

The Olfactory Resource™

*A sensory rich stabilization technique developed by:
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History & Science

This resource was created out of a set of understandings about how our brains make sensory associations and how to decrease or increase those associations as part of trauma work. The two main sources for these insights come from **EMDR Therapy** and **TBRI®** (Trust Based Relational Intervention).

What is EMDR Therapy? Per EMDRIA: EMDR is a structured therapy that encourages the patient to focus briefly on the trauma memory while simultaneously experiencing bilateral stimulation (typically eye movements), which is associated with a reduction in the vividness and emotion associated with the trauma memories. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy is an extensively researched, effective psychotherapy method proven to help people recover from trauma and PTSD symptoms. Ongoing research supports positive clinical outcomes showing EMDR therapy as a helpful treatment for disorders such as anxiety, depression, OCD, chronic pain, addictions, and other distressing life experiences (Maxfield, 2019). EMDR therapy has even been superior to Prozac in trauma treatment (Van der Kolk et al., 2007). Shapiro and Forrest (2016) share that more than 7 million people have been treated successfully by 110,000 therapists in 130 countries since 2016.

What is TBRI®? Per The Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development (a program of the Department of Psychology in the TCU College of Science & Engineering): TBRI® is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. TBRI® uses Empowering Principles to address physical needs, Connecting Principles for attachment needs, and Correcting Principles to disarm fear-based behaviors. While the intervention is based on years of attachment, sensory processing, and neuroscience research, the heartbeat of TBRI® is connection. EMDR Therapy utilizes bilateral stimulation as part of that trauma therapy modality. Bilateral stimulation essentially means drawing the client's attention back and forth across the mid-line of the body. This can be done with eye movements, tapping, drumming, and even tones alternating in each ear. Currently, the volume of research gives the most validation to the eye movements for efficacy. Within EMDR Therapy there are protocols for "installing" positive calm or safe places, visualizations of safety and emotional regulation. TBRI® introduces a wide range of sensory knowledge and body based strategies as part of its Empowering Principles that address physical responses human beings have to sensory information when there have been disruptions in healthy child development. Taken together, one can see the potential for utilizing the senses and bilateral stimulation when developing resources for emotional safety.

So why Smell as the sensory resource of choice? Your olfactory sense is actually your strongest link to memory. Herz RS, Eliassen J, Beland S, Souza T. Neuroimaging evidence for the emotional potency of odor-evoked memory. *Neuropsychologia*. 2004;42(3):371-8. doi: 10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2003.08.009. PMID: 14670575. This is true whether we are talking about positive or negative experiences. Smells are handled by the olfactory bulb, the structure in the front

of the brain that sends information to the other areas of the body. These smells take a direct superhighway route to the limbic system. There is swift access to the amygdala and the hippocampus, regions related to emotion and memory. If you would like to know more about the science behind smell and memory, you can check out the scientific work that won the Nobel prize for this understanding in 2004: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/2004/press-release/> Given this knowledge, we ought to be able to enhance an association between a smell and a nervous system state- (a felt sense of calm/safety for example) using bilateral stimulation. Certain distinct smells have been associated with a particular response in many people. (ex. - Lavender for calming: Koulivand PH, Khaleghi Ghadiri M, Gorji A. Lavender and the nervous system. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2013;2013:681304. doi: 10.1155/2013/681304. Epub 2013 Mar 14. PMID: 23573142; PMCID: PMC3612440.) This is the foundation of aromatherapy. That is **NOT** what we are going for here. We are using the brain's super highway power of association through the olfactory sense to create something similar to muscle memory.

In essence, you are enhancing and other times even creating a positive trigger in sensory memory.

Methods for Installing the Olfactory Resource:

Two strategies:

Enhancement Method: Strengthen a scent association that the client already has to a positive memory or experience. Scent still needs to be portable and not frequently encountered. Examples, A) a child client once used a dryer sheet because the smell of his freshly laundered blanket reminded him of feeling safe and warm and cared for. B) an adult client once used an old newspaper because the smell strongly linked with memories of being held in her father's lap while he read the paper.

Creation Method: Install a Safety Smell using the office experience of felt safety. Use previous resourcing activities and assist your client in experiencing a deeply regulated mind/body experience in the connected space of your office. Once you have both agreed that the mind, body, and nervous system is deeply regulated and feeling safe, you are ready to pair that noticed experience with a novel scent. The scent needs to not have any other strong associations to memory, and not be frequently encountered without intention. It is important that the smell be portable, so that the client can use this resource in their everyday life. For this reason, an essential oil often works best. Examples, A) An adolescent client was not able to identify a smell that connected to feeling calm/safe. The therapist/client relationship became the steadying experience until more family and community resources could be developed. This experience was paired to the smell of Double Bubble Gum. The client had learned to do breathing exercises using bubble blowing contests with the therapist using this very strong smelling gum. The smell of that gum came to represent playful connection and acceptance. B) An adult client with significant structural dissociation was not able to recall any time or place where they felt calm/safe. The therapy room became the anchor for a more regulated experience. This experience was paired with orange essential oil, as there was no adverse experience associated with it and it was not encountered in everyday living. The orange smell came to represent feeling seen, heard, cared about, and reasonably "safe enough".

The Protocol Step by Step:

Discuss with the client the knowledge that smell is the most effective link to experiences. This is something like interesting trivia and can be talked about in a playful manner, especially when working with children and adolescents. Share an example of your own that is not too personal, but demonstrates what you are talking about. Ex: cinnamon always reminds me of snowy days and celebrations.

If you have not already, do some psycho-education about the window of tolerance, how emotion regulation really works, and why finding new ways to communicate with our nervous system that a situation is “safe enough” is a great life hack.

Invite the client to try creating a resource together that may help them experience more emotional regulation (no complicated self care strategies to have to remember...no words even!).

What to say:

Instructions to Clients for Enhancement Method: I’m going to ask you to do something a little different just now. You are going to take that scent (whatever you and the client agreed on) and hold it up to your nose while you think about the calm/safe place/experience that it brings up for you. Think about how that feels in your body, any visuals that go with it, try to notice all of the pleasant sensations that connect to this smell and that memory. You can close your eyes for a minute if you need to in order to help you make it as real as possible. When you’ve really got it and feel that experience, calm and safe (can substitute other words here; like seen, understood, connected, ok) I want you to raise your hand. When your hand goes up I am just going to start moving my hand across your field of vision. I want you to just smell your smell and watch my hand go back and forth, left to right and back again slowly.

- (Do 10 passes, slowly, at a distance between 3 feet and 6 feet from your client. This can also be done successfully via telehealth. Make certain the client is able to track with their eyes all the way to the left and then to the right.)
- Adaptation - if eye movements are uncomfortable, contraindicated (has headaches), clients can use Butterfly Tapping (see separate handout) for bilateral stimulation.

Ask the client, “How was that?” If the experience was pleasant and the client is willing, it is often helpful to do the process a 2nd time to strengthen the association even more.

Instructions to Clients for Creation Method: I’m going to ask you to try a little something different with me today. I’d like you to be able to take with you today this experience you have of feeling safe/calm (can use other appropriate words like: ok, steady, less anxious, seen, cared for, supported, grounded), so that you can use it to help you whenever life gets particularly difficult. Remember how we were talking about smell being a strong link to experience? I’d like to help your nervous system recognize a smell, sort of like muscle memory, for what it’s like here when things are going really well. Can you think of one we might pair to here that doesn’t already remind you of anything else? (offer some options from essential oils selection or scented moisturizers)

Once a smell is agreed on: You are going to take that scent (whatever you and the client agreed on) and hold it up to your nose while you think about the experience of feeling calm/safe (use appropriate words for your setting and clients experience) place/experience that we have here today. Think about how that feels in your body, any positive thoughts that go with it, try to notice all of the pleasant sensations that you experience as we connect this smell to the here and now. You can close your eyes for a minute if you need to in order to help you really connect the smell to how you are feeling now. When you've really got it and feel that experience, calm and safe (can substitute other words here; like seen, understood, connected, ok) I want you to raise your hand. When your hand goes up I am just going to start moving my hand across your field of vision. I want you to just smell your smell and watch my hand go back and forth, left to right and back again slowly.

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Instructions for clients post resource installation:

So any time you start to experience feeling out of your window of tolerance, anxious, depressed, rattled or panicking: I'd like you to take this smell (can have oils available on a felt pad in a keychain, jewelry, ziplock baggie, or just carry the little bottle. Get creative at finding ways to have the resource scent available as needed, but NOT ever present. Explain that it is important that the smell only be smelled when needed and that they do not expose themselves to it all the time as this will decrease its effectiveness as a rescue remedy. The scent may need to be "recharged" (just do the whole protocol again) eventually. Effects often last for months...sometimes even years, depending on the strength of the association, the novelty of the scent, and proper use.

**Cautions for using essential oils: People with certain medical conditions, such as asthma and pregnant people ought to consult with a physician before using essential oils. It is important not to ingest essential oils as they can be poisonous.*

Thank you for exploring The Olfactory Resource™

