

# Statement to support the Lila Wellbeing Therapeutic Yoga initiative

## Who am I ?

I am [Dr Claire Plumbly](#), a HCPC clinical psychologist and EMDR Consultant. I work in private practice in Somerset, my specialism is trauma, anxiety and burnout in adults over the age of 18. I am providing some background psychology theory in support of the Lila Wellbeing initiative following a request by Helen Jeffries the founder.

## What happens to the body when we experience a traumatic event?

When someone experiences a traumatic event stress hormones are released, and we go into a survival state which encompasses our whole system (brain and body). To overcome this we need to 'process' it - this might be both verbally (having someone to talk it through with to provide validity and space to understand what has happened) and somatically (by releasing the pent up stress hormones and / or thawing out if we have become frozen and dissociative). The aim of processing is to help the body to know that the traumatic event has ended and that we are safe again. It then stops being hypervigilant (anxious and watchful) and remembering the worst (flashbacks in the form of memories or physical pain).

Living with the unpleasant experiences of unprocessed trauma (such as negative emotions and physical pain) can cause a disconnect with our body - when I work with adults who experienced trauma in childhood which hasn't been treated I find they have spent a life time trying to avoid 'feeling' - perhaps by busying themselves, overworking, using substances to numb themselves or other quick-fix options like impulsive shopping, social media addiction or self-harming. All of these have their own detrimental effects.

## How can yoga help?

Historically in the world of therapy the focus has been on verbal processing but in recent years important publications\* and theories\*\* have demonstrated how important it is to work somatically too; how helping the body to feel safe can then trickle 'up' to our brain - creating calmer thoughts and emotions in us (known as bottom-up approaches).

As such many trauma-trained therapists like myself either weave in somatic exercises or recommend a course of therapeutic yoga (or other similar body-based therapies). Yoga offers a gentle way of not only becoming attuned to the body again but also connecting with a sense of joy and confidence in your body. This is so powerful for someone who has spent a lot of time feeling fearful of their body sensations or like they have no option but to try and cut off from it.

## How is therapeutic yoga different?

Whilst yoga is helpful it's important for someone with trauma to work with a yoga specialist who has extra training in supporting this group. Therapeutic yoga uses more invitational language i.e. you are invited to listen to what your body needs with the aim of rebuilding connection. This is different to yoga that is aimed at fitness goals.

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### **Endorsement**

I fully endorse Lila Wellbeing's initiative, and I only wish it had been available for the adult clients I see for therapy in my clinic. I hope that this initiative will help many people recover from their difficulties much earlier in life so that they can develop healthy habits and thrive.

### **\*Publications**

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk

Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma by Peter Levine

When the Body Says No by Gabor Mate

### **\*\*Theory**

Polyvagal Theory - Stephen W Porges

Window of Tolerance -Dan Siegel.