



## Practical Ways to Address Trauma

Carolyn Braddock, MA

**Trauma expert Carolyn Braddock offers tools for responding to trauma in children, in the absence of mental health support.**

*Be patient.* It often it takes several weeks to move beyond an acute reaction to a traumatic event. By using the power of breath, sound and movement, it is possible to unlock feelings that may be frozen in the body. The following exercises are effective in facilitating recovery from trauma with all ages - particularly children.

*Be present.* Breathe, make sounds, and move with children. Participate with, follow, and be *with* them. Use creative arts, music, and movement to help them be present. Much may be said *nonverbally*, in what I call "body voices". These are the distinctive patterns in the way a person breathes, moves, or makes sound. Children may hold their breath, or breathe shallowly, when remembering a traumatic event. A smell or sound can also trigger memories of trauma. The same may be true for eye contact. Eye contact can produce fear and hyper vigilance for those who have experienced trauma. Are you and the child making eye contact? Playing some drums while making eye contact allows for simultaneous expression of feelings – especially strong emotions – and practice with eye contact. See the following YouTube video in which some of these exercises are demonstrated with at risk children at Chi Chi Rodriguez's Youth Academy, where the golf course is used as a living classroom.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0C0cXGQKdk8>

### *Breathe*

Breath and emotions are connected. Slow and easy breathing may suggest calm, fast and shallow breathing may indicate fear, extreme stress, or the triggering of a traumatic response. Constriction of the throat, chest, or abdomen not only cuts off our breath but also blocks our connection to and expression of emotions. Instead, feel the rhythmic expanding and contracting of the breath. In nature you can see and feel expansion and contraction. Birds in flight are a great example.

Practice breathing with children. Try circular breathing. Have children draw a circle with their hands or a magic marker as they breathe. Breath *in* through the nose and *out* through the mouth. Connect the *in* breath with the *out* breath. If light headed, slow down and breathe slowly through the nose only. Notice the rhythm of the breath. Play along with the rhythm of the breath by lightly drumming on the body or on a table, or by using other props.

Practice holding the breath and releasing it. Have children take a *big* deep breath and hold it for a few seconds. When ready, have them exhale fully. You might play with letting the breath have some sound upon exhalation. This method helpful in times of anxiety or mind "racing", or when the simpler technique above is not effective. Alternatively, squeeze or wring a towel while holding your breath and tightening your body. Then *release* the breath *slowly* all the way out as you *release* the towel. This is a great one for expressing intense emotions. Children *and* adults can use this whenever tension builds.

### *Get Moving with Sound*

Play with using sounds or singing what might want to be said or what is being felt. You might even sing a question and invite children to sing a response. What are some favorite songs that might express feelings? Make one up together. These are simple ways to regain one's voice through sound.

Shake out tension with plastic egg shakers or beans in a plastic container. Children can use these to release whole body tension. Keep shaking until they appear to relax. I use this in almost all of my workshops, as a tool for managing high anxiety.

### *Get Moving*

Walk. Talk with children about what you notice. Colors, sounds, things in nature. This will help them feel more empowered, grounded, and balanced. If something startles them as you walk, practice a breath technique, shake the body, or use sound to regain equilibrium. This is a good way to practice the exercises above.

Play some music and invite children to join you in moving whatever way their bodies want to move. This choice gives them a sense of control and helps them to know that they can move out of a stuck "trauma" place that may keep them still or frozen in fear or terror.

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**Carolyn Braddock, MA** specializes in innovative mind/body approaches to managing stress and patterns resulting from traumatic events. The Braddock Body Process® that she developed is a body-centered approach based in Tai Ji and Qi Gong movement and philosophy, whereby individuals learn to identify and respond to signals of stress and manifestations of trauma in their distinctive patterns of breath, movement and sound. Carolyn received intensive training in family therapy at the Colorado Institute for Marriage and Family Therapy and studied extensively with renowned pioneer psychiatrist Carl Whitaker in the field of family therapy. She founded the Institute on Child Abuse and Neglect in 1981 through the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver and The Professional Psychology Department at the University of Northern Colorado. To learn more, visit [www.braddock-body-process.com](http://www.braddock-body-process.com)

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