

Out of the FOG
Into the CLEAR;

Dealing with and
Healing from
Toxic
Relationships



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Objectives

Therapists will learn specific strategies to help clients;

- ▶ Notice and address the toxic relationships in their lives,
 - ▶ family of origin
 - ▶ harsh relationship within themselves
 - ▶ here and now relationships
- ▶ Take stock of the Fear, Obligation, and Guilt that currently confounds them, including how the FOG set in with the Games Toxic People Play.
- ▶ Understand how the rational mind, emotional mind, and the reactive survival mind are at war inside of them as well as;
 - ▶ how to calm the battle; healing the limbic and survival systems
 - ▶ make better decisions; keeping the rational mind in charge
 - ▶ notice when they are feeling pulled back into the FOG
 - ▶ how to take care of themselves more effectively.

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Objectives; (cont.)

- ▶ Understand trauma-bonding and untangling unhealthy attachments.
- ▶ Creating and maintaining boundaries, even with people who don't respect them.
- ▶ Placating, People-pleasing, and Peacekeeping; the three ways clients continue to undermine themselves
- ▶ Emotional distancing; helping a client learn to watch the circus go by.
- ▶ Rebuilding a healthier sense of self
- ▶ Creating healthy self-care strategies, and self-compassion
- ▶ Re-envisioning a healthier life with non-toxic relationships internally and externally

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- BA from Bowdoin College
- MSW from U Conn School of Social Work
- Therapist for over 35 years;
 - Developed, Clinical Director for therapeutic boarding school/ranch
 - Clinical Director of IOP, and Transitional Living programs
 - Private practice in Bangor, Maine,
 - Currently in private practice in Tucson, AZ.
- YouTube Channel; Therapist Talks; Thrive Beyond Narcissism
- Out of the FOG Into the CLEAR; Journaling to Help You Heal from Toxic Relationships
- Guested on over 50 podcasts from all over the world
- Masterclass and support group for healing from toxic relationships

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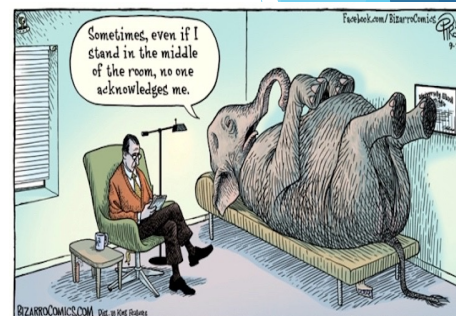
Cameron, Rhoda, Eleanor, Diana, Jackie,
Francine, Anna, Georgia, Robert, Charlotte



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Assessment; The Toxic Elephants in the Room

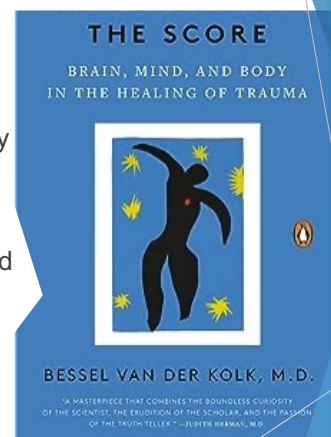
- When a person is lost in the FOG of a toxic relationship, they often avoid, defend, or are simply blind to the impact these are having on their mental health.
- When a client is buried under the oppression of a toxic family of origin history, they have developed a toxic relationship with themselves.
- The abuse from others may have ended long ago yet continues in the way they talk to themselves.
- Early traumas create Templates our clients carry into their relationships



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Diagnoses;

- ▶ Bessel van der Kolk, M.D. in *The Body Keeps the Score*, says, such patients (trauma survivors) typically receive 5 or 6 unrelated diagnoses depending on the focus of the provider;
 - ▶ if a doctor focuses on their mood swings, they identify Bipolar,
 - ▶ if they notice their despair, they treat them for depression,
 - ▶ if their restlessness and lack of attention, they diagnose and treat their ADHD,



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Jackie;



When lost in the FOG, a client may avoid, defend, or be unaware of the impact of a toxic relationship

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Diana;



In addition to avoiding and defending, Clients take ownership of the abuse and say they are, “just a mess.”

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Cameron;



Their family of origin toxicity lives on in the self-talk that condemns, harasses, berates; causing ongoing depression, anxiety, and even suicidality.

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Templates;

- ▶ Dr. vander Kolk says, secret childhood traumas “become inner toxins—realities that you are not allowed to acknowledge to yourself or to others but that nevertheless become the **template of your life**.”



Rhoda; The template of being the, “doormat” while performance of perfectionism keeps the secrets of the toxicity of her upbringing and her marriage and adult children under tight wraps

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Eleanor;



The, “I Can Handle It” template;
Perfect on the outside, frozen on the inside

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Robert;



Taking care of everyone and everything
while neglecting self
Defining his own worth as a 'paycheck'

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Fear, Obligation, and Guilt; the FOG of a Toxic Relationship

- ▶ A client lost in the FOG feels powerless, hopeless and helpless to make any clear decisions and tends to guess and second-guess themselves into despair.
- ▶ Don't underestimate the power of this FOG and the defenses that are built up around it.
- ▶ Recognize the trauma-bond that is at the center of it
- ▶ Don't push them to leave a relationship.
- ▶ Clients are hyper-sensitive to feeling judged and shamed due to the toxic relationship with themselves and with the other
- ▶ Clearly let them know you support and will walk with them no matter what they decide.

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The Games Toxic People Play

- ▶ Defining terms; “toxic relationship”
- ▶ Personality Disorders; narcissism, borderline, histrionic,
- ▶ Severe attachment styles; anxious-avoidant, anxious-dependent and chaotic
- ▶ Toxic people get others to meet their needs, fill in their empty sense of self, keep their insecurities at bay, or prevent their fear of abandonment through control, manipulation, and all of the following games.

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Battle Tactics of the Abuser

- ▶ Huge arsenal of hooks and lures, ammunition, and tactics to destabilize, confuse, pressure, and control
- ▶ Flipping from one to another sometimes in rapid fire style can create such an escalation of anxiety that your client gives in, placates, lets go of boundaries just to make the chaos stop.
- ▶ Always followed by a honeymoon period in which your client may even believe they’ve had a “breakthrough.”
- ▶ This cycling creates the Trauma-Bond in which your client feels more dependent, less capable, more lost, over time
- ▶ The client begins to train themselves to do the abuser’s work for them; managing their own behavior and choices to please and placate

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The Seduction of Delusion

- ▶ Educate clients on delusion; (a false belief so strongly held that the person will not let it go even in the face of evidence to the contrary.)
- ▶ Identify the delusions; encourage and restrengthen reality-testing
- ▶ Help client regain confidence in their own perceptions
- ▶ Understanding this helps a client step back and see the games for what they are
- ▶ The judge at a forensic hearing; “By the way, sir, you really are NOT a good person.”



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Love-Bombing

- ▶ What's love got to do with it? Absolutely nothing!
- ▶ Love is a verb; an action word
- ▶ Mirroring, shining on, enmeshing, absorbing,
- ▶ Define attachment, trauma-bond, and enmeshment vs. love
- ▶ Character qualities; looking at the reality of that person and not the fantasy or “their potential,” to help them conclude they perhaps don't even like that person.

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Devaluing;

- ▶ During the love-bombing they have gathered the ammunition for the devaluing.
- ▶ They will find the most sensitive areas; faults, old regrets, traumas, family issues, grief.
- ▶ They are very adept at finding those most tender spots and will zero in like a shark with blood in the water
- ▶ They will keep hitting that button to make your client feel broken, unlovable, and unworthy.
- ▶ Their lack of empathy shines through in these attacks
- ▶ It's important a client recognizes the absolute meanness
- ▶ The toxic person is intentionally destabilizing, hurting, humiliating, your client in order to control them.



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Isolation;

- ▶ The toxic person shrinks your client's world down to just them
- ▶ Devaluing family and friends
- ▶ Creating an "it's you and me against the world" narrative
- ▶ Making all of this look like "love"
- ▶ Undermining your client's sense of independence and sense of self so they isolate themselves
- ▶ Creates feeling that they can't live without them
 - ▶ Feels unsafe, anxious, depressed, frightened and empty without them



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Gaslighting;

- ▶ Virtually everything they say and do is to manage and manipulate others
- ▶ Over time client believes they are
 - ▶ not making sense
 - ▶ Feels they may actually be “crazy”
 - ▶ They are the problem in the relationship
 - ▶ They are overly sensitive
 - ▶ They are too reactive
- ▶ Help client regain sense of reality and confidence in their perceptions

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Imploding;

- ▶ The toxic person will gradually or suddenly escalate, bursting into tears, but often a raging tearful diatribe of accusations, guilt trips, about how your client has failed them, has broken obligations, how they can't trust them, how they abandoned them, and can even include suicidal threats.
- ▶ Unnerving to the point your client gives in, placates, and promising to 'do better' just to make this meltdown stop.
- ▶ Pia Melody; “offending from the victim position;”
- ▶ Rhoda; their adult daughter
- ▶ The processing of these incidents usually results in the imploder telling the victim what they need to do or not do in order not to “set them off again.”



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Exploding;

- ▶ The modality of the bully or overt narcissist
- ▶ Progression from sullen, brooding, moody, to frustration, pressure, anger
- ▶ Often building to full-on verbal, emotional, physical or sexual assault.
- ▶ Usually goes to the point they need to get needs met which encourages early placating to stop the escalation sooner than later
- ▶ Your client will often do whatever it takes to placate and make it stop.
- ▶ The calm down and reuniting will reinforce your client taking responsibility for the other person's actions.
- ▶ Often followed by a "I'm sorry, but if you hadn't made me so mad, I wouldn't have blown up like that."
- ▶ Often leading to belief they've, "had a breakthrough"

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Blame-Shifting to other People, Places, and Things

- ▶ It's easy to find reasons for bad behavior and at times these are true, "she's got a lot on her plate," "he's working so much,"
- ▶ But if your client is always buying the toxic person's excuses, it's time to ask if they would excuse themselves acting that way because they were "stressed" or "tired?"

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Projection;

- ▶ How toxic people tell on themselves
- ▶ Educate your clients about projection
- ▶ When a partner is highly and ridiculously jealous, they are often unfaithful.
- ▶ When they project something like, “you probably want to kill me,” he is telling her he wants to kill her.
- ▶ Both of these happened with Diana and her angry husband.
- ▶ Encourage clients to listen and take these projections as the abuser telling on themselves
- ▶ Encourage them not to get hooked into arguing with them, but instead recognize it as crucial information to help them make rational decision to leave

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Cycling; Perfect Recipe for Trauma-Bonding

- ▶ Cycling of games keeps a client off balance, unable to get grounded
- ▶ Makes them think that if they just “did it right,” they could get back to the “love” part of the relationship
- ▶ Help them see the games for what they are; and that the “love” never was love
- ▶ Help them reclaim their right to have their own thoughts, feelings, wants and needs in every relationship
- ▶ Don’t underestimate the depth, breadth, and confusion a client feels in this trauma-bond.
- ▶ They target, groom, undermine, destroy, and then discard

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Oxytocin; The Crack-Cocaine of Attachment

- ▶ Sexual intimacy creates oxytocin
- ▶ Attaches a client to someone they don't fully know or trust
- ▶ Puts them at risk of strongly bonding to this person at the level of bonding you feel towards your baby while breast-feeding
- ▶ “make-up sex” re-bonds and undermines a client's ability to make rational decisions based on the facts of the relationship.
- ▶ Sex is used as a tool to bond, re-bond, control, and placate
- ▶ Encourage clients not to make love unless they feel loved

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Diana;

- Began to see her husband as having 5-year-old tantrums in a big, scary, grown-up body
- Noticed he would flip from fine, to frustrated, to full on anger, to making himself out to be a martyr, (“I have to do everything around here”), to subtle threats, to more aggressive threats, to martyr again
- She noticed she fell into freeze, and fawn, and placated more and more intensely until he calmed down.
- This became the foundation of her being able to speak up for herself and begin to set boundaries.
- Gave her the emotional distance to recognize his behavior was not her fault.
- “You’ve probably got a boyfriend in the wings just waiting for you to dump me.” “You knew who I was when you married me, I’m not going to change so get over it.” “If you try to divorce me, I’ll burn the house down with you in it.”



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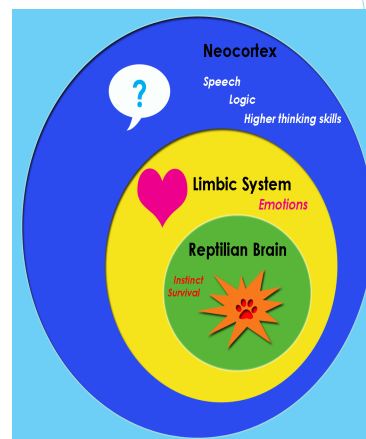
The Triune Brain; The Adaptive Brain

- ▶ Triune Brain theory is being called “obsolete”, replaced with the theory of the Adaptive Brain.
- ▶ The argument; our systems are not separate, did not evolve separately, there is more interactivity between three aspects than theorized
- ▶ I totally agree, however, recognizing the three aspects of our brain IS helpful to clients;
- ▶ It helps them understand;
 - ▶ why they feel like they're running for their lives all the time,
 - ▶ why they struggle with emotional reactivity,
 - ▶ why they feel like they can't think straight, can't make decisions, are so overwhelmed by their emotions, they undermine good decisions
 - ▶ why they get sucked into abusive relationships and can't navigate their way out.
- ▶ Thus; not going to defend the triune brain theory or get lost in the adaptive brain theory; both are true and use what helps clients.

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The Triune Brain;

The Survival System
Emotional/Limbic System
Rational Mind



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Mortal Danger and Chronic Stress

- ▶ When in mortal danger; survival system fires up with adrenalin and other stress hormones to give us the ability to fight or flight.
- ▶ If we are hampered/caught/trapped, we will freeze and dissociate.
- ▶ Rational mind takes a back seat
- ▶ Chronic stress, feel like we're in mortal danger, causes survival mind to be chronically on fire, and rational mind to be chronically off-line.
- ▶ When a client says they feel like they're 'going crazy', 'can't think straight', 'can't make decisions,'
- ▶ May even think they have ADD, or even dementia,
- ▶ They are living in their survival and emotional minds; they have very limited access to their rational mind.

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Calming the Survival and Limbic Systems

- ▶ Calming the survival system is critical to feeling better AND to making more rational and less emotional decisions.
- ▶ But; here's where the interactivity of these systems comes to light;
- ▶ Our **limbic system puts emotions and traumatic experiences together** from the past, triggering **survival-level reactions and creating self-escalating chronic stress states aka panic attacks.**
- ▶ Our limbic and survival systems can be hijacked by fear, manipulation, and **intentional survival-triggering** which toxic people do really well.
- ▶ They exert constant emotional pressure, moodiness, sullenness, anger, implosion or explosion to trigger a client's fear so that they cannot get or keep their neocortex online.
- ▶ Then they gaslight them with statements like, 'you really are crazy,' 'you're so reactive all the time' 'what is wrong with you?'
- ▶ Keeps a client trying to calm the toxic person, living with their survival and emotional systems chronically on fire.
- ▶ Even when apart, they stress, obsess, and ruminate, keeping their systems on fire.

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Feelings VS. Facts

- ▶ Old stories from childhood traumas create 'feelings' that clients interpret as facts
- ▶ They are the foundation of their toxic relationship with themselves

Feelings like;

- ▶ "I'm worthless, I'm stupid, bad, crazy, wrong,"
- ▶ "My life is hopeless,"
- ▶ "I'll never be loved again."
- ▶ "I'm not good enough"
- ▶ "I'm not worthy,"
- ▶ "I have to work all the time, or I don't matter"
- ▶ "I'm unlovable"
- ▶ "I've always been a burden"
- ▶ They may even feel like they're going to die, lose their minds, never get better, or if they start crying, they will never stop,
- ▶ These are Feelings, Not Facts
- ▶ When you help a client calm and access the rational mind, they find the true facts, make good decisions, and get free of the FOG

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Healing;

- ▶ Dr. van der Kolk says, "Nobody can "treat" trauma; what has happened cannot be undone; but what can be dealt with are the imprints of the trauma on body, mind, and soul."
- ▶ Goals; help a client reestablish ownership of their body and their mind. "To know what you know and feel what you feel" so they can;
 - ▶ 1) become calm and focused
 - ▶ 2) learn to maintain calm in response to triggers of the past
 - ▶ 3) find a way to be fully alive in the present and engaged with other people
 - ▶ 4) not having secrets from themselves about the past or their attempts to survive it.
- ▶ This is not about dwelling on the memories but looking at the reactions in the present lodged in the emotional brain/limbic system.

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Breathing, Movement, Touch

- ▶ Recalibrating the autonomic system needs to include practices involving Breathing, Movement and Touch;
- ▶ **Breathing**; MBSR, grounding, DBT, and all forms of prayer and meditation involve noticing and deepening your breathing.
- ▶ **Movement**; helps them reclaim their bodies and move out of freeze mode. Dance, yoga, and theater are discussed with several studies showing their effectiveness.
- ▶ **Touch**; Studies show petting an animal can lower blood pressure and calm the central nervous system. Recent research on human-dog interactions showed that talking to and petting a dog are accompanied by lower blood pressure. More effective than human conversation.

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Stress Scale; Self-Assessment; MBSR

- ▶ Invite clients to notice their stress/intensity level on a 1-10 scale; 1 being “very calm” and 10 being “complete stress, panic, anger, or other intensity.”
- ▶ Teach and practice; Relaxation/Visualization.
- ▶ Notice decrease in stress in a few intentional minutes.
- ▶ Discuss how they feel throughout a normal day
- ▶ Educate about cortisol build-up in brain; agitation, anxiety, hyper-reactivity, exhaustion, and other symptoms
- ▶ Living in the 5-10 zone is like drinking poison all day
- ▶ Essential to calm down and recalibrate survival and limbic systems, and live in the 1-5 zone
- ▶ Notice or journal stress scale throughout the week between sessions

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Resetting the Fire Alarm;

- ▶ Understanding and resetting broken fire alarms;
 - ▶ goes off when there is no fire
 - ▶ doesn't go off when there is
 - ▶ chronic hyper-arousal and alert; reacting but no fire
 - ▶ triggered into numbness or frozen state when there is real danger
- ▶ Practice mindfulness and self-calming so the rational mind can look at the reality of danger/no danger,
- ▶ In order to make rational decisions rather than reactive survival or emotional decisions based on faulty alarm, old stories, feelings vs. facts

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Summary of Triune/Adaptive Brain

Help clients recognize when triggered and emotionally charged;

- ▶ Recognize the three systems at play in their mind
- ▶ Use breathing, movement, and touch to calm the overwhelmed survival and emotional systems
- ▶ Use the rational mind to assess danger; is it here-and-now actual danger, or have you been triggered into a past emotional memory
- ▶ Sort out the Feelings Vs. Facts
- ▶ Empower your rational mind to make decisions
- ▶ Help the survival mind and emotional mind recalibrate, heal and function the way they were designed.

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Diana;

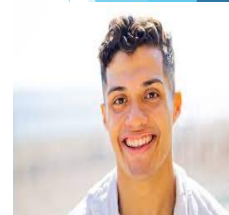
- ▶ Frequently talked about the rational mind and emotional/survival systems
- ▶ So she could begin to recognize her rational thoughts;
 - ▶ this relationship is unhealthy, the stress is “killing me”
 - ▶ his anger is becoming more dangerous
 - ▶ he doesn't believe he is at fault for relationship problems
 - ▶ he is not doing what it would take to change
- ▶ Able to recognize feelings (and that these are not facts)
 - ▶ believing she can't live without him, is unsafe without him
 - ▶ Believing she is a bad person for wanting to leave him
 - ▶ Feeling she must stay; she doesn't want to hurt him
- ▶ Able to make the rational decision to leave
- ▶ Able to notice emotional mind and survival impulses
- ▶ Able to keep her rational mind in charge; compassionately supporting the emotional mind, while not letting it steer her back into the FOG.



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Cameron;

- ▶ Helped him see that the anxious, feeling like a 'piece of shit' was old limbic system injuries.
- ▶ He learned to self-calm, use self-compassion, recognize and feel empathy for what he went through and evict his stepfather's voice from his head.
- ▶ To treat himself/talk to himself the way he supports and talks to mother, brother, friends, teammates.
- ▶ Asked what he would say to his stepfather
- ▶ He decided to confront his stepfather
- ▶ His anxiety and self-esteem largely resolved within a few more sessions
- ▶ A year later, feeling anxious and upset again
- ▶ He called his stepfather, talked to his brother
- ▶ Recognized that honoring his thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs resolved the anxiety



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Francine;

- ▶ Felt desperate and terrified when abandoned by her abusive husband.
- ▶ She believed she could not take care of herself or her kids
- ▶ In her recovery she realized what a gift this was that he left her,
- ▶ Feels she probably would not have had the strength to get herself out of the relationship.
- ▶ She had to reset her alarm that went off when alone and felt 'safe' when with him.



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Francine;

- ▶ Still in a constant state of hyper-arousal; pressured speech, anxiety, reactivity.
- ▶ Lived throughout childhood and her marriage swinging between frantic placating and debilitating exhaustion.
- ▶ Has battled numerous auto-immune and other disabling medical issues.
- ▶ Relaxation/visualization and EMDR to help her learn to quiet her internal storm, reclaim her internal space, evict her ex-husband and mother's voices from her head
- ▶ Is also teaching her three teens these skills
- ▶ When she begins to ramp up, she notices trigger, sees an old story or a here-and-now stressor, handles the here-and-now, and calms her emotional/survival systems with MBSR, grounding, and prayer and meditation.



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Rhoda;

- ▶ What she would want if she wasn't afraid of the repercussions from anyone else; get her own place.
- ▶ What stops her; being alone is "utterly terrifying."
- ▶ When alone, she believes someone is coming to kill her.
- ▶ Used concept of her rational mind to help her look at whether she is in danger at the airbnb, or at home. Realizes there is more danger at home; from her schizophrenic brother, and now her daughter and husband.
- ▶ Invited her to imagine herself on her own and enjoying being on her own.
- ▶ Realizing she is safer on her own, gained confidence in taking care of herself, she began to feel she would love her own place.
- ▶ As she exuded this independence, and added in good boundaries, her family dynamic changed radically.



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Journaling;

- ▶ James Pennebaker PhD. was the first researcher that studied therapeutic effects of writing. Developed a method called expressive writing; "putting feelings and thoughts into written words to cope with traumatic events or situations that yield distress"
- ▶ Writing gives a client access to their inner world of feelings and traumatic experiences without filtering
- ▶ Clients can make connections, associations, unravel the tapestry they've created.
- ▶ In studies participants who wrote 15 min a day their deepest thoughts and feelings about traumas, showed improved mood, improved physical health, as seen by a 50% drop in visits to the health center, lowered blood pressure and higher T-cells
- ▶ Results sustained when follow-ups done six weeks later

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Boundaries;

- ▶ Boundaries are how we take care of ourselves in relationships
- ▶ People often say, “boundaries don’t work” with this person
- ▶ Boundaries always work. They either set new dynamic for the relationship, or they inform the client of the reality of the relationship
- ▶ Listen for boundaries or lack thereof
- ▶ Do they fully show up in their relationships or show up as people-pleasers?
- ▶ Do they express their thoughts, feelings, wants and needs or completely focus on the other person?
- ▶ Do they notice and speak up if they are feeling violated in physical, emotional, spiritual, or social boundaries or are they absorbing the negative emotions from the relationship?
- ▶ Are they passive, passive/aggressive, are they often in fight, flight freeze or even fawn?
- ▶ Noticing out loud; helps the client begin to identify these patterns for themselves

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Placating, Peacekeeping, and People-Pleasing; How Clients Undermine Themselves in Relationships

- ▶ Notice the 3 P’s; placating, peace-keeping, and people pleasing
- ▶ Opposite of boundaries
- ▶ How clients undermine themselves and don’t show up fully
- ▶ When they do show up; share their thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs;
 - ▶ are they heard and respected? If so, there is potential for the relationship.
 - ▶ If not; they are not allowed to fully exist in this relationship
- ▶ This gives your client the information they need to take care of themselves by leaving.

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Progression of Boundaries;

- ▶ When a client is very committed to the relationship or wants to see if the relationship is salvageable,
- ▶ Teach and try the '**grown-up time out.**'
- ▶ When the toxic person is being manipulative, controlling, imploding or exploding, the client can say, 'I'll talk to you later when you calm down,' 'I'm not going to listen to this tone or anger,' or 'I'm hanging up now, or leaving now.'
- ▶ This gives the toxic person opportunities to grow
- ▶ And gives your client the information they need to assess the reality of the relationship
- ▶ If this leads to intensified, escalating rage, or implosions, blaming, attacks, this lets the client know even more clearly, that this is not resolvable
- ▶ Helps a client know they tried everything they could and allowed every opportunity

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Emotional Distancing;

- ▶ Teach clients to step back and watch other's behaviors,
- ▶ Recognizing that another person's attitudes and behaviors are theirs alone
- ▶ Learn to watch without personalizing
- ▶ Notice and marvel, and know it's not about them
- ▶ Watch the circus go by and not to attach to any of the hooks, lures, or drama.
- ▶ When a client starts to step back and watch, they often are amazed and strengthened

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Diana;

- ▶ Learned to step back and watch the circus
- ▶ staying present within herself
- ▶ Saw his actions as a childish tantrum
- ▶ Saw that it wasn't about her
- ▶ Stopped placating
- ▶ Sometimes walked into the other room, hung up the phone, left the house.
- ▶ He at times seemed willing to work on himself, but went to counseling and didn't even talk about his anger; obviously wasn't willing to do the work to make internal changes
- ▶ 'Nice'ness was shorter and shorter lived
- ▶ Passive or passive/aggressiveness was always eventually followed by explosions.
- ▶ She decided to divorce him.



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Eleanor;

- ▶ Found her 'template' was to absorb negative emotions, make everything look perfect, drive herself to do everything for everyone, and never express her thoughts, feelings, wants or needs.
- ▶ Realized through therapy that she never fully showed up
- ▶ When she began to show up, husband and adult children welcomed her whole self and their dynamics shifted.
- ▶ As the placater/people-pleaser she came across as a resentful martyr.
- ▶ Her sister initially apologized for the childhood abuse, and Eleanor restored the relationship, but her sister continued intermittent abusive explosions.
- ▶ People-pleasing in her friendships.
- ▶ Resetting the alarm
- ▶ She now sees she can 'handle it' but she no longer HAS to
- ▶ Notice when she is placating or feeling numb, notice if there is a here-and-now trigger? Speak up, take care of herself



50

Robert;

- ▶ In therapy he has shifted into an awareness of himself, his thoughts, feelings, wants and needs
- ▶ Has learned to express himself and his boundaries assertively
- ▶ He recognizes he has value to his family (not just as a paycheck)
- ▶ Has built more open and genuine relationships with his adult kids and a healthier relationship with his wife
- ▶ Has new boundaries around her verbal abuse, sees it as her issues, disconnects when it happens and does not personalize
- ▶ Encouraged him to notice what he'd like to say and say it
- ▶ Set boundaries sooner than later
- ▶ Assertively point out the toxic verbal abuse
- ▶ Walk away rather than engage or accept the abuse
- ▶ Model for kids, helping them to be more balanced, hard-working, yet self-caring young adults.

He is determined the generational pattern ends with him



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Francine;

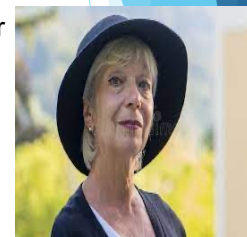
- ▶ Emotional distancing helped her navigate the contentious divorce from her abusive husband without getting drawn into his manipulations again
- ▶ With her raging mother, she learned to say, 'Ok, I'll talk to you later,' and hang up the phone.
- ▶ Is able to watch her sister's games, disconnect, and not get emotionally damaged by them.
- ▶ She has grown into a self-compassionate, and self-supporting woman who has good boundaries with others, including her children, and is healing and moving forward in her life.
- ▶ She is teaching her children the same skills and awareness so that the cycle stops with her.



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Charlotte;

- ▶ Lifelong pattern was as scapegoat of her family of origin,
- ▶ Recreated this with narcissistic husband and now adult children.
- ▶ Lapse into fawning when she felt hurt, discarded, or disrespected, which only amplified their disrespect of her
- ▶ This year;
 - ▶ kept herself internally aware of her strengths,
 - ▶ showed up with her whole self
 - ▶ did not lapse into fawning
 - ▶ kept her emotional distance
 - ▶ recognized their games
 - ▶ did not personalize
- ▶ Found that when she showed up differently, they treated her differently.
- ▶ Notice old templates and show up fully instead



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EMDR;

- ▶ EMDR; numerous studies over decades of use
- ▶ Creating Safe Space
- ▶ Helping clients find and reclaim their internal world
- ▶ Trauma recovery;
 - ▶ Finding the stories they internalized with their traumas
 - ▶ Gaining perspective that helps them step back from its intensity
 - ▶ Rewire old stories that negatively impact their relationships today
- ▶ It isn't just the trauma itself, but how we 'story it' that lasts a lifetime if we let it.
- ▶ As clients settle into themselves, they can process, heal, and move forward with clarity
- ▶ RemotEMDR

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Anna;

- ▶ Recent trauma was having severe vision loss for several weeks
- ▶ Very frightened, depressed, fear of losing her independence
- ▶ Self-judgment statements “not existing,” “feeling alone,” “asking for help is weak.”
- ▶ EMDR; angry and frustrated with herself. Felt she was ‘doing it wrong,
- ▶ Able to experience emotions without trying to escape them
- ▶ Realized she has felt frozen with expectations of perfectionism which has been a lifelong source of anxiety and depression
- ▶ When not perfect, she feels “not seen, not heard, having no control, and being vulnerable.”
- ▶ Anger an issue in current relationships;
 - ▶ Realizes she can come across as harsh and judgmental
 - ▶ Asked her to notice when she is feeling angry, and to work backwards to see whether she is feeling not seen, not heard, or having no control.
 - ▶ Realized anger is a cover for vulnerability, and she can notice and shift her perfectionism of self or others



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Georgia;

- ▶ Anxious, agitated, can't feel safe or comfortable
- ▶ 1st EMDR; breathing, self-calming and identifying safe space; extremely helpful
- ▶ Reports more relaxed, able to notice the areas in her body where she carries tension and release some of that tension
- ▶ Encouraged her to practice self-calming, using deep breathing, relaxation, safe space. She created a meditation space in her yard
- ▶ She noticed she felt a lot better overall, at work, at home, calmer and more comfortable in her body
- ▶ She processed the OD death of her daughter; previously blamed self, able to let go of that story
- ▶ More assertive, less anxious, able to speak up for herself,
- ▶ Spoke up at a meeting; calmly stood her ground
- ▶ Stronger, more focused, letting herself move through emotions instead of being overwhelmed by them



56

Rebuilding;

- ▶ Rebuilding after a toxic relationship;
 - ▶ involves a client's sense of self
 - ▶ sense of safety
 - ▶ feeling capable
 - ▶ replacing the lost aspects of themselves and their lives
 - ▶ sorting through the old templates from childhood trauma
 - ▶ harsh self-judgments from the introjected voices
 - ▶ as well as the lies, and manipulations, control games from the recent relationship(s).
- ▶ It means cleaning out the negative, self-condemning thoughts, and becoming your own best friend; encouraging and supporting yourself with self-compassion instead of harsh criticism and beratement.

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Rebuilding Healthier Sense of Self;

- ▶ When you help a client clean out the negative, you've got to put something else in its place
- ▶ Define the **truths** they're learning about themselves.
- ▶ Write and/or talk about;
 - ▶ their character qualities
 - ▶ aspects of themselves they respect
 - ▶ their values and what matters to them
- ▶ These are not the empty 'affirmations' of the '80's; real truths, genuine self-esteem
- ▶ Foundation of self-compassion
- ▶ What do you say to a best friend who is struggling?
- ▶ Encourage them to use these truths and these messages to support themselves throughout every day.



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Cameron;

- ▶ Discussed how he cares for others, his values, morals, character qualities
- ▶ Difficulty depends on the level of their internalization of self-hatred
- ▶ Initially said he was “useless, ugly, unlovable, stupid.”
- ▶ By asking what his friends, brother and his work teammates would say, he said he is, “caring, empathic, diligent, honest, dependable, determined, compassionate, respectful.”
- ▶ Concluded his character qualities are things he likes and respects
- ▶ Able to see the voice in his head is his abusive stepfather's, not his.
- ▶ Able to realize that the character qualities are who **he really is**.
- ▶ Even able to marvel at surviving his childhood
- ▶ He realized that feelings, struggles, and mistakes are human, and he can encourage and support himself the way he encourages and supports others.



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Georgia;

- ▶ She expressed concern about her negative sense of self
- ▶ Discussed the old stories versus the knowledge of who she truly is
- ▶ Thrown out of house at 15, she really felt she was “nothing.”
- ▶ Other painful self-judgements
- ▶ Discussed her character qualities and the values that shine through in her work and in her current relationships
- ▶ She identified knowing she cares deeply about others, works hard, is respected for her care, integrity, compassion, empathy, intelligence, knowledge
- ▶ Notice old stories and put the new knowledge in its place
- ▶ She says she is processing better, feels more relaxed, focused, and engages in compassionate coaching with herself.



60

Re-Envisioning Your Life

- ▶ Rebuilding a client's ability to feel, dream, re-envision their lives means asking;
 - ▶ if you were not afraid of the repercussions, what would you want most to do?
- ▶ Robert is re-envisioning his business so that he can do the things he loves and let go of what is toxic and stressful.
- ▶ Rhoda wants her own condo, to write poetry, and volunteer for a hospice
- ▶ Diana wants to have her own place and move closer to her kids and grandkids
- ▶ Anna wants to expand her connectedness in her community again through volunteering and meeting new people
- ▶ Georgia wants to join a new church and feel spiritually connected to a community again



61

Creating Healthy Self-Care Strategies

- ▶ Self-care is crucial for us all and teaching and encouraging self-care is part of every session
- ▶ Self-care is when you;
 - ▶ notice the internal needs of your Body, Mind and Spirit
 - ▶ take action to respond to those needs
- ▶ Self-care is deliberate action we take to care for our mental, emotional, and physical health
- ▶ We all have not only the right but also the responsibility to practice self-care and make sure we are living a balanced, healthy life

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Self-Care Myths;

- ▶ Myth 1: Self-care is anything that soothes you
- ▶ Myth 2: Self-care is always relaxing
- ▶ Myth 3: Self-care is selfish
- ▶ Myth 4: Self-care is a reward
- ▶ Myth 6; You have to set big goals and make all of these changes right now
 - ▶ Atomic Habits by James Clear
 - ▶ 1) Don't set goals but change habits
 - ▶ 2) Make small changes that are doable and larger more permanent changes will follow
 - ▶ 3) Connect those small habit changes to good habits you already have, and you will be more successful sticking with those changes.
- ▶ Specific areas; sleeping, eating/nutrition, spirituality, fun, intellectual stimulation, socializing.

63

Wrap-Up, Summary, and Homework;

- ▶ At the end of every session, summarize the important insights or work, and assign homework.
- ▶ If they journal, give them journal prompts
- ▶ If they don't, say, 'I invite you to notice...'
 - ▶ how you're talking to yourself this week...
 - ▶ when were you harsh, when you were able to shift to compassionate
 - ▶ when were you in your survival or emotional mind, and when could you shift to your rational
 - ▶ what was your stress scale number through most of every day? what ramped you up, what calmed you down?
- ▶ Notice talking to yourself the way you would talk to your best friend
- ▶ Notice if you feel calmer, clearer and stronger
- ▶ Notice when you respect and even like or love who you are and what brought on positive or negative feelings about yourself.

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Notice; Examples

Anna;

- ▶ Notice when you felt angry and ask yourself if you're feeling unseen, unheard, or out of control. Then ask yourself if your reaction is from old stories or here and now. If it's here and now, take care of yourself in that situation; but siphon off the emotional intensity of the old story. For instance...
- ▶ Or if you feel unheard with your other friend, can you identify what you want to say and say it?

Diana;

- ▶ Notice when you're falling into placating, people-pleasing, and peacekeeping,
- ▶ Ask yourself what you'd like to say, and even if you don't feel safe in saying it, notice
- ▶ Take care of yourself by leaving the call, leaving the room or leaving the house if he's getting angry.
- ▶ Remind yourself, his reactions are his; you don't have to sit through his tantrums.

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Notice;

Robert;

- ▶ Notice what happens when you take care of yourself, your emotions, when you're assertive instead of passive or passive/aggressive. Notice fewer headaches, feeling more energy, feeling less resentful and less angry, feeling more heard, known, cared about and respected.

Rhoda;

- ▶ Notice when you're feeling numb or dissociated. Write, go for a walk, stretch, talk to a friend, notice when you feel unsafe or if you feel like a doormat. Can you respond to that situation to reclaim your sense of self, your space in the house, and in the world?

Cameron;

- ▶ When you're anxious, or feeling badly about yourself, notice what's happening that's triggering those old stories. See if you can shift into self-compassion and telling yourself the truth about you; about your capabilities to handle things, about who you are in your character qualities. Remember that critical, harsh voice is your stepfather's not yours, and you can evict him from your head any time you choose.

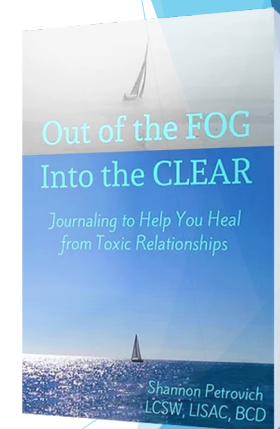
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Q and A;

Out of the FOG Into the CLEAR;

Journaling to Help You Heal from Toxic Relationships

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