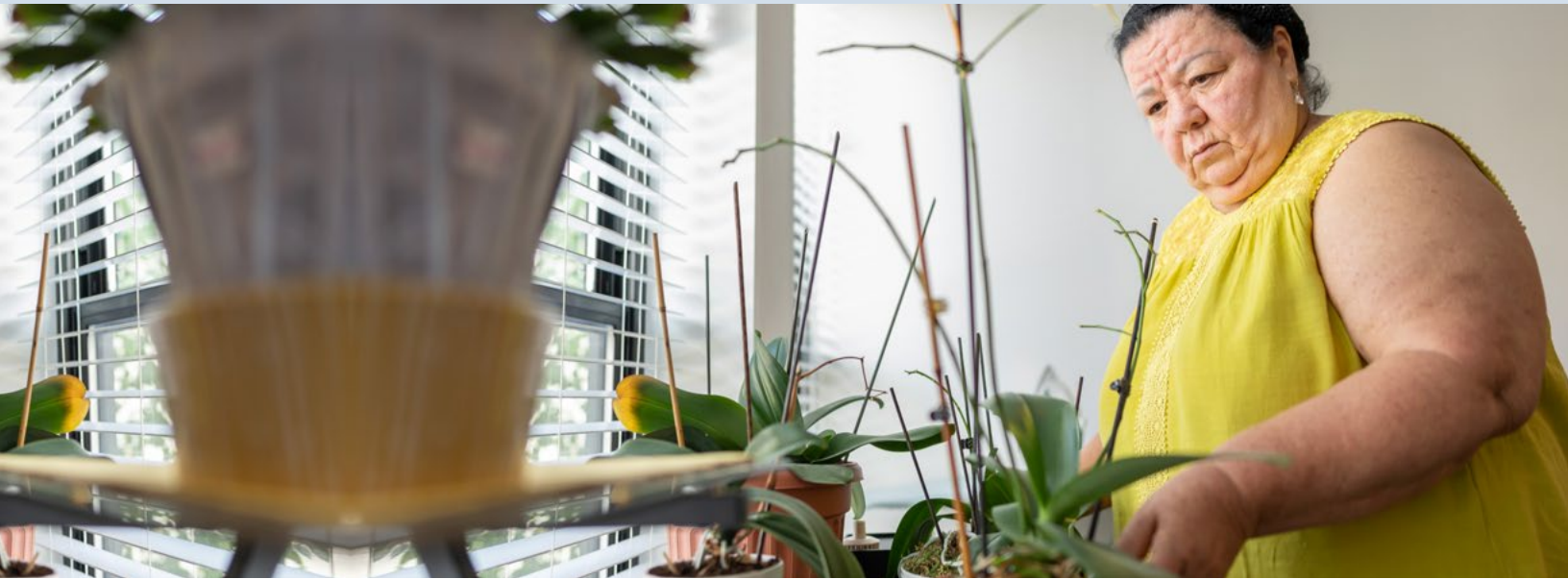


Centering Exercises



This tool was developed by POAH in partnership with Design Impact as part of a larger effort to make housing more trauma-informed. To learn more about POAH's work and see how this exercise might fit into your own organization's efforts to become more trauma-informed, visit POAH's Trauma-Informed Housing Toolkit at: traumainformedhousing.poah.org

Purpose

- Centering exercises are activities that can settle our mind and reduce our stress by bringing awareness to the present moment. They are typically brief and can be done alone or with a group.
- Use centering exercises to practice trauma-informed care with yourself and with your team.
- Consider including a centering exercise at the beginning of your team meetings.
- Start by inviting participants to find a comfortable and safe place to be still.

Tips for Trauma-Informed Practice

- **Abandon the plan if necessary:** Be responsive to the needs and desires of participants. Prioritize the group over the agenda or exercise.
- **Practice transparency:** Explain the purpose and plan for the exercise, including what options are available and how long it will take.
- **Offer choice:** Offer participants choice to keep their camera on/off (virtual), eyes open/closed or to simply sit quietly instead of participating.
- **Give room:** If difficult feedback or painful emotions arise, allow room for expression. Avoid minimizing the experience or proposing solutions that may bypass it.

EXERCISE 1: P-A-N (Pay Attention Now)

“PAN” is a mindfulness exercise that helps bring awareness to our thoughts, feelings and emotions. By bringing awareness without judgment, we can find calm and reduce stress. This exercise takes about 7-10 minutes and should be done slowly.

- First, bring awareness to what’s going on in your head.
 - What is happening in your thoughts?
 - Are you feeling scattered? Are you thinking about your grocery list?
 - Don’t judge what you are thinking, just notice.
- Next, bring awareness to what’s going on in your body.
 - Are you feeling heavy? Light? Tense?
 - Is there discomfort or tension?
 - No need to judge or fix what you feel, just pay attention to your body.
- Finally, bring awareness to what’s going on in your emotions.
 - How are you feeling? What emotions are surfacing?
 - Are you stressed? Overwhelmed? Excited?
 - Remember, no judgement. Just pay attention to how you are feeling in this moment.
- Take a few more deep breaths. And when you are ready, come back to the group.

EXERCISE 2: Box Breathing

Box breathing is a great way to reduce stress and improve your mood. The instructor starts by explaining the exercise – breathe in for four, hold your breath for four, breathe out for four, hold your breath out for four. The instructor then counts the group through the exercise for 2 rounds, then allows participants to count on their own for 2-3 rounds. This exercise takes about 4-6 minutes.

- Instructions:
 - Start by breathing out slowly, releasing all the air from your lungs.
 - Breathe in through the nose for a count of four.
 - Hold your breath for a count of four.
 - Exhale for a count of four.
 - Hold your breath out for a count of four.
 - Repeat 2-3 more times on your own.

EXERCISE 3: Brain Dump

The Brain Dump is a simple way to ease a busy mind. The Brain Dump can be utilized when participants are feeling distracted by something in the future or feeling pulled in many directions. This exercise takes about 3-5 minutes.

- Invite participants to find something to write with/on, such as a piece of paper or their phone.
- Next, encourage participants to spend 1-2 minutes writing down everything that is on their mind – it could be a to-do list of things they need to accomplish after the session, a lingering thought from a prior meeting or anything else that is on their mind.
- Pro-tip: Play instrumental music while participants are writing out their “brain dump.”
- If desired, participants can throw the thing away (if they want to “release” it) or they can save it to return to later.

