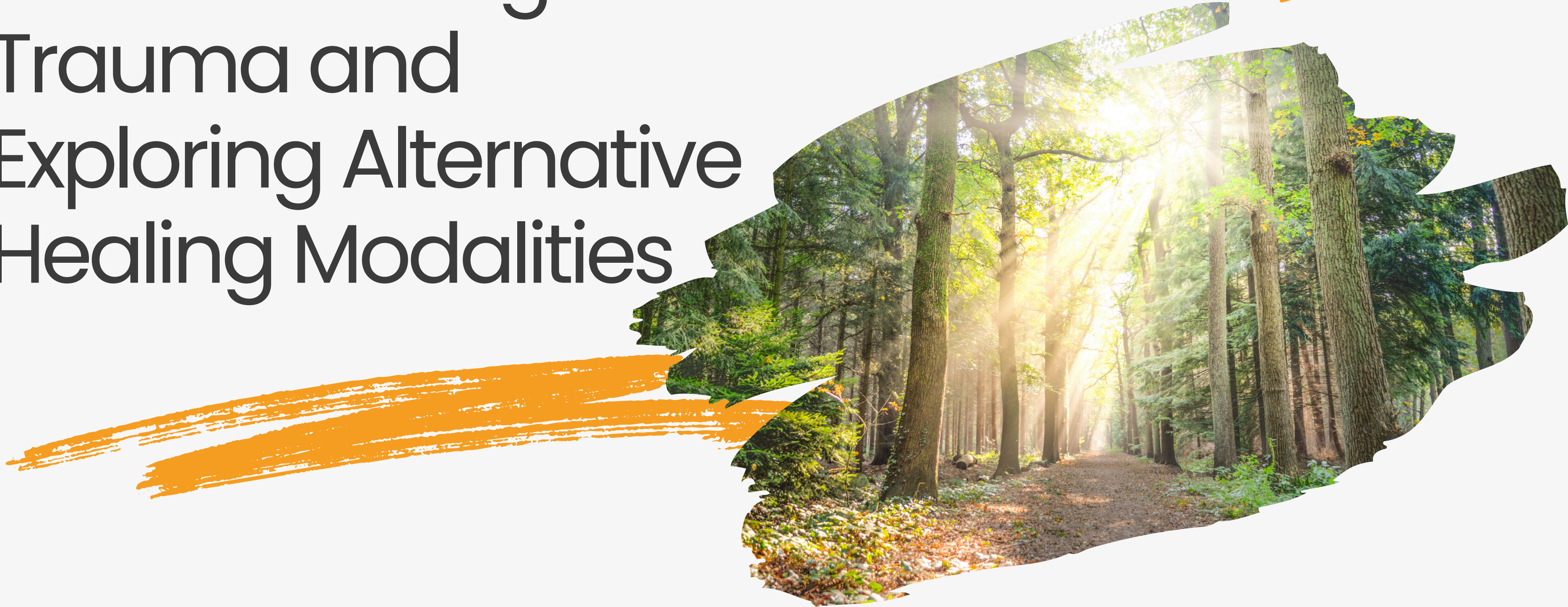


# Understanding Trauma and Exploring Alternative Healing Modalities



**Mental  
Wellness  
Initiative**



**Facilitator: Segametsi Dithale**

27 Nov 2024



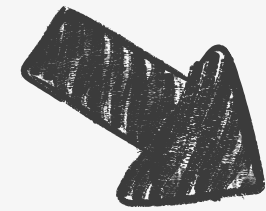
# Table of Contents

A thick, textured orange brushstroke underline that starts under the word 'Contents' and extends to the right, ending under the word 'matters' in the list below.

- 1.Introduction
- 2.Purpose
- 3.Objectives
- 4.Ground-rules
- 5.Exercise: Identifying and mapping stressors
- 6.Understanding the effect of trauma on researchers
- 7.What is trauma?
- 8.Exploring Alternative Healing Modalities
9. What is Somatic therapies
- 10.Modalities overview
- 11.Vagus nerve activation
- 12.River of life exercise
- 13.Why trauma healing matters



# Introduction



01

As researchers, you engage deeply with complex, often emotionally charged subjects, which can take a toll on your mental and emotional well-being. This session aims to shed light on the subtle but profound ways trauma can impact professionals like you, influencing not only your work but also how you show up in your personal and professional spaces.

## Purpose of the Presentation

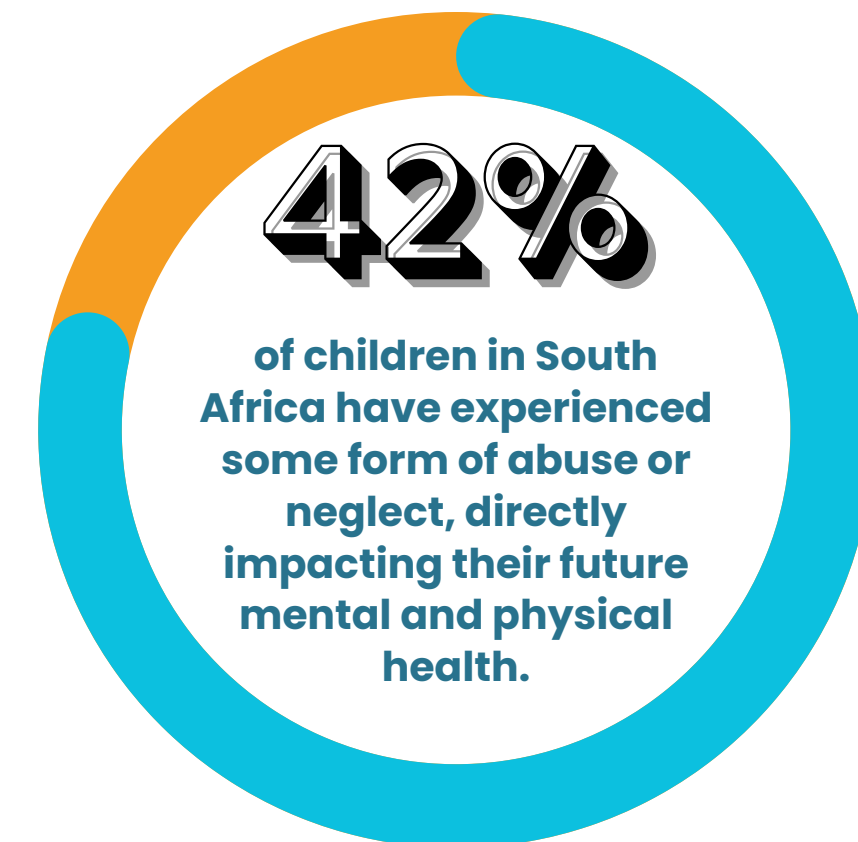
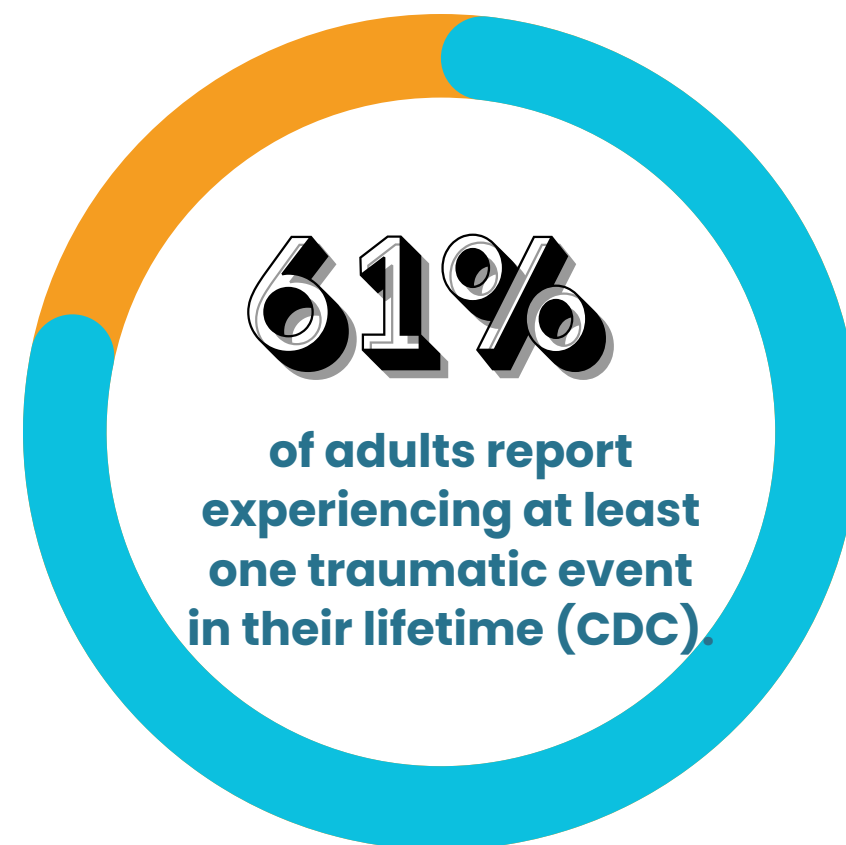
The purpose of this presentation is to create awareness about the effects of trauma on researchers, provide insight into the role of somatic therapies and alternative healing modalities, and equip you with practical tools to manage stress and trauma. The ultimate goal is to foster a culture of self-care and healing, empowering you to navigate the challenges of your work with strength and compassion.





one in three women globally experiences GBV, often resulting in long-term trauma.

*The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates*







# What is trauma?

~y adj worthless  
**trauma** /'trɔ:mə  
(med) diseased  
a wound or ini  
leading



Trauma is the body and mind's response to overwhelming stress.

## Types of trauma:

- Acute Trauma: Resulting from a single distressing event.
- Chronic Trauma: Prolonged exposure to stress or harmful situations.
- Vicarious Trauma: Emotional residue from exposure to others' trauma, often experienced by researchers in sensitive fields.

## How Trauma Manifests (for Researcher)

- Emotional signs: Anxiety, irritability, or emotional numbness.
- Physical signs: Fatigue, muscle tension, or chronic pain.
- Cognitive signs: Difficulty concentrating, memory issues, or decision-making struggles.
- Behavioral signs: Withdrawal, procrastination, or increased reliance on unhealthy coping mechanisms.

## Unique challenges faced by researchers include:

- Confronting distressing material or balancing heavy workloads. (eg. researcher exploring gender-based violence who may absorb emotional distress from participants' stories).





# Understanding the Impact of Trauma



## Emotional Exhaustion and Compassion Fatigue

Researchers working with sensitive or distressing subjects may absorb the emotional weight of their work, leading to feelings of overwhelm and diminished empathy over time.

## Vicarious or Secondary Trauma

Exposure to participants' stories of pain or suffering can result in trauma-like symptoms, such as heightened anxiety, flashbacks, or emotional detachment, even if the researcher is not directly involved in the traumatic events.

## Cognitive Impairments

- Chronic stress from trauma can interfere with memory, focus, and decision-making, reducing researchers' ability to critically analyze data or produce high-quality work.
- 

## Increased Risk of Burnout

- Prolonged exposure to stressful material, coupled with heavy workloads, can lead to physical and emotional burnout, affecting overall well-being and professional performance.



# Activity!!!



Reflect on your current stressors and understand how trauma may be affecting their work and well-being.

## 1. Preparation:

- Prepare a piece of a blank piece of paper and a pen/pencil.

## Step 1: The Stress Web

- Draw a circle in the center of the page and write “ME” inside it.
- Around the circle, write down stressors or challenges they face in their research work (e.g., deadlines, difficult subjects, participant interviews, personal pressures).
- Connect the stressors to the central “ME” circle using lines, creating a “web” of stressors.

## Step 2: Reflection:

- Once the web is complete, please circle or highlight the stressors you feel are most emotionally or mentally draining for you.

Step 3. Please share on how these stressors might link to the impacts of trauma discussed earlier (e.g., emotional exhaustion, cognitive impairments).

- Think about how recognizing these patterns can help you take proactive steps to manage your well-being.
- REFLECTIONS and recommendations



# Confronting underlying trauma



## Recognise Avoidance Patterns

Identify behaviours that help you avoid trauma, such as overworking, substance use, or withdrawing from others.

- *Reflection: "What am I running from when I engage in this behaviour?"*

## Commit to Self-Compassion

Remind yourself that it's okay to feel vulnerable. Healing requires patience and kindness toward yourself.

- *Mantra: "I am doing the best I can, and that is enough."*

## Build a Support Network

Surround yourself with people who listen and validate your feelings.

- *This could be a friend, a support group, or an online community focused on healing.*

## Use Visualisation to Face Trauma

Picture the trauma as a locked box in your mind. Imagine opening it in the presence of your inner guide (a visualisation of your stronger self).

- *Explore what's inside without fear and remind yourself you're in control of this process.*



# Shadow work



Shadow work helps with trauma by addressing and integrating the hidden or suppressed parts of the self—often referred to as the "shadow"—that may carry unresolved pain, fears, or emotions stemming from traumatic experiences.

## 1. Acknowledging Suppressed Emotions

Trauma often leads to the suppression of emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, or shame.

## 2. Reconnecting with the Self

Trauma can fragment a person's sense of identity. Shadow work helps individuals reconnect with their authentic selves by exploring and integrating the parts of themselves they have rejected or disowned due to fear or societal expectations.

## 3. Breaking Patterns of Self-Sabotage

Unexamined trauma can manifest in behaviors like self-sabotage, avoidance, or projection. Shadow work helps identify these patterns, offering insights into their root causes and enabling individuals to change unhealthy habits.

## 4. Cultivating Self-Compassion

Shadow work emphasizes self-acceptance and compassion, creating a safe space for individuals to confront their past without judgment.





# River of life journaling exercise

**A reflective exercise to map significant life events and how they shape our lives**

## **Instructions:**

- Draw a river on a piece of paper, symbolizing your life's journey (Past Past, present future).
- Mark milestones, challenges (e.g., rocks or rapids), and moments of flow or peace.
- Reflect on patterns or insights about personal and professional growth.





# Overcoming Trauma

**Trauma recovery is a journey of resilience and empowerment:**

- Resilience Building: Developing coping skills and adaptability.
- Committing to healing trauma – Healing modalities
- Forgiveness: Releasing resentment toward oneself or others.
- Community Healing: Collective efforts to break cycles of violence and trauma.







# Exploring Alternative Healing Modalities



# What are Somatic Therapies?



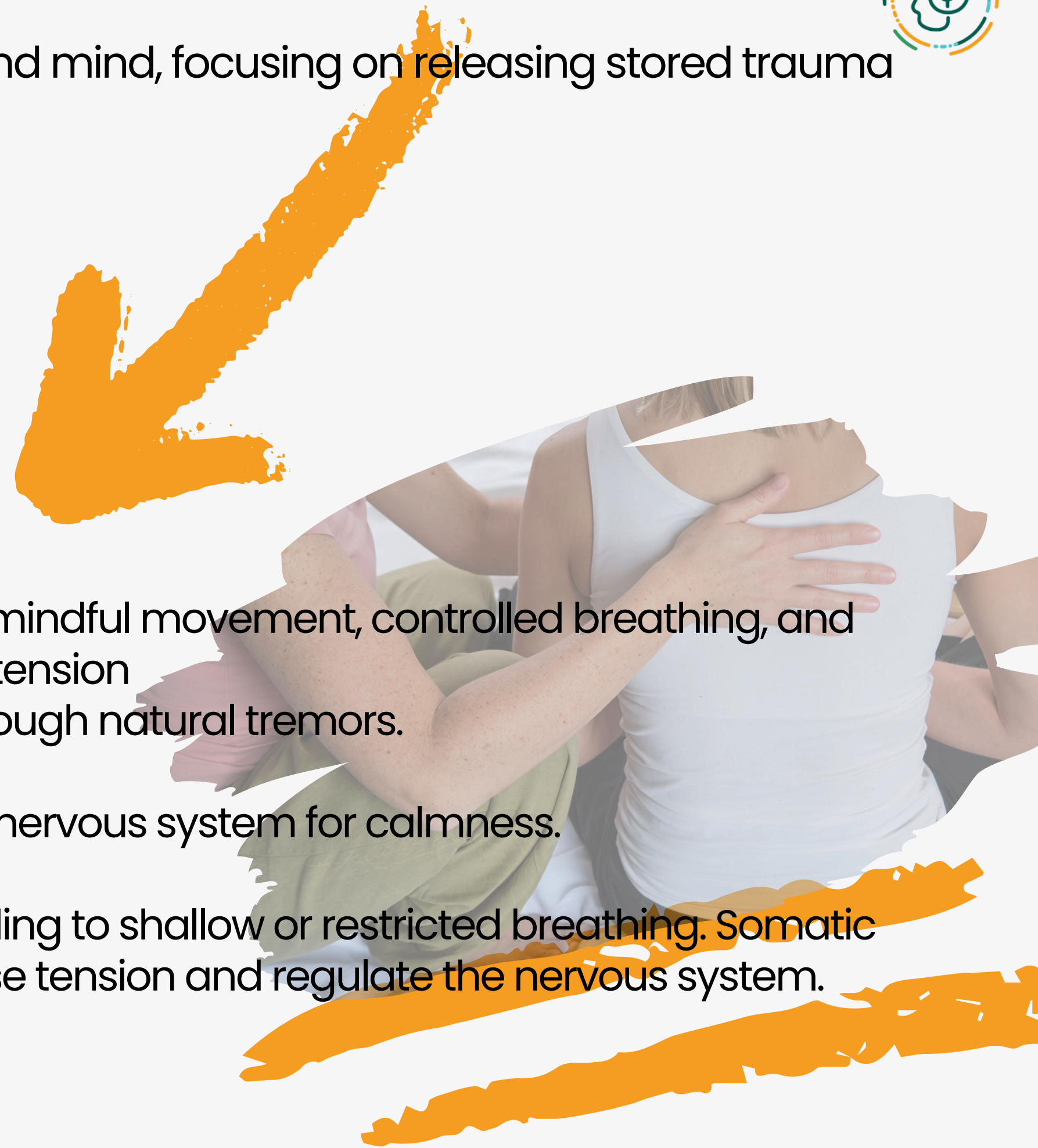
Somatic therapies address the connection between body and mind, focusing on releasing stored trauma through physical and mindful practices.

## Benefits:

- Recalibrates the nervous system.
- Promotes emotional release and physical relaxation.
- Builds resilience against future stressors.

## Modalities Overview

- **Body based movement – Yoga and Qi-gong:** Combining mindful movement, controlled breathing, and meditation to regulate the nervous system, release stored tension
- **TRE (Trauma Release Exercises):** Helps release tension through natural tremors.
- **Vagus Nerve Activation:** Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system for calmness.
- **Breathwork:** Trauma often affects breathing patterns, leading to shallow or restricted breathing. Somatic breathwork uses intentional breathing techniques to release tension and regulate the nervous system.







# Trauma and emotional Release Exercise

A set of exercises designed to release deep muscular tension and calm the nervous system.

## Benefits

- Alleviates chronic stress and anxiety.
- Improves emotional regulation and resilience.

**A video/demonstration of TRE technique**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Flm8v8IKCg>**





# Vagus Nerve Activation



The vagus nerve is the longest cranial nerve in the body, running from the brainstem to the abdomen, and plays a critical role in regulating the parasympathetic nervous system (the "rest and digest" system). It helps control heart rate, digestion, and emotional regulation.

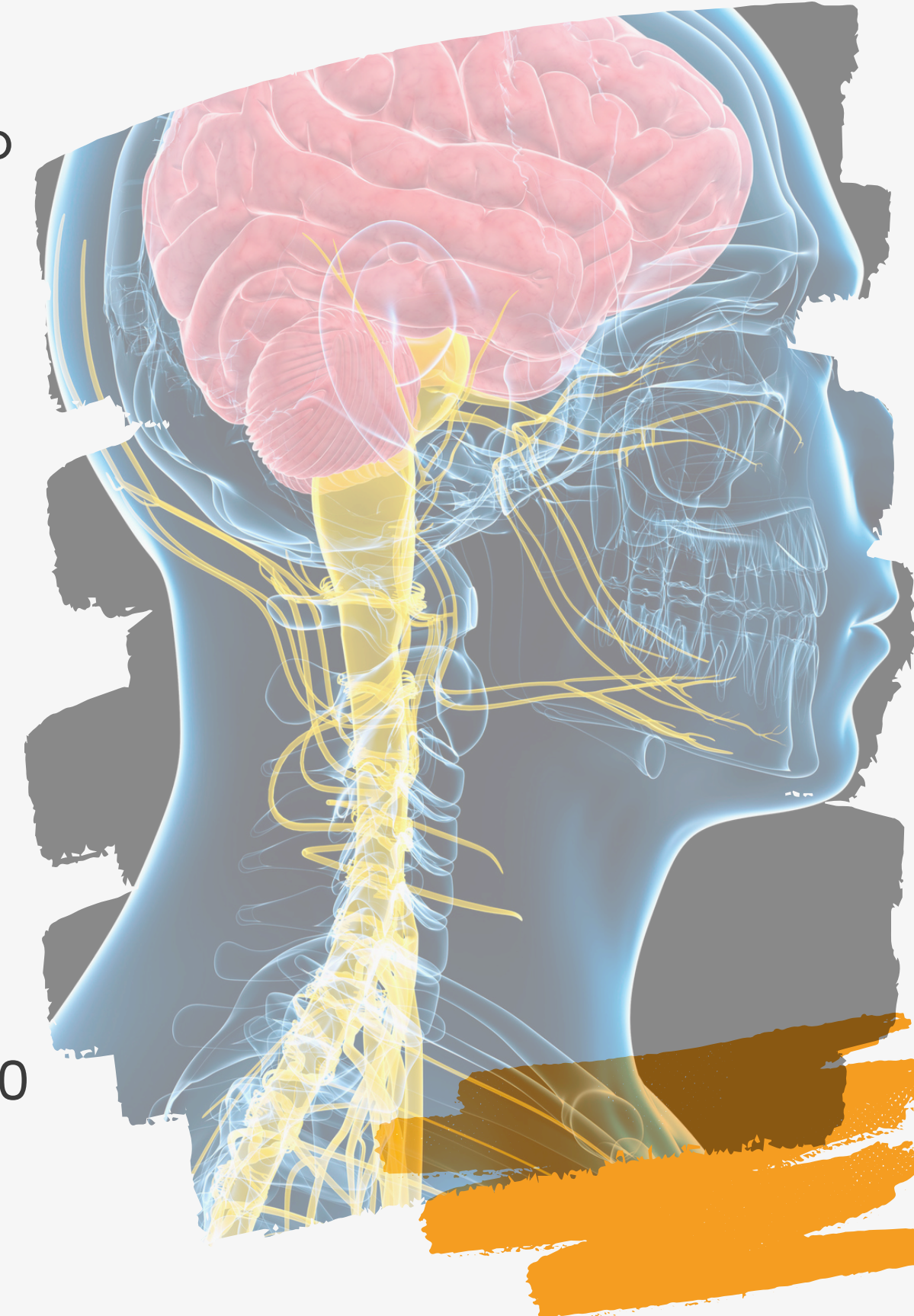
In trauma, the vagus nerve can become dysregulated, keeping the body in a state of heightened stress or "fight, flight, or freeze" mode. Activating the vagus nerve through specific exercises—such as deep breathing, cold exposure, or humming—helps calm the nervous system, release stored trauma, and restore a sense of safety and balance

## **Guided exercise : Vagus Nerve Activation (Eye Exercise)**

Instructions:

1. Sit comfortably and look straight ahead.
2. Slowly shift your gaze to the far left without moving your head. Hold for 30 seconds.
3. Shift your gaze to the far right and hold for 30 seconds.

Effect: Participants may notice relaxation or a deep breath.



**15 minutes**



# Wrap-Up and Q&A



## Conclusion

Healing trauma is a journey that begins with understanding and acceptance. By utilising these healing modalities, individuals can reclaim their lives and contribute to building resilient, empowered communities. Let us take collective action to break the chains of trauma and foster a culture of healing and growth.

## Key Takeaways

- Trauma is common but manageable with the right tools.
- Healing requires a holistic approach, integrating body, mind, and spirit.
- Somatic exercises offer accessible, effective ways to manage stress.

- **Kindly share one thing you've learned or will take away from the workshop. (This can be done via the chat room).**

## Additional Resources

Suggest readings: The Body Keeps the Score by Dr Bessel van der Kolk.

Websites: [TREGlobal.com](https://www.treglobal.com), [VagusNerveExercises.org](https://www.vagusnerveexercises.org).





Get in Touch  
with Us



**Segametsi Dithale**  
**Community Engagement and Programmes Manager**  
+27 81 513 1318  
segametsid@mwi.org.za  
[www.mwi.org.za](http://www.mwi.org.za)