

Body Awareness

Body awareness is an important part of healing from trauma. In many ways, your body is a key to understanding how you responded to trauma and how trauma affects you today. Trauma lives in the body in how we respond to reminders of the trauma.

People who have trauma tend to only notice their bodies when they are in extreme discomfort or distress. Learning how to observe and attend to your body is an important step to understanding your body's reactions to trauma and trauma reminders

Maury's Story

Maury's felt as if she constantly lived in a state of discomfort and pain. Her muscles were constantly tight. She seemed unable to find a comfortable position no matter what she was doing. She had visited many specialists and had several diagnoses (chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, arthritis), but none of the therapies she tried seemed to offer any long-term relief.

Maury felt like she was constantly worrying and "on edge" about events in her life. She also tended to get down and depressed a lot. Maury had sought counseling off and on throughout her life to deal with her anxiety and depression.

One day, Maury came across information online that talked about the connection between chronic pain and trauma. Before this, Maury had never connected the two. Maury had grown up with an alcoholic father who hit and kicked her as a young child. Maury was also sexually assaulted as a teen by her friend's older brother. Then, in her late teens, she had been in a very abusive relationship with someone who was much older than her. Maury had never been diagnosed with PTSD, yet she began to wonder if many of her symptoms could be connected to what she had experienced.

Maury learned that our bodies choose reactions when we go through traumatic experiences. Our bodies can either fight, flee, freeze, or fawn (befriend the threat). She also learned that these reactions to trauma can be stored in the body as automatic responses. These automatic responses can show up any time our body is reminded of our traumatic experiences. Reminders of trauma include sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, feelings, situations, people, and more. Sometimes our brain and body can have so many trauma reminders that our body feels like it's constantly in a state of fight, flee, freeze, or fawn.

Below is a list of bodily sensations. Use the list as a guide to what you may experience in different parts of your body. Then, use colored pencils or crayons to show where you feel the sensations in your body.

Body Sensations

Achy	Jagged	Constricted
Frozen	Spacious	Breathing
Raw	Closed	Light
Airy	Jittery	Stringy
Full	Spasming	Contracted
Rolling	Cold	Limp
Alive	Jumbly	Strong
Fuzzy	Sticky	Cool
Shaky	Congested	Loose
Bloated	Jumpy	Suffocating
Goose Bumpy	Still	Cozy
Sharp	Energized	Nauseous
Blocked	Pulled	Sweaty
Gurgling	Tingling	Cramped
Shimmering	Expanding	Numb
Breathless	Pulsing	Tender
Hard	Trembling	Dense
Shivery	Faint	Open
Brittle	Quaking	Tense
Heavy	Twitchy	Dizzy
Shudder	Fluid	Paralyzed
Bubbly	Quiet	Thick
Hot	Vibration	Dull
Silky	Flushed	Pounding
Burning	Quivering	Throbbing
Icy	Warm	Elastic
Smooth	Fluttery	Pressure
Buzzing	Radiating	Tickly
Intense	Weak	Electric
Soft	Frantic	Prickly
Chilled	Ragged	Tight
Itchy	Wobbly	Empty
Spacious	Knotted	Puffy
Clammy	Stretchy	Tightness of skin

