



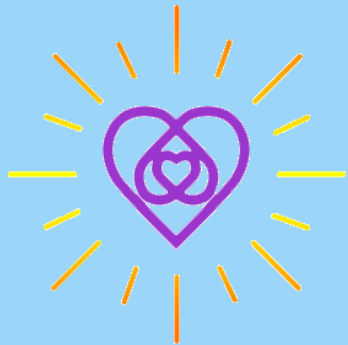
*Di Frost*

**Creative Heart Healing**

Healing for Survivors of Childhood Trauma

# Using the Internal Nurturing Parent and Creative Writing as a Therapeutic Intervention for Healing

# Introduction



*Di Frost*

**Creative Heart Healing**

Healing for Survivors of Childhood Trauma

- Trauma Workshops
- Creative Heart Healing Retreats
- Private Practice Kempsey, NSW
- Not For Profit – Centre for adult trauma healing near Newcastle
- **Life Healing Foundation**

# Outline – Science Informed Practice

1. Phases of trauma treatment
2. Neuroscience of creativity and healing
3. Using writing to heal trauma – research
4. Healing requires supportive relationships
5. Inner child and nurturing parent ego states
6. The Life Healing Process



# 1. Phases of Trauma Treatment

1. Safety and stabilisation
2. Processing (Remembrance and Mourning)
3. Integration

(Judith Herman, Courtois & Ford, 2009)

**Trauma cannot begin to be processed,  
much less `confronted' in the absence  
of ability to tolerate affect**

# Phase 2

- Processing the trauma
  - Reconstructing the trauma story (remembrance)
  - Grieving for multiple losses (mourning)
    - (childhood, sense of self, trust, parental love, innocence, etc)
  - Processing emotions/ caring for emotions
  - Release of trauma emotions and body sensations
  - Re-empowerment



# Phase 3

- Integration
  - Acceptance of past
  - Making sense of the story
  - Integrate trauma story into life
  - Integrate right and left hemispheres of brain
  - Looking to the future
  - Turning tragedy into purpose. (Eg. Bravehearts, Dolly's Dream Foundation)
  - Connecting with community

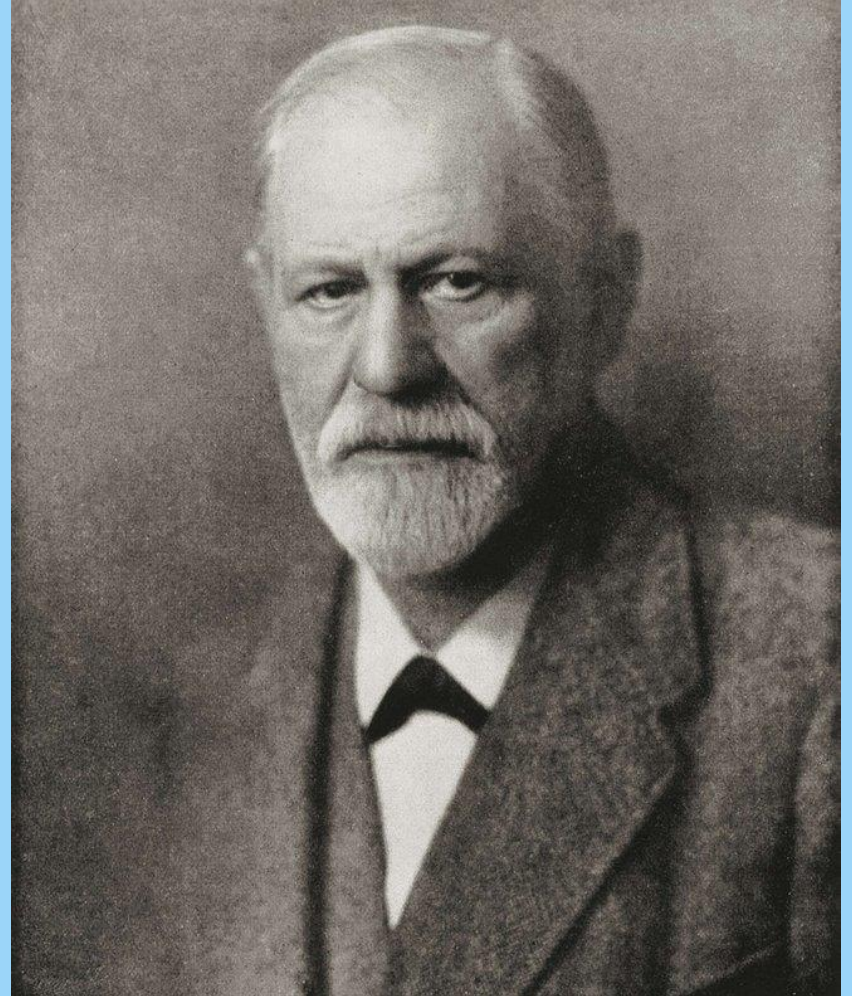


# Need to Process Trauma

- Inhibiting trauma thoughts/ memories/ feelings stressful on body (Levine, Siegel, Porges)
  - Increased heart rate, stress hormones, cortisol
- Also disrupts thinking, unable to integrate or organise cognitions
  - Thought disturbances, memory problems
- Often surfaces as anxiety, ruminations, disturbing dreams, triggers (Pennebaker, 2010)

# Need to Process Trauma

- Catharsis (Freud) – venting and *reflecting*
  - Venting not enough
  - Need to understand emotional reactions
  - Make sense of experience





# The Heart Healing Process

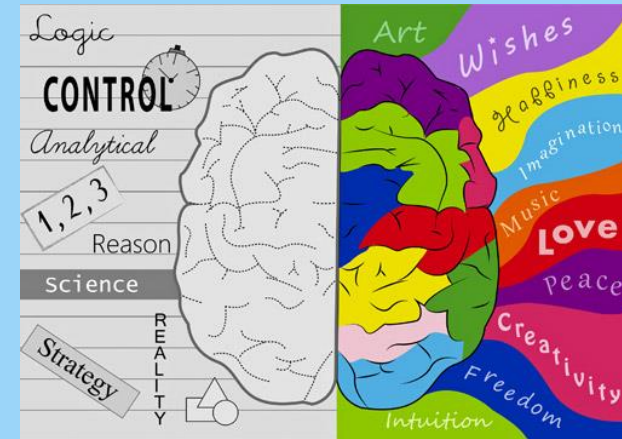
*A Science Informed Process*



1. Connect with inner nurturing parent using right brain
2. Connect to inner child, listen to their trauma story
3. Care for feelings using art/ writing
4. Reparent inner child
5. Empower the inner child

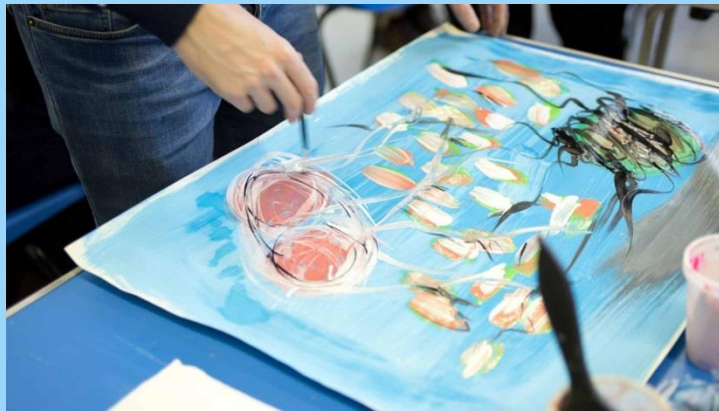
## 2. Neuroscience of Creativity and Healing

- Trauma memories and emotions are stored in the right brain
- Art, drawing, craft, music, dance, creative pursuits come from right brain
- Use right brain to access and heal trauma memories and emotions
- Build and strengthen brain wiring from amygdala to frontal lobes for better emotional regulation



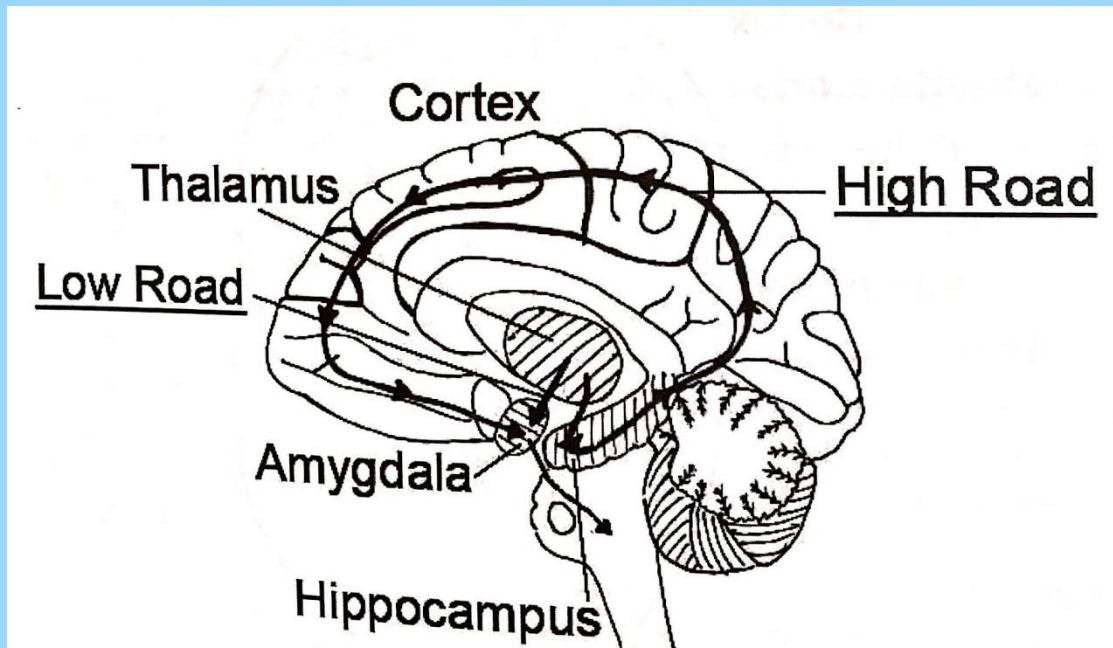
# Neuroscience of Creativity and Healing

- For clients unable to express difficult emotions verbally – can use art/ writing, even if in high arousal (Hull, 2002)
- Slows process of expressing trauma down to manageable speed – less likely to overwhelm
  - Making decisions on how to write, draw or paint the trauma keeps brain wiring connections to frontal lobes working (Le Doux, 2002)



# Neuroscience of Creativity and Healing

- Childhood neglect associated with significant thalamic inactivation (thalamus=relay station)
  - ‘high road’ to self-reg (Lanius et al., 2005)
- Brain more likely to take low road to activation
  - Sensory activity of writing, drawing, art stimulates thalamic connections (Cozolino, 2002)

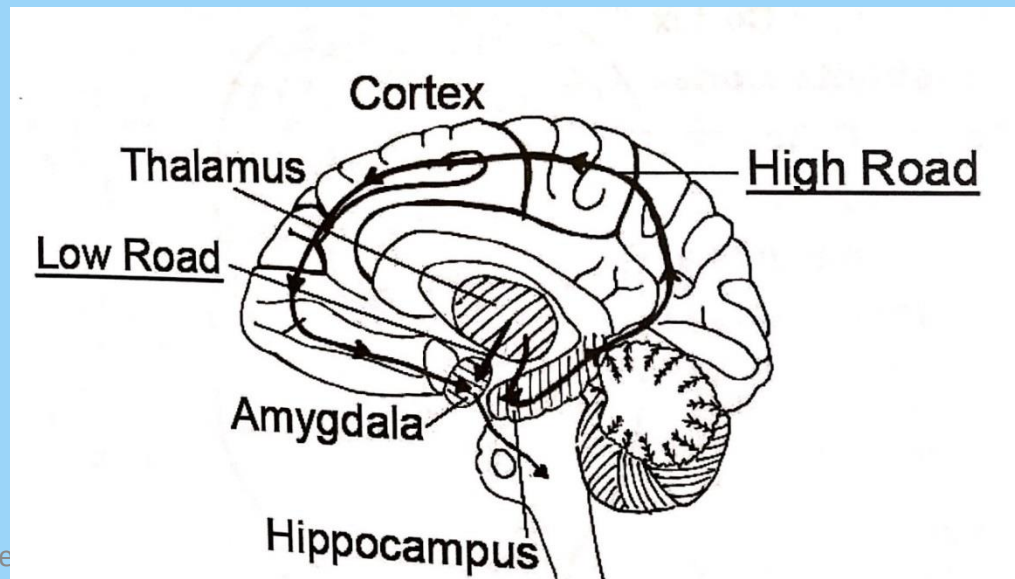


# Neuroscience of Creativity and Healing

- Visual task of writing & making art interrupts emotional overwhelm – brain needs to attend to process of writing/art (Schupp et al., 2007)
- Use intuition, thoughtfulness, positive emotions in art making & writing processes – use of the ‘high road’ to self

regulation

- Habituate this to rewire the brain (Carr, 2008)



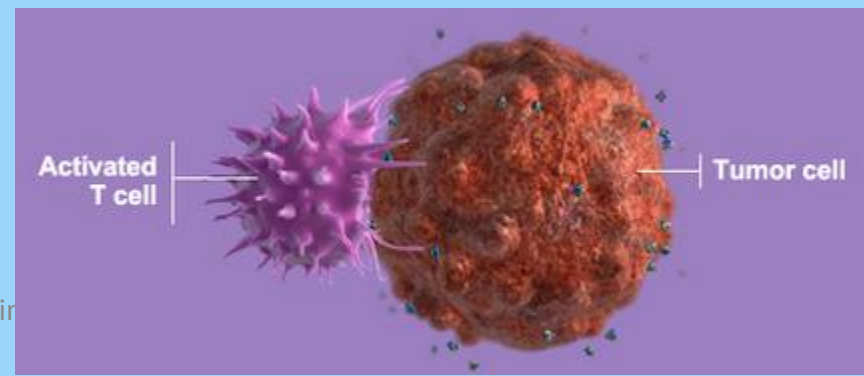
# 3. Using Writing to Heal Trauma- Research

- 50 university students - writing for 15 mins for 4 days – 2 groups (Pennebaker, 1987, 2000)
  - i. Control – wrote superficial/ irrelevant topics eg. Shoes, room description, etc
  - ii. Deepest thoughts and feelings about important issue
- Results:
  - Immediate increase in sadness/ anxiety
  - Long-term decline in visits to student health centre
  - Felt greater sense of value and meaning in life



# Using Writing to Heal Trauma-Research

- Impact on Immune Function (T-lymphocytes)
- 50 university students - writing for 20 mins for 4 days – 2 groups (Pennebaker, 1988)
  - blood taken before writing, immediately after and 6 weeks later
  - i. Control – wrote superficial/ irrelevant topics eg. Shoes, room description, etc
  - ii. Deepest thoughts and feelings about difficult issue (eg. trauma)



# Using Writing to Heal Trauma-Research

- Results
  - Group writing about difficult issue showed enhanced immune function immediately after writing and 6 weeks later
  - Survey several months later – this group responded
    - they had better understanding and insight
    - able to deal better with trauma pain
    - let it go



# Using Writing to Heal Trauma-Research

- Kircanski, Lieberman & Craske, 2012 - Affect Labelling Research - UCLA Phobias
- Exposure therapy + affect labelling
  - Able to get closer to spider
  - Therapy lasted 6 - 12mths longer
  - Fear into language – activates pre-frontal cortex and turns down amygdala
- Putting feelings into words improves self-regulation



# Using Writing to Heal Trauma-Research

- Meta-Analysis of Writing as Therapy (Smyth, 1998) - trauma writing increased physical health 2-3 mths after
- Weirman et al., 2008 – punch biopsy wounds healed faster in participants writing about trauma
- IBS – writing group – reduced severity of symptoms 1 & 3 mths later
- Krpan et al., 2013 – MDD – trauma writing group sig decrease in depression scores immediately after writing + 1mth later
- Smyth et al. 2008 – PTSD war veterans/ sexual assault – trauma writing group showed improved mood, decreased stress/ reactivity and increased post-traumatic growth

# Creative Writing to Build New Neural Pathways

- Writing and language connect the story in left brain with negative emotions of right brain
- With regular writing practice, brain enters theta waves (meditation), integration between R & L
- Creates new neural pathways – 30 days with consistent regular effort



# Creative Writing to Build New Neural Pathways

- Can come from sub conscious mind – gain new insights
- Use non-dominant hand writing to connect with emotions and right brain wounds
  - Use of bi-lateral writing, art, drawing (both hands) assist with left-right hemisphere integration (McNamee, 2003)



# 4. Healing Requires Supportive Relationships – Social Engagement System

- Healing occurs in relationship with supportive others – co-regulation of calming/parasympathetic nervous system
- Difficult to heal in isolation
- Therapy involves trusted listener – validate, normalise, support
- Difficult for survivors to have access to the *quantity* of therapy/ listening they need

# 5. Need Nurturing Parent

- Be heard, listened to, validated in between therapy sessions
- Comforted, soothed, loved
- ie. Re-parented so brain can be re-wired
- Few survivors have access to an actual nurturing parent 24/7
- Use ego state of inner nurturing parent



# Ego State Therapy (Helen & John Watkins, 1971)

- Jungian – divine child, 1951, eternal child, 1969
- Psychodynamic School - Berne, 1957, Federn and Weiss 1960s
- We develop different metaphorical parts or selves to cope in different situations
  - ‘Control freak’, Peter Pan complex, rebel
  - Wounded inner child ego state
  - Wise, nurturing Self state that can support the healing of wounded parts

# Inner Child Ego State

- Trauma memories and emotions stored in childlike part of self that remains wounded until trauma is processed
- Wounded child concept (Lucia Cappicione, 1976, 1991, John Bradshaw 1991, Charles Whitfield, 1987)
- Also wonder child – where our awe, joy, innocence, wonder, sensitivity and playfulness come from





# Nurturing Parent

- Ego State Therapy/Psychodynamic (Helen & John Watkins, 1971, Lucia Cappicione, 1976)
- ACT (Hayes, 1982) - Observer self
- IFS (Schwartz, 1995) - Self (Best Self)
- Higher Self – Buddhism (5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE)

- Client to connect with nurturing parent
- Re-parent wounded inner child



# Nurturing Parent

- Sometimes difficult for some survivors to find nurturing part of self
- May be too collapsed into wounded child ego state
- Can use spiritual/ Higher nurturing being
  - Nurturing grandparent/ ancestor
  - Spiritual nurturer – Mother Earth, Biame, Divine Creator
  - Religious figure – Mother Mary, God, Allah, Shekinah, Jesus, Buddha, Parvarti

# Spiritual Nurturing Parent - Research

- Spiritual support from a divine being allows trauma survivors to cope better and recover quicker
- A loving divine being provides secure attachment figure
- Bryant-Davis et al., 2012



# 6. The Life Healing Process

1. Go to safe place and connect with nurturing parent (visualisation/ guided meditation)
2. Connect to inner child, listen to their story
3. Care for feelings – write, draw, paint and use language to label feelings
4. Reparent inner child by listening, caring and helping them get their needs met that were not met during trauma – write words of love and caring from nurturing parent
5. Empower the inner child, write a new ending to the trauma story

# Writing Prompts

- Where does wounded inner child feel safe?
- Where did she/ he go when scared as a child?
- What happened?
- What does she/ he feel about what happened?
- What does she/ he need right now?
- What would a nurturing parent say to you about this event?
- What would a nurturing parent do?

# Wounded Child to Wonder Child

- Re-parenting also involves doing activities to bring the positive feelings back for the inner child
- Swing on a swing, bubble baths, beach, go fishing, build something out of Lego, watch Disney DVDs, make jelly, make mud pies, finger painting, singing kids songs, read picture books, climb a tree, play snap, jump on a trampoline, dig for worms....



# In Summary

- Writing provides safe container for expressing and releasing trauma emotions
- Can meet needs of wounded inner child
- Can re-empower the dis-empowered child
- Nurturing parent can nurture, comfort, sooth wounded inner child - safe healing relationship
- Client learns self-regulation, acceptance and self-love, re-wires brain
- Client learns to how to heal self

# HEART HEALING



# RETREAT



- Central West NSW - 3 Day Retreat
- 9th - 12th August, 2018
- Venue: Shalom, Carcoar, NSW (40min Bathurst)
- Cost: \$435 including accommodation and meals.
- Max number participants: 12