

Restoring Connection® With Life & Thriving: **Description**

Restore Yourself While Learning How To Restore Others

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We are not alone! We are interconnected and interdependent. Each one of us is a vital part of the web of Life. We are meant to be securely connected with ourself, others and all that is.

Yet inherent in the human condition are felt experiences of connection, disconnection and restored connection. When we're balanced and in the flow of life, we naturally fully meet these kinds of experiences and are able to move through them, successfully restoring connection when needed.

For many reasons this innate process can get thwarted. When disconnection prevails, a sense of separation, isolation and alienation ensues, often coupled with fear, anxiety and shame. Prolonged disconnection creates imbalance, which may also eventually express itself in physical disease. (Anda & Felitti, 2012) It's usually when people are stuck in their process and need assistance in restoring connection that helping professionals are contacted.

Living in these times of tremendous change and uncertainty is stressful. Many people say that nowadays they're feeling depleted and overwhelmed more often.

We instinctually sense this is not a time to go it alone. It's as if Life is nudging us to caringly turn toward each other and restore connection with ourself, others and all that is, to more fully live from the heart. We're being called to collectively attend to what's been neglected personally, nationally and globally.

The group training program, "Restore Yourself While Learning How To Restore Others", provides us with a means for doing this. By restoring oneself and each other we become revitalized, discover new ways to restore others and are better able to be of service.

"Restoring Connection® With Life & Thriving" is an experiential integrative body mind heart spirit approach to transforming suffering, connecting with what truly sustains us, experiencing joy and thriving. Providing a cohesive integration of several of the best transformational modalities, it can enrich what you're already doing, as well as be beneficial in and of itself.

Through this approach you become aware of the organic processes of connection, disconnection and restored connection, as well as how to harness, more effectively use

and further develop what's life-affirming. You're also given specific ways to restore connection with yourself, others and all that is.

In many respects, the Restoring Connection® approach resembles caringly tending a tree. The nourishing soil of "attuned-holding-presence" from which all that grows is cultivated throughout our group experience. The roots are encouraged to spread deeply into the earth, and for that to occur, bodily grounding is essential.

The trunk of the tree is tended to, wherein connection with our body wisdom and listening to our deeper self occurs. Just as the branches reach into the heavens towards the sky, Restoring Connection® helps participants open themselves to the bigger picture while remaining fully grounded, integrating what is experienced into the body.

A deeply rooted, vibrant and resilient tree thriving amongst other trees, symbolizes the restored self this approach offers us: alive, radiant, totally in the now, fully connected to ourself, others and life.

This profoundly restorative experiential approach is organic and multi-dimensional. It is not linear, and its elements are not discrete. Yet, it is presented as such for learning purposes. In reality everything is interrelated, and once all the elements of Restoring Connection® are brought into awareness, engaged and integrated, an incredibly rich, cohesive whole results. Throughout, we establish and consolidate the bonds between all the following elements:

Attuned-Holding-Presence

Our Embodied Experience

Restorative Mindfulness

Restorative Resourcing

Restorative Processing

Restorative Communication

Restorative Activism

These elements are briefly introduced at certain points and then revisited later, in more depth. In a very real sense, the elements are natural and specific processes within the larger process of *Restoring Connection*®. Brought together, these elements result in a profound sense of integration of our body mind heart and spirit, as well as being in right relationship with ourself, others and all that is. From this connected, heart-centered way of living comes a true sense of joy and thriving.

Attuned-Holding-Presence

First we come into "the delicate flower of presence" as Eckhart Tolle refers to it (Tolle, 1999), the overriding stance from which all else emanates. It includes also coming from a place of "unconditional positive regard", to use Carl Rogers' term (Rogers, 1959). We bear witness to and gently hold without judgment, our own and the inner experience of

others. We welcome what is expressed with "a tiny bud of a smile on our lips", as Thich Nat Hanh says (Hanh, 1991) and what Tara Brach refers to as "unconditional friendliness" (Brach, 2003). We call this element "attuned-holding-presence" (Lehmann, 2009).

Our Embodied Experience

Then we spend time with "our embodied experience" (Lehmann, 2009), understanding the nervous system from the perspective of neurophysiological researcher Stephen Porges (2011), tracking the ways in which it is activated, so as to facilitate its regulation, while increasing its range of resilience. We know that if we are not within our range of resilience, we are physiologically unable to truly be curious, open or present to our inner experience and others.

Restorative Mindfulness

Fundamental to attuned-holding-presence is "mindfulness", that is bringing gentle awareness to something external or internal and simply noticing without judgment (Brach 2003; Hanh, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Mingyur, 2007; and Napier 1993). This very mindful act of non-judgmental awareness in turn changes our experience, which can then also be tracked and noticed, facilitating a sense of cohesiveness internal flow. Deeper opening and awareness can then follow. An internal island of safety that can be returned to time and again throughout any processing is also provided. As used within this approach, we refer to it as "restorative mindfulness" (Lehmann, 2009).

Restorative Resourcing

We take the time to strengthen already existing resources as well as develop new ones we can call on to soothe and calm the nervous system (Heller & Heller, 2001); and we use the bodily felt sense (Gendlin 1981), an amazing innate resource, to help identify what these other specific resources might be. This element, called "restorative resourcing" (Lehmann, 2009) is not only essential to developing self-regulation, increasing the range of resilience in our nervous system and feeling more centered, it also enables us to go deeper into our experience, while maintaining regulation and safety, being present to ourselves and others.

We explore restorative, mindfully guided experiences and practices throughout *Restoring Connection*®, including practices devoted to cultivating a compassionate and grateful heart as well as connecting with our Core Self (our pure unwounded essence), also known as our soul. Additional practices facilitate connection with other healing energies (Young, 2014), and the larger system of Life. During these practices, finding oneself opening to a sense of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all Life often occurs.

These experiences become another wonderful means of resourcing, developing resilience, and further positioning ourselves for deeper processing and connection.

Similarly, it is from a place of restored connection with what may be referred to as our soul, Core Self, essence, etc., and the larger system of Life, as well as through attuned-holding-presence and restorative mindfulness that we are best able to connect with and deeply listen to our body's wisdom and release whatever may be internally blocking us as well as facilitate what is newly emerging.

We rely on our bodily felt sense, as identified by Eugene Gendlin while conducting research with Carl Rogers at the University of Chicago, to guide us throughout all the different elements of *Restoring Connection*®. While we track nervous system activation, through felt-sensing we simultaneously follow and deeply listen to the unfolding of our own and others' experience, actively using restorative resourcing as needed. Also, as natural spontaneous moments of resourcing occur, they are identified, slowed down and awareness is brought to them through the bodily felt sense. Similarly, time is taken to securely root in the body any shifts that occur there to facilitate full integration.

Restorative Processing

Through experiential healing practices such as “Integrative Focusing” (based in Eugene Gendlin’s Focusing), we are able to process any undigested pockets of earlier disturbing experience we may be carrying inside, thereby further restoring our sense of connection and wholeness (van der Kolk, 2014).

Once we know how to access and safely be with our body’s wisdom through the specified movements of “Integrative Focusing”, we are also able to tap into and be in process with the wellspring of Life from which our creativity, carrying forward of Life, true joy and thriving flows.

Safely processing what’s stuck inside and facilitating what’s newly emerging are two kinds of restorative processing. There is overlap between the two, yet each has a different focus. The first tends to focus on what’s troubling us, whereas the latter tends to focus on what’s newly emerging within us, wanting to be expressed and carried forward.

Restorative Communication

Deeply listening, resonantly responding and authentically expressing our personal truth in ways that help us connect and carry life forward are experientially taught.

Furthermore, an inevitable part of being in relationship are eventual misunderstandings between people, with resulting misattunements and ruptures in connection. Given this, the *Restoring Connection*® *With Life & Thriving* approach also experientially teaches

communication skills (Rosenberg, 2003; and Cohen et al, 2011), enabling us to once again be in right relationship. And skills are taught for mindfully separating, when it is wise to do so.

Restorative Activism

Sensing the next right step to take, within ourself, with others and the world, then taking it, as well as taking the next one, and ..., is a natural outgrowth of feeling restored and connected both within and between. Many of us find ourselves practicing some form of advocating in the world on behalf of heart-centered, sustainable living (Macy and Johnstone, 2012) that feels right to us.

In Conclusion

Restoring Connection® intentionally takes place within the “attuned-holding-presence” of others. The circle of the training group is co-created and energetically held by Elizabeth, the group members and the larger system of Life. Secure connection (Bowlby 1989, Fosha 2003, Levine & Heller 2010, Siegel 1999) with our inner experience, as well as with others, is intentionally fostered throughout. The safe experience of secure connection then in turn becomes another profound resource for us.

The restorative guided experiences and practices are explored together, including reflecting on what it was like to experience them. This sharing is key, for it is in relationship that we are wounded, and it is in relationship that we are healed. Furthermore, embedded in the rich nourishing soil of secure connection with ourself, others and all that is, we experience true joy and thrive.

It feels completely right that through this restorative approach many ultimately experience heart openings. For it is in the heart of hearts that true integration and transformation ultimately occurs. And it is through the door of the heart that we pass from judgment into compassion, from fear into love, and from separation into oneness.

We are poised for transformation. Albeit challenging, it is also an exciting time to be alive. We have gratefully been and continue to be given so much to help us move forward personally and collectively, facilitating our great unfolding.

May the transformation and connection that occurs through *Restoring Connection*® *With Life & Thriving* have a far-reaching ripple effect, positively impacting all Life.

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