

## SESSION 6: SLEEPING WELL

*Why is sleep important to trauma recovery? What increases sleep quality and quantity?*



### PRACTICE DEEP BREATHING

Start class by practicing the deep breathing method discussed on page 28.

### INTRODUCTIONS

Last meeting we talked about taming traumatic memories. Your homework was to journal write to your traumatic memory.

- *Who wants to share what they learned from their journal writing?*
- *Who wants to share any improvements they experienced this week with flashbacks or nightmares?*

### BEHIND THE SCENES

*Ahh... sleep. When was the last time you got a good night sleep? When was the last time you woke up feeling rested and ready for the day?*

Sleep is essential for healthy brain functioning. Sleep helps your brain recover from the physiological effects of trauma and prepare for the tasks of the next day. Without enough sleep, we feel irritable, unfocused, and ill-equipped for life's daily challenges.

People who have experienced trauma often have trouble sleeping well for two reasons: 1) the nightmares/flashbacks we discussed in the last session: *Fighting Back Memories*, and 2) hyper-alertness or high anxiety, another common side effect of PTSD. As we discussed earlier, when someone experiences trauma his/her brain can revert from normal brain functioning (controlled primarily by the rational frontal lobe) to survival mode (controlled primarily by the emotional limbic system). In survival mode, the senses are fully charged and the body/brain responds

similarly to an animal fearing imminent attack. The heart races, the blood pulses feverishly, cortisol (the stress hormone) surges, the eyes dart looking for a safe escape, and the body stiffens ready for fight or flight—or if that is not possible, the body may enter a state of shock and emotional numbness. After the trauma, this hyper-alertness remains. The brain has learned that life is not always safe and that it needs to be on guard for another attack. Unfortunately, even when the trauma survivor is in a safe environment, this hyper-alertness stays on guard, ready to fend off an attack. This hyper-alertness is evident in people who have trouble relaxing, are quick to startle or be alarmed, and live with a pervasive sense of unease and deep-seated fear that you are not safe. Anxiety is apparent in repetitive thoughts that evoke fear, worry, and/or stress. Many soldiers with PTSD symptoms can relate to a constant unease and fear for their safety even after they have returned from combat and are safely back in their home environment. During trauma, the autonomic nervous system was set on high alert and sometimes remains stuck in that position.

### **MOVIE CLIP** - *Play Chapter 5: Sleeping Well*

As you watch, look for how hyper-alertness and anxiety are affecting Leslie's daily life.

### **THINK-PAIR-SHARE**

[First, write responses to the questions below (*think*), then share your responses with a partner (*pair*), then discuss the questions as a group (*share*):

1) What does Leslie say that indicates she has ongoing anxiety and trouble sleeping?

2) Can you relate to a sense of high-alertness or anxiety? On a scale of 1-10, how much anxiety do you feel on a regular basis?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_\_\_ 10  
No anxiety, at all      Some anxiety occasionally      Moderate anxiety daily      High anxiety daily

a. How would you describe your sense of anxiety? What does it feel like in your body and mind?

b. How often does anxiety affect you?

c. Are there triggers (events or situations) that increase your anxiety level?

d. Does your anxiety level bother you more during the day or at night or both?

3) Can you relate to having trouble sleeping? On a scale of 1-10, how often do you have trouble sleeping

1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_6\_\_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_\_8\_\_\_\_\_9\_\_\_\_\_10  
Sleep well most nights                      Have trouble sleeping occasionally                      Lay awake often trying to sleep

a. If you have trouble sleeping, what is keeping you awake?

b. Are there triggers (events or situations) that affect your ability to sleep?

4) What have you tried to help reduce anxiety and to help you sleep better? Is there anything you would recommend to others?

## CLASS DISCUSSION

Psychiatrist and author of *The Chemistry of Calm* Dr. Henry Emmons writes<sup>5</sup>:

*"Fear itself is a normal, necessary part of being human. Like pain, it is a useful, even indispensable signal that there is something in our environment that is threatening or simply needs our attention. The problem comes when something goes awry in an otherwise normal process—when the reaction becomes excessive or unyielding."*

Reclaiming a sense of calm requires interventions for both the body and the mind. This session will focus on three brain-body routines essential to trauma recovery.

**HEALTHY DIET:** Imagine a bottle of clear water. What happens if you drop blue food coloring in the water? The appearance changes. What happens if you add oil to the water? The chemistry changes; the water and oil stay separated. Restoring a sense of calm starts with rebalancing your brain and body chemistry. Like the blue dye, when stress enters your system (fueled by high levels of the stress hormone cortisol), your body chemistry changes and begins to try to overcompensate. To reduce anxiety levels, you need a healthy body, which begins with a balanced, vitamin-rich diet. Irregular eating, "junk food," or excessive eating causes a metabolic imbalance that weakens your system and makes you more vulnerable to anxiety. This week's homework will focus on key ingredients of a healthy diet.

**EXERCISE:** Additionally, exercise is a natural elixir for reducing anxiety, balancing body chemistry, and improving sleep. Our bodies were designed for daily activity. Since the beginning of time, regular exercise has been a way of life. Civilizations have depended on labor to gather food, farm, hunt, construct buildings, care for children, and walk to and fro. It is only in recent generations that “desk jobs,” sitting at work and in the car, have dominated much of our 24 hours. Our bodies (muscles, blood system, and brain chemistry) crave physical activity. No matter what your experience or comfort level with exercise, you can likely improve upon the amount of physical activity you seek out each week. Little things like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking around the block, or doing sit ups and push ups at home can increase your heart rate, get your blood flowing, and ultimately improve your brain and body chemistry. This week’s homework will also focus on building exercise time into your weekly routine.

**SLEEP:** We talk about anxiety and sleep together in this chapter because they go hand-in-hand. More sleep reduces anxiety and on the unfortunate flip side, more anxiety reduces sleep.

***“Sometimes the cure for restlessness is rest.”***

– Colleen Wainwright, Author/Speaker

Deep, slow-wave sleep is another of nature’s natural cures for restoring brain chemistry and boosting psychological resiliency. Without deep sleep, we feel weak and vulnerable. Sleep deprivation is actually a form of torture historically used by combatants to break people down. With sleep, we can recharge and rebuild healthy brain connections needed for trauma recovery. Last session we talked about “fighting back memories” in flashbacks and nightmares that increase anxiety level and interrupt or prevent sleep. This session we will focus on daily habits shown to support restful sleep.

## **APPLICATION AND REFLECTION**

The next page, *Handout 6.1: Sleeping Well – Do’s and Don’ts*, is a list of activities known to support sleep if done or undermine sleep if not done. Take about three to five minutes to look over *Handout 6.1* and **check any activities you want to try or improve upon.**

After checking items on Handout 6.1, discuss:

- ***What did you learn from the Sleeping Well – Do’s and Don’ts list?***
- ***Which of these items do you plan to start incorporating into your weekly routine?***

One person read aloud, then discuss as a group: **What can you relate to?**

**Can you relate to having trouble sleeping?**



**FROM BROOKS:** *I remember waking up one morning in the spring of '82, when I was a student at Baylor. What was most remarkable about that experience was that I was actually waking up from sleep. As I thought about what was "different," I realized that to wake up, I must have been sleeping and then came to the realization that I hadn't actually slept—really slept—for two years. I would lie awake with my mind racing. Eventually, as the sun was coming up, I might begin to doze off, but ultimately, I would give up and crawl out of bed.*

*As time has gone on, there have been periods when I have slept well and others I have not. Most of the time when I can't sleep now it is because of stress and the busyness of my life. I think one of the negative outcomes of what I've been through is that I keep a constant degree of chaos in my life. I think it's largely because I'm not sure how to operate without it. This, of course, gives me a whole new issue to work on.*

*But at the end of the day, I have seen, and continue to see, light at the end of the tunnel. I have periods of time when I have slept well, so I know it's possible.*

*As years and lots of good life experiences provide a level of clarity, I can identify the things I'm feeling and need to correct. Some are related to the things that happened when I was 16. Others are just mischief of my own making that I need to deal with head on. As I do, I will again have peaceful sleep.*

## **HOMEWORK**

This week's homework will focus on the three kinds of body-brain habits essential to trauma recovery—a healthy diet, regular exercise, and deep sleep. Use *Handout 6.2: Choosing Healthy Living* to monitor your daily activities that can reduce anxiety and improve sleeping patterns. *Handout 6.3: Guidance for Healthy Living* provides additional information on justifications and strategies for a healthy diet, exercise, and effective sleep patterns.

<sup>5</sup> Emmons, Henry. (2010). *The Chemistry of Calm*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

# HANDOUT 6.1: SLEEPING WELL – DO’S & DON’TS

## SLEEPING WELL – DO’S & DON’TS

### **DO:**

- ☐ Establish a regular 8-hour sleep schedule (e.g., 10:30 pm – 6:30 am)
- ☐ Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. Sugar, large portions, and artificial foods significantly effect brain-body chemistry and make it harder for your body to restore naturally.
- ☐ Try natural vitamins and supplements associated with reducing anxiety and improving sleep. (See pg. 44)
- ☐ Practice deep breathing (see pg. 28). Deliberate, deep breathing throughout the day can significantly reduce anxiety levels and reset brain chemistry.
- ☐ Schedule at least 2-3 hours each week for cardiovascular (getting your heart beat going) exercise.
- ☐ Consider relaxation activities before bed (example: stretching, yoga, T'ai Chi, mindfulness activities). There are exercise DVDs (available online or in stores) that you can use at home.
- ☐ Read and/or journal write before bed. These relaxing activities can make your eyes feel tired and signal the bedtime routine.
- ☐ Have a bowl of cereal (hot or cold) before bedtime—this directs metabolic activity toward the digestive system and may help relax brain activity.
- ☐ Try listening to relaxing music before bed and throughout the day. (Choose music that soothes rather than energizes you. See pg. 28 for music designed for trauma recovery)
- ☐ Make time for quiet time. Life can be so busy(!)—full of work, TV, phones, computers, and other disruptions. Unplug from the daily busyness. Find a quiet place in your home, yard, or community where you can sit quietly, breath deeply, and listen to the subtleness of silence. Use that time for prayer, meditation, or mindfulness activities.
- ☐ If you share your bed with someone, be at peace with that person. You will both sleep better. Rubbing each other’s back or having a peaceful, supportive conversation can significantly improve your mood and reduce anxiety.
- ☐ Consider buying a sleep monitor—e.g, Jawbone ([www.jawbone.com/up](http://www.jawbone.com/up)) or FitBit ([www.fitbit.com](http://www.fitbit.com)) —are reasonably priced (about \$130) devices that track the amount of deep, restful sleep your body receives each night. (These devises also monitor daily activity and calories burned.)
- ☐ For more information about healthy habits that help increase sleep and reduce anxiety, read *The Chemistry of Calm* by Dr. Henry Emmons.

### **DON’T (these are activities to **not** do):**

- ☐ Take naps. Sleeping during the day makes it harder to fall asleep at bedtime.
- ☐ Drink alcohol. Alcohol disrupts brain-body chemistry and makes it harder to obtain deep sleep, rather than fitful sleep.
- ☐ Take sleeping pills. Sleeping pills may be necessary within the first few months of trauma, but they are not a long-term solution.
- ☐ Drink caffeinated drinks. Even during the day, caffeine intake can affect sleep patterns.

## HANDOUT 6.2: CHOOSING HEALTHY LIVING

This week's homework will focus on healthy habits of diet, exercise, and sleep. Monitor how many times you engage in each activity per day. See Handout 6.3 for additional info.

Begin the journal on whatever day tomorrow is (example: Weds.) and fill in answers for each day of the week.

	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	TOTAL
<i>Sample</i>	II	I		III	I		II	9
<b>HEALTHY DIET</b>								
Ate meals with only whole foods (without chemical additives) <sup>(1)</sup>								
Ate moderate sized meals (not too big or too small) <sup>(2)</sup>								
Ate a fruit or vegetables <sup>(3)</sup>								
Had vitamin/nutritional supplement <sup>(4)</sup>								
<b>EXERCISE</b>								
Made time for 5+ deep, deliberate breaths <sup>(5)</sup>								
Exercised for at least 30 minutes <sup>(6)</sup>								
Did relaxation activities <sup>(7)</sup>								
<b>SLEEPING</b>								
Scheduled at least 8 hours for sleep <sup>(8)</sup>								
Read or journal wrote before bed <sup>(9)</sup>								
Had at least 15 min. of "quiet time" <sup>(10)</sup>								
Slept well (deep, uninterrupted) <sup>(11)</sup>								
<b>ANXIETY INDUCERS/SLEEP DISRUPTORS</b>								
Had alcohol, drugs, caffeine, big meal or dessert, nightmare <sup>(12)</sup>								
Other Sleep Interrupters _____								

## HANDOUT 6.3: GUIDANCE FOR HEALTHY LIVING

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Below is additional information behind each item in Handout 6.2: Choosing Healthy Living\*\*.

### HEALTHY DIET:

- 1) Meals with only whole foods (without chemical additives)
  - Buy unprocessed, organic food as much as possible. Artificial food is difficult for bodies to digest and use as energy.
- 2) Moderate-sized meals (not too big or too small)
  - Read the serving size on food items. Eat slowly and stop before you feel stuffed.
- 3) Fruit and vegetables
  - For recommendations on fruits and vegetable quantity for every day, see: <http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/fruitsvegetables/howmany.html>
- 4) Vitamin/nutritional supplements
  - Dr. Henry Emmons and others recommend a multivitamin or B complex, Vitamin D<sub>3</sub>, Omega-3: fish oil or flaxseed, calcium, magnesium, and zinc.

### EXERCISE:

- 5) Time for at least 5 deep, deliberate breaths
  - See page 28 for effective breathing techniques
- 6) Exercise for at least 30 minutes
  - See <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html> for physical activity guidelines.
- 7) Relaxation activities
  - Try to find a book or DVD that can guide you through relaxation exercises such as yoga or mindfulness activities in your home.

### SLEEPING:

- 8) At least 8 hours of sleep
  - See page 29 for sleep strategies
- 9) Read or journal write before bed
  - Choose books that inspire and reflect the kind of life you want to live. Try biographies/autobiographies of people you admire. When journal writing, imagine you are talking to a friend or a therapist.
- 10) 15 min. of “quiet time”
  - Make time, find a quiet space, be intentional, and be aware in your prayer or meditation.
- 11) Sleep well (deep, uninterrupted)
  - Try sleep monitors (discussed on page 29) to assess sleep patterns

### ANXIETY INDUCERS/SLEEP DISRUPTORS:

- Alcohol, drugs, caffeine, big meal or big dessert
- Every high has a low, eventually

\*\*For detailed guidance on most of the recommendations above read *The Chemistry of Calm* by Dr. Henry Emmons.