

Somatic Experiencing

Peter Levine



"TRAUMA IS A FACT OF LIFE. IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A LIFE SENTENCE."

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Somatic Experiencing

A naturalistic, and neurobiological, body-oriented approach to healing trauma and other stress-related disorders; restoring the authentic self with self-regulation, relaxation, wholeness, and aliveness.

The SE™ Approach

The Somatic Experiencing® method is a body-oriented approach to the healing of trauma and other stress disorders. It is the life's work of Peter A. Levine, PhD, resulting from his multidisciplinary study of stress physiology, ethology, biology, neuroscience, psychology, and indigenous healing practices, together with over 50 years of successful clinical application. The SE™ approach releases traumatic shock and restores connection, which is key to transforming PTSD and the wounds of emotional and early developmental attachment trauma.

SE offers a framework to assess where a person is "stuck" in the fight, flight, or freeze responses and provides clinical tools to resolve these fixated physiological states. It provides effective skills appropriate to a variety of healing professions including mental health, medicine, physical and occupational therapies, bodywork, addiction treatment, first responders, education, and others.



The Science of SE™

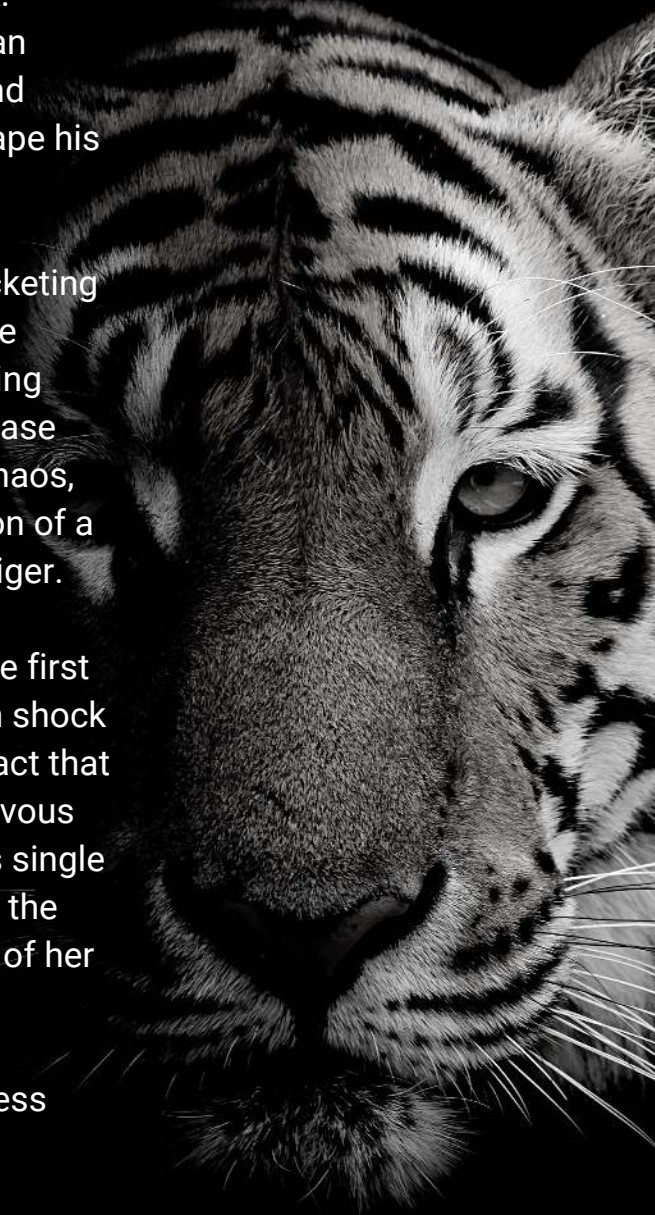
Trauma may begin as acute stress from a perceived life-threat or as the end product of cumulative stress. Both types of stress can seriously impair a person's ability to function with resilience and ease, and live in the here-and-now. Trauma may result from a wide variety of stressors such as accidents, invasive medical procedures, sexual or physical assault, emotional abuse, neglect, war, racial discrimination, oppression, natural disasters, loss, birth trauma, or the corrosive stressors of ongoing fear, conflict, and chronic shaming.

How SE Began

The imaginary image of the tiger was invoked by Peter A. Levine, PhD in 1969 during a session with a young woman named Nancy, who suffered from an array of physical and anxiety symptoms, in an event that would define and shape his career.

Without warning, Nancy suddenly froze, her pulse skyrocketing and then abruptly plummeting as she began revisiting the moments of a traumatic childhood surgery, including being bound and anesthetized with ether. "I'm going to die! Please don't let me die!" she repeated, helplessly. Amidst this chaos, Dr. Levine was compelled, by a seemingly prescient vision of a charging tiger, to say: "Nancy, you're being chased by a tiger. Run! Run and climb those rocks to safety!" It was at this moment, as Nancy began moving her legs, that Dr. Levine first witnessed the human animal's innate ability to heal from shock and terror, by completing the instinctual, self-protective act that had been overwhelmed and frozen into her body and nervous system, over 20 years earlier. On repeated follow up, this single session had a dramatic impact on Nancy's life, including the dissolution of her panic attacks, agoraphobia, cessation of her migraines, and a renewed, sustained vigor in living.

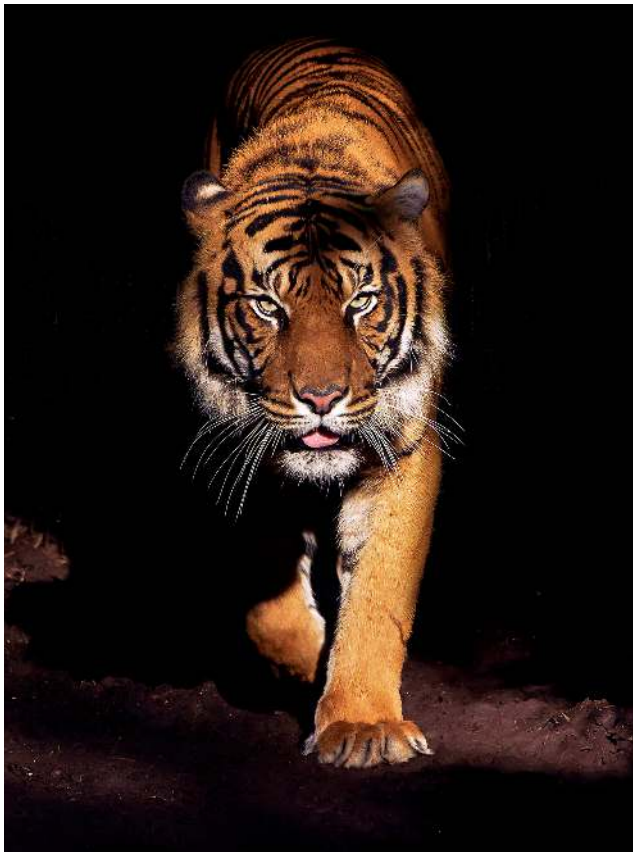
The Tiger awakened has become a symbol of our aliveness and our innate nature.



Nature's Lesson

Beginning in the 1970's, Peter's explorations into how animals deal with threat led to the development of the Somatic Experiencing® method (SE™), a method that is highly effective in dealing with the effects of overwhelm on our nervous system. SE™ is a clinical methodology based upon an appreciation of why animals in the wild are not traumatized by routine threats to their lives, while humans, on the other hand, are readily overwhelmed and often subject to long-lasting traumatic symptoms of hyperarousal, shutdown, and dysregulation.

How Animals Discharge Shock



Dr. Levine was inspired to study stress on the nervous system when he realized that animals in the wild are constantly under threat of death from predation, yet rarely show symptoms of trauma. He discovered that deep trauma has to do with the third survival response to perceived life threat, which is freeze and collapse. When fight and flight are not options, both animals in the wild and humans freeze and immobilize, like “playing dead.” This makes them less of a target. The freeze and collapse response is time-limited; in other words, it needs to run its course and allow the massive energy that was prepared for fight or flight to discharge through spontaneous gentle inner shaking and trembling. If the immobility phase does not complete, then that charge stays trapped, and, from the body's perspective, is still under threat and often continues to perceive the world from that perspective. Somatic Experiencing® works to release this stored energy and turn off this threat alarm that causes dysregulation and dissociation.

How it Works

Human beings have an innate ability to overcome the effects of diverse traumas. The SE™ approach facilitates the completion of self-protective motoric responses and the release of thwarted survival energy bound in the body and nervous system, thus addressing the root cause of trauma symptoms. This is approached by gently guiding clients to develop increasing tolerance for difficult bodily sensations and suppressed emotions, building their capacity for containment and resilience.

Don't Re-live, Renegotiate

Dr. Levine believes that the traumatic event isn't what causes long-lasting trauma, it is the overwhelming trapped response to the perceived life-threat that is causing an imbalanced nervous system. Somatic Experiencing's aim is to help one access the body memory (procedural memory) of the event, not the story. It is not necessary to share the details of your trauma history to do SE™. The objective is to diffuse the power of the narrative and remap the body memory to regain aliveness and flow.

Bottom Up Processing

Like other somatic psychology approaches, Somatic Experiencing® is a body first approach to dealing with the problematic (and oftentimes physical) symptoms of trauma. It helps individuals create new experiences in their bodies; ones that contradict those of tension and overwhelming helplessness. This means that healing isn't about reclaiming memories or changing our thoughts and beliefs about how we feel, it's about exploring the sensations that lie underneath our feelings and beliefs, as well as our habitual behavior patterns.

