

Understanding Sensorimotor Psychotherapy: A Beginner's Guide

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP) is a pioneering, body-oriented approach to trauma counselling. Unlike traditional talk therapies that focus mainly on thoughts and emotions, SP integrates somatic awareness by noticing body sensations, posture, and movement as key pathways to healing.

This guide is designed for beginners who want to understand what SP is, how it works, and how it may support recovery from trauma, stress, or emotional dysregulation.

What Is Sensorimotor Psychotherapy?

Developed by Dr. Pat Ogden, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy combines insights from attachment theory, neuroscience, and mindfulness. It is widely recognised and supported by research from clinicians such as Bessel van der Kolk, Daniel Siegel, and Stephen Porges who introduced Polyvagal Theory.

SP recognises that trauma is not only stored in memory and emotion but also in the body. By working with physical sensations, gestures, and automatic nervous system responses, SP helps clients reprocess trauma in a safe and structured way.

Key Principles

- 1. The Body Remembers**
Traumatic experiences often leave traces in the body in the form of tension, posture changes, or startle responses.
 - 2. Mind-Body Integration**
Healing requires the integration of body awareness with cognitive and emotional processing.
 - 3. The Window of Tolerance**
Sessions are paced to keep clients within a manageable arousal zone and avoid retraumatisation.
 - 4. Safety and Resourcing First**
Techniques such as grounding and breathing are taught early to establish stability before processing trauma.
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What to Expect in a Session

A typical SP session with a professional therapist involves:

- **Clinical Intake**
Gathering your history, medical background, and trauma experiences.

- **Observation and Awareness**
The therapist may track signs like breathing patterns, muscle tension, or posture.
- **Guided Somatic Exploration**
You may be invited to notice sensations, small movements, or impulses in the body.
- **Reprocessing and Integration**
Techniques support the interruption of old trauma responses such as freeze or flight and help you build new adaptive responses.

Sessions are collaborative and paced according to your comfort and capacity.

How Is SP Different From Other Therapies?

- Talk Therapy focuses mainly on thoughts and emotions.
- Somatic Experiencing (SE) emphasises nervous system discharge of trauma.
- Sensorimotor Psychotherapy uniquely combines structured body work with narrative and cognitive processing.

It can also be integrated with:

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
 - Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)
 - Internal Family Systems (IFS)
 - Schema Therapy
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Who Can Benefit?

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy can help:

- Adults, adolescents, and children
- Individuals living with PTSD, complex trauma, anxiety, depression, and panic attacks
- People with histories of abuse, neglect, or accidents
- Clients experiencing chronic pain, migraines, fibromyalgia, or bruxism
- Those struggling with attachment issues, relationship challenges, or grief

SP is not typically used as a standalone intervention for acute psychiatric crises, but it can complement medical and psychological care.

Evidence and Research

- Bessel van der Kolk's research highlights that body-based therapies improve trauma recovery where medication or talk therapy alone may not.

- Daniel Siegel emphasises the importance of integration between body, mind, and relationships.
- Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory explains why clients experience fight, flight, or freeze states and how SP helps regulate these states.

These findings confirm SP's growing reputation as an evidence-informed, trauma-sensitive approach.

Why Choose a Qualified Practitioner?

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy requires specialist training and certification through the Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute. At Energetics Institute, our therapists are:

- Certified in Sensorimotor Psychotherapy
- Members of PACFA, ACA, and AHPRA
- Experienced in working with trauma across individuals, couples, and families
- Trained in integrating SP with other evidence-based modalities

This ensures sessions are safe, ethical, and effective.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many sessions will I need?

This varies, but clients often notice changes within the first 6 to 10 sessions, with longer-term therapy recommended for complex trauma.

Is SP covered by Medicare or health funds?

Medicare rebates may apply with a GP Mental Health Care Plan when sessions are delivered by registered practitioners. Some private health insurers also provide rebates.

Can I do Sensorimotor Psychotherapy online?

Yes. Telehealth sessions are available and can be effective, though some clients prefer in-person sessions for body-based awareness work.

Conclusion

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy is an empowering, integrative approach to trauma recovery. By working with both mind and body, it offers new ways to release stored trauma, restore nervous system balance, and build resilience.

At Energetics Institute in Perth, our team of trauma-informed therapists is here to guide you through this process with professionalism, compassion, and care.