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Finding safe sanctuary: Creating the neural pathways of healing through yoga nidra

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We know that in clinical populations in mental health, the prevalence rates of trauma is at 90% or more (National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, 2006) and it is reported by Mathieu (2011) that 60% of clinical staff working in Canadian healthcare environments report histories of trauma before they enter the helping profession (p. 13). In this 75-minute workshop participants will be introduced to the mind-body practice of yoga nidra (Lusk, 2015). This practice comes to us from the Yoga tradition. In recent years, there has been accumulating evidence that this practice is demonstrating therapeutic benefits in helping trauma survivors manage and support their healing and recovery journeys (Fritts & Khusid, 2014;

Miller, 2015; Pence, 2014). The session will provide an overview of the practice and situate the practice within an embodied discipline that supports healing. Participants will begin to develop a comfortable stance of welcoming for all thoughts, feelings, and sensations and to distinguish between these qualities. Participants will have an opportunity to experience some of the layers that comprise the practice of yoga nidra. The foundational skillset is accessing the relaxation response by activating the parasympathetic nervous system to calm the stress-response system and reduce emotional over-reactivity (Benson & Proctor, 2012; Jerath, et al., 2006). The second skill set is gaining an orientation to interoceptive awareness and beginning to direct the breath (Brown & Gerbag, 2012; Craig, 2014; Marks-Tarlow, 2012). The third skillset invites one to create an imaginal inner sanctuary of safety (Fay, 2017; Brown & Elliott, 2016; Davenport, 2009; Fogel, 2009; Holmes, 2001; Mikulincer, Shaver, Sapir-Lavid & Avihou-Kanza,

2009; Yelling & White, 2011). Developing a safe sanctuary provides a platform for us to apprehend the emergence of presence, connectedness, and joy (Gilbert, 2009; Geller, 2017; Goleman & Davidson, 2017). The session will conclude with a group discussion to process the experience and allow time for questions, discussion and explore potential next steps.

Biography

Steven Hughes, M.Ed., is an Education Specialist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto. He has worked in the mental health community and psychiatric hospital system facilitating educational programs in the area of Prevention and Management of Aggressive Behaviour (PMAB) and community safety programs with CAMH and the CTI Canadian Training Institute for over 30 years. As a life-long learner, he has interests in delivering educational programs pertaining to creating psychologically safe work environments that are characterized by optimal individual and team resilience and well-being. He has been a certified yoga teacher since 1985 specializing in yin yoga and yoga nidra. He integrates his interests that include transformative learning, positive psychology, dialogue methods, contemplative neuroscience, mindfulness, holotropic breathwork, and wellness-based modalities that assist individuals to cultivate self-awareness and unlock their full potential. All of his programs support learners to gently explore the edges of their personal growth boundaries and to experience new realms of self-discovery.

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