


Guiding Traumatized Clients to Find Solid Ground



Prof. Bethany Brand

29 March 2025 | 9.00am - 12.00pm AEDT





Guiding Traumatized Clients to
Find Solid Ground

Bethany Brand, Ph.D.

copyright Bethany Brand Art by Rachel Elise


1

Disclosure



copyright Bethany Brand

2




Learning Objectives

1. Apply interventions recommended by experts that help stabilize dissociative individuals in the first stage of treatment for complex trauma
2. Demonstrate how to work with patients to develop specific skills used in the *Finding Solid Ground* program
3. Assess the functions that self-harm may serve in traumatized individuals

Copyright Bethany Brand Art by Rachel Elise

3



copyright Bethany Brand Art by Rachel Elise

Acknowledgement & thanks:

- ❖ to **colleagues** Ruth Lanius, Hygge Schielke & Francesca Schiavone
- ❖ **To the individuals who live with dissociation** who have given us crucial feedback throughout the development of *Finding Solid Ground*
- ❖ to the TOP DD studies' research participants whose input improved *Finding Solid Ground*

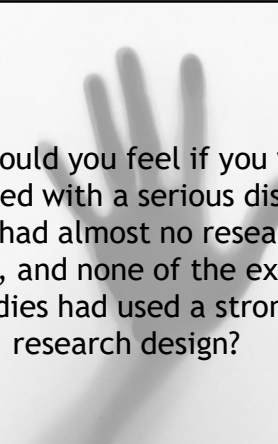
4

Topics

1. The "Why" of *Finding Solid Ground*
2. Brief overview of the phase-oriented treatment of complex trauma & DID
3. Overview of the TOP DD studies and development of *Finding Solid Ground Program*: participant- and research-informed program for complex trauma
4. Introduction to the first two modules of *Finding Solid Ground*

copyright Bethany Brand

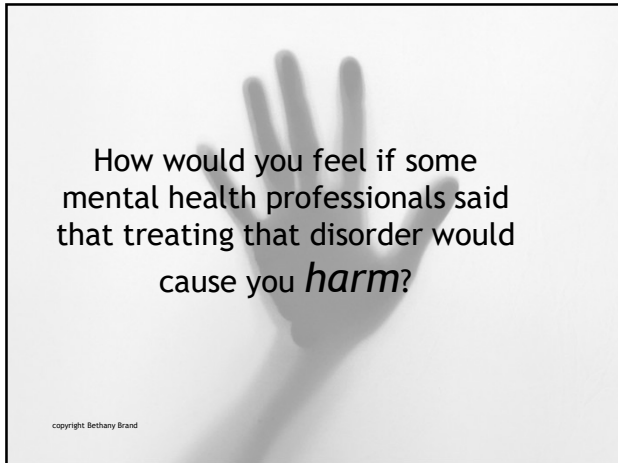
5



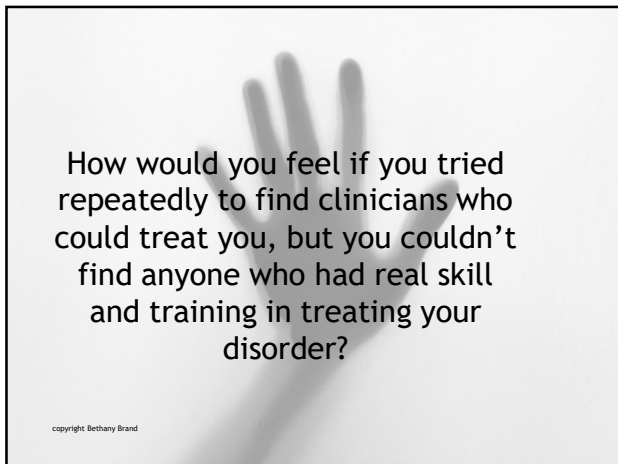
How would you feel if you were diagnosed with a serious disorder that had almost no research studies, and none of the existing studies had used a strong research design?

copyright Bethany Brand

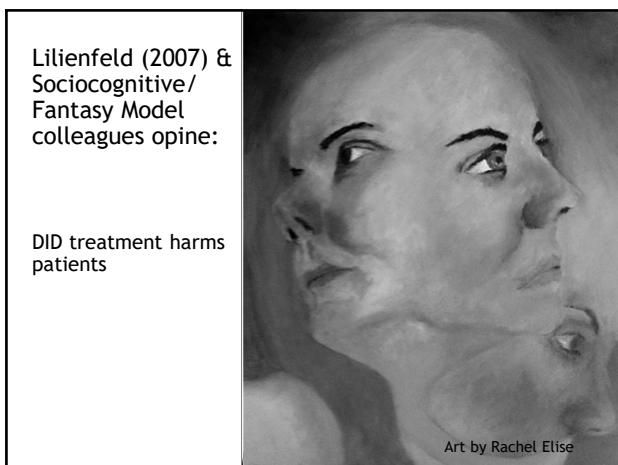
6



7



8



9



copyright bethany brand

10

TOP DD Study Researchers

- ▶ Bethany Brand, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Towson, Maryland, USA
- ▶ Hygge Schielke, Ph.D., Co-Investigator, Toronto, CA

Scientific Consultants:

- ▶ Karen Putnam, Ph.D. & Frank Putnam, M.D., Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA
- ▶ Ruth Lanius, Ph.D., M.D. and Paul Frewen, Ph.D., London, Ontario, Canada
- ▶ Richard Loewenstein, M.D., and Amie Myrick L.C.P.C., Baltimore, Maryland, USA
- ▶ Ellen Jepsen, M.D., Ph.D., Modum Bad, Norway
- ▶ Kathy Steele, M.N, C.S., Atlanta, Georgia, USA
- ▶ Suzette Boon, Ph.D., The Netherlands

- ▶ TOP DD RAs: Shae Nester, Nick Pierorazio & Jerrica Robertson

copyright bethany brand



11

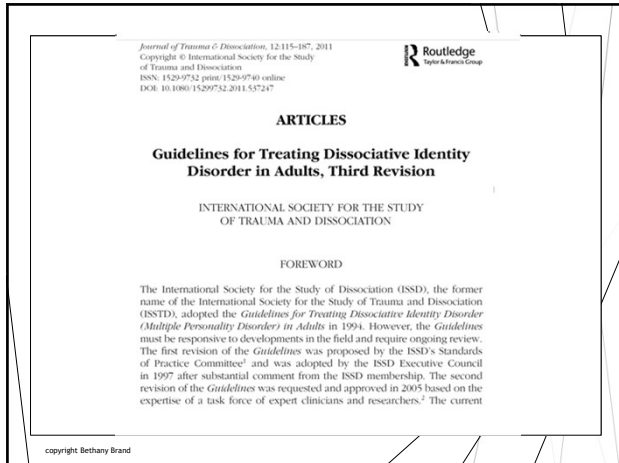
We are indebted to the following for funding:

Michael Hemmer	Brad Foote, M.D.	Anonymous donation to Sheppard Pratt Health System's Trauma Disorders Research Program
Trauma Disorders Fund, Sheppard Pratt Health System	ANS Research Constantinidas Family Foundation	Anne Bartoletto and family
International Society for the Study of Trauma & Dissociation	Towson University FDRC grant and College of Liberal Arts Grants	Many additional generous donors

copyright bethany brand



12



13



14

"Top 10" Expert Recommendations for Treatment of Dissociative Disorders

Intervention	Stage 1 Stabilization & Safety	Stage 2 Trauma Processing
Establish safety	yes	yes
Establish/repair alliance	yes	yes
Teach/practice grounding	yes	yes
Educate about disorders & treatment options	yes	
Diagnose comorbid disorders	yes	
Teach/practice self-care	yes	
Develop healthy relationships	yes	
Develop affect tolerance impulse control	yes	yes
Stabilize from current stressors & crises	yes	yes
Teach/practice containment	yes	yes
Teach cooperation with self-states		yes
CBT focus on cognitive distortions		yes
Identify/work with self-states		yes

Brand et al. 2012
doi:10.1037/a0026487

copyright Bethany Brand

15

Fewer suicide attempts and less self-harm	Fewer hospitalizations	Decreased symptoms: depression, PTSD, dissociation, physical pain, general distress, street drug use
Increased engagement in school, volunteer jobs, & relationships	Increased feeling good	Trend: reduced revictimization

TOP DD Naturalistic Study Results

copyright Bethany Brand

16

TOP DD
work together, learn together, heal together

**TOP DD Network Study:
The *Finding Solid Ground* Program**

copyright Bethany Brand

17

Second TOP DD Study: Network Study

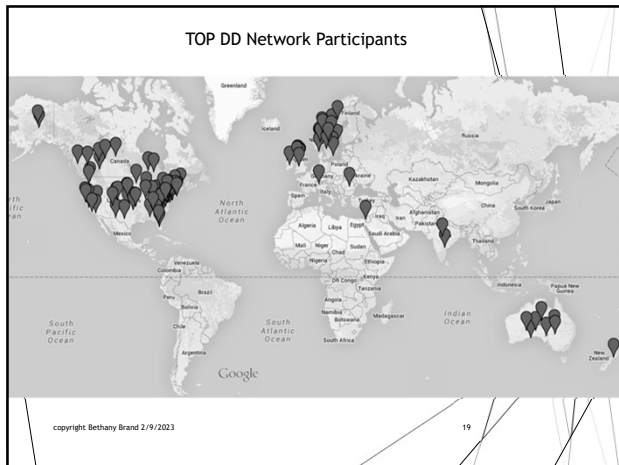
2-year prospective pilot study

N = 111 patients: 1 and/or 2-year data; 71% w/ DID

Both therapists and patients had to participate

copyright Bethany Brand

18



19

Methodology

- Adjunctive educational program
- No patient excluded based on severity of safety problems, co-morbid disorders, medications
- No control group

copyright Bethany Brand

20

Web-based program:
TOP DD Network study
 Free and easily accessible
 for individuals with dissociative people AND therapists:

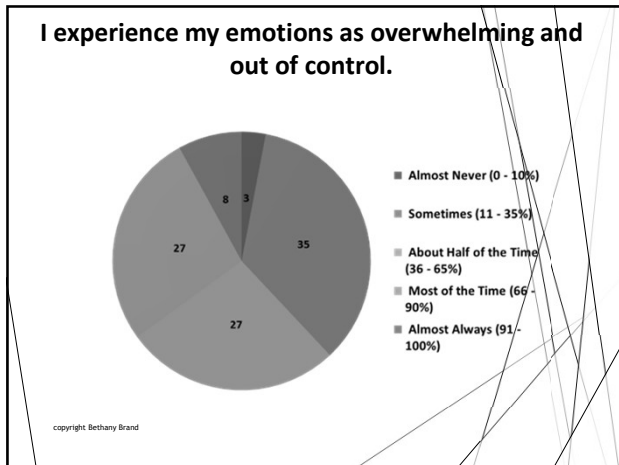
- **Grounding: Improving control over dissociation**
- **Separating past from present**
- **Healthy ways for emotion regulation**
- **Getting healthy needs met safely**

- 45 videos plus written reflection and practice exercises
- 2 years access to program

Development informed by input from expert clinicians, research and input from panel of individuals with lived experience (DID)

copyright Bethany Brand

21



22

TOP DD Network study

Example:

- Video: reasons traumatized people engage in risky or unsafe behavior
- Written: make a list of reasons why you engage in risky, unsafe behavior; make a list of healthier alternatives
- Practice: use healthier coping list

copyright Bethany Brand

23

Does Safety Improve?

Most severe self-harm (last 6 mo):

- Patient harmed 100 times: 0 at Year 2
- Patient harmed 125: 10 at Year 2
- Patient harmed 150: 10 at Year 2

copyright Bethany Brand

TOP DD
work together. learn together.

24

Summary of TOP DD Network Study

Improvements in:

- ▶ PTSD & dissociative symptoms
- ▶ Stabilization of self-harm & improved emotion regulation
- ▶ Use of healthier coping
- ▶ Increased awareness of warning signs, reasons for unsafe behavior, healthy ways to manage impulses & feelings
- ▶ Treatment costs decreased
- ▶ Trend for suicide attempts and hospitalizations to decrease

copyright Bethany Brand

25

Finding Solid Ground Program

Refined through

- Research
- Input from those with lived experience
 - In-person group participant feedback
 - Participants' feedback

copyright Bethany Brand

26

Finding Solid Ground

Overcoming Obstacles in Trauma Treatment

Bethany L. Brand
Hugo J. Schellie
Francesca Schwaninger
Ruth A. Lantieri

OXFORD

copyright Bethany Brand

THE Finding Solid Ground PROGRAM WORKBOOK

Overcoming Obstacles in Trauma Recovery

Hugo J. Schellie
Bethany L. Brand
Ruth A. Lantieri

OXFORD

27

Finding Solid Ground Program

Teaches patients 4 crucial skills:

1. *Grounding*
2. *Separating past from present*
3. *Healthy ways for emotion regulation*
4. *Getting healthy needs met safely*

(Brand et al. 2022; Schielke et al., 2022; Loewenstein, 2006)

copyright Bethany Brand

28

8 Modules - Finding Solid Ground

Grounding

Prevent getting overwhelmed by learning how to help yourself when feeling too much or too little

Separating Past from Present

Noticing when the present is safer than past, being aware of current resources, learning how to contain traumatic intrusions

Additional Foundations

How best to help yourself make progress towards getting and feeling safer

Getting and Feeling Safer, Part 1

Getting healthy needs met safely; learning how to recognize and interrupt patterns that can contribute to risky, unhealthy, or unsafe behavior, or get in the way of getting and feeling safer

copyright Bethany Brand

29

8 Modules - Finding Solid Ground

Addressing Trauma-Based Thoughts

Learning how to shift trauma-based thoughts to healing-focused thinking

Getting and Feeling Safer, Part 2

Learning more ways to help yourself recognize, interrupt, and reduce patterns that can contribute to risky, unhealthy, or unsafe behavior

Improving Your Relationship with Emotions, Body Sensations, Aspects of Self

Sticking with the Process and Building on Progress

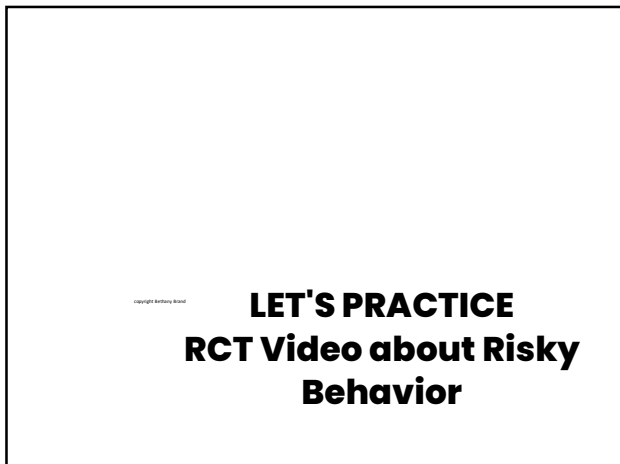
learn together, learn together

30

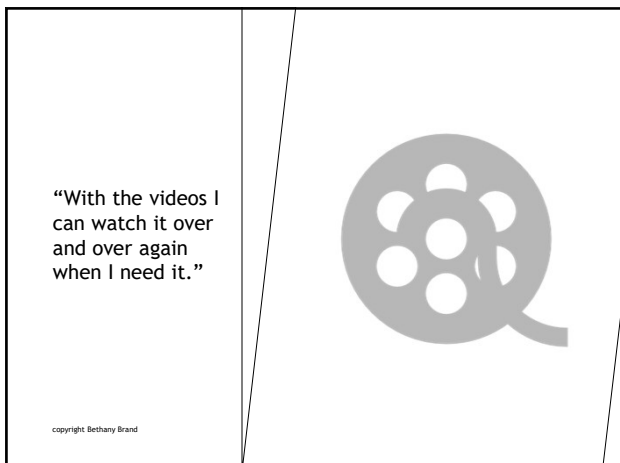
30 Topics (examples) - Finding Solid Ground

Grounding <i>Prevent getting overwhelmed by learning how to help yourself when feeling too much or too little</i>	Grounding: When, How, Why
	Signs of Getting Ungrounded and Healthy Ways to Get Grounded
	101 Healthy Ways to Get Grounded
Separating Past from Present <i>Noticing when the present is safer than past, being aware of current resources, containing traumatic intrusions</i>	Separating Past from Present: When, How, Why
	Using Imagery to Help Separate Past from Present
	Separating Past from Present: Managing 90/10 Reactions
Additional Foundations <i>Learning additional ways to help yourself make progress towards getting and feeling safer</i>	More Healthy Ways to Help Yourself When You're Feeling Too Much
	How to Help Yourself Heal the Impact of Trauma on the Brain
	Managing Crisis-Level Feelings
	The Importance of Self-Compassion in the Healing Process

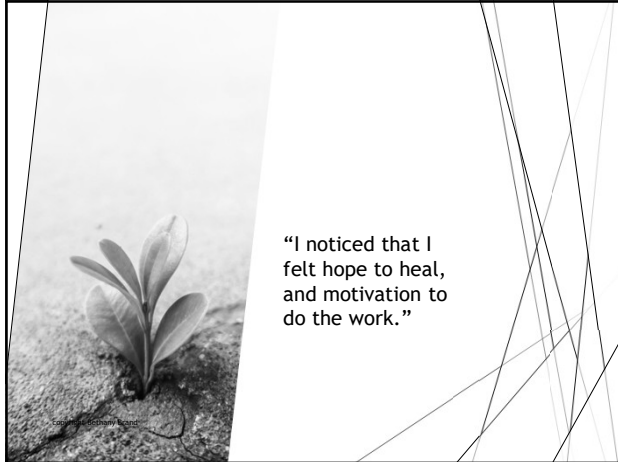
31



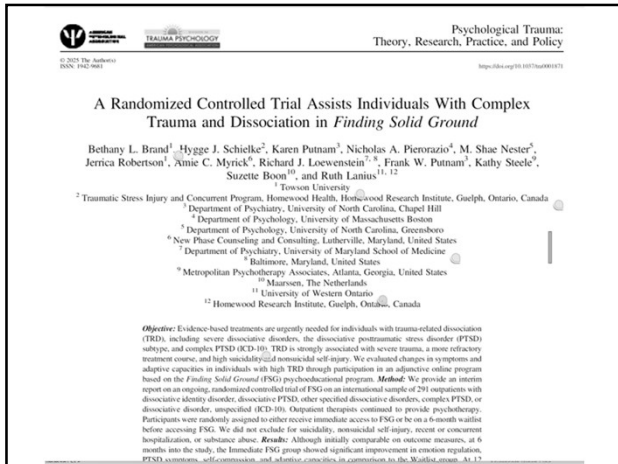
32



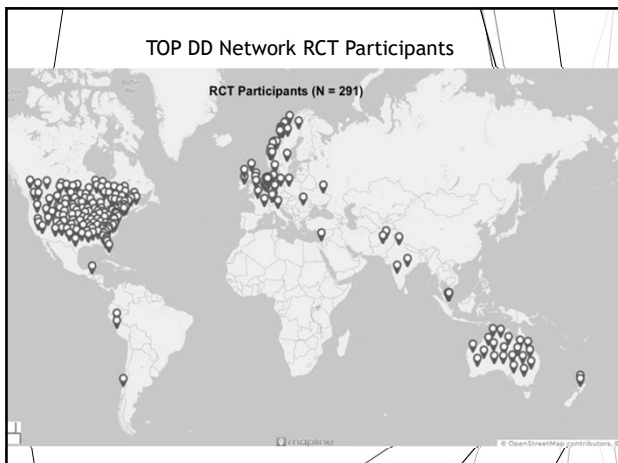
33



34



35



36

Finding Solid Ground (FSG) Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)

- 291 therapists participated with one patient and both reviewed FSG educational materials
- They watched 30 short (10-15 minute) educational videos
- Each video matched with journaling & practice exercises
- Therapist-patient teams had access to FSG for 1 year

copyright Bethany Brand 2020/2023

37

(Brand et al. 2022; Schielke et al. 2022)

37

Design of FSG RCT Study

- Therapist-patient teams went at individualized pace
- Patients had to continue in individual therapy to stay in the study
- Therapist-patient teams randomly assigned to get immediate access to FSG program, or to 6-month waitlist
- Those in the waitlist continued with "treatment as usual" then after 6 months, they also got access to the FSG program

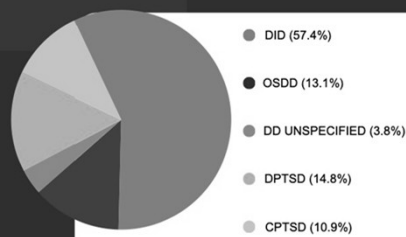
copyright Bethany Brand 2020/2023

38

(Brand et al. 2022; Schielke et al. 2022)

38

CURRENT TOP DD RCT PARTICIPANTS



copyright Bethany Brand

39

Therapist Reported Initial Patient Safety

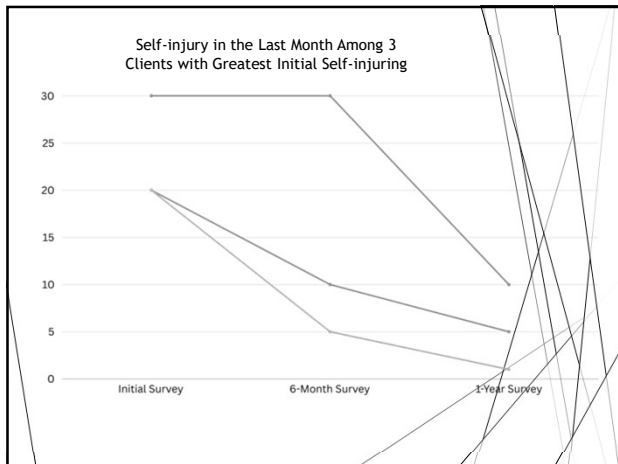
	Any	0	1	2	3 or more
Suicide attempts last 6 months	7.5%	92.6%	3.2%	1.1%	3.2%
Hospitalizations last 6 months	9.6%	90.4%	2.1% <1 week	3.2% Between 1 - 4 weeks	4.3% >4 weeks

copyright Bethany Brand

N = 92 preliminary sample

40

Self-injury in the Last Month Among 3 Clients with Greatest Initial Self-injuring



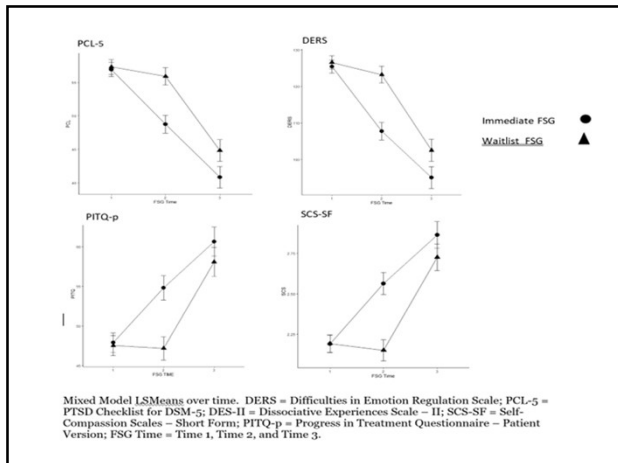
41

Interim RCT Findings

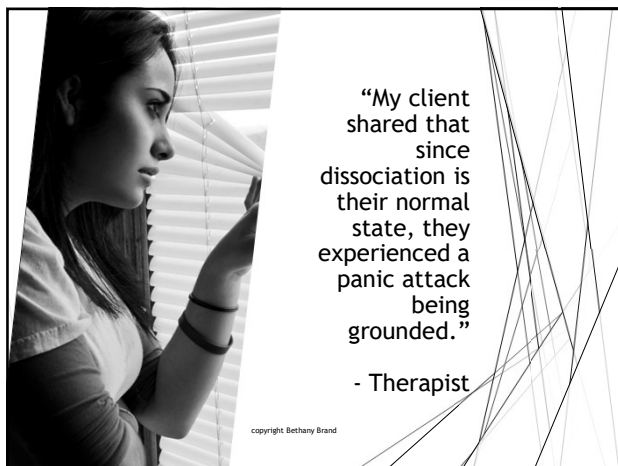
- The Immediate Access to *Finding Solid Ground* group showed
 - decreases in PTSD symptoms
 - increased self-compassion, emotion regulation, and adaptive capacities compared to Waitlist group
- Large effect sizes with 1 year access to the program

copyright Bethany Brand

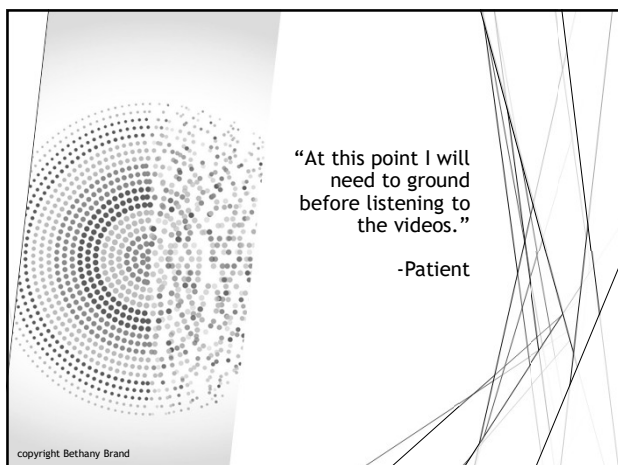
42



43



44



45

What about the FSG program has been helpful, if anything?

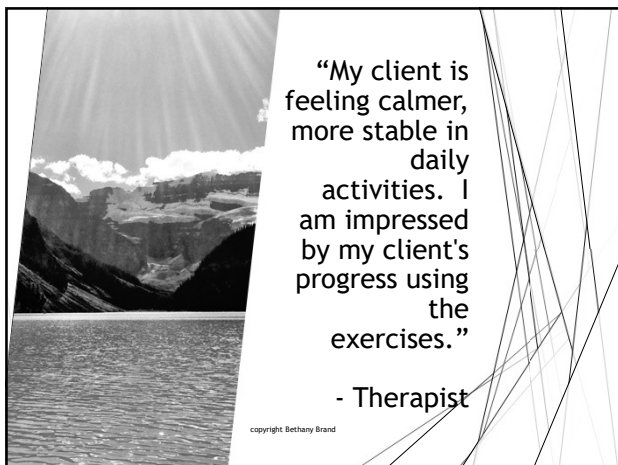
"...I think overall just the really gentle and regular reminders to be compassionate with ourselves along the way and educating us on the very real impacts of living with trauma. It was validating to have so many of my struggles be acknowledged and explained and then taught what could be done about them."

copyright Bethany Brand

46



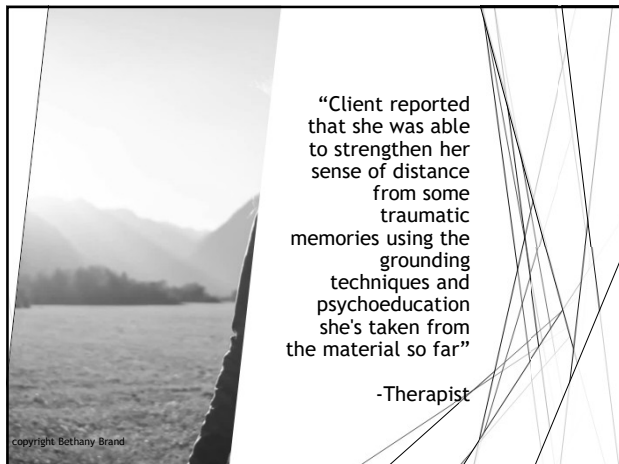
47



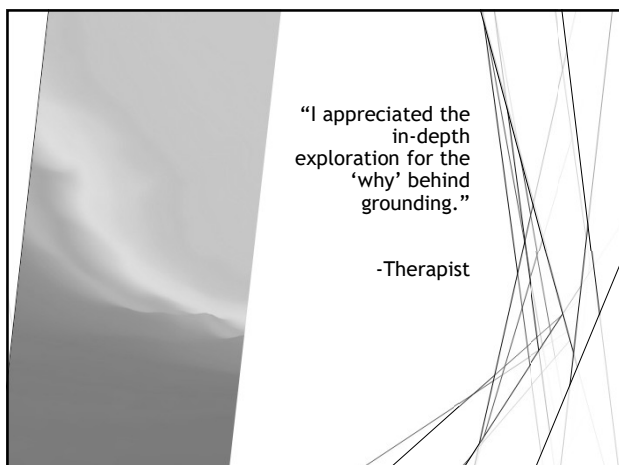
48



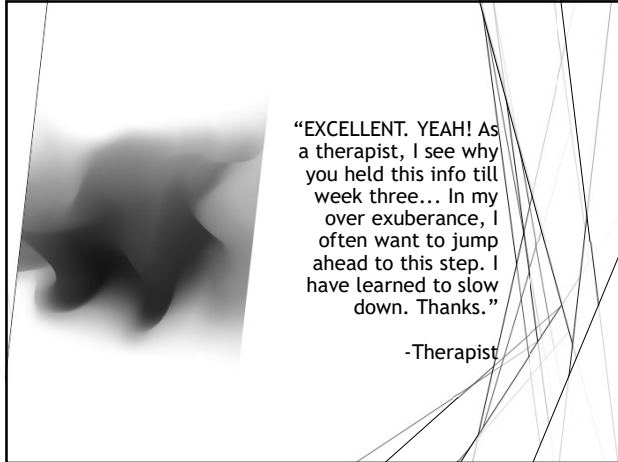
49



50



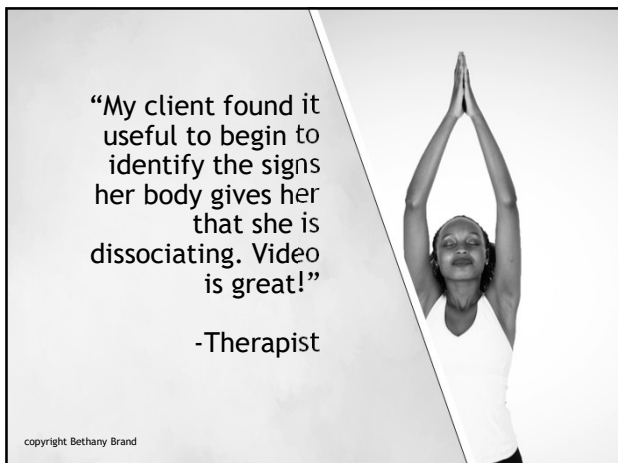
51



52



53



54

Nicolás Rodríguez M.D.'s Testimonial about FSG

EMDR accredited consultant, Past President of the EMDR Chile Association, Faculty at the Trauma and Dissociation Unit of the Department of Psychiatry School of Medicine, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

I have seen remarkable changes since my patient learned *Finding Solid Ground*. She shows much better control and safety. She is much better able to identify when she is dissociating and to know what to do in those moments. There are times when atrocities of the past would come to her fleetingly as sparks. Today she can get out of it quickly, by being able to separate the past from the present. I also observe her being more self-compassionate and better able to tolerate difficult and unpleasant emotions, as well as improving her internal dialogue between her different parts. Without exaggeration, the program saved her life. In a moment of crisis, she remembered Bethany's words (from the videos): "Step by step, you will get there" and just remembering it brought her out of "there and then" and allowed her to activate her crisis plan, also learned in the *Finding Solid Ground* program.

55

Nicolás Rodríguez M.D.'s Testimonial about FSG

EMDR accredited consultant, Past President of the EMDR Chile Association, Faculty at the Trauma and Dissociation Unit of the Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

You have given us a great evidence-based treatment. Sincerely, I think *Finding Solid Ground* will mark a before and after in the treatment of trauma and dissociation. It systematizes therapeutic interventions, allowing the therapist to improve his or her skills and confidence, and to finally help put an end to so much suffering of people who have unjustly experienced trauma.

56



Break

copyright Bethany Brand

57

Places Conducting Studies about Finding Solid Ground



Harvard's McLean Hill Center -
Drs. Kaufman, LeBois & Robison



Purdue University's Dr. Laura
Hawkins



Modum Bad hospital in Norway -
Dr. Ellen Jepsen

copyright: Bethany Brand

58

THE FINDING SOLID GROUND GROUPS PROJECT

Laura Hawkins DNP, PMHNP-BC, NCC
Sarah Chipps, PhD
Kim Foreman, LCSW
Stephanie Johnson, LCSW
Aimee McCann, LCSW

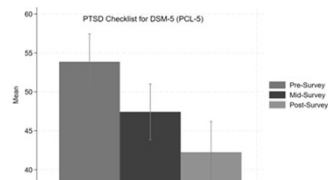


3/19/2025 59

59

PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)

	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre vs. Mid	Pre vs. Post	Mid vs. Post
	mean (SD) or n (%)	mean (SD) or n (%)	mean (SD) or n (%)	Difference	Difference	Difference
PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)	53.86 (12.40)	47.43 (12.41)	42.25 (13.68)	-6.44 <0.001	-11.61 <0.001	-5.18 <0.001

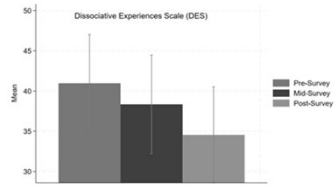


3/19/2025 60

60

Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES2)

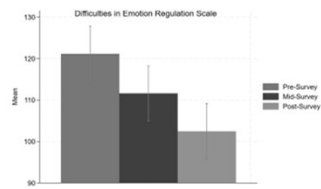
	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre vs. Mid	Pre vs. Post	Mid vs. Post
	mean (SD) or n (%)			Difference	Difference	Difference
Dissociative Experiences Scale	40.96 (21.04)	38.34 (21.23)	34.54 (20.69)	-2.62 0.107	-6.41 0.003	-3.80 0.030



61

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)

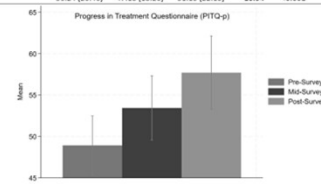
	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre vs. Mid	Pre vs. Post	Mid vs. Post
	mean (SD) or n (%)			Difference	Difference	Difference
Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)	121.13 (23.18)	111.60 (22.96)	102.45 (23.23)	-9.53 <0.001	-18.68 <0.001	-9.15 <0.001



62

Progress in Treatment Questionnaire (PITQp)

	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre vs. Mid	Pre vs. Post	Mid vs. Post
	mean (SD) or n (%)			Difference	Difference	Difference
Progress in Treatment Questionnaire (PITQ-p)	48.92 (12.36)	53.45 (13.49)	57.71 (15.37)	4.53 0.009	8.79 <0.001	4.26 0.005
PITQ-p without parts	50.12 (11.92)	54.79 (12.84)	58.42 (15.23)	4.67 0.006	8.29 <0.001	3.63 0.020
Parts (n=40)	41.60 (21.05)	45.81 (22.06)	53.97 (21.27)	4.21 0.178	12.37 <0.001	8.16 0.002
PITQ-p skills items	36.24 (20.46)	47.18 (18.26)	51.13 (22.13)	10.94 <0.001	14.90 <0.001	3.95 0.111



63

"When I was a little girl, I never learned how to regulate feelings, what the feelings were named. I didn't know how to express or speak because of my neglect at home.

So in my mind I had a color chart for my feelings, and a system that I understood when feelings took over.

So when I was patient (at Modum Bad hospital in Norway where they had FSG groups and art therapy sessions), that was a groundbreaking moment for me! I could suddenly speak the language I understood and knew how to speak!!

After that, I developed and expressed my inner language/feelings on the canvas.

Colors, brushes and canvas saved my soul in a very a special way.

And I am so thankful."

Ida Hellevammen

Ida Hellevammen



64

Finally found a way to
express feelings

- Artist: Ida Hellevammen
- Facebook/Instagram: art_byIda



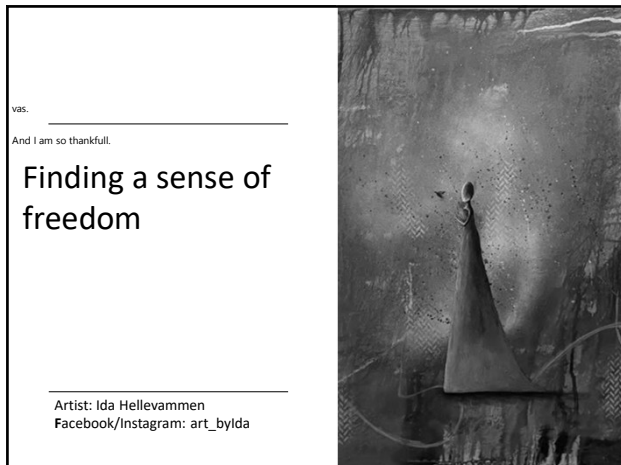
65

Inner
Communication

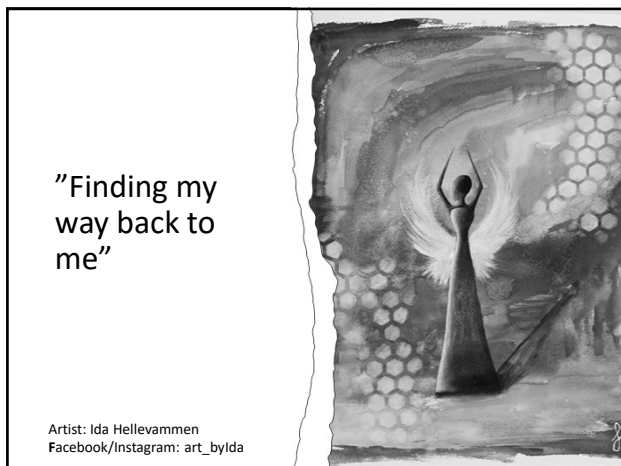
Artist: Ida Hellevammen
Facebook/Instagram: art_byIda



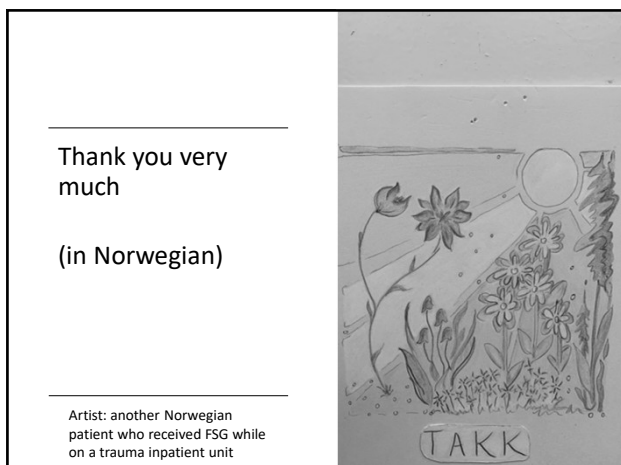
66



67



68



69

What can therapists do to help stabilize patients' safety?

1st: Learn the functions and triggers of self-harm

Nester, M.S., Boi, C., Brand, B.L., & Schielke, H.J. (2022). The Reasons Dissociative Disorder Patients Self-Injure. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*.

Qualitative analysis of data from 156 TOP DD patients answering a question about 3 reasons for self-injury.

copyright Bethany Brand 6/11/2021

70

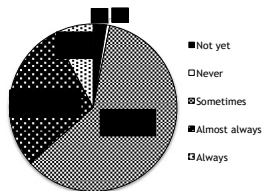
70

Triggers for Self-Harm

Answered questions to assess knowledge about the cycle of self-harm and their triggers

"I know what leads me to have urges to be unsafe" (n = 156)

Awareness of Triggers



TOP DD
work together, learn together

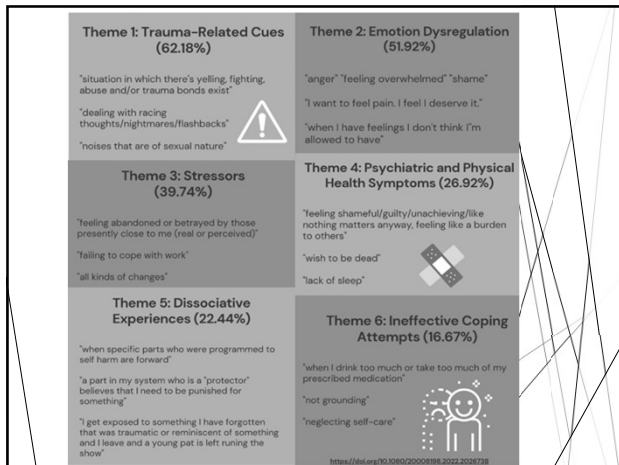
71

HOW GROUNDED ARE YOU?

When looking at things that were most triggered for DD clients, what therapies would you expect to be most helpful?

IF YOU NEED, TAKE A MOMENT FOR A FEW BELLY BREATHS.

72



73

Treatment Implications: Unsafe Behavior

- Work towards building awareness and identification of triggers
- Safety plan
 - Explore triggers
 - Plan for managing triggers of various forms
- Focus on reducing trauma symptoms & improving containment skills
- Enhance repertoire of coping and grounding skills
- Improve emotion regulation capacities


74

FINDING SOLID GROUND

MODULE 1: GROUNDING

copyright Anthony Bond

75




Why doesn't FSG focus immediately on safety or emotions or parts?

• Feedback:

"It is overwhelming to focus on this before they learned more skills for regulation!"

76



GROUNDING

HEALING FOCUSED SKILL


HELPS WHEN FEELING TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE

- overwhelmed by emotions
- numbing or disconnected
- losing track of time in ways that can be scary
- worry about bad things happening again

77

BEING GROUNDED ENHANCES SAFETY

- increases ability to think clearly
- increases awareness of what is happening
- increases awareness of options, choices, and resources available



78

BEING GROUNDED HELPS WITH HEALING

- makes it possible to learn new skills
- makes it possible to learn and use adaptive ways of relating to self and others
- helps with noticing when the present is safer than the past

copyright Anthony Brand



79

**How much of you is here right now?
What do you need so it feels safe
enough to get more of you here right
now?**

copyright Anthony Brand

Oxford University Press, 2022

80

GETTING GROUNDED

Orient

- CURRENT YEAR?
- MONTH?
- DAY?
- WHERE AM I?
- HOW OLD AM I?



copyright Anthony Brand

Anchor

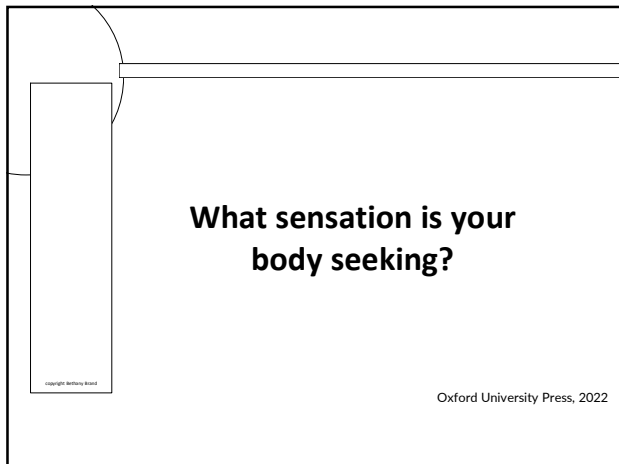
USE EIGHT
SENSES TO
CONNECT TO
THE HERE AND
NOW IN THE
BODY.



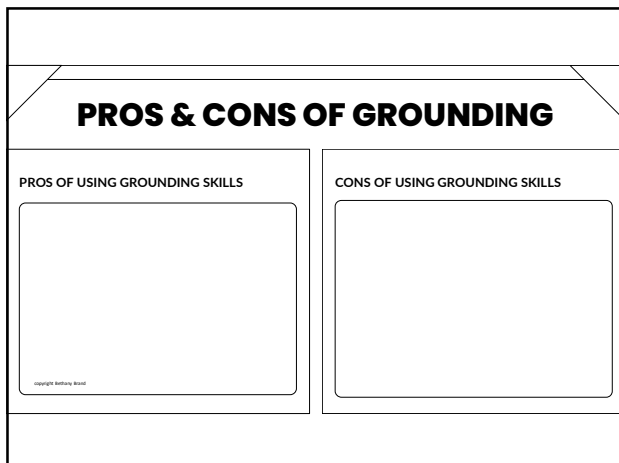
81



82



83



84

GETTING GROUNDED

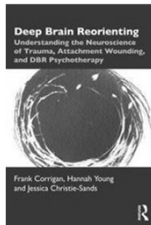
Orienting to "Where Self"

**Frank Corrigan's
Deep Brain Reorienting**

copyright Anthony Brand

85

Deep Brain Reorienting



copyright Anthony Brand

86

**LET'S PRACTICE
Locating Where Self**

copyright Anthony Brand

87

FINDING SOLID GROUND MODULE 2: SEPARATING PAST FROM PRESENT

copyright Anthony Board

88

SEPARATING PAST FROM PRESENT

- Confusion of "here and now" with "then and there"
- Can range from another situation feeling "just like" a traumatic situation to flashbacks

copyright Anthony Board



89

90/10 REACTION

**A VERY
STRONG/INTENSE
REACTION TO A
CURRENT SITUATION
BECAUSE IT TRIGGERS
FEELINGS FROM A PAST
SITUATION.**

copyright Anthony Board

90

Join me on
Instagram:



Join our email list to get our publications and
future trainings:

drbethanybrand@gmail.com

copyright bethany brand

91

See our publications
Make a donation
Get the PITQ questionnaires:

TopDDStudy.com

copyright bethany brand

Thank you!

92
