

# Trauma-Informed Seva in Crisis and Disaster

## A Training Module for Sikh Dharma Ministers

presented by the Office of the Secretary of Religion

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## Practice #1 - Grounding Techniques

*“Recognize that as a Minister you are part of the equation and that it is important for you to identify your feelings and body sensations. Take time to stop and to notice what you are feeling and then take action; it is an essential part of service to get your needs met in this way.” —SS Shanti Shanti Kaur Khalsa*

Take a few moments to “drop into” your body. Notice any tension and assess how connected you are to your body. Then do some of the suggested grounding techniques below and follow with another assessment of how you feel.



**\*NOTE: Doing grounding techniques is essential before practicing any of the other Trauma-Informed skills.**

- Breathe long and deep
- Repeat a mantra of your choice
- Place hands on your thighs
- Place one hand on head or chest and the other hand on belly and hold for a few seconds
  - Feel the ground under your feet  
(then roll ankles, flex knees, push down into the ground, roll hips, stretching spine, shoulders, moving arms, scrunching face in order to feel embodied, supported, and grounded in body.)

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## Grounding Tips

Be aware that this isn't simply a movement practice (such as doing Kundalini Yoga). Grounding is a way to feel connected with your body, with your focus on being present in your body, instead of, for example, focusing on your third eye. In yoga, we are looking to create an experience. The grounding skills shared here are used to create a connection.

Use these techniques to create a feeling of being both strong and connected to self, but also open, aware of yourself as well as others, and feeling neutral and receptive toward others. In addition to a sensory grounding in your body, also take time to ground in the Divine as well. Feel your connection with God and Guru and their love and support for you and for your seva (service).

## Practice #2 – Language Skills

Sit with a partner. One partner is sharing about an emotional situation in their life. The other partner will be listening and communicating using both **reflective statements** and **invitational language**.



With a person in trauma their mental capacity to process information may be impaired. Take time to pause and allow the person take in what has been said; it may take longer than usual for them to understand what you are saying.

Use invitational language instead of command language (see below).

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**TRAUMA-INFORMED LANGUAGE EXAMPLES:** Start where they are; help the person calm and settle themselves using your words and voice. Shift speed to a slower pace, lower your volume and pitch.

Use a kind, empathetic, clear, strong voice, asking and getting permission, finding voice for what is unspoken; naming emotions; give them space to correct you; follow their lead; use short, clear focused sentences; use simple words that are easy to follow and understand.

## Reflective Statements and Invitational language (Examples)

*"Is it ok if I stand here with you?"*

*"Can I offer you some support?"*

*"You seem pretty shaken by this, I wonder how you are doing."*

*"This is really upsetting to me, how you are doing?"*

*"I'm glad to see that the first responders and the Red Cross are here to help, have you connected with them as yet?"*

### Language Skills Tips

With language skills, the intention is not to solve an individual's problems, but to help the individual to self-regulate. The goal is to help them feel grounded, alive in their bodies, and reconnected to their own resources of body, mind, relationships, and spirit, so that they are empowered to act on their own behalf.

The aim of Trauma-Informed Seva is not to "fix" a problem, but about creating a safe enough environment for the other person to help themselves.

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## Practice #3 – Pacing and Leading

*“Pacing and leading is a slightly more sophisticated approach to connecting with another human being. Meet them where they are (upset, emotional tone) and mirror that kind of interaction, including hand gestures. It’s not about mimicking, but behaving in a similar enough way to reflect a sense of connection between you and the other person. Then you begin to lead them into a more therapeutic inner space, with slower breathing and a calming voice.”—SS Dr. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa*

Sit with a partner. Switch roles from the previous practice and use the tools of Pacing and Leading to help the other person to regulate themselves.



Pacing and Leading is one of the key co-regulation skills. People in villages had the experience of naturally reflecting each other and helping each other to return to a safe space. The idea is that it is

easier to connect with others when you meet them where they are and then help them to move into a different pattern.

**Pacing**—Use a similar breath pattern, use words that pace their own words, match their speed of speech, adjusting volume and posture, etc.

**Leading**—It is also true that you want to help them move to a more useful psychological space; so, you begin gradually to “lead” by shifting your breath rhythm (slower and deeper), word choice (less dramatic), relaxing areas of holding in your body, etc.

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## Role Playing

While watching the video, see if you can identify  
the following Trauma-Informed skills:



- **NAGAR** (Notice, Assess, Ground, and Reach Out)
- **Trauma-informed Language Skills**
- **Pacing and Leading**
- Pay particular attention to see if you can identify the point where “Margaret” shifts into self-regulation.

## Self-Care Tools



Self-care is a key element to supporting trauma-informed seva in a way that is balanced, intentional, and safe.

Self-care can be described in three parts: before, during, and after an emergency situation.

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## Before a Crisis:

**Practice** the basics of a Healthy, Happy, Holy Lifestyle. Get enough sleep, eat well, having loving relationships, and a strong spiritual practice.



**Practice** the NAGAR steps (NOTICE, ASSESS, GROUND, and REACH OUT) so that you have integrated them as helpful skills.

In addition to what you have learned in this training module, you might want to **explore other training opportunities** such as first aid and mental health first aid (see Resources section on our website and below).

**During a Crisis:** Be clear on what is possible for you to do with your individual skills and abilities.

- Connect with your intention of how you are going to be able to help. What is realistic?
- Do self-assessment periodically during an event. It is easy to lose yourself in a crisis situation. Stay in touch with yourself. Ask, "Am I okay right now? How do I know I am okay?"
- Take the time you need to ground yourself in body, mind, and spirit.
- Keep a mantra going; stay connected to your breath and heart.

**After the emergency has passed:** Remember that secondary trauma can affect the helpers, including yourself. When you are open to other's trauma, you can be affected by it. Be aware of any possible signs such as irritability, sleeplessness, restlessness, nervousness, anxiety.

Debrief with peers, sangat, friends. If you are unable to self-regulate, then you might also seek professional help. Use exercise, yoga kriya, water therapy, time in nature, time alone, time with others. Know what is helpful to you to be able to re-center yourself and connect with your true self.

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## Additional Resources and Training



We offer suggestions on some additional resources for learning more about serving in crisis and disaster situations, if you would like to further learn more about this topic.

### Kundalini Yoga for Trauma & Crisis

[KRI Crisis Kit – Kundalini Yoga for Stress and Crisis](#)

[The Science of Kundalini Yoga for Trauma and Addictions \(article\)](#)

[Reclaiming Life After Trauma by Julie Staples, PhD and Daniel Mintie, LCSW](#)

### Professional Trauma Counseling Services & Courses

[Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, PhD, Practicing Psychotherapist, Claremont CA](#) – A licensed psychotherapist, Dr. Khalsa is also in the process of developing and researching the benefits of Kundalini Yoga-based therapeutic programs.

[Shanti Shanti Kaur Khalsa, PhD, Guru Ram Das Center for Medicine & Humanology](#) - Courses on yoga therapy and trauma-informed Kundalini Yoga for Recovery from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

[Emotional Freedom Techniques \(EFT\)](#) – online training in this mind-body approach to treating traumatic or stressful memories and experiences.

### Disaster Response Training & Volunteering

The [American Red Cross](#) provides FREE disaster training for all volunteers. Trainings are both online and in-person depending on the course. Contact your local Red Cross office for training and volunteer information or [visit their website](#) to volunteer. Or [learn more](#) about how the Red Cross volunteers support international disaster efforts around the world.