

Somatic Experiencing (SE)- Intermediate Year

The funding I received from the FPSA has enabled me to complete the Intermediate Level Year of Somatic Experiencing training. Somatic Experiencing is a therapeutic approach which supports the healing of trauma. This training consisted of two 6-day intensive (residential) weeks in April and October 2022 in Corrymeela, Northern Ireland and St Dominic's Centre in Cork, Rep of Ireland respectively. The course is organised and run by SE Ireland, which Brid Keenan is the Co-ordinator. The lead trainer on this course was Linda Stelte, who had flown in from Canada. There are three elements involved in this Intermediate year's training:

1. Course work (72 hours teaching module)
2. Personal sessions (5 of 15 of the required hours for certification completed this year) and
3. Case Consultations (6 of 18 hours completed this year)

The personal session component to the course provides practitioners with the opportunity to become involved in exploring their own process while attending hour long individual SE sessions with the assistants and other qualified SE practitioners.

I have found this to be really helpful as it is giving me an understanding and experience from the client perspective i.e. in receiving the SE session.

The third element of the course consists of Case Consultation sessions both individually and in group format with the teaching assistants and primary therapy trainers. This is when I got the chance to bring my client cases to consider the SE intervention work with them in greater depth and with expert guidance, exploring how the theories we are learning relate to the trauma work with our clients, in my case the adolescents and their families.

I achieved an Intermediate year Certificate for completing this year.

I work in a busy Child & Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) clinic in the centre of Dublin city, Ireland. I am employed as a senior social worker and systemic psychotherapist. The SE approach has really enhanced my work with the young people (mostly aged 11-18 years) attending our service in that it has given me other skills to engage with the adolescents without the need for words and using the body to naturally and somatically move through and process life experiences.

The SE therapeutic approach has trauma resolution at its core. This training has given me the tools and helped me to work in a different way with a number of my young teenage clients who have been engaging in self-harming behaviours such as cutting themselves, in the context of managing strong emotions having experienced traumatic events/occurrences, some of which were recent single events and some of which are more developmental in origin.

It was a wonderful training. The SE approach was pioneered over 40 years ago by acclaimed American author and clinician Dr Peter Levine. As noted it has been found to be very effective in the treatment for stress and psychological trauma. Melanie Klein is another renowned clinician using the SE approach and working specifically with children and adolescents. Ideas

from her work have offered me many innovative and creative ways of engaging with my clients, using nature, games and artwork.

Overall, my learning in this year consolidated my knowledge of the autonomic nervous system and our physiological responses to novelty/threat in our environment.

Exploring and learning about the Polyvagal theory developed by Dr Stephen Porges and his discovery of the vagus nerve has enhanced our understanding of how the body processes trauma and the different modes our bodies naturally move through. These include the sympathetic (action) the parasympathetic (either 'rest' phase with the presence of resource and connection with our social engagement system i.e the relational system or the shut down and avoidance). These correlate to the fight, flight and freeze responses in the context of a threat.

Talking with the adolescents and sharing an understanding of these body processes with them (and their parents/families) has introduced, a way of recognizing and moving through these states with more support and ease.

Rather than flooding their systems with traumatic memory, the SE approach supports the ability to 'pendulate' in and out of these experiences. The concept of 'titration' (to touch off) also facilitates this and with the support of the therapist's nervous system in the room, this enables the young person's nervous system to co-regulate and the energy can deactivate & release bringing in more positive energy.

I am really grateful to the FPSA for their financial support which has enabled me to complete this year of training. It has been invaluable in my work with my young clients moving forward and helping them regulate their emotions and manage anxiety and low mood.