



## Frozen Moments

Consider some of the following and see if you can identify with any of these or similar situations. Discuss as a group:

- Can you remember a time when someone said something insignificant or even perhaps silly or stupid, but for some reason the way it was said and the timing can still make you laugh out loud today?
- Can you think of a time when you were feeling sad or down and a person came up to you and said or did just the right thing to make you feel better?
- Can you think of a time when someone said or did something that still brings about a creepy, tense or other uncomfortable or hurtful feeling in you today, even though it may be years or even decades later?
- Can you remember a little slice in time with someone you care about that still holds a lot of meaning and feeling for you? (Something simple like a walk or a talk or a car ride or a card or gift or a simple pat on the back, word of encouragement or other gesture from a friend or loved one that still feels meaningful today)
- Are there other moments that may seem insignificant in the greater scheme of things that still seem to stand out in your mind even though time has passed? Consider a few examples to get you thinking:
  - A hug or a word at just the right time that you can still “feel” when you think about it even if it was years, or even decades ago
  - A harsh thing said that hurt or embarrassed you that still stings when you think of it even if it was years ago
  - An action that left you feeling left out, excluded, disliked (or even worse, unloved) that never fully healed
  - A proud moment that still feels good, even if it was long ago like winning an art contest as a child or raising your hand and getting the right answer on a question no one else in the class knew or hitting a home run in gym class or little league

It is very interesting to think about how there are special little moments *frozen in time* that seem to last forever, when so many other memories just fade away forgotten with time. The positive frozen moments that we have are so important to hold on to because they are like treasured jewels that can be brought out of the safe every once in a while for a smile or a laugh or a warm feeling.

However, the moments that we may hold on to that are not so pleasant may be linked with our personal reaction to emotional trauma. Emotional trauma is often likened to a scar but it may be more like a wound that never fully healed correctly. A wound that has not healed can more readily be reinjured and therefore be re-traumatized. When it comes to emotional healing and effective coping, it is less important to try to figure out why certain moments in life are more traumatizing and therefore more memorable than others. Rather, it is much more valuable to think about what helps a person to cope and bounce back when a painful, hurtful or otherwise traumatic memory makes an unwanted appearance in one's conscious mind.



## Using a Traumatic Memory Checklist – Group Activity

For the sake of learning more about using a **Traumatic Memory Checklist** first consider a personally challenging “frozen moment” as described earlier. However consider the following before selecting the specific moment that you want to work with for this exercise:

- If this is being done in a group setting, do not pick something that exceeds your **comfort level** with the group. For example if you have a memory that comes to mind that is too difficult for you to handle at this time or that you do not feel close enough with the group yet to discuss it openly then bypass that one for now. If something is bothering you that you do not feel comfortable discussing with the group it may be a good idea to set up an individual counseling session to discuss that instead. Pick something that you feel that you can handle right now.

Select your memory and go around the group sharing it briefly with the rest of the group. Take turns and be supportive. Do not make fun of or trivialize someone else’s frozen moment. Remember that we all experience feelings and trauma differently so be sensitive and respectful of others’ experiences and perspectives the same way that you want others to be respectful and supportive of you and your feelings.

An example of a frozen moment for this exercise:

*“I can remember in fourth grade I was on the playground and everyone was playing kickball. I was in the outfield and the ball didn’t come to me the whole game. Finally just as the game was ending, the other team’s best player kicked the ball way out to me and all I had to do was catch it and we would have won. But, I dropped it and then my classmates ripped into me with mean comments, taunts and insults. I felt so rejected and overwhelmed that I can still feel the hurt of that exact moment and I wish I could just go back in time again and catch that stupid ball. I wanted to crawl into a hole just to get away.”*

**Take turns sharing your frozen moment of choice by going around the group.**

### **Now use the Traumatic Memory Checklist:**

1. Understand your feelings. Use feeling words and try to identify what you felt at the time. Understanding your feelings increases insight which can help with the rest of this process

**If doing this as a group, go around and talk more about your feelings related to your frozen moment, using specific feeling words. Use a feeling chart if needed**

2. Give yourself a break – If you don’t like the way you handled a negative situation in the past and you wish you would have handled it differently, it is important to come to terms with the fact that **you did the best that you knew at the time.**

**If doing this as a group, go around and discuss what it is like for you to come to terms with this. It may be easier for some situations than for others and for some people it may come more naturally to do this than for others. That’s ok**

3. Recognize your strengths - How have I improved as a person since then?

**If doing this as a group – Discuss the following: How am I stronger, more experienced and wise and better equipped to handle and bounce back from life’s challenges since time has passed? How can I handle similar situations so much better today than back in the time of my frozen moment?**



4. Time travel, self-healing - Finally, imagine if you could go back in time now to visit your younger self right after the moment we have been discussing. You are not going back to undo what happened but rather to focus on how would you go back as a person today to comfort your younger self with all of the knowledge, experience and wisdom you have gained over the years since then.

**If doing this as a group take turns discussing: What would you now specifically say to your younger self in the past to comfort yourself and tell your younger self that you are going to be OK. How would you support and convince your younger self that you are going to bounce back, survive, thrive and get stronger with time?**



5. Close out debriefing. Now that this activity is coming to a close, do a self-check to make sure that you are emotionally stable and prepared to cope with any feelings that still may be lingering.

**Discuss:**

**How did this activity feel for you?**

**How are you feeling right now? Are you feeling ready to stop and move forward on a positive note?**

**What are your current coping skills for trauma and negative feelings? List three just to make sure:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Who are your supports? Who can you call if you leave here and you need someone to talk too?**

**Finally, how have you learned, grown, or benefited from this exercise? What is one strength that you know that you possess today? What is at least one positive thing you will take with you?**