

Christ-Centered Trauma Informed Practices On The Mat

by Dr. Donna Jagielski

All of us will face trauma at some point in our lives. The reason why is because there are two types of trauma. The first type is referred to as *developmental trauma* which is described as chronic and ongoing. Examples of developmental trauma are neglect and/or abuse. The second type is referred to as *shock trauma* which is described as a single isolated rather unexpected event. Examples of shock trauma are sudden loss, falls, accidents. Shock trauma is the type that will ultimately impact all of us during the course of our lives. Shock trauma is unavoidable.

No matter what type of trauma we experience, our physical, emotional, social, and psychological reactions/responses are the same. Anytime we are confronted with trauma it impacts our nervous system. When we are in a state of trauma, our sympathetic nervous system is activated into what we know as 'fight or flight.' During these times our goal is to de-escalate and activate our parasympathetic nervous system which places us in a relaxed state.

If we don't have reliable strategies to de-escalate or properly cope with the trauma, we most likely will be faced with challenges affecting our ability to self regulate, focus, and concentrate. We might enter into a flight or fight mode due to triggers such as loud sounds and sudden movements. Based on the source, length, degree and type of trauma, we might experience feelings of isolation, disconnection, embarrassment, guilt, depression, and choose to withdraw

and avoid social interactions and relationships. Seemingly simple risk taking such as exploring a new yoga pose now creates an increased level of anxiety.

Traditional trauma-informed strategies and practices will de-escalate anxieties and provide basic coping, yet they leave behind a sense of emptiness and "something is missing". Such practices are not enough to feed our soul. As Christ-centered yogis, we need to transform these strategies into "Christ-centered Trauma Informed Practices" so we can begin the healing process from the inside out, starting from our soul first.

The following components of orienting, grounding, and centering are found in all yoga classes. The strategies found within the three components, aim to mitigate trauma. Each of the strategies are described in their traditional form and then how they can be transformed using a Christ-centered approach.

Orienting - This is how we see ourselves in relation to time and space.

5,4,3,2,1 - Utilizing all five senses, rapidly identify: five things you can see; four things you can touch/feel; three things you can hear; two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.

Christ-centered approach: Many of the miracles Jesus performed are related to the five senses. Know that Jesus continues



to perform miracles in our lives. He heals all pain and suffering. It also reminds us that Jesus knew his fate, being prepared for his burial. Again, this serves as a reminder to us that Jesus faced far more challenges than we ever will in our lifetime.

Biblical Scriptures:

Sight: John 9:5-7 “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam.” So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Touch: Matthew 8:3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing”, he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.

Hearing: Mark 7:34-35 And looking up to heaven he sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Scent/Smell: Matthew 26:12 When she poured perfume on my body, she did it to prepare for my burial.

Taste: John 2:7-9 Jesus said to the servants “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

Grounding - This is how we identify our connection physically to our surroundings.

Finger/Hand Tracing Breathwork

(Pranayama): Sit in an easy cross-legged pose so that you are fully connected to the earth as you perform this breathwork. Expand one hand, spread all five fingers, and place on the mat in front of you, flat like a pancake. Using one finger from the other hand, begin to trace the outer edges of each finger as if a slow-motion roller coaster was traveling up one side and down the other. Inhale on the upwards tracing and exhale on the downward tracing.

Christ-centered approach: Five Holy Wounds of Jesus. At the time of the crucifixion, nails were placed in both hands, feet, and the chest of Jesus. May this remind us of the ultimate sacrifice made for us. May this remind us that our suffering is nowhere near what Jesus endured for us.

Biblical Scripture: 1 Peter 2:24 “He Himself bore our sins” in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”

Centering - This is how we are able to connect to the balance and tranquility within ourselves and achieve a greater sense of confidence and efficacy.

The Three Blocks: Using yoga blocks each one represents the following: mind, body, breath. When they are scattered that is how we are, scattered. When scattered, our mind, body, and breath are disconnected. When the blocks are stacked, we are aligned and centered. This is when our mind, body and breath are working together in unison as one unit.

Christ-centered approach: The three blocks represent the Holy Trinity. When the blocks are stacked, we are aligned and



centered, we are open to receiving Jesus. We are obedient and faithful followers when we are centered. Jesus, Heavenly Father and Holy Spirit. If we lack understanding and/or belief of any one of the three, we will be disconnected from our faith. Only when we fully understand the connection of all three, our faith is unshakeable.

Biblical Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Granted, trauma is not something that should be taken lightly, minimized or that can be eradicated or healed by practicing Christ-centered yoga. Yet, one of the great blessings of Christ-centered yoga is the ability to equip ourselves with strategies

that place the Lord at the forefront and center of our practice. As a result, by utilizing such tools, we are able to cope more authentically, and embrace our struggles with an open and loving heart.

About the Author: Dr. Donna Jagielski holds a doctorate in education from ASU. She has been an educator, educational administrator and currently works in educational programming for a nonprofit organization. She is actively involved in her church in Phoenix and Flagstaff where she maintains dual residency. She is a RYT-200 and RCYT-95 and is a member of the Yoga Alliance. She currently leads Christ-centered yoga for the Women on the Move program she facilitates at her Phoenix church and also leads yoga at a juvenile detention center in Phoenix.



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