

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS &
VETERANS

Off Duty, Back in the Body

Trauma-informed yoga, breathwork, and guided meditation
for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual bodies.



Why This Belongs in Your Toolkit



WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

- First responders experience PTSD at roughly 20% — close to three times the general population's rate of about 7% — and only about 40% of those diagnosed access care.
- The National Center for PTSD estimates about 7 in every 100 veterans will experience PTSD in their lifetime.
- A 2022 pilot in Complementary Therapies in Medicine compared Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga with Cognitive Processing Therapy for women veterans with PTSD related to military sexual trauma.
- VA covers yoga, meditation, and guided imagery under Whole Health complementary and integrative health services (VA Directive 1137).

These practices work alongside your care team, peer support, and treatment — not instead of them.

Four Bodies, One You



The job trains you to override all four. Recovery is learning to listen again.

Physical

A armor, adrenaline, and sleep that never fully resets

Mental

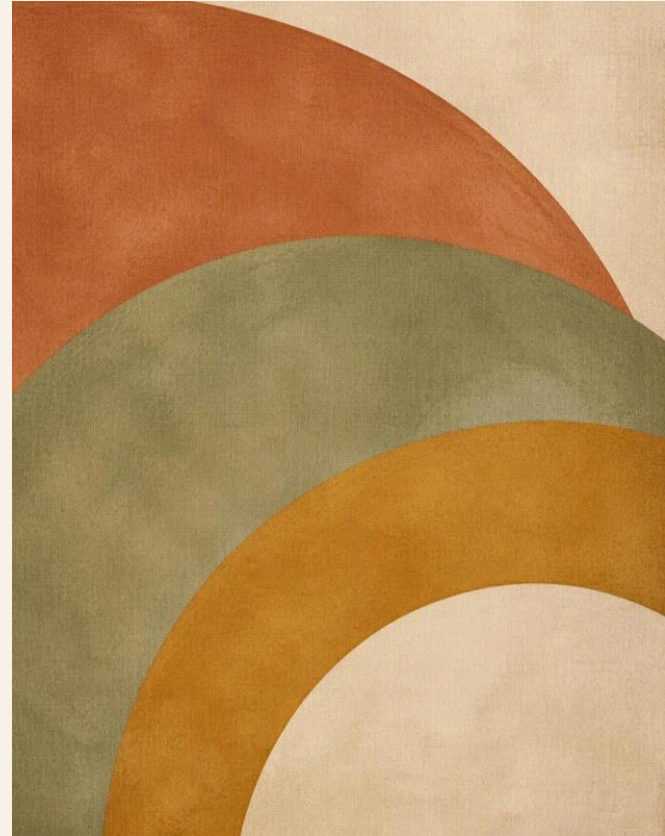
Hypervigilance, replay, and decision fatigue

Emotional

Numbing, anger, grief you never had time for

Spiritual

Meaning and purpose, including moral injury



The Physical Body



PRACTICES FOR ARMOR AND ADRENALINE

- Feet flat, sit tall, feel the floor — the shortest route out of a keyed-up nervous system.
- Chair-based forms work in a station, a bunk room, or a truck cab. No mat, no gym clothes.
- Legs up the wall or constructive rest after a shift, before you try to sleep.
- Slow neck, shoulder, and hip work for gear-loaded posture and body armor tension.
- Ask "what do I feel?" instead of "am I doing it right?" There is no scored performance here.

You may change, modify, or come out of any shape at any time, for any reason.

The Mental Body



PRACTICES FOR HYPERVIGILANCE AND REPLAY

- Anchor attention: count breaths one to five, then start over. Losing count is expected.
- Name the loop — "replaying the call," "scanning," "planning" — then come back to the breath.
- Urge surfing works on cravings and on the pull to check, drink, or numb out: watch it rise and pass.
- Eyes open with a soft, wide gaze. You never have to close your eyes to practice.
- Three to five minutes at shift change beats an hour you'll never schedule.

Hypervigilance kept you alive on shift. The practice is teaching it when it can stand down.

The Emotional Body



PRACTICES FOR NUMBING, ANGER, AND GRIEF

- RAIN (Tara Brach): Recognize what's here, Allow it, Investigate with care, Nurture yourself.
- Lengthen the exhale first. Regulate the body before you try to reason with the feeling.
- Titrate: touch the hard thing for a few breaths, then return to a neutral anchor like your hands.
- Anger is often the only feeling the culture allowed. Underneath it there is usually grief or fear.
- Meet moral injury with a phrase rather than a verdict: "May I be kind to myself right now."

Numbing is a skill you learned for a reason. Feeling is the skill you're relearning now.

The Spiritual Body



PRACTICES FOR MEANING AND CONNECTION

- Connection, not doctrine — none of this asks anything of your beliefs.
- Moral injury is a wound to what you believe is right, and it needs meaning-making, not just symptom relief.
- Y12SR (Yoga of 12-Step Recovery) pairs yoga with 12-step work if substance use is part of the picture.
- Purpose after the uniform: service, mentoring, and being in a room with people who get it.
- Build a ritual — same corner, same time, same blanket. Predictability steadies the system.

"Something larger than me" can be your crew, your family, the outdoors, or the person you're becoming.

What Makes a Practice Safe



TRAUMA-INFORMED GROUND RULES

- Choice — every cue is an invitation, never an order.
- Agency — you set the depth, the duration, and when you're done.
- No hands-on assists without clear consent; many teachers skip touch entirely.
- Eyes open is fine. Sit where you can see the door. Leave whenever you need to.
- Predictable structure, no surprises, no one walking the room behind you.
- If you go numb, floaty, or wound up: stop, open your eyes, press your feet down, and name five things you can see.



Breathwork: A Starting Menu

SLOW AND GENTLE IS THE WHOLE POINT

Diaphragmatic breath Hand on belly, let it rise. 2–5 minutes.

Extended exhale In for 4, out for 6–8. Takes the edge off.

Box breath In 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4. Steadies focus.

Coherent breath About 5–6 breaths a minute, even in and out.

Alternate nostril Nadi shodhana — balancing and quieting.

Cautions

- Skip long breath holds and fast, forceful breathing — both can trigger panic or dissociation.
- Never force the breath. Returning to normal breathing is always an option.
- Check with your care team first if you're pregnant or manage cardiac, respiratory, or seizure conditions.

Script: The Post-Shift Reset



THREE MINUTES · IN THE RIG, THE LOCKER ROOM, OR THE TRUCK

Sit however you are. Both feet down. Eyes open and soft, or closed if that's comfortable.

Let the breath be exactly as it is for a few rounds. Nothing to fix, nothing to report.

Now four slow rounds of box breath: in for four, hold for four, out for four, hold for four. If the holds feel tight, drop them.

Then let the holds go entirely. In for four. Out for six. Let the exhale spill out rather than pushing it.

Notice the weight of your body in the seat. The call is over. You are here.

Before you stand up, name one thing you can see and one thing you can hear.



Two Short Guided Meditations



GROUNDING FIRST, THEN SELF-COMPASSION

Orienting · 2 minutes

"Let your eyes move around the room on purpose — you're allowed to look. Notice five things you can see. Four things you could reach out and touch. Three sounds. Feel where your body meets the chair and where your feet meet the floor. Nothing in this room needs you right now. You are off duty, and it is safe enough to be here."

RAIN for a hard call · 5 minutes

"Recognize — name what's here: anger, guilt, the image you can't shake. Allow — let it be present without arguing with it. Investigate — where does it sit in your body, and what does it need? Nurture — put a hand where you feel it and offer yourself a kind phrase: I did what I could with what I had. When you're ready, feel your feet and open your eyes."

Where to Find Support



24/7 CONFIDENTIAL LINES

Veterans Crisis Line

Dial 988 then press 1 · text 838255 · chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net)

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call, text, or chat 988 · Spanish, press 2

COPLINE (law enforcement)

1-800-267-5463 · answered by retired officers

Fire/EMS Helpline · Share the Load

1-888-731-3473 · National Volunteer Fire Council

Safe Call Now (all public safety)

206-459-3020 · staffed by first responders

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-HELP (4357) · free treatment referrals, 24/7

PROGRAMS & TEACHERS

VA Whole Health

Yoga, meditation, and guided imagery are covered VA services — ask your care team or Whole Health point of contact.

Veterans Yoga Project

Free in-person and online classes through a VA partnership — [veteransyogaproject.org](https://www.veteransyogaproject.org)

Warriors at Ease

Trauma-informed, military-culture-informed teachers — [warriorsatease.org](https://www.warriorsatease.org)

Connected Warriors

No-cost trauma-conscious classes for responders, veterans, and families — [connectedwarriors.org](https://www.connectedwarriors.org)

Find a TCTSY facilitator

Center for Trauma and Embodiment — traumasensitivelyoga.com

If you're in immediate danger, call 911.