



Latinx Therapists  
Action Network

# CARE PRACTICES GUIDE



**A resource for collective care  
in movement building.**



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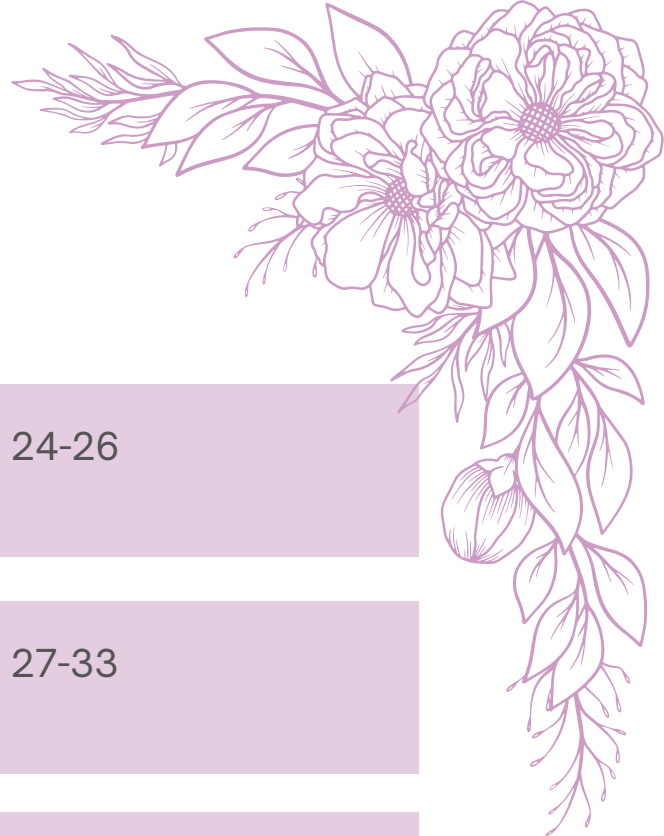
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# GUIDE OVERVIEW

This guide is a labor of love from immigrant rights organizers, healing justice practitioners, and mental health professionals committed to the well-being of Latinx people on the frontlines of movement building and the communities they work with. This guide was created in collaboration with LTAN staff, members, and immigrant rights organizers in Fall 2024. Though our experience is based on our work in immigrant communities and its leadership, this guide is meant for anyone currently building their team and membership, dreaming up or carrying out their campaigns to address and transform social conditions.

We extend our deepest appreciation to LTAN members Faviola Agustin, Sandra Olarte-Hayes, and Selma Yznaga, whose insights and expertise were invaluable in creating this Care Guide.


We are also grateful to long-time organizers Jacinta Gonzalez and Claudia Muñoz for their thoughtful contributions. Their experiences, rooted in an unwavering belief in the power of organizing, have ensured that this guide reflects a commitment to fighting for healing justice and liberation.

This guide was arranged, written, and edited by LTAN staff, Francisca Porchas-Coronado and Jeanette Charles-Marquez.

This guide also includes some textual adaptations from LTAN's Tools For Healing for Laredo Educators (produced in July 2022) and our Healing Inside Detention Curriculum, produced by LTAN member Selma Yznaga (produced in 2024).





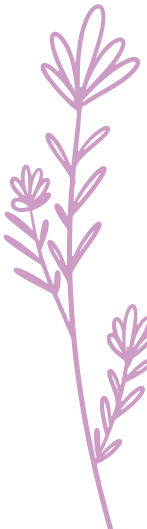


Collective care is not an afterthought; but a foundational component of building power together to ensure our movements endure the most challenging times and for the long run. This guide provides a basic understanding of the intersections of trauma, oppression, and well-being. It is meant to be a resource for mental health education. This guide includes practices you and your team can collectively engage in or individually with each other and your community.

Building containers to hold our teams, communities, values, worldviews, campaigns, and hopes for the future is a challenging yet critical part of our liberation work. It is about building a culture that can reflect the world we want to create. Through this process, we have the unique opportunity to practice our values through the organizational structures we create, the leadership we embody and develop among our team and membership, the social relations we establish, and the decision-making processes we engage in. Remember to seek the support you need from your peers, elders, capacity builders, and seasoned team builders to help align your values, what you care about, and your organizational infrastructure and functioning.

We encourage you to invest time, energy, and resources into building resilient containers for your work. This requires a true commitment to your own self-preservation, whether through therapy, ancestral traditions, or other healing modalities that can explore and shift your own habitual protective responses to the daily pressures of the movement work and traumatic stress. We encourage you to invest in your leadership and the leadership of everyone on your team and the community through the work to be well and resource yourself emotionally. An organization is a collective nervous system shaped by our own stories, tendencies, and nervous systems. We are up against a lot and will only be as effective as the work we are willing to do on ourselves.

In this guide, you will find:

- 
- An overview of trauma and oppression and their relationship to deportation and detention.
  - Strategies to understand and manage primary and secondary trauma and its manifestation in the body.
  - Tools and practices to ensure that organizers support their mental health and create a supportive, trauma-and-healing-informed environment.
  - Practices for building a culture of care in our organizing practice with community members.

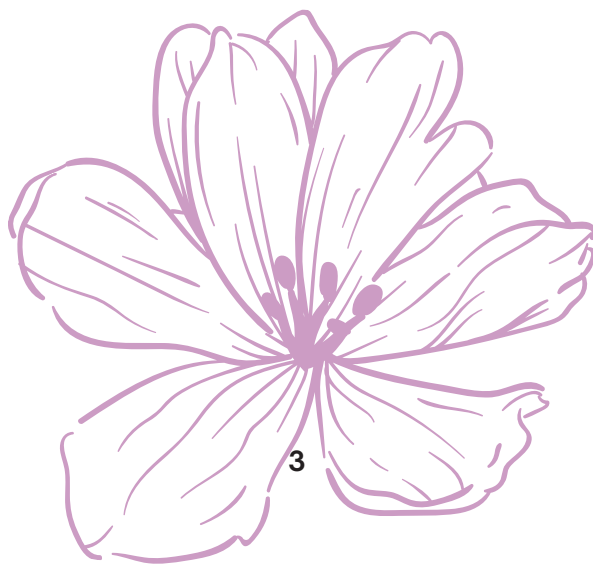


## WHO WE ARE: AN AFFIRMATION



The Latinx Therapists Action Network (LTAN) is a healing justice network of Latinx/e Latino, Latina, mental health practitioners, community health workers, activists, and organizers who are committed to interrupting the generational trauma caused by the U.S. immigration system. We are an offering of love for the migrant communities who have suffered over three decades of mandatory detention, the militarization of the Southern border, and the systematic, homophobic, sexist, ableist, and racist collusion of local law enforcement across the country with Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement. We center our work around building the resiliency of frontline organizers, activists, attorneys, and service providers who have spent countless hours centering the well-being of individuals, their families, and their communities—often at the expense of their own.

This love and commitment extends to all those who are healing justice practitioners, radical health providers, community health workers, organizers, and movement leaders on the frontlines of the struggle for a new world with a radically different set of social relationships based on life, community, wellbeing, reciprocity, and relationality. Our work takes many forms: a directory of mental health practitioners, emotional support, mental wellness education, healing circles, and ceremonies, developing a healing justice curriculum, and other tools that can support movement builders. We are committed to playing our role in building resilience so that we can be well and we can win.





# HEALING JUSTICE



We are profoundly shaped by the world around us, with various layers of influence that are often unseen: spirit, social norms, and historical forces, institutions, community, physical landscape, as well as family or intimate networks that raised us. Somatics Coach, Bodyworker, and teacher, Alta Starr teaches that “we are what we practice the most.” If we practice a particular way of thinking, behavior, or dynamic with ourselves or others, these practices become what we embody daily. Somatics teacher and practitioner Prentis Hemphill adds that “healing is a lifelong process of re-establishing a sense of safety, regaining a sense of agency, and finding purpose and meaning beyond traumatic events.”

Every movement for our liberation has included traditions, practices and caregiving infrastructures designed for our wellbeing and protection. We see ourselves and this work as part of a long tradition of healing justice. Healing Justice (HJ), as originally articulated by Cara Page of the Kindred Southern Healing Collective, “...identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene on generational trauma and violence, and bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts and minds.” HJ is both a political and spiritual framework deeply rooted in disability justice, environmental justice, reproductive justice, and abolitionist movements. HJ draws from ancestral traditions and practices of people of color, poor people, people with disabilities, women, femmes, and queer and trans people.



# MOVEMENT BUILDING AS HEALING

In today's organizing landscape, there is a growing need to integrate healing into collective processes that build power and community. Many organizing spaces struggle to balance how to meet communities' immediate needs and foster long-term, sustainable political engagement. Sometimes, the most transformative moments in organizing are those that carefully center the collective experience through consistent time and space for the community to gather, listen to, and witness each other.

Historically, organizing is more than addressing immediate needs—whether that means securing housing, legal support, or other basic necessities. Organizing is also about building power and healing through community. People often develop their own individual as well as collective resilience, strength, and joy in coming together, sharing stories, and fighting for change. However, as a result of recent conditions since the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizing efforts have become more service-oriented, with an overwhelming focus on individual cases or needs, without the community-building that once defined these spaces. As a result, this work regularly results in a collective sense of overwhelm. Organizers are often stretched thin and reluctant to take on roles they feel unprepared for, particularly when it comes to addressing the emotional and mental health challenges within communities.

In the context of immigrant rights and for our community members facing detention and/or deportation, their experiences are often marked by trauma, uncertainty, and isolation. While securing immediate resources like legal support, housing, or employment is critical, it is equally important to engage people in a process that helps them understand their situation within a broader political and historical context.

At the core of this is our belief that organizing is an expression of healing justice and is not just about responding to crises. This means we are actively creating space for individuals and communities to engage in deep political education and transformation. To do this, we must employ intentional organizing strategies based on a healing justice approach.







# ORGANIZING STRATEGIES

## **1:1 Conversations and Relationship-Building:**


Organizing is about relationships. One-on-one conversations between organizers and community members are essential for building trust and understanding. These conversations allow organizers to meet people where they are, explore their needs, and understand the emotional, physical, and political landscapes they are navigating. In these conversations, healing justice can be integrated by acknowledging the trauma and pain individuals carry while also exploring ways to build resilience through direct resources, community support and solidarity.

## **Political Education and Storytelling:**

Testimonies and storytelling have long been used in organizing to humanize political issues. A key strategy for building political power is providing spaces for members to share their stories and connect their personal experiences to larger systemic issues. For those facing detention and/or deportation proceedings, sharing their testimony can feel intimidating. However, through processing the fear attached to this, there is also a great opportunity for healing. Story circles and collective dialogues offer community members a unique opportunity to understand their struggles within the context of a collective fight against oppression. For organizers, it's necessary to create a container and help community members feel supported enough to share their testimony. In doing so, organizers and community members have the chance to listen deeply. This, in turn, builds empathy and provides a deeper analysis of conditions. Ultimately, community members and organizers feel seen through this process and create lasting bonds to each other and often, the movement.


## **Collective Analysis:**

Organizing should encourage everyone involved to engage in a collective and constant analysis of conditions. By facilitating conversations that unpack the root causes of community members' experiences—whether it's immigration policies, systemic racism, or economic exploitation—organizers encourage community members to move from a place of individual frustration or fear to one of collective consciousness and power. This understanding helps the community see that our struggle is not isolated but connected to broader issues of injustice. These spaces also foster solidarity as people begin to see their fight as part of a larger movement for change.





# COLLECTIVE CARE PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZATIONS



While collective organizing practices address part of the healing process, these practices are often not enough to grapple with the emotional and mental health toll that our communities and organizers face navigating the currently heightened anti-immigrant landscape and government repression.

While the scale of harm is often greater than the size of our movements, there are ways for our organizations and communities to consistently integrate care practices, which offers organizers and community members a much-needed opportunity to acknowledge how these systems of oppression impact them.

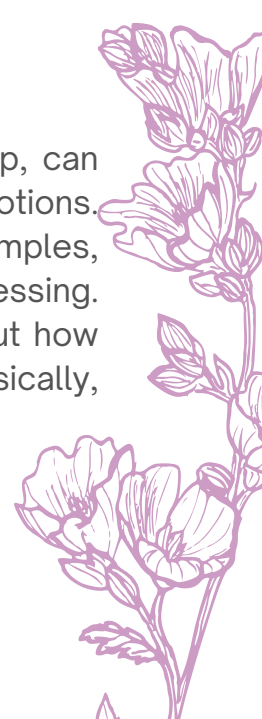
These practices offer tools for emotional regulation and help build resilience, connection, and sustainability in organizing spaces. A few key practices are included next.

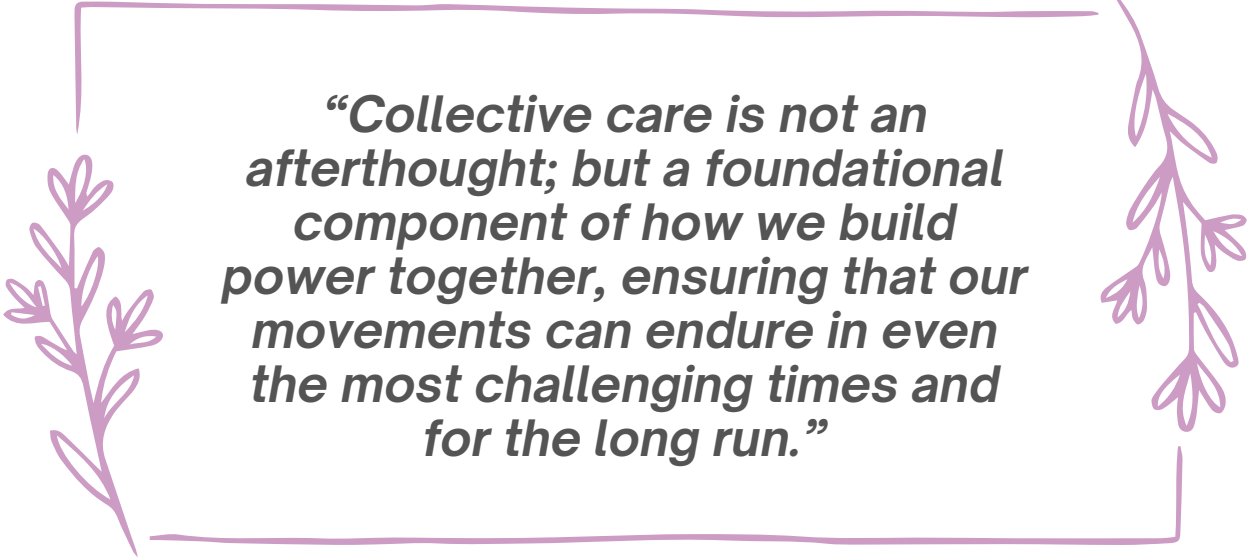
## **Debriefs:**

After high-stakes actions, intense meetings, or challenging organizing moments, it is vital to hold space for debriefs. These structured and intentional conversations, whatever the length, allow members and organizers to feel seen and reflect on what went well, what challenges arose, and how they felt during the process. Debriefs are an opportunity to process emotions collectively, normalize feelings of stress, frustration, and indignation as well as identify areas for growth, which in turn fosters a deeper sense of community and solidarity.

## **Reflection Time (Together and Individually):**

Setting aside intentional time for reflection, both individually and as a group, can help organizers and community members process their experiences and emotions. Group reflections or time to journal during meetings, among other examples, provide moments for the team to share collective insights and personal processing. Consistent reflection time encourages people to think and feel deeply about how their work is impacting them politically as well as emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.





***“Collective care is not an afterthought; but a foundational component of how we build power together, ensuring that our movements can endure in even the most challenging times and for the long run.”***

## **Thoughtful Check-ins and Check-outs:**

Incorporating thoughtful check-ins and check-outs at the start and end of meetings or organizing sessions is a simple yet powerful way to ground the group. These practices allow organizers to land in their bodies, share their feelings, express what they need from the group, and/or mention any emotional weight they may be carrying. Check-ins allow people to feel seen and heard, while check-outs help close the space in a reflective and supportive way, offering a sense of closure and collective care.

## **Creating Consistent Spaces for Connection:**

It is necessary to build in regular opportunities for people to connect outside of task-oriented organizing. This can include holding community-building circles, casual group gatherings, or shared meals where the focus is not on productivity but on fostering relationships and mutual support. These spaces serve as an antidote to burnout and isolation by reminding people that they are part of a community that values them beyond their organizing contributions.

## **Emotional and Mental Health Support:**

Another foundational practice is offering access to mental health resources or creating partnerships with therapists and healing practitioners. Ensure that there are avenues for people to seek professional support when needed to demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of everyone involved in the movement. Through LTAN, we have a growing national directory of mental health providers who are ready and to support immigrant rights organizers and community leaders.

## Radical Hospitality and Creating Safe Spaces:

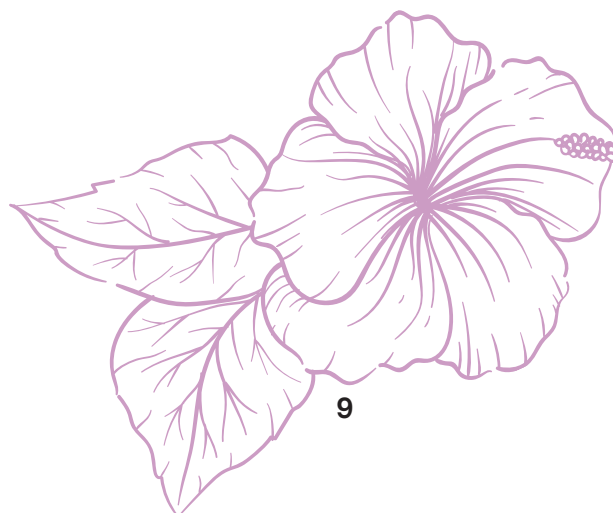
Organizers must prioritize holding spaces where community members feel welcomed, safe, and supported. This can take the form of “radical hospitality,” where the act of bringing people together is infused with care, warmth, and respect. When people feel that they belong to a community that honors their experiences, it fosters healing and empowers them to engage more deeply in the organizing process.

## Reflection Questions:

Which of the organizing strategies mentioned is your organization currently implementing? Are there additional strategies that your organization implements that you feel are aligned with these?

Which of the organizing strategies mentioned would you like to see your organization implement more? How do you feel like this would benefit the organization and/or community?

What support does your organization need to implement practices around developing healing justice-centered organizational strategy?







# UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND OUR EMBODIMENT

We believe that healing justice is as much about our right to well-being as it is about building power. Our ancestral lineages have survived centuries of attempted erasure, confinement, displacement, and exploitation. We know that we can heal and are committed to honoring the cultural and movement-building practices that have sustained our communities, enabling us to overcome oppression and build resilience for generations.

## Trauma

Psychiatrist and researcher Judith Herman defines trauma as the overwhelming of the body's natural defenses in response to a real or perceived threat. Trauma is a universal part of life. For millennia, all living beings, especially humans, have navigated threats of the natural world — from disasters to predators in the wild. At some point, our ancestors began approaching these challenges with a fundamentally different relationship to themselves, their environment, and one another. They had spiritual practices, medicinal knowledge, and community infrastructure to process, mitigate, and even transform the trauma from these experiences into healing.

Colonization disrupted these ancestral traditions, profoundly shifting a world based on life-affirming relations and social connections to one driven by the exploitation of nature and people; colonial settlers weaponized trauma. This could only happen through an incredible amount of violence in order to establish the systems of oppression and control necessary to shift entire societies into submission and indoctrination. For these systems to endure, trauma became a tool and project of the state. As trauma healing practitioner Prentis Hemphill aptly states, "oppression is the organization and distribution of trauma."

Our collective definitions and understanding of trauma have changed over time. In the past, trauma was primarily understood as a subjective, negative response to a large-scale event like a natural disaster, accident, or war. We now know that trauma is not just caused by major one-time events but can be caused by a series of events over an extended period of time that accumulate and create an ongoing survival response in your nervous system. On the following page we will explore examples of ongoing trauma.

- Growing up in a household with ongoing violence from a caretaker,
- Experiencing the abandonment of a parent,
- Living with a constant lack of food or shelter,
- Witnessing persistent police presence and violence in your community.

These are all forms of trauma that leave lasting imprints on our bodies and minds. As trauma healer Peter Levine, PhD, explains, “Traumatic symptoms are not caused by the event itself. They arise when the residual energy of the experience is not discharged from the body. This energy remains trapped in the nervous system, where it can wreak havoc on our bodies and minds.” In other words, our bodies have the ability to store traumatic experiences, like a form of body-based memory. Even when our minds cannot fully recall the event, our bodies continue to relive it and react as if it’s still happening.

## Here are some examples:

- After experiencing a car accident, you may feel constant anxiety when driving—tensing up, imagining being hit, bracing yourself, or obsessively checking the rearview mirror for anyone driving erratically or tailgating you on the road.
- If a dog has bitten you, your heart might race, or you may start sweating when you see a dog, instinctively looking for an escape route or avoiding dogs altogether.
- If a parent abandoned you as a child, you might live in constant fear of rejection or abandonment in friendships, romantic relationships, or even at work.

## Body Based Trauma Responses

**The fight-flight-freeze** response can appear in many situations where we perceive a threat to our safety, including when the current situation feels similar to a prior threatening situation. To better understand how your body reacts under stress or pressure, you can scan your body by looking for some key signals such as:

**Fight-flight response:** Accelerated heart rate, rapid breathing, hyperventilation, body tension, feeling overheated, stomach aches, or digestive issues.

# OUR BODY'S PROTECTIVE RESPONSES TO THREAT

The body holds vital clues about how trauma and stressors affect us. Certain stressors activate fear in our bodies and are perceived as signs of threat. These stressors activate the amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for protective responses like Fight, Flight, Freeze, or Appease. When these survival modes are activated, the prefrontal cortex—the front part of the brain responsible for logic, reasoning, and short-term memory—shuts down. This is why, when under stress or pressure, your reactions may feel automatic or unconscious. Your nervous system's primary goal is to keep you safe, even if the response you're having doesn't match the reality of the situation.

## **Fight:**

Aggressively facing any perceived threat. An example is when you have a disagreement with a loved one, and your protective response escalates the disagreement into an argument.

## **Flight:**

Fleeing from the threat or danger. This might look like you running faster across the street when a car is coming at full speed so you do not get hit or dating someone who now wants to be in a serious relationship, and you have decided to “ghost” them by never calling them back.

Body Sensations of fight or flight protective responses: Feeling stuck or tense in a particular part of the body, feeling cold or numb sensations, physical stiffness or heaviness in the limbs, decreased heart rate, restricted breathing or breath-holding, a sense of dread, or feeling disconnected from the body.

## **Freeze:**

Feeling unable to move or take action. An example could be that you see an act of police violence, and you freeze, unable to do anything in shock. It could also be that you are given a project that is beyond your skill level, and you get stuck every time you start drafting the plan.





## Appease:

Immediately try to please the person(s) or situation to avoid tension or conflict. An example is facing a barking dog and beginning to speak to him in a sweet voice. Another example could be being in a serious debate inside your organization due to differentiating opinions. The debate is between your two directors and the rest of the staff, like you. When it is your turn to speak, though you agree with the staff, you appease and agree with the directors.

Body sensations under freeze and appease response: Feeling stuck or tense in a particular part of the body, feeling cold or numb sensations, physical stiffness or heaviness in the limbs, decreased heart rate, restricted breathing or breath-holding, a sense of dread, or feeling disconnected from the body.

<b>FIGHT</b> Explosive temper Controlling Sense of entitlement Aggressive, Angry behavior Intolerant to others views	<b>FLIGHT</b> Obsessive compulsive Panic, anxiety Rushing, fidgety Perfectionist Overachiever Substance abuse
<b>FREEZE</b> Depersonalization Isolating, Dissociation Brain fog, Difficulties making decisions	<b>APPEASE</b> People pleasing Scared to express thoughts Flatters others, over caring Can't say no or stand up for self Concerned with fitting in

Graph designed by: Selma Yznaga (LTAN Member)





## Connection:

Our bodies are inherently wired for connection. Over the past 200 million years, as beings on this planet, humans have developed evolutionary wisdom and the capacity to connect with ourselves, other people, living beings, nature, and spirit as sources of well-being to keep us safe from threat. When pulled into a protective response, we can choose to stay connected to help return to a state of calm and regulate ourselves in the present moment. This connection can create the possibility for the moment to pass more easily, and in the case of traumatic events—whether brief or prolonged—it can foster safety, mitigate the impact of trauma, and eventually contribute to meaning-making and transformation.

Body sensations under connection response: Eased muscle tension, regular heartbeat, paced breathing.

No matter your response to stress, pressure, or trauma, your nervous system has done what it needs to keep you safe. You can honor and express gratitude for this. At the same time, by growing awareness of how your body reacts—what sensations arise and how you respond physically and mentally—you *can start to differentiate between real threats and habitual responses*. As the saying goes, "If you see everything as a nail, then you are always going to be a hammer."

A key to well-being comes from responding to situations based on the present moment, NOT relying on old stress and trauma response patterns. It is essential to understand this for yourself as an organizer as well as for the individual and family you're accompanying through the process of fighting a detention or deportation.



# KNOW YOUR BODY BASED TRAUMA RESPONSES

Under stress or pressure, what is your most common body-based protective response (fight, flight, freeze, or appease)? Do you know why?

## My Stressors

List at least (3) stressors that activate your stress response--fight, flight, freeze, fawn

1.

2.

3.

What activities help me get out of the stress response to a state of calm?

Who are the people who help me get out of my stress response to a state of calm?





# KNOW YOUR ORGANIZATION'S TRAUMA RESPONSES

Under stress or pressure, what is your organization, collective, or the team's habitual response to stress?

## Collective Stressors

List at least (3) stressors that activate your organization's stress response--fight, flight, freeze, fawn

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What activities, practices, or other grounded actions, support your team to move from a stress response to a state of purposeful calm? If you notice there are not many, what would you like to see implemented?

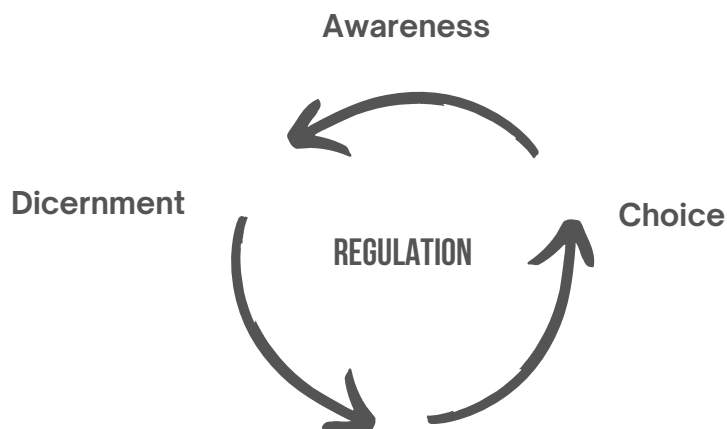
# REGULATING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Progress in our healing process is often measured by flexibly transitioning between different protective response states. A vital practice of this is actively regulating our nervous system and co-regulating with others. Resilient Strategies (RS) defines nervous system regulation as making accessible the resources that oppression and trauma might lead us to believe are unavailable to us. According to Deb Dana, researcher, counselor, and teacher, nervous system regulation involves three components:

1) Awareness: Recognizing what is happening at the level of our physiology and emotions. Pausing for a moment and asking yourself what sensations are showing up in your body related to the moment of stress. Maybe it's a knot in your throat, your heart racing, or you have stopped breathing altogether.

2) Discernment: When this pause occurs, and you become more aware, you make more space to notice the feelings and narratives that are coming up related to the moment of stress. This is the moment you can reflect and decide whether your response to the "threat" is genuinely appropriate. Is the disagreement with your co-worker/comrade like a lion trying to eat you? Does it deem you running away or shutting down? Or should you lean in and work through it? It is in this process that we gain insights into what these responses and stories/narratives are communicating and telling us about ourselves.

3) Choice: Creating the opportunity to exercise agency and decide how to proceed in the moment of protective response. Now that you have gained some perspective and can discern what is what, you can gain more agency and create the ability to choose how to respond instead of staying in your protective response and reacting from that place.



# REGULATION PRACTICES

We recommend that organizers develop a set of practices they can use when they feel activated or dysregulated. These practices will become more natural to use when you are activated if you first begin practicing them when you are fully regulated. There are many more regulation practices that can be used, and the list in this Care Guide is intended to get you started. Try them out and keep practicing the ones you like, adding to them as you learn new strategies.

Almost any regulation practice an organizer uses can also be taught to the families you work with to help them build their toolkits for when they are activated. They can also be used to open or close community spaces.

## Massage the Vagus Nerve With Small Jaw Movements

The central vagal branch of the nervous system is involved when a person feels safe enough to connect with others. It can be easily stimulated with very small jaw movements. To massage it and settle your nervous system, follow these steps:

- With your mouth closed, line up your top and bottom front teeth so they are directly on top of one another.
- Open your jaw just a few millimeters so your bottom and top front teeth are a few millimeters apart.
- Close your jaw so your teeth touch again.
- Repeat this a few times. By doing so, you are gently massaging the ventral vagal nerve, lowering your heart rate, and bringing your body back into regulation.





# REGULATION PRACTICES

## Activate Your Digestive System

When your “fight or flight” response is activated, your parasympathetic nervous system (the “rest and digest” part) is temporarily shut down since the two cannot be online at the same time. A quick, invisible way to re-engage the “rest and digest” nervous system and thus regulate a trauma response is to engage your digestive system. This can be done in two ways:

- With a closed mouth, run your tongue along the outside of your top and bottom teeth
- Run your tongue along the inside of your top and bottom teeth.
- Repeat this motion until you notice more saliva in your mouth. By stimulating your mouth and producing saliva, this re-engages the digestive system and thus regulates the nervous system.

Or

- Take sips of water (the colder the better).
- Stay very mindful of how the cold water feels going down your throat and entering your body to increase awareness of your sense of taste. Awareness of the sensations in your digestive system can help to reactivate your digestion and the parasympathetic nervous system, which thus regulates your nervous system.



# CO-REGULATING WITH OTHERS

From the moment that we come out of the womb into the world, we seek safety and connection in order to survive. Connection is the act of relating authentically to another person, another being or something bigger than yourself like the environment or the spiritual world. Our survival depends on the ability and capacity of our caretakers to attend to our every physical and emotional need. Our survival and well-being are completely dependent on the presence of a consistent caretaker who can respond to our emotional needs.

Co-regulation with a caregiver in our formative years is key to developing our ability to self-regulate or soothe our activated nervous system's protective response. Many of us who lacked a caretaker who could co-regulate with us and support us in learning to self-regulate spend a lifetime struggling to generate a sense of safety internally and with others within all the environments we navigate. We can often misinterpret what is safe and what is not safe. Not knowing how to regulate or co-regulate consistently might also leave us feeling threatened, thus activating the protective response when there is no actual threat. When we are dysregulated, we have difficulty managing emotional responses, leading to mood swings, impulsive behavior, and other emotional challenges. Extreme reactions to minor stressors, persistent irritability, or difficulty calming down after being upset can all be signs of emotional dysregulation.

Even though we might have spent our childhood without co-regulating caretakers or parents, that does not mean we cannot develop the capacity to connect with others in our adulthood and learn to self-regulate.

Coregulation is essential for life and happens when a person is better able to regulate because those they are interacting with are regulated, and thus, they are co-regulating together. We are social beings and it has been the connection with others that has allowed us to feel safe and survive. What initially attracts us to and sustains us in movement building and collectives is the ability to regulate our nervous systems with others and thus create a sense of safety. From a physiological perspective, there is a lot of truth to the organizing saying, "An organized community is a safe community."



Source: [Exceptionallives.org](http://Exceptionallives.org)

# REFLECTION PRACTICE

## Dysregulation/Co-Regulators

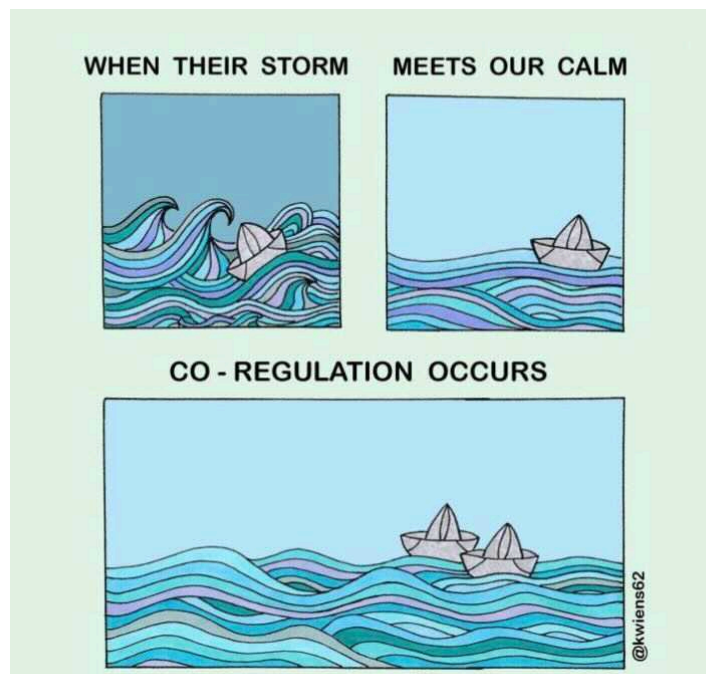
Think about people in your life. Take a moment to reflect and answer the following questions.

Consider which connections or relationships are most dysregulating (not calming and not safe) for you.

- What does your body feel like when this happens?
- What sensations do you feel?
- How does this impact your mood?
- Name the emotions, outlook, and/or thoughts accompanying this mood or state of being. What feels less possible?

Consider which connections are most often co-regulating (calming and safe) for you.

- What does your body feel like when this happens?
- What sensations do you feel?
- How does this impact your mood?
- Name the emotions, outlook, and/or thoughts accompanying this mood or state of being. What feels more possible?





## TRAUMA IN THE CONTEXT OF DETENTION & DEPORTATION

In migrant communities, trauma is layered and multifaceted with its roots in displacement to the constant threat of detention or deportation. Many migrants encounter new forms of trauma along their journey—whether through border crossings, exploitation, or separation from loved ones. These experiences leave residual effects in their bodies, minds, and spirits, manifesting as anxiety, hypervigilance, or an increased sense of fear. For those who face these traumatic experiences, their chronic stress response is exacerbated, and this puts them in a heightened survival state.

Detention and the looming threat of deportation are not just external circumstances—they become embodied traumas. The constant fear of being forcibly removed from one's family and communities, coupled with the harsh and dehumanized realities of detention centers, creates an overwhelming sense of helplessness and instability. As a result, migrants often suffer from insomnia, panic attacks, depression, digestive issues, chronic headaches, or disconnection from the body, all of which affect the ability to heal from past and present trauma.

Many also experience a constant state of hyperarousal, where the nervous system is stuck in "fight or flight" mode, making it difficult to feel safe or settled. Like an unfamiliar knock on the door, stressors can send the body into a cascade of stress responses. This physical memory of trauma keeps people feeling on edge and unsafe, even in moments of relative calm.

Additionally, the trauma that lives in the body can disrupt an individual's ability to connect with others or find comfort with family or in the community because a person's nervous system may be too preoccupied with the possibility of danger to emotionally attune to others. The cumulative effects of this embodied trauma are often intergenerational, with children of migrants sometimes inheriting the stress responses of their parents despite not directly experiencing the same events. This cycle underscores the importance of addressing both the emotional, physical, and intergenerational aspects of trauma in healing justice for migrant communities.



# CHILDREN & YOUTH

## FROM POWERLESSNESS TO POWER-BUILDING



Many children and youth already feel a sense of powerlessness in their lives because adults frequently make decisions for them. In the context of detention and/or deportation, youth often experience even higher degrees of powerlessness than their peers and adults because they face additional uncertainty about whether they will be separated from their parents or loved ones. The psychological and emotional toll of such instability can push youth to shrink into isolation or to cope by checking out, whether through video games, substance use, or withdrawal. Others try to seize power in other ways, such as “armoring up” with defiance, aggression, or other acting-out behaviors. Many do not share their concerns with their parents to avoid further burdening them, and many do not feel safe going to their peers for emotional support around migration-related fears.

In addition to witnessing the deportation and detention of their family members and loved ones, many children and youth face the terrifying reality of being directly targeted by the state themselves. The fear of deportation or experiencing detention firsthand can amplify their feelings of powerlessness and trauma. This level of instability and fear can deeply affect their sense of safety, belonging, and identity, often leading to anxiety, depression, and intense behavioral changes. These circumstances force children and youth to navigate emotional landscapes that most are not psychologically equipped to handle, further contributing to their isolation.

To transform this powerlessness into power-building, organizing requires that we honor the emotional realities of young people’s lives and provide collective spaces where they can build connections and reclaim their power. *Healing circles*, which guide participants through safe and intentional reflection and somatic practices that move trauma through the nervous system, can open up space to process these feelings. In circles, the act of speaking truth in a supportive community is in itself a form of reclaiming power, as it combats the isolation that systemic trauma festers. Likewise, direct mentorship programs that include psychoeducation on trauma’s impacts on the body and spirit can help youth recognize their own responses and find language to express themselves. Through collective healing and organizing, youth can begin to shift their experiences of powerlessness toward ones of agency, resilience, and connectedness. For any organizer working with a family or community member where children and youth are involved, it’s essential to bear this in mind and seek out the most appropriate and relevant resources.



# NAVIGATING ORGANIZATIONAL EXPECTATIONS AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

It's critical to attune to the unique needs and processes of each person or family dealing with detention and/or deportation. Organizers often carry their own hopes and expectations for what the journey should look like—whether it's building long-term political engagement or creating strong, active community leaders. However, it's essential to recognize that what an organizer and/or organization may hope for isn't always what people are ready for or need at the moment. The process of healing and organizing can look different. Early on, it may be less about asking people to show up for meetings or actions and more about meeting people where they are—understanding and addressing their immediate needs first.

Organizers must cultivate *self-awareness* and be mindful of the expectations we bring into the space. Self-awareness helps ground the work in empathy and understanding rather than placing undue pressure on individuals to conform to the organization's timeline or goals.

Conflict can arise when there is a disconnect between these expectations and the realities of those we're supporting. While the long-term goal may be to politicize and mobilize people, the short-term may require facilitating resources or offering a listening ear. Recognizing that timelines will vary—and being open to that variability—can prevent frustration, burnout, and inner conflict. This awareness and acceptance allow organizers to move beyond the myth of this process as linear. When individuals don't show up for work in the ways we might expect, it's often a reflection of where they are in their own process, and not necessarily a failure of the organizers or the organization.

We recommend that organizers and organizing teams sit with the following questions and assess their own expectations in relation to the needs of those they are working with and in the context of detention and/or deportation.





# MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL EXPECTATIONS & COMMUNITY NEEDS

The following is a questionnaire that organizers can use to reflect on and discuss collectively the nuances of their work. While individual organizers can consider these questions on their own, they are better addressed when in a collectively facilitated space.

## Whose needs are being centered?

- Are we focusing on the family's needs for safety, stability, and emotional support, or are we pushing them to prioritize the goals of the organization and/or campaign?

## What assumptions are we making about the family's capacity and willingness to participate in organizing?

- Are we expecting people to engage at a level that may not be realistic, given their emotional, financial, and other burdens? How can we adjust our expectations to meet people where they are while also inviting them to participate in the organizing process?

## Are we creating a space where families can express their needs?

- How are we ensuring that families feel heard and can communicate their needs without feeling pressured to act in ways that may not serve their well-being?





## **How are we addressing trauma for the organizer(s) and family?**

- In what ways are we creating opportunities for healing and processing trauma, not only focusing on the fight against detention and deportation but also recognizing the emotional toll on everyone involved?
- How do we balance urgency in organizing with the need for care and healing for the family?

## **What is our plan if the outcome is different from what we hoped for?**

- Are we prepared to support the family in the event that deportation or detention continues? How can we plan for long-term support that considers both legal implications and emotional well-being?

## **Are we allowing families to process their grief and heal on their own terms?**

- How do we balance the campaign's urgency with the family's need for space and time to process their emotions?
- How do we measure success in a way that honors both the family's journey and the larger movement? What does success look like?

## **What support do we need to facilitate families to meet their emotional needs?**

- Does the family need funding or other community resources (food, shelter, or other materials)?
- Who are the collective care practitioners, therapists, health workers, and traditional healers, among others, who can be called on to serve or build capacity within the team?





## PROXIMITY TO THE WORK

Immigrant rights organizers often hold a profound personal proximity to the work, stemming from their own lived experiences or those of family members and the greater community. Many organizers have witnessed or endured the trauma that comes with police surveillance, deportation, detention, or the long process of immigration status changes. This closeness to the issue can serve as the root of an organizer's commitment to their work which informs and shapes their experiences.

However, this closeness can also cause trauma responses as organizers continually confront the same indignities and discrimination the community has faced. The humiliation associated with navigating immigration systems—often grappling with how to defend one's dignity through invasive questioning, policing, and outright hostility—makes this work deeply personal.

***While it's precisely this closeness that fuels the fire,  
it's equally important to prioritize an organizer's care plan.***

Some organizers may see their work as a way to prevent the suffering they've witnessed or experienced, projecting their past traumas onto the communities they serve. However, this level of emotional proximity can also lead to burnout and exhaustion from working tirelessly and ignoring their own well-being. Their personal connection to the issues can foster a sense of responsibility to protect others, and many feel personally guilty when campaigns are unsuccessful. When organizers are constantly reminded of their own struggles, it may be difficult to create space for processing emotionally. Over-identifying can blur the line between organizing *and* overextending. While it's precisely this closeness that fuels the fire, it's equally important to prioritize the organizer's care plan. If we don't pause to care for ourselves, our bodies and spirits often find ways to force us to do so.

# RECOMMENDED PRACTICE IF YOU'RE FEELING ACTIVATED BY PROXIMITY:

## Connect with Your Boundaries

Proximity can make it difficult to distinguish what is emotionally ours and what belongs to the people we work with. Because of this, connecting to our bodies and to our boundaries can help us sort out what is ours and what is theirs. Follow these steps to reconnect with your emotional and physical boundaries:

1. Say to yourself: "Boundaries are the lines between people that distinguish what is mine and what is theirs. The most basic boundary is my skin. My skin is the threshold between what is physically mine (my body) and what is theirs or ours (the external world). These are my edges."
2. Cross your arms and tap on your arms with your hands, tapping up and down your body as you need and even massaging if it feels right. Experiment with different levels of force and pressure as you tap and massage your skin to find the intensity that helps you most powerfully feel the boundary of your skin containing you.
3. Gently say to yourself: "This is my skin, my body. Everything outside my skin is someone else's. It cannot hurt me because I do not have to take it in if I don't want to. My edges are protecting me."


Visualize how other people's feelings, energy, pain, hopes, memories, and anger exist outside your skin and do not belong to you. You can choose to witness it, but it is not yours. You are in control of your body and of what comes in.

# DISSOCIATION AND COMPARTMENTALIZATION

Dissociation is a normal part of life and all people dissociate occasionally. Any time we zone out briefly, we are mildly dissociating. But dissociation and compartmentalization are also common coping mechanisms when a person is very overwhelmed by a stressor, and there are few or no options to change their conditions or stay safe. **Dissociation** occurs when one mentally detaches from the present, the emotional weight of the situation, or even from one's body as a way to avoid overwhelming stress, fear, and helplessness. In these moments, people may feel numb, disconnected from reality, or distant from their own feelings, as if watching events unfold from outside themselves. This response helps to shield the mind from constant distress, allowing them to manage practical tasks without being emotionally paralyzed.

On the other hand, **compartmentalization** involves mentally separating different aspects of one's life to maintain functionality amid a crisis. Someone, like an organizer, supporting a person who faces deportation may split their emotional experiences into distinct categories—such as focusing on legal advocacy during the day while suppressing deeper fears and anxieties until a more “appropriate” time.

The psychological partitioning of compartmentalization allows organizers to navigate the bureaucracy and challenges of detention and/or deportation while continuing to engage with daily life, work, or other relationships. But compartmentalization can also lead to emotional burnout if feelings remain unprocessed for too long.



## THE COSTS OF DISSOCIATION AND COMPARTMENTALIZATION

While dissociation and compartmentalization can help a person get through extremely difficult circumstances, they come with significant costs. Janina Fisher, a trauma and dissociation expert, teaches that while a person can be consciously aware of the calm, collected part of themselves that helps go about day-to-day life, there may also be trauma-related parts outside of their conscious awareness. These parts hold dissociated reactions such as: vigilance and anger, self-destructive instincts, escapism, afraid shutdown, a self-sacrificing shame response, and a part that craves connection and protection. Even if a person isn't consciously aware of these trauma-related parts, they can occasionally take over where a person might not feel they have any conscious control over their actions.

Additionally, dissociation and compartmentalization create problems with a person's ability to experience the full range of human emotions, including joy, love, hope, and possibility. They create a sense of alienation from the present and one's emotional landscape. When a person numbs pain, they also numb all of their emotions, including meaning, connection, and happiness. This is unintentional and happens naturally when a person builds psychological walls between themselves and their emotions. Dissociation and compartmentalization from pain also create problems with interpersonal relationships because vulnerability and feeling are needed in order to "be with" and emotionally attune to others. To connect deeply, we need access to our feelings. Dissociated reactions also harm interpersonal relationships when loved ones get hurt or frustrated when a person keeps engaging in harmful behavior, even when it's entirely outside of their conscious control.





## HOW TO NOTICE DISSOCIATION AND COMPARTMENTALIZATION

**Below are some common signs of dissociation:**


- Spacing out briefly.
- Thinking of something else while engaging in a task.
- Mentally leaving your body or the present moment.
- Feeling mentally “foggy” or sensing that the world around you feels “cloudy”.
- Shutting down or numbing your feelings without meaning to.
- Feeling as though you aren’t yourself, someone else is in charge of your life like the world around you isn’t real, or as though you aren’t a real person.

**Common signs of compartmentalization:**

- Being in a situation that you would expect a person would have feelings about, not feeling much of anything, but then having the feelings to show up powerfully at another time,
- Only being able to access certain feelings at specific times.








# RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR WHEN YOU NOTICE DISSOCIATION

## Grounding With Your Senses

This is a short grounding practice that takes just a minute to help bring you back into your body or the present moment.

- Take a breath or two.
- Notice 5 things (colors, objects, shapes) that you can see in the present moment around you. Notice them for a few breaths.
- Notice 4 things you can hear in your surroundings. Notice them for a breath or two.
- Notice 3 things you can feel in or on your body. Notice them for a few breaths.
- Notice 2 things you can smell. Observe them for a few breaths.
- Notice 1 thing you can taste at the moment. Notice it for a breath or two and then bring your awareness back to the world around you.

## Send Compassion to your Defenses

- Breathe and gently acknowledge to yourself that your brain and body are trying to protect you from something painful by dissociating and compartmentalizing.
  - Continue breathing and offer gratitude and compassion to that defense mechanism for having protected you for so long. At some point in your life, it kept you safe.
  - Remind yourself that the dissociation will pass when you are ready.
  - If you begin to criticize yourself or get caught up in a story, notice that thought and come back to honoring the way your body has protected you.
- 

## Vergence Practice: Look to the Horizon

When we are feeling intense emotions or our stress response is engaged, we tend to look at what is right in front of us because our bodies are trying to protect us from imminent threats (e.g., a tiger about to attack). One way to ground involves slowing down and widening our perspective and scope of vision by looking out to where the horizon would be/is (if visible).

Take a few deep breaths. While seated, turn your torso to the left and take three deep breaths while looking out to where the horizon would be/is. Now, focus on a point right in front of you for a few breaths, then focus on the horizon again for a few breaths. Do this a few times.

Come back to the center.

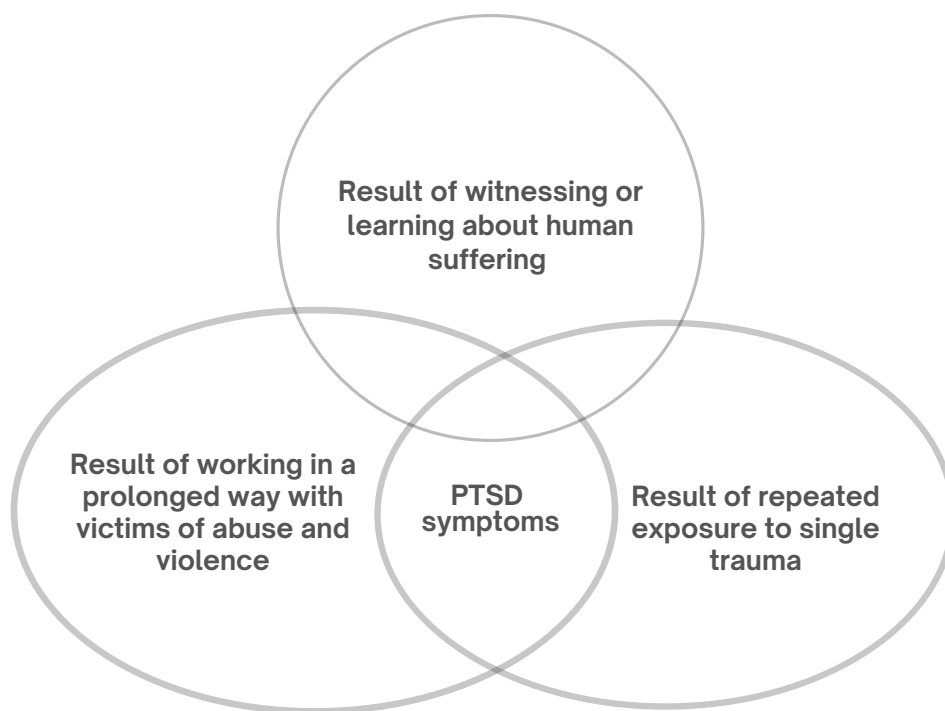
Now, turn your torso to the right and repeat the exercise in this position while alternating between focusing your gaze out to where the horizon would be/is and a point right in front of you.





# SECONDARY TRAUMA

Immigrant rights organizers often experience what is referred to as secondary trauma. Secondary trauma is the “emotional effect of cumulative exposure to trauma stories,” and its “impact is related to how much you care.” This ongoing exposure can lead to compassion fatigue, where organizers begin to feel emotionally exhausted and depleted, unable to keep giving at the same high levels. A key question for organizers to reflect on is--how do I honor what I can do without beating myself up for what I cannot? Setting boundaries and acknowledging one’s needs is essential to avoid internalizing the trauma of others and prevent burnout. Organizers must work to understand and accept their limits as well as recognizing and prioritizing the need to care for themselves. This means understanding what they are capable of offering and learning to let go of guilt when they cannot solve every problem or be there for the community member in question at every moment.



Graphic: Selma Yznaga CPLC, 2020





## SYMPTOMS & IMPACT OF SECONDARY TRAUMA



Graph designed by: Selma Yznaga (LTAN Member)

Secondary trauma also impacts relationships, both personal and professional. Organizers may begin to deplete their capacity for care, leading to relational fallout with their children, partners, colleagues, and friends. The constant pull to help others can make organizers feel as though someone else needs their time and attention more than themselves. The burnout from secondary trauma often creeps up and, even when recognized, organizers may feel guilty and push through, believing the urgency of the work cannot wait. This can lead to a sense of failure or shame when organizers finally reach a breaking point, feel forced to slow down or quit. There are too few people willing to do the real work associated with organizing and organizers may push through their exhaustion because they know this reality.

However, one useful practice is conducting a personal needs and values assessment. With this awareness, organizers can make deliberate, conscious decisions about how much time they can realistically devote to their work without neglecting other important areas and people in their lives.



## CARE PRACTICES FOR SECONDARY TRAUMA

### **Recommended practices for care in the face of secondary trauma:**

- Build parameters around needs.
- Make time for deliberate breaks for rest and recharging.
- Maintain connections with loved ones.
- Hold debriefs and check-ins with other organizers who understand the realities of this work.
- Seek out professional, emotional support and/or therapy and other healing modalities.
- Study and understand your body-based trauma responses.



# BRIEF MINDFUL PAUSES

Organizers can practice brief moments of “micro-mindfulness” throughout the day to deepen their awareness of their body’s responses to their work. This will help you more quickly recognize when you are activated or dissociating, help protect you from secondary trauma, and learn how to respond to soothe your body and get grounded.

## Steps for a brief mindful pause

- While engaging in your life and work (even if you’re talking to someone), briefly (for 2-5 seconds), scan your body and notice any sensations. Don’t focus too much on the story behind the sensations.
- Notice what the sensations in your body feel like for just a brief moment with curiosity and with openness. You might notice:
  - If the sensations are sharp, shooting, tight, constricting, stabbing, pulsing, floaty, fluttering, tingly, fuzzy?
  - Do the sensations have a color?
  - Do the sensations have a shape?
  - If there’s anywhere in your body that feels hot or cold?
  - Is there any restlessness or an urge to do something in your body?
- You can then visualize putting that sensation aside, so that you can examine it later when you are alone.
- Then, turn your attention back to the activity you’re engaged in.
- Later, come back to the sensations you put aside. Ask yourself, “What would I call these emotions?” If you are able to identify the feeling such as sadness, fear, grief, then do so, but if not, then there is no need to worry. Ask yourself: “Why was I feeling this way? What do I need?” This step is optional.

This process should take you only 5-10 seconds and you should be able to do it while engaged in just about any other activity. The more you practice, the easier and faster it becomes. We recommend practicing it while under stress, at rest, and during moments of enjoyment or connection to better make friends with your body’s reactions.







# CONNECTION & THE BODY

## Recommended Practices

### Body Scan Meditation

- Purpose: To bring awareness to different areas of the body, releasing tension and promoting relaxation.
- How-To: Sit or lie down comfortably. Starting at the top of your head, gently focus your attention on each part of your body (face, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, abdomen, legs, feet). Notice any tension and, if possible, imagine releasing it with each exhale.

### Safe Space Visualization

- Purpose: To cultivate a sense of safety and calm, especially in moments of heightened stress.
- How-To: Close your eyes and imagine a place where you feel completely safe and secure. This could be a real location or an imagined one. Picture every detail – sights, sounds, smells – and spend a few minutes immersing yourself in this environment.

### Shaking Exercise

- Purpose: To release built-up tension, stress, and emotions stored in the body.
- How-To: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and begin to gently shake your body, starting from your feet and moving upward. Shake your legs, hips, torso, arms, and head. Continue for 1-2 minutes, then pause to notice any shifts in your energy or mood.

### Self-Holding for Safety

- Purpose: To provide comfort and a sense of containment when feeling anxious or overwhelmed.
- How-To: Cross your arms over your chest, placing your hands on opposite shoulders (like a self-hug). Take deep breaths and focus on the warmth and comfort of your touch. This can help create a sense of physical and emotional safety.



## Heart Coherence Breathing

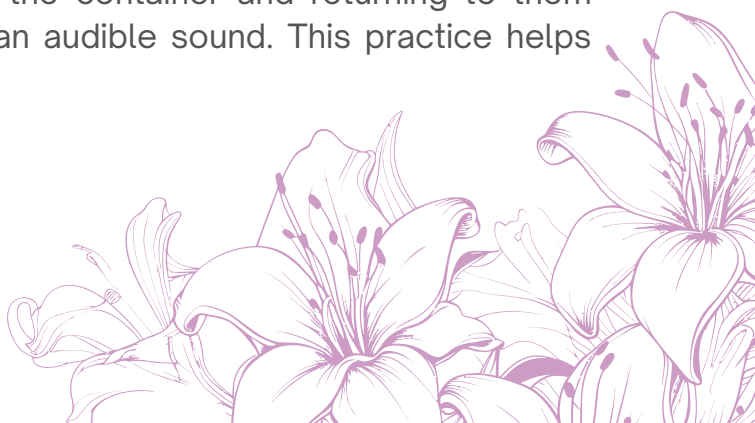
- Purpose: To regulate the nervous system and encourage a feeling of safety and connection.
- How-To: Place your hand over your heart and begin to breathe in and out slowly, as though you're breathing directly through your heart. Imagine a warm, gentle light expanding with each breath, creating a calming rhythm. Practice for 3-5 minutes.

## Gentle Movement for Reconnection

- Purpose: To release stress, encourage energy flow, and foster reconnection with the body.
- How-To: Find a quiet space and engage in gentle movements – stretches, shoulder rolls, neck stretches, or even a slow walk. Focus on the sensations in your body and move in ways that feel good and safe.

## "Container" Check-In Practice

- Purpose: To create a mental and emotional "container" for feelings, especially before or after stressful events.
- How-To: Imagine a container – it could be a box, a jar, or a room – where you can temporarily “place” intense emotions or thoughts that feel overwhelming. You can visualize placing these feelings into the container and returning to them later. Imagine closing the container with an audible sound. This practice helps you to focus and stay grounded.





# THE NOTICE AND NAME PRACTICE

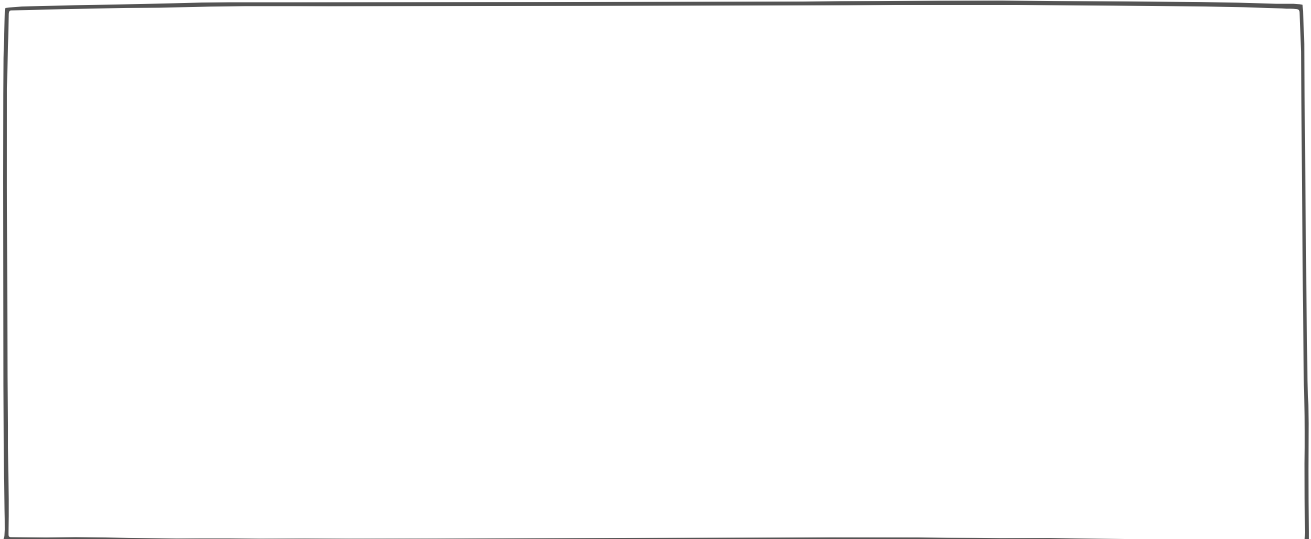
Take a moment to recall a low-level stress situation where you experienced a body-based protective response (fight, flight, freeze, appease). Spend a few moments bringing the memory into your mind's eye and allow your body to feel the associated sensations (such as being late for work, missing a flight, or having a disagreement). Turn inward and listen to what your nervous system is telling you. Try not to get too caught up in the details or “story” of the stressor.

## Steps

1. Be Curious: Identify what activated the protective response.
2. Observe Your Response: Did you take action (fight or flight), experience immobilization (collapse or shutdown), or seek connection (prayer, calling a friend, tapping into an internal resource like a memory or mantra)?
3. Listen Briefly: With curiosity and without judgment, observe your nervous system's response for about a minute. The goal is to build your ability to notice and reflect on your nervous system's activation and its potential for connection without becoming overwhelmed by the stressor itself.

This activity invites you to notice and name your responses. After your own practice, lead the community member and/or their family in this exercise to expand their understanding of how trauma shows up and what emerges.

**Use the space below to write out your reflections:**





## Breathwork: Lengthen Your Exhales

A simple way to bring your nervous system back into regulation is to notice and regulate your breathing. You can do so by following these steps:

1. Imagine that each inhale is fueling your activation and each exhale is soothing it.
2. Pay attention to your breath by counting on each inhale and exhale.
3. Make sure your exhales are longer than your inhales to soothe your nervous system and come back into regulation.

## Breathwork: Square Breathing

1. Breathe in for the count of four (count silently in your head).
2. Hold your breath for the count of four.
3. Breathe out for the count of four.
4. Hold your breath for the count of four before breathing in again. (You can trace a square on your hand with your fingers if that helps you keep track).
5. Repeat for a minute or two or until you come back into regulation.





## Energetic movement

Another way of discharging the energy in the nervous system and bringing the body back into regulation is through movement. This can feel a bit silly for adults but can be deeply regulating and so we recommend trying it at least once when you are alone.

- Stand up if possible. If it is not possible to stand, you can remain seated with your feet firmly planted on the floor.
- Gently begin swaying or twisting and allowing your hands to swing around you with the momentum of your body's motion (perhaps slapping at the sides of your body).
- Then, start to move your body more quickly and gradually begin twisting your body and swinging your arms faster.
- When you've reached a fast pace, finally start jumping up and down and wiggling all of your limbs vigorously to release the energy in your nervous system.
- Dancing works too!



# ANCHORS PRACTICE

Our cues for safety can be found in the who, what, where, and when. You can create a sense of safety by thinking or imagining a connection anchor (a person, place, thing, or time) which can hold you and bring you back to a state of connection and safety after a stressful experience has pulled you into a space of fight, flight, freeze or collapse. With practice, anchors strengthen your capacity to return to a place of regulation and connection.

Steps: Sit comfortably and have a paper and pencil/pen to write.

Who: Reflect on those people in your life and make a list of those that make you feel safe and welcome. This can be a person. You can extend the list to a pet, an ancestor or spiritual figures.

What: Think about what you do that brings your state of connection alive. Look for actions that feel nourishing and inviting of connection.

Where: Reflect on your world and find the physical places that bring you cues of safety. Look around your home, your workplace, your community, and any place where you find spiritual connection.

When: Identify the moments in your daily life or memories of the past when you have felt anchored in connection and safety. Take a moment and revisit those experiences. Bring them into conscious awareness and write them down.

*Adapted practice from Polyvagal Practices for Safety and Connection: 50 Client-Centered Practices by Deb Dana.*





# REINTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY MEMBER(S)

## Key Considerations for Organizers:

When supporting individuals reintegrating after detention and/or deportation, it's critical to support them in an assessment of their safety and needs. One major consideration is whether they are reentering a family situation that could be abusive or unsafe—does the organization have awareness of this, whether through explicit conversation or observation? Is this individual returning to people they can trust, and is the environment non-threatening? Understanding the person's immediate environment is crucial for crafting an effective reintegration strategy and care plan.

Organizers should also evaluate the community member's needs by facilitating a conversation around these issues —like housing, food access, transportation, and employment. Organizers can also determine if there are trust local systems, such as churches or social workers, that can be utilized. What are reliable and effective resources in the community?

A practical next step to support community members is for organizations to maintain an updated map of local resources and networks. Relationships with local contacts are invaluable, even if it's just one or two trusted people who can respond quickly and efficiently to support in a time of need. The goal is to ensure that individuals are reintegrating into an environment where they feel safe and supported, emotionally, psychologically, and materially.



# CARE PRACTICES REMINDERS

After reading this material you might feel a sense of overwhelm or emotions including: sadness, anger, resentment, despair, frustration, or grief. Some of these emotions and others might show up in your body. These emotions can surface as an upset stomach, headache, tight chest, or breathing issues, especially if you have pre-existing conditions. Our stress responses may also show up as: tight muscles or soreness in different parts of our bodies. If you have shared your stories with others in a collective space out loud, shame or embarrassment might also be overwhelming and create feelings of discomfort. Recalling and sharing old memories may also inspire recurring thoughts of the memory or lack of sleep.

**Healing is hard.** But, remember, on the other side of this process is the ability to create more awareness and greater possibilities for our lives which have been limited by systems and patterns. This healing journey is challenging and oftentimes painful; but, it is also filled with new opportunities for healthier thoughts, feelings, relationships, joy, and more peace of mind.

Finally, if you, an organizer, and/or a community member or members need additional support, let an LTAN member or staff person know you would like to be connected with resources or sessions topics related mental health and emotional well-being, our healing circle keepers team, or with a mental health practitioner via our directory, or with someone in our emotional support team.



# REFLECTION SPACE



# APPENDIX

## Instructions for Adapting Practices for Use with Individuals, Groups, and People Undergoing Deportation Proceedings

Most of the practices in this guide can be used individually and can be adapted for use with a collective. We want to note that when holding space for a group and leading a collective through a practice, it is important to first ask the group about their access needs and adapt the practices so that all participants can engage in it by giving modifications. For example, any of the practices in this guide that involve movement can be done while standing or can be done while sitting in a chair. They are still helpful if a person is moving parts of their bodies if not all. If you know that someone in the group has different access needs around movement, be sure to include multiple options for how a person can participate that are inclusive of everyone.

### Reflection Questions on Page 9

Individually: These questions can be reflected on individually through journaling and internal reflection.

Collectively: Staff members and groups of organizers can either dialogue around these questions in pairs, triads, or as a group with your organization's Leadership Team. Additionally, they can journal individually and then share their responses.

### Know Your Body Based Trauma Responses Exercise on Page 15

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Organizers can lead families or individuals undergoing deportation proceedings through this guided journaling exercise. Families and individuals can journal in response to the questions and then share their responses with the organizer, or the organizer can go through each question with the person or family verbally. If the family or person does not want to share their responses, they can choose to journal and then share their reflections and observations around what it felt like to engage in the journaling practice without sharing their answers.

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1. Please note that if a person or organizer is teaching or leading others through a practice from this Care Guide, it is very important that the organizer has already become familiar with the practice by having used it on their own first. The leader or organizer's familiarity and comfort with the practice can help put others at ease while trying something new.

Individually: These questions can be reflected on individually through journaling and internal reflection.

Collectively: Participants can spend 5-10 minutes filling in their responses before sharing with others in the group – in pairs or as a collective (2).

### **Know Your Organization's Trauma Responses on Page 16**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: These questions are not designed for use with individuals and families who are actively undergoing the traumatic stress of deportation proceedings.

Individually: Readers can reflect on these questions individually via journaling. Afterwards, they can then choose to share their responses with a friend or colleague.

Collectively: Members of the organization's base and groups of organizers can spend 5-10 minutes writing their responses to the questions. They can then share it with others in the group in pairs or as a collective.

### **Massage the Vagus Nerve with Small Jaw Movements Regulation Practice on Page 18**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Organizers can teach this regulation practice to an individual or family they are working with so they can use it to calm their nervous system. Organizers should practice it with the family and invite them to practice it at home as well.

Individually: This practice can be used individually by an organizer to regulate their bodies during times of stress. It can be helpful to practice in times of rest to help increase the body's vagal tone (ie the body's ability to regulate itself after stress),

Collectively: Groups of organizers and teams can use this regulation practice in multiple ways. It can be helpful to teach and lead the group through the practice after a particularly stressful or activating meeting or action to help the group regulate their bodies before transitioning back to their daily lives. It can also be used at the start of meetings to help participants drop into the space.

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2. Please note that if a person or organizer is teaching or leading others through a practice from this Care Guide, it is very important that the organizer has already become familiar with the practice by having used it on their own first. The leader or organizer's familiarity and comfort with the practice can help put others at ease while trying something new.

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: These regulation practices can be taught to families and practiced at home to calm their nervous systems. They can be integrated with practicing mindful eating at the dinner table.

Individually: Organizers can use these regulation practices while at rest or before, during, and after an activating situation.

Collectively: Groups of organizers can be led through either of these exercises before or after a stressful meeting or action. They can also be taught to a group while the group is calm as a way of integrating regulation practices into all meetings and work. They can also be used as a “check out” where the group can practice the regulation practice individually and then debrief about what they noticed in pairs.

### **Reflection Practice on Page 21**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Organizers can also invite the families they work with to reflect on these questions and share their answers with other family members and loved ones. If families feel comfortable, they can share their responses with one another. Parents can use accessible age-appropriate examples to model how to engage in the exercise for their children.

Individually: Organizers can reflect on these questions individually by writing and journaling. They can choose to keep their answers to themselves, or share their answers with a colleague or a trusted loved one. It is helpful to also notice how and when these sensations arise throughout your daily routine.

Collectively: A group of organizers can be led to reflect on these questions. They can do so silently and individually without sharing, they can share their responses after writing, or the group can be invited to reflect on each question verbally with the group. Leaders should be thoughtful about if enough safety has been established in the group for the group to feel comfortable sharing their responses out loud before inviting the group to do so.

### **Managing Organizational Expectations and Community Needs Reflection Questions on Pages 25-26**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: These questions (in their current wording) are not meant to be shared with families and individuals undergoing deportation proceedings and were designed for collective



internal discussion among organizers. Organizers can, however, ask families about their experiences working with the organization and can adapt these questions to get feedback from families and community members who are receiving support from the organization.

Individually: Organizers may reflect on these questions on their own if they do not have others to discuss them with, but we recommend sharing your responses with a colleague or a loved one.

Collectively: To collectively facilitate a discussion among organizers using these questions, we recommend asking each question to the larger group and allowing time for group discussion before moving on to the next question. Opposing viewpoints and perspectives should be encouraged, as well as personal reactions to the work. Dialogue is intended to uncover projections and insight.

## **Connect with Your Boundaries Practice on Page 28**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Parents can be taught this practice, which can be helpful when supporting their children's emotional process while also undergoing their own trauma and grief. Families can also be encouraged to use it when they are engaging with others undergoing similar deportation proceedings or others who are sharing traumatic stories that are connected to their own.

Individually: This practice can be helpful whenever an organizer feels their body become activated when working with someone who is dysregulated or feeling strong emotions or when an organizer has just heard a traumatic story. This can be more likely to occur if an organizer has lived experience of immigration-related trauma, as their proximity to the issue can make them more prone to identifying with the other person's pain. In these moments, we recommend using this practice after meeting with the person or family or after hearing the story, when alone.

Collectively: This practice can be very helpful to help a group of organizers relieve tension from their bodies and feel grounded after conflict, a difficult meeting or direct action, or after hearing traumatic stories. It can be particularly helpful if they feel they may be taking on the stress and emotions of others or identifying with the families they are working with because of their proximity to the issue. To lead the group in the practice, leaders can invite the group to close their eyes or look gently

towards the ground, turn their attention inwards, and engage in the practice. The practice comes more naturally with repetition and so this can be a helpful practice to return to after future meetings. The meeting can end after the practice is complete, or participants can be invited to share their observations and reflections as part of the check-out.

### **Grounding With Your Senses Practice on Page 32**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: This practice can easily be taught to parents, adolescents, and families undergoing deportation proceedings. It can be especially useful when a family member is experiencing dissociation, as it helps the family learn to recognize the signs of dissociation and help guide their family member through the practice to ground them. However, the practice can be also effective in any moment of activation, and can be done in any setting. We recommend having organizers lead parents or a family through the grounding exercise, practice it with them, and follow-up with the family by asking about their experience using it.

Individually: This practice can easily be used by an individual while alone and only takes a minute. It can be particularly helpful when an organizer is activated or experiencing dissociation, but can also be used while at rest in preparation for a stressful situation.

Collectively: This practice can be used with groups of organizers. Group leaders can provide information about how to recognize activation and dissociation and then lead the group through the grounding practice. It can be particularly useful to facilitate the practice collectively at the beginning of a meeting to help participants transition into the meeting and drop into the space mindfully. It can also be used at the end of the meeting to help participants transition back to their daily lives. Afterwards, meeting participants can be encouraged to use the practice whenever they are in transition between stressful and restful moments, as well as when they feel activated or are experiencing dissociation.

### **Send Compassion to your Defenses Practice on Page 32**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: As families and individuals learn about their body's response to the trauma and stress they are experiencing, they may come to feel frustrated with their own responses to threat. In these moments, it can be helpful for organizers to teach this practice to families

and individuals undergoing deportation proceedings. They can lead the person or family through the practice by inviting the person to close their eyes or gently look towards the ground if closing their eyes feels dysregulating. Because this is a vulnerable practice, we recommend leading the person through the exercise without pressuring the person to share the details of their internal process.

Individually: This practice can be particularly helpful whenever an organizer feels frustration with their body's protective instincts and defense mechanisms such as dissociation and compartmentalization, as both states can be highly uncomfortable experiences. Additionally, because the body's natural responses to threats such as fight, flight, freeze, and fawn responses can also have unintended and uncomfortable consequences, we also recommend using this practice if you are feeling frustrated with your threat responses. This practice is usually most effective if you use it while you are alone and not feeling actively threatened by others in your presence, as it can be a vulnerable practice to engage in.

Collectively: This practice can be used collectively, but unlike other practices in this guide, we recommend doing so without inviting participants to share their experience with the group because it can feel very vulnerable to share one's internal process of frustration with their own defenses in a group. A group leader can lead the group through the practice by inviting the group to close their eyes or look gently towards the ground, and use general, invitational language that isn't specific to dissociation such as:

- “Notice anything that might have come up for you during the meeting today....any feelings of stress, fear, anger, or even dissociation or compartmentalization.”
- “If any unwanted responses or feelings arose within you, you can gently acknowledge that your brain and body are trying to protect you from something painful.” To note, if leading a group, the leader should give multiple examples of defenses that could have shown up as not all members of the group will have experienced dissociation or compartmentalization and the goal is for everyone to be able to participate and find value in the practice.

### **Vergence Practice: Look to the Horizon on Page 33**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: This practice can be taught to families and individuals undergoing deportation proceedings. Organizers can teach adaptations for using the practice subtly if the person is in the presence of others by instructing them to alternate the focus of their gaze between a point right in front of them and a point out in the distance without turning their

Individually: Organizers can use this practice as a way to regulate their nervous systems after activation. It can be helpful to practice while alone as turning one's entire torso could draw attention and questions from others. If an organizer is in a room with other people, they can also engage in the exercise in a more subtle way by alternating between shifting their visual focus back and forth between a point right in front of them, and a point out in the distance (each for a deep few breaths), without turning their torso.

Collectively: This practice can be a helpful way to center the group before a meeting, or help organizers regulate afterwards, especially if the meeting was stressful or is anticipated to bring up fear or anger, leaving participants primed for action. It can also be taught before a direct action for organizers to use throughout the action as tension and feelings arise.

### **Care Practices for Secondary Trauma on Page 36**

**With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings:** While this guide presents these practices as being specifically for secondary trauma, they can be helpful for any parent or individual experiencing a stressful, ongoing, traumatic situation. Organizers can share these practices with families and individuals and engage in a discussion about if it would be helpful to incorporate them and how they might do so.

Individually: Organizers reading this guide can reflect individually on how and if they incorporate each of these care practices into their lives. They can also reflect on how they might incorporate them more fully. After their individual reflection, they may choose to share their thoughts with a colleague or a loved one.

Collectively: These practices can be presented as a discussion topic to a group of organizers. We recommend sharing information about secondary trauma with staff including how to recognize it, then engaging staff in a collective discussion about how organizers on the team are incorporating these practices into their lives and how they can better support one another in doing so as individuals and as an organization.

### **Brief Mindful Pauses Practice on Page 37**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: We highly recommend that organizers teach this practice to families and individuals undergoing very stressful situations such as deportation proceedings. We would suggest the organizer first lead the family or person through the practice, then practice it with them. Finally, they can invite the person or family to engage in the

practice on their own, without being led by the organizer's verbal prompts, or they can even lead the organizer in the practice. Again, consistency is key and this practice can be used multiple times within the same meeting or multiple times over the course of many meetings. People undergoing stressful moments can also be encouraged to set reminders to pause and engage in the practice once to a few times a day.

Individually: We recommend that organizers begin to use the practice while calm and resourced. It can be helpful to set a reminder once a day, or a few times a day, to pause and take a brief moment of mindfulness. Consistency is key and the more often a person practices this, the easier it becomes.

Collectively: This practice can be used at any point. It can be used to open a meeting, to launch the check-in (by inviting participants to silently use the practice and then share their reflections), after a difficult discussion, or even to prepare for the meeting's check-out. It can be helpful at the start of the meeting to invite participants to take brief mindful pauses throughout the meeting or throughout the day.

### **Body Scan Meditation Practice on Page 38**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Organizers can share this body scan meditation with families they are working with or with individuals undergoing deportation proceedings. We recommend leading the person through the practice, then practicing it with them. It can also be helpful to invite the person to lead the organizer through the practice so they become more comfortable and confident using it.

Individually: Organizers can begin using this practice to check in with their bodies while at rest or while activated. It can be helpful to begin using it while alone and in a space that is free of distractions so they can fully turn their attention inwards.

Collectively: This practice can be helpful to use to start or end meetings and to initiate the check-in and check-out process. It can be taught to groups and organizers can be encouraged to use the practice on their own.

### **Safe Space Visualization on Page 38**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Families and individuals can be led through the visualization by an organizer. We recommend inviting the family to close their eyes or gently look towards the ground while going

through it, and encourage the organizer to speak slowly and take long pauses while leading the family through the visualization. They can ask for more details about the safe space and can invite the person to verbally describe and share what they observe, sense, and feel in their bodies. We recommend inviting the person to describe their safeplace aloud, but giving the person permission to silently enjoy their safe place without verbally sharing about it if they are hesitant to share. We also recommend naming that many people find it easier to use their imaginations to create a safe place that they have never been to and that this is very normal.

Individually: Organizers can create an internal resource by going through this visualization while alone with their eyes closed. A person's safe space becomes more accessible the more often they practice the visualization and so we recommend that an organizer bring up their safe space visualization daily when they are first beginning to develop it. It can also be helpful to give your safe place a name that you can use to access it when needed.

Collectively: A group of organizers can also be led through this visualization collectively. They can be invited to share about their safe places with the group or in pairs, or they can be invited to silently journal about what they sensed, observed, and felt. It is helpful to encourage group members to continue internally bringing up their safe place about once a day when they are starting to develop it, to make it more accessible.

### **Shaking Exercise on Page 38**

With families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Families can be taught this practice as a way of releasing tension and bringing their bodies back to regulation. This can be a fun practice for parents to use with their children as it can easily invite laughter and lead to wiggling, dancing, and connection among family members.

Individually: Community organizers can use this practice to release tension in their bodies, especially after stress. Using this practice around others might invite questions and is very noticeable, and so we recommend using the practice while alone (unless you are comfortable with these questions). The practice is most effective when a person shakes their whole bodies, but can also be effective if a person is seated in a chair or in their car and shaking their upper bodies.



Collectively: A group of organizers might find it helpful to be led through this practice after a stressful direct action to relieve the stress and tension that might have been building in their bodies as a result of the action's energy or any activating interactions with law enforcement, counter protesters, or lawmakers. Be sure to ask in advance about the different access needs of the group and give prompts that are inclusive and accessible for all.

### **Self-Holding for Safety Practice on Page 38**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: This practice can be taught to families and individuals undergoing deportation proceedings and we recommend leading a family through the practice, then inviting them to engage in the practice without the organizer's verbal instructions. This practice can be particularly helpful to teach to parents so they can model using it in their own lives in the presence of their children. With very visible soothing practices, young children will sometimes begin engaging in the practice without any instruction simply from hearing their parents say they will use it during times of stress and then observing them doing so.

Individually: Organizers can engage in this practice to provide themselves a sense of containment and self-holding. This practice is also very noticeable by others and we encourage organizers to practice it while alone unless they are comfortable with others seeing them and possibly asking questions about what they are doing.

Collectively: Groups of organizers can be led through this practice as well. It can be a helpful practice to use at the end of a meeting or after a direct action and the group can either silently reflect on the experience, share their observations in pairs, or check out by sharing their reflections.

### **Heart Coherence Breathing Practice on Page 39**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: This practice can also be helpful to teach to families. Parents can be encouraged to teach it to their children and model its use with their children present. Organizers can lead families or parents through the practice and then invite the person to use the practice without any instruction.

Individually: This practice can be used by organizers while in a calm, quiet place. If using the practice for a few minutes, it can be helpful to close one's eyes in silent reflection, but if around other people, an organizer can use the practice with their eyes open as well.

Collectively: This practice can also be used in groups. It can be particularly helpful to center a group of organizers at the start of a meeting, can be part of the check-out process, and can be helpful after an activating direct action.

### **Gentle Movement for Reconnection on Page 39**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Families and individuals undergoing deportation proceedings might find this practice helpful to use to release tension and activation in their bodies. Some people might find it awkward or feel silly engaging in these movements and we recommend that the organizer teaching the practice engage in the practice of gentle stretching while guiding the person through it.

Individually: Organizers may use this practice whenever they notice tension in their body that they would like to release. It can be used while alone or when in the presence of others. The practice is helpful when standing or sitting.

Collectively: Groups of organizers can be led to engage in gentle movement to open or close a meeting. They might also find it helpful to collectively use the practice after direct action or any moment of stress or tension. Be sure to have asked about access needs before leading the group through the practice and give participants the option to stand up or stay seated while engaging in gentle movement so that all can participate.

### **“Container” Check-in Practice on Page 39**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Organizers can lead families or individuals undergoing stressful situations through the practice of visualizing the container for the first time. After initially visualizing the container, the person can then use their container visualization during stressful moments moving forward. If an organizer is considering prompting a person to use their container check-in practice during times of stress, we strongly recommend doing so only if you have asked for their permission to do this in advance.

Individually: This exercise can be done with the eyes open or closed. It can be helpful to begin developing the image of the container while alone and at rest, and transitioning to using the visualization while stressed or even when around others

Collectively - The container check-in practice can be introduced to a group of organizers and practiced together. The group can be guided verbally to visualize their container; imagine placing their thoughts, feelings, and memories within it; and then encouraged to use their visualization on their own. A possible check-out question to use after the visualization is to ask “Describe your container and how it felt to use it during the visualization?”

### **The Notice & Name Practice on Page 40**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Organizers can also lead parents, individuals, and families through this practice by inviting them to reflect, journal, and share their responses to the questions. The organizer should introduce the purpose of the exercise before beginning as being to better understand their body’s responses to stress so that they can respond and build their toolkit of regulation practices.

Individually: Organizers are encouraged to reflect on these questions and write in the space provided while alone or in a quiet, calm space.

Collectively: Groups of organizers can be led through this practice. We recommend inviting the group to silently journal their responses and then share with a partner or with the group. Before beginning the exercise, we recommend that the leader reflect and decide on whether they should invite the group to share any details of the activating event or encourage the group not to share the experience itself and focus instead on their responses to it. Some close-knit groups of organizers who have engaged in prior healing work will be able to comfortably and succinctly share the experience without getting overly activated, but if the group members could easily become activated or overly drawn into the story by sharing details or if enough emotional safety has not yet been built in the group, the leader should encourage group members to share their responses without sharing the event itself.

### **Breathwork Practices on Page 41**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Both breathwork practices can also be taught to families and individuals undergoing deportation proceedings. Organizers can lead the family or person through the exercise by giving verbal prompts and reminders, and practice it with them. It is recommended to lead a person or family through the same breathwork multiple times over

different meetings, as repetition can help a person feel more comfortable with the practice and notice different observations each time. Both exercises can also be good “check-out” exercises and people can find the ritual grounding of ending multiple meetings with the same breathwork practice.

Individually: Both of these breathwork practices can be helpful for organizers to regulate themselves. They can be done daily (for example every morning or every evening), or can be used after a stressful experience to bring the body back into regulation.

Collectively: Both breathwork practices can be helpful to open and close meetings and to help a group regulate after a stressful action or meeting to prepare for transitioning back to their daily lives. We recommend using the same breathwork practice to ground a group over the course of multiple meetings to give the group a sense of consistency.

## **Energetic Movement Practice on Page 42**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Many individuals initially feel a bit silly or awkward while engaging in this practice to release the tension in their bodies, and so we recommend that an organizer teaching this practice to a family or individual also engage in the practice with them. This practice can also be particularly enjoyable for families to do together as it will oftentimes lead to connection and laughter.

Individually: This practice is very noticeable by others and so we recommend an organizer practice this while alone if they do not want to invite questions. This practice can be done while standing or while seated and should be adapted based on different individual’s access needs.

Collectively: This practice can be used to close any meeting where tension, anger, or fear may have arisen within the group. We recommend that the group leader participate in the practice as well, and that the leader ask the group in advance about their access needs.

Collectively: This practice can be used to close any meeting where tension, anger, or fear may have arisen within the group. We recommend that the group leader participate in the practice as well, and that the leader ask the group in advance about their access needs before implementing the practice. This way, they can

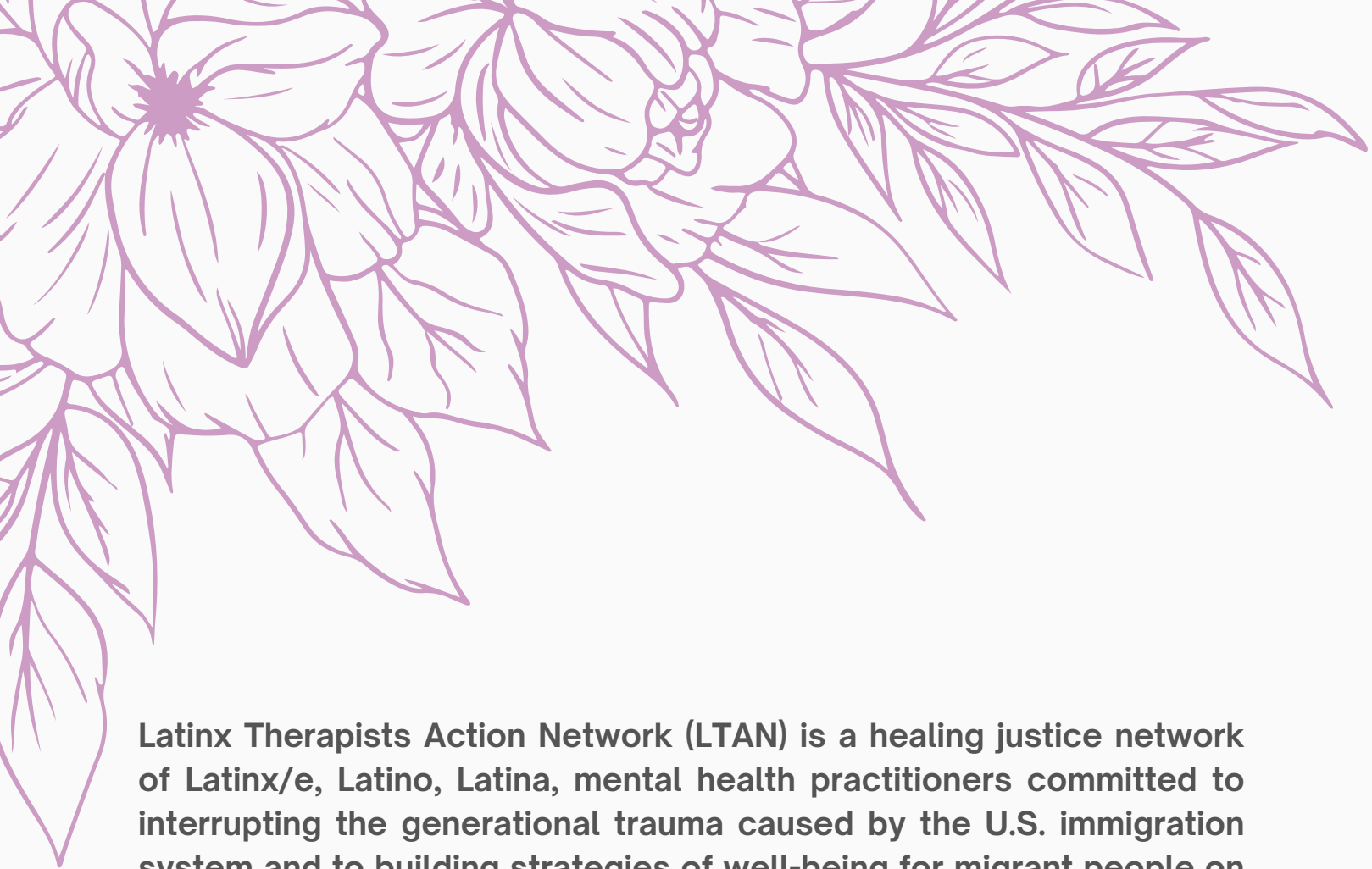
adapt it so that it is accessible to everyone and give necessary modifications by inviting participants to stay seated or selecting a different practice that everyone can participate in.

### **Anchors Practice on Page 43**

With Families and Individuals Undergoing Deportation Proceedings: Families can be led through this practice as well. Each family member can write their own response and then share, or the practice can be done through dialogue where the organizer asks each question and allows each family member to respond. Using this practice with children and parents together can foster emotional vulnerability and connection.

Individually: After journaling with the prompts in this practice, organizers can choose to share their responses with a close loved one or a colleague.

Collectively: Groups of organizers can use this practice together. They can silently journal their responses and then share their responses with the group or in pairs, or they can share their observations, emotions, and the bodily sensations that arose as they were completing the exercise without sharing their responses.



Latinx Therapists Action Network (LTAN) is a healing justice network of Latinx/e, Latino, Latina, mental health practitioners committed to interrupting the generational trauma caused by the U.S. immigration system and to building strategies of well-being for migrant people on the frontlines of the immigrant rights struggle. We are an offering of love for migrant communities who have suffered over three decades of mandatory detention, militarization of the border, and the systematic, and homophobic, sexist, ableist, and racist collusion of local law enforcement across the country with Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As such, our work is centered on assisting in the healing process and resilience of immigrant rights leaders, organizers, and activists as a critical part of collective liberation.



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Action Network**