

# **Not Quite Here**

## **Practical Presence & Avoiding Body-Based Triggers**

by the Crisses

*-- June 11, 2023 (or June 12, 2023 for folks across the International Date Line).*

# Overview

- Introduction & Purpose
- Triggering Terminology & Definitions
- Benefits of Presence
- What's the Problem? and Understanding triggers
- Solutions - examples of non-body-based presence techniques
- Empowerment - examples for redirection
- Practitioner Tips
- Q&A

"Meditation on these subjects, however, can only be successful if we have built up a certain power of concentration, a power achieved by the practice of mindfulness in everyday life, **in the observation and recognition of all that is going on**. But the objects of meditation must be **realities that have real roots in yourselves** – not just subjects of philosophical speculation." (emphasis ours)

– Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, 1975, ch 6

# Who are The Crisses?

"there are many Crisses in Criss"

# Purpose

- Help survivors choose a menu of presence techniques that help them
- Help survivors avoid triggering undesirable somatic memories & flashbacks
- Educate supporters about issues with language & directives
- Inspire professionals to develop a library of alternatives to body-based presence practices

# Triggering Terminology

The words we use matter:

- Problem words
- Giving directions, specifying poses, telling survivors what to do
- Issues around silence inside & out
- Potential for suggestible language

# Community Terminology

- Here & Now - the "opposite" of dissociation from place & time
- There & Then - Traumatime
- Stuck & Lost - headmates in traumatime

# Basic Definitions

- Presence - The act of working towards being more into the Here & Now, being more engaged with the present. It does not mean always being 100% in the Here & Now.
- G-word - Connecting to the earth to shunt off excess energies or anxieties. aka "earthing"
- Centering - drawing our mental & physical attention back to our "center" i.e. our body-mind.
- Mindfulness - being more fully & completely in this one moment, without judgment.



# Somatic means "of the Body"

- Somatic memories - trauma is physiological, our body "remembers" what happened - aka "The Body Keeps the Score" (van der Kolk)
- Somatic triggers - our nervous system has memorized circumstances that lead up to a traumatic event so that it can try to prevent it from happening again
- Somatic flashbacks - re-experiencing the body memories of a traumatic event

# Confusing terminology

- Co-consciousness, co-awareness
- Body-based "earthing" techniques
- Confusion: Imagination vs. Inner World

# The benefits of Presence

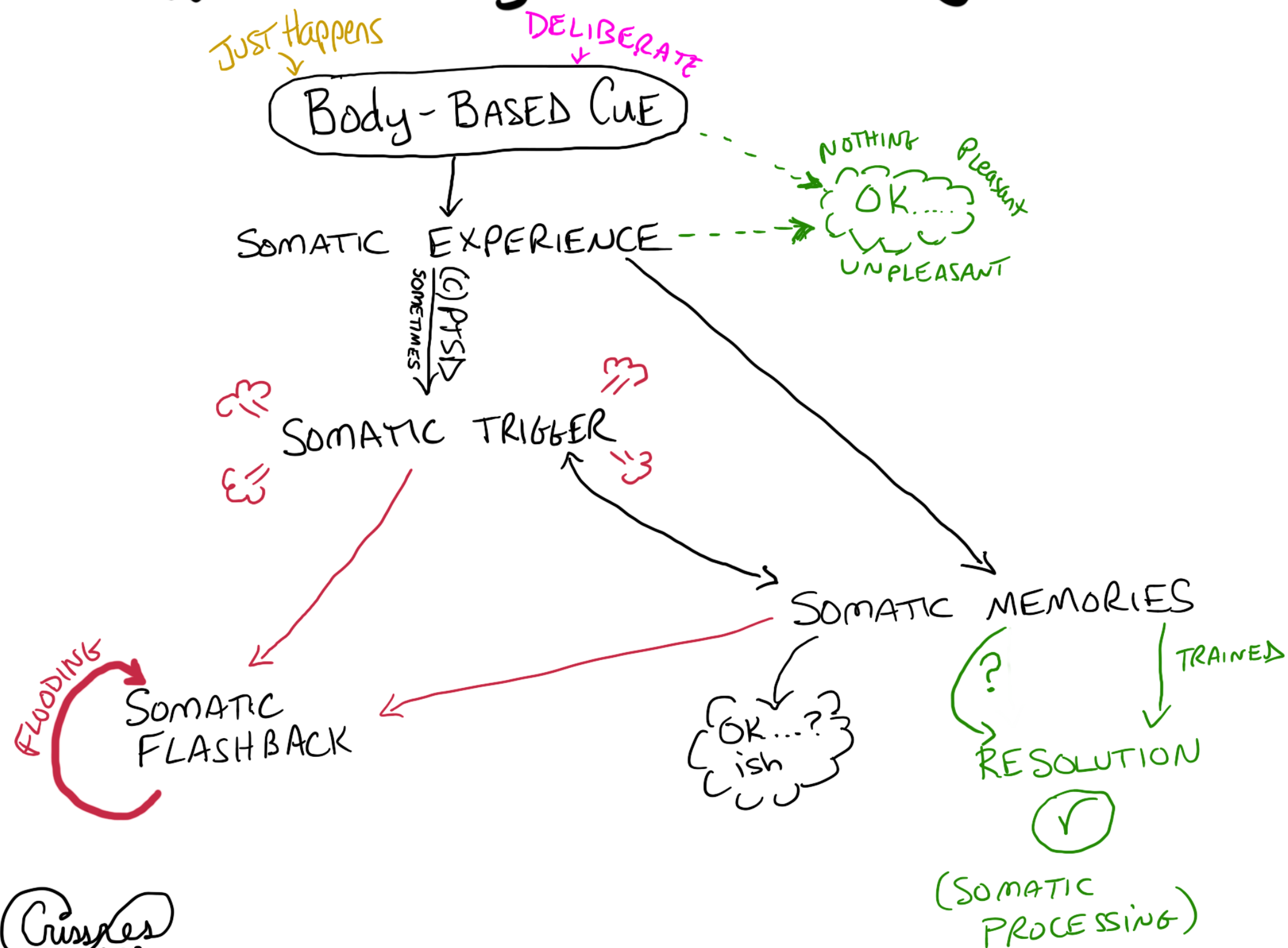
- Reduced symptoms
- Manage emotions
- Lower dissociation
- Spoons
- Improve memory
- Self-awareness
- Intention
- Identify needs
- Make decisions
- Self-compassion
- Lower judgment
- Adaptability
- Intention

# What's the Problem?

"Traumatized people are often afraid of feeling. It is not so much the perpetrators [...] but their own physical sensations that are now the enemy. Apprehension about being hijacked by uncomfortable sensations keeps the body frozen and the mind shut. Even though the trauma is a thing of the past, the emotional brain keeps generating sensations that make the sufferer feel scared and helpless. [...] Their sensory world is largely off limits."

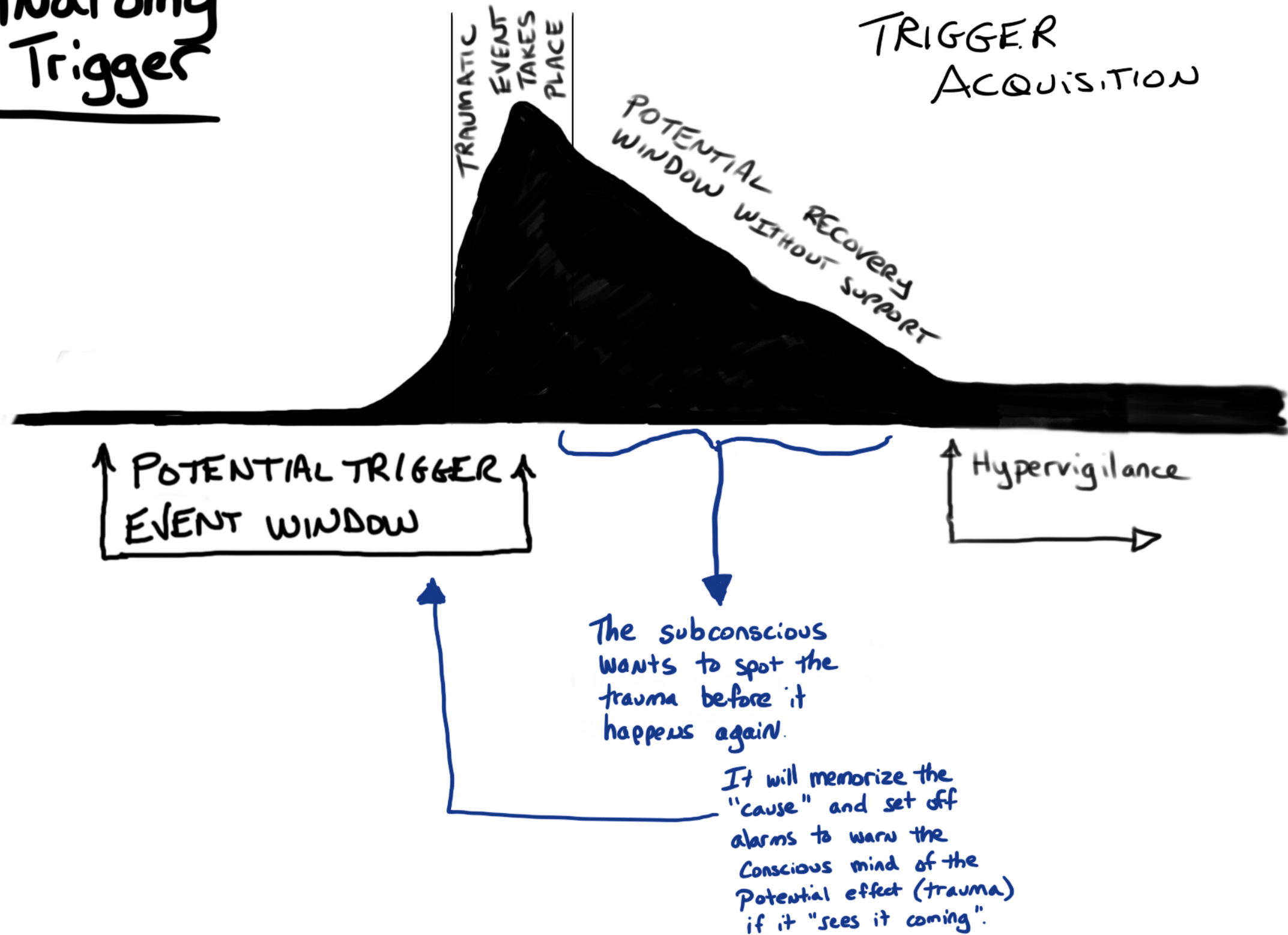
– *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014) - Bessel van der Kolk, p 210.

# What May Be Happening



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# The Anatomy of a Trigger



# Why Might Body-Based Techniques be a Problem?

- trauma response triggers
- somatic flashbacks
- "Oh – you're home!" - pending body memories may flood
- chronic pain & disabilities
- (gender or body) dysphoria

# Community Experience...

- feeling ashamed and "broken" because it's evidence-based & "supposed" to work universally
- "progressive relaxation"
- breathing techniques can be a somatic trigger



# **A Variety of Presence Techniques**

# Deliberate Sensations

- Aromatherapy
- Tactile experiences i.e. sensory boards
- Weighted toys/blankets

# In The Here & Now

- One Moment: bring to mind just this one moment
- Use time & place to emphasize presence
- Current situation
- Sensory surroundings

# Describing

Pick something in the environment and describe it in detail

- Details
- Reflections, shadows
- Texture
- Placement, angle

# Noticing

- What is around you?
- What y'all are doing, holding, touching
- How you're interacting with, affecting your environment
- How these interactions with environment happen, feel

# Pattern Tracing

Some are created deliberately like yantras, mandalas, and labyrinths.

- Shapes, colors
- Patterns
- Empty or white space
- Breaks in the patterns
- Zoom in and out

# Music: Attentive Listening

Listening for:

- overall composition
- repeated themes
- beat, rhythm, syncopation
- tempo & changes
- pauses
- lyrics

# Critter Watching

Be curious about a nearby critter.

- movement, breathing
- colors, textures
- sounds

If it's your own pet, you may also play or interact with it.



# Anchoring

Picking a specific object to carry around that can be used as a presence anchor to explore, observe, play with, etc.

- personal or sensory object
- fidget, stim toy
- jewelry, watch, keyfob
- crystal, stick, bark, rock

LISTENING  
REST & RELAXATION  
HOPE  
FRIENDS  
HEALING  
LOVE  
COMFORT  
BOUNDARIES  
CREATIVITY  
TIME  
NEW FRONTIERS  
SKA  
AWIE  
SELVES-CARE  
GRATITUDE  
= PLAY =  
DISCOMFORT  
CONNECTIONS  
CRYING  
SPONTANEITY  
SLEEP  
MISTAKES  
Be Ourselves

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# Inner World Awareness (Plural Community)

- May be able to do earthing techniques internally
- Can be present to internal events, objects
- With permission, can comfort & soothe one another
- Access safe(r) spaces
- Practice internal containment techniques (holodeck, etc.)

# "Three Inches to the Left" (of our body)

- Being in the room with one's body
- Having control of our body
- Being mindful of the body & senses

...while not fully in it

# Breathwork - Intermediate

- Can be an issue in itself, so approach cautiously
- Provides a living metronome/counter that we always have available
- Can provide ANS regulation

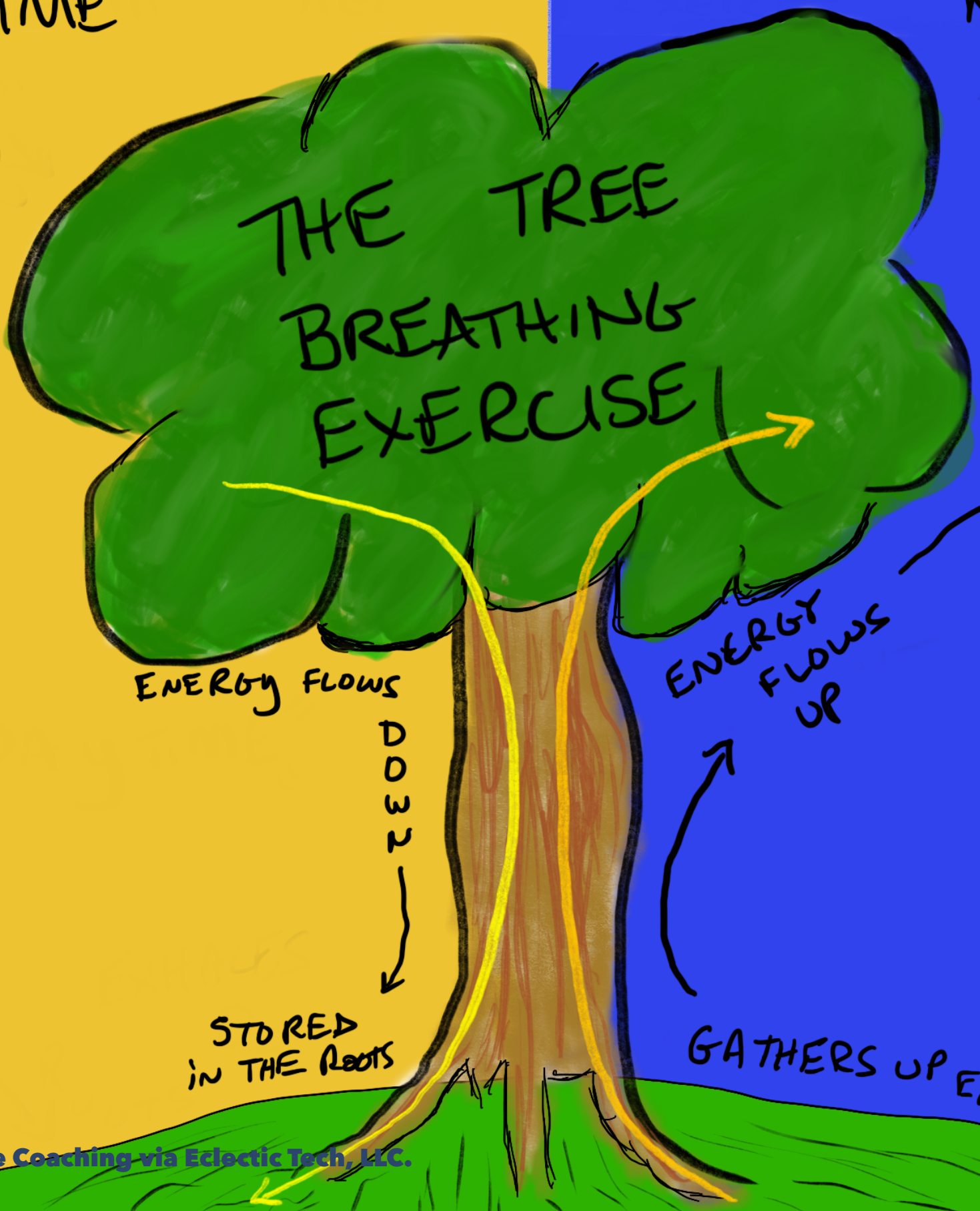
## Tips:

- Others can co-regulate breathing with us rather than direct our breathing.
- We might combine breathing regulation with "Three Inches to the Left" or other adjustments.
- Use other techniques such as singing or movement that encourage shifts in breathing.
- Play/Experiment: there's a wide variety of methods

DAYTIME

NIGHTTIME

"Breathe" in  
Sunlight  
↓  
Energy



BREATHE  
OUT  
CARBON  
DIOXIDE

ENERGY FLOWS

DOWN

STORED  
IN THE ROOTS

ENERGY  
FLOWS  
UP

GATHERS UP ENERGY

Criss

# What works for you/y'all?

Different headmates are likely to have different needs, triggers, sensitivities...

- Feel free to develop your& own techniques
- Add menus of ideas to safety plans or system management documents
- Welcome anyone who wishes to participate
- Allow anyone who doesn't to bow out

# Empowerment

- Recognize whether body-based earthing is an issue for y'all
- Practice a script for redirecting partners, friends, practitioners
- Choose a menu of ideas that work for your& system - add to safety plan
- Be safe(r)!



# Practitioner Tips

- Invite system members to participate or remain out of any potential exercises, at will/as needed
- Inquire as to past experiences with body-based techniques and modify accordingly
- Ask questions rather than give directions "Would you like to...?"
- Avoid directive language and telling people what to do with their own body ("Choose a position that honors yourself...")
- It may help to use eyes-open techniques with dissociative folks

# Thank you!

Contact us via

- **[thecrisses@gmail.com](mailto:thecrisses@gmail.com)**
- **[LiberatedLifeCoaching.com](https://LiberatedLifeCoaching.com)**
- **[kinhost.org](https://kinhost.org)**
- **[crisses.org](https://crisses.org)**