



**The Healing Collective**

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# **POSES AND MOVEMENTS**



# **FOR SAFETY**

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## Poses and Movement for Safety

### Symptoms Addressed

- Emotional awareness and regulation
- Concentration and attention
- Dysregulated interoception
- Memory
- Stress response
- DSM-5 PTSD arousal and reactivity symptoms



Safety poses and movements help clients move their attention inward to the body in a safe and gentle manner. For many clients, trauma has caused the body to be experienced as dangerous, and this often results in clients avoiding the body, intensifying the disconnect between the mind and the body. This is especially true for clients who suffered physical trauma to the body (through violence, sexual assault, etc.). To heal trauma, a re-integration of the body and mind is necessary, and one way to work toward this is to help clients begin to re-enter the body in a safe, controlled way.

The following safety poses and movements help clients reconnect with the body in a way that promotes a sense of safety and security. Each of the poses and accompanying movements presented here may be practiced with clients in the context of psychotherapy, with little space and no equipment required.



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## POSES AND MOVEMENT FOR SAFETY TIPS



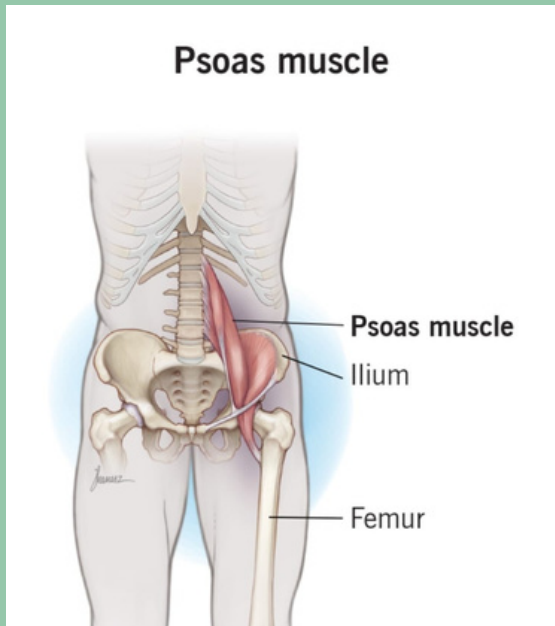
- During these exercises, attention may simultaneously be brought to the breath, focusing on long, slow, steady inhales and exhales.
- It is also recommended to have clients imagine that they are breathing into the poses and movements as they engage in them.
- If appropriate, these techniques can also be utilized with top-down, cognitive techniques, including trauma-focused approaches. For instance, while in a grounding pose, clients may be asked to access information regarding a traumatic memory. As they do this, they remain in the pose, and continue to focus on pressing their feet or pelvis (or other body parts connected to the ground) into the earth as they discuss some aspect about the memory.
- Whenever a client experiences an unexpected, uninvited distressing memory, they may remain in the safety pose or shift into a grounding pose by placing their feet onto the floor and pressing downward, into the earth.





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## PSOAS RELAXATION POSE

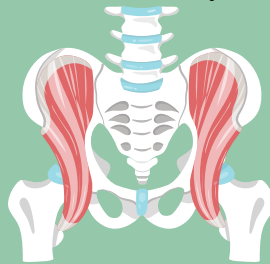


The psoas muscles connect the legs to the front of the spine, and the upper torso with the pelvis. These muscles function to stabilize and decompress the spine, and to help individuals walk upright and maintain a healthy posture. Chronic tension in, or injury of, the psoas muscles

(which is a common outcome of sexual abuse specifically and trauma more broadly) can lead to lower back pain. If this occurs over a long period of time, neck and shoulder pain may also develop.

An interesting fact about the psoas muscles is that they are involved in the experience and storage of traumatic experiences. We can work with this area of the body to facilitate recovery from trauma, including releasing traumatic energy from this region. As trauma expert Dr. David Berceli (2005) states, "The psoas muscles are considered the fight or flight muscles of the human species" (p.14). Specifically, the psoas muscles play a role in keeping us braced and protected when something very stressful or traumatic happens.

The psoas muscles contain the largest number of "fight or flight nerves" (sympathetic nervous system nerves) in the entire body, and these nerves become activated during traumatic events, causing strong tension in the psoas region. In other words, when there is trauma or a strong stress response, psoas tension is present, which can remain long after the trauma has subsided. One goal of body-based trauma treatment can include psoas muscle release, so that the body can enter a more relaxed state and a sense of safety can return to the body.



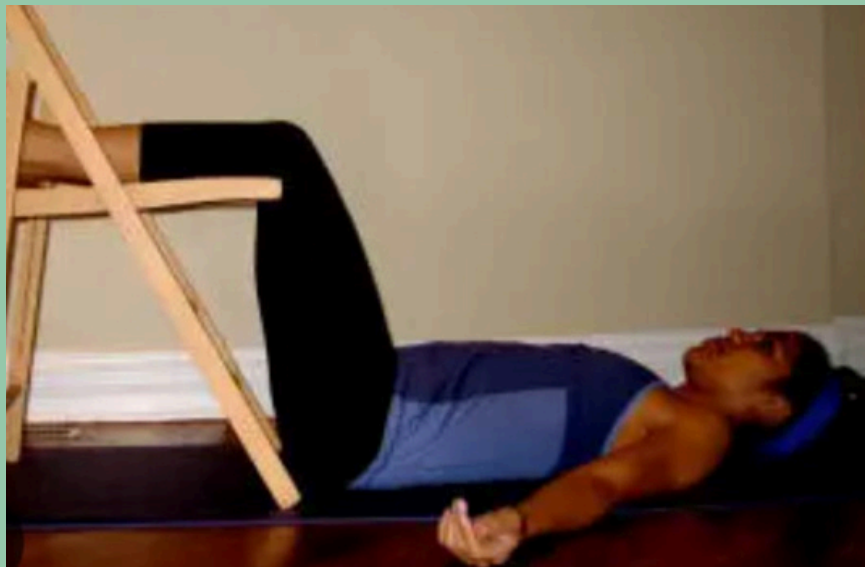


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## Enter the Psoas Relaxation Pose

To enter the psoas relaxation pose, you may lie down and rest your lower legs and feet on a chair as shown in the figure below. As you enter this position, ensure your lower back is pressed into the floor and allow your arms to fall gently at your sides, palms up. Next, feel your hip flexors begin to release as your femurs (the bones of the upper legs) relax into your hip joints.



Begin to breath deeply into this position and, as you breath, focus on the sensation of your femurs relaxing into your hip joints, thereby reversing any tension in your psoas muscles. Stay here for a few moments, continuing to take long, deep breaths, imagining that you are breathing relaxing and health into your hip flexors.



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## Incorporate Movement

To incorporate movement, gently move one knee toward your chest, grasping the lower leg with your arms and gently pulling it into the chest. Breathe into this position for a moment before releasing the leg back to its original position on the chair, and repeating this motion with the other leg.

Alternate legs every few breaths, for approximately 3-5 minutes.





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## FORWARD BEND POSE



To heal trauma, it is important for individuals to experience the body as a safe haven, and a protected space to which they can turn when feeling distressed. This pose creates a feeling of "folding into oneself" and promotes a sense of safety and protection. We have often noticed the tendency that many people have to curl up into a ball when extremely stressed or upset; this natural response to stress is meant to help the person feel safe and comforted within their own body. It can also be understood as a self-soothing strategy.

To enter forward bend pose, begin by sitting upright in a chair, feet flat on the floor shoulder width apart (or even slightly further apart), spine elongated upward with arms resting down at the sides of the body. Begin by slowly inhaling and, as you do this, extend the arms out, away from your sides, and then lift them straight up until they are close to your ears. Keeping the arms straight, begin to exhale very slowly and, as you do this, lean your torso forward, keeping the spine as straight as possible.

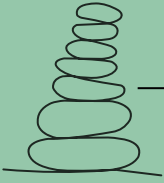
Continue to slowly bend forward as you exhale, slowly bringing your abdomen and chest down to the tops of the legs until the abdomen is resting on the legs. Do not force yourself to stretch more than feels comfortable, and ensure that while your abdomen is resting on your legs, it is not pushing hard into your legs so that you have difficulty breathing. Allow your arms to relax down to your sides and begin taking slow, long breaths while maintaining this pose.





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Continue to breathe into this position and, as you inhale, straighten your spine just a little, making room for the breath to enter the diaphragm. Move slightly downward with each exhale, curving the back as the air exits your diaphragm.



## Incorporate Movement

To incorporate movement, you can slowly, in rhythm with the breath, move between forward bend pose and sitting upright. To do this, start by sitting upright and move into forward bend pose using the instructions provided above. Once in forward bend pose, start to inhale slowly as you extend your arms out from your sides, straighten your spine a bit, and begin to lift your torso upward. As you continue moving your torso upward, lift your arms until they are straight above you, arms next to your ears. As you complete the inhalation, assume an upright seated position. Now, as you begin to exhale, slowly transition back into forward bend pose. You may flow through these two poses for a few moments, inhaling to come into an upright seated pose, and exhaling to fold into forward bend pose.

