

Case Study: **The Courage to heal - In the body** Recovering from sexual abuse with Integrative Massage Therapy

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Credo quia impossibile - I believe because it is impossible
Tertullian

When Sam, 30 years old, came to see me she was panicking. The death of her abuser elevated fragments of memories, invasive pictures, unsolicited nightmares. She wasn't sure of the details, though. Was it real? She stopped having sex with her partner, and withdrew inside. Sam was lost and fearful. Her body was miles away from her mind, shivering in the corner. She sought help because she couldn't handle it anymore.

Like many other survivors of sexual abuse, Sam had a history of eating disorders and was easy to disassociate: from her feelings, from her loved ones, from her body. Like other survivors of sexual abuse, Sam was used to hiding, to enduring, to punishing herself. Dare she have her needs met? Dare she be helped?

When I asked Sam what she would like to achieve she said:

I want to be free of thoughts that are bothering me
I want to know what happened
I want to start drawing again
I want to enjoy sex and my body
I want to resolve the relationship with my mom

I have seen Sam in a short-term, goal-oriented contract for 10 sessions over a course of four months, in which we have done various journeys to meet her needs and fulfil her goals.

Integrative-Massage-Therapy (IMT) combines both goal-oriented and process-oriented therapeutic interventions. IMT draws experience and knowledge from three main pillars of therapeutic approaches: Cognitive, Subconscious (or somatic...) and Bodywork. The cognitive approach includes various psychotherapeutic and hypnotherapeutic processes aiding to gain insights; The subconscious approach includes NLP (and Neuro-Linguistic Psychotherapy), hypnotherapy and shamanic processes to tap into our subconscious resources and create profound change; the bodywork approach combines different types of massage, breathing work, deep bodywork and Reichian and neo-Reichian body-psychotherapeutic techniques, aiming at grounding and realising the changes on somatic, bodymind levels – embodying change and forming oneself.

When we began working together we made sure Sam is safe, setting the conditions for safety in the therapeutic space and making sure these are maintained. She courageously explored holding patterns in her body and, using hypnotherapy and touch, emotional and physiological release was encouraged. The session was highly charged, and very intense, but safe.

In the second session we used hypnotic regression to retrieve Sam's memories. With careful guidance

