

National Capacity Building Project: Technical
Assistance of the Survivor of Torture Programs

The Role of Expressive Arts in Healing: Steps to an Ecosystem of Healing

Joe Mageary, PhD, LMHC, CCMHC



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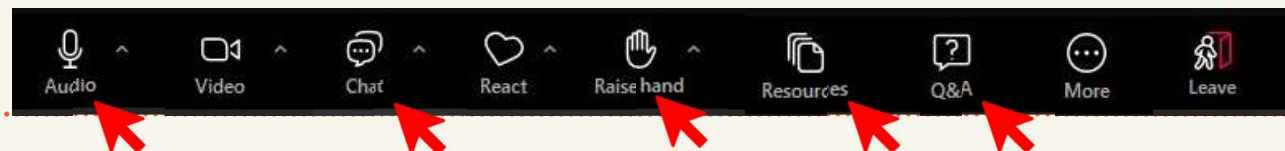
Overview

- This webinar is brought to you today by the The National Capacity Building Project is a project of the Center for Victims of Torture in partnership with Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma and the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs.

Attendee Controls

All functions are located at the bottom of your screen

- All participants are in mute mode.
- Please use the chat box to send comments to the presenters.
- To pose your question aloud, please raise your hand. A moderator will assist you with unmuting your line.
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Associate Provost for Mental Health and Wellbeing
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THE ROLE OF EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN HEALING

STEPS TO AN ECOSYSTEM OF HEALING

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October 2, 2025

DISCLOSURES:

Joe Mageary is receiving a speaker's fee for this presentation but does not have any other relevant financial relationships or conflicts of interest to disclose concerning the subject matter of this presentation.

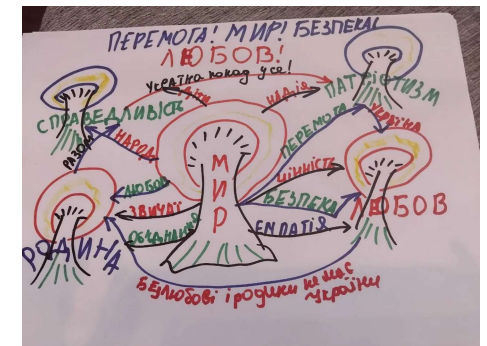
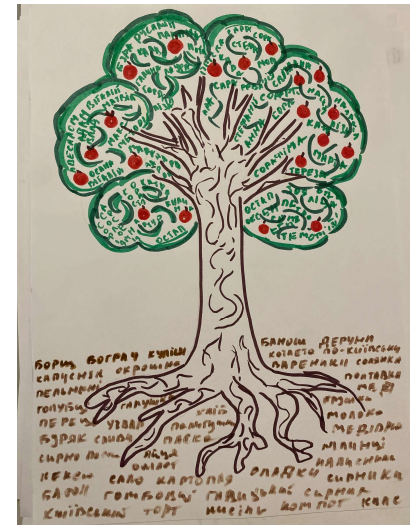
All projects and clinical work discussed in this presentation are conducted on a pro bono/volunteer basis.

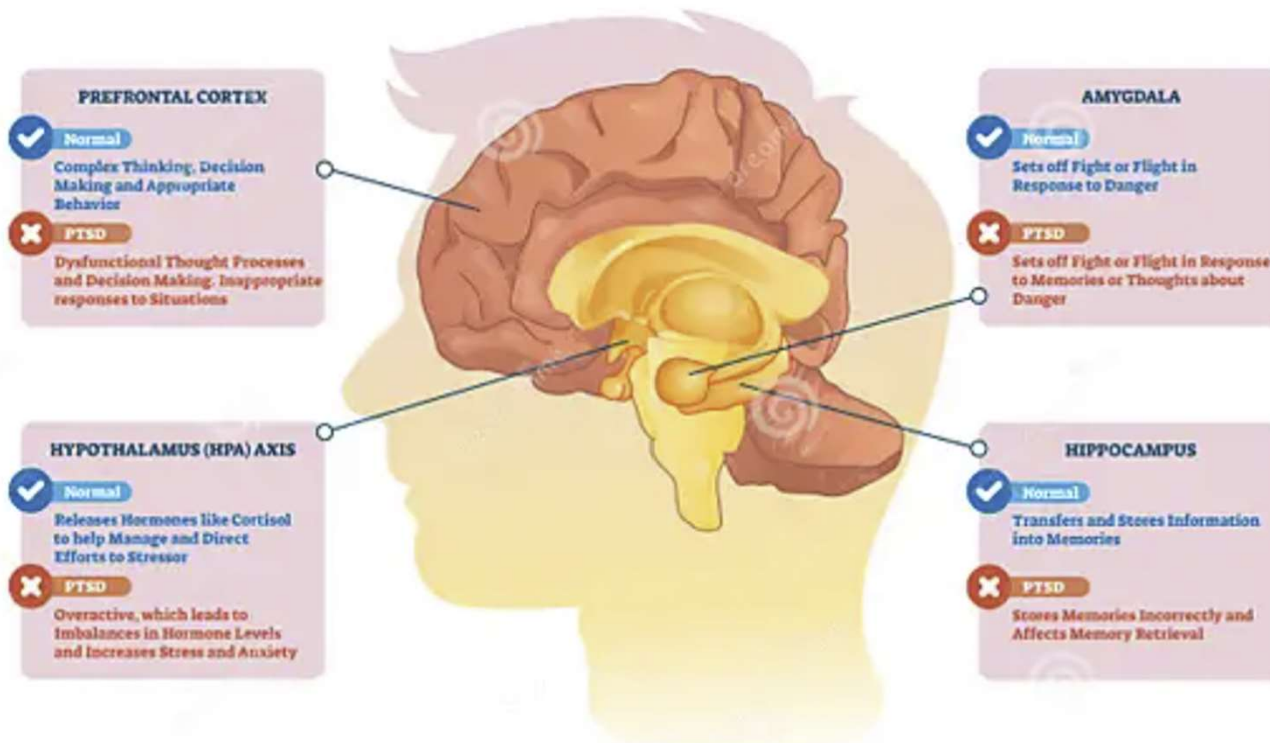


The rooster: a Ukrainian symbol of resilience
Artwork made by children in the Kirovohradska Oblast, 2025

OUR OBJECTIVES

- Review the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma H5/H.E.A.R.T. model
- Explain how utilizing therapeutic metaphor and creative projects support hopefulness, connection, and healing for individuals who have experienced (dis)place(ment)
- Extend the Harvard H.E.A.R.T./Healing Environment concept to encompass an Ecosystem of Healing
- Explore a case example that use arts-based approaches with people impacted by war and displacement in Ukraine





THE PROBLEM: UNPROCESSED TRAUMA GETS "STUCK" IN THE LIMBIC SYSTEM, BREEDING HOPELESSNESS AND DISCONNECTION

Van der Kolk (2014).

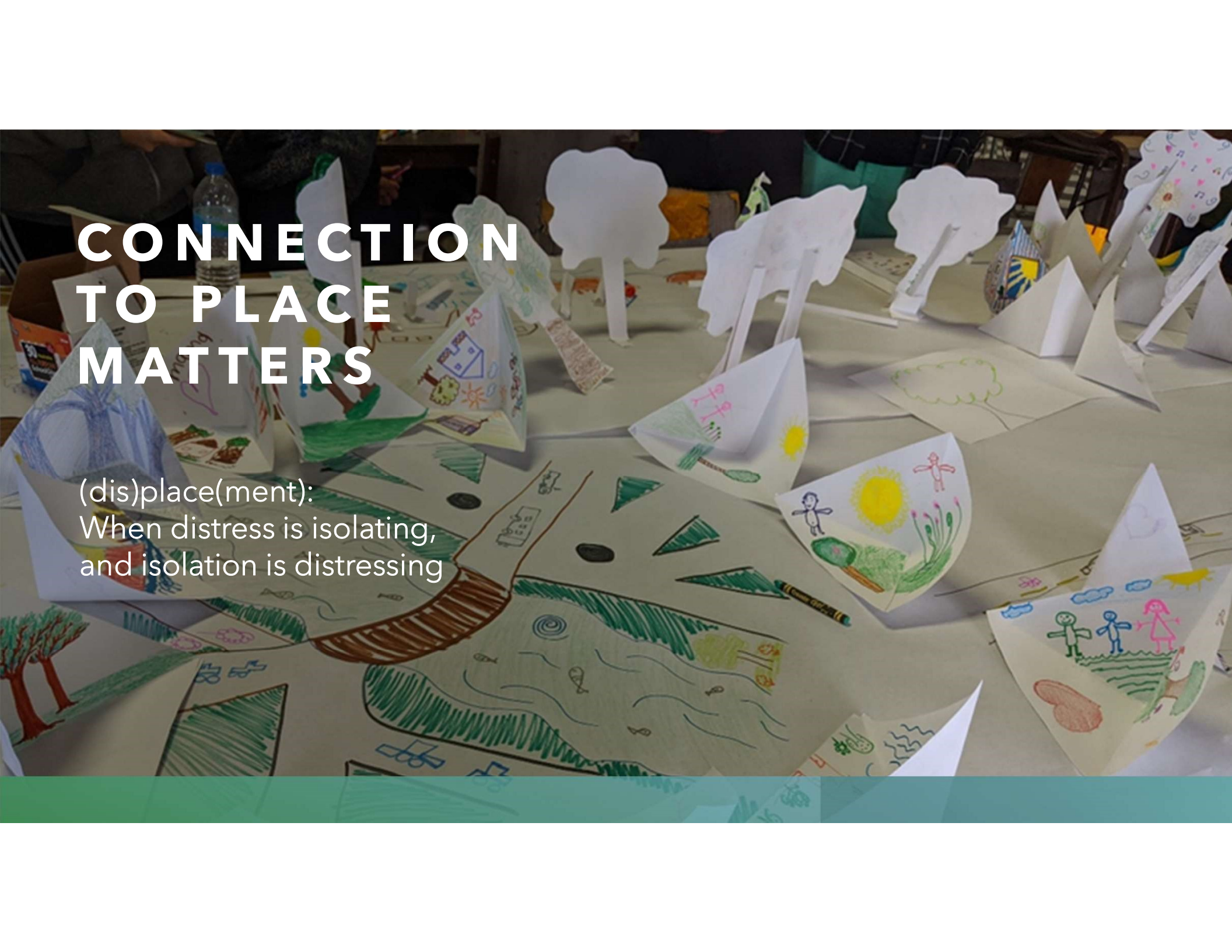


STEPS TO
AN ECOLOGY
OF MIND

GREGORY BATESON



CONNECTION TO PLACE MATTERS



(dis)place(ment):
When distress is isolating,
and isolation is distressing

THERE IS NO HEALING WITHOUT BEAUTY

- Emotional/spiritual wounds can be too “hot” to address directly. Zeig (2019) advocates for the indirectness of a therapeutic intervention to be commensurate with the resistance, or “heat”.
- Arts-based approaches provide opportunities to engage in creating new neural pathways that circumvent the roadblock set up during the amygdala hijack (i.e., orienting towards the therapeutic goal, with care-full indirectness).
- What's more, creative, generative, and collaborative activities increase connection, promote opportunities for vicarious resilience, and tap into parts of a person's identity and skills that stand outside of the trauma-saturated problem narrative.
- The healing power of judicious* play cannot be overstated.
 - *a word of caution: play can also be dysregulating



THERE IS NO HEALING WITHOUT BEAUTY...SO WHAT IS BEAUTY?

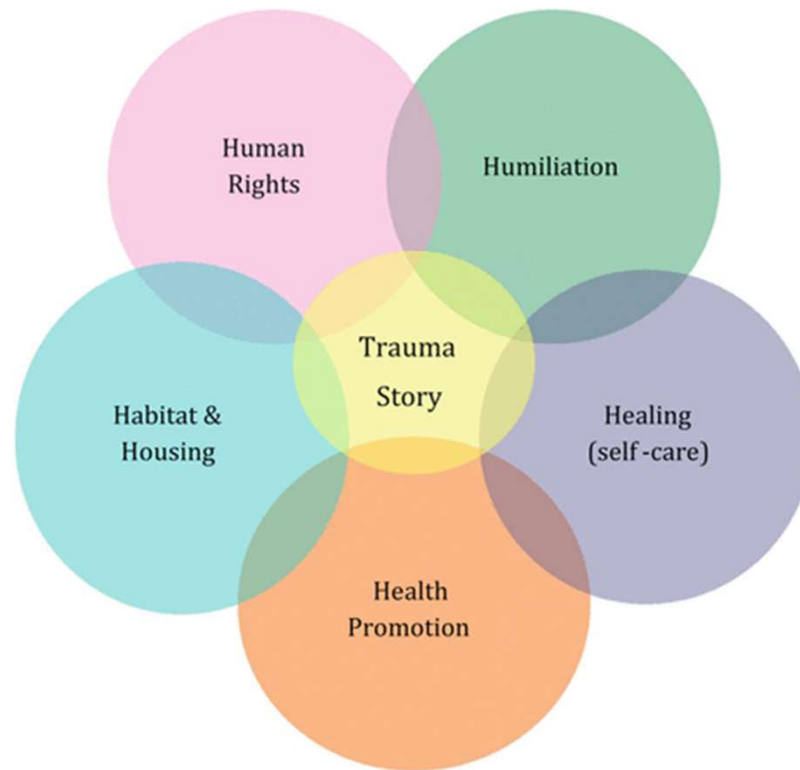
- **Meaningful internal consonance** = the net embodied result of engagement with the external world, when the external world re-connects you to:
 - harmony (ex: quietude, as in nature),
 - things that make sense (ex: symbols of patriotism, for some),
 - or limbic attunement and regulation
- **Ex-stasis** = ex: "out of" or "without" and stasis: equilibrium
- **Awe/collective awe** = awe is ephemeral, enacted, and engaging. Awe can be helpful in co-regulation and building attention, if traumas and disruptions have impacted attention (esp. in children)



**EXPRESSION AND CREATIVITY ARE KEY
COMPONENTS IN CULTIVATING
HEALING ENVIRONMENTS AND
RESTORATIVE THERAPIES (H.E.A.R.T.)**







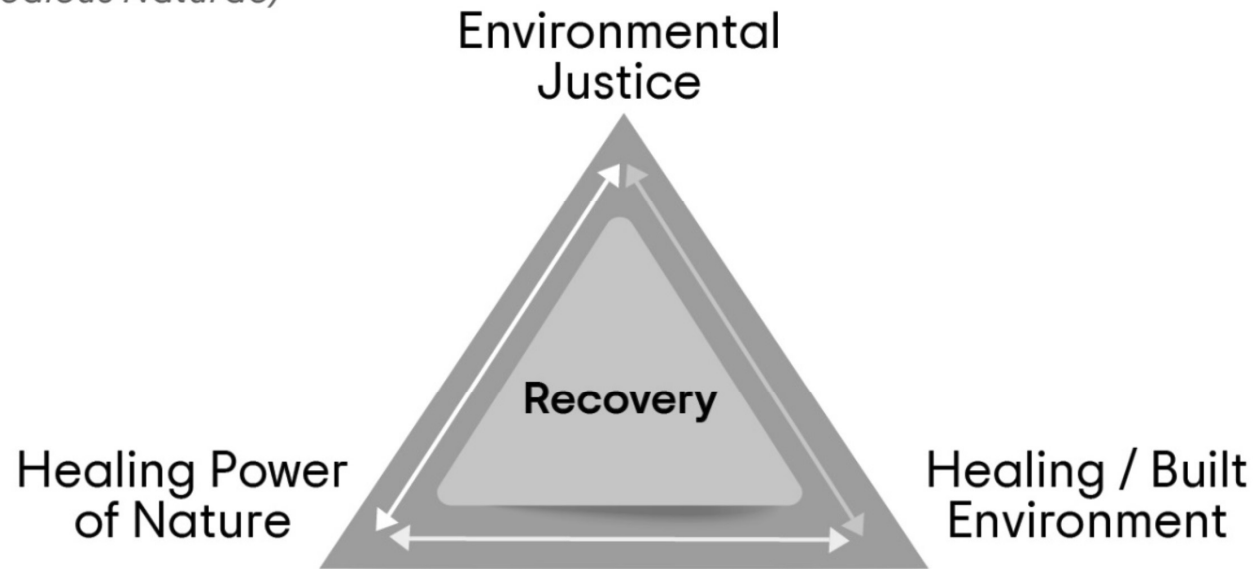
**YOU DON'T NEED TO BE
AN ARTIST TO ACT WITH
H.E.A.R.T.**

"[helpers and healers] are
midwives for the soul."

Coleman (2013)

Recovery Displacement - Climate Change - Ecocide

(Medicus Naturae)



THE FUNDAMENTAL TASK OF EXPRESSIVE ARTS
THERAPY IS TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTS
WHERE PEOPLE CAN HAVE A HEALTHY CORE
EXPERIENCE AND DISCOVER A MEANINGFUL
CONNECTION TO THE WORLD AROUND THEM

THERAPEUTIC METAPHOR



“Refugees and other people who have been through trauma need to find a place they can think of as home, where they can feel safe and secure. This is how they can find peace and joy again.” – Eugene Augusterfer

<https://postgraduateeducation.hms.harvard.edu/trends-medicine/blueprint-addressing-trauma>



"In hard times, we do a project."

Epston, D. (2013). [Conference presentation].
International Narrative Therapy and Community
Work Conference, Adelaide, Australia.

**CREATIVITY: AN
ANTIDOTE TO GETTING
STUCK IN A RUT**



PROTECTIVE FACTORS THAT ENHANCE RESILIENCE (SOUTHWICK & CHARNEY, 2012)

- Use of humor
 - Emotion regulation
 - Social support
 - Cognitive flexibility
 - Spirituality
 - Altruism/morality
 - Connections to purpose and meaning
 - Physical activity
 - Resilient role models
 - Arts-based activities can be joyful
 - Arts-based activities can be calming
 - Creative projects can be collaborative
 - Creativity requires flexible thinking
 - Artistic engagement can inspire awe
 - Connecting with others helps others
 - Arts-based activities express values and beliefs
 - Play, dance, music, and movement are all physical
 - Activity facilitators can be role models of resilience
- 

**THE
ESSENTIALS
OF HOPE:
A GOAL,
A DESIRE,
POSSIBILITY**

Miller, W. (2024)

*8 Ways to hope: Charting A Path through
Uncertain Times*

Dr. Bill Miller, co-founder of
Motivational Interviewing

Hope is a universal human
experience that “lives in the land
of not yet”...it anticipates a better
future.

“Hope is a ‘Velcro construct’. It
sticks to everything.”

BILL MILLER'S EIGHT WAYS OF HOPING



1.DESIRE



2.PROBABILITY



3.SEEING
POSSIBILITY



4.OPTIMISM



5.TRUST



6.MEANING
AND PURPOSE



7.PERSEVERANCE



8.HOPE
BEYOND HOPE

8. HOPE BEYOND HOPE

A form of hope that endures when all others have been exhausted...a refusal to give in to hopelessness, cynicism, or despair

A choice to believe in a better future and not assume that things will always stay the way they are

Victor Frankl: hope is the last of the human freedoms

Hope Beyond Hope may be looking toward a horizon that lies beyond your own lifetime. It may be what you are hoping for future generations

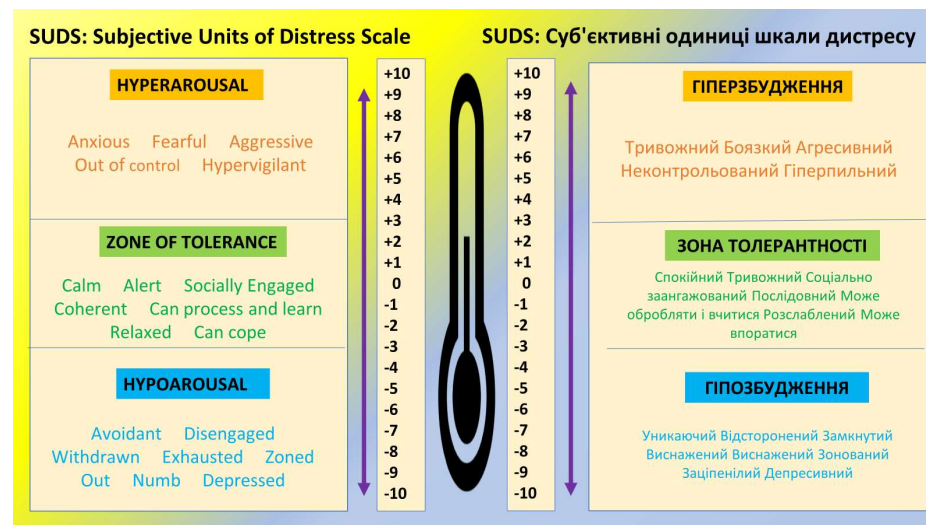
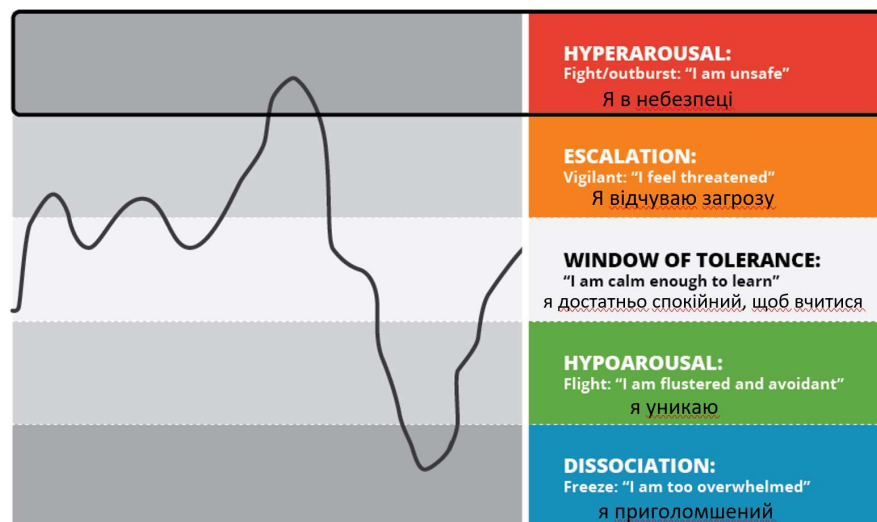
Miller's Advice:

The trajectory of your work aligns with hope

- "Choosing to hope may be the most hopeful act of all"
- hope lifts your vision to the horizon beyond where you are at the moment...and we've got 8 ways of doing it

Consider, in an ongoing way, how you can "act against" the evils

- such as what the Ukrainian poet Yuliya Musakovska said when she spoke at Lesley University: It is necessary to present examples of beauty at this time. This is an act of resistance.



"A MEANINGFUL PAUSE": PHYSIOLOGICAL REGULATION VIA BREATH WORK

I a m c r e a t i v e

I a m c a l m

I a m c o n n e c t e d

**M y c o m m u n i t y
c a r e s f o r m e**



THE VELA PROJECT: A CASE EXAMPLE OF HEALING ARTS IN ACTION

<https://youthtalentschool.org/>

[Lesley Institute for Trauma Sensitivity \(LIfTS\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/@-vela3898/videos>



THE ECOSYSTEM OF HEALING



Tree of Life - Earth
Day 2023

Animal Metaphors

Hope
Thermometer

"Looking Through
Your Window of
Tolerance with
Infinity Binoculars"

Animal Yoga

"We Are Water" -
Earth Day 2024

Collective
Experiences of
Awe in Nature

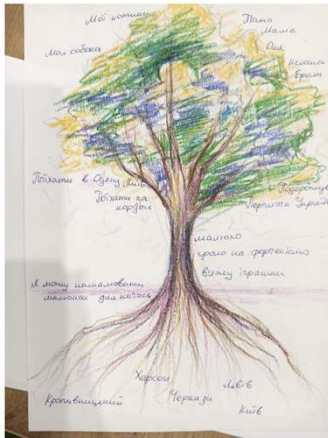
Butterfly
Breathing/Butterfly
Hug

Wellbeing Flowers

Gratitude Garden

Mycelial Networks
of Beauty and
Unity

TWO EXAMPLES: TREE OF LIFE / GRATITUDE GARDEN



Tree Of Life

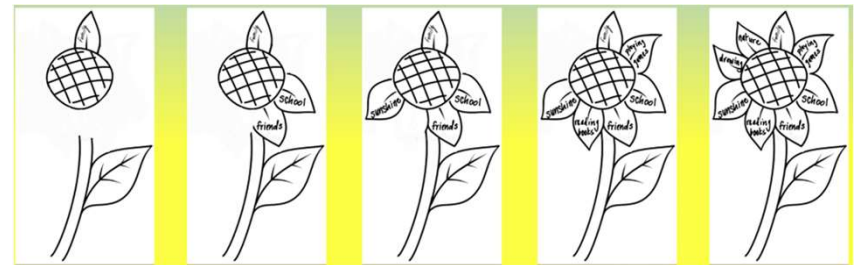
Dear teachers, educators, and psychologists!

We invite you to join your students in the action of international unity "Tree of Life" activity as part of the XXVIII Open All-Ukrainian festival of children's and youth creativity dedicated to World Earth Day.

This year, the theme is "The Earth is for us, posterity, and healing. Partnership for sustainable development"

The celebration will be held from April 19 to 21, 2023 in the city of Kropyvnytskyi, Ukraine.

The action of the international association is based on the project and therapeutic practices called the "Tree of Life". This action is collaboratively supported by the Lesley University Institute of Trauma Sensitivity (Cambridge, USA). The "tree of life" is a metaphor designed to remind us of our values and relationships with other people. This exercise helps us realize the unity of all people on the planet, the importance of respecting our common habitat, and the connection between children of Ukraine and children from all over the world. All children and youth 8 to 21 years old from countries across the world are invited to participate in the event.



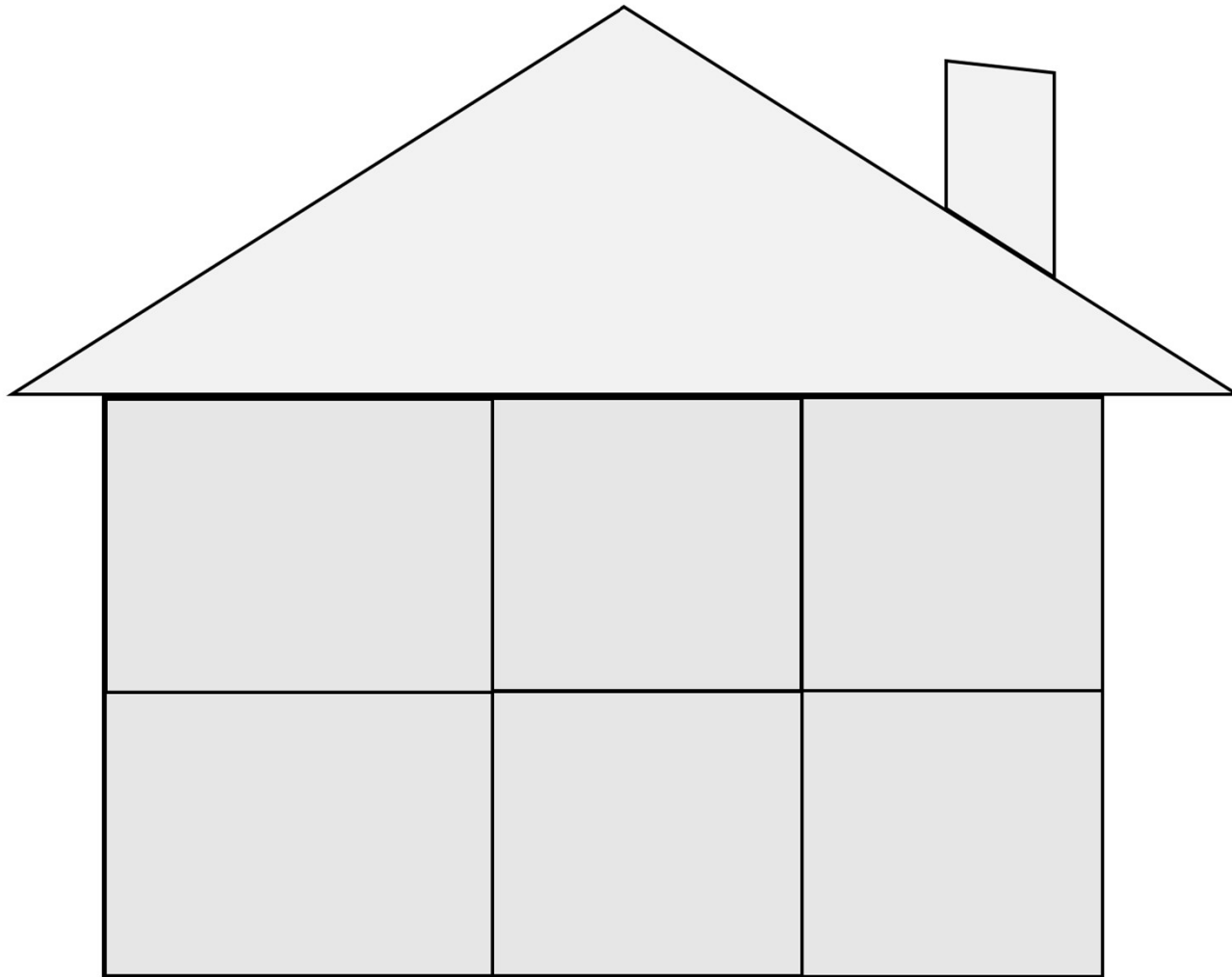


**TIP: LEAVE SPACE FOR
"YES, AND..."**





**MY HOME IS
"WHERE I'M
FROM"**



"WHERE I'M FROM" ACTIVITY

- Read/listen to the George Ella Lyon poem *Where I'm From* (on next slide)
- Considering your own origins, take the next five minutes to complete the "I'm From..." house activity
- Use the provided template, or draw your own house, and write/draw responses to the prompts (on subsequent slide) for each room of the house

WHERE I'M FROM

**BY
GEORGE ELLA
LYON**

For more information on George Ella Lyon's work, and other "Where I'm From" activities, see her website:

<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush,
the Dutch elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.
I am from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know- it-alls
and the pass- it-ons,
from perk up and pipe down.

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I'm from He restoreth my soul
with cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures.
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments --
snapped before I budded --
leaf- fall from the family tree.

1. Three items around your childhood home, one with a brand name

2. Three items found in your yard, neighborhood, or areas where you would play.

3. Names of relatives that link you to the past

4. Sayings remembered from childhood.
Alternative option: family traditions

5. Names of foods that recall childhood or family/community gatherings

6. Names of places you keep in your childhood memory that were important to you

7. Family photos or mementos, keepsakes or things that remind you of the past

I'M FROM...

THANK YOU

- Now: Discussion/questions
- Later: contact me at jimageary@lesley.edu



Photograph of the US/Mexico border from an airplane, January 2020
(when you step back far enough, it's just a line in the sand)

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Questions?

Have a question or something you want to discuss more in-depth? Here are some options for you:

- Type your questions in the Q&A, or
- Raise your hand using the reaction button.

Have a questions after the presentation? Here is the contact information for our presenter:

- Name: Dr. Joe Mageary
 - Email: jmageary@lesley.edu
-

Thank you for
attending this
webinar!



Please scan QR
code for evaluation

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More resources are available at www.healtorture.org.



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