall Score	5 out of 5	Strongly trauma-informed and deeply somatic-based, with significant potential benefits for trauma survivors when practiced with care

Common Somatic Awareness Practices

Typical somatic awareness practices include:

- **Body Scan:** Systematically moving attention through different parts of the body
- **Breath awareness:** Focusing on physical sensations of breathing in various parts of the body
- **Mindful movement:** Gentle, deliberate movements with attention to bodily sensations
- **Tension and relaxation exercises:** Consciously tensing and relaxing different muscle groups
- **Emotional body mapping:** Noticing where in the body different emotions are felt
- **Grounding techniques:** Using physical sensations to anchor attention in the present moment

Finding Somatic Awareness Practices

Somatic awareness practices are commonly found in clinical settings and specialized mindfulness programs rather than traditional meditation or general mindfulness apps. They are particularly prevalent in trauma-informed therapeutic approaches.

Here are some helpful terms to guide your search for somatic awareness practices:

🔍 **In mindfulness apps or when searching for resources, look for phrases like:**	🔎 **When asking professionals or looking for classes, inquire about:**
• "Body scan meditation" • "Somatic awareness exercises" • "Mindfulness of the body" • "Interoceptive awareness practices" • "Trauma-sensitive body awareness" • "Mindful movement practices"	• Trauma-informed body-based mindfulness • Somatic experiencing techniques • Sensorimotor psychotherapy • Mindful body awareness for beginners • Body-centered meditation practices • Somatic therapy or counseling • Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) body scan practices

As interest in body-based mindfulness grows, more resources may become available in mainstream meditation apps and programs. However, for now, the most comprehensive and trauma-informed somatic awareness practices are typically found in specialized settings or with specially trained practitioners.

Integrating Somatic Awareness Practices

Integrating somatic awareness practices into daily life can involve formal meditation or informal practices throughout the day. Many everyday activities can become opportunities for somatic awareness, such as noticing bodily sensations while walking, paying attention to your posture while sitting, or being aware of physical responses to emotions.

Here are some examples of how to integrate somatic awareness practice into your daily life:

- **Micro-practices:** Brief moments of body awareness throughout the day. *Example: Pausing to notice the sensations in your hands as you type or write*
- **Breath awareness:** Noticing the physical sensations of breathing. *Example: Feeling the rise and fall of your chest or the air moving through your nostrils*
- **Mindful eating:** Paying attention to the physical sensations of eating and digestion. *Example: Noticing the texture, temperature, and taste of food as you eat*
- **Posture check-ins:** Bring awareness to your body posture throughout the day. *Example: Noticing how you're sitting and making small adjustments for comfort*
- **Emotional awareness:** Gently notice the physical sensations connected with your emotions. *Example: Being curious about any changes in your body when you feel calm or content (or stressed)*
- **Grounding practice:** Using body awareness to center yourself in stressful moments. *Example: Focusing on the sensation of your feet on the ground when feeling overwhelmed*

Trauma-Informed Considerations

As a trauma survivor, somatic awareness practices can be powerful tools for healing, helping you reconnect with your body and develop a sense of safety and control; however, it's important

to approach these practices with care and sensitivity. These practices may bring up complex sensations or difficult emotions, so it's important to go at your own pace and have support available via a trained practitioner. Remember to approach these practices with patience and self-compassion. It's okay to start small and gradually build your awareness. Choose practices that feel comfortable and safe for you, and it's okay to modify or skip any that don't feel right. If any practice feels uncomfortable or triggering, it's okay to stop and shift your attention to something that feels neutral or pleasant, like the sensation of your feet on the ground.

Here are some key points to keep in mind as you practice somatic awareness:

🚦 **Things to Keep in Mind**	💡 **Trauma-Informed Tips**
Body focus can be challenging Focusing on bodily sensations can sometimes trigger trauma responses or feel overwhelming for some. It is helpful not to rush, over-focus, or push too hard.	**Start with neutral areas** Begin by focusing on parts of your body that feel neutral or pleasant. Have an "exit strategy" ready, such as shifting your focus to an external object (like something in the room near you or looking out a window) if body sensations become too intense.
Unexpected sensations As you practice somatic awareness, you might encounter unfamiliar or uncomfortable physical sensations as you develop greater body awareness.	**Use grounding techniques** If a sensation feels uncomfortable, use grounding techniques, such as focusing on the weight of your body on a chair or floor. If the practice becomes overwhelming, pausing or stopping is okay.
Emotional intensity As you increase body awareness, you might experience intense emotions or memories. Only you know if being with these emotions or memories is tolerable.	**Practice self-compassion** Be kind to yourself if difficult emotions arise. Remember that it's normal and okay to feel whatever you're feeling and back off the practice whenever needed. Consider working with a trauma-informed therapist for additional support.

🚦 Things to Keep in Mind	💡 Trauma-Informed Tips
Dissociation You might initially experience numbness or difficulty connecting with bodily sensations, which may continue even with sustained practice.	**Go slowly and be patient** It's okay if you don’t notice much at first or if it feels hard to connect with a particular internal sensation. Start with very brief practices and gradually build up. External sensations (like the feeling of clothing on your skin) can sometimes be easier to notice initially.

Movement Meditation Practice

Overview

Movement Meditation Practice is a form of mindfulness that combines physical movement with present-moment awareness. It's about paying attention to what's happening in your body and mind while you're moving. The practice involves intentionally moving your body while maintaining mindful awareness of the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that arise. It focuses on directing conscious attention to bodily sensations and movements while engaging in various physical activities. Key principles include integrating movement and mindfulness, using movement as an anchor for attention, noticing interoceptive and proprioceptive sensations (your sense of your body's position and movement), and emphasizing the mind-body connection. Movement meditation can take many forms, from slow, deliberate practices like walking meditation or Tai Chi to more dynamic practices like yoga or dance meditation. While beneficial on its own, movement meditation is often used alongside other forms of mindfulness practice and can be particularly valuable in trauma-informed approaches to mindfulness.

Highlights

- **Primary focus:** Developing mindful awareness during physical movement by paying attention to bodily sensations, breath, and the flow of movement
- **Applications:** Stress reduction, improving mind-body connection, enhancing physical health, grounding in the present moment
- **Benefits:** Enhanced body awareness, improved balance and coordination, stress relief, potential reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression

Trauma-Sensitive Rating

Trauma-Informed	4 out of 5	It is adaptable and can be modified for trauma survivors
Somatic-Based	5 out of 5	It is inherently focused on bodily movements and sensations

Overall Score	4.5 out of 5	Strongly trauma-informed and deeply somatic-based, with significant potential benefits for trauma survivors when practiced with care

Common Movement Meditation Practices

Typical movement meditation practices include:

- **Walking meditation:** Slow, deliberate walking with attention to the physical sensations of walking
- **Trauma-Sensitive Yoga:** Gentle yoga practice with an emphasis on choice and the internal experience of the practice
- **Tai Chi and Qigong:** Slow, flowing movements that focus on the sensations of breath and energy flow in the body – Qigong specifically involves coordinated body posture, movement, and breathing
- **Mindful stretching:** Gentle stretches with attention to bodily sensations
- **Dance meditation:** Free-form or structured movement with mindful awareness, often accompanied by music
- **Mindful running or swimming:** Bringing awareness to body sensations during cardiovascular exercise

Finding Movement Meditation Practices

Movement meditation practices can be found in traditional and modern settings, often as part of mindfulness programs (therapeutic, clinical, and non-clinical), yoga studios, or specialized movement classes.

Here are some helpful terms to guide your search for movement meditation practices:

🔍 **In mindfulness or yoga apps or when searching for resources, look for phrases like:**	🔎 **When asking professionals or looking for classes, inquire about:**
● "Mindful movement practices" ● "Walking meditation" ● "Trauma-sensitive yoga" ● "Tai Chi for beginners" ● "Mindful dance" ● "Qigong exercises" ● "Body-aware fitness"	● Trauma-informed movement practices ● Mindful walking groups ● Gentle or restorative yoga classes ● Tai Chi or Qigong for stress reduction ● Movement-based mindfulness workshops ● Dance meditation or authentic movement classes ● Mindful swimming or running programs

Integrating Movement Meditation Practices

Integrating movement meditation practices into daily life can involve formal practice sessions or informal mindfulness during everyday activities. Many regular activities can become opportunities for movement meditation, such as mindful walking during your commute, bringing awareness to your body while doing household chores, or practicing mindful stretching during work breaks. Integrating movement meditation into daily life can help reinforce the practice and extend its benefits beyond formal sessions.

Here are some examples of how to integrate movement meditation practice into your daily life:

- **Micro-practices:** Brief moments of mindful movement throughout the day. *Example: Take a few mindful steps when moving between rooms in your home or office*
- **Mindful walking:** Bringing awareness to the sensation of walking during daily activities. *Example: Feeling the movement of your feet and legs as you walk to your car*
- **Gentle stretching:** Incorporating mindful stretches into your routine. *Example: Doing a few mindful neck and shoulder stretches while sitting at your desk*
- **Mindful chores:** Bringing awareness to your body as you do household tasks. *Example: Feeling the movements of your arms and the sensation of water on your hands while washing dishes*
- **Breath-coordinated movement:** Syncing your breath with simple movements. *Example: Raising your arms as you inhale and lowering them as you exhale, repeating for a few breaths*

- **Mindful exercise:** Bringing awareness to your body during regular exercise routines. *Example: Noticing the sensations in your body as you jog or swim*

Trauma-Informed Considerations

As a trauma survivor, movement meditation practices can be powerful tools for healing, helping you reconnect with your body and develop a sense of safety and control, but they are not without caution. These practices may bring up complex sensations or emotions, so going at your own pace and having support available as needed is important. Remember, you're in control of your practice, so it's okay to modify movements, take breaks, or stop if you feel uncomfortable. If you're new to movement meditation, consider working with a trauma-informed instructor who can guide you safely through the practice and offer personalized modifications.

Here are some key points to keep in mind as you practice movement meditation:

🚦 **Things to Keep in Mind**	💡 **Trauma-Informed Tips**
Movement can trigger body memories Specific movements or postures might unexpectedly trigger body memories or emotional responses related to trauma.	**Start slowly and choose your movement** Begin with simple, everyday movements that feel safe. You can choose which movements you do and how you do them. It's okay to modify or avoid any movements that feel uncomfortable.
Challenging experiences may arise You might find it challenging to stay present with bodily sensations during movement or feel disconnected from your body. Movement can also sometimes release stored emotions, which might feel overwhelming or unexpected.	**Use grounding techniques and pace yourself** If you notice yourself disconnecting, try focusing on the sensation of your feet on the ground or your breath. Open your eyes and look around to orient yourself if needed. It's okay to take breaks or stop if emotions become too intense. Consider having trusted support available when trying new practices.

🚦 Things to Keep in Mind	💡 Trauma-Informed Tips
Comparison or self-judgment In group settings, you might feel self-conscious or judge your movements; this may be more pronounced if trauma has affected your relationship with your body.	**Practice self-compassion** Remember that there's no "right" way to do these practices. Your experience is valid, so moving in whatever feels right for you is okay. Focus on your internal experience rather than how the movement looks.

Practice Summary

Ratings by Practice Type

Remember, these ratings are general guidelines. What feels best can vary significantly from person to person and day to day. It's always okay to adjust any practice to fit your needs or to seek guidance from a trauma-informed instructor. The most trauma-sensitive practice is often the one that feels right for you on any given day.

As we've explored several mindfulness practice types, it's helpful to see how they compare regarding trauma sensitivity and somatic body focus.

Trauma-Sensitive Ratings

Here are the five practice types we reviewed ranked from most to least trauma-sensitive:

Practice	Overall Rating	Note
Somatic Awareness Practice	5 out of 5	It is deeply connected to body sensations, with a strong focus on individual comfort.
Movement Meditation Practice	4.5 out of 5	It is fundamentally body-oriented and adaptable, offering many options for personalization.
Compassion Practice	4 out of 5	It is emotionally supportive, though less body-focused than some other practices.
Concentration Practice	3 out of 5	It can be grounding but not specifically designed with trauma in mind.
Open Awareness Practice	3 out of 5	It is flexible but may require careful guidance for trauma survivors.

Remember, these practices are tools that can adapt to your needs and comfort level. It's always okay to pause, modify, or choose not to use a particular practice.

Part 4: Putting it Together

Final Thoughts

Final Thoughts

Let's Recap

As we conclude our journey together through this guide, let's take a moment to reflect on all that we've covered. We've explored the intricate world of trauma, mindfulness, and somatic practices to help empower you on your healing path.

Key Takeaways

1. Trauma affects everyone differently, influencing our thoughts, feelings, bodies, and relationships; it's a normal response to abnormal situations, not a personal failing.
2. Mindfulness isn't about clearing your mind or achieving a particular state; it's about cultivating present-moment awareness and relating to your experiences with kindness and curiosity.
3. Somatic practices, which focus on the body-mind connection, can be particularly powerful for trauma survivors, helping to reconnect with the body and develop a sense of safety.
4. There's no one-size-fits-all approach. Whether it's concentration practices, open awareness, compassion meditation, somatic awareness, or movement practices, the best approach is the one that feels right for you.
5. Safety always comes first. It's okay to modify practices, take breaks, or seek support when you need it. You're in charge of your practice.

Trust Yourself

Remember, your mindfulness practice is uniquely yours! What we've covered here is a starting point, a map to help you navigate the diverse (and sometimes complex) world of mindfulness. Some practices might resonate with you more than others, and that's okay. Trust your instincts and listen to your body – they're your most reliable guides.

As you continue on your mindfulness journey, be patient and kind with yourself. Mindfulness practice is rarely linear, and it's okay to have ups and downs. It's a practice — it's not about

perfection but about consistently and repeatedly showing up for yourself. Small moments, many times!

While this guide provides a foundation to help you choose your mindfulness adventure, working with a trauma-informed mindfulness teacher or therapist can offer personalized guidance and support. Don't hesitate to seek professional help when you need it.

As a trauma survivor, taking a step to explore something new or unknown, like mindfulness, takes a lot of courage. Remember, you're not alone on this journey. Many others have walked this path before you, and many walk alongside you now. I hope your mindfulness practice brings you greater ease, self-understanding, and spaciousness.

A deep bow of gratitude to you,
April N.

Resources

Mindfulness Apps

Note that not all app content may be trauma-sensitive, so please approach cautiously and at your own pace.

- **Ten Percent Happier** - Known for its practical approach to mindfulness from notable teachers.
- **Calm** - Provides guided meditations, sleep stories, and relaxation exercises.
- **Headspace** - Offers a wide range of guided meditations and mindfulness exercises.
- **Insight Timer** - Offers a large library of guided meditations from various teachers, including free and paid versions.

Somatic Practitioners

Most somatic practitioners are trauma-sensitive, but not all. Please verify the credentials of anyone you choose to work with.

- **Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute** - Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP) certifies licensed therapists. Search the directory here: Therapist Directory - Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute.
- **Somatic Experiencing International** - Has a practitioner directory that includes therapists and practitioners. Search the directory here: Somatic Experiencing Practitioner Directory.
- **Hakomi Institute** - Hakomi Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy has a directory of therapists and practitioners. Search the directory here: Find a Hakomi Practitioner.
- **The Embody Lab** - Is a trusted source for somatic therapeutics and embodied education. It has a directory of somatic practitioners and mind-body therapists. Search the directory here: The Embody Lab Therapist Directory.

Mindfulness Teachers

Most mindfulness teachers are not trained in trauma-sensitive modalities like Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (TSM), but some practices like MBSR and MSC have trauma-informed principles. Please verify the credentials of anyone you choose to work with.

- **David Treleaven** - The author of "Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness," offers TSM training for mindfulness teachers. While the site doesn't provide a public directory, you could contact them for recommendations for teachers in your area. Here is a free resource: The Truth About Mindfulness and Trauma.
- **Mindful Leader** - Has a directory of certified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) teachers trained by the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Brown University, or the UC San Diego Center for Mindfulness. You can view the directory here: MBSR Certified Teacher Directory - Mindful Leader.
- **Mindfulness Association** - Has a directory of mindfulness teachers, including MBSR practitioners, primarily in the UK and Europe. You can view the directory here: Find an MBLC Teacher - Mindfulness Association.
- **The International Mindfulness Teachers Association (IMTA)** - While not all mindfulness teachers are TSM trained, many may have experience working with trauma survivors. You can view the directory here: IMTA Certified Teachers Directory.
- **Mindful Directory** - A platform for mindfulness teachers and other professionals to register their credentials and list their events. Search their directory here: Find a Teacher - Mindful Directory.

Yoga Teachers

Most yoga teachers are not trained in trauma-sensitive modalities like Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY). Please verify the credentials of anyone you choose to work with.

- **Trauma-Sensitive Yoga** - The original yoga for trauma, created by Dave Emerson, author of "Trauma-Sensitive Yoga in Therapy" and "Overcoming Trauma through Yoga," has a directory of teachers: Facilitators — Trauma Sensitive Yoga.
- **International Association of Yoga Therapists** - While yoga therapists aren't inherently trauma-informed, some teachers may have specific trauma-sensitive training. Search their directory: Find a Certified Yoga Therapist.

The Trauma Survivors' Guide to Mindfulness

Books

There are thousands and thousands of books on mindfulness. Here are a few selected titles to start with.

- "Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness" by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- "Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing" by David A. Treleaven
- "Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself" by Dr. Kristin Neff
- "The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook: A Proven Way to Accept Yourself, Build Inner Strength, and Thrive" by Dr. Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer
- "Overcoming Trauma through Yoga" by David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper, PhD
- "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook" by Bob Stahl, PhD and Elisha Goldstein, PhD
- "The Somatic Therapy Workbook: Stress-Relieving Exercises for Strengthening the Mind-Body Connection and Sparking Emotional and Physical Healing" by Livia Shapiro