

HEALING TRAUMA THROUGH THE BODY: INTRODUCTION TO SOMATIC EXPERIENCING

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SE is a psychobiologically-informed treatment modality which offers:

- A comprehensive understanding of traumatic stress and human stress behavior
- A framework to assess where a person is “stuck” in the fight, flight and/or freeze responses
- Clinical tools to resolve these fixated states, transform old patterns, and strengthen resiliency



Peter A. Levine, PhD
Founder of Somatic Experiencing®

WHO USES SOMATIC EXPERIENCING?

- SE trainings have been held in over 25 countries worldwide including Brazil, Italy, Denmark, Canada, Australia and the United States.
- Over 8000 mental health clinicians, medical professionals, body workers and other helping professionals are trained in SE.
- SE has sent teams of SE certified professionals to provide work with various survivors of 9/11, Tsunamis, the Japan earthquakes and Sandy Hook.
- Over 250,000 copies of Peter Levine's book, Waking the Tiger have been sold worldwide.

SE Informed by Animals In The Wild

Overwhelmed or threatened, animals go through predictable stages of responding to danger via fight, flight & freeze

- In order to optimize chances for survival, the body:
 - Activates implicit, hardwired survival sequences
 - Mobilizes high levels of energy to defend itself
 - Shuts-down unnecessary bodily functions
- After threat has passed, animals return to normal functioning by:
 - Discharging survival energy
 - Integrating excess activated energy



Completion of Survival Response

A short video of a polar bear demonstrating active completion of survival (fight/flight/freeze) responses.

[View video](#)

Neocortex

"Thinking"

Cognition, Language, Speech,
Social and Regulatory Centers

Limbic/Mid-Brain (Amygdala)

"Feeling"

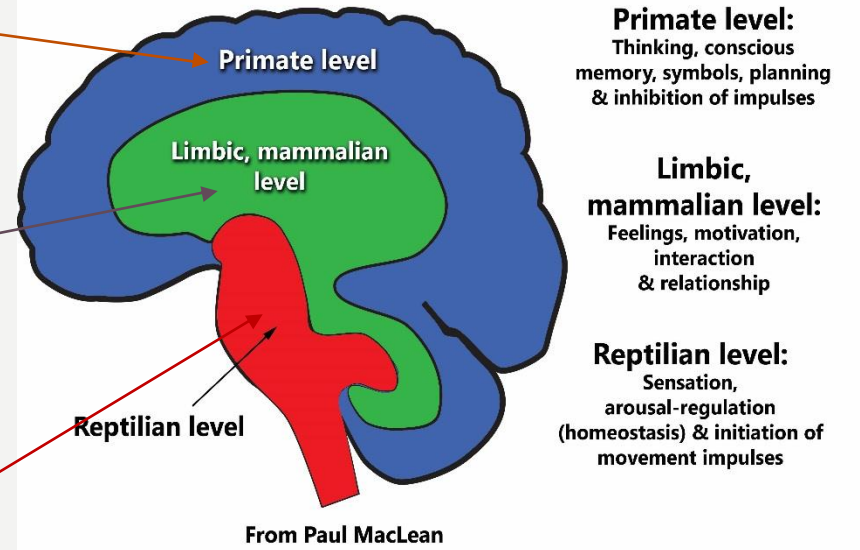
Memory, Emotions & Alarm Center

The Brainstem ("Reptilian Brain")

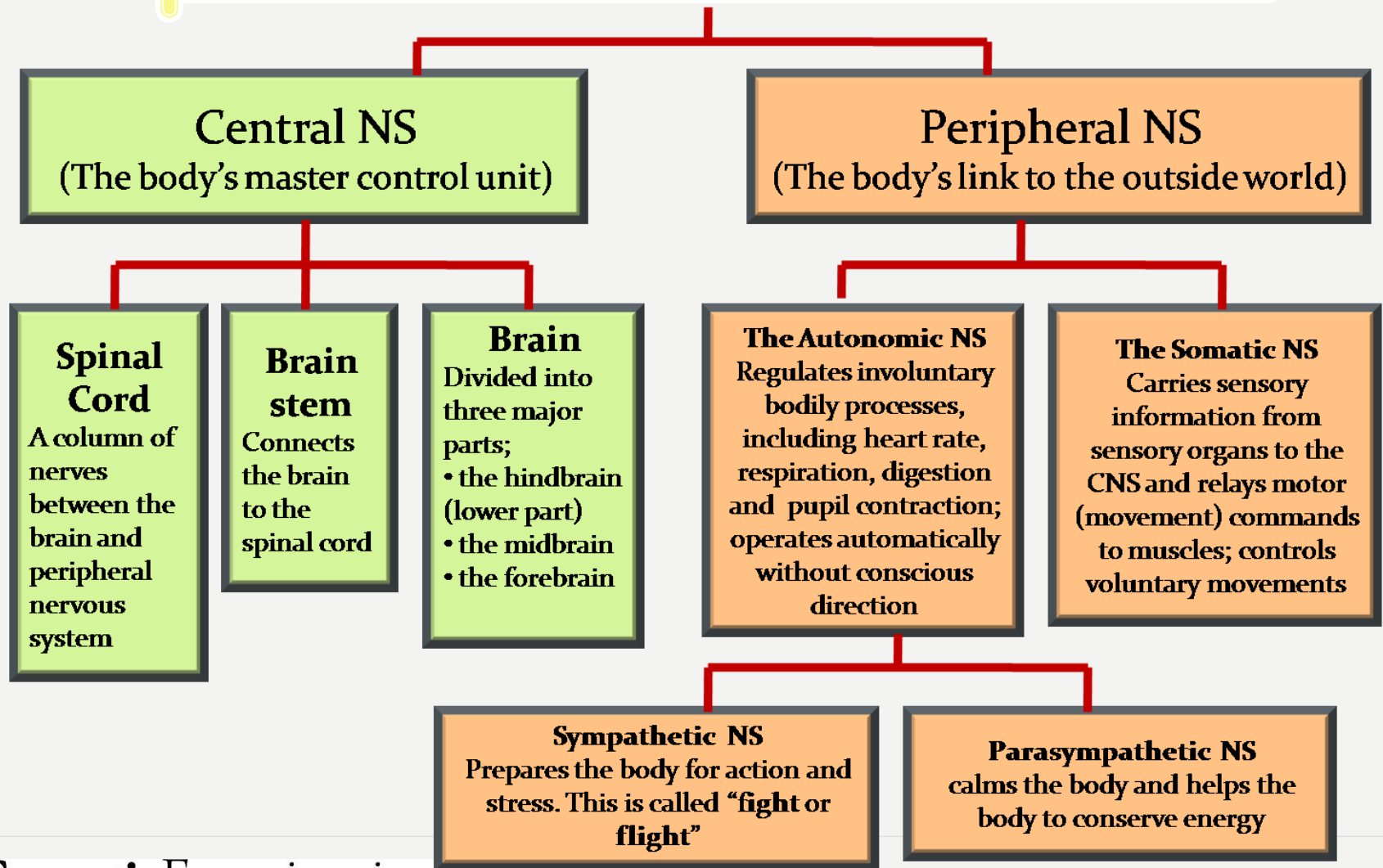
"Sensing"

Survival & Instinctual Centers (*fight, flight, freeze*)
Digestion, Reproduction, Circulation, Breathing, Sleeping

The Triune Brain

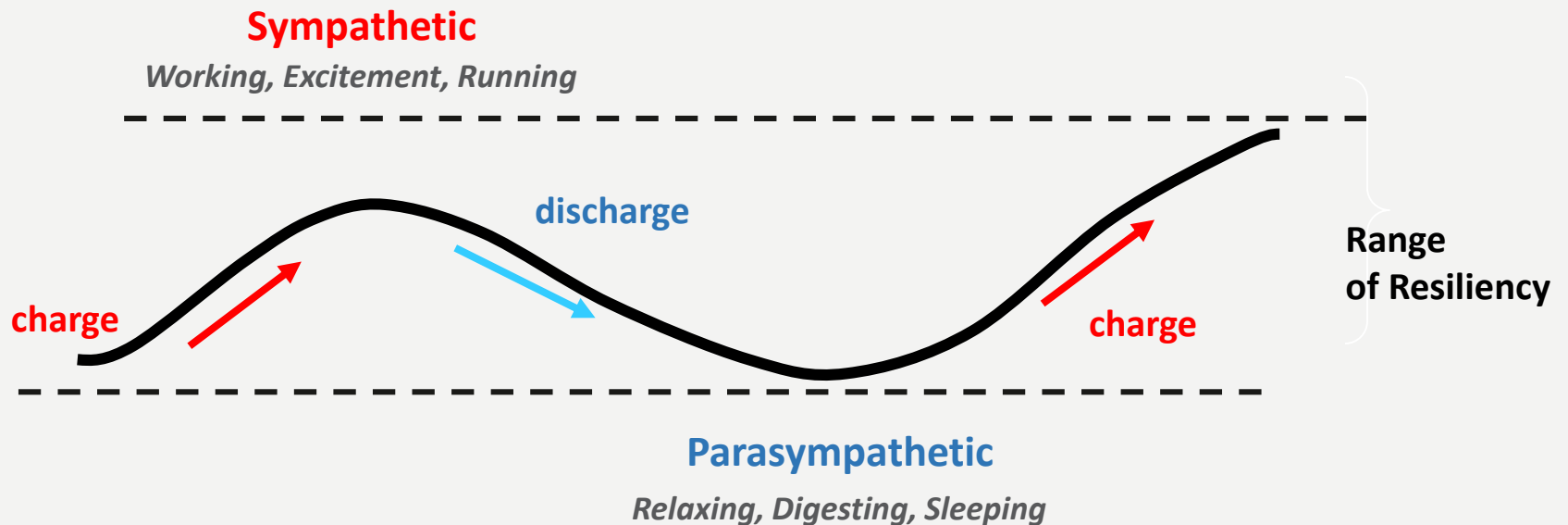


The Nervous System



The Regulatory Process of the Autonomic Nervous System (Sympathetic and Parasympathetic)

Activation – Deactivation Cycles



Somatic Exercise

1. Take a moment to notice your overall experience. Feel your feet on the floor, moving and shifting until you feel the contact.
2. Now think of something that you enjoy or that is calming. Notice what happens.
3. Now, think of something mildly annoying or irritating. Notice what happens.
4. Now, think again of something you enjoy.
5. Come back to your feet and seat.



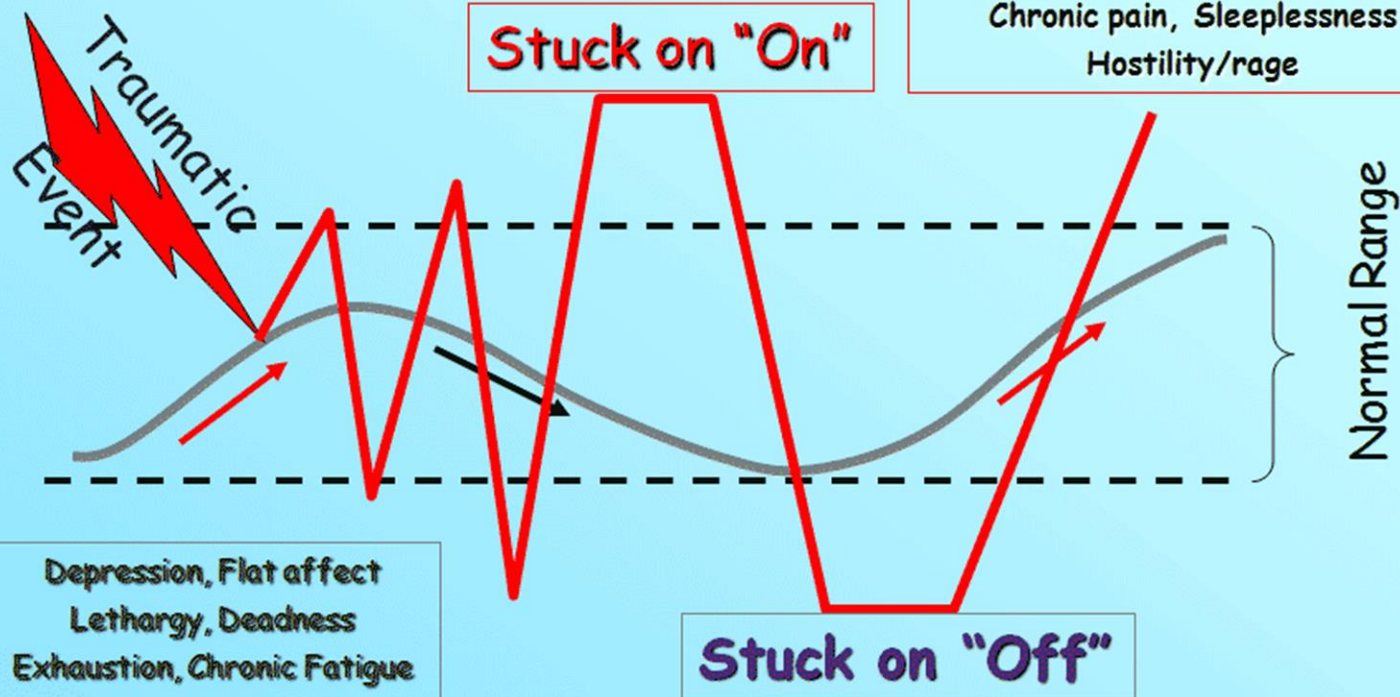
PETER LEVINE'S DEFINITION OF TRAUMA

- TOO MUCH
- TOO FAST
- TOO SOON
- NOT ENOUGH FOR
TOO LONG



Symptoms of Un-Discharged Traumatic Stress

Anxiety, Panic, Hyperactivity
Exaggerated Startle
Inability to relax, Restlessness
Hyper-vigilance, Digestive problems
Emotional flooding
Chronic pain, Sleeplessness
Hostility/rage



Depression, Flat affect
Lethargy, Deadness
Exhaustion, Chronic Fatigue
Disorientation
Disconnection, Dissociation
Complex syndromes, Pain
Low Blood Pressure
Poor digestion

WHY ARE HUMANS MORE VULNERABLE TO THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA?

- Humans are similarly designed to rebound from high-intensity survival states.
- However, we are too smart for our own good and often get in our own way.
- The pre-frontal cortex tends to override the natural discharge of excess survival energy.
- Through rationalization, judgment, shame, acculturation and fear of bodily sensations, we tend to disrupt our innate capacity to self-regulate and reset.



The Body Keeps the Score



“Beyond the Talking Cure”

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk introduced to the mainstream that ***talk-therapy alone*** was ***insufficient*** for trauma and stress-related disorders

Somatic Therapies Broaden Traditional Approaches to Trauma Treatment



Cognitive Approaches:

- Focus on how thoughts influence emotions and behaviors (“top-down”)
- Help identify distorted cognitive beliefs and maladaptive behaviors
- Target reduction of symptoms
- Help create more adaptive self-beliefs and behaviors
- ***Rely on insight and behavior change***

Somatic Approaches:

- Focus on how the body influences thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (“bottom-up”)
- Help people become aware of body sensations and procedural memories
- Target underlying dysregulation in the nervous system that causes/maintains symptoms
- Help create a greater control over debilitating symptoms and unconscious dynamics
- ***Rely on body awareness & physiological regulation***



Next Wave of Evidence–Based Treatment Approaches

Somatic Approaches

- Recent neuro-scientific advancements are propelling a major growth of evidence in support of brain-body (somatic) approaches
- Promising research demonstrates that somatic approaches is effective in reducing trauma symptoms.
- **EMDR** (2010) was the first somatic approach recognized as an evidence-based treatment in the U.S.
- There are currently a number of research studies on Somatic Experiencing being completed in the U.S., Europe and Brazil

SE Demo with Ray: *Working with Iraqi War Veteran*

Dr. Peter Levine using Somatic Experiencing in working with Ray, a veteran who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjeJC86RBqE>

RESOLVING TRAUMA THROUGH THE USE OF SE

- SE provides clients with tools that teach them how to gently increase tolerance for difficult bodily sensations and suppressed emotions.
- SE also facilitates the completion of self-protective motor responses and the release of bound survival



SE FOCUSES ON CORRECTING WHAT DIDN'T GET TO HAPPEN

- A child who couldn't run or fight back.
- A truck sideswiped a car before the driver could brake or turn.
- One's body hits the ground before he/she could break the fall.
- A surgeon approached a patient with a scalpel as he/she is strapped down.
- A a soldier wasn't able to protect a comrade.

ROLE OF THE SE PRACTITIONER

- Stay present
- Allow plenty of time
- Encourage curiosity
- Reinforce the use of sensation
- Help a traumatized client anchor/ground and use resources to support discharge of activation.
- Use language to facilitate continuity between experience and completion of biological processes.
- Track sensation through posture, impulses, muscle tone, constriction, expansion, breath, skin tone etc...

ROLE OF THE SE PRACTITIONER CONTINUED...

- Connects the client to the inherent wisdom and health in his/her nervous system.
- Encourages the client to look for the times when the body “worked” or “did it right”.
- Focuses on islands of safety and love.
- Explores what the client did “right” in the traumatic situation.
- Helps a client complete what is incomplete.
- Assists a client in restoring trust in himself/herself.

A Few Basic SE Skills

- ✓ Orientation
- ✓ Felt Sense
- ✓ Tracking
- ✓ Resourcing



Felt Sense: The Language of Sensation

Intensity of Sensations

Sharp Dull
Intense Weak
Hard Soft
Pressure Solid

Muscle Sensations

Trembling Achy
Shuddering Crampy
Shivery Twitching
Pulsing Fluttery
Shaky Shuddering
Throbbing Tense
Spasming

Skin Sensations

Itchy Prickly
Tingly Sweaty
Moist Clammy
Dry Flushed
Goosebumps

Temperature

Frozen Icy
Cold Cool
Numb Warm
Hot Boiling
Steaming

Constriction Sensations

Stuck Contracted
Knotted Tight
Blocked Congested
Tense Constricted
Breathless
Compressed
Suffocating

Whole Body Sensations

Trembling Heavy Thick
Vibrating Flaccid Full
Puffy Jittery Gurgling
Energized Light Calm
Fidgety Jumpy Tingling
Faint Fuzzy Wobbly
Spinning Buzzing

Expansion Sensations

Expansive Moving
Floating Flowing
Fluid Relaxed
Radiating Glowing
Waves Streaming

Resources

Anchors that help stabilize a client



EXTERNAL

- People, places or activities (in reality or in imagination) that are comforting, calming, settling
 - *Safe people, pets, places in nature, home, special rooms, music, exercise, travel, vacation, spiritual community*
- The therapist's engagement: capacity to track well, to be in resonance/attunement, to create a safe space in the office

INTERNAL

- When client experiences settling, less constriction, more breath, more presence, pleasure
- Positive sensations in the body:
 - *relaxed, more spacious, less tense, grounded, stable, connected, have a freer range of movement, tingling, more alive*

WHO BENEFITS FROM SE?

Everyone benefits from coming home to their bodies and forming deeper more meaningful connections to themselves.

More specifically, SE is effective for those who suffer from:

- Anxiety, panic disorder, phobias and PTSD
- Depression
- ADHD
- Sexual, physical and emotional trauma
- Bullying, racism and discrimination
- Medical trauma
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Dissociative disorders
- Chronic pain and somatization disorders
- Early attachment trauma including pre and perinatal trauma

HOW DO CLIENTS BENEFIT FROM SE?

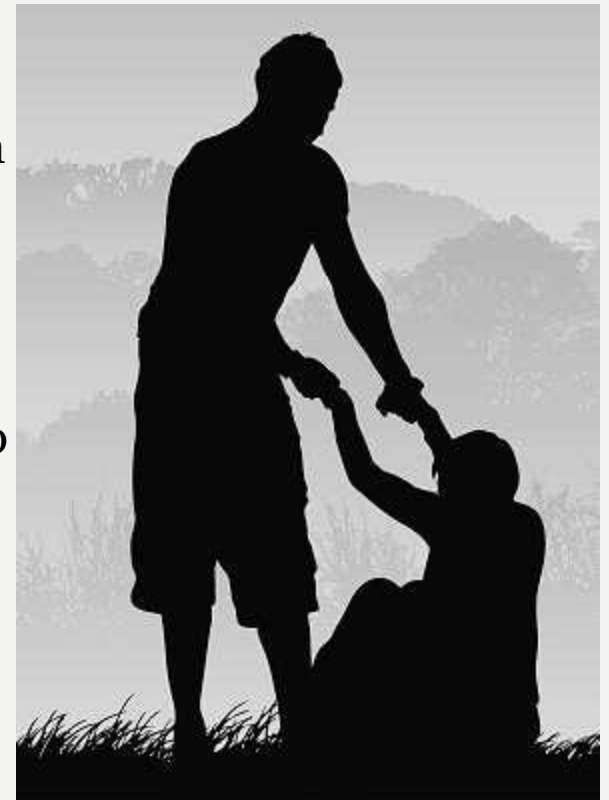
Clients find relief through:

- Being able to gently release traumatic shock through completion of fight, flight, freeze responses.
- Increasing their capacity to tolerate difficult bodily sensations and emotions.
- Feeling empowered by developing new skills to self-regulate and restore trust in themselves and their bodies.



HOW DO CLINICIANS BENEFIT FROM SE?

- Experiencing less burn-out by witnessing clients with complex trauma “heal and get better”.
- Utilizing an understanding of the nervous system and the body to appropriately and effectively intervene when clients become overwhelmed.
- Gaining knowledge of the language of the body to better understand a client’s story.



Want to Learn More?

- ❑ Reflect on how the SE model might more effectively inform your work with trauma
- ❑ Observe the body and be curious!
- ❑ Learn more about Somatic Experiencing®
 - ✓ Read SE books and publications (see reference list)
 - ✓ Watch SE videos (YouTube)

Sign-up for the **SE™ Professional Training** at traumahealing.org



A Comprehensive Training Program
to Become a
Somatic Experiencing Practitioner (SEP)



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SOMATIC EXPERIENCING,

- Go to www.traumahealing.org for information on SE and the national and international training schedule.
- Email the Somatic Experiencing Training Institute at info@traumahealing.org for more information or call (303)652-4035.
- Contact me by email at Rehrke@traumahealing.org with any questions or for more information.

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David Baldwin's Trauma Information Pages: <http://www.trauma-pages.com/>