

LAYERING EXERCISE

OVERVIEW

The following exercise is to be used in conjunction with our book, “*What Is PTSD? 3 Steps to Healing Trauma*” for best effect. Please visit www.WhatIsPTSD.com for additional resources.

GOAL

The goal of the *Layering Exercise* is to help you draw on techniques that you have already begun to master in *Section One: Finding Comfort* and earlier in this section as well.

Deep breathing is a central component to this exercise and so, we recommend that you become familiar with and master the use of a deep breathing method prior to using this exercise. See *Step 1: Finding Comfort*, if you need to review breathing exercises.

Layering can be used whenever you have a heightened sense of distress over a recent event. Once you are comfortable with how Layering works, you can use it to help you resolve a traumatic memory. We suggest that you start with a memory that is more manageable and then over time, once you become skilled at Layering, you can use this approach as a Mastery technique for managing feelings of distress related to a specific traumatic memory or any current event.

Layering is a self-mastery exercise that allows you to focus on a disturbing memory, then on self-soothing and alternating between both until you feel more relaxed when recalling the details of an upsetting memory.

Use this exercise to enhance your coping skills when feeling anxious or to simply relax and restore yourself. Remembering your trauma and telling your story can bring up old feelings and make you feel as if you are experiencing the trauma – but above all, keep yourself safe.

TIME OUT

Don't begin this Layering Exercise if you are actively dissociating, if you begin to dissociate during the exercise or if you have a respiratory ailment. If you are unable to use Layering, this exercise can be substituted for the *Comfort in the Palms of Your Hands Exercise* that we will be describing in a moment.

MATERIALS AND LAYOUT

Paper, pencil and the form provided on the following pages.

PATH TO COMPLETE

Complete the *Layering Exercise Form* on the following pages using the instructions below as a guideline:

1. Identify the source of discomfort or disturbing memory. Rate it from one to ten on your SUD’s scale. As mentioned earlier, SUD’s describes a feeling of distress where 1 = feeling calm; 5 = some upset but I can handle it; and 10 = the worst feelings of distress; I feel out of control.
2. Now begin to focus on your breathing using one of the breath exercises practiced earlier. Alternatively, focus on the center of the palms of your hands, picture a warm glowing ball, soothing and softening in your palms. Imagine the warmth radiating from the palms.
3. If using breathing as your self-soothe skill, practice with five deep inhalations and exhalations throughout. Review the breathing exercise described earlier, if needed.
4. Begin by either writing or speaking aloud what has occurred or what keeps this memory disturbing for you. Keep the initial description as succinct as possible to begin with. Add more details as you become more comfortable with the content. Maintain calm without losing control of your breath or comfort in the palms of your hands.
5. As you begin describing the event, remain aware of your breathing or comfort in the palms of your hands. Stop whenever you recognize a noteworthy change in breathing or loss of comfort.
6. Now focus inwardly and begin five deep inhalations and exhalations as you learned earlier, or focus on increasing comfort in the palms of your hands. After the fifth exhalation, focus outwardly again.
7. Take a SUD’s rating based on how you feel now. If the SUD’s is higher than five, take five more deep breaths. If five or lower, begin to describe more about the event that has been causing you discomfort.
8. Continue with this process until the SUD’s rating has been consistently reduced to below five while describing the entire event.

LAYERING EXERCISE FORM

ID Target Event

SUD's

Emotional Reaction

Thought

What is it that makes this event so upsetting?

Outcome

What happened?

Deep Breathing (5 times) (or Comfort in one part)

Target Event (Further description)

Deep Breathing (5 times) (or Comfort in one part)

Cognition (What thoughts go along with this experience?)

Deep Breathing (5 times) (or Comfort in one part)

Emotion (What feelings do you have about this event?)

Deep Breathing (5 times) (or Comfort in one part)

Bodily Sensation (What feelings of discomfort do you have in your body?)

Deep Breathing (5 times) (or Comfort in one part)

Emotion (What feelings do you have about this event?)

Deep Breathing (5 times) (or Comfort in one part)

Emotion (What feelings do you have about this event?)

Continue working with the stages of this exercise until your SUD’s rating is five (5) or lower. If you cannot reduce your response to five or below using the Layering approach, return to one of the other exercises from *Finding Comfort* to achieve this sense of inner peace.