

SIBAM

An introduction to a body work modality called SIBAM that is from “Somatic Experience” or SE®

SE® is based on the work of American psychotherapist Dr Peter Levine who believes trauma is primarily biological - a physical phenomenon - not an incurable disease only marginally controllable as many psychologists have chosen to view it.

Peter Levine’s theory is based on observations of wildlife. Animals are regularly threatened with death yet rarely traumatised; their survival instinct kicks in, flooding their body with highly charged energy ready for fighting back or running away. When the threat’s passed, that intense energy is discharged and the animal returns to full normal health.

We are all equipped with the same capacity to overcome an overwhelming experience. Yet we also have an upper rational brain that frequently ‘rejects’ the powerful primal instinct of the body. **The result is that huge fight/flight energy gets trapped in our nervous system where it can lead to all sorts of symptoms; sometimes immediately, sometimes not until years later.**

Your experiences belong to five core components of a therapeutic model called SIBAM:

Sensation - for example, tension, heat, relaxation

Image - internal (memory, dreams, metaphors) or external (an object in the room)

Behavior - for example, posture, facial expressions, speech

Affect - feelings and emotions

Meaning - beliefs, judgments, thoughts, analysis - often expressed through words

It is through these are the lenses through which we gather, interpret, process, react to, and store information about our world.

They are all incredibly useful. – HOWEVER, - the problem is, many of us rely way too heavily on one or maybe two, and pretty much ignore the others. This is an unbalanced and inefficient way to live. And when problems come along, the default modality will only get us so far.

So we meet mind-oriented people, for example, who believe that if they just think long and hard enough, they will figure out solutions to all their problems. They can go round and round in circles forever, spinning their wheels, getting nowhere. In fact, the root of all their problems might just be that they **bury, ignore** and /or mistrust their emotions; or

that they endlessly procrastinate and never *do* anything; or that they are completely out of touch with what's going on in their body; or that they seem to have no imagination; or all the above. To be whole, we need to learn to use all five.

So let's look at each of the 5 elements and see how we can see them and use them with the people we minister to:

Sensation comes from:

● **Kinesthetic awareness**

- Muscle tension- constriction, bracing, tense or bound energy
- Movement impulses

● **Autonomic nervous system, involuntary sensations**

- Temperature-hot, cold, warm, flushed, sweat, chills
- Digestion- fullness, hunger, nausea, tension
- Heart-rate- normal, rapid, relaxed
- Viscera (organs)-intuition, gut feelings, tension, space, complex sensations
- Eye movements
- Respiration

● **Proprioception (self-perception)**

- Where one part of our body is in relation to another and how fast we are moving
- Joints
- Helps us notice where we are in space
- What our position is, information to brain about how to stabilize

● **Vestibular**

- Inner ear
- Relationship, orientation to gravity
- Uprightness, balance, equilibrium
- Sense of acceleration and de-acceleration

Note: Vestibular disturbances can present as nausea, dizziness, or vertigo. Often shows up when there have been falls, motor vehicle, skiing, biking accidents. This can mimic structural or medical problems and should also be evaluated by health care provider specializing in vestibular dysfunction.

KEY THINGS - When working with Sensations

- Use COAL with them (Curious, Open, Accepting, Loving) to what may come up, even if it might be unpleasant.
- Learn to speak in “sensation language” to access the involuntary functioning of the reptilian brain. Examples of descriptive sensation language: warm, tingly, electric, fowing, smooth, static, soft, tense, relaxed, dense, light, fuzzy, sharp, achy, dull, permeable, porous, liquid, light, bubbly, deadness, numbing, chilly, cold, hot, foggy, clear, etc.
- Help the person you are ministering to expand their awareness. Good questions are: *“Is there anything else that you notice about it?”* *“Do you notice it intensifying, lessening, or no change at all?”* *“Does it have a size, shape, density, location, or sense of direction or substance?”*
- Watch with them and in their body how it changes, shifts and or releases
- In trauma resolution work, sensation is the central organizer of integration after the damage and disruption caused by undercoupling and overcoupling, which are inherent in trauma dynamics.

IMAGE

- Images are what *seems* to come from the outside
- External image – Inputs that come from our five primary senses (and possible ‘sixth sense’. When external images are not available, we move to internal ones
- Internal image – includes dreams, visions, metaphors, symbols – perceptions derived from internal stimuli.
- Behavior → Impulse → Image
- Every perceptual image has a sensory-motor experience associated with it. Help them find it with questions back to the body – *“so what do you notice now, inside of you?”* for example
- Each image can have a corresponding element to another part of SIBAM
- Images include all perceptual information from external and internal stimuli that is not self-perception or kinesthetic.

The sensorium includes the five primary senses:

- Auditory-sounds
- Tactile- touch
- Olfactory- smells
- Gustatory- tastes
- Visual- sights

When working with Images:

- Move between image and sensation. By asking the person you are ministering to - to pendulant between the image and the sensation can give distance to overwhelming sensations and or images, and can help slow things down
- Help determine whether image is a resource, or is activating. Is the image comforting, or unpleasant? – We don't always know, and sometimes they do not either
- If the image is unpleasant or disturbing, then help them find or search for more pleasurable images to use as resources (safety and peace)
- When they have dreams, visions, fantasies, remember these imaginings come from the “inside”. These are internal images. Connect these to sensation and behavior as the person you minister too shares them.
- Image can be used to help with titration (‘just a little at a time’. For example, looking at a scene or memory or image as though you were looking through backwards binoculars helps distance a client from the intensity of overwhelm.

BEHAVIOR

Behavior is any activity observable from the outside of the client, including verbal and non-verbal activity.

Verbal—words, sounds, vocalizations, expressions, tone of voice, cadence and infection of speech, pitch and rapidity, etc.,

Non-verbal—includes movement (gross motor and micro-movements, voluntary and involuntary), posture, gestures, facial expressions, character structure, muscle tone, eye movements, breath, skin color, gait, motor tics, etc.