

**Progressive Treatment Practices**  
**working with**  
**Veterans with Moral Injury**



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## I- Military Culture & Identity

- Process of becoming a (Soldier, Marine, Airman, Seaman, Coastguardsman) is an indoctrination into a CULTURE as much as it is training to mission.
- Military = Tribal Culture
  - Rules
  - Structure
  - Identity
  - History
  - Rituals/Ceremony
  - Language
  - Mindsetx



## Why Do People Join?

- Identity Formation
- Sense of Family/Culture/Stability
- Self Discovery
- For the Cause
- To get away
- Benefits



## Potential Implications/Risks

- Potential Sense of Disappointment/Failure
- Adrenaline Addicted
- Fall from Grace- Transition
- Loss of Camaraderie
- Adaptability- Who am I?



## Military Culture & Identity

- Price of Entry is a shift in IDENTITY
  - This gives a sense of belonging, intimacy, and connections
  - A sense of shared struggle
  - Family..... MEANING
- A Culture based on INTEGRITY- CORE VALUES, IDEALS, PROTECTION- in a context of violence and aggression
- Dissonance- Inner Conflicts

## Military Culture & Identity

- Military culture asks for sacrifices from its members (warrior and family)
  - Family, Time, Self (physical, moral, developmental)
- There are dichotomies between empowerment and disempowerment
  - Huge and exciting responsibility
  - Day-to-day is predictable and managed
  - “We get so taken care of, we forget how to take care of ourselves”

## Military Culture & Identity

- It is a job that leads one to NOT be in touch with one's emotions
  - Keep that which we came in with and loved “boxed off”
- It is a job that can leads one to see things and do things beyond what we (civilians) have to deal with- beyond the media
- Reintegration
  - “Unpacking” all that was packed away
  - Mourning for the self that was lost
  - Readjusting to our “insane and mundane” civilian world

### Don't pathologize this!

Just understand it and try to be open to seeing how this may impact one's transition back to civilian society and back to family and work.

## Military Cultural Competency

- Important consideration with any specialty or culturally distinct group
- Military personnel and veterans are a HETEROGENEOUS group- the whys, the whens, the wheres, and the hows differ
- Military Cultural Competency entails an integration and understanding of service and its impact on multiple levels



## Social Context of War

- We are defined by our socio-political-cultural landscape
- What are we fighting for? Each war is different.
- Media Portrayals
- Who Defines our Wars and our Warriors

## Media's Influence on our Perceptions



## What do you see?



## What do you know?



Are there Misconceptions?



Who does War belong to?



And when they return?



Have we gotten better at welcoming our warriors home?



## Stigma

- Stigma is real
- See the person, not the label
- Stigma is not only a concept but an experience
- The “system” is set up with inherent labels, categorizations, and assumptions

## Transitional Challenges that Service Members Commonly Face

- Post traumatic Stress
- Substance/Alcohol Misuse
- Suicide Attempts
- Military Sexual Trauma
- Chronic Pain/Physical Injuries
- Emotional Injuries
- Isolation/Disconnection from others
- Identity Loss- Warrior to Civilian
- Existential Conflicts
- Hopelessness about self and future
- Anxiety and Sleep Disturbance
- TBI and resulting Cognitive Limitations



## Psychological Factors

- **Self-Protection- Adaptive Mechanisms**
- Traumatized persons can become so terrified of re-experiencing the horror of a traumatic event that they avoid any triggers of the memory. Protecting themselves from pain, they are unable to see in the triggered memory, the dream, or flashback as an opportunity to “make meaning” – to find the words.
- **Protection of Others**
- Some never put words to the feelings, sensory images or somatic glimpses of their traumatic experience because they try to protect others from what they have faced. Trauma Survivors fear overwhelming their loved ones.

## Psychological Factors, Continued.

- **Disenfranchised Trauma**
  - “Who am I to speak – look how others have suffered.”
  - Those with PTSD would look to their physical disabled battle buddies and feel ashamed to share their reactions.
- **Burdensome Reactions**
  - The attempt to share the history of a trauma experience brings so much emotion that those sharing may end up taking care of those listening. Sadly, their experience confirms a fear of being different, pitied, or damaged. It keeps them from finding those who can share and bear witness to their story.



## Suicide & Loss

- Levels of Loss (purpose, identity, service, family, self, others)
- Grieving (how, where, when)
- Ambiguous Conflict
- Closure, Grief, & Healing takes Time
- Invisible Wounds
- Giving Up
- All or Nothing Thinking
- Point of No Return
- Questioning Mortality



## Bad Paper

- Other Than Honorable or Dishonorable Discharge, often tied to a struggle or incident the person encountered
- Slim to NO support from Community
- Feelings of Futility- What's the point?

## Statistics

- Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the US for all ages.
- There is 1 death by suicide in the world every 40 seconds.
- Depression affects 20-25% of Americans ages 18+ in a given year.
- Over 800,000 people die by suicide every year.
- Suicide is the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death in the world for those aged 15-44 years.
- Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide.

## Alarming Numbers

- Suicide statistics- Approximately 22 reported service members a day commit suicide (VA study, 2012)
- There are more self inflicted military deaths than deaths by combat (Time)
- People who have suffered from mild traumatic brain injuries or concussions carry a higher suicide risk (Public Integrity)
- Suicide rates for veterans are more than double the rate of the civilian population (Center for Public Integrity)
- Approx 49,000 took their own lives between 2005 and 2011 (Public Integrity)

- Vietnam Veterans have the highest rates of suicide- Annual suicide rates among adults aged 35 to 64 increased from 13.7 to 17.6 suicides per 100,000 people between 1999 and 2010.
- About 1.4 million veterans are considered at risk of homelessness due to poverty, lack of support networks, & dismal living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing. (HUD)
- The US Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates 49,933 veterans are homeless on any given night.(HUD)
- Veterans make up one in four homeless people in the United States (National Coalition for the Homeless)
- Since 9/11, 246,000 returning veterans are Unemployed- higher than the civilian population (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

### Sub-Groups Affected

- Gender / Women
- Sexual Trauma
- LGBTQ
- Vietnam Era
- Non-Combat Veterans
- Legally Involved



### Evolution of Community

- As Warriors change, so do the Communities that welcome them Home (parallel timelines)
- "We see by now that the Warrior is a foundational archetype built into our spiritual, psychological, cultural, historical and social lives. In dealing with its warriors any society is dealing with the warrior archetype's contemporary manifestations of identity, role, social, historical, political and economic functions, psychological stage of development and spiritual status. Every society should be concerned with healthy, honorable and creative warrior development." (Ed Tick, Soldier's Heart)

### A Warrior's Path

- Being away from home and homeland and in combat is a most challenging, difficult and transformative part of the journey, yet we must focus on the lifelong journey supporting its unique and irrevocable identity. To the warrior, even the negative, betraying or morally questionable dimensions of military experience can provide opportunities for growth and reintegration into a positive identity. To be on the warrior's path includes the spiritual and social conditions of warriorhood, the private and public identities of individual warriors, the relationship between warriors and their societies. (Ed Tick, Soldier's Heart)

## Departure, Initiation, and Return

- Joseph Campbell mapped the “hero’s journey.” Though there are many individual and cultural variations in how journeys unfold, the underlying pattern is identical across cultures, religions, and civilizations.
- Campbell mapped three stages of the warrior’s journey: Departure, Initiation and Return

## Bearing Witness

- “Public truth telling is a form of recovery, especially when combined with social action . Sharing traumatic experiences with others enables survivors to reconstruct repressed memory, mourn loss, and master helplessness, which is trauma’s essential insult. And, by facilitating reconnection to ordinary life, the public testimony helps survivors restore basic trust in a just world and overcome feelings of isolation. But the talking cure is predicated on the existence of a community willing to bear witness. ‘Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships. It cannot occur in isolation.’ (Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery)

## Validation... Understanding



## Potential for MIS-understanding





## Need for Help vs. Leave Me Alone



## Love My Service / Hate My Service



## Can be Intimidating...



## Out-Processing

- TAP (Transition Assistance Program)
- Superficial
- Delayed Onset
- Check in the Box
- Doesn't meet needs
- Information Overload
- Stigma



## Veteran Civilian Divide

- It's a job that lends itself to NOT being in touch with one's emotions and with keeping that which one came in contact with "boxed off"
- It's a job that can lead one to see things and do things beyond what we as civilians have to deal with (A Failure of the Imagination)
- When one gets home, one can be confronted with having to 'unpack' all that was packed away; and the realization that they are not who they were when they went in
- Mutual Misunderstandings

## Spiritual Deprivation- Clinical Trends

- WHO ARE YOU- how to identify
- Re-Defining Normal
- Roles
- Life Areas Affected
- Impact on Family
- Evolution of an individual- Facing the Unknown- What now?
- Apathy, Anxiety, Void, Loss



## II- Moral Injury?

Moral injury is a relatively new concept and "involves psychological and spiritual wounds that result from experiences that conflict with one's deeply held beliefs of right and wrong. This is not a mental disorder", says Katinka Hooyer, PhD, also a character in Almost Sunrise.

Dr. Brett Litz, a pioneer in the study of moral injury, points out that, "The key precondition for moral injury is an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life..."

## What is Moral Injury?

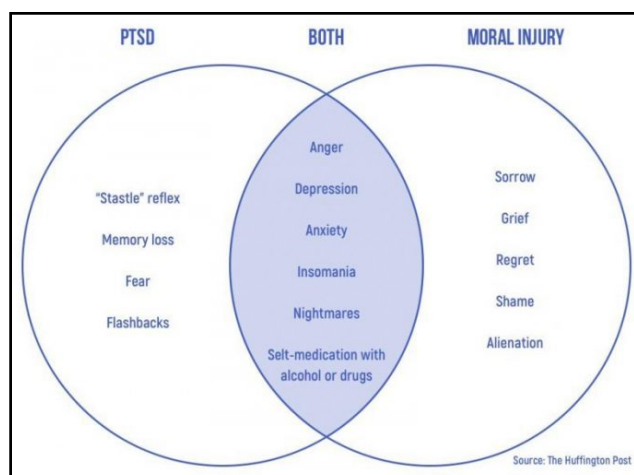
- Taking Inventory / Introspective Questions
- Spirituality and Existence
- Soul Wound
- Post Traumatic Stress and Moral Injury Distinction
- Trends of Moral Injury to be Aware of
- Mixed Feelings and Contradictions

### PTS and Moral Injury Distinction

"The diagnosis of PTSD has been defined and officially endorsed since 1980 by the mental health community, and those suffering from it have earned broad public sympathy and understanding. Moral injury is not officially recognized by the Defense Department. But it is moral injury, not PTSD, that is increasingly acknowledged as the signature wound of this generation of veterans: a bruise on the soul, akin to grief or sorrow, with lasting impact on the individuals and on their families."

– David Wood, *A Warrior's Moral Dilemma*, Huffington Post

*"Moral injury is not PTSD. Many books on veteran healing confuse and conflate them into one thing. It is possible, though, to have moral injury without PTSD. The difference between them is partly physical. PTSD occurs in response to prolonged, extreme trauma and is a fear-victim reaction to danger. It produces hormones that affect the brain's amygdala and hippocampus, which control responses to fear, as well as regulate emotions and connect fear to memory. The moral questions emerge after the traumatizing symptoms of PTSD are relieved enough for a person to construct a coherent memory of his or her experience. We organize emotionally intense memories into a story in the brain's prefrontal cortex, where self-control, planning, reasoning, and decision-making occur. The mind creates a pattern from memory fragments stored in various places. Emotions are essential to moral conscience, but until people can construct enough of a coherent narrative to grasp what they did, they cannot evaluate it."* (Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War, Nakashima Brock & Lettini, 2012)



### MORAL INJURY IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR

The actions that war requires, whether committed or witnessed, often violate the core cultural beliefs Veterans learned from their families and communities. Moral injuries surface when a Veteran begins to reflect on the memories of war, judging their own behavior or that of their friends or leaders. The memories that define a moral injury are about sorrow, shame, and deception, not so much fear or anger.

The consequences of violating one's moral code, even if the act was necessary and unavoidable in that moment, can be very destructive. In these instances, self-judgment is at the core of moral injury.

The emergence of moral injury has no particular timeline. There are life experiences that may trigger awareness of moral injuries. These experiences include changes in life stages, marriage, the birth of a child, and the loss of a relationship, the empathy of a stranger, the death of a loved one or even experiencing unconditional love.

Are my morals intact?  
 Did I commit actions that go against my morals?  
 Do I carry shame, guilt, or regret?  
 Do I carry resentment?  
 If so, against who or what?  
 Am I a good person?  
 Am I weak?  
 Have I maintained integrity?  
 Am I here for a reason?  
 Why did he/she die, but I survived?  
 Could I have done something differently?  
 What are my morals? Have they changed?  
 What's most important to me in my life right now?  
 Will I be able to be a good family member?



### Trends of Moral Injury

- MI involves feelings of shame, guilt, questioning, anger, regret, and/or betrayal.
- MI is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, with psychological, spiritual, emotional, and cultural components.
- MI can either occur concurrent with, or independent of other conditions.
- MI is connected to one's belief system, which often (but does not always) have religious or spiritual ties.
- MI can be a result of action, inaction, mere involvement, or even bearing witness to particular events.

### Trends of Moral Injury, continued

- MI is riddled with "What If" questions.
- Someone experiencing MI often turns the blame inward and self-punishes.
- MI tends to have a delayed onset and often sinks in after the immediate reactions or transitional periods level out.
- MI can be difficult for someone to describe and is best expressed through creative avenues such as writing, art, drama, or music, where metaphor plays a role in communication.
- MI often has subconscious roots, which makes the experience of it often unclear to the experiencer, and difficult to pinpoint.

### Peripheral Trends

- Homelessness
- Suicide and Loss
- Bad Paper



### Implications

Recently, researchers and therapists on the frontlines of veterans' care have started to identify what may be a critical factor in the overall suicide crisis – a sort of “missing link” – a condition called “moral injury”.

“I would bet anything, that if we had the wherewithal to do this kind of research we’d find that moral injury underlies veteran homelessness and suicide.”

– Dr. William Nash, Director of Psychological Health  
for the United States Marine Corps



*Ceremonial Rose: Statistics say I should be dead a couple times over by now. Policy says my death would not be that of an honorable man.*

### III- Expressive Therapies



### COMPLEXITY NEEDS COMPLEXITY



## TRAUMA divides



### The Creative Process as a Therapeutic Ritual

- Experiencing and holding emotions as a Community- Social Accountability
- The importance of **Ritual**- How/where/when to Feel, to Grieve, to Honor
- The Cathartic process is rejuvenating- Power of Experience, Renewal
- Including meaning-oriented and philosophical thought helps guide clients toward accepting pain as a part of life. (strength based)- EXISTENTIAL
- Isolation symptoms- How to support a connection to society with a sense of value and purpose- Establishing Roles- Relational
- "Soul Wound"- Post Traumatic Stress- Post Traumatic GROWTH
- Warrior mentality- How to support life transitions- Adaptation- Survival

### Trauma is Divisive, Expression is Unifying

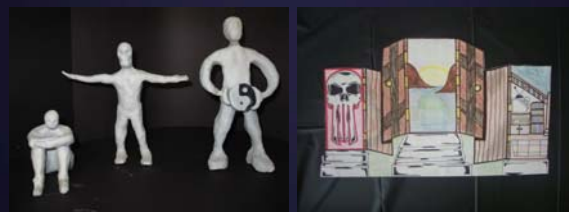
- How to create Inner Cohesion
- Help someone gain Insight and Perspective about their outer life (work, friends, family)
- Find a sense of Closure and Acceptance
- Put the pieces together



### Art Therapy: Metaphor Triangulated Access- Less Threatening

Transformations

Past, Present, Future





## Art Therapy- Self Discovery and Externalization

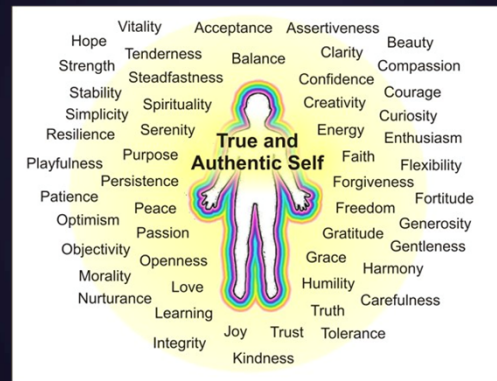
Developing Insight



Representing the Unspeakable



## Why the Arts?



## The Power of STORY

- Listen, Learn, and Share experiences



## Story and Metaphor in the Arts

- Tangible depictions of the human experience
- Existential Themes are common
- Building Context -> Adding Movement to Life
- Reintegration- Connect to others and environment
- Create one's story and thus feel validated
- Externalization:  
Pain shared is Pain divided, Joy shared is Joy multiplied

## Stress

- Activities like painting, sculpting, drawing, and photography are relaxing and rewarding hobbies that can lower your stress levels and leave you feeling mentally clear and calm.
- The Relaxation Response
- Being Present
- Releasing and Expressing Emotions
- Reframing- Creating analogues with art
- Increasing Self Knowledge



## Stress as a barrier to problem solving and creativity:

- "It's only when desires get elevated to demands that anxiety is caused"
- Stress response elicits brain activity (cortisol) that prevents us from focusing and developing rational thought patterns. (cumulative risk factor and identity formation inhibitor)
- Calming the Brain = Recovery and Solution

## Let's Look at Some



*The Original Selfie*



*The New Yorker's Life*



*The Modern Thinker*



*Musician:*

*"Some People are Artists. Some Themselves are Art."*



*Footsteps - "I think that's what we all want, in the end. To know that we left footprints when we passed by, however briefly. We want to be remembered. So remember us. Please. Remember us."*  
~Mike A. Lancaster

## "Lucky Stiff" by Kenneth Peters



Read by Andrew Plaginos  
Air Force, 1994-2002

### Surrender



#### Verse 1:

*These demons eat away at me  
The torture of PTSD  
I need help. It's so hard to bear  
I'm reaching out for someone that cares*

*I'm so frustrated, can't think straight  
Memories haunt me, rolling out the gate  
Soldiers getting killed by IED's  
Now the battles being home with PTSD.*

#### CHORUS:

*I surrender  
Facing my fears  
I surrender  
Healing through tears  
I surrender  
I'm not alone  
I surrender  
I'm not on my own*

#### Verse:

*Lost in my head, laying in bed  
Wake up in cold sweats, wish I was dead  
When I was young there was no combat zone  
I need help, I can't do this alone*

*Loves that were lost and left behind  
Lives that were lost not forgotten with time  
Hands in the air, my soul to bare  
I'm stronger now, handle with care*

#### CHORUS:

#### Verse:

*This recovery is like a calm after a storm  
Putting back together the pieces that were torn  
It's a confusing unpaved road  
But to ourselves, it's finally owed*

*I'm not who I was before  
There is still so much to explore  
We go strong, we go hard  
For we are United States Bodyguards*

### Benefits: Drama Therapy

- Drama Therapy- Allows for creative exploration- interactive
- Roles and Relationships- in vivo reparative relational work, trust
- Re-enactment - storytelling and ability to take control and alter one's story (reprocessing)
- Externalization, validation, and narrative re-scripting



## Veterans and Theater- "Vets on Stage"



"The parallels are strong:  
a lot of people making it happen  
with sweat, guts & smarts."

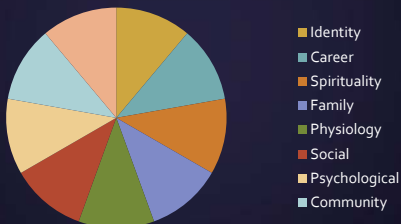


## IV- Progressive Methods



### Holistic and Integrative Model

Allows for our Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual components to be addressed in unison



### Mind-Body Focused Practices: Re-Gaining Control of One's Physiology

- ☐ Yoga- Trains somatic awareness, pain reduction, thought clarity
- ☐ Acupuncture- Targets symptoms directly, and non-chemically (anxiety, chronic or acute pain, depression)
- ☐ Meditation and Mindfulness- Teaches quieting response, down regulation of Amygdala (stress center of brain)
- ☐ EMDR, Brainspotting, Rapid Resolution Therapy- Uses somatic and visual cues to promote neurological movement and non-verbal trauma processing and release



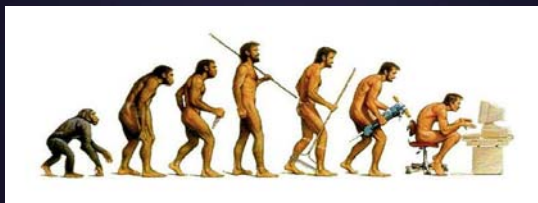
### Counterproductive ways to Manage Stress

- Avoidance
- Denial
- Drugs or Alcohol
- Irritability/Anger/Scapegoating
- Isolation
- Withdrawal
- Co-dependent relationships
- Cutting/self-harm
- Poor Communication
- Severed relationships

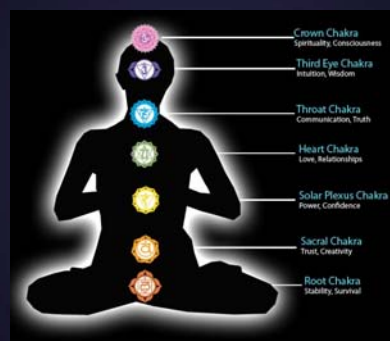
### Productive ways to Manage Stress

- WELLNESS HABITS AND LIFESTYLE
  - Exercise, Work, Social Engagement
  - Good eating and sleep habits
  - Open Communication with loved ones
  - Stress Reduction Skills
- Supportive Social Network
  - Aligned in goals
  - Validation, support, encouragement
  - Communication with peers

### Spiritually Regressed



### Ancient/Spiritual Practices





## Learning to Channel Your Energy When You Need It Most

- Self-care timing: Avoiding explosions.
- When stress builds, we may employ our defenses.  
FALSE SELF- counterproductive habits
- Self-care strategies- channel the TRUE SELF
- Reservoir of "good" energy- self control and regulation techniques
- Managing "shoulds" by creating visual symbols of strength based awareness/insight/assertiveness

## Yoga



## Nutrition

- Weekly meetings with Nutritionist
- Healthy Body/Healthy Mind
- Early Recovery Diet
- LICR Cookbook
- Healthy Living
- Garden
- Comfort
- Health



## Energy Practices

- Shamanic Healing
- Meditation and Mindfulness
- Aromatherapy (sensory)
- Reiki







Ralph's speech

### Long Island Center for Recovery:

- Solution-Focused
- Client Centered
- Humanistic
- Evidence Based
- Individualized
- Strength Based
- Real/Authentic
- Progressive
- Cutting Edge
- Holistic
- Aesthetic
- User Friendly
- Family-Centric
- Accessible



### LICR- The Basics

Long Island Center for Recovery (LICR) is a comprehensive rehab center providing addiction treatment and recovery for adults struggling with alcohol addiction, drug addiction, addiction to prescription drugs such as depressants, opioids and stimulants.

Our 50-bed inpatient rehab was established in 1995 by Jack Hamilton, one of the first individuals to bring Narcotics Anonymous meetings to the local New York communities. In carrying out Mr. Hamilton's vision of providing compassionate, professional and affordable care, our alcohol and drug rehab offers a complete range of addiction treatment services including detox, inpatient and outpatient treatment, all in our Long Island rehab location.

### At Long Island Center for Recovery...



Treatment is welcoming,

And inviting..



with a great aesthetic



Courtyard



Great Room



Music and the Arts

### Program Schedule

- 7 days a week
- Morning until night (9am-9pm)
- Variety of Groups, including AA/AA and Peer Led Groups
- Rigorous but Manageable
- Writing is woven throughout group processes
- Timelines are presented within group settings
- Client is part of his/her treatment team

### Expectations

- Accountability
- Structure
- Respect
- Integrity
- Commitment
- Honesty
- Mutual



### Addiction Treatment Highlights:

- Addiction Treatment Assessment
- Detoxification and Medical Stabilization on Premises
- Individualized Treatment Plan
- Inpatient Drug and Alcohol Program
- Outpatient Drug and Alcohol Program
- Relapse Prevention Program
- Trauma Resolution Therapy
- 12 Step Study Groups
- Aftercare Planning
- First Responders and Military Programming
- Women's Group
- DWI Group
- AA and NA Meetings Every Evening
- Family Education and Counseling
- Educational Lectures and Workshops
- Creative Writing/Poetry Workshops
- Expressive Therapies/Art Therapy
- Nutritional and Recreational Counseling
- Meditation and Mindfulness
- Yoga
- RECOS
- Breathwork



## Trauma Release Exercise



The Therapeutic muscle tremors evoked by the TRE process are a natural, internal, neuro-physiological response of the body to reduce its own stress and restore a sense of well-being.

## What is Biosound Therapy?

The integration of:

- Biofeedback
- Music therapy
- Sound frequency massage
- Guided imagery



## How Does it Work?

Binaural beats induce meditative state.  
Low vibrations trigger relaxation response.  
Heart rhythm patterns synchronize the body.  
Positive affirmations develop mindfulness.

## What Are The Benefits ?

- Stop AMA early discharges
- Crisis intervention
- Assist with detox
- Prevent Staff Burnout
- Induce relaxation and heighten awareness



## Breathwork



*Breathwork* is a general term used to describe any type of therapy that utilizes breathing exercises to improve mental, physical, and spiritual health. Many forms of *breathwork* therapy exist today, each with their own unique methods of using breath for healing purposes. LICR is LYL Breathwork certified.



*Breathwork* is a powerful, active meditation technique for self-healing. This particular breathing pattern moves stuck energy, allows us to let go of the mind, and opens the heart. This is a powerful tool for processing unresolved pain and healing trauma.

Most people leave sessions feeling lighter, clearer, and more connected

### Increased Physical Well-Being

- Increases oxygenation throughout the body
  - Improves energy levels
  - Stimulates circulation
- Balances the flow of energy through the body
  - Assists in resolving addictions
- Improves well being for many conditions and ailments such as Stress Reduction,      - Respiratory ailments, Headaches, Low energy, Psychosomatic illnesses, Anaerobic diseases, and many others.

### Improved Mental and Emotional States

- Reduces worry and anxiety
- Enhances awareness of self-sabotaging patterns
- Clears past traumas and dramas
- Increases life enjoyment
- Relieves depressive and negative emotions
- Improves self-esteem





### Spiritual Expansion

- Deepens meditation and expands awareness
- Develops spiritual gifts
- Allows fuller expression of love and joy
- Strengthens the connection with your Higher Consciousness



With Rapid Resolution Therapy®, trauma is resolved gently and painlessly. Conflict blocking desired change disappears. Because the root causes of problems are pinpointed and cleared, positive changes endure. Negative emotions and destructive behavioral patterns are eliminated. There are dramatic and lasting improvements in thoughts, feelings and behavior.

### LONG ISLAND CENTER FOR RECOVERY



To learn more or to make a referral, please contact:

**Aynisa Leonardo, 646-599-0577**

**or 631-728-3100 ext 107 (admissions)**

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