

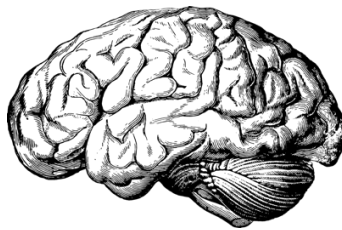
Foundations of Feeling Good: Incorporating Bodywork into Psychotherapy and Recovery

Tracy Maxfield, MFA, P-dtr, CNMT, SRT, NKT

“The true value in life is connectedness with other people.”

Stephen Porges

The trauma field is clearly moving in the direction of focus on the body. As I treat more clients and collaborate with mental health professionals, I see my work as facilitating all other forms of trauma work: EMDR, Somatic Experiencing, and even CBT and self-help methods. What was once a multi-layered method for relieving pain in the body has become a way to help people recover, develop grounded-ness, and achieve greater satisfaction in their relationships. The following points help explain the basis of my body psychotherapy services. TM, 2021



- If we change our body movements, we also change how we think and feel (Feldenkrais, 2009).
- Mainstream culture overvalues work, achievement, and acquisition – telling us, on an unconscious level, that we live in constant danger.
- The world in which we live also focuses on the cognitive, neglecting the *body's* experience of thought and emotion. This avoidance of body awareness leads to **dissociation**.
- **Dissociation** takes many forms, including chronic overuse of substances and an inability to feel emotionally connected to other people. Emotional disconnection from others leads to more addictive/dissociative behaviors, creating a vicious cycle of defensive numbing and isolation.
- The **social engagement system** (Porges, 2017) provides avenues for intervention and treatment. If we can help clients feel safe, then **defensive mechanisms will turn off and the client will be physiologically available for health, growth, and restoration**.
- Clients in recovery need to know their symptoms are a functional part of a neural control system that, at one time, enabled them to survive traumatic experiences and adapt to their environment.

- At the same time, these symptoms provide clues to the body psychotherapist about where to intervene first. As a body psychotherapist, I listen for the physical locations of dysfunction. *Symptoms lead us where we need to go.*
- **Body psychotherapy** maps the two-way communication between the brain and the rest of the body. Sensory information (from the whole body) travels to the brain and shapes how we respond to the world. When this information is corrupted by trauma, the brain receives faulty information about the world. Body psychotherapy improves the quality of this sensory information, so clients can re-learn to engage safely.
- Being able to regulate our visceral states allows us to learn new things and connect with people. Body psychotherapy facilitates this by locating dysfunctional sensory receptors and resetting the level of electrical activity going through them. I often do this using a non-invasive treatment called the *proprioceptive deep tendon reflex (P-dtr) technique* (Palomar, 2017-2018).
- Body psychotherapy helps clients re-attune to emotion and sensation in the body, allowing for moment-to-moment awareness, grounding, and adaptation.

As a trauma psychologist, I find that my clients recover much more quickly when we combine modalities. I refer clients to Tracy Maxfield, especially when they seem “stuck,” when EMDR processing appears blocked, or when there’s any kind of cyclical relapse into dissociative habits. Clients come out of sessions with Tracy much more grounded and able to process information.

Deborah Cox, Ph.D., ABPP, Springfield, MO

I have seen dramatic improvements with grounding and reductions in anxiety in my clients who’ve worked with Tracy. I also see an overall sense of connection with the body. Issues seem less intense, more manageable after working with him. He has a gentle presence that helps people feel comfortable. It does seem like combining EMDR with Tracy’s body psychotherapy approach helps people feel better faster.

Leah Donnelson, LCSW, Springfield, MO

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Palomar, J. (2017-2018). The P-dtr Method. <https://pdtr-global.com/about-pdtr/jose-palomar-md/>

Porges, S. (2017). The pocket guide to The Polyvagal Theory: The transformative power of feeling safe. New York: W. W. Norton.