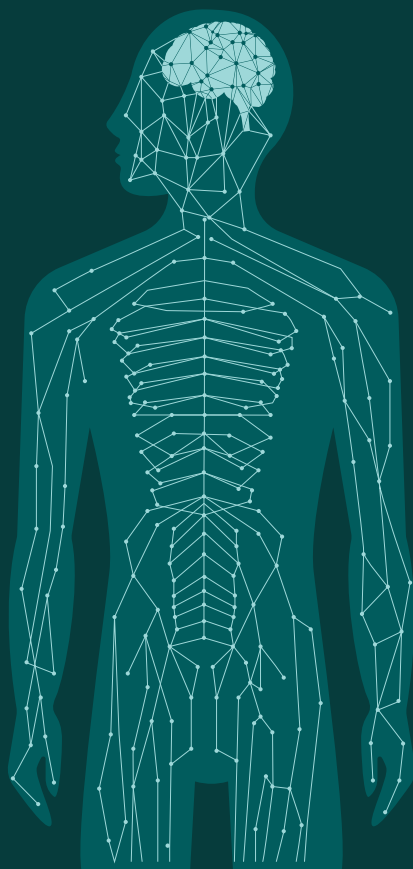


SELF-SUPPORT MANUAL



 **KOLPING**
Україна



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

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**This guidebook will be beneficial
for everyone who was touched
by a war.**

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This guidebook provides the basic theory and principles of trauma work. The presented approach was developed by the Institute of Bodydynamic over the last 40 years and is used in the countries suffering from war hostilities (Balkans, Israel, Palestine, some African countries) and in the countries where the veterans organize communities and actively seek effective strategies for psychological recovery (Denmark, USA).

The Bodydynamic method (body-oriented psychotherapy) has been widely used in the Ukrainian veterans' community since 2015. The method's effectiveness is supported by the ongoing empirical research.

You will learn what self-regulation skills are, and receive step-by-step instructions on how to use them. These exercises and techniques are tested and effective for people who have suffered psychological trauma.

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INTRODUCTION

The process of returning to civilian life might begin with the decision to end the service or to go home – in case of a volunteer battalion. However, while the body returns home, our mind might take a long time to integrate the experiences of war and to learn how to live at peace with ourselves and people around us. This process is often complex and manifests itself as insomnia, impulsiveness, excessive aggression, loss of interest in the profession (or other familiar activities) that the person engaged in before the war, depression, and lack of enjoyment in life.

Exercises and techniques described in this guidebook are intended to serve as the instruments to solve these problems.

The guidebook is written by the veterans for the veterans, and everyone touched by the war.



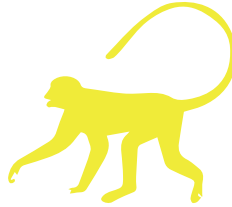
WHAT IS SELF-REGULATION AND WHY DOES IT WORK?

We describe self-regulation as the ability to manage one's psycho-emotional state through thoughts, images, body, and breath. Restoring inner balance is impossible without understanding what is going on in your head and your body. One of the models for explaining mental processes is the Triune brain theory (Paul McLean, 1968).

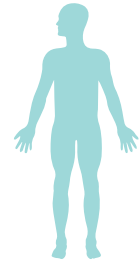
According to this theory, the brain is divided into three parts by structure and function:



Reptile Brain
(brain stem)



Monkey Brain
(emotional brain, limbic system)



Human Brain
(cortex of the large hemispheres)

- **Reptile Brain** - Designed to Survive (Instincts)
- **Monkey Brain (Emotional Brain)** - designed to interact with other members of society / tribe or pack
- **The human brain** is actually what we think about ourselves, analyze, dream, plan and more.



According to this theory, self-regulation can happen at any level. “Reptile” regulation simply requires one set of instruments and emotional regulation needs another set.

This theory is useful for describing human conditions during military service and participation in direct combat (even though it does not cover the full complexity of the processes occurring in the human psyche and nervous system).

The problem is that our Human Brain and emotions (Monkey Brain) step back during survival. We use our Reptile Brain to make decisions optimal for survival, but in civilian life these strategies often do not work, moreover, they become harmful for our relationship with others.

After the period of survival when we are guided by the Reptilian Brain, instincts are over (may it be combat or natural disaster), emotions come back, however our ability to deal with them diminishes.

At the same time the emotions – the ability to distinguish, to accept, and to express them – that are often the key to successful self-regulation – reconciliation with oneself and with the loved ones.



EMOTIONS



To better understand your own emotional experience and the experience of others, we suggest dividing emotional states into 3 levels according to depth, degree of self-control, ability to be in contact with other people, and ability to be responsible for one's actions.

The deepest level is the Instincts (Reptile Brain), the middle one is the Emotions (Monkey Brain), and finally the Feelings (Human Brain). The Instincts (i.e., horror, rage) is the level that is often activated in response to a threat to life or dignity. It can also be a manifestation of PTSD.

To cope with the level of Instincts it is important to experience Emotions in a successful and timely way without getting stuck in them (the ability "to contain" emotions). Just like a big fire can be stopped by a small fire, the appearance of panic attacks can be stopped by the ability to experience fear and not to avoid it.

To experience Emotions we use several principles:

- 1 we do not divide emotions into positive or negative, because it narrows the spectrum of the allowed experiences and may lead to the avoidance of the unpleasant (or as we call them "bad") emotional state. For example, shame can be a very unpleasant emotion but without it is impossible to correct mistakes and to take responsibility for the things we have done);
- 2 we recognize that each emotion has its benefit and function (for example, anger helps to defend boundaries and values, sadness helps to let go of the past, joy – to be filled with energy). We need joy as well as sadness and fear to live life to the fullest!
- 3 we use certain exercises to prevent transition of Emotions into Instincts;
- 4 we communicate with the others (see The Bodyknot);
- 5 we learn to identify our own emotions and use "I statements". For example, "I am angry because..." not "you make me angry... stop getting on my nerves..."
- 6 we combine the name of the emotion and the body sensations that accompany it – "I am sad, and it makes my chest tighten..." , "I am scared and my legs tremble". " This helps to understand how the experiences of emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, joy, etc., affect the body sensations and the physical state of the body, pain, heaviness, fatigue, absence/presence of energy.

LEVELS OF EMOTIONS IN BODYDYNAMIC



| INSTINCTS (Reptile Brain) | EMOTIONS (Monkey Brain) | FEELINGS / MOOD (Human Brain) |
|---|---|--|
| Similar to those in reptiles | Similar to those in mammals | Typical human experience |
| State of life/ death | Rhythms, communication, interaction management. Essential for the pack survival | Mixture of emotions, instincts, fantasies, stories |
| Uncontrolled, acting out, not easily, almost not corrected verbally | Controlled, the ability to contain and to be in contact is preserved | Controlled, reflect prolonged emotional states and concepts |
| RAGE (Primitive use of strength (SNS)) | Anger | Irritation, frustration, jealousy, bad mood, happiness, love, contempt, hatred, guilt, shyness, embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, admiration, dislike |
| HORROR Panic fear (SNS) | Fear | |
| GRIEF Sorrow, mourning (SNS) | Sadness | |
| EUPHORIA Pleasure (PNS) | Joy | |
| MATING reproduction (PNS) | Sexuality | |
| VOMITING REFLEX (SNS) | Disgust | |
| | Shame (White or red) | |

*SNS/PNS - sympathetic and parasympathetic parts of the autonomic nervous system

THE BODYKNOT COMMUNICATION MODEL

When communication is constructive and smooth, we rarely think about how complex the process is. In the case of good communication, unexpressed directly or insufficiently formulated ideas and emotions do not particularly affect the contact. is.

But when something “went wrong” during the interaction and, as we might call it, the communication left a bad aftertaste”, it is a good idea to consider the communication process in more detail. For instance, veterans often complain about the lack of understanding from the civilians. Conversely, social workers, relatives or friends emphasize the veteran’s explosiveness and lack of ability to calmly explain her or his opinion, request, or state.

To research what caused “the wrong way” in communication, to find the initial point of misunderstanding, and what went missing, etc. we can use the BodyKnot* communication model developed by the Bodydynamic Institute.

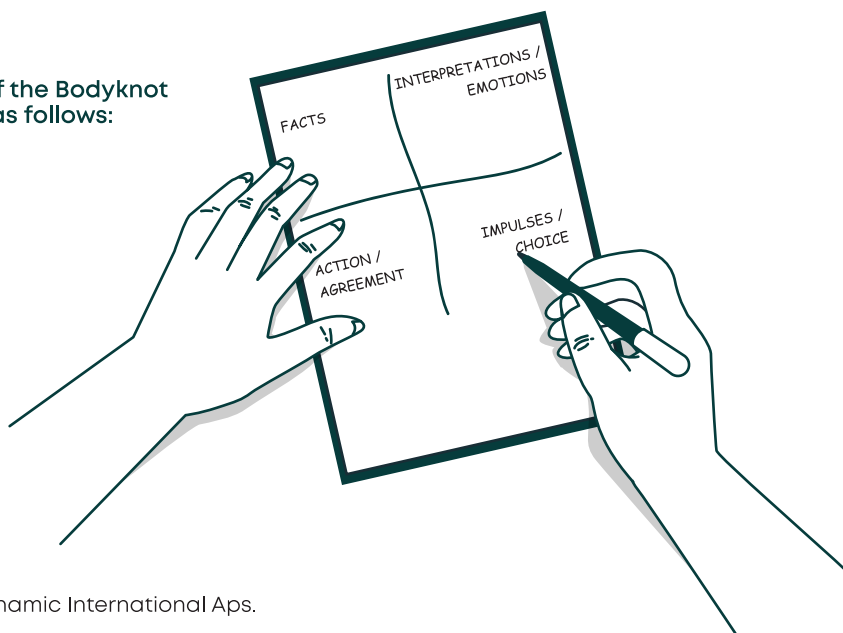
It is used as a coordinate system that helps work out different communication problems.



The model describes 9 elements that constitute communication processes.

| | | |
|---|---------------------|---|
| 1 | At this moment I... | Context, present mood, previous history of communication, current state |
| 2 | I see, I hear... | Facts, outer sensations (5 sense organs) |
| 3 | I think it means... | Interpretation and phantasy |
| 4 | I sense... | Sensations in the body |
| 5 | I feel... | Emotions and feelings |
| 6 | I would like... | Impulse to act |
| 7 | If... then... | Analysis of different actions and consequences |
| 8 | I choose... | Choice / yes or no |
| 9 | I say, I do... | Action or statement based on the choice made |

In brief the Bodyknot looks as follows:



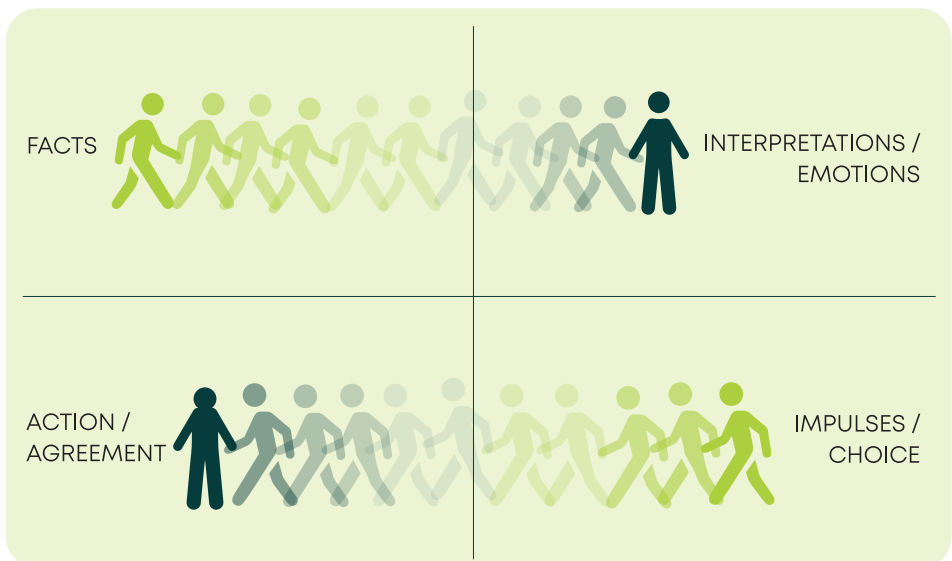
HOW DO WE PRACTICE THIS MODEL?

We draw this square on a big piece of paper (or on the floor with the chalk), place it on the floor, and describe the situation stepping to the appropriate squares.

The opponent uses the same template. The Bodyknot can help us to figure out what happened and why, and effectively communicate it to our opponent. Our experience shows that a lot of important information is present in the elements that we do not use often – feelings, emotions, impulses.

The moment of separation of the Facts from Interpretations is also very revealing and usually decreases the tension between people.

*Note: *The name is derived from the expression “to untie the knots”, meaning to solve the problems, resolve difficulties.



PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-REGULATION SKILLS

The fundamental Bodydynamic philosophy is that we have a unique balance between our Dignity and Connection with others. This balance contributes to the complete human development – physical, emotional, and spiritual. It can be broken by difficult life events. Since the balance involves all aspects of human development, self-regulation is most effective when it combines both the body and the mind.

All bodydynamic exercises described below should be started by doing the Body scan. This exercise helps us develop the ability to be more aware, more in contact with our body and to sense it better. It also helps to work with pain, increases the sense of physical enjoyment, helps to relax and even to fall asleep. To make the process more effective we write down our observations in the Body Book (the notebook in free format where you can make notes about the exercises and the reactions that occurred).



Duration -
1-2 minutes

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL

Body Scan



- Starting point – sitting on a sofa or a chair
- Note what happens in your body when you slow down and carefully listen to yourself
- Breath and observe
- Pay attention to ALL sensations not just the painful ones
- Write down your observations



Duration -
5-7 minutes

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL

Grounding

(the ability to be present)



EXERCISE "FEET"

- Starting point – sitting on a sofa or a chair
- Vigorously knead, rub, and slap the sole of the left foot with both hands
- Stand up, sense the difference, and describe it
- Do the same with the right foot
- Write down your sensations



Duration -
2-3 minutes

EXERCISE

"Feet and knees"



- Starting point – standing or sitting
- Grab the ground with your toes
- Stamp your feet
- Make springing movement with your knees



Duration -
3-4 minutes

EXERCISE

"Spine"



- Starting point - standing
- Lean forward very slowly, vertebra by vertebra
- Once you completely lean forward exhale, relax your head, neck, shoulders, and arms
- Smoothly return to the initial position
- You can count vertebrae aloud or in your mind while doing the exercise

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL

Boundaries



EXERCISE "THIS IS MY SPACE!"

- Starting point - standing
- Imagine a person or a situation that limits/irritates/affects you
- Activate the front part of the deltoid by bringing the arms forward and say aloud "THIS!"
- Bring elbows to the sides as if you are making your way in a crowd – "IS!"
- Drop the "load" from the shoulders - "MY SPACE!"
- You can repeat it 2-3 times
- Write down your sensations

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL

Centering



EXERCISE "CROSSOVER"

(a fast way to recover from a panic attack)

- Starting point – Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, bend your arms at the elbows
- Do the crossover movements touching an elbow to the opposite knee
- Make a sound or at least exhale loudly when you touch your knee with an elbow
- 5-10 times
- Write down your sensations

EXERCISE

"Rotators"



- Starting point – Stand with your feet shoulder width apart
- Rotate freely around the axis of the spine, hands move freely
- Gradually reduce the amplitude by 50%, 50% more, 50% more
- Perform the micromovements of the spine
- Choose an object and focus on it, while doing the micromovements of the spine
- Write down your sensations

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL

Energy management

(includes emotions)



EXERCISE “BREATHING”

- Observe your breathing
- Place a hand on your chest or abdomen
- 3 inhales/exhales with your chest (upper breathing)
- 3 inhales/exhales with your abdomen (lower breathing)
- Place hands on the ribcage
- Make 3 inhales/exhales while sensing how your ribcage expands to the sides into your hands
- Breathe slowly and deeply as much as you can
- Write down your sensations

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL

Self-support



EXERCISE “GOD’S HANDS”

- Starting point – standing or sitting
- Imaging a big ball behind your back
- Make spring like movements like you try to squeeze the ball several times (m.latissimus dorsi)
- Look at the palms of your hands and imaging that they are filled with support from the people important to you or from spiritual beings (loved ones, friends, angels, God)
- Place your hands onto the kidneys area (m.quadratus lumborum)
- Try to lean into your own palms and imaging that the support energy flows into your body
- Write down your sensations

Small joys

Remember what activities over the past few months brought you joy, write it down and focus on it. The activities should not be related to alcohol or use of any drug substances.

Think about the activities or hobbies that used to bring joy or that you still enjoy currently.

The aim of the exercise is to make a recipe for small joys and to start implementing them into your daily life.

Example:

- The walk in the park gives me joy.
- I like to get up early and to go outside when there are still no people out on the street.
- I enjoy kayaking and paddling.
- I enjoy table games.
- I love to swim.
- Good movies in good company.
- Spending time with pets (a dog, or any domestic animals...)
- I like to sketch, to read, to work with clay, to carve wood, etc.

When I walk to work, I go through the park or by the lake if I can and leave the house a bit earlier, so that the streets are empty.

I became a member of the kayaking club and attend morning or evening training several times a week.

I am only able to go swimming once a week but it's a good start.

We agreed to go to the movies with my friends or I found a movie club where we can watch movies and discuss them afterwards.

It may seem that all of this is obvious and clear. However, the absence of regular “small joys” that help us recharge and fulfil our need in communication makes our life bleak and sometimes hard to bear.

Safe people

The idea is to build formal agreements with people who can help us in some important life areas or support us in different situations.

Example:

FINANCIAL SAFETY

I have a good friend who stands firmly on his feet in a financial sense. I asked him if he would be my safe person in case of financial issues. He agreed. We discussed the specific limits of loans that I can borrow from him if the need arises.

SAFE DOCTOR

I know a very good surgeon and I made an agreement with him that I can ask for his consultations and services or for recommendations regarding other medical specialists.

SAFE PERSON TO WALK MY DOG:

It is very important for me to travel, but I often can not take my dog with me, and I live alone. I agreed with a friend who has a house outside the city that I can take my pet there if necessary. It allows me to gain new perspectives while travelling and to be mobile.

The point is to take care of the key life areas by making agreements with people who can help or provide support if the need arises. This increases the feeling of personal safety. The anxiety level decreases and our ability to trust people grows without feeling guilty or uncomfortable when asking for help.

Assignment :



Write down the list of key areas where you need to have safe people.



Identify the people in your life who might become safe people or who already play this role informally.



Call them and have a talk about what you need. Ask if they would agree to be safe people for you. (formalize agreement).

Safe places

Everyone has a place where they feel safe like in their own “cave” or especially calm and cozy.

Some of these places can be from the past or no longer accessible to you. Some could be accessible now. Think about such places.

Did you remember anything? Write down a short list of such places.

Identify the places that you can realistically reach if you need. For example, the place could be abroad, but you should understand a way to get there if you have a very bad day and you want to escape somewhere to get through it.

Example:

I have a friend in Greece whose house I consider to be a safe place. We discussed that I could visit her if I need a place to recharge. However, during the pandemic I cannot go there, so the place is not accessible at this time.

So, I am looking for a new place. My parents' country house where I was born is on the list. I made an agreement with them that I can go there (the principle of formal agreements like in the case of safe people). Even though it goes without saying that I can go there I still discuss it with them.

I also have a special hiking route in the mountains in Turkey. However, I can only go there once a year. I am in the process of looking for similar routes in the Carpathians that can serve as “a place to hide”. At the same time, I have the necessary equipment and all-season tent so that I can go to the mountains during any season (this makes it a realistic plan).

PEAK EXPERIENCE

Peak experience can be described as a sum of extraordinary positive experiences that are not connected to a life-threatening situation. The specifics of such experiences differ from person to person, but they all share similar characteristics.

Recall and write down the events when you experienced the following:

- being in a flow, being immersed in the activity
- something that left extremely clear memory even after years have passed
- altered perception of time
- “dissolving into the space” – it’s like I was inseparable from the world around me
- feeling of euphoria, great joy without the help from any mind-altering substances
- being one with God/Universe/Higher Power as you perceive it
- a sense of greater faith and meaning of life
- usually, we do not discuss such memories with others because they are deep and personal, and we do not want to be hurt by someone’s bad comments (the qualities of depth and vulnerability)

Every one of us has a unique experience like this, and the circumstances could be very different for different people.

Example:

I hiked in the mountains along the seaside with a very heavy backpack. I found a very beautiful spot and stopped to rest there. I took my backpack off, sat on a stone and suddenly felt like I was dissolving into this place. The sounds became very distinct and clear, the colors bright, my breathing slowed down, I was completely still.

I listened to the sound of the wind gust, the rustling of the tree branches, I felt warmth radiating from the rocks, the scent of pine tar. I don’t know how long it lasted but it seemed like an eternity...

Making a recipe:

The task is not just to recollect these events but to identify the elements and to start using them in daily life.

There are the following elements
in the above example:



Physical exercise



Mountains



Sea



Sunny weather



Warmth



Beautiful views



Pine forest

What can I use in my daily life?

I can choose a route to work that goes through the park or a forest, maybe with some hills on the way. I can plan my vacation in the areas with lakes or rivers, open spaces, and pine forest.

I purposely place myself in the settings that give me resources. I look for the routes and places that can help me relieve the peak experience at least to some extent around the place I live.



CLOSING REMARKS

This is probably the most difficult part of the guidebook to write since it does not describe specific instructions but rather talks about our values, wishes and aspirations. Our project “The Fundamentals of Individual and Group Bodydynamic Trauma Work” would be impossible without the support from Hadi and Ditte Marcher and the Bodydynamic Institute. Our team is grateful for the opportunity to use the knowledge and techniques that the Institute accumulated over the years, especially the training program adopted to the veteran’s community. Since the first training for veterans led by Ditte Marcher and Ukrainian assistants in 2015 thousands of people acquired new knowledge and skills that help them not just to feel better but to also to take part in building a democratic society.

We hope that the training in Chernivtsi will serve as the next step in building a common safe space for all of us.

We hope that the new knowledge and skills will bring about positive changes in the professional and personal life of all the participants and the people who will ask for help in the future. And we will support you in your initiatives!

Useful links:)





