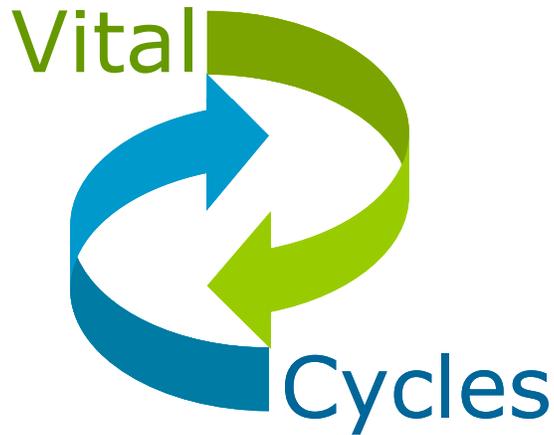


Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

<u>Page</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Section</u>
3	Meeting Guide		
	Healing Principles		Healing Paths
10	Empowerment	44	Surviving
11	Focus	46	Stabilizing
12	Integrity	47	Flowing
14	Ownership	50	Freeing
16	Self-care	52	Yearning
17	Learning	54	Opening
18	Safety	56	Choosing
19	Celebration	58	Accepting
20	Acceptance	61	Recharging
22	Playfulness	63	Understanding
23	Creativity	67	Affirming
24	Community	69	Learning
		71	Harmonizing
		78	Processing
		81	Uniting
		83	Connecting
		86	Renewing
	Community Principles		Other Tools
26	Inclusion	89	Grounding Techniques
27	Healing Environment	90	Healing Environment Issues
29	Confidentiality	91	Meeting Guide
30	Inner Wisdom	92	About Vital Cycles
32	Equality	95	Business Meeting and Roles Guide
34	Flexibility		
35	Simplicity		
36	Transparency		
37	Outreach		
38	Independence		
40	Ideation		
42	Appreciation		

Meeting Guide



Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

VITAL CYCLES MEETING GUIDE

[\(insert starting time here\)](#) We welcome you to the _____ meeting of Vital Cycles. We acknowledge your strength, hope and courage in being here. The primary focus of this meeting is healing the effects of _____

The Purpose of Vital Cycles is to empower those who seek joy in living while healing the emotional impact of trauma.

Vital Cycles is a healing community. It is designed to be one part of your support system on your therapeutic path of healing and thriving. It offers a healing process which allows you to foster your own spirituality or other belief systems.

In our meeting, every week, one member takes the role of Healing Environment Nurturer. The HEN has the responsibility to gently remind all members of any meeting guidelines and or principles as needed. The HEN is picked by the facilitator before the meeting, and may be any member.

Self-Care Invitations:

Choice

- ☺ We start meetings by reading written material, after which there is time for sharing. Members “pass” whenever we want. For example, we can choose not to take a turn reading the literature. We can say “pass” instead of introducing ourselves, or we can introduce ourselves in a manner that is most healing to us.

Grounding

- ☺ Using grounding techniques, like the ones at the end of this notebook, can sometimes help us to stay emotionally present.

Pacing

- ☺ If grounding doesn't work, we encourage members to step outside the room at any time to prevent becoming overwhelmed or shutting down. We find it much more helpful to be outside the room for a while to stay grounded, rather than be in the room and not feel grounded.
- ☺ We recommend sharing in a way that keeps you balanced and healing.

Respecting

- ☺ The only limitation on the way we participate is that we must follow the guidelines for other members' healing as well. Let's treat each other with respect and gentleness.

Now let us go around the room and in 1 sentence each introduce ourselves by first name and why we're here.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

The **Healing Principles** are core to great healing. They provide a helpful guide as we approach emotional healing inside and outside of this meeting. The more we align our lives with them, the more we heal.

We'll now take turns reading the **Healing Principles**.

- Empowerment** We shape our own healing process choosing what best serves us.
- Focus** Focusing on a vision of joy and healing motivates us to positive action.
- Integrity** We discover our authentic core values and strive to live in alignment with them.
- Ownership** Taking appropriate responsibility for the effects of the trauma today improves our dignity and relationships.
- Self-Care** A gentle pace and a nourishing lifestyle accelerate our healing.
- Learning** We achieve ever greater clarity through lifelong curiosity.
- Safety** Healthy boundaries, respect, and gentleness sustain our healing environment.
- Celebration** Learning to appreciate the delights of the moment invigorates our lives with joy.
- Acceptance** We honor all emotions and memories.
- Playfulness** Feeling free follows from fanciful fun and festivity.
- Creativity** Nourishing our intuitive expression of self frees our healing energy.
- Community** Together we heal more quickly and easily.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

The Community Principles help focus us on what to do to create a healthy healing environment.

We'll now take turns reading the **Community Principles**.

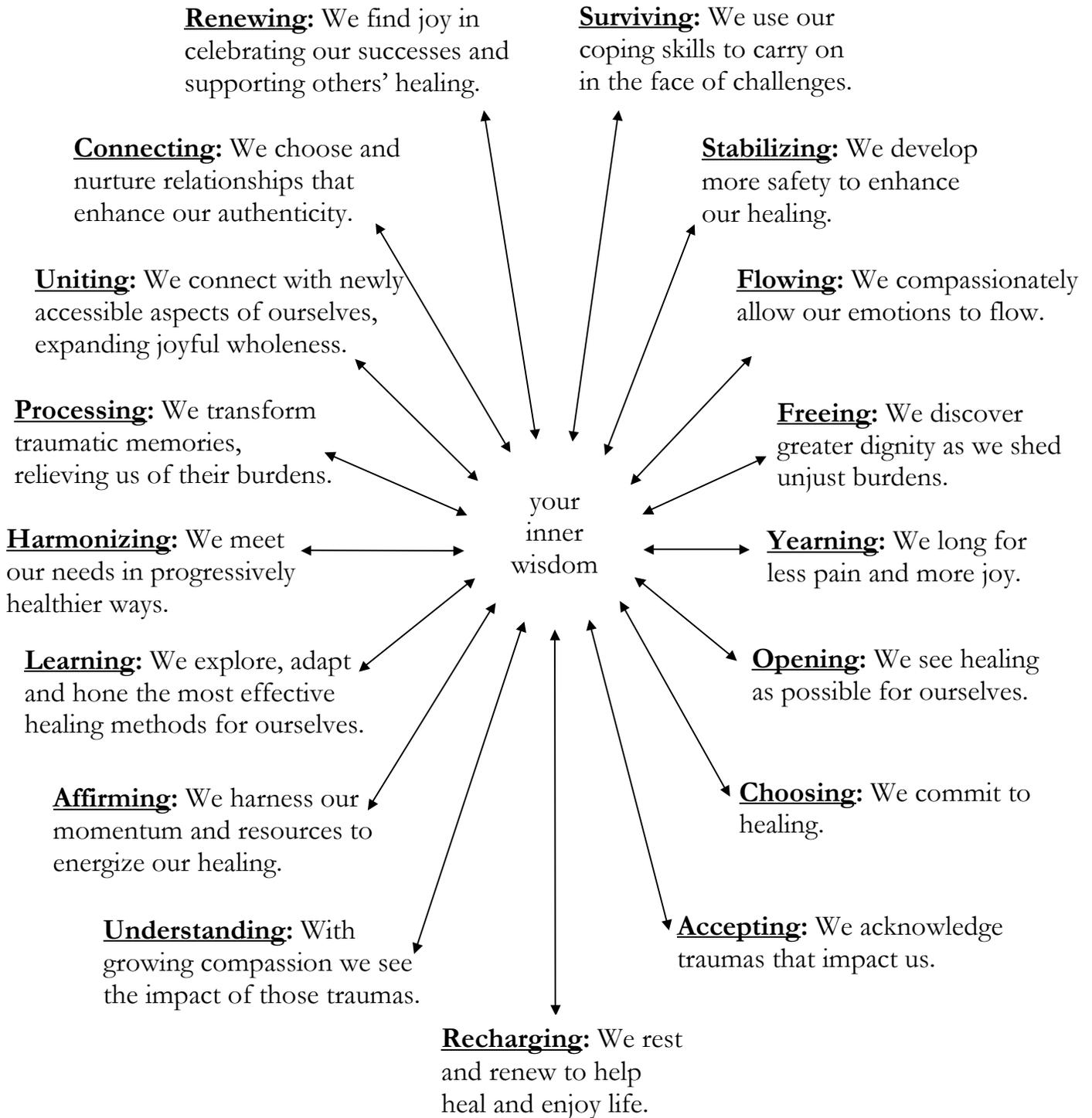
- Inclusion** All adults are welcome who are willing to align with our Principles.
- Healing Environment** Each group is responsible for adopting and gently implementing guidelines that are relevant to the group's focus and are consistent with our Principles.
- Confidentiality** Trust is critical in our healing environments. We only share a member's identity and other personal information with that person's permission.
- Inner Wisdom** We honor the right of all people to draw ideas, support and guidance from whatever practices, beliefs and sources they choose. Thus, in our groups we respect everyone's way of defining inner wisdom.
- Equality** All members share the opportunity for contributing to the identity and direction of their groups.
- Flexibility** Support groups and service groups* have the freedom and responsibility to create and shape their healing environments as they wish, so long as they align with the Principles.
- Simplicity** In order to focus our energies on the Purpose of Vital Cycles we keep guidelines, decision-making and organizational structure clear and simple.
- Transparency** We build trust within our community by openly sharing all support group and service group information.
- Outreach** Vital Cycles members can speak to their own personal healing experience as a member, but cannot speak for the Vital Cycles Community as a whole.
- Independence** Vital Cycles as a whole engages exclusively in Vital Cycles activities. All events that service groups co-sponsor with outside organizations, as well as contributions accepted, must further our Purpose and align with our Principles.
- Ideation** The generous and compassionate exchange of ideas infuses our healing with possibilities. We offer ideas to others only when they want them, knowing they will choose what they will do.
- Appreciation** We celebrate each other's strengths, vulnerabilities and contributions that make our community richer and more vibrant.

(* "Support groups" are where Vital Cycles members gather to help each other heal.
"Service groups" take action to help create Vital Cycles healing opportunities.)

The **Healing Paths** give us specific actions we can take to further our healing. They also give us a language to talk about a stage or phase we are at in a particular area of healing or in general. See the "Vital Cycles Tool Kit" for more explanation and ideas for each Path and Principle.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

You choose the next Path in your healing vital cycle guided by your own inner wisdom.
We'll take turns reading the Healing Paths, starting with Surviving and moving to the right.



Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

One Breath Joy Sharing (briefly share what you can in one breath – not too strict): We all strive for balance in life. It is easy to get overwhelmed by everyday events and focus on aspects that are difficult. Let's each take the opportunity now to share a recent positive experience in our lives.

Here are the **Healing Environment Guidelines** for this meeting:

- ☺ Individuals need to decide when they are up for touch, such as hugging and holding hands. Please gain someone's permission each time.
- ☺ We only respond positively to others sharing.
- ☺ We allow others to share uninterrupted.
- ☺ Please alert the other members before sharing graphic trauma information. Each of us can leave the room at any time in order to stay grounded.
- ☺ Please help maintain the focus on the person sharing by keeping movements and sounds discreet.

The reading today will be the (*facilitator chooses which Healing Path or Principle*). It is on page (see Table of Contents)

We will now transition to sharing time. Sharing may include thoughts and feelings in response to the Vital Cycles Healing Paths and Principles, past or current painful experiences, memories and or healing paths you are taking. You can share about challenges and successes and you can ask for other's support and affirmation. Let others know when you have completed your sharing and if you'd like any particular response, support or ideas from others. Please remember that in this group we only give input when invited by the person who has shared. During your own sharing you can highlight what resonated with you from someone else's sharing. At times it might be confusing to know what to share about. Feel free to share openly, sometimes you may just want to think out loud, or share through drawing, movement or sound.

The meeting is now open for sharing.

[\(insert your optional break time here\)](#) **Break:** We'll now take a five-minute break

[\(insert your meeting restart time here\)](#) **Announcements and Independence Principle** (Pass the basket for donations.) *We collect voluntary donations to pay the rent, and print new literature. Extra money is sent to the Vital Cycles Board to support outreach.*

Please remember (only read these if you take a break):

- ☺ We only respond positively to others sharing.
- ☺ We allow others to share uninterrupted.
- ☺ Please help maintain the focus on the person sharing by keeping movements and sounds discreet.
- ☺ Please alert the other members before sharing graphic trauma information. Each of us can leave the room at any time in order to stay grounded.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

[\(insert your closing time here – 10 minutes before the end\)](#) It is now time to close the meeting.

There are many ways to enhance your healing community.

- ☺ Other Vital Cycles meetings and events
- ☺ Supportive friends
- ☺ Effective trauma therapists
- ☺ Helping others
- ☺ Complementary practices such as body work, energy work, other support groups, etc.
- ☺ Processing alone (journaling, art, etc.)

Affirming what is going well, and seeking what we want, inspire us to further healing. So, we'll now take turns reading the **Celebrations of Healing**.

We accept our needs and feelings and express them as a natural part of who we are.

Our integrity and sense of self grow stronger.

Inner tranquility and contentment increase and deepen with each healing step.

We appreciate the positive changes and the beauty in our lives.

We create and maintain healthy boundaries for our healing and well-being.

We embrace our innocence and learn to love and nurture ourselves.

We nurture relationships with those who honor our boundaries, and treat us with respect and care.

Our creativity flows and inspires us as we play, work, and heal.

We choose work that is fulfilling and sustainable.

Our self-confidence and self-esteem strengthen as we learn to rely on our inner wisdom.

Self-care becomes a central part of thriving in life.

Passion for life and hope for the future take root and flourishes within us.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Please Remember:

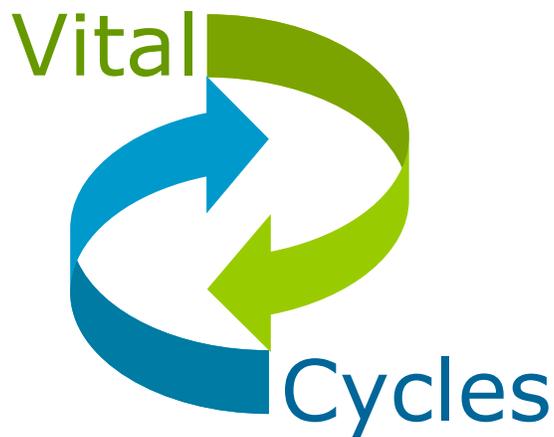
- ☺ Individuals need to decide when they are up for touch, such as hugging and holding hands. Please gain someone's permission first.
- ☺ Keep identity and personal information confidential
- ☺ Reassure yourself if parts of you are feeling fearful
- ☺ Be gentle with yourself and each other
- ☺ Focus on healing
- ☺ Connect with and support one another

We'll now go around the room and briefly share one thing that you will do for your healing during the next week.

All those who wish can join me in the **closing**, handholding is optional.

**We celebrate our
triumphs over trauma,
We honor our own
process and our own
pathway,
and we continue to
respect our strength, hope
and courage as we find
joy in healing.**

Healing Principles



Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Empowerment

We shape our own healing process choosing what best serves us.

We can develop the skills to make good decisions for our healing so we can lead lives of joyous dignity.

An important skill for our healing journey involves learning to access and trust our inner wisdom, sometimes known as intuition. By developing our connection with our inner resources, we gain valuable insight to help guide our choices. Ways to access one's inner wisdom include journaling, visualization, creating art, meditation and prayer. Developing this connection and aligning ourselves with it is an enriching lifelong process.

Consulting our inner wisdom helps us discover our needs. Knowing more about our needs gives us power! We can proactively seek ways to meet our needs, taking care of as many of them as possible. The sense of empowerment gained in recognizing our capacity for self-nurturance leads to increased self-respect and dignity.

As we build self-awareness, we discover there are many ways we can begin to meet our needs. It's vital we become expert in discovering what works for us and adapting it to fit. After all, we are the only ones who can truly know what is best working for us.

Gradually, we gain the emotional maturity to choose the paths that are most healing for ourselves. Gradually, we shift from seeing ourselves as victims, to seeing ourselves as survivors and over time as thrivers. This is more of a cyclic process than a linear one. Even after much healing has elapsed, we may still find aspects of ourselves feeling like victims at times. It helps when we can turn towards these aspects with empowered compassion.

As we continue to make empowering choices for our healing and deepen our connection with our emotions, our capacity to experience joy grows, and our lives feel progressively richer and more fulfilling.

Vital Cycle: The better we shape our healing process the more empowered we are. The more empowered we are the better we can shape our healing process.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Focus

Focusing on a vision of joy and healing motivates us to positive action.

Each of us can only heal if we believe we can. By choosing to direct our focus towards the joy and healing we desire, we are actually taking a step toward reaching these goals. Our positive mental imagery provides powerful motivation for us to choose positive behaviors. Prioritizing facilitates the focusing process: we choose what is most important for our own joy and healing and we focus upon that.

A primary tool in healing is positive language; it is a way of consciously using language to influence how we feel. It can be utilized both verbally and with our internal thought process. As an example, compare the following sentences: “I have a lot of crap in my history to deal with,” and “I really want to heal the impacts of past traumas.” Notice how you feel after reading each sentence. This is an example of how positive language can facilitate our healing—our choice of words affects how we feel. It’s not magical, but it definitely increases self-acceptance and produces healthier results faster.

It works! Choosing positive self-talk and mental imagery actually enhances our physiology. For example, research shows that laughter results in reduced levels of the stress hormone, cortisol and increased levels of endorphins. Our body actually begins to move towards the mental images we hold – that’s why it’s vital to use positive imagery that guides us towards healing.

Focusing on a vision of joy and healing provides lush benefits. It nourishes our capacity to see the opportunities for joy and healing around us. It also allows us to embrace existing joy and healing more fully. Focusing on a joyful healing vision enables us to choose the lightest, easiest and most enjoyable pathway of healing. It allows us to appreciate the joy in our lives today and be proud of the healing we have already done, while creating a platform for future joy and healing.

The bottom line is: it enables us to thrive more today!

Vital Cycle: The more motivation we have the more positive action we do. The more positive action we do, the more motivated we are.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Integrity

We discover our authentic core values and strive to live in alignment with them.

Living in integrity builds self-respect and allows us to live lives of honor and dignity. Distinguishing the difference between myths, rules and values can be difficult given our histories. The effort involved is well worth it, as our increasing understanding allows us to live with a sense of adult self-awareness and blossoming self-integrity.

Myths are what were taught to us in our childhoods or times of trauma. Many of them instilled in us negative beliefs about ourselves and our capabilities. Rules try to force people and situations into conformity. Rules are rigid, eliminate connection and minimize personal ownership.

In contrast, values are essentially core principles that are used to guide behavior and attitudes.

We were born with inherent core values but may have lost touch with them for a while due to trauma we suffered. When we live out of alignment with our own core values it erodes our self-esteem, our sense of purpose and ability to experience joy. We need to rediscover our intrinsic value systems. As we continually align with our values we're mindful that both our values and our selves are works in progress and growth is something we seek. Values help to determine who we are and how we respond to choices we face every day. Healthier practices evolve out of living true to our personal core values.

Some examples of core values are: honesty, caring, humility, individuality, creative expression, treating others with respect, acting with dignity, etc. Core values differ from person to person. One person may have a core value of putting others above oneself, while another person values individuality and expression of self. The list goes on and on. Only we can know which core values are the most important to us.

When discovering or rediscovering your core values, ask yourself:

- What are the 3-5 most important core values that are most important to me?
- What would I tell my children are the core values that I hold throughout my life, and that I hope they will hold when they become adults?
- If I awoke tomorrow morning with enough money to retire for the rest of my life, would I continue to live these core values?
- Can I envision them being valid 100 years from now?
- Would I want to hold those core values, even if at some point one or more of them became a disadvantage?

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Core values guide us to make the best choices for ourselves. They allow flexible choices rather than the prescribed rigid limitations of myths and rules. Here is a table that clarifies the difference between myths, rules and value-based guidance:

Topic	Myth	Rule	Value-based guidance
Clothing	I must look sexy.	Never wear white after labor day.	I will dress respectfully in relation to myself and my personal needs. I will buy myself quality clothing.
Touch	Touch is dangerous. It leads to abuse.	I must never allow anyone to touch me.	I will experiment with allowing myself to be touched in safe situations (hugs from safe friends, massage from a certified therapist, etc.).
Anger	It's not safe to feel angry.	I'm not allowed to be angry.	Appropriate anger expressed in a non-destructive manner is healthy.

As we become skilled at recognizing myths, rules and values, we may choose to replace myths and rules that contradict our values.

As with any new skill, discovering and aligning with our core values may feel awkward and confusing at first but it does get easier with practice. The more we align ourselves with the principles that matter to us on a core level, the more authentically we live. A life we feel at home in, and can flourish in, takes form.

Vital Cycle: The more we live in alignment with our values, the more integrity we feel. The more integrity we feel, the more we can live in alignment with our values.

Activity: The table above illustrates some basic examples. You may wish to apply the idea to myths and rules that you want to reframe as you explore shaping a value-based life.

Healing Principle: Ownership

Taking appropriate responsibility for the effects of the trauma today improves our dignity and relationships.

Taking ownership is empowering! It helps us access the power that we have to make a difference. Over time we learn to give voice to what needs to be spoken. This can be deeply healing for those who were compelled to keep silent about traumatic events. The Ownership Principle is about stepping up—taking responsibility for our healing.

First, we need to realize that our reactions to trauma are common to others who were traumatized. Given our histories, it is understandable to experience:

- Shock, numbness and confusion
- Excessive vigilance
- Increased reactivity
- Intrusive recollections
- Anger and resentment
- Guilt
- Physical complaints
- Withdrawal, isolation and avoidance
- Fear, anxiety and panic
- Pessimism
- Disorganization
- Distraction
- Sudden temporary upsurges of grief
- Isolation

Taking responsibility for the effects of the trauma gives us the power to address them. It allows us to heal such destructive effects as over-responsibility, alcoholism, or sex addictions. The concept of appropriate responsibility is vital here. We are NOT responsible for what others have done to us. Being sexually or physically abused as a child, for example, was not the child's fault. As we gain awareness, we can learn to let go of the victim-hood of our past and take ownership for our current lives.

Taking appropriate responsibility also means doing so with self-compassion: refraining from blaming or shaming or otherwise internally condemning ourselves. Besides treating ourselves with respect and dignity, we extend respect toward others, realizing that they are responsible for their own healing. We may need to make amends to ourselves and others, for ways we may have acted out destructively in the past, or otherwise caused damage.

As we realize the trauma's impact and own our capacity to heal we're able to decide to change our lives. By nourishing and growing our authenticity, our relationships with ourselves and others improve. Through awareness we can choose thoughts that build self-love and confidence. Focusing our attention on the present keeps us grounded and supports our ability to live our lives today to the fullest.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Vital Cycle: The more authentic we are the more we improve our dignity and relationships. The more we improve our dignity and relationships, the more authentic we are.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Self-Care

A gentle pace and a nourishing lifestyle accelerate our healing.

Learning to listen to and be gentle with ourselves enables us to heal more quickly and with greater resilience. Enhancing our ability to listen to our bodies and nourish them is a vital part of this. Self-care may be difficult at first but it becomes easier over time as it is habituated. Self-care can become a nurturing habit, and can be a lifelong growth process.

Self-care encompasses nourishing our body, our mind and our spirit. Examples of nourishing our body include healthy diet, regular moderate exercise, and sufficient sleep. Nourishing our mind and spirit can include passion-driven work, positive self talk, fun, play, healthy hugs, supportive relationships, pets, helping others, spiritual practice, time in nature, etc.

A vital component of self-care is learning to listen to our bodies. It's a skill that requires focus. Some examples of listening to our bodies include: Tuning in to physical and emotional sensations (i.e., tension, energy level, temperature, comfort, hunger, pain, etc.).

A key component of self-care is gentleness. Being gentle with ourselves is actually the fastest and easiest way to heal. As contradictory as this may seem, it's actually true. For example, if we believe we are not good enough as we are and strive for that ever elusive state of perfection, we may be buying into myths learned in our childhoods. Inevitably, we fall short in our efforts, which usually leads to feelings of negativity and low self worth and we wind up back at square one having not attained our goals. If we attempt to force healing to happen, we can cause damage to ourselves along the way, which also creates resistance to healing. Whereas if we are able to embrace our humanness and respect the limitations we currently have, then we can approach healing more gently. This creates far more internal alignment. It is similar to the fact that gentle yoga stretching helps someone to gain flexibility faster than trying to force flexibility, which actually causes injury. Gentleness helps us to heal much more quickly, easily and smoothly.

Embracing our humanness includes embracing our emotions, even the intense ones. Some fear of intense feelings is understandable but we can allow the fear to move gently through us. Summon the courage within to face our fears and we will discover we are enough just as we are. Self-care is self-respect. WE ARE WORTH IT!

Vital Cycle: The more we heal, the better we're able to practice self-care. The better we're able to practice self-care, the more we heal.

Activity: Form a list of current activities and behaviors that represent your current understanding of self-care. If you wish, form a list of activities and behaviors that you would like to add.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Learning

We achieve ever greater clarity through lifelong curiosity.

So much about our histories was confusing to us. Through learning about the impacts of trauma (such as the way the human brain is affected) we gain the understanding to begin to put things into perspective. Learning happens everywhere, not just in formal education. There are many ways of learning; each of us has the ability to discover what works best for us. Knowledge is power. We CAN begin to empower ourselves!

Openness is a necessary component of learning. As we begin to replace old myths that we've carried since the trauma with new, more accurate and helpful truths we're able to pursue curiosity more fully. Learning is a process. There are many healing modalities we can explore. Over time we come to understand what does not work for us and what does work for us as individuals. Even though there are many common impacts of trauma, each of us has our own unique blend of reactions. We can learn a lot from others, AND only we can know how specific modalities or words can affect each of us in a given moment. There is no one right way to heal. Different ways of learning are all okay. Whatever works—visual, auditory, exploratory, theoretical, experiential—we can find what combination works best for each of us in a given situation. An excellent example of a healing tool that we can begin to use today is the replacement of negative self-talk with realistic, positive self-talk.

We see curiosity as a lifelong pursuit and a proactive exploration. Curiosity can open up new roads on our healing journeys that provide adventure, insight and meaning. Curiosity fuels our willingness to explore our world.

Learning who we are allows us to live more fully. As we live more expansive lives, the effects of our trauma have less and less influence on us and our growing self awareness allows us to live increasingly joyful lives.

Vital Cycle: The more we learn the greater clarity we have. The greater clarity we have the more we learn.

Activity: Brainstorm a list of healing tools and methods. Pick a few from that list that you might wish to explore further.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Safety

Healthy boundaries, respect, and gentleness sustain our healing environment.

Creating a healing environment for ourselves enables far more rapid and smoother healing. There are many facets to a healing environment. It is incredibly helpful to have interactions with others that are gently respectful of our boundaries. This is necessary for us to heal. It's a process of gradually finding and nurturing relationships that support our healing. See the Connecting Path for more ideas on this.

Establishment of self-awareness regarding safety creates a fundamental foundation for further healing, self-actualization (or realizing our full potential), and learning. Our internal environment is as important as our external environment. When dealing with our internal environment the concepts of healthy boundaries, respect and gentleness are paramount. Being gentle with ourselves, and respectful of the challenges we are facing, helps us to create healthy boundaries for our internal world. Focusing on self-safety creates a platform for healing.

Traumatic memories carry with them myths and fears that can skew our sense of safety. Sometimes the myths and fears make us feel unsafe when we are actually physically safe. Sometimes they lead us to believe that we're safe in risky situations. These skewed perspectives can lead to behaviors that limit our opportunities and/or lessen our safety. A major function of healing is developing the ability to discern our actual level of safety regardless of our emotions. One of our members says to himself, "I am safe today when my health and well being are not at risk."

Each of us is responsible to choose whom we share with and how much we share. Maintaining healthy boundaries is an ongoing process with each person we relate to, shifting to fit the situation.

We create our own safety today. Each of us deserves to be safe and to feel as safe as we can. It's up to us to choose situations and set boundaries that are safe for us. We can choose healing tools that help us determine and maintain healthy boundaries. They can also foster respect and gentleness—towards ourselves and others.

Vital Cycle: The healthier our boundaries, the safer we are, the easier it is to set healthier boundaries.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Celebration

Learning to appreciate the delights of the moment invigorates our lives with joy.

In addition to invigorating our lives with joy, celebration helps us focus upon what is good for us. Celebration can happen just because we want it to regardless of others' rules and beliefs. We are worthy of celebration! Celebrating our successes is a way to honor ourselves. Celebrating others' achievements helps improve our focus and relationships. Plus, celebrating simply makes life more fun.

Some of us may have fears about celebrating due to the myths we were given. Safe exposure to celebrating ourselves and others will replace those myths. This may be a stretch for some at the beginning. Learning the art of celebration is a process.

Our traumatic memories habitually bring our focus to the worst moments of our life. We need to consciously shift the focus and recognize the good things in our lives today. While we do need to focus on the darkest moments at times during our healing process, we can bring balance to this by focusing on the memories we enjoy as well. The more we process the traumatic memories (see the Processing Path) the easier it is to celebrate the good times.

There are celebration opportunities all around us. We can live in the moment. Celebrate the moment! It's all about the joy of living in the present!

Vital Cycle: The more we celebrate, the easier it is to heal. The more we heal, the easier it is to celebrate.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Acceptance

We honor all emotions and memories.

As we accept traumatic memories and the emotions that accompanied them, we can restore our ability to embrace all emotions.

One common pattern is denying our own emotions and memories because, at the point of trauma, experiencing that emotion would have been overwhelming or perhaps dangerous. To honor them we begin to shift old patterns of denial, dissociation and self-negation (see the Acceptance Path). Many of us have experienced strong influences to deny, ignore or even suppress certain selected emotions and memories. This is understandable, as the innate response to trauma can cause us to repress certain powerful emotions, such as anger and grief. However, the suppression of one or two emotions causes us to repress or constrain all emotions.

Access to our emotions determines the quality of our lives. Emotions give us purpose, passion and drive. We see all emotions as valid information worthy of awareness and attention (see table below which lists some common responses for some fundamental emotions).

Fundamental Emotion	Physical Sensation	Role in Healing
Joy	Opening, high spirit, lightening	Makes healing and living worthwhile. Motivates us to seek more joy.
Anger	Tightness, flushed, pounding/racing heart	Helps us change situations that cause us pain or fear.
Fear	Nausea, sweating, pounding/racing heart	Can be used as a regulator to help us pace our healing.
Sadness	Weightiness, overall ache, intense pain, fatigue, tears	Validation of our experience and grief for our losses.

Our memories are our memories. We aren't here to debate or confirm the accuracy of the memories. We are here to accept what we feel and remember and heal the lingering effects, including myths, beliefs, pain, and patterns of thought and behavior.

As we restore connection with our emotions and memories, the entire range of feeling becomes available to us. Having released deep pain, we gain the capacity to experience immense joy and our wholeness is revealed.

Vital Cycle: The more we honor our emotions and memories, the more we accept ourselves. The more we accept ourselves, the more we honor our emotions and memories.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Activity: Take the table above and adapt it to your own perception and experience. If you wish, add more emotions, your experience of physical sensation and that emotion's (many) roles in your healing.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Playfulness

Feeling free follows from fanciful fun and festivity.

Lighthearted fun expands our joy and frees our spirits. Fun and joy build self-esteem, self worth, self-confidence, and our ability to heal. Playing purely for the fun of it is a key ingredient of joy. Play enhances the quality of life. Play that is aligned with the healing principles nurtures us and our relationships.

There are many myths attempting to limit play. For these and other reasons, letting go of inhibitions may initially feel unfamiliar or even scary. With practice, it eventually feels freeing and joyful.

Play is for adults too. There is research that shows that it prolongs the functionality of our minds and actually gives us a physiological boost. Playful activities can increase the elasticity of the brain and nurture creativity and learning. Play can center us, giving us a more balanced perspective of ourselves and our lives.

For these reasons it is wonderful for us to embrace play in our lives as a way to further our healing and to live ever more fulfilling lives.

Vital Cycle: The more fun we have the more joy we feel. The more joy we feel the more fun we have.

Activity: Make a list of activities and events that you take part in that are fun for you. This may include hobbies, elements of your work, relationships that are fun. Then make a list of activities and events that you might wish to explore.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Creativity

Nourishing our intuitive expression of self frees our healing energy.

Nurturing our creativity develops our intuition and strengthens our connection with our inner wisdom. It helps release us from old myths by giving us new insights to replace them with.

- What do we mean by creativity? Creativity is the state of original expression. It can mean originality, imagination, and resourcefulness. It involves developing something that was not there before. For example: New concepts
- New ways of healing
- A new way of seeing something
- New ideas
- New ways of playing
- New ways of being or doing
- An object
- Art, in many forms (music, paintings, writing, dancing, acting, singing, etc.)

Some of us had to connect or reconnect with our creativity (or creative aspects) that had been suppressed. Our access to it might have been stymied by old myths such as: “I don’t have a creative bone in my body,” “I’m not talented enough,” “my work isn’t good enough,” or “it doesn’t come easily to me.” Creativity is a human characteristic that we all share. Whether we have knowledge of it or not, the trait is there for us to unearth and develop.

By developing our creativity we are reclaiming a piece of our intuitive self, a part of our self that may have gone underground during traumatic times. The creative process is rich with learning opportunities about our inner world, our capabilities and strengths. Exercising our creativity can help us express our emotions and give texture to our lives. Making creativity a priority in our life will continue the process of regaining a significant part of our inner community which brings new dimensions to our healing and increases our joy.

Vital Cycle: The more we are creative the easier it is to heal. The more we heal, the easier it is to be creative.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Principle: Community **Together we heal more quickly and easily.**

Collective energy invigorates us all towards better healing. In the past many of us experienced isolation and danger in communities. Today we have the tools to construct and participate in safe, healing and nurturing communities.

Seeing others heal confirms that we can heal. They can be an inspiration to us. We can both teach others and learn from others about healing. Hearing about others' experiences helps us understand the impact trauma had and may continue to have on us. Being part of a group can help us to begin to replace isolation with connection.

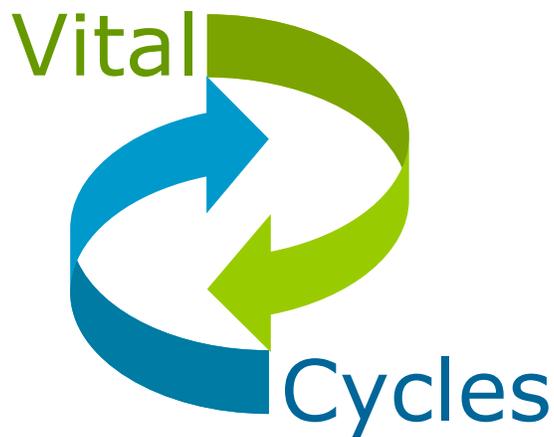
Feeling compassion for others helps us feel it towards ourselves. It is often easier to have compassion for another first. Also having compassion shown to us aids in our learning to be gentler with ourselves.

One of the possible impacts of trauma is to believe that we're 'all bad'. That is a myth. We all have good qualities. We can serve as enlightened witnesses to each other. The group can serve as a mirror reflecting our positive qualities back to each other. Seeing that group members care about us confirms this.

As we start to bust these myths our healing is invigorated. Through this *vitalized* healing we're strengthening the community that helps us heal. Through this spirit of community we are more empowered (see Empowerment Principle) and thus are able to contribute more fully.

Vital Cycle: The stronger our healing community the faster and more easily we heal. The faster and more easily we heal the stronger we make our healing community.

Community Principles



Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Inclusion

All adults are welcome who are willing to align with our Principles.

Vital Cycles welcomes all adults who wish to heal from the effects of any trauma, large or small. That trauma may include emotional, physical or sexual trauma. We welcome diversity and include all people regardless of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or age. We focus on the creation of a supportive environment for those who wish to heal from the effects of trauma as we seek to lessen pain and fill our lives with more joy. Because of the wide variety of reporting requirements for certain forms of abuse, groups focusing on healing from childhood abuse are limited to legal adults.

Groups may, given their collective wisdom choose a primary focus for a specific trauma, such as emotional neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, witness of violence or other traumas (see the website for the full range of traumas). These groups may choose to self-define because of a desire to create a group that focuses in depth on specific issues in an environment of mutual understanding.

We know that having been traumatized can make being in a community challenging for all of us. The Community Principle focuses on establishing safe, healing environments for the greatest number of trauma survivors.

Example 1: The Birmingham Alabama group did not think about a specific gender restriction when they founded a group with a focus on childhood sexual abuse, but all of the founders were women, and the group became comfortable in its ability to share about childhood sexual abuse freely and openly. After three months of existence, Joey showed up. At first, the group was uncomfortable, but recognized quickly that Joey's goals for being there were the same as theirs, and he rapidly became a "regular" at the group. The group chose to solidify its gender mix in its healing environment guidelines.

Example 2: The Sunday afternoon Singapore meeting chose to define a focus on individuals who had sustained physical abuse in their childhoods. In addition, the members chose to create a closed meeting, except for the first Sunday in each month, when those who were supporting members of the group in their healing process could also attend.

Example 3: After Jill had a stroke, she was concerned about her ability to function as part of her Vital Cycles Group. When she was able to return, the group continued to provide her with readings that were shared aloud. She read aloud slowly, but over time, her speech and speed improved. She was grateful for the compassionate acceptance of her home group!

Community Principle: Healing Environment

Each group is responsible for adopting and gently implementing guidelines that are relevant to the group's focus and are consistent with our Principles.

Each Vital Cycles group, whether it is a support group or a service group, shares responsibility for creating, defining and maintaining its own healing environment. The collective wisdom of the group plays a critical role in creating and shaping that sense of safety. When gently but firmly stated, these healing environment guidelines create helpful boundaries for individuals to share.

Sample healing environment guidelines are posted on the Vital Cycles website, www.vitalcycles.org and can be either directly applied by a group, adapted, or used as a model for the development of group-specific healing environment guidelines. Some issues to explore in creating an environment of clarity and safety include:

- Establishing clear start, stop and break times for the group
- The types of responses to others sharing that are acceptable. E.g., many groups ask that the sharing of an individual be uninterrupted by others and, at its conclusion, be embraced as a complete thought by the group. Comments and support can be provided on an individual basis at the break or after the group ends. Other groups may choose to allow supportive input after each sharing, with appropriate boundaries established.

In addition, part of creating a safe and healthy healing environment is creating a simple and effective business structure for the conduct of business. See the Equality Principle for more information on this. Regular conduct of business meetings can help keep the focus of the regular meeting on healing matters only.

Part of any healthy group is the opportunity to reach out to support the healing of others. Groups can welcome newcomers in any number of ways that seek to provide comfort and reassurance to newcomers as they arrive at the group. Trust in the strength of the individual Vital Cycles group can come over time as confidentiality is respected, boundaries are preserved and a healing environment is created. We are safe today, and with that knowledge we learn that the trauma is in the past.

We strive to create environments that are safe and healing. Thus, individual groups can choose to exclude those who do not strive to align with our healing and community principles. In addition, in our desire to create and maintain a healing environment individual groups may apply guidelines to create and enhance a sense of appropriate safety.

Example 1: The Tuesday Night Mexico City meeting was faced with a challenge of behavior when a member of the group, at a social event that was an anniversary party for the group, rather abruptly kissed another member on the mouth. The woman discussed it with the event planners, and at the next business meeting, the actions of Jim were reviewed. After careful discussion, Jim was invited to discuss his behavior at the next business meeting, and was also asked to not attend that Vital Cycles meeting during the interim.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Example 2: The Wednesday Night Billings Montana meeting developed a practice of establishing a “newcomer mentor” for newcomers who arrived at the meeting. The Mentor would gently approach the newcomer during the break time, welcome them, and ask if they had any questions or concerns. The Group felt that this acknowledged the courage of the newcomer in showing up, and sought to create a level of comfort for the individual to return.

Example 3: The Sunday afternoon Houston meeting maintains a small supply of “You Are Not Alone” medallions that they provide to newcomers. In addition, annual anniversaries are celebrated with other medallions.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Confidentiality

Trust is critical in our healing environments. We only share a member's identity and other personal information with that person's permission.

Respecting each person's right to privacy is critical to the creation and maintenance of a healthy and healing environment. For many of us, our childhood trust was violated by the effects of trauma, and thus confidentiality is paramount in our adult life. For all of us, we can heal more effectively when we make the choice who finds out about our histories, and when that happens. Personal information, such as our last names, telephone numbers, email addresses, mailing addresses, workplace or occupation must remain private unless given the permission to share by the individual in question.

The establishment of confidentiality does not come at the cost of appropriate healing dialogue. It can be helpful to talk to a peer/mentor or a therapist about the contents of a meeting, but the identity of the individual members of that group should never be revealed.

Personal safety or the safety and integrity of the group and its healing environment can, on rare occasions, be cause for breaking confidentiality. There may be times that the actions or activities of an individual may bear discussion at a business meeting or a called moment of collective wisdom. However, this should be done with as much care and respect as possible.

Example 1: In listening to the powerful sharing of Rick in her last Vital Cycles meeting, Sue came to some valuable and profound insights that support her own healing journey. In her next therapy session, Sue discusses those insights; referencing Rick's sharing with her therapist, but does not reveal Rick's name or any other identifying information. The point, after all, is the power of the information and insight presented in the sharing.

Example 2: In a group, a member embarks upon behavior that is persistently and consistently destructive to the safety of the meeting. He calls phone numbers that have been released to him in confidentiality, and speaks with spouses about the sharing of the individual in the group. In the next business meeting, the actions of that individual are discussed, and a course of action to review the behavior with the individual is developed. The group concludes that either the individual needs to modify his behavior or be told to not attend. While this is a difficult decision, the group reflects that the decision sustains its sense of safety.

Example 3: Pierre sees a newcomer who has just started attending his home Vital Cycles meeting, and the newcomer is standing with what appears to be a group of the newcomer's co-workers as they head out for lunch. Pierre greets the newcomer, but never gives any hints about knowing him from Vital Cycles.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Inner Wisdom

We honor the right of all people to draw ideas, support and guidance from whatever practices, beliefs and sources they choose. Thus, in our groups we respect everyone's way of defining inner wisdom.

Vital Cycles welcomes many different beliefs regarding religion and spirituality as a key part of the foundation of the program. Thus, Vital Cycles credits each individual with the personal autonomy to define their inner wisdom and recognizes the inherent wisdom in all people regardless of their belief structure. To that end, Vital Cycles members neither proselytize our own beliefs nor attack the beliefs of others. All belief structures are equal.

In our process of healing from the effects of trauma, it may be necessary for some of us to share in a way that speaks to current or past belief structures. Such sharing supports a healing process so long as it neither promotes nor attacks the specific belief structures of each other. Vital Cycles strives for tolerance of belief structures that may be at variances. We ask that members be gently aware of the potential for variances in the group and strive to respect not only their own beliefs but the beliefs of others.

Example 1: Fernanda has recently found a rich and supportive religious community that has embraced her and has given her a venue for community involvement. She shares at a Vital Cycles group about the importance of that community to her, the value of feeling part of the group and the value of finding and enhancing her understanding of her personal theology. However, in her sharing, she avoids “promoting” that new community to others in the group.

Example 2: Bill is an atheist, a considered position developed after years of theological exploration. He shares, from time to time, about the rigidity of the theological beliefs with which he is raised, but in his sharing, avoids attacking the beliefs of others.

Example 3: Pedro has become a fervent member of a well-defined religious community. He has started to speak with Vital Cycles members at break about the possibility of their attending his new religious community. In addition, in his sharing, he invites other members to join him, and presses the opportunity upon them. After considered discussion, the Vital Cycles group discusses with Pedro the nature of the violation of boundaries and asks him to cease proselytizing.

Example 4: Sara found great strength in the religious beliefs that she was trained in her youth, and continues to find them a bulwark of strength. As she reflects upon the concepts of Inner Wisdom, she realizes that she has routinely discounted the beliefs of others in her group, in an unconscious desire to maintain her loyalty to one of the few positive attributes of her childhood history. As she focuses on this insight, she determines to be less judgmental of others in the group.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Example 5: Aiko was raised in what he came to believe was a restrictive religious environment in his childhood. He began to speak about his perceptions at his Vital Cycles group, but was careful to phrase his commentary about his childhood religion in the first-person singular, so that he would not offend others in the group who might have different belief structures. He found that focusing on the “first-person singular” actually facilitated his own clarity of thought and insight.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Equality

All members share the opportunity for contributing to the identity and direction of their groups.

Starting and maintaining a group so that it sustains a healthy healing environment is a rich opportunity and responsibility. Vital Cycles encourages all members to contribute to shaping the identity and character of the groups they attend, including support groups and service groups. The members of a group become members simply by attending and striving to align with the Healing and Community Principles of Vital Cycles.

The collective wisdom of the group can be facilitated by regular business meetings (usually monthly), guided by the Community Principles. The establishment and maintenance of these regular business meetings to discuss and review the business matters at hand supports the sustaining of a healthy and safe group; these meetings allow an opportunity for Vital Cycles members to participate in shaping business decisions for the group. Although the specifics of business structure and the conduct of the business meeting are left to the collective wisdom of the individual group, which sustains autonomy over its actions, Vital Cycles recommends:

1. The development of a regular schedule for business meetings.
2. Establishment of a consistent format for the group. This may include the format of readings and time-structure for the group, and may also include a monthly format for the group as well.
3. Announcing the business meeting for several meetings prior to the date
4. Fair and equal voting to ensure that each member, without exception, has one equal vote and voice during the vote. In this way we recognize the equal value of all member votes. For example, the vote of a “newcomer” is as valued and valid as the vote of an “old timer”.
5. The establishment of “Best practices” for each, including the solicitation of minority opinions and the development of group decisions.
6. Most groups use a majority vote for decisions, but groups may also choose to use consensus (all feel good enough about the decision), or a certain percentage of votes, to make decisions.
7. The implementation of brainstorming tools and techniques that support the development of creative ideas quickly.
8. The definition of standing roles, such as:
 - o Facilitator who facilitates business meetings
 - o Treasurer who gathers donations, pays rent and sends contributions to Vital Cycles
 - o Secretary who takes notes during business meetings
 - o Literature person who downloads and prints Vital Cycles literature for the meeting
 - o Space facilitator, who locates space for the group and for workshops, may negotiate rent and other aspects of the relationship with the space provider and may make specific accommodations for the group’s needs when the group meets.
9. In addition, the group may wish to establish term limits for each role, thus allowing responsibilities to be rotated and to provide everyone with the opportunity to “grow into service.”
10. The delegation of some tasks and responsibilities to subcommittees. Such groups would be empowered to move more quickly and efficiently to take action, while still reporting

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

back to the business meeting and the group as a whole. Such subcommittees may facilitate certain tasks, such as planning workshops and social events, developing group formats, selecting literature, etc.

11. The conduct of the business meeting should support the timely sharing of all individuals, including old-timers and newcomers, without requiring sharing.
12. Each member of the group has but one vote. Being elected to a volunteer service role does not confer any power or greater voice in decision-making.
13. Groups may delegate decision-making regarding specific tasks to certain roles for greater ease and speed of action.
14. Groups can determine whether they will use proxy voting, absentee voting or telephone call-in voting for certain situations.
15. In addition, groups may wish to create a basis for an impromptu “Healing Environment” meeting called in the moment to deal with an immediate circumstance.

Example 1: After three weeks of announcements, the Tuesday Night Phoenix group holds its business meeting. Joey, the group chair for the year, has prepared a preliminary agenda, and the group considers additional agenda items. Part of the agenda is to commit to a workshop that focuses on journaling, and a brainstorming session is sustained to discuss the probable content of the workshop. A subcommittee is created that is given the responsibility for determining a location and place and will continue to design the workshop. The subcommittee will report back at the next business meeting, which will be held on the next second Tuesday of the month.

Example 2: The founders of the Tuesday Night group in Lagos, Nigeria felt strongly about creating a group that chose to restrict membership to those who had experienced war crimes. Over time, the membership chose to reconsider this boundary, and in a series of business meetings, the group chose to place aside that boundary, thus accepting anyone who had sustained any violent trauma.

Example 3: During a meeting, a newcomer shares about currently physically abusing a child. David, feeling uncomfortable with the sharing, as it violates a core Community Principle, calls for a “Healing Environment Meeting” to be held immediately following the break. During that meeting, David speaks to his concerns, and all others who wish to are asked to speak as well. At the end of the “Healing Environment Meeting”, the group agrees to ask the newcomer to not return.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Flexibility

Support groups and service groups have the freedom and responsibility to create and shape their healing environments as they wish, so long as they align with the Principles.

Vital Cycles promotes the freedom of choice of format and content so long as the activities remain consistent with Vital Cycles Healing and Community Principles. That freedom also indicates the responsibility to shape the development of a healing environment that remains vibrant, growing and active. The flexibility to experiment with new ideas and approaches allows each group to develop new best practices!

Individual Vital Cycles groups can develop their own group format. This may define a “no crosstalk/sharing” format, or may include a variety of formats. (“No crosstalk” means that, as an individual shares during the group meeting, other participants refrain from commenting or giving advice to the individual.) Some groups have found that their healing process is enhanced by “art night”, “play night” or “psychodrama night”. Some groups may choose to sponsor other activities, such as social events, retreats, workshops or other activities.

Service groups may form in response to the desire of individuals and/or groups to undertake activities and events. This may include a website, newsletter, telephone information line, email information chain, workshops, or retreats. These service groups respond to the needs of their members, and do not represent the individual groups as an aggregate entity with the Vital Cycles Board

In all of these matters, Vital Cycles encourages you to bring all of your creativity, skills, passion and talent as you sponsor Vital Cycles healing activities.

Example 1: After three years, there were three very active Vital Cycle groups meeting in central New York. After some discussion, Joey began to organize a local service group that had participants and individuals from each group. This service group created a mission of taking on healing activities that could best be sustained with collective resources, including workshops, an annual social night and an annual retreat. The quarterly meetings also became a resource for sharing group “best practices”. Over time, this group’s treasury allowed it to sponsor rent for new Vital Cycles groups until they could accumulate sufficient membership to pay their own way. In addition, the service group was able, via fundraising activities, to sponsor several “scholarships” to a nearby Vital Cycles retreat.

Example 2: After returning from a weekend healing retreat, Jill spoke to her Friday night group about the success of psychodrama, bringing with her the worksheet that had been used. The group decided to dedicate the “fifth Friday” to psychodrama instead of having an open format discussion.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Simplicity

In order to focus our energies on the Purpose of Vital Cycles we keep guidelines, decision-making, organizational structure clear and simple.

Our goal is to experience more joy and less pain by healing from the effects of trauma. In order to maintain our focus, we strive to keep the business structures of our groups and other Vital Cycles activities and events as simple as possible.

It can be easy to create a labyrinth of rules and regulations as a device for creating a sense of personal and organizational safety for the conduct of the group, business meetings and service groups. As groups create and sustain themselves over time, care can be taken to focus on “right-sizing” the decision-making process and organizational structure. Regular business meetings and careful and prudent re-evaluation of the group’s structure can sustain organic change and growth over time. Thus we have more time and energy to focus on healing. This approach also makes it easier for volunteers to make a difference and enjoy making contributions of time and money. We recommend using *the simplest process and the most minimal set of rules* to enable a healing environment.

- Example 1:** At the third business meeting of the Berlin, Germany Vital Cycles meeting, David suggested using Roger’s Rules of Order to run the meeting. As an alternative, Jill suggested using some simple group polling techniques that would guarantee that everyone would have a voice, and that everyone would have a single vote. After discussion, the group agreed to the simpler group process, but remained open to the use of more complex structures if the group grows. Over time, the group became comfortable with developing a “collective wisdom” and saved voting for those issues that were complex, or for decisions regarding the group’s treasury.
- Example 2:** At the founding meeting of the Willow Grove meeting, the members decided to create a threshold of “prudent reserve” for the group of \$50.00. Money in excess of that was to be distributed on a percentage basis to the Vital Cycles Global Service Group, with the balance to be used to sponsor scholarships to a Vital Cycles retreat.
- Example 3:** At first, the Monday evening Wilmington Sao Paulo, Brasil group established just three service roles, a facilitator, a treasurer and a secretary. Over time, the group became increasingly committed to sponsoring workshops that occurred on different nights than the group, so they chose to create an “events coordinator” position to help organize the workshops.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Transparency

We build trust within our community by openly sharing all support group and service group information.

Vital Cycles continues operational clarity and develops trust by sharing all information about the business decisions of the group and service groups. We make information reasonably available to our members and in appropriate public outlets. However, the most closely held information within Vital Cycles is the personal information about individual members.

Example 1: Although the notes were brief, and focused mostly on the issue of how to distribute the group's treasury, Maria circulated the one-page meeting minutes to all that were comfortable releasing their email addresses. She carried a hardcopy to the group for anyone who wished to review it at break for two weeks.

Example 2: After discussion, the Bristol, England Group decided that their group format had some interesting variations from the original format that the group's founders pulled from the Vital Cycles website; they had generated an "art night" that provided a once/month alternative to their traditional sharing format. Jane forwarded the format to the Vital Cycles website information email, and was pleased to see their format posted on the site as an alternative choice several weeks later.

Example 3: The Vital Cycles Board, which is a service group, routinely publishes its meeting minutes, annual financial statement, and bylaws on the Vital Cycles website. These documents can be printed and reviewed by any interested party.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Outreach

Vital Cycles members can speak to their own personal healing experience as a member, but cannot speak for the Vital Cycles Community as a whole.

As we continue our healing, some of us may wish to reach out by sharing our story with others via writing, interviews and other communications media. Sharing our stories can be empowering and healing as we learn to speak with honesty and openness about our process of healing. As we do so, we need to remain mindful of the need to retain the confidentiality of other Vital Cycles members.

Most people on Earth have endured trauma that has left painful long term effects. Every person who experiences healing helps make the world a better place. We can offer Vital Cycles knowledge and tools to those who want it. However, we only offer gently, knowing that all individuals must decide for themselves when and if they are ready for healing. We cannot predict how Vital Cycles may work for others. We can only share our successful healing, and that we've seen that others have been healing (keeping confidentiality in mind).

Members, groups and service groups may reach out to the larger community via a rich variety of communication tools, including websites, direct mailings, public service announcements on radio, television and print media, fliers and word-of-mouth. The Board of Trustees provides a spokesperson who can speak on behalf of the Board. Outreach goes hand-in-hand with transparency as we are clear and open about what Vital Cycles is about and how others can participate.

Example 1: The Paris, France Vital Cycles group was experiencing great growth, but knew that there were others in their community who could benefit from knowing about the existence of Vital Cycles. After a business meeting that used brainstorming tools to array a range of choices, the group decided to create a subcommittee that assembled a simple one-page flier that could be mailed to therapists and counselors in their geographic region. As word of the program expanded, the group grew, and eventually was able to nurture two new groups on different nights!

Example 2: Randy had assembled a unique combination of therapists, including a trauma therapist, a somatic worker and an acupuncturist to support his process of healing from childhood sexual abuse. His somatic practitioner interviewed Randy. The interview was taped and replayed on a local educational radio program. Randy shared freely about his process of healing, and referenced Vital Cycles as a core part of his program, keeping the focus on his own process of healing and being careful to protect the confidentiality of others in his home group. Randy wanted people to understand the power of peer support as he processed traumatic memories, so he spoke about the value of attending his local Vital Cycles meeting regularly to support those goals.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Independence

Vital Cycles as a whole engages exclusively in Vital Cycles activities. All events that service groups co-sponsor with outside organizations, as well as contributions accepted, must further our Purpose and align with our Principles.

The Purpose of Vital Cycles is to empower those who seek joy in living while healing the emotional impact of trauma. Vital Cycles groups, activities and events gratefully welcome contributions of time, energy and finances when those contributions enhance our purpose without compromising our Healing and Community Principles.

Service groups may choose to co-sponsor events and activities with other organizations when those events and activities support the Purpose of Vital Cycles. Each group or service group retains autonomy on these issues so long as they remain in alignment with the Healing and Community Principles.

This focused, flexibility enables Vital Cycles to help more people, and at the same time keep it focused clearly on our Purpose without conflict of interest.

- Example 1:** Sue has been asked to seek a new home for her group, and has discovered that a local church provides space for various support groups for free, so long as the individual group maintains the space by tidying up after the meeting. The group accepts the offer of free space, and determines that the money previously spent for rent can be used to sponsor a workshop once a quarter.
- Example 2:** Ellen and her group have arranged for a mass mailing of information about Vital Cycles to the therapeutic community in their region. The cost of the fliers, when printed in color, is high, and the printer has offered to print the fliers at cost if the group is willing to accept a tagline at the bottom of the flier announcing the printer's charity. The printer's goals don't seem to align with the Vital Cycles principles so Ellen declines and the group agrees to modify the design to read well in black and white, thus reducing the cost to the parameters that the group can afford.
- Example 3:** The Switzerland Service Group had a significant number of referrals from the Bern Rape Crisis Center. After several conversations, the two organizations collaborated on a Trauma Healing Day. Vital Cycles leaders led several groups onsite, and provided the opportunity for individuals to explore Vital Cycle's healing principles.
- Example 4:** The Southern Florida Service Group co-sponsored a series of workshops with the Miami Family Healing Center. Those interactive workshops focused on the dynamics of healing from the effects of trauma, and were led by experienced Vital Cycles members. The day closed with an open Vital Cycles

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

meeting for those that chose to attend. That led, over time, to the Miami Family Healing Center offering space for a permanent Vital Cycles group.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Ideation

The generous and compassionate exchange of ideas infuses our healing with possibilities. We offer ideas to others only when they want them, knowing they will choose what they will do.

The group process of any Vital Cycles group can generate enormous collective wisdom, energy, insight and creativity. We seek to find ways to build on these rich resources by supporting the free and open sharing of ideas, approaches, and thoughts in our business and planning meetings. We seek to create group processes that promote the giving and receiving of ideas, reflecting the flexibility of the group as it strives to develop and refine “best practices.” This may be challenging at first, as many of us are used to situations that thwarted free communication and creativity. The act of sharing freely can be healing. As we develop and refine our individual skills in our groups and Vital Cycles activities and events, we become increasingly confident in the ability of our inner wisdom to guide us in sharing our creativity.

The sharing of ideas can also be on a personal level as our own healing journey provides us with ideas that we believe may be of personal value to others. However, we offer ideas to others with great care, recognizing that each individual chooses to shape a healing process based on that individual’s own inner wisdom. There is a great difference between giving advice and offering ideas for others to take if they like. Offering ideas is much gentler and respectful. Yet even offering ideas should only be done if the person expresses openness to hearing them.

Example 1: The Buenos Aires group decided to develop a workshop format that would allow them to do deep healing together once a month. Those interested gathered together and used some “Ideation Guidelines” from the Vital Cycles website. Juan facilitated an ideation discussion in which everyone could propose whatever topic and format they wished. During that hour, individuals shared ideas from experiences in other groups, in retreats, and with their individual therapists. Maria wrote down every idea. At the end of the hour, they had filled their writing board with ideas! After voting to find out which were the favorite topics the group chose the top three voted topics, one for each of the following workshops. Because of the freedom of the discussion, individuals felt free to speak to their feelings and thoughts, and filling the volunteer roles needed became a very easy and even joyful task!

As a byproduct of their experience, Juan reviewed the brainstorming guidelines and proposed some changes, emailing them into the Vital Cycles website. Several weeks later, he was delighted to see his revised guidelines posted on the website, which could be downloaded by any other Vital Cycles group!

Example 2: During Jane’s sharing, Jill realized that she might be able to use some of Jane’s ideas to help her own healing. At break, Jill asked Jane if she would share more information. Jane shared her experience and the various ideas she

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

used without ever giving advice. Jane thanked her, and the two began a discussion that was deeply valuable to both of them about healing tools and techniques.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Community Principle: Appreciation

We celebrate each other's strengths, vulnerabilities and contributions that make our community richer and more vibrant.

We learn to appreciate ourselves and others in Vital Cycles by celebrating each other's successes and by openly acknowledging our vulnerabilities. For some of us, this may be challenging at first, because we may not be used to viewing appreciation and vulnerability as powerful elements in healing. As we heal, we understand how much they help us. Celebrating each individual's contributions creates a rich foundation of confidence and honesty that strengthen our ability to heal.

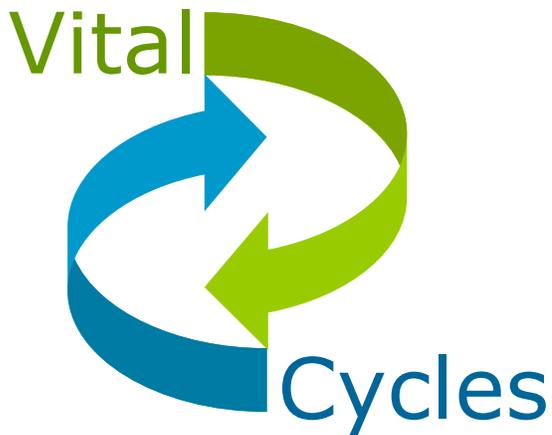
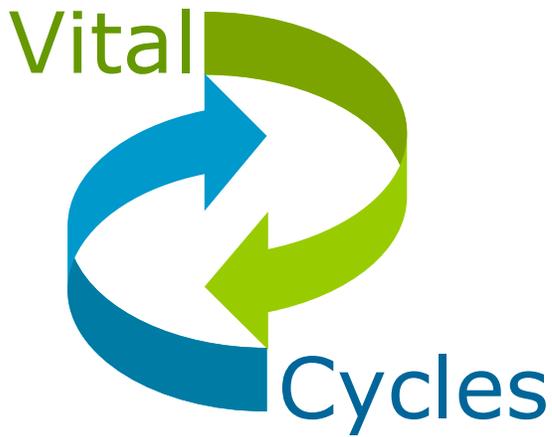
To make the most effective healing environment we respectfully share our individual strengths. We strive to reach out to newcomers, seeking to create a safe place for personal exploration and healing. We volunteer, as we are able, finding ways to contribute the best of what we have to give. The more we heal, the more easily we can share openly about trauma and the related pain and challenges. The more openly we can share, the more easily we can heal.

We bring our whole selves to the community, including our unique knowledge, experience and insights. We may have special or unique talents that we can contribute, we may have time, and we may have the ability to contribute financially. Together, we are stronger, wiser and more resourceful.

Example 1: Although a relative “newcomer” to the local Vital Cycles group, Natisha discovered that the group was planning a social event. As the business meeting discussed the potential activities, Natisha offered to coordinate a “talent evening,” acting as MC and as a coordinator. She used ideas from her years as a camp counselor. The evening was a great success as Natisha encouraged more and more folks to stand up and sing, dance, or play, some of them for the first time in years. The group decided to make “talent night” a key part of what became an annual social event for the group.

Example 2: After a discussion about celebration of healing at a business meeting, the Sydney Saturday Night Vital Cycles meeting decided to set aside one meeting a year to celebrate their healing successes. This special anniversary meeting became a time for individuals to acknowledge the healing they had sustained in the previous year. The group made a decision to allow applause after each sharing of healing success. They were all thrilled and felt encouraged to continue healing and celebrating!

Healing Paths



Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Surviving

We use our coping skills to carry on in the face of challenges.

Life is messy. It takes our strength, determination and courage to get through the tough times. It's worth giving ourselves credit for having gotten here at all. The will to live is so powerful that we'll do whatever it takes to survive. There were times in our lives that were very messy, and we may wish we had handled some things differently. Even the most healthy and successful people cope in ways that have negative side effects. Second-guessing later doesn't change the past. At a certain point it's critical for us to really accept that what we've done was the best that we could do in that situation. Then we can move forward in life.

We can eventually become grateful for the way our coping skills have also protected us. Regardless of the outcomes, they helped us survive. All coping skills have both positive and negative affects. For example, many of us avoid a situation that seems scary. One positive of avoiding situations is less fear. One negative is that we might miss out on good opportunities. In addition some of us have used addictive behaviors to mask greater pain or challenges. One member said, *"When I used to have flashbacks it was better that I got drunk than to commit suicide. Now I'm learning from Vital Cycles and other sources that there are other ways to cope, and even heal. I hope to completely let go of over-drinking in time."* Others of us have said the same type of thing, but talked about drugs, sex, binge eating, self-injury, or life-risking activities. There are other ways we can react to emotions such as pain, fear, guilt, shame, anger, etc. Examples include; "stuffing emotions" down inside, creating ongoing drama in our lives to distract ourselves, "spacing out" so we're out of touch with what's going on inside, and even working so much that we leave no time to feel or think. All of these may help us get through a difficult time until we're able to face our emotions and begin to heal.

It's incredibly helpful to be aware of how we cope with life's challenges. When life's experiences are very intense we may not understand what is happening. Many times we begin using a coping skill that protects us from the residual effects of the trauma without even realizing the reason for our changed behavior. For instance, we may find ourselves avoiding situations where people are speaking loudly, there is a big crowd, or there is conflict. Or we could get into a pattern of overworking in order to avoid intimate relationships because we don't have the ability to trust others. Whatever methods we use, it helps to be gentle with ourselves. As we learn about our coping patterns, we can honor them as having helped us survive. We are better able to understand our own creative bravery when we listen to others share their stories of strength and endurance. Also, the more aware we are of the coping skills we have, the more we can choose when to use them.

One of the great things about the way our brains work is that we can learn new ways of coping. There are countless examples, within Vital Cycles and without, of people turning over a new leaf. In the Harmonizing Path, described later in this Healing Toolkit, there are many great ideas for choosing coping methods that work better for us. Only we can know when we are ready to choose a new coping method. No one else can decide for us. We also can choose to cope the new way some of the time, or to completely replace the old coping method. The good news is that the same strength and creativity we used to develop coping skills will help us on the rest of our healing journey.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: Identify a challenge you face and the ways you cope with it. (Repeat as helpful.)

Activity 2: List some coping skills you use. Describe how they have helped you get to where you are today.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Stabilizing

We develop more safety to enhance our healing.

We deserve to be safe. It is our most basic need. We deserve physical and emotional well-being. For example, having more stability may mean that we feel comfortable in our home, have friends we can be authentic with, and that we believe we are physically safe. It may also mean that we can depend on secure housing, food and enough income to take care of ourselves. It makes sense to find ways to increase stability in any area of our lives that will help us feel more safe. If we doubt our own worth at times, we can try to treat ourselves as we would treat someone we really respect. This includes how we treat ourselves internally. Beating ourselves up less, and being more gentle with ourselves is another way to increase safety. The safer we feel, the more we can achieve our hopes.

Once we've done this for a while, we discover that we can set boundaries. For example we can speak up more about our wants and needs. This may include saying "no" to things that do not feel physically or emotionally safe. Boundaries like these can make us safer and even increase our self-respect.

Stabilizing may even mean drastically changing relationships that are dangerous for us. This may be a challenging task when there is a lot of conflict involved. However, as we set boundaries we discover that it becomes easier over time to speak up more confidently for ourselves.

Stabilizing will become a healthy habit. This creates a strong foundation to support our healing. Our lives will continue to have challenges, of course. However it's much easier to have a good life. Saying "no" at the right times enables us to say "yes" to what's best for us as well. We are more open to life and living, and can embrace new opportunities for healing and personal enjoyment.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: In your healing journal write about how your life is better because of stabilizing.

Activity 2: Create a list of areas in your life where you'd like greater stability.

1. Pick one of these areas.
2. Think of a few ways to improve it.
3. Repeat as needed.

Activity 3: Learn from others that you respect. Look for things that they've done to increase stability and security in their lives. Adapt these ideas to your own life.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Flowing

We compassionately allow our emotions to flow.

When emotions flow freely through us we have more energy and passion for life. We're better able to understand what we need, and are able to be more successful in everything we do. Yet for many people who have experienced the intense emotions of a trauma it can be terrifying to feel them. Some of us associate feeling emotions with weakness and vulnerability. In truth, when emotions are allowed to flow it leads to greater strength and health. Feeling our intense pain actually opens the door for us to feel intense joy. We free ourselves to feel the full spectrum when emotions can safely flow.

There are very good reasons for having trouble letting our emotions flow. During traumas we were overwhelmed by emotions in a frightening way. If we did not get enough support to express our feelings shortly afterwards it becomes much harder to deal with it all. We quickly begin to use various coping tools to manage the overwhelming emotions threatening to return. A very common reaction is suppressing emotions ("stuffing feelings"). This is our minds' attempt to push the feelings away so that they don't overwhelm us. Suppression can protect us from emotions, memories, ideas, etc. However, it also can lead to depression, stomach pain, and muscle tension. We also can use distractions to avoid emotions such as drugs, work, sex, TV, movies, eating, etc. Once we're stable enough and ready to heal, we can learn again how to allow our emotions to flow.

Despite the fears we have developed regarding emotions, they all serve a very important purpose in our lives. Unfortunately, some of us have been misled into believing that some feelings are bad. However, psychology, brain science and new trauma-healing approaches have proven that there are no bad emotions. Happiness draws us toward what can help us. Fear pushes us away from things that might hurt us. Anger helps us push dangerous things away. Hatred kicks in when the anger isn't enough. Love helps us attach to others, and makes life more fulfilling and secure. As we heal, we become more aware of our own feelings, with less judgment. As we learn to let our emotions flow, we come to understand that our emotions, by themselves, are safe to feel. We may need to move slowly in letting ourselves remember repressed memories. These memories may carry very negative beliefs about ourselves and our safety. However, the emotions themselves are safe. We gradually can come to acknowledge, accept and embrace the presence - and the value - of all of our emotions.

Experts have slightly different opinions about emotions. Many say that there are several core emotions that all humans feel, including happiness, sadness, anger, disgust and fear. Almost all other emotions are a form of one of these, or a blend. Each of these core emotions has a physical element as well; we literally feel and express the emotion. Our face changes to express various emotions - for example, we smile or we frown. Experiencing anger or rage can change our pulse rate and our blood pressure. Shame can cause our face to flush, and we may look downward and avoid direct eye contact with others. As we come to understand our emotions, we can also understand how we feel and physically express them.

We can learn to allow our emotions to flow. We may find that, at first, letting our feelings flow creates some feelings of anxiety and fear - this may be a new experience! However, as

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

we give ourselves the time and emotional “space” to feel emotions, we can become more practiced at understanding, not only what we are feeling, but why. We can get help from competent therapists, caring friends, and even safe time alone letting emotions flow. Usually allowing our body, voice and face to authentically express the feeling is important. Sadness may flow by allowing tears to fall. Other feelings, like anger and rage, may best be processed by brisk physical activity such as walking and other exercise. Happiness flows easiest when we smile, laugh and celebrate. Relaxed play also allows joy and excitement to flow as well. There is even a type of yoga called “Laughter Yoga” which helps these emotions that feel so good to flow more easily. We may need to reassure ourselves that emotions are safe and okay as we make progress in flowing. This may be helpful in counter-balancing the suppressive myths others have fed us over time. More and more research is showing that expressing emotions authentically helps us. For example the expression “a good cry” is true. Some of the peptides in our brains that cause the sad feelings actually come out in our tears. When people feel emotions authentically they usually make noise as well. One guideline we’d like to share is that “any way of expressing emotion is okay as long as no one gets hurt”.

Once we begin to accept, even welcome our emotions, we discover a rich capacity to feel them. Emotions can help us understand something about how a current or past circumstance affects us. As emotions flow we’re better able to process memories. It helps us to be “in the moment” and enjoy life. It also helps us to make better and better decisions for ourselves, as we’re clearer about how things affect us. Sometimes, experiencing emotions may lead us to later develop a specific plan of actions. For example, feeling angry about the harsh words of a colleague may lead us to develop a careful plan to have a clear discussion with that individual about how we’d prefer to be talked to. We may eventually even be able to “surf” our emotions so that we can allow them to flow and still choose whatever actions are best for us -- at the same time. When emotions flow powerfully we’re able to feel passion for what we love in life.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: At the end of the day notice (and write if you want) the emotions you felt during the day. As much as you can let the emotions flow when you feel them. Change topics if it begins to feel overwhelming. Flowing is an activity like lifting weights - we get stronger the more we do it.

Activity 2: Imagine that the emotion you are scared of is an old friend sitting across the table from you. Find out what this old friend wants to tell you. Some of us find it helpful to write this in a healing journal, as “Self” and “Emotion” writing to each other.

Activity 3: Find safe ways to express emotions. For example:

- a. Happiness: Laughing during a funny movie.
- b. Sadness: Thinking and crying for 10 minutes a day about a sad topic. It’s good to not get too overwhelmed by the emotions. Gradually increase your ability to flow.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

- c. Anger: Hitting an old pillow with a wiffle ball bat and yelling. (Make sure only those that support you can hear you.)
- d. Fear: Write/talk about something you are afraid of. Acknowledge that all people with traumatic pasts tend to have fears that seem out of place at times, and that's okay. Regardless of what people pretend, all people have fear. It's a survival tool.
- e. All emotions: Pretend the person you feel a need to talk to is in an empty chair. Then say what you need to say. Let it loose. Talking to a chair hurts no one, and it can help those emotions to flow having expressed them.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Freeing

We discover greater dignity as we shed unjust burdens.

Many of us feel quiet stirrings of hope as we think of reaching a place of inner peace and tranquility, free from the painful feelings and beliefs we carry. Too often however, that feeling of hope can be quickly overcome by other thoughts and feelings. Maybe we think that we have made mistakes and deserve the burden we carry. Maybe we feel that we are somehow unworthy of healing. Maybe we even feel misplaced guilt for terrible things that others have done. Whatever unjust burdens we carry, we can start to free ourselves from them by recognizing responsibility others had in past events, and learning to more fairly and compassionately view our own past actions.

For many survivors of trauma, particularly those traumas caused by actions of others, incorrectly feeling responsible for some part of their actions is normal. Sometimes, when we are in a situation that seems to be out of control, one way we can feel even a measure of control is by taking the blame or responsibility for the incidents. As bad as we feel when feelings of blame or shame run through us, those feelings are often easier to cope with than feeling weak or powerless. After all, if we can believe we are to blame, then we can also believe that we can be safe if we just do things a bit differently. Regardless of old beliefs, a child is never responsible for being abused by an adult no matter what the child feels he or she did or didn't do. In addition, no adult ever deserves to be abused by their partner. For example, forgetting to clean a room, or accidentally burning a meal, never justifies violence or cruelty by others. Once we are able to recognize these false beliefs, we are that much closer to finally being free.

As we complete each pass down the Freeing path, we will feel lighter, and experience greater joy. Along the way, we may feel other emotions that we have carefully avoided. Often feelings of anger will emerge as we recognize the truth of our innocence, and the wrongness of the actions of others. We may feel intense sadness as we grieve for ourselves, and the unfairness of past events. For many, alternating between the Flowing and Freeing paths is helpful as we encounter new feelings and learn to express them in safe ways.

There are times when the path to feeling freer means we have to accept ownership for those events when our actions may have caused harm, even if accidentally. If we really did cause harm to ourselves or someone else, taking responsibility for our mistakes and working hard not to repeat them lightens the load we carry, and moves us along a path towards greater peace, self-acceptance, joy, and even a bit of justified pride. We can carry our heads high, and step into our lives as we proclaim our humanity, and own our healing journey. "Yes, we have made mistakes, and we are doing our part to make things better!"

Each time we use the Freeing path, we will feel freer and lighter. Whether it is our first time down the path, or hundredth, we continue to let go of old beliefs and feelings, becoming the more joyful person we always deserved to be.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

- Activity 1:** Pick one unjust burden you carry. Write down several reasons why the burden is unjust. Write down why you have believed you have needed to carry this burden. Write down several alternatives to carrying this burden.
- Activity 2:** Find an empty coffee can, and then gather up a pile of pebbles and label them with memories and beliefs that no longer support your vision of a rich and vibrant life today. As you are ready, pick up each pebble, examine its label, and drop the pebble into the can saying: "I let this memory and belief go free from me."
- Activity 3:** Fear of emotions is common. Some people will make progress by allowing the emotions to flow in only limited ways at first. Write down your fears and concerns about expressing or experiencing an emotion, and ways that it can be felt or expressed safely, even if for just a moment. Share your ideas with others. (For more help and ideas on letting emotions flow, also read the Flowing path.)
- Activity 4:** When feeling anger over the past actions of others, finding safe ways to confront others for their actions can be helpful for some of us. In many cases, confronting the guilty person is not possible, or not safe. Write a letter to this person about how their actions have hurt you. You may want to say what they did to you, how it made you feel then, and/or what effect it has had on your life. Add anything else into the letter that you want. When you are ready, you can share the letter with other safe people.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Yearning

We long for less pain and more joy.

Desire for a better life is the first path in healing emotional pain. For many of us the Yearning Path is first taken days, weeks or even years before our first coming to Vital Cycles. Many of us began this path when we were unhappy enough to seek help in general, even if we had not yet identified trauma in our lives. Some of us began this path when we were inspired by others who seemed to have a life with more joy. Many of us struggled getting to this path, because we had unwittingly suppressed the yearning with addictions or other coping behaviors that masked excruciating pain. Thus we were only able to feel this yearning when we began to address our coping behaviors. Being able to face the pain allows our yearning for change to grow, which motivates us on our healing journey.

The amount we focus on “less pain” versus “more joy” shifts over time. At the beginning of our healing process, joy may be an alien concept for some us. For some of us even the idea of less pain can be inaccessible - we may need to simply hold onto an idea such as “For now, I will try this instead of suicide.” Some of us may find at first that our emotions are so shut down that it is difficult to even be aware of how we feel. Yet even in our darkest moments, some small part of us yearns for the pain to go away. This gradually transitions to a yearning for more joy in life.

Yearning can cover a variety of desires and thoughts. Over time we discover the different things we yearn for. Some examples of “yearning for less pain and more joy” are:

Longing to move from:

- Despair to hope
- Feeling worthless to feeling worthwhile
- Loneliness to meaningful connection with others
- Feeling adrift to having a sense of purpose and meaning in life
- Self-hatred to self-understanding to self-love
- Self-blame to understanding ourselves
- Feeling helpless to feeling empowered
- Feeling stuck in life to moving hopefully on the path of healing
- Fearful to self-confident
- Emotional numbness to emotional awareness and being able to feel all emotions

Acknowledging and welcoming our yearnings motivates us toward positive change. Guided by the Focus Principle, we focus on gaining more joy, and come up with better solutions than when we focus on less pain. The more we cycle through the paths, the more often we’re able to focus on joy to motivate us.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: Look at the list above and write down the ones you yearn for.

- Make sure to write down what you want to move to as well as what you want to move away from.
- Add other things you yearn for that healing might bring.
- List what you would be willing to do to make these yearnings come true.

Activity 2: Write a list of things in your life that bring you joy. Write in-depth about one of these things.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Opening

We see healing as possible for ourselves.

Hope grows within us as we come to understand that healing the impact of trauma is possible. However, at the beginning, many of us struggle to feel that healing is possible for ourselves. It can be difficult to see that what appears to be irreparable damage; is actually emotional wounds that can be healed. Seeing others' healing from these wounds helps us to know that healing is possible for us. The negative myths about ourselves stemming from the trauma can make it challenging to realize that we deserve to heal. We can heal because we want to. We do not need to wait until we heal enough to know that we deserve to heal. This is a very painful part of our lives, and it is important to be gentle with ourselves as we face it. For many of us being open was dangerous in the past. Now we can choose safe ways to share about ourselves with others. As we move toward healing it is helpful to share about our traumas only with those who support our healing. It is also helpful to share at a manageable pace.

There are some common myths that can be hurdles to openness in healing. Over time, we replace the myths with empowering truths.

Examples of myths and empowering truths:

Myths	Empowering Truths
My pain is "my shit."	My pain is a result of past traumas and deserves compassionate healing.
"I am bad and do not deserve to heal." "It was my fault."	What happened to me was bad, and I deserve to heal from it. It was the perpetrator's fault.
"It is wrong to talk about what happened."	What happened was wrong. Telling safe people helps me heal. I can claim my innocence and right to talk.
"If I start crying, I will never stop."	Once I start crying, the grief can begin to subside, and I can begin to heal.
"My family will be destroyed if I talk about this."	The perpetrator's actions hurt the family. Only through openness with safe people can I heal.
"I am not strong enough to deal with this."	With gentle pacing, and the right support, I can heal my wounds.

We can help ourselves be open to more healing by reminding ourselves of the progress we have made in the past.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: Make a list of ways you can help yourself be open to healing.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

- Activity 2:** Talk to three people who have done some emotional healing, and find out what it has done for them. Write down ideas from what they said in your Healing Journal.
- Activity 3:** Look over the list above, and talk with others about those myths that have stuck with us, and then list the empowering truths. Talk about other empowering truths that apply to these myths.
- Activity 4:** Make a list of myths not covered in the list above, and their corresponding empowering truths. Talk about these with a safe person.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Choosing

We commit to healing.

Many of us, at some level, have already taken this path by simply being here. Being willing to do whatever it takes with gentle pacing is key to full healing. If we need more energy in order to make this commitment, revisiting the Yearning and Opening Paths can help build our momentum. This does not require being sure that we will heal, just that we are willing to try.

We have the power to make choices to help us heal. Tapping into our feelings can unlock the power and understanding to propel commitment.

Examples of motivating feelings are:

- Urge to move from emotional numbness to a life filled with meaning
- Anger towards those who hurt us
- Determination to stop the cycle of trauma
- Fear of past problems returning
- Desire for authentic relationships
- Anger for losses we've suffered as a result of the trauma
- Feeling responsible for family, work, etc.
- Defiance towards the myths pushed upon us
- Desire for more joy in our lives
- Excitement about feeling better
- Hope for a better future

There are many things we can do to make it easier to choose healing. We can commit to finding ways to address our emotional needs. We can tailor our environment to be more supportive of our healing.

Here are some examples of ways of addressing emotional needs and tailoring our environments.

- Assess what needs to happen to increase safety in our internal and external environments for healing.
- Develop our support networks: therapists, mentors, spiritual advisors, supportive friends and family, Vital Cycles events, pets, etc.
- Gradually start to set some boundaries with those who deny our feelings and history.
- Use our Healing Journals to process emotions and gain clarity.
- Develop a deeper understanding of our emotions, and learn to accept them. This will help increase that sense of personal safety that supports deep healing.

The bottom line is that the more committed we are to healing, the more we will heal.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: Write and/or talk about your feelings that can give you motivation to heal. You can use the first list above to focus your thinking.

Activity 2: Design an optimal lifestyle for your healing. Get ideas from this book, others who are healing, and any other resource, and then choose those that are best for you at any given time.

Activity 3: Seek sources of healing knowledge and consult your own inner wisdom to help you heal.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Accepting

We acknowledge traumas that impact us.

Accepting traumas that we have endured is a gateway to healing. In later paths we will experience profound relief as we gain a compassionate understanding of how the trauma impacted us. We can only do this after accepting that these events really occurred and that the pain is real. Psychological "trauma" is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as "an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others." Examples include military combat, violent personal attack, natural or manmade disasters, and torture. For children, sexually traumatic events may include age inappropriate sexual experiences without violence or injury. (DSM IV, p. 424) Traumas we are healing may result from sexual, physical, emotional and/or ritual abuse. Those of us who have experienced environments that were neglectful, unsafe, or harsh often carry lasting wounds. There are many things that are not mentioned here that cause pain that deserves healing. Pain is pain, and all wounds are worth healing.

Accepting is a very gradual process. It's helpful to try to pace ourselves by looking at one piece at a time. It is a natural tendency for many of us to push acceptance as fast as possible to get rid of the pain. However, we can become aware of so much pain during the Acceptance Path that it is easy to become emotionally overwhelmed. It may seem paradoxical, but accepting in a way that is gentle and compassionate to ourselves enables us to actually heal more easily and quickly. When we try to force acceptance our protective mechanisms jump into action to prevent our being overwhelmed.

One of the most common protective mechanisms is denial. It helps us to prevent being overwhelmed and taking more extreme protective actions. Some events are so outside of our frame of reference that it is easier to deny them than to accept that such things can occur. Or we adopt and create myths to deny painful truths we didn't know how to deal with. Yet we're only able to process them once we understand enough about what happened and learn compassionate truths that help us heal.

Following are some common myths that may come up in us, or we may hear from others, as we accept the traumas.

Myths	Truths the myths protect us from	Compassionate truth for healing
<i>"It wasn't that bad."</i>	It hurt so much that it is hard to even let ourselves feel the pain from it today.	We deserved to be treated with respect and protected from harm.
<i>"I'm making it up" or "It didn't happen."</i>	This hurts too much to acknowledge that it happened.	Something did happen to cause this pain and the negative beliefs we suffer with.
<i>"It was my fault that it happened."</i>	We could not stop it, and there was no real meaning to what happened.	We were innocent.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Myths	Truths the myths protect us from	Compassionate truth for healing
<i>“I’m bad”, or “I deserved it.”</i>	The perpetrators of the trauma did it for their own twisted reasons. It was not about us.	I deserved to be treated respectfully and with love. All people do.
<i>“I didn’t fight back” or “I went along with it.”</i>	It would have been worse to have fought back or not submit.	Protecting ourselves from something even worse is a logical and good response, even if it felt bad to do.
<i>“Some part of it felt good therefore I’m bad.”</i>	We had no control over our bodies’ feelings. We were manipulated in a way that took advantage of the way our bodies naturally react.	All people have needs and desires, AND we would have preferred for them to have been met in a way that felt all good.
<i>“It happened because of the way I look.”</i>	Believing that we can protect ourselves by changing our physical appearance makes us feel safer, by giving us the illusion it’s something we can control.	No matter how we look we deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.
<i>“I can’t face this or talk about it.”</i>	There is a lot of pain, and it’s natural to want to avoid it, but it only gets worse when it’s not healed.	It’s safe to accept this with enough support, compassion and gentle pacing.

There are some challenges to accepting – simply being human. We may not remember every aspect of what happened. Some of us remember images, but not emotions or vice versa. Some remember negative beliefs about self, but nothing else. Our brains have many reactions to traumatic memory that may make remembering difficult, such as suppression, repression, dissociation, depression, and minimizing. In short, suppression, repression and dissociation are mental/psychological dynamics that make it very difficult to remember or think clearly about certain topics or time periods.

It is easy to get caught up in trying to confirm every piece of a memory. Some of us bypass this challenge by focusing on simply having less pain and more joy.

Traumatic memories confuse the matter still further. They feel very different from other types of memories. They are stored in our brains differently and are accessed differently. Unlike other memories, they tend to come back with the same emotional tenor and potency for years and years. This can make it difficult to tell the difference between the emotions of a traumatic memory and emotions from current events. This can lead to the common misconception that when people are experiencing traumatic memories they are actually “dwelling in the past,” or “regressing,” or “going back.” Yet the reality is that we are in the present. We are experiencing feelings and beliefs that are both part of traumatic memories

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

and part of protective mechanisms. They also cause much more extreme reactions within us, particularly when we attempt to deny them. Understanding the way traumatic memories work makes it easier to face them, and then eventually learn to process them.

The more we gently accept the past, and compassionately process current impacts, the more we're able to allow ourselves to remember. Staying focused on that makes acceptance far easier. The pain we feel during acceptance is there, regardless of whether we look at it or not. However, by accepting it we move from coping with the pain to opening ourselves for healing from it. In honoring all emotions and memories, over time we gain a greater sense of calm and clarity.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: Empathy for yourself: Look for examples of where you can see how hurt someone was by a traumatic experience, even more than they can see. Noticing others minimizing their experience helps you to understand the ways you do as well.

Activity 2: Analyze the incentive of the people who may prefer to either deny or minimize the importance of your memories. What do they lose if you're right? What do you gain from being right – if it's only the chance to heal then you're not making it up.

Activity 3: Look over the list of myths above, and talk with others about those myths that have stuck with you. Also talk about truths they were protecting you from and the compassionate truths. Talk about other truths the myths were protecting you from and compassionate truths that apply to these myths.

Activity 4: Make a list of myths not covered in the list above, and their corresponding truths. Talk about these with a safe person.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Recharging

We rest and renew to help heal and enjoy life.

We heal faster by resting when we need to. Even though many of us feel driven to push ourselves, the truth is that we actually must allow time for resting and replenishing our bodies and spirits. In the self-care principle, we learn that gentle pacing accelerates our healing. In the Recharging path, we take it even further by acknowledging that resting and discovering what recharges us are crucial to our overall healing and our delight in life.

Trauma survivors can frequently find ourselves in a state of hyper vigilance, where it's like our systems are on red alert to prepare for perceived danger. Remaining in this hyper state for too much time can create sleep challenges. It can have other damaging effects on long-term health as well. Many of us find it helpful to relearn the opposite state—a healing one of relaxation, which supports recovery. There are plenty of options to explore for calming one's nervous system—meditation, breathing exercises, many varieties of yoga, massage, general stress reduction programs and more.

For different people, different things can be recharging. For some, listening to music or spending time in nature can be recharging. Extroverts may like to spend time with others; introverts may prefer to spend time alone in order to feel reenergized. Taking the time to explore and discover situations and environments that recharge us is an investment in our healing and well-being.

A few among us might still find ourselves feeling overly tired much of the time. This may be the result of some underlying health issue. In addition to recharging tools, consulting with a medical doctor or alternative health professional could prove valuable. It may require persistence to get to the bottom of issues causing exhaustion. It's worth doing, and we all deserve our maximum vitality!

It's completely understandable that some of us feel a sense of urgency about healing—we want to be healed right now! Remember that pushing past our internal warning reactions does not actually speed our healing. A gentle pace is the fastest way to where we want to go. Research shows that people who take mid-afternoon power naps actually get more done during the rest of the day than those who do not recharge, and that marathon runners who walk occasionally actually finish the race faster. Resting when we need to makes us more powerful and helps us do far more.

A good balance of action and relaxation is key to building our resilience and ability to thrive. Healthy rewards are wonderful to mark progress and appreciation. The more we integrate rest and relaxation into our daily lives, the more we notice ourselves stopping to enjoy the small things—delightful sights, sounds and smells; as well as the time spent with supportive friends. Our lives feel richer and more joyful, and we are actually able to heal even better.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

- Activity 1:** Sometimes slowing down helps us get there faster. Example, staying up exhausted to finish work on a project may take five hours when exhausted. That same project may only take two or three hours when done well-rested. List some ideas where slowing down can speed up your healing.
- Activity 2:** Make a “To don’t” list of things that wear you down and prevent recharging. Look for things that you can cut out of your life, or do less of, to help you be stronger.
- Activity 3:** Many of us feel that we are only worthwhile when we are productive. Every person is worthwhile also while we are at play and rest. Think about what resistance you feel to resting. List ways you can be better to yourself and others if you are recharged.
- Activity 4:** As a trauma survivor, sleep challenges are common. Taking steps to create the best possible sleeping environment for one’s self can help. Here are some examples. Put a lock on your bedroom door. Install a security alarm. Try other ideas like aromatherapy or soothing music, or the use of earplugs. Set two alarms so you know you will not over sleep. Get a deadbolt installed so that you can feel safe. Leave a light on. Make a “To don’t” list to ease your stress. Etc.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Understanding

With growing compassion we see the impact of those traumas.

Doing this path dramatically improves our perspective on ourselves, our lives, and what it means to be human. This is where we see the wonderful truth – these behaviors and attitudes we've been burdened with are NOT our identity. They are normal responses to trauma that *can be healed*. As we come to understand the impact of trauma on us, our lives make more sense. Before understanding how much of our behaviors were reactions to trauma, we had false and terrible ideas about ourselves. These ideas came from the lies of others and the understandable confusion people naturally experience after trauma. So much of the internal conflict in our minds was due to these inaccurate myths we carried about ourselves. Sometimes the compassionate understanding comes in sudden flashes of insight. Other times it's a slow dawning of gentle comprehension.

Psychological "trauma" is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as "an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others." (DSM IV, p. 424) Examples include military combat, violent personal attack, natural or manmade disasters, and torture. For children, sexually traumatic events may include age inappropriate sexual experiences without violence or injury. Traumas we are healing may also result from emotional and/or ritual abuse. Those of us who have experienced environments that were neglectful, unsafe, or harsh also often carry lasting wounds.

Compassion for ourselves helps to improve the quality of life (the way it feels to be us). While compassion for ourselves may be a foreign concept at the beginning, it will become a more and more familiar territory over time. Compassion is a strength and a skill – the more we develop it the easier it gets. There is a “vital cycle” between the Accepting and Understanding Paths. The Acceptance Path actually begins the process of compassionate understanding, and deeper understanding continues the process of acceptance. Compassion helps us to treat ourselves gently. Gentleness is vital to full healing. As the “Self-Care” Healing Principle indicates – we heal more quickly and thoroughly when we address only as much as we can safely handle while keeping a balanced life.

It is important to have support during this process. We will experience incredible release and relief during this path, and we also may unearth a lot of pain to grieve. (See the Learning, Harmonizing and Processing Paths for help with grieving). Some of the myths we are shedding played a defensive role, protecting us from the pain associated with the traumas and their impacts. As we unburden many of the painful and debilitating myths, we allow wounded aspects of ourselves to emerge for healing. We may notice a natural, physiological tendency to avoid the pain. While this may feel overwhelming at times, the rewards for facing these truths far outweigh the temporary pain.

Intense trauma that is not immediately processed compassionately always has lasting impacts. The impacts of trauma are many and varied. As we understand how our unprocessed trauma has impacted us we gain compassion for ourselves, begin healthier behavior patterns, and are able to heal. We're going to share here some of the impact that

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

emotional trauma has on human brains. In later paths we will talk about how to heal and transform these impacts.

Brain scans reveal that trauma actually changes the structure and function of the brain. It particularly affects the way we handle powerful emotional input and extremely stressful situations. Following are a few of the ways these changes can show themselves in our lives.

- Chronic fear, pain and the feeling of being unsafe can lead us to avoid situations, people, or even relationships in general.
- Self-negating myths kept stuck by traumatic memory can make it difficult for us to relate with others. E.g., if we carry a sense of unworthiness we may accept mistreatment.
- Powerful stored emotions intensify our reactions to some situations that our brains associate with a past trauma. This can lead to us being seen as “over sensitive”, “highly emotional,” etc. (This is similar to someone patting a friend who has an unseen sunburn on the back and being surprised at the intensity of the response.)
- Those of us who have experienced trauma cope by using a variety of psychological mechanisms. One of the most effective ways people cope with overwhelming trauma is called "dissociation." Dissociation can run the gamut from having trouble paying attention to extended mental blackouts. In the most extreme situations aspects of someone’s psyche can actually seem to be mentally separate from the person. Dissociation interferes with our identity, memory, thoughts, feelings and experiences.
- Adults who were sexually abused in childhood are at higher risk for developing a variety of psychiatric disorders, including dissociative disorders (such as dissociative identity disorder/multiple personality disorder), anxiety disorders (panic attacks, etc.), personality disorders (borderline personality disorder, etc.), mood disorders (such as depression), PTSD, and addictions.

Here are many common impacts of trauma:

- **Internal changes:** self-esteem drops, feelings of shame, self-hatred, hypervigilance, disconnected from one’s emotions.
- **Self-medicating behaviors:** addictions, numbing out, eating disorders, and excessive exercise, work and shopping.
- **Other common side effects:** chronic illness, difficulty focusing, low-functioning (grades, etc.), difficulty relating with others.
- **Sense of the world:** feeling isolated, “the only one that feels this way,” shamefully unique, the need to perform (perfectionism) and hide, the world feels dangerous, feeling of impending doom (thinking death is imminent), feeling like an imposter, feeling like an outsider in every group, subhuman, feeling the need to earn the right to live, to be loved, etc.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Here are some examples of understanding the impact of trauma. Notice the myths people often tell themselves about certain coping behaviors. Coping mechanisms that got us here are driven by desires for safety, love and living. The examples below are both generalized and simplified for clear reading. In reality coping mechanisms are more complex patterns of feelings, thoughts and behavior. Understanding a piece at a time helps us to unravel the complex patterns.

Coping Behaviors	Examples of some Myths that could apply	Examples of some Truths that could apply
Extreme security measures when there's no actual threat. Hypervigilance.	<i>"I'm a coward", "I'm paranoid", "I'm in constant danger", etc.</i>	Our protective "fight, flight or freeze" mode is stuck in overdrive in reaction to traumatic memories. Our bodies are trying to protect us.
Excessive sexual activity.	<i>"I'm a slut", "I'm bad", etc.</i>	We're trying desperately to feel good, or to stimulate suppressed aspects of ourselves. Searching for love. Seeking reassurance.
Intentional self-injury.	<i>"I'm defective", "I don't deserve to live", "I'm sick", etc.</i>	We're trying to feel something. Trying to distract from pain. Trying to overcome the pain. Anger towards perpetrators is turned inwards on self as a safer way to express it (but then it gets stuck that way).
Overly risk-taking behaviors.	<i>"I have a death wish", "I'm a psycho.", etc.</i>	We're creating extreme emotions to find a sense of excitement. Conquer fear. Play with death as an escape.
Addictive behaviors: e.g., drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, eating/dieting, shopping, exercising, etc.	<i>"I'm sick", "I'm no good", etc.</i>	We're numbing and distracting from pain and self-negating thoughts. Trying to not feel physically bad.

The greater clarity we have about how trauma works and the impact of trauma on our lives, the more we can see ourselves in a more realistic and positive way. This path inspires us to heal and lightens our internal resistance to it. Healing now becomes much easier to do.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: Healing Journal Activity:

- Talk with peers about how some of the traumas influenced the coping behaviors you have struggled with in your life.
- Make an “Understanding Coping Behaviors Chart” for yourself.
 - a. For safe pacing, finish one coping behavior and its myths and truths before starting a new one. Take it slow and easy.
 - b. It’s often difficult to see the truth behind our own behaviors. Ask a compassionate and supportive person for input when you feel safe enough to do so.

Activity 2: Developing compassion:

- If the trauma occurred to others, what compassionate things could you say to them? Say these things to yourself.
- Having compassion for others in Vital Cycles helps to develop compassion for oneself. Notice the empathy you have for others’ pain.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Affirming

We harness our momentum and resources to energize our healing.

Before we begin the Learning Path and look for new healing ideas, it's helpful to take stock of what we already have. Each of us has a variety of things that support our healing. Focusing upon these positives in our lives is a powerful way of galvanizing our efforts. Another advantage to this focus is we can then intentionally choose to continue these things. Learning to appreciate the strengths and other resources we have invigorates our lives and enables future healing. Our natural protective mechanisms we discuss in the Understanding Path tend to focus us disproportionately on pain, fear and what we think we lack. Affirming helps us to balance this for a more realistic perspective of ourselves and our lives. Developing appreciation for our lives increases our joy, and fuels us for more healing.

In the Understanding Path we learn that we *deserve* more than the myths implied. In the Affirming Path we realize that we *are* more than the myths implied. It is much easier to harness energy we already have to keep healing. For example we already clearly have some great traits: Survivability, determination, courage, strength, perseverance, and enough self-care to find Vital Cycles. We've survived the actual event, we've survived other memories of traumatic events, and we have the strength to survive future memories and issues we face, especially as we pace ourselves gently.

There are many examples of resources and momentum for healing: previous healing experience, yearning to heal, supportive friends, caring family members, pets, healthy habits, therapists, complementary healing modalities, spiritual practices, support groups, publications, and relevant skills, interests and knowledge.

As we become aware of our abilities to heal, we build our confidence and self-esteem. In later paths we will want to take advantage of every skill and resource we can to accelerate our healing. We have already done so much to help our own healing. Let's celebrate how far we have come, and power up for the healing ahead.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

Activity 1: List your strengths, momentum and resources you are currently using. List at least 5 internal and 5 external examples. (An internal strength example is the ability to make friends. An external resource example is a trusted trauma therapist.)

- Talk about how the items on your list have helped you.
- Gain momentum by reviewing and adding to your list over time. This path can be used before every step in healing (and everywhere else in life).
- Use artwork that you most enjoy to illustrate your strengths or resources (E.g., collages, sculpting, crayon drawings, painting, etc.)

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Activity 2: Look at past successes in the face of a similar situation to one you're facing now. What healthy things did you do then that can help you now? What did your actions reveal about your core strengths?

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Learning

We explore, adapt and hone the most effective healing methods for ourselves.

Learning is one of the single most empowering things we can do for our healing. Knowledge and skills are powerful. There are countless healing methods in the world today, and new ones are being developed all the time. Only you can know through exploring which ones appeal to you, and which are the most effective for you at a given time. Each of us can adapt healing methods to fit ourselves better. We are all different and find that different methods work better for each of us. We also find that what is most effective may change over time. The most effective methods may be ones that ignite our passion, hope, and even laughter.

Here are some commonly used healing methods:

- Self-led independent tools, including journaling, meditation, prayer, exercise, emotional venting, psychodrama, art and other creative expressions.
- Self-led peer support activities, including a variety of peer activity communities – 12-Step groups, groups based around specific activities, such as creative dance, focused peer support, such as psychodrama.
- Professionally assisted: talk therapy, Internal Family Systems models, psychodrama, art therapy (and other creative expressions), dance therapy, guided visualizations, religious or spiritual counseling, and EMDR (Eye Movement, Desensitization and Re-Processing), body work (acupuncture, cranial-sacral, massage therapy, Tai Chi, Yoga, chiropractic care, breath work, etc.)

A foundation of physical and mental health makes healing much easier. Here are some examples of good self-care that build that foundation: balanced exercise, good nutrition, sufficient sleep, appropriate medical care, healthy hygiene, and dressing in alignment with a healthy self-image.

These Healing Principles can help you in deciding what healing methods to explore:

- **Focus:** Maintaining a vision of joy and healing helps us choose the best healing methods for us in the moment.
- **Integrity:** We use healing methods that are in alignment with our authentic core values, replacing those methods that do not fit well.
- **Safety:** Remember, while exploring and adapting healing methods that healthy boundaries, respect, and gentleness sustain our healing environment.
- **Celebration:** Look for and enjoy the moments of clarity, progress and healing your learning brings you.
- **Acceptance:** The most effective healing methods honor all emotions and memories we have.
- **Playfulness:** It's most effective to balance healing play with healing work. We can learn to bring a playful spirit into our work, relationships and home life. Laughter helps reduce stress and supports our immune systems. This is the most affordable healing method we have access to... and it's fun!

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

The more we use a method the more we increase our skill and comfort with it. Learning as a life-long habit helps us heal, develops ourselves, and keeps life interesting. Some of us come to master some methods over years of practice. We may end up using these methods for self-development in general as much as in healing. It's helpful to regularly assess our healing methods and replace some with alternatives that are faster, easier, more fun, more respectful or otherwise more helpful.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

- Activity 1:** Find and adapt methods. Use the above Healing Principles to guide which healing methods you explore.
- Ask 5 people what they do for healing.
 - Go to the Vital Cycles website and look for new ideas posted since the last time you looked (www.VitalCycles.org).
 - Contact Vital Cycles members for their ideas.
 - Visit other healing related websites.
 - Which ideas are the most appealing and seem to fit the Healing Principles the best?
 - Try some of these ideas out, adapt them to fit.
 - Choose the best methods for you at this time and continue to use them.
 - Look for ways to improve your skills in these methods.
 - Adapt these methods to work better for you.
 - This is ongoing...

Activity 2: Build something fun into your day, every day.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Harmonizing

We meet our needs in progressively healthier ways.

We have learned a lot of ways of coping and healing in our lives. Harmonizing involves accepting all aspects and behaviors as creative attempts to deal with the fallout from trauma. It also involves recognizing what is working well, and working toward embracing healthier ways to meet our needs. Sometimes it's merely fine-tuning what's worked fairly well before, and sometimes the changes are more dramatic. The four areas we focus on the most during Harmonizing are our thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and actions.

We've found that it's far, far easier to gently choose more nurturing habits rather than to simply try to stop the old habits. When we choose something that truly solves what the old habits are trying to accomplish we can meet our needs in healthier ways, and heal the painful dynamic. Merely stopping a behavior takes far greater will power. It often leads to a relapse because the needs that behavior was filling aren't being met anymore. One example is gradually replacing a pain-distracting technique of self-injury with nurturing techniques of self-soothing. This allows us to heal the pain instead of continuing to avoid it.

Harmonizing takes both tenacity and gentleness. We can be both gentle and respectful of our emotions and urges. At the same time, we can tenaciously implement healthier behavior patterns. There are some changes that may be temporarily painful as we face difficult memories, beliefs or emotions – similar to taking a band-aid off to treat a wound. In the long run, however, healthier behaviors create more joy and less pain than our old behaviors.

There are a number of ways of harmonizing. As long as methods align with the Healing Principles, we encourage their use. We encourage each person to find models and techniques that work for you and adapt them to fit with the help of knowledgeable support. We'd like to hear what's working for you. If you'd like to share your harmonizing models and tools please send them to Healing@VitalCycles.org. Time permitting, we will post those that we feel align with the Principles on the website, VitalCycles.org.

In order to demonstrate the Harmonizing Path we will describe a developing approach, the "Inner Team Model," inspired by a well known therapeutic model*. The I.T.M. is built on the premise that as humans we have various aspects that make up our whole personality. There are statements that demonstrate this. For example: *"I'm of two minds about this."* *"There's an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other."* *"I'm feeling torn."* Here's an example a member gave: *"When I was invited to a party I felt many things. I felt excited to be included, and nervous about being in a crowd. I wanted to please the inviter by attending, and I didn't want to let on that I didn't have other plans. I wanted to meet new people, and I was afraid of being rejected. I wanted to have a great time out, and I wanted to watch TV and relax."* In this model it is normal for different aspects of our personality to be active at the same time. It is also normal for us to act differently when we are in different situations. At work certain aspects help us do our job. When we are with family we behave quite differently. In romantic situations, yet other aspects are active.

Different aspects normally feel somewhat connected to and part of us, although they may feel unlike other aspects with differing approaches. However, when the intensity of a traumatic experience is too much to tolerate, our brain and nervous system become

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

overwhelmed and unable to integrate and process the emotionally laden material. This can cause the sense of the connections to diminish drastically, called dissociation, in an attempt to avoid and keep boundaries between different and overwhelming memories, feelings, sensations, thoughts, and beliefs. These aspects begin to be more rigidly locked into the creative ways developed to deal with the fallout from the trauma. These coping mechanisms can migrate from their original focus and become patterns of behavior – that can be used any time when we feel pain from any source. The memories and feelings “held” by these different aspects can then become intrusive and overwhelming under future stress and stimulation. Sometimes even positive feelings or events can feel threatening and bring up the urge to use these kinds of dissociative coping mechanisms to protect ourselves.

When we were traumatized various aspects responded differently to cope with the fear and betrayal. Some aspects of ourselves held the pain from that time forward. Some aspects focused more on how to function day to day. Some aspects help us move forward. Some aspects took on protector roles. Other aspects worked primarily at helping us cope with the challenging residual effects of the trauma. It helps to differentiate between the aspect that plays a certain role, and the dynamics it has been involved with. This way we can harmonize by honoring and nurturing our aspects and changing the dynamics.

It helps us to have compassionate understanding for the aspects of ourselves that enacted the old behaviors that served us. We find that compassionately understanding the *positive* intentions of an aspect help us to gradually take care of its needs in healthier ways. They often shield us from the residual effects of trauma such as unresolved anger, pain and negative beliefs about ourselves. We can be grateful to our internal protective dynamics that work so hard to keep us from being overwhelmed by these effects. These protective dynamics keep us in a tightly controlled emotional state in order to prevent the effects from overwhelming us. The traumas often trained these aspects of us to respond to the world out of fear and pain. Years of responding out of fear and pain created patterns and habits.

Usually people can at least hear the fears, or negatively stated view of intentions that come up during inner dialog. Here are a few examples, “I don’t want to die”; “I don’t want to be abandoned”; or “I don’t want to be alone”; etc.

When the trauma originally occurred these reactions were critical to our survival, but they tend to persist as unconscious fears about life that guide our behavior and self-concepts until they are finally adjusted or even replaced.

Each of these fears that affect us has a positive intention underneath, such as the following examples: Trying to prevent being hurt (these usually start when we have no other choice in a situation in which we were powerless). To stay alive. To get love. To get food. To have a sense of control. To make pain more bearable. To feel deserving of life, love, protection, etc. To protect others.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

By focusing on the positive intention at the core of the protective mechanism we can then choose healthier ways to respond that help fulfill the intentions. Staying focused upon the negative intentions tends to perpetuate fear and defensiveness.

Harmonizing brings us to better places and healthier patterns, than simply trying to abstain. Remember, we do all behaviors in attempts to meet our needs. Now we can gradually use healthier ways to get those needs met. We strive to focus on making progress, knowing that perfection is one of the myths impossible to attain. The more we do the healthier behaviors the more easily and quickly we become able to pull ourselves out of self-negating patterns. Celebrating successes in the direction of less pain and more joy inspires us to continue healing.

Below are examples of harmonizing from some of our own personal experiences with these aspects of ourselves. The chart is divided into four columns. The first column contains possible names for types of aspects common to many people. The second column lists many of these aspects' goals and attributes that are evident in a healthy state. The third column identifies some common dynamics that apply to the various aspects after being impacted by trauma. The fourth and final column gives possible healthier alternative behaviors and beliefs for these aspects. It is important to remember that this chart will not fit everyone. In fact we writers agree that it does not fully describe each of our own internal situations. It offers ideas we can use for customizing our own deep and meaningful harmonizing model.

Aspects Chart (Note: re-label and redefine categories to what works for you.)

Aspects	Goals & Attributes	Common Dynamics before Harmonizing	Healthier Alternatives
Inner Wisdom	<p>Goal: Authentic richness of living.</p> <p>Attributes: Lives at the core of who we are. Provides nurturing to other parts. Fed by love, respect, understanding, and acceptance. Respects and is interested in self and others. It is more focused upon being rather than doing.</p>	<p>Our Inner Wisdom is often protectively hidden under layers of habits and defensive mechanisms to keep it safe from trauma. Difficult to discern and hear from. Lack of self-respect. Denial of the importance of one's own being. Denial of self-worth in public situations. Being disconnected from this aspect can leave us feeling adrift with little sense of who we are or where we want to go.</p>	<p>More time spent in the state of Inner Wisdom. Tapping into the confidence, creativity, serenity, joy, light, gentle playfulness, and authenticity. More and more we can get in touch with our Inner Wisdom before responding to others' behaviors, with the ability to see more clearly, calmly and more authentically. We can view others and ourselves with compassion, caring and insight. Gentle humor is a strong sign.</p>

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

<p>Stabilizers</p>	<p>Goal: Stability, trying to keep the inner world balanced.</p> <p>Attributes: Persistent, consistent.</p>	<p>Seek to avoid change, not rock the boat. Numbing dissociation, avoidance, and distracting behaviors to suppress emotions. Repression of memories, staying active to avoid feeling pain aspects carry, codependence and pleasing others and counter-dependence.</p>	<p>They can focus on keeping life nourishing and sustainable so that all of our selves are resiliently stable.</p>
<p>Producers</p>	<p>Goal: Actively influence our environment favorably for us.</p> <p>Attributes: Assertive, plans ahead, organized, focused, action-oriented.</p>	<p>Seek to avoid and distract from pain and feelings with activities to “get over it”. Can be judgmental, workaholic, perfectionist, nagging, overly self-critical, and obsessive with certain behaviors and in general try to control too much.</p>	<p>Focus on being financially comfortable. Helps us achieve excellence. Motivate us towards self-improvement. Make and keep our homes comfortable and safe. Taking care of responsibilities that help us live well.</p>
<p>Adventurers</p>	<p>Goal: Provide energy and strength to protect and address problems.</p> <p>Attributes: Give surges of energy to make changes. Assertive and single-minded focus.</p>	<p>Adventurers seek to immediately overcome the pain and fear of traumatic memories with behaviors that cause extreme mood shifts without regard for consequences. They have extreme, aggressive, and urgent reactions to emotions they see as threats. They hate to feel weak, to admit vulnerability and dependence on others. They usually function in fight, flight or freeze mode, engaging in adrenaline producing activities that risk life and limb. They can push addictive and compulsive use of</p>	<p>Our adventurer aspects have so much power and vitality to help us drive healing – making us stronger, more independent and more resilient. Once these aspects understand how they can help, they often become very motivated to help us heal. For an adventurer to accept that we were victimized (as distasteful as that is) at the point of trauma it helps in letting go of the feelings of guilt, shame and self-blame.</p>

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

		substances and behaviors (alcohol, drugs, food, sex, etc.). They can create dissociation in response to emotions and memories. They may engage in self-harming behaviors that make us feel less unsafe and more stable.	
Seekers	<p>Goal: Live more fully.</p> <p>Attributes: Curious, eager, sensitive, they seek life, love, joy...</p>	Strong reactions of fear, pain, rage, despair, guilt, shame that are often feared by other aspects. Carrying these emotions they seek a way out – of the place where the traumatic memories keep replaying... a way out of the pain, the fear, feeling trapped, feeling terrible about ourselves, the sadness ...	<p>Framing what they seek in the positive. E.g., if a seeker says, “I’m afraid of dying”, see them as “I want to live.”</p> <p>Once healed they are free again to seek love, vitality, joy, etc. They can frolic in the “Inner Wisdom”.</p> <p>Cautionary note: The strong reactions of the seekers are often feared by other aspects. It is important that we are attentive to safety when working to help these aspects heal.</p>
<p><i>Note: many dynamics overlap between roles. The dynamics listed here are where they most often are found.</i></p>			

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

- Activity 1:** Choose one of the aspects you can identify with.
- a. Create your own name that works well for you and that aspect of you.
 - b. Write down what parts of our description of that aspect feels right to you.
 - c. Write down other descriptions of goals and attributes that make sense to you.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

- d. Write down one protective dynamic/behavior that you see that aspect engaging in. Then write down positive goals and intentions of that behavior, and what you would like to have as a healthier option.
- e. Gather ideas on how to help harmonize the beliefs and behaviors to of this aspect. You could find ideas from our chart below, other people on a healing path, professional helpers, etc.

Protective Behaviors	Possible Positive Function of Protective Behaviors	Healthier Behaviors
Isolating when traumatic memories are intruding	Trying to reduce stimulation to calm things down and stop traumatic memories from intruding.	Calling other healing trauma survivors, going to a Vital Cycles meeting, calling therapists, inviting friends for meals.
Over stressing my body through over-work, pushing past limits, ignoring symptoms of stress, self-sacrifice, etc.	Keeping attention away from traumatic material, feeling in control by engaging in distracting activities.	Learning to pace ourselves: e.g., listening to our bodies' sensations and needs, resting, taking naps, saying 'no' to things that would push us too far. Being gentle with ourselves for having human limitations and challenges – realizing no one is perfect. Respect our bodies by acknowledging our needs and taking care of them. Use other techniques to contain traumatic material, e.g. aspect finding a safe place, putting memories in a container.
Sleep deprivation	Trying to prevent nightmares, staying alert to protect oneself because of traumatic intrusions that cause you to believe you aren't safe in the present.	Sleeping adequately, creating an environment that supports good sleep including saying "good night" to all aspects like helping them go to a safe place to sleep.
Painful and disturbing sexual fantasies and behaviors	Strong stimulation to block feelings or traumatic memories. Repetition of painful traumatic memories to try and understand them.	Allow aspects of self that want to act out to vent in a journal, talking nurturingly to self in a mirror, reading a book about healing one's sexuality.
Cutting (self-	Strong stimulation to block	Venting emotions through

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

mutilation)	feelings or traumatic memories; to feel alive/not numb; to “punish” another aspect that is blamed for abuse.	internal dialog in journaling and beating a pillow or using imagery to “turn down” intensity of strong emotions or deposit strong emotions in a strong container; feel alive by other strong stimulation e.g., holding ice pack, hard exercise, deep breathing, having fun, journal or seek support.
Drug or alcohol addiction	Numbing out traumatic memories and feelings.	Deep nurturing behaviors and habits, and healthy means of excitement and adventure.
Toxic Relationships	Seeking connection with others because attachment is necessary for human survival, and turning to familiar, although toxic, sources.	Replacing them with nurturing friendships and relationships.

Activity 2: Gradually do more and more of the new behaviors until the pain and fear fade and the new beliefs and behaviors feel natural. Note, this life-changing activity may take months or even years. Remember to pace yourself gently and compassionately. Pushing too hard actually slows down the healing.

** Note: In alignment with our “Independence Principle” we do not endorse specific therapeutic models. The “Inner Team Model” is simply included as a way to demonstrate a way to do the Harmonizing Path. The Inner Team Model draws heavily from Positive Psychology, Solution Focus Therapy, the “Internal Family Systems Model” by Richard Schwartz, and “Eye Movement, Desensitization and Reprocessing” by Francine Shapiro.*

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Processing

We transform traumatic memories, relieving us of their burdens.

Traumatic memories impact many areas of our lives. They can intrude and skew our sense of situations dramatically, making it more difficult to relate with other people and ourselves. They can affect how we talk, work, love, act, and think. The impacts vary from person to person and each memory has different effects. Processing memories can benefit us in many ways such as fewer nightmares, sleeping better, reduced hypervigilance, more peace, better self-esteem, greater capability for success in work situations, more positive relationships, better self-care that comes more naturally, as well as greater hope and vitality. Processing reframes the memory itself through a deep, connected expression of the memory's burdens that allows the discharging of emotions, replacing warped myths/beliefs with nourishing truths, and putting the event in its true perspective.

The following is an example from one of our author's life:

Like many other times that I processed a traumatic memory I felt tremendous fear beforehand. I was terrified that the memory would overwhelm me; that I would hate myself forever or even commit suicide as a result. I had to do a lot of preparation with my therapist to become ready. While processing the memory I allowed the horrific scenes of torture, and their accompanying emotions and beliefs, to flow out of me. It did feel intense, scary, and very painful, and yet it was finally moving! The pressure was easing with each tear drop, with each expression of these long-repressed memories. Afterwards, I was able to see that I had actually been an innocent victim in the situation I'd remembered. I felt the burden of self-negating beliefs and emotions lighten a bit more. The overwhelming feeling of guilt and of being evil faded more and more. I felt freer without this terror looming over me. I felt calmer and more in control of my life. And I was finally able to grieve the pain of that terrible situation. Over time I came to be able to talk about that memory with more and more ease. Some things that used to trigger intrusive traumatic memories no longer seemed to affect me, so I felt safer in my life. I gained more confidence and was more motivated to process more memories whenever I could to keep up this progress. The rewards were certainly worth the effort for me. Now, years later and dozens of memories processed, I feel like a totally different person with so much hope, passion for life and confidence in my future.

Processing allows pain that has been stuck to emerge and dissipate. Yet there is a common misconception that processing increases pain. However the truth is that we are exposing the pain that was already there, so we can heal the wounds. What feels like a crazy response to the present is actually a memory playing in the body. It's not "dwelling in the past" to experience emotions, sensations and beliefs remembered from that time period, it's simply that memory is not fully processed and resolved during traumatic situations so it can be reactivated and replayed over the years into the present.

Memory is processed differently in our brain during trauma. Sometimes portions of the memory or even the entire memory can be dissociated (out of conscious awareness). Traumatic memory often carries a powerful, negative emotional charge, frightening images,

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

body sensations (urges, scents, physical pain, remembered pressures, etc.), negative beliefs about self and life, words that were said and other auditory inputs. These need to be intentionally and skillfully processed. The presence of traumatic memories recycling repeatedly in our brains perpetuates emotional wounds. These are wounds that time does not heal. Often one traumatic incident may cause a number of traumatic memories to be stored, and each may need processing. Sometimes these associated traumatic memories need to be processed together to find the inevitable freedom.

There are a number of key ingredients for doing this path safely and well – sufficient life stability, emotional resilience, being able to be gentle with one’s self, having learned processing skills and concepts, an ability to self-soothe, a support network, and feeling safe enough to do it. Other ingredients that can be very helpful are an ability to harmonize internally, a skilled trauma therapist who fits you well, a safe place to process at home, and a safety plan for difficult times. There are countless other things that people do to help them with processing. If one feels unready for this path, it can be helpful to do other paths and come back when ready. Processing memories safely usually requires skillful and careful help from others. Healing is easiest when one is centered, compassionate and curious regarding one’s self. Compassionately understanding the impacts of the traumatic memories helps wounded aspects of ourselves to open up for healing.

There are many different metaphors people use to help them access and process traumatic memories. A composite of memories and ensuing patterns can feel like it has its own personality. Some terms people use for this is: an “aspect,” “inner child,” an “exile,” a “part,” an “alter,” a “wound”, “younger part,” “child part,” “auxiliary,” etc. (See the Harmonizing Path for one model.) It’s helpful to be gentle and respectful to the protective dynamics/aspects that are resistant to processing memories. These aspects can be listened to, understood and soothed before proceeding. Processing is much smoother, easier, faster and safer if we do this first. Listening to protective aspects often helps us pace ourselves appropriately. Pushing too much too fast can overwhelm us unhelpfully. We can learn to respect the protective aspects, find out what they need, and gain their permission to process the memory. Developing a relationship with the protective aspects is as important as connecting with other aspects that contain memories. We can also ask aspects to slow down the emergence of memories so we can process it more safely.

The perspective you had during the trauma remains unresolved; thus when a memory emerges we find that aspects often speak as if they are the age you were when the trauma occurred. It’s most helpful to treat this aspect as you would a precious child who is just escaping from that traumatic situation. As the memory is processed, these sensations of being younger gradually dissipate. During the Uniting Path these aspects connect with other aspects and gain a more updated understanding about self and the world. Simultaneously we gain a broader and more balanced view of life with every aspect that unburdens.

There are a number of methods for processing traumatic memories, and there are new methods being developed all the time. There are many methods, including Internal Family Systems therapy, EMDR, psychodrama, gestalt therapy, somatic experiencing, art therapy, and many others. We are all different and will find that different things work for us at different times. However, we should be cautious in which approaches we explore. There are many methods that can be more traumatizing than healing. It is a natural tendency to want

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

to stir up feelings, or act them out. For example, forcing memory activation is usually counter-productive and often adds to one's trauma burden. A sadly common counter-productive method is re-enacting victim situations. Even more tragic is perpetrating abuse on others. Practices should be chosen based on how they help us achieve more joy and less pain for ourselves and others. We find it most helpful to consult our inner wisdom and look for practices that adhere to the Vital Cycles Healing Principles.

An important part of processing traumatic memories is venting the emotional charge. Venting is a critical coping mechanism at other times as well. Venting techniques are like pressure escape valves that help temporarily to ease emotional pressure inside (e.g., anxiety, anger, fear, pain, guilt, and shame). We suggest that any way of venting is healthy as long as NO ONE gets hurt, including the one doing the venting. Some examples of healthy venting are beating a pillow with a hose, hitting a punching bag, hitting balls at a batting cage, writing letters that are not going to be sent, etc. It's also very important that you are able to maintain the awareness that you are an adult and safe in the present despite the traumatic memories and feelings you are experiencing and venting.

There are many positive outcomes of processing. We find that our hope increases, we feel more joy, celebrate successes, feel lighter inside, more centered, more connected to ourselves, and build healing momentum. The example in the first paragraph demonstrated these outcomes.

- Activities:** (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)
- Activity 1:** Attend a Vital Cycles workshop or retreat and participate in a processing session, e.g., Sculpture (Memory Recasting).
- Activity 2:** Use Internal Family Systems therapy (selfleadership.org).
- Activity 3:** Write about sensations, beliefs or emotions you feel that seem to come from another time, or when you were younger. Notice the difference between how a traumatic memory and current situations feel. Talk about this with others on a healing path or trusted others who understand. The more we can understand and sense traumatic memories the easier it is to respond appropriately to life today.
- Activity 4:** Use a healing journal to express all the components of a memory in manageable pieces. It is very important to gently pace ourselves.
- Activity 5:** Develop a list of venting tools that work for you. Create an action plan to explore a new venting technique that you can use safely and easily.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Uniting

We connect with newly accessible aspects of ourselves, expanding joyful wholeness.

Increasing internal unity has many benefits. Forming new or stronger connections often alleviates pain and tension from conflicting aspects. It also builds our self-esteem and self-acceptance, which enhances contentment. We show up more fully and are able to apply more of our energy and focus on creating the life we want. Uniting helps aspects who have unburdened traumatic memories to reconnect to the other aspects of who we are. There may be other aspects of ourselves that long to be closer to the whole of who we are as well. Uniting also generates a more comprehensive sense of self, our history, and where we're headed. Loss can now be grieved by the whole of who we are which makes it easier and faster to come to acceptance. Uniting also helps us to own the many qualities, strengths and energies that the various aspects contain. In addition, uniting creates a stronger sense of self for even easier and smoother healing.

The major action in Uniting is warmly appreciating the motivations, roles and power of these aspects. We find it extremely helpful to moderate inner dialogs in which all aspects with an opinion on an issue have the opportunity to express themselves fully and be appreciated. Then we begin to negotiate internally and choose actions that create more balance and energy in our lives. We can resolve conflicts between various aspects in areas such as: house cleaning, self-care, expression of creativity, assertiveness, protecting ourselves well, humor, and dealing with emotions, etc.

Actively nurturing these aspects helps us to unite even more. We can find and create environments and activities that nurture us internally. Some examples are: Being in nature, socializing with supportive friends, meditating, dancing freely, creative expression, journaling, sharing with supportive others about the aspects we're connecting with, doing activities these aspects like to do. Note, the activities that aspects like to do often change as they unite and continue healing.

During Uniting we once again use the Understanding and Harmonizing Paths, now with recently unburdened and protective aspects. These aspects long for self-connection and purpose. Uniting helps these aspects to feel accepted, and to shift their extreme behaviors to more win-win behaviors. We will still be complex beings with various aspects of ourselves. We'll find that these aspects are more connected, more accepted, and help us live happier, more harmonious lives. The more we unite, the easier it is to harmonize and process. And the more we harmonize and process the easier it is to unite.

Uniting helps our aspects to work more as a team. Over time we find that the chorus of disagreeing voices quiet down and we can move more easily, clearly and confidently.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

- Activity 1:** Journaling: Find out from an aspect what its' motivations and hopes have been. Help this aspect see the beauty and power it possesses.
- Activity 2:** Inner Dialog Journaling: "What does this aspect want to do now?" "What role can it play in our inner community?"
- Activity 3:** Journaling: Adapt and hone your ability to build internal connections. Run a Vital Cycles meeting with your aspects, expressing freely the urges, motivations and emotions carried in each aspect.
- Activity 4:** Seek out people who support you and the aspects of you that are emerging.
- Activity 5:** Talk to others who have done the Uniting Path and find out what worked for them. Take and adapt the ideas you like best.
- Activity 6:** Seek environments that are conducive to building inner connections, such as nature, private journaling, support groups, spiritual group, etc.
- Activity 7:** Take part in an activity that appeals to multiple aspects of you.
- Activity 8:** Do the Understanding and Harmonizing activities that appeal to the newly emerged aspects.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Connecting

We choose and nurture relationships that enhance our authenticity.

This path is about being able to be true to yourself, and being in relationships that allow you to be true to yourself. This is not about being completely open about everything, but being sincere with what we share and do. The idea underlying this path is that the healthier our relationships are, the greater our quality of life. Relationships that enhance our authenticity: strengthen our self-esteem, give life more meaning, build our support network, and make it a lot easier to heal. Plus they tend to bring more joy to our lives. Without these kinds of relationships we tend to get our social needs met in ways that are less fulfilling, less safe and may even hinder our healing.

The ability to nurture authentic relationships begins with nurturing ourselves (you have to have it to give it away). The more we engage in self-care, self-respect and self-nurturing, the more able we are to develop more enlightened and healthy relationships with others. There is a vital cycle here in that when we help others we learn what we can do for ourselves. Thus, we find that nurturing healthy external relationships enhances our internal relationships between aspects of ourselves as well.

The impacts of trauma often make it difficult to connect with others. There may be residual fears, negative myths, and protective patterns that make it harder to make authentic connections with others. Connecting may feel even impossible at times. We find that breaking it into small, doable steps helps make connecting manageable. At first some of us may not be sure how to connect healthily with others. Later, as we recognize and experience our success, we can broaden and deepen healthy connections with others, thus creating a cycle of healing.

Focusing on a vision of greater joy and healing can give us the motivation to do what is best for ourselves in the long run. As we heal, mature and thrive some relationships will change. The word “choose” in this path is critical here. We may look at our relationships, nurture some, negotiate healthy boundaries with others, limit some, and take a break from others. This is a natural process of growth. To nurture authentic relationships, gentleness and respect are important.

- **Nurture:** We find that it is easiest to start nurturing the safest relationships. Many people develop their relationship skills with a respectful and caring therapist, and in Vital Cycles meetings and events. Over time we may choose and nurture professional relationships, other support groups and community based relationships that also do this. Being authentic with trusted friends enables us to be more authentic throughout our lives. For many people a relationship with a higher power can be a wonderful source of connection and comfort. All of these relationships can also deepen our inner wisdom. We nurture these relationships in ways that enhance authentic healing and thriving.

Mutually supportive relationships are the most sustainable. These tend to lead to personal growth in many areas of life for all parties involved. Relating for mutual growth takes skill, time and effort. There needs to be a sustainable balance between listening and

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

sharing, supporting and being supported.

Some qualities in this type of relationship tend to be:

- a. increasing honesty with self and others
- b. appropriate openness
- c. treating both self and others with respect and caring
- d. accepting our feelings, strengths and challenges
- e. accepting each other's feelings, strengths and challenges
- f. being willing to take risks through being vulnerable
- g. asking for what you need to be authentic
- h. respectful boundaries for all parties

- **Negotiating and Creating Healthy Boundaries:** The thought of setting healthy boundaries may seem daunting and inspire fear of losing a relationship, yet the rewards for successful boundaries are huge. Both parties are able to be more respectful, more vulnerable, more open, and grow into their own beauty more.

There are those who actively or passively attempt to hide the truth of traumas we have suffered. Some deny out of fear of reprisal or criminal prosecution. Others may deny out of guilt, shame, confusion, or simply because they don't want to acknowledge that it could have happened.

Any denial may be cause for disconnection until they are willing to relate within our boundaries. Great care must be taken in choosing to set boundaries in a confrontational setting. When we confront in this way we can control what boundaries we set, whereas we cannot control their responses. If there is a chance of violence, confrontations may be done indirectly or with Gestalt techniques (pretending to talk to the person, beating a pillow, writing a letter without sending it, etc.).

Many of us have found that to truly heal and grow we specifically need to let go of certain relationships that keep reinforcing negative patterns. This can be very difficult, particularly when these are family or close friends.

Over time we find that we develop an inner circle of trusted friends. This takes an active pursuit of healthy relationships, and the realization that we are worth it – even if some aspects of us don't feel it yet. Our ability to have authentic relationships will gradually expand into other areas of life. This is particularly true as we choose mutually supportive relationships over disruptive ones. The greater our own authenticity and self-respect grows, the higher our standards for those in our inner circle.

Activities: (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

- Activity 1:** List the 2 most authentic relationships you are in:
- What can you do to nurture these current relationships?
 - What boundaries would be helpful to put in place to enhance these relationships?

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

- Activity 2:** Brainstorm a list of what you need in relationships that enhance your authenticity? Prioritize this list.
- Activity 3:** Make a list of ideas for “How do you start new relationships to have the best probability of them enhancing your authenticity?” Gain ideas from others who do this well.
- Activity 4:** Choose from the following ideas for gradually turning isolation into connection.
- Within Vital Cycles: Vital Cycles meetings are a great place to develop connection skills. Come to the meeting early; stay afterwards to talk to people; socialize after meetings; make eye contact; take on a service role to help keep the meeting going and keep yourself going to the meeting; share regularly; ask people for ideas for things you’re improving; attend Vital Cycles events; reach out to others who can use your help; give your phone number/email/IM address to others to help and ask for others’ contact information; co-mentor with another Vital Cycles member. These practices can build confidence and skills to help reach out to others outside of Vital Cycles as well.
 - Outside of Vital Cycles: Other 12-Step groups, therapy groups, support groups, community groups, church groups, etc.
- Activity 5:** Plan something fun at least once a week with friends (more if possible).
- Activity 6:** List ideas for “What relationships would be best to let go of altogether?” How could you do this respectfully and safely? Ask others’ opinions and plan before acting.
- Activity 7:** Some people find that having a pet can help gradually develop the skills and desire for connection with others. Over time these same skills can be applied more and more with other people.
- Activity 8:** Make amends to others who have been hurt by your actions or inactions to increase your sense of authenticity and integrity.
- Activity 9:** Pick one relationship that has problems, but is too important to lose. Write down ideas of healthy boundaries and discuss with a trusted person how to implement these gently.
- Activity 10:** Think about the dynamics of your work relationships. Look for ways of enhancing personal boundaries in a way that enriches your work.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Path: Renewing

We find joy in celebrating our successes and supporting others' healing.

In renewing ourselves we energize our lives. We increase our yearning for more joy and healing as well as help others on their healing path.

Celebrating our successes motivates future healing and focuses us on what is working for us. It builds our self-confidence and self-esteem enabling us to heal even more quickly. Celebration grounds us in our strengths and accomplishments. Celebration improves our ability to enjoy life, helping us to be more playful in personal and work situations.

There are many successes we may find in healing:

- more joy and less pain
- healthier relationships
- improved physical health
- calmer state of mind
- clearer sense of self
- healthier self-care
- greater enjoyment in our work

There are infinite ways to celebrate. Here are a few examples: playing freely, giving oneself treats, parties, celebrating big life events (birthdays, etc.), cooperative game playing, applause for each other, cheering each other on, recognizing each other's strengths, telling respectful others about our successes who will celebrate with us, hugging, enjoying fun, doing wonderfully fanciful activities such as kite-flying, drawing with crayons, playing with pets, nonsense poetry, word or number games, etc.

Even though some aspects of us may be uncomfortable with celebration, allowing the rest of us to celebrate makes our whole being lighter. We find it helpful to balance celebration with the need to honor other feelings.

Within Vital Cycles supporting others' healing strengthens the community that supports us all. When we help others in ways that we are passionate about and find fulfilling we generally give more freely, more richly, and sustainably. This is joyous outreach, not a sense of obligation. We find it helpful to ask ourselves, "Is my support helping me live more authentically, or is it a distraction from meeting my own needs?" Helping others at our own expense tends to lead to burn out, frustration and resentful service. While there are always boring tasks that need to be done in creating healing opportunities – if passion fuels us, we can actually enjoy the process, and everyone gains from the effort. The more we do what we're passionate about the more successful we'll be.

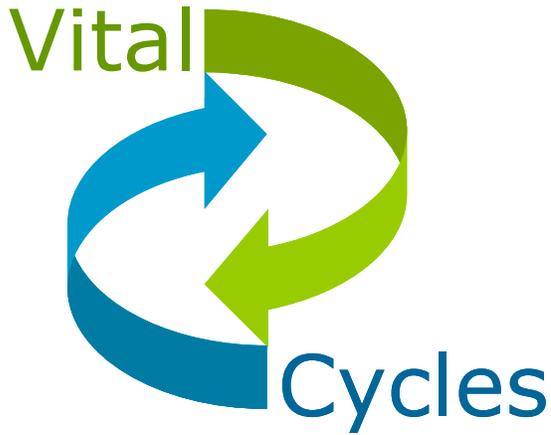
Founders note: We started this community because we wanted to spread the hope and healing we have experienced and we've found it to be tremendously renewing. We learn best from teaching and sharing. In helping others we're renewed by hearing others' perspectives, and remembering what has helped us. Our gratitude for

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

the help we've received along the way can inspire us to help others as well. Thus, we sustain the vital cycle of healing.

- Activities:** (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)
- Activity 1:** List successes and the positive outcomes of these successes.
- Activity 2:** Look for ways to share your strengths and insights as ideas others can use. E.g., contribute your insights to www.VitalCycles.org for others to use.
- Activity 3:** Discuss with friends, “What ways of supporting others’ healing are most gratifying for us?”
- Activity 4:** Experiment and find out where supporting others also nourishes your healing. Put more of your energy into these areas.
- Activity 5:** Develop mantras or slogans that you use when celebrating. This helps resistant aspects of us to see the value in celebration over time. E.g., “Celebration is a good thing”, “Wanting more joy is a good thing”, “I’m worth it”.
- Activity 6:** Start and nurture peer mentoring relationships in which you both gain from an exchange of insights, ideas and support. It is helpful to be guided by the Vital Cycles Principles.
- Activity 7:** See www.VitalCycles.org for a free download of forms of “peer mentoring”.
- Activity 8:** Renew yourself by giving to others: start a new Vital Cycles meeting, host a workshop, present at a retreat, form a service group, reach out to those that can benefit from Vital Cycles.
- Activity 9:** Build something fun into your day, every day.

Other Tools



Grounding Techniques

- ☺ Journal
- ☺ Breathe deeply
- ☺ Notice sensations of clothing on body
- ☺ Notice details of surroundings (e.g., nature, pictures, signs, walls, etc.)
- ☺ Increase physical sensations (e.g., scrunching toes, rub fingers and thumb together)
- ☺ Listening to sounds such as breathing, etc.
- ☺ Ask yourself, “What do I need right now?” Listen to inner voice(s). Try to embrace responses with compassion.
- ☺ Self-massage (shoulders, neck, scalp, face)
- ☺ Butterfly hug
- ☺ Doodle
- ☺ Pray
- ☺ Meditate

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Healing Environment Issues

Healing Environment Principle: Each group is responsible for adopting and gently implementing guidelines that are relevant to the group's focus and are consistent with our Principles

If someone has a concern about an issue that may be a danger to the Healing Environment (e.g., a member might talk or behave inappropriately in the meeting) they can take the following steps.

If someone is very disruptive skip to step 3, but take the break immediately allowing newcomers to step out if they choose and are not involved- and then holding the Healing Environment Meeting right afterwards.

1. If not immediately disruptive, then after the meeting, ask another group member who was present, to gain a different perspective. If this doesn't alleviate your concerns go to step 2.
2. Ask if they will mediate a discussion with you and the member you see as threatening the safety of the group. The mediator must try to be neutral on the issue and work to ensure that both parties are able to express their perspectives in a respectful manner. If no impartial member from local group is available, it is ok to seek assistance from a member of another Vital Cycles group. If possible, have the mediator ask the person involved in about if they would be willing to talk with you within the next week, with the mediator present. (Or later if you both want to wait longer.) Both people can bring one other person to the mediation for support if they want.
If you can, stay open to the possibility that you may have misunderstood the situation until after you've talked.
3. If unable to resolve the issue through mediation, have a group conscious to discuss during next meeting.
4. During announcements ask for a Healing Environment Meeting on a Healing Environment Issue after the break. If a majority vote supports that the Secretary should suggest that newcomers (who are not involved) may want to skip that part of the meeting.
5. Healing Environment Meeting regarding potential Healing Environment Issue: To respect all group members, one person speaks at a time when called upon by the secretary.
 - a. All members who were present when the potential safety issue" occurred (e.g., disruption of meeting, inappropriate cross talk, discussing perpetrating acts, etc.) can share their perspective of what occurred.
 - b. Other members can share their thoughts and feeling about the issue. All members must have the opportunity to share if they desire.
 - c. Someone can make a motion on how to respond to the issue at hand.
Possible motions might be:
 - To drop the matter and consider it over and done.
 - To bar person for a specified number of meetings
 - To set a boundary that if the person who did the "safety issue" does it again, they will not be permitted to attend the meeting any more.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

- To bar the person who did the “safety issue” from attending the meeting any more.
 - Etc.
- d. Close the meeting with the closing.
- We celebrate our triumphs over trauma,
We honor our own process and our own pathway,
And we continue to respect our strength, hope and courage
as we find joy in healing.**

Vital Cycles Speakers Guide

Speaker Meeting: The chairperson invites a member with a minimum of 3 months in Vital Cycles to speak about the following 4 suggested topics. These are just suggestions, of course, the questions to help give a speaker ideas of what to talk about.

1. Experience:
 - What trauma have you survived?
2. Affects:
 - How has the trauma affected you?
3. Strength:
 - What insights/strengths/support have you gained on your healing path?
 - What examples of improvement in your life can you give to show this?
4. Hope:
 - What further benefits do you expect/hope to gain from attending Vital Cycles?
 - What are your healing goals, and how do you plan to attain them?
5. After speaking, please pick a topic for the rest of the meeting.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

About Vital Cycles

What is Vital Cycles?

Vital Cycles is a non-profit, peer support group, healing community. It can be one part of your support system on your therapeutic path of healing and thriving.

What is the purpose of Vital Cycles?

We strive to empower those who seek joy in living while healing the emotional impact of trauma.

How does Vital Cycles achieve that?

We provide individuals and peer support groups with a core set of recommended concepts and tools, including healing principles and paths. These, along with the Community Principles, can be used to support and sustain the activities of groups and support groups, including weekly, biweekly and monthly meetings, workshops and retreats.

Where can I find or start a support group in my community?

Some groups already exist. Vital Cycles maintains group contact information on our website. www.VitalCycles.org

We can support you in starting a group community by providing you with a meeting template. You may wish to consider a weekly, biweekly or monthly group. You may wish to initiate an Internet or telephone group. As you establish your group, we ask that you register your group with Vital Cycles so that information can be available via our website. In addition, this creates the opportunity for you and your group members to gain information about regional and national Vital Cycles events.

What is necessary for me to be a member of Vital Cycles?

To seek joy in living while healing the emotional impact of trauma. All adults are welcome who are willing to align with our healing and Community Principles.

What is necessary to be a Vital Cycles Group?

The only agreement you must make to call yourself a Vital Cycles group or event is to align with the Vital Cycles Healing and Community Principles.

What types of trauma do people heal from in Vital Cycles?

Vital Cycles is open to anyone who wishes to heal from the emotional effects of trauma. We believe that there are universal processes that support the healing from trauma of any type. We also believe that many types of trauma may become interwoven in the experience of an individual. For example, an individual may have experienced physical abuse and emotional neglect as a child – and that may affect their experience of trauma as an adult.

Individual Vital Cycles groups may choose to specify a focus, such as healing from the effects of childhood sexual abuse or dealing with post-war PTSD. Other groups may wish to remain open to all who wish to heal, regardless of the nature of the original trauma.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

What is Vital Cycle's perspective on therapy?

Vital Cycles is designed to be one part of your support system on your path of healing and thriving. For many of us, creating our healing journey includes working with a skilled trauma therapist who fits us well.

Does Vital Cycles endorse any specific therapeutic schools or theories?

We believe that the language of Vital Cycles parallels and supports the fundamental shift towards positive focus and self-empowerment that is occurring in the field of trauma therapy. We are aware of and acknowledge the profound impact of some major approaches that have emerged, including EMDR and the Internal Family Systems model as well as the work on the innate aspects of emotion. However, Vital Cycles does not endorse a specific approach. Each member chooses what works best. As scientific and empirical research continues in the field of trauma therapy, other schools and techniques may come forward in the future. Vital Cycles embraces that as an opportunity to simplify and enrich our personal healing journeys.

Where is a higher power in Vital Cycles?

Vital Cycles offers a healing process which allows you to foster your own spirituality and other belief systems and strives to be truly ecumenical. For some, their inner wisdom may sustain them in a profoundly religious process. For others, their inner wisdom may sustain them in secular humanism or atheism. We believe that true healing from the effects of trauma can be supported with diversity of belief systems.

What is Vital Cycles definition of "inner wisdom"?

We believe that each individual has, within themselves, a core capacity to understand and empower their individual healing journey. With some, that inner wisdom may be highly intuitive, with others, that inner wisdom may be highly structured.

You may choose to find any number of ways of accessing your inner wisdom and that you develop and refine your capacity to empower your healing journey over time. We suggest that you develop your inner wisdom as you undertake to process the effects of trauma so that your journey is safe and progressive, not overwhelming and frightening.

What is "confidentiality" in Vital Cycles?

Trust is critical in our healing environments. We only share a member's identity and other personal information with that person's permission.

Who wrote the Vital Cycles Paths, Healing Principles and Community Principles?

The founding members and advisors to the board of Vital Cycles developed the language in a series of intense retreats during the latter part of 2007 and early part of 2008. We sought the comments of a "virtual focus group" as well as the detailed commentary of several trauma therapists.

We view the language of Vital Cycles as a "living document" and welcome your comments as you apply the paths to your own healing journey.

Who founded Vital

In July of 2007, a group of individuals began to focus on the core issues

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Cycles?

of healing from the effects of trauma. The five founding board members and special advisor have decades of experience with healing from the effects of trauma in our personal journeys. This group created a fundamental language of Vital Cycles, as well as the framework for peer support self help groups, workshops and retreats.

How is Vital Cycles supported?

Our fundraising sources include contributions from individuals and groups. In addition, we engage in selected fundraising activities and events. In the future, we may solicit grants that provide us with funding while supporting our core mission.

Where does my contribution go?

Your contribution goes to support the costs of maintaining Vital Cycles, including the website, the development of literature, sponsoring retreats and other activities. All of the board members and special advisors serve without pay, and there are no paid professional staff.

What do I do if I have other questions that I want answered about Vital Cycles?

Please contact us at info@vitalcycles.org and we will strive to answer your question.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Business Meeting Guide.

Business Meeting Process: The Secretary facilitates these meetings. It will take place the 1st meeting of every month, from _____.

- Treasurer's Report.
- Ask for a new chairperson for that month if no one has signed up yet.
- Vote to fill other roles at the end of each quarter.
- Secretary tells the group about decisions made at previous business meeting that affects this one. E.g., Business topics tabled until this time, deadlines set on projects, etc.
- Read the full "Business Meeting Process" (this section) out loud to the group.
- If you believe there is an issue that affects the Healing Environment, use the Healing Environment Issue Guide in this binder to address it, rather than a business meeting.
- Brainstorm a list of possible topics for agenda.
- Prioritize topics by show of hands. (each person can vote for ½ of the topics)
- All have a chance to share their opinion on the top voted topic.
- One person can make a motion to propose a change. (Ask if anyone else has an opinion before the motion is seconded.) If another person seconds it the group votes. A majority vote puts the proposal into reality.
- Once the 15 minutes are up the topics not addressed are tabled unless a majority vote chooses to continue on for up to another 15 minutes.
- The group can also vote to meet for a longer period of time on another day to get more business done. (e.g., 2 hours on a Saturday working on topics too lengthy to discuss in 15 minutes.)
- Close with the "Triumph over Trauma".
- After the meeting the secretary writes the minutes into the Minutes section.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Facilitating the Meeting: This can be decided each meeting, or volunteers can sign up to chair for a month. If they are not able to make a particular meeting they should call other members to find a replacement.

Anyone can ask for a **Healing Environment Meeting** at any time. The secretary facilitates this process. If someone seconds the need for the Healing Environment Meeting at this time, then a majority vote is needed to open discussion. An amount of time for that discussion should be chosen before beginning to talk.

The **contact person** here at our meeting site is _____ . We pay

\$____/month in rent by check made out to _____ .

Information about this meeting can be gained at VitalCycles.org.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Role Definitions

Facilitator:

- Facilitates the meetings using the Meeting Guide as a guide.
- Invites someone to speak about experience, strength and hope for the ___ meeting of the month. Speakers ideally should be in Vital Cycles for at least 3 months.

Secretary: (ideally minimum 6 months in Vital Cycles)

- Facilitates the business meetings. (See “How this Meeting Works” bullets 1 and 2 for that process.) The secretary can ask former secretaries or others to facilitate for her if she is not able to attend.
- Write/type decisions made during business meetings in Minutes & insert in notebook.
- Facilitates a Healing Environment Meeting when it is called.
- Describe business meeting decisions during Announcements the next few meetings.
- Pass on this information to the next person in this role.

Treasurer: (ideally minimum 6 months in Vital Cycles)

- Collects, keeps safe, and tracks the weekly contributions in the Minutes section.
- Pays the monthly rent (can pay once at the beginning of the quarter for all 3 months)
- Gives Literature person money for printing new literature.
- Sends money to the Vital Cycles Global Service Group and other service groups as the group decides.
- Gives a Treasurer’s report at each business meeting about how much money the group has and recent expenditures.
- Pass on this information to the next person in this role.

Literature: (ideally minimum 3 months in Vital Cycles)

- Keeps track of what literature the group currently has.
- Prints new literature as the group decides (or as individuals donate money for).
- Maintenance of literature in box.
- Pass on this information to the next person in this role.

Group Rep.: (ideally minimum 6 months in Vital Cycles)

- Communicates on behalf of the group with the Vital Cycles Global Service Group and the host site.
- Pass on this information to the next person in this role.

Vital Cycles Healing Toolkit

Role Sign Up Sheet

Group Rep. (rotate yearly): 2011: _____. Alternate Group Rep _____

Group Contacts: _____ *(There is no mandatory rotation for the sake of consistent communication with the Global Service Group and new members. They can change if they want.)*

2011 Chair & Group Role Sign Up Sheet

<u>rent</u> <u>paid</u>	Group Roles (ideally change quarterly)
<u>initials</u>	1st Quarter
	Secretary:
	Treasurer:
	Literature:
<u>initials</u>	2nd Quarter
	Secretary:
	Treasurer:
	Literature:
<u>initials</u>	3rd Quarter
	Secretary:
	Treasurer:
	Literature:
<u>initials</u>	4th Quarter
	Secretary:
	Treasurer:
	Literature: