

Activity: Nature Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: Trauma Survivors

TH Activity Plan – Intergenerational Storytelling

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants apply intergenerational storytelling & horticultural metaphors as family-level interventions for climate disaster trauma.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Undertake narrative processing using storytelling

Physical: Process physical responses to trauma; consider strategies to reduce physiological symptoms of stress & trauma

Psychological/Emotional: Develop sense of empowerment by telling their personal story; generate family, community, & regional identity; decrease natural disaster traumatization by precise processing of trauma by sharing survival lessons

Sensory: Process interoception internal signals & symptoms of stress, anxiety & trauma

Social: Develop trust among groups of people; build community

Materials

If outside, a large blanket or each participant to bring a yoga mat, towel, or blanket to sit on

Inside, chairs arranged in a circle

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator must create a safe space, either inside or outside, in which participants can sit & face each other in a circle. Participants must know & consent to participate in a climate disaster healing space. Facilitator's prior experience in crisis counseling, trauma counseling, or related experience is highly recommended.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming participants & defining Climate Disaster Trauma (refer to applications section).
3. Facilitator then poses the following prompt questions (see applications section).

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Beginning with defining climate disasters trauma:

"The impacts of (climate) disaster may uniquely have persisting effects on PTSD" (Crane et al., 2022, p. 7).

Acute events – last for days (wildfires, hurricanes, floods)

Sub-acute events – last for months (droughts, heat waves)

Lasting environmental changes – sea level rises, permanently altered environments (O'Donnell & Palinkas, 2024)".

Facilitator then poses the following prompt questions:

What were the stories you heard when you were little about surviving natural disasters?

What were the stories you heard about the native ecosystem you grew up in?

What stories or advice would you give to the next generation?

Are there plants that you associate with your "home" that may have been impacted by climate disasters?

What does that plant tell you about survival?

Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator could have participants answer these prompts in a circle or could divide the group up into subgroups to answer them. Participants do not have to answer all or any of these questions (listening is also participation), but these prompts gently guide them to share the lessons they have learned after surviving natural disaster with others. Prompts can be written on a board or passed out on notecards. Some facilitators may opt to simply say the prompts out loud and have participants remember all four questions.

Some subgroupings that work well are: generational affinity groups (i.e. Gen Z, Millennial, Gen X, Boomers), geographic location (i.e. Northeast, Southeast, South, Southwest, West Coast, Midwest), and disaster type (i.e. hurricane, flood, earthquake).

Notes on storytelling: “Therapeutic storytelling interventions leverage the power of stories to facilitate healing, understanding, and empowerment. Techniques include narrative therapy...and creative writing to help individuals explore their narratives, challenge limiting beliefs, and develop new, empowering stories” ([Ackerman, 2017](#)). A narrative therapy modality helps individuals rethink and reshape their experiences by exploring their narratives, identifying alternative ones ([Chung Easton, 2025](#)).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

Facilitators’ prior experience handling trauma is preferred, such as trauma counseling or crisis counseling. Co-treatment using interdisciplinary treatment teams including a licensed mental health professional, may be appropriate if facilitator does not have a clinical background. Refer to *Notes or Other Considerations* for trauma counseling guidelines.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitator communicates that participants can participate as much or as little as they want, including standing up and leaving the group without facilitator comment. Additional points:

1. Strong feelings can and will come up when sharing traumatic memories. All reactions to your own story are acceptable.
2. Physical touch (such as hugs) must be consented to before offered or given.
3. Trauma responses are physical processes. Participants may become angry, tearful, fidgety, dissociate, yell, or leave. It is important for the facilitator to breathe and notice their own reaction before attempting to respond to a participant

This exercise is recommended for adults ages 18+. Mixed-generation groups are encouraged.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Ackerman, C. E. (2017). [19 best narrative therapy techniques & worksheets \[+PDF\]](#). *Positive Psychology.com*.
Chung Easton, V. (2025). [Narrative therapy techniques: How to use them with therapy clients](#). *Blueprint.ai*.
Crane, K., Li, L., Subramanian, P. et al. (2022). Climate change and mental health: A review of empirical evidence, mechanisms and implications. *Atmosphere*, 13(12), 2096. <https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos13122096>
Kiser, L. J., Baumgardner, B., & Dorado, J. (2010). Who are we, but for the stories we tell: Family stories and healing. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 2(3), 243.
Thompson, B., Kellas, J. K., Soliz, J. et al. (2009). Family legacies: Constructing individual and family identity through intergenerational storytelling. *Narrative Inquiry*, 19(1), 106-134.
O'Donnell, M., & Palinkas, L. (2024). Taking a trauma and adversity perspective to climate change mental health. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 15(1), Article 2343509.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2024.2343509>

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