

# Arousal and Attentional Control Applied to Somatic Complaints in Patients with PTSD

- **Four group sessions (once or twice weekly)**
- **Facilitated by a therapist, with support from DVD presentation, CD homework support, and handout material**

## **Typical Session Format**

### **Session 1:**

**0-20: Therapist:**

**a) Overview of course (helping control anxious arousal, distracted attention, sleep, somatic discomfort and pain)**

**b) What is your optimal quality of life, and what is stopping you from obtaining that?**

- Typically what is optimal (framed positively) is to be comfortably absorbed in what one is engaged in.
- Typically what detracts from that optimal experience is being pulled away from the moment by distracting thoughts and uncomfortable feelings.
- In this course we will learn how to be more fully and comfortably engaged in every moment, whether that is work, sleep, or being with a loved one.

(Paying special attention to one's focus on external locus of control vs internal locus of control for cause and solution; or framing goals as avoidance of the negative vs identifying positive ways of being.)

**21-30: DVD-guided meditation on topic**

### **Sessions 2-4:**

**0-10: Therapist:** Welcome and do brief **10 minute DVD-guided meditation** on topic

**11-30: Therapist:** Debrief from homework (meditation practice and in-vivo situational practice)

### **All Sessions (continue):**

**31-45: DVD:** Psychoeducational Presentation of This Week's Topic

**46-65: DVD:** CBT Personalizing the Topic in the context of each patient's life

**65-75: DVD:** DVD-Guided Meditation on Topic and homework assignment (daily practice with CD Track 1; and in-vivo practice using skills)

**75-90: Therapist: Discussion to help contextualize:**

- How will you practice this in your life?
- What are the challenges?
- What can you do to overcome these challenges?

1<sup>st</sup> 12:30 minutes: **Arousal Control Experiential Exercise**

\*\*\**Pause while therapist reviews how patients been doing*

2<sup>nd</sup> 13:05 minutes: **Psychoeducational Presentation of stress**

- Stressor (environmentally adaptive vs internally maladaptive)
- Automatic healthy stress **responses** (M/E/P/B-R)
- Chronic habitual unhealthy stress **reactions** (M/E/P/B-R)
  - Control comes from **identifying** habit **responses**, and
  - **Learning to Control** the Cognitive, Emotional, Physiological, and Behavioral **reactions**

3<sup>rd</sup> 10:48 minutes: **Personalizing Exercises:**

- ID a typical external stressor you are likely to encounter (that which causes a stress response)
- What are your typical **reactions? C/E/P/B-R**
- What would be a **healthier response?**

4<sup>th</sup> 10:17 minutes: **Arousal Control Experiential Exercise to control C/E/P/B reactivity**



**MATERIALS:**

- **Personalizing Exercise Sheet** – CBT Stress Worksheet
- **Homework Exercise Sheet** – Daily log: ID stressor, stress response, effort to control
- **CD** - Arousal Control Track



1<sup>st</sup> 14:46 minutes: **Attentional Absorption Control Experiential Exercise**

\*\*\**Pause while therapist reviews how patients been doing*

2<sup>nd</sup> 14:03 minutes: **Psychoeducational Presentation of being in the moment and being distracted from this moment**

a) **Discuss three principles of attention:**

- Attention is enhanced processing, whatever we focus on we enhance it's processing.
- Our brain and body support the intent of the focus (vigilant worry; relaxing recuperation; etc).
- Focus on something if you can act in that moment to improve the situation (worry, pain, etc); otherwise shift your focus to what will improve one's health and happiness (sleep, breath, what one is working on, etc).

b) **Discuss eeg states of attention:**

- When it is useful to be vigilant about one's surroundings (Beta)
- When it is useful to suspend vigilance and be fully absorbed in what one is doing
  - SMR (more restrictive vigilance with most awareness in the moment)
  - Alpha (receptive sensory awareness with low top-down intent)
  - Theta (low effort with internal/external flow as it arises, minimal top-down intent)
  - Delta (no effort, with internal activity, no top-down intent, no effort)
- Optimal Performance stems from being able to flow between these states as needed

3<sup>rd</sup> 10:04 minutes: **Personalizing Exercises:**

- How much time do you spend fully engaged in the moment without worry about what just happened, what is about to happen, and without judging or reacting to what you think is happening?
- What are you doing the rest of the time?
- How much time would be useful to be spending more fully and comfortably engaged in the moment?
- What needs to change to allow you to experience this more often?

4<sup>th</sup> 9:47 minutes: **Attentional Control Experiential Exercise to practice being more fully and comfortably engaged**



**MATERIALS:**

- **Personalizing Exercise Sheet** – Awareness of Attentional State
- **Homework Exercise Sheet** – Daily Log: Practice absorption meditation, note what takes one away, note what brings one back
- **CD** – Practice Attentional Absorption Track



1<sup>st</sup> 11:27 minutes: **Transitioning into Sleep Experiential Exercise**

\*\*\**Pause while therapist reviews how patients been doing*

2<sup>nd</sup> 23:24 minutes: **Psychoeducational Presentation of healthy and unhealthy sleep**

- Stages of healthy sleep
- What goes wrong with sleep
- Sleep Hygiene do's and don'ts
- Review the three principles of attention with regard to sleep

3<sup>rd</sup> 2:54 minutes: **Personalizing Exercises**

- What healthy and poor sleep habits do you have?
- What can you do to correct these sleep habits?

4<sup>th</sup> 7:37 minutes: **Transitioning into Sleep Experiential Exercise**



**MATERIALS:**

- **Personalizing Exercise Sheet** – Sleep Hygiene
- **Homework Exercise Sheet** – Daily log (mornings) –what did you do to facilitate sleep?
- **CD** - Arousal Control Track 1



1<sup>st</sup> 9:57 minutes: **Distancing the Distress (non-reactive awareness) Experiential Exercise**

\*\*\**Pause while therapist reviews how patients been doing*

2<sup>nd</sup> 20:37 minutes: **Psychoeducational Presentation of pain and discomfort**

- Pain is a conscious experience, and we can control our experience
- Suffering due to excess focus and reactivity
- We can't always help the nerve sensation or initial feeling that arises, but we can control our reaction to it (and the reaction is much if not most of the problems we experience)
- Notice without reacting, and redirect focus to what one is engaged in
- Review the three principles of attention with regard to somatic discomfort

3<sup>rd</sup> 30:45 minutes: **Personalizing Exercises**

- How much time do you spend focusing on discomfort (physical or emotional)?
- How much does this focus on discomfort prevent you from being more fully and comfortably engaged in activities you would otherwise like
- How do you focus on the discomfort? (what do you focus on, how much do you focus on it)
- How do you react to the discomfort? (Mentally, emotionally, physically, behaviorally)
- Next time your find yourself focusing and reacting to the discomfort, what can you do?

4<sup>th</sup> 7:07 minutes: **Distancing the Distress (non-reactive) Experiential Exercise**



**MATERIALS:**

- **Personalizing Exercise Sheet**
- **Homework Exercise Sheet** – Daily log: Focusing on the discomfort and alternatives
- **CD** - Distancing the distress track (instructional; listen then practice on one's own)

