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Trauma Informed Approaches Articles (All)

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Article: Yoga and Healing

Journal of Nonprofit Innovation

TITLE

Yoga for Mental Health and Healing

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AUTHOR

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Yoga, Depression, Anxiety, Healing, Mindfulness, Meditation, Breath, Awareness, Body Movement

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Yoga for Mental Health and Healing

-By Angie Holzer, EdD

Overview: Yoga has been shown to be a great tool in dealing with a variety of different mental health topics. To utilize yoga as a healing tool, there needs to be a broader understanding of yoga beyond using yoga as an exercise. When we engage other aspects of yoga into our practice, such as mindfulness and pranayama (breath), we increase the possibilities of healing by making it a holistic approach.

“Yoga is a great way to experience your body and all the sensations that arise, which can aid in the healing process.”

- Dr. Angie Holzer

Yoga for Mental Health

By Dr. Angie Holzer, EdD, MBC

About the Author: Dr Holzer is a leading expert in yoga for mental health. She completed her yoga training in Rishikesh India with Yogi Dinesh. She is certified in trauma-informed yoga, adaptive yoga, yoga for cancer survivors, and yoga for mental health at Stanford University where she taught yoga and mindfulness from 2017-2021. She has a doctorate in organizational leadership and a master's in educational counseling. Learn more at www.yogawillheal.com

What is Yoga? Yoga is a holistic approach to living a balanced life. As we practice yoga, we need to remember that yoga is not simply a way to exercise the body, instead there are 8 limbs of yoga. Often, our focus is on the third limb (asana), focusing on movement and the body. As we use yoga for mental health, we need to be mindful of involving the other elements that include eating healthy, letting go of things harmful, pranayama (breath work), focus, concentration and meditation. When we use yoga as a tool, we open the door to healing.

When practicing yoga, we need to involve all areas as we hold postures (asana), take deep breaths (pranayama), focus inward/being mindful of how we feel (pratyahara), concentrating on the present moment (dharana), and meditating on a mantra (dhyana). Being mindful of what is happening in our body and mind, and then learning to let go of things we cannot control.

Yoga: A Tool to Help in the Healing Process. Yoga can help us become mindful of the sensations of the body that will help us know when we can push ourselves and when we need to be kind and release a pose. Yoga can help us bring awareness to our thoughts, giving us the space to recognize unhealthy thought patterns, learning to refocus, and training ourselves to stay in the present moment. Yoga gives us the tools to refocus our worries back to our breath, helping us be in the present moment and thus reducing anxiety for the future. Yoga is a great way to experience the sensations of our body as we hold poses and breathe, then notice what comes up (A., V. der K. B. (2015).

The following are the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, referring to the 8 limbs of yoga. Each offers guidance on how to approach mental health.

1) Yamas (Self-Restraint) - things we remove from our life to bring ourselves into alignment as we move towards a union of body and mind. Mental Health. Learning what to remove from our lives that can often promote unhealthy reactions and responses. This can include removing junk food, decreasing social media intake, or even establishing ethical standards in our life to help with discipline.

2) Niyamas (Observance) - a combination of attitude and action. These are standards to move towards over a lifetime. These standards include choosing purity, contentment, pairing passion and non-attachment, self-reflection and devotion. Mental Health. Adding things to our life that help promote a healing environment. This is a combination of attitude and action. This can include eating nourishing foods to help heal or adding things to your routine that can enrich your life.

The first 2 limbs give us increase tranquility internally and in our environments. Purity comes through simplicity. Simple living means we choose to have and do less, but as a result, we enjoy more (Lee, 2016).

3) Asana (Movement & Postures) - creates steadiness in our body. Don't force a perfect posture. Instead, notice how the body is feeling. Adapt the practice to your body's needs. Mental Health. Different poses and flows can help aid in the healing process. Different areas of mental health may require a different approach (see Table 1). Long holds may be beneficial to help promote endurance, teaching us that when we are uncomfortable, we can hold on for a few more breaths. We also need to learn what our body needs both mentally and physically as we move through different poses. Knowing when to hold a strong pose and when to relax into savasana, a kinder place to heal. Being aware of your thoughts and when to use active movement and flows to take yourself out of your mind and into your body. Also knowing when you need to move to child's pose or savasana, helping you relax your muscles, slow your breathing (and your heartrate), and creating a space for stillness.

4) Pranayama (Breath) - controls and expands our energy flow. When we breathe, it's important to **breathe slowly**, which streamlines the breath, with the free and easy movement of the diaphragm, engaging the entire torso (in fact, the entire body). **Practice breathing through the nose**, which naturally slows the exhale, because the nostrils offer more resistance to the breath than the mouth. It also gives the lungs enough time to extract the maximum amount of oxygen and

carbon dioxide in the body. This type of breathing activates the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system and the relaxation response (Rosen, 2002).

Mental Health. Breathing exercises can help bring our awareness back to the body and the present moment. Often those dealing with mental health concerns live in the past or future, bringing a state of anxiety, fear, worry or depression. (see Table 1).

5) Pratyahara (Withdrawal of Senses) - can be seen as withdrawing from the senses and choosing to focus inward. Pranayama (breath work) prepares the body for pratyahara and asana, which helps to prepare the body for meditation. It is the connection between the inner and outer aspects of yoga.

How can one practice Pratyahara?

- Detox from the media. We can start by withdrawing from the things that work against us, such as unhealthy food and toxic relationships.
- Move yourself into peace. During asana practice, we release physical tension.
- Focus the mind and the senses will follow.
- Patience and practice.

The first 5 limbs can and should be practiced simultaneously.

6) Dharana (Concentration) - Dharana means “holding,” “concentration,” or “steady focus.” When you practice Dharana, you are “binding” the mind to one place, idea, or object. How can one practice Dharana? Taking a steady and comfortable seat (asana), controlling the breath (pranayama) and restraining the senses (pratyahara), focus your mind on one of the following:

- Mantra – Many concentration and meditation techniques rely on the use of sound to concentrate the mind. A very common mantra to use is Om (or Aum), which can be repeated aloud or silently in the mind, over and over, until the mind becomes still. A mantra can be a word or phrase (Hay, 2012).
- Breath – You can focus on the breath coming into and leaving the body, as an aid to concentration (Rosen, 2002).
- An Everyday Object – You can use a pleasing or soothing object to focus your attention on. For example, a flower, a key, perhaps a small statue of something which means something to you. Many yogis practice gazing at a flame. The practice of gazing is called *trataka* in yoga.

7) Dhyana (Meditation) – a meditative state of being. The practice of Dhyana brings about keen awareness without focus and moves us from a state of doing to being. Although Dhyana sounds and seems similar to Dharana, it is subtly different. While Dharana teaches us a one-pointed focus, encouraging us to concentrate all of our attention onto the breath, or a sound,

or a visualization, Dhyana brings about keen awareness *without* the focus. **Mental Health.** Meditation can help clear the mind and create peace within the body and mind. Different types of meditation are more effective than others for certain areas of mental health. For example, those with anxiety, engaging in guided meditation is the best approach. Sitting in silence meditation, ruminating in their own thoughts, could be a struggle. Another approach could be a seated meditation, while adding the Om (Aum) mantra. The Om activates the vocal cords and vibrates the vagus nerve, which has shown to calm the mind. When you focus on one thing (ie Om, breath, mantra, etc.), other thoughts are temporarily let go.

Limb 6 & 7: Develops concentrated focus (Dharana) into a devotional awareness in which we feel inner peace and enter meditative stillness (Dhyana).

8) Samadhi - with regular practice, we can live, and move, and breathe in inner tranquility and joy (Source: True Yoga, Jennie lee). Only by relaxing, reposing in the self, by practice of resting, conscious relaxation and conscious rest can you achieve this state of samadhi. Unconscious rest is sleep which we are forced upon by nature. In sleep you are not really resting. It is possible only in deep meditation because you are consciously resting. **Mental Health.** As we bring the first seven limbs into alignment with our needs, we will move closer to completeness, or samadhi. The closer we move towards a healthier alignment, our ability to heal increases.

The following table reviews two mental health topics (depression and anxiety) and how different elements of the 8 limbs have shown to help in the healing process. Keep in mind that everyone is unique and there needs to be a flexibility and awareness in knowing what is working for you and what you need to let go of in your yoga journey.

Table 1: *Yoga Elements Can Help Mental Health*

Topic	Yoga Elements to Consider
Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poses (Asanas): Movement, to engage the mind and activate calming parasympathetic pathways. (Sun salutations, Yoga flow, Vinyasa flow) • Breathing: 1) Chanting of yoga mantra, 2) Om, 3) Ujjayi breath, 4) Abdominal breathing (those with anxiety tend to breathe primarily in the chest and at a faster rate than normal. Slow exhalations through the abdomen can help) • Stretching: Can improve stress and cortisol levels. • Meditation: Guided Meditation preferred

	<p>(avoid silent meditation – long period of stillness and silence not preferred)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid: Long periods of stillness and silence. No hot yoga – heat often activates the stress response
Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathing: Breath of Joy, Ujjayi Breath, Kapalabhati, Breath count exercises (slowing down the breath), Dirga (yoga 3-part breath) • Poses (Asanas): Backbends stimulate and elevate mood more than other postures (eg. cobra, sphinx, hasta utthanasana), regular exercise, ending practice with yoga nidra and/or relaxation • Avoid or Reduce: Restorative yoga may not help (long holds in gentle poses may leave a depressed mind to return to negative thinking) • Mantras: Dynamic mantras can help release emotions – mantras said vigorously can release anger, due to some depression can be the result of anger turned toward self

Yoga and Anxiety. Each mental health topic could impact the body in a different way. “As a complex mental and physical phenomenon, anxiety influences the cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal, immune, and endocrine systems, each of which is modulated by interactive feedback loops within the nervous and circulatory systems” (Mason, p.29, 2018). “Studies of anxiety disorders reveal dysfunctions in the central nervous system (CNS), autonomic nervous system (ANS), and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, a neuroendocrine component of the stress response. The two branches of the ANS, the PNS and the SNS, counterbalance each other” (Mason, p.29, 2018). Understanding how to bring balance to the different systems in our body can help us address mental health in a more holistic way. For example, **doing a yoga flow refocuses the awareness to the body, allowing the mind to temporarily rest from the worries that often comes along with anxiety.**

Anatomy of Breathing. Studies show that yoga can bring balance to the ANS. Researchers measure autonomic balance when they use the heart rate variability (HRV), taken from the rate of change in the heartbeats per minute between the inhales and exhales. As we breathe, our inhaling slightly speeds up the heartrate, while exhaling slows the heartrate down – this is called normal sinus arrhythmia (RSA). Inhaling stimulates the sympathetic nerves while exhaling stimulates the parasympathetic nerves. “HRV is a

composite of the effects of breathing (and other factors) on vagal parasympathetic activity (slowing the heart) and sympathetic activity (speeding up the heart)” (Mason, p.32, 2018). In anxiety, there is an overactivity of the SNS, and an underactivity of the PNS which leads to a reduced HRV. This can be seen in a loss of flexibility and adaptability cardio-respiratory system. The PNS is underactive, which is necessary for feelings safe and calm. Using a slow controlled breath, while particularly lengthening the exhale, helps in bringing harmony to the body.



Yoga and Depression. For example, **deep breathing techniques are an important part of the yoga practice for alleviating depression.** A good breathing exercise is yogic 3-part breath (*dirga*), which can be taught with the *Ujjayi* breath. “The typical breathing pattern of a person suffering from depression may be shallow, and *dirga* expands the lungs and deepens the breath, thus encouraging an increase in oxygen consumption and a release of carbon dioxide” (Mason, p.63, 2018). Practicing a breath like *dirga* can encourage deep breathing which can induce short-term feelings of vitality.

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Massage Therapy and Trauma

By Julie Karlinsey LMT; CMHC

About Author: Julie Karlinsey loves working with and learning from people. She began her helping career as a Licensed Massage Therapist in 1997. Wanting to integrate body, mind, and spirit modalities Julie added a master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and Chaplaincy to her learning.



Trauma is the experience of, or perception of, something disturbing or dangerous. Examples may include witnessing a disturbing scene; physical, emotional or sexual abuse, vehicle accidents, wartime events, injuries, and many other situations.

Trauma is an experience that exceeds our window of tolerance. Most life experiences can be rated in a range from 0 to 10 scale. 0 being the lowest or no intensity and 10 being the highest. Trauma is an experience or exposure to something that is not within our scope of experience, the trauma exceeds the 0-10 range. When this occurs, our brain does whatever it can to help us survive the impending threat and responds with *Fight*, *Flight* or *Freeze*. This process is referred to as the Neurobiology of Trauma.

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, Peter Levine, MD and Stephen Porges, PhD are leaders in the field of the Neurobiology of Trauma. Their collective work explains the brain's Trauma response and further describes approaches and treatments that can assist the brain and body in healing from Trauma. Among these treatments, Massage Therapy and other forms of bodywork are shown to have clinical success in relieving trauma symptoms. The experts teach that when varied forms of massage are

skillfully utilized, they can play an essential part in the healing process for those who have experienced Trauma.

The Briere & Runtz Trauma symptom checklist gives examples of how trauma manifests in the body. Digestive issues, Headaches, Sleeping issues, Muscle spasms, Chronic pain, etc. **A trauma informed massage therapist can work with the systems of the body to sooth the nervous system, provide a haven of safety, and assist the body in releasing trauma and tension.**

While we can read the last sentence in only a moment, the process of utilizing massage in treating trauma is more complex and requires education and training.

Trauma affects a person's brain to respond as if the threat is happening right now. Even though the experience is in the past, the brain sends chemical signals as if the threat is happening in the present moment. A person's individual response to trauma is important to assess so the massage therapist knows how to work with that individual.

For example, if the primary response to trauma is *Fight*, the person's nervous system is working overtime, hypervigilant even, in preparation to fight, their body will show up with symptoms of high muscle tone, or what this author calls "Perma flex" of the musculature, *Fight* may also cause insomnia, or digestive issues.

Another example: A person who responds to the threat with a *Freeze* response may have low muscle tone and low affect, their respiration rate may be slowed, their cognition response may be compromised. **Trauma informed massage is an effective, if not essential, treatment for those who have endured traumatic experiences.**

Resources:

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Sound Bathing as a Healing Modality

By Dhyani Bella Niedelman, Sound Bath Instructor



Sound therapy is thousands of years old. But today the ancient practice of singing bowls is hitting the mainstream. What is a sound bath?

It is an acoustic “concert” session, either individual or group, devoted to wellness, intention, grounding, and relaxation, conducted by a sound bath practitioner. They orchestrate overlapping sounds, creating deep soothing vibrations. The experience allows people to integrate mind and body (1, 3, 4, 5).

Sound bath practitioners use a variety of instruments in their programs to achieve healing. Singing bowls, both Tibetan and crystal, are each tuned to a different note to promote a calm meditative state that corresponds to the body’s chakras, otherwise known as energy centers. Other instruments include gongs, tuning forks, chimes, drums, didgeridoos (the oldest known sound healing instrument used by Aboriginals) ocean drums and rain-sticks (4, 5). To me, each instrument has a purpose; in short, gongs bring up deep emotions, bowls retune and balance, water sounds wash away, chime sounds bring in manifestations. Each instrument also corresponds to each of the energy centers, the lower deeper frequencies being more grounding for the root, sacral and solar plexus and the higher pitch/note instruments for higher chakras.

Listening to music can trigger the release of dopamine in the body, according to a Harvard Health article. Certain sounds and frequencies are known to promote healing. Sometimes a sound bath will engender a release so strong

that it brings a person to tears. Typical benefits of a sound bath include:

- lowered heart rate and blood pressure
- lessened stress
- greater energy levels
- more positive outlook
- reduced physical pain
- reduced anxiety and depression
- better sleep (3, 4, 5, 6)

Sound baths have also been successfully used with trauma patients. In his groundbreaking book *The Body Keeps the Score*, van der Kolk points out that art forms such as music can successfully treat trauma nonverbally (7).

Trauma induces a freeze response in a victim. Healing needs to take place at the body level, as opposed to analytic thinking. Sound therapy practitioner Simone Vitale points out that “[T]herapeutic application of sound vibration, as it travels through bones, muscles, and fascia, can help to bring movement to these stagnating . . . areas, therefore helping the stuck energy to circulate again” (2, 8).

Sound bath therapy is not a cure-all for every disorder. But it is a powerful tool in advancing both mental and physical health in human beings. Perhaps that is why people have been using it for so long.

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Intuitive Eating: A Nutrition Component of Self-Care and Healing

By Maria Givler, M.Ed., RDN, Clinical Assistant Professor, Utah State University

Intuitive Eating (IE) supports that the weight-centered health paradigm (WCHP) can result in a variety of mental and physical harms (1,5).

Intuitive Eating (IE) is an approach to healthful eating developed by dietitians Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch (2). After years of experience in private practice, Tribole and Resch realized something was inherently missing from methods used to promote weight loss and maintenance. According to Tribole and Resch: “The process of Intuitive Eating is a practice, which honors both physical and mental health. Intuitive Eating is aligned with Health at Every Size (HAES)(3) because the pursuit of intentional weight loss is a failed paradigm, which creates health problems: including weight stigma, weight cycling, and eating disorders. All bodies deserve dignity and respect” (4,6).

10 Principles of Intuitive Eating

1. Reject the Diet Mentality
2. Honor Your Hunger
3. Make Peace with Food
4. Challenge the Food Police
5. Discover the Satisfaction Factor
6. Feel Your Fullness
7. Cope with Your Emotions with Kindness
8. Respect Your Body
9. Movement—Feel the Difference
10. Honor Your Health—Gentle Nutrition

Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Anti-Diet Approach

The notion that all bodies deserve dignity and respect challenges many of the societal voices that say one must look a certain way or fit into a certain size to obtain success, love, recognition, acceptance, etc. On the other hand, the principles of IE do not foster an “anything goes” mentality. The core principles of IE support mental and physical wellness, with an overarching tenant of self-respect and self-care.

What does self-care look like from a nutritional perspective? Nutritional self-care incorporates

attunement with how your body feels and what it needs to function optimally (4). In today’s fast-paced world, truly listening to one’s body may require skill development, reprioritization, and intentional change. Optimal functioning includes peace with self, achievable goals for health, and realistic expectations (2).

Questions to consider include:

1. Does the diet mentality exist in one’s belief system?
2. Is stress affecting eating choices? What is truly needed to manage tension?
3. Is enough eating time allotted to enjoy food and sense satiety cues?
4. Have genetics been taken into consideration to support what is achievable for the individual?
5. Do individuals know the right sources to obtain reputable nutrition information?
6. **Has professional help been explored in cases of abuse or trauma?**
7. Does food security exist, allowing the attainment of healthful foods?

Intuitive Eating principles invite learners to consider aspects of nutrition that might not have been addressed in the past. Time, practice, and patience are requirements, yielding more holistic and sustainable change.

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Singing and Healing: Thought Paper

By Kimberly Nearon – Vocal Coach and Performer

About Author: Kimberly Nearon has Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Music Dance Theater. She has taught private voice lessons for almost 20 years. Kimberly created the drama program at St. Nicholas School in Los Altos, CA and directed and choreographed shows for children’s companies around San Francisco Bay Area. Kimberly is the writer and director of *Ship Brooklyn, a New Musical* that premiered in June 2018.

Singing can be a healing experience, both for the body and the soul (1, 3, 4). “Music has the ability to repair brain damage and return lost memories” (3). Common themes in recent studies and articles discuss how “singing releases endorphins, serotonin and dopamine - the ‘happy’ chemicals that boost your mood and make you feel good about yourself” (3). “Singing also counts as an aerobic activity as it introduces more oxygen into the blood leading to better circulations - and a better mood” (3). Singing can “stimulate the immune response”, “improve snoring”, and “improve lung function” benefiting those who suffer from “asthma, cystic fibrosis, cancer, MS, COPD and quadriplegia” (1). Singing can also help overcome “strokes, brain injury and even Alzheimer’s” can find benefits in music as it works both sides of the brain the language left side and musical interpretation on the right side to “increase brain activity” for “recovery” (2).

Singing can also help with personal development as the singer works on timing, words, pitch, and volume. “Mastering a new song can deliver a real sense of achievement, build self-esteem and increase confidence. It also exercises our memory, flexes our concentration, and tests our listening skills” (4). And lastly, a common theme is connecting bonds with others as we sing, like singing in a choir. “Group singing gives us a sense of belonging, working together for a common purpose, and bonding with choir members. Like yoga, singing forces you to focus on your breathing and physical performance, giving you a break from the brain-chatter and worries that occupy your mind throughout the day” (4).

With so many potential benefits impacting your health, anxiety, relationships, and personal joy, singing is a great tool to relieve the stress that results from these areas of concerns. Why are more people not singing? Many people worry about having a terrible voice, or they can’t sing. We need to ask ourselves, who do you define can sing? How do you get chosen for that gift? Is it something you are born

with, or can you develop this gift? As a private voice teacher, I deeply feel that anyone can sing to one degree or another. Not everyone is meant to be a professional opera singer, or the next Louis Armstrong. People should be individuals and not feel the need to be like someone else. The journey for singing is an individual matter and could have a profound effect on you, in your own special way!

My Experiences. I must admit, I was a bit taken back when a former professional opera singer expressed that she didn’t feel she was truly gifted. When she taught voice, she also felt most students didn’t have a real gift for singing. However, she taught because she had to pay the bills. I was stunned to hear that perspective. True, not everyone will be singing opera for their bread, but not everyone has that as a personal goal. I have taught mothers who wanted to sing to their baby and feel that beautiful connection with their newborn. I have taught working professionals who wanted to participate in their community choir or sing in their synagogue. Or a young child who wanted to find joy singing in their school’s talent show. There are many different reasons why people want to sing, and all are worthy reasons. There are many benefits to singing, regardless of where or why we sing.

In my studio, I often get new students, or students who have vocal challenges with past vocal experiences. They come in anxious and sometimes feel stuck. In time, I began calling my teaching style “vocal yoga”. It feels more like a type of meditation in the approach to finding a healthy balanced voice. In process, the singers are getting less anxious and, by get getting less anxious, they are becoming better singers! Here are a few examples and experiences to illustrate different aspects of teaching voice.

A Nervous Student. A young man comes to me completely flustered, lots of nervous energy, and a major determination to be able to sing well. His dream was to join a college a cappella vocal group. Unfortunately, he was often flat. His high school choir teacher tried to correct him with tips (use smiling cheeks, lift your eyebrows, move your lips this way). This young man was so tight in the face, shoulders, jaw with zero connection to his breath. Even though he was trying to use his diaphragm, he was not sure he knew what that exactly was. This approach did not allow him to progress.

Stretching and Breathing: I had this young man take time to stretch and get the blood flowing. He needed to connect to his body and think of his body as the instrument. I often have my students lay down on the floor, on their back, knees up, get good alignment and just breathe. If a student is still too anxious to breathe, I would guide them with some meditation. It was important to stop, slow down, and breathe. And then let them get reconnected to their body and spirit. It is so beneficial to feel how the body takes in air, how the diaphragm supports that air, and how that can connect with our vocal cords and then create an amazing

resonance through the body. It is such a powerful feeling to discover. It also gives you time to connect with your body. We need to ask ourselves, Am I holding tension in my neck? Am I breathing in chest? Is my face and jaw tight? Can I let that go? Taking time out to find this will do wonders in your ability to sing. Many of the singer's challenges could be resolved if they could find that balance.

After a session or two, this young man had a completely different experience with his voice. He looked like he just got out of a massage session. He was not used to being relaxed when singing. And he could finally feel a connection to his breath and how that worked with his vocal cords. He also sang on pitch with a beautiful sound he had never heard come out of his body before. It was such an amazing discovery. This young man needed a safe place to let go of his worries and judgements in order to progress. He needed to know that someone believed in him and that he had a voice in there. He needed to be willing to explore other ways to produce a healthy balanced sound. His grateful mom was worried that she would have to let her son know that he did not have the gift to sing, and he would need to find another hobby. Oh, what a shame if she did that. He can sing, he loves to sing, and singing will benefit him his whole life.

The Girl Who Could Not Sing. A teenage girl recently moved into my area. She had a new stepmother who wanted to gift her with voice lessons. This sweet girl had a passion for singing, it was her heart and her soul. It is the only thing she wanted to do. But she also, couldn't sing. I mean, literally could not sing. No sound would come out of her. She was so scared to sing that she told me to look away when I gave her a song to work on. I told her to look at my Christmas tree on the other side of the room and I would have my back towards her. And even still, she was so tight with vocal tension, there could be no air to help the vocal cords create any sound. And yet, this was important to her. Her mom had died a few years before, and this was her way to heal. So, with some laughs and a bit of a sense of humor, playing vocal games and maybe a pillow fight with our singing, we found our voice. Creating a voice studio that was a safe space to let go of walls was important for her to find her voice. I believed in her. I sang with her and cried with her. In time, she found her voice. Her high school choir encouraged her to finally sing a solo in front of her school. And then she began writing music with her best friend and recorded them. She found her voice, and not just her singing voice.

Dancer and Singer. Another teenage student came to me as a dancer who wanted to be a better singer in her singing/dancing group. I told her, "*Welcome to vocal yoga.*" She progressed quickly. You could see in her facial expressions the wonder of finding this incredible voice she never knew she had. When you feel balance and resonance, it feels incredibly spiritual. She had a gorgeous soprano voice that continue to expand with each challenging piece

of music. She found joy. She was the dancer who was now the leading lady in her musical. But greater things came from singing. Her father had a hard time connecting with her, until she began to sing. He loved music, and so they formed a wonderful bond over music. Her mom said, 'The power of community through music is a great way to describe the healing aspect. People more readily find common ground when they communicate through the arts.' Her daughter 'struggled with finding true friends and a 'tribe' as a teen. Being part of her singing and dancing group, musicals in town and through her church created camaraderie that she will never forget. The most powerful experiences were the ones that were combined with serving others.' Singing, changed her life. Could it change yours?

Personal experience. I was a really shy and quiet child. My kindergartner teacher said he heard maybe five words come out of my mouth that whole year. I was also struggling with dyslexia that kept my reading comprehension skills to very low levels. I wanted to just quietly hide and get through the drama that school had presented to me. But at home, I was very creative. I loved to sing and dance and escape to my imagination. Amazingly, my mom enrolled me to participate in *Crazyatics Children's Musical Theatre* (later known as Edward Belasco Theatre). I was in the musical *Big River*, and was given a tiny little solo, sharing the song "Arkansas" with two other girls. I do not remember how I felt when I sang it, but my dad has told me that I looked petrified, and he thought I might run off the stage. He was convinced I would never do a musical again but was so proud of me to get through this one. And yet, that was the beginning of many musicals, solo concerts, a degree in Music Dance Theater and teaching, directing and writing my own musical.

Singing Can Help Build Confidence and Life Skills.

What did I have to gain from being in a musical and taking voice lessons, and dancing, aside that it became a career profession? I gained confidence. I found my voice, and not just a singing voice. I found songs that spoke to me, that gave me a space to express my thoughts and emotions. I was able to work on reading and comprehension skills as I would learn scripts and dig deep into the plot and character development. I was able to work on making friends and building relationships with those I performed with, in which was petrifying to me before. I worked on listening skills, getting directions (which was challenging to me), and still learning to take criticism without putting emotional energy into it. I learned how to be a leader, a speaker, how to take on something challenging and scary and come out feeling like a winner. I learned life skills and could find the health, de-stress and joy benefits that can last a lifetime.

Ask yourself: Can singing help me heal? Consider the potential benefits of singing. If you have a desire to sing, but maybe you are worried you don't sound very good -

Sing Anyways! Sing in the shower, in the car, maybe join a choir and take private lessons. You will greatly benefit from singing. Avoid comparing or thinking that singing has to be a competition. If you don't feel good about your singing, it won't feed your soul. For teachers and educators in voice, you need to see that your gift to teach students to discover their voice can be life changing. You might think you are a great teacher if your student wins a Tony, but maybe you are the best teacher if you changed a life.

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Review: We Need Trauma-Informed Workplaces

From Harvard Business Review, March 31, 2022
Original article by Katharine Manning, Author of *The Empathic Workplace*, Review by JoNI Staff
<https://hbr.org/2022/03/we-need-trauma-informed-workplaces>

We are seeing a growing number of articles about the need for organizations to support employees through trauma-informed approaches. "Organizations have had to confront issues they never expected and find new ways to support their employees through repeated traumatic experiences."

Overview. This article addresses how organizations have been dealing with trauma in their workplaces for some time now, and it looks like organizations are more open to addressing these needs. Over the past few years there has been turbulent times with Covid, political unrest, racial violence, war, environmental disasters, and more. This article addresses the need to recognize that anxiety and depression having been on the rise. "Trauma is not new in our organizations. It's not going away, either." **Did you know that there is an estimation of**

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six in 10 men and five in 10 women who experience at minimum of one trauma in their life? The numbers also shows that PTSD impacts 6% of the population in their lifetime. "Trauma and distress can arise from a wide array of causes, including domestic violence, sexual assault, racism, bias, harassment, economic uncertainty, political division, and more. New challenges arise every day, and conflict and strife anywhere in our globally connected world affect us all."

What can workplace do? "The way organizations support people during periods of trauma is uniquely powerful, and the ramifications are long-lasting." This article gives us six guiding principles to ensure that our organizations have the skills and resources to address trauma in the workplace.

Six Guiding Principles

This information is taken from the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*:

- 1) Safety
- 2) Trustworthiness and transparency
- 3) Peer support
- 4) Collaboration and mutuality
- 5) Empowerment, voice, and choice; and
- 6) Cultural, historical, and gender issues.

Simplified version of the six principles:

- Acknowledgement ("I will be heard")
- Support ("I can get the help I need")
- Trust ("I will be treated fairly")

For the full article, visit: <https://hbr.org/2022/03/we-need-trauma-informed-workplaces>

