

How Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Works

Healing trauma through the mind, body, and nervous system

When we experience something frightening, overwhelming, or painful, our mind and body work together to help us survive. Your nervous system may learn to become highly alert, tense, guarded, numb, disconnected, or ready to act quickly.

These responses can be very adaptive at the time. Sometimes, however, the nervous system continues to respond to situations in the present as though the danger is still there—even when you are safe now.

You may notice this as:

- Feeling on edge, anxious, or easily startled
- Tightness or tension in your muscles
- Changes in breathing or heart rate
- A strong urge to escape, fight, hide, or please others
- Feeling frozen, numb, or disconnected
- Difficulty knowing what you feel or need
- Automatically reacting in ways you later wish you could change

Why pay attention to the body?

You may understand intellectually that something is over, while your body continues to react as though it is happening now.

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy gives us another way to work with these patterns. Along with talking and thinking about your experiences, we gently pay attention to what is happening in your body in the present moment.

For example, we might notice:

“What happens in your chest when you think about that?”

“Do you notice an urge to move, pull away, freeze, or protect yourself?”

“What happens when you imagine saying no?”

These observations are not about judging your body or finding something wrong with you. They give us information about how your nervous system is responding.

We go slowly

Trauma therapy does not require you to relive everything that happened.

Instead, we work within a range that is manageable for you. We may move toward difficult experiences for a short time and then return our attention to something that feels safe, steady, or grounding.

This process—sometimes called **titration**—allows you to explore difficult material without becoming overwhelmed.

The goal is not to make you feel calm all the time. The goal is to help your nervous system become more **flexible**: better able to recognize what is happening, respond appropriately, and return toward balance afterward.

Developing new choices

Sometimes the body carries an automatic response that was once protective.

You may have learned to become very quiet, work hard to keep others happy, withdraw, become angry, stay constantly alert, or disconnect from your feelings.

We don't view these responses as weaknesses or something to get rid of. We approach them with curiosity:

“What was this response trying to accomplish for you?”

“How did it help you survive or get through that situation?”

“Is this response still needed in the same way today?”

As you become more aware of these patterns, you can begin to experience more choice. You may discover new ways to set boundaries, protect yourself, tolerate difficult emotions, ask for help, stay present, or respond to situations differently.

The goal: greater choice and connection

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy is not about forcing your body to change. It is about developing a deeper awareness of the connection between your thoughts, emotions, body, and nervous system.

Together, we practice recognizing:

What is happening in me?

What does my body need?

What am I feeling?

What am I being pulled to do?

What choices do I have now?

Your nervous system learned ways of protecting you based on what you experienced.

Therapy can help you discover that **what happened then does not have to determine how you respond now.**