

Introduction to the Therapeutic Spiral Model

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When working with survivors of trauma, the main objective of every clinician is the creation of a structure that supports safety and containment.

With the practice of action therapy, this objective becomes more crucial. Action therapy, including even what appear to be rather benign techniques, is a powerful tool that can trigger unprocessed material in survivors of trauma, resulting in flashbacks and decompensation.

The Therapeutic Spiral Model was developed by clinical psychologist Kate Hudgins, Ph.D., as an integration of classical psychodrama, object relations and recent advances in trauma theory to provide additional safety and structure when working with trauma. It follows the goal of providing safety and containment at every step for the patient as well as the helping professional.

Aspects of the model can be employed in both individual and group sessions and may be easily adapted by talk therapists. The model identifies safety and containment in five specific areas:

Warming up. Participants first identify personal strengths they bring to the session by the use of props to build positive energy and provide a psychological and visual container for the work that is to follow.

The use of Containing Double and other prescriptive roles. The

Containing Double, a variation of the classical psychodramatic Double, prevents regression and dissociation with patients. Other roles, such as the Keeper-Manager-Holder of Defenses and the Observing Ego, support healthy and conscious functioning as well.

Types of dramas.

Patients are assessed according to the type of drama that will be produced and are not permitted to address core trauma material until clinically appropriate. Types of dramas include Restoration and Renewal, Dreams and Metaphors, Initial Discovery and Accurate Labeling, Exploring and Expressing Core Trauma, Conscious Re-experiencing with Developmental Repair and Letting Go and Transforming.

Controlled step-by-step regression.

Trauma dramas are divided into specific pieces of work that have clear boundaries and contracts for where the action will go. When the contract for a drama touches directly on core material, the director follows the Principles of Conscious Re-experiencing that take the protagonist through a controlled process with six action steps: talk, observe, witness, re-enact, re-experience and repair.

Team approach. An action trauma team consists of at least four people: the director, the assistant leader and at least two trained auxiliaries. Trained



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auxiliaries play roles of perpetrators in core trauma dramas as well as Containing Doubles and other important roles that advance the session. The team meets for warming up and post-processing for planning and support.

Hudgins is the co-editor with Peter Felix Kellermann of "Psychodrama With Trauma: Acting Out Your Pain," published in 2000 by

Jessica Kingsley Publishers. It features a chapter on the model as well as other chapters from 17 psychodramatists from around the world explaining how they have used psychodrama to address trauma of all kinds, including family abuse, political torture, rape, traffic accidents, significant loss and war.

Hudgins' book, "Experiential Therapy for PTSD: The Therapeutic Spiral Model," published in 2002 by Springer Publishing Company, details the typical action interventions of the model.

The model has been adapted for use by diverse clinicians around the world in working with treatment of eating disordered people, sex offenders and addicts and alcoholics in various stages of recovery.

Information about the model, including training schedules as well as papers to print or download, are available at the Web site at www.drkatehudgins.com.