



STILL HERE.

Your Personal Toolkit for Navigating Hard Times

Facilitated by Soft Spaces Therapy

FACILITATORS



Meg (she/they)

A liberation-oriented psychotherapist, writer, journalist, poet, and co-founder of Soft Spaces Therapy.



Nishtha (she/her)

A neuro-queer affirmative psychotherapist supporting exploration, expression, and care.



Sreenidhi (she/her)

Expressive arts psychotherapist, dancer, and writer exploring healing through movement, creativity, and human connection.



Karina (she/her)

Queer, neurodivergent. Liberation-based trainee therapist. Anti-carceral, justice-oriented care.

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Navigating the Toolkit

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Your Personal Toolkit for Navigating Hard Times

Soft Spaces Therapy · Meghna Prakash · 2026
meg@softspacetherapy.in · softspacetherapy.in



This booklet belongs to you.

It was made to be carried, dog-eared, drawn in, returned to. The tools here are evidence-based, trauma-informed, and grounded in queer liberation psychology. They work on a Tuesday commute, in a bathroom break, at 2am — not just in a therapy room.

You don't need to be in crisis to use them. You don't need to explain yourself to use them. You just need to be here. And you are.

1. YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM IS NOT BROKEN

When you feel overwhelmed, shut down, hypervigilant, or dissociated — your nervous system is not malfunctioning. It is doing exactly what it was designed to do: protect you.

Dr. Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory identifies three states our nervous system moves through:

SAFE & SOCIAL (Ventral Vagal) — Connected, curious, regulated. This is where healing happens.

MOBILISED (Sympathetic) — Alert, anxious, fight-or-flight. High activation — ready for action.

SHUTDOWN (Dorsal Vagal) — Numb, collapsed, frozen. The body's last-resort protection.

Minority stress — the chronic pressure of existing in a world that actively legislates against your identity — keeps the nervous system in the upper two states far more than it should. The tools in this booklet help you find your way back to the first.

The Window of Tolerance

Your 'window' is the zone where you can feel your feelings and still function. Trauma, grief, and systemic stress narrow this window. These tools widen it — gently, over time.

2. RIGHT NOW — IMMEDIATE GROUNDING

Use these when you feel overwhelmed, panicked, dissociated, or just very far away from yourself.

5-4-3-2-1 SENSORY GROUNDING

Slowly name out loud or in your mind:

- 5 things you can SEE right now
- 4 things you can physically TOUCH — and touch them
- 3 things you can HEAR — even quiet sounds
- 2 things you can SMELL
- 1 thing you can TASTE

Take a breath after each sense. This works by bringing the prefrontal cortex (thinking brain) back online when the amygdala is running the show.

BOX BREATHING (4-4-4-4)

Inhale through the nose 4 counts

Hold 4 counts

Exhale through the mouth 4 counts

Hold 4 counts

Repeat 3–4 times. Used by emergency responders to regulate under extreme stress.

THE PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGH

Step 1: Inhale through the nose (normal breath)

Step 2: At the top, take one more short inhale through the nose (double inhale)

Step 3: Long, slow exhale through the mouth — let it all go

Repeat 1–3 times.

The fastest known method to reduce acute physiological arousal. Researched at Stanford by Dr. Andrew Huberman. Works in under 30 seconds.

Safe Place Visualisation

Close your eyes if that's comfortable — or soften your gaze.

- Imagine a place — real or invented — where you feel safe and at ease.
 - It might be a room, a landscape, a memory, a future moment.
 - Notice: what do you see? What sounds are there? What does the air feel like?
 - Spend 3–5 minutes here. You can return here whenever you need.
- (If 'safe' feels too charged, try 'brave place' or 'my place' instead.)

3. SOUND & MOVEMENT

Your body has its own intelligence. Sound and movement bypass the thinking mind and speak directly to the nervous system.

HUMMING (Vagal Nerve Activation)

Sit or stand comfortably. Take a breath.

- Breathe in through the nose.
- On the exhale, hum — any tone, any note, any length.
- Feel the vibration in your chest, throat, lips.
- Repeat for 3–5 breaths.

Why it works: humming activates the vagus nerve through vibration in the throat, slowing heart rate and shifting the nervous system from activation toward rest. A UCLA study found it increases vagal tone by 37%. Om, humming a tune, or simply 'mmm' all count.

Watch On Youtube

Hum to Activate the Vagus Nerve (8 min guided): [youtube.com/watch?v=QSAvPggQ2L0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSAvPggQ2L0)

Irene Lyon — Nervous System & Somatic Healing channel: [youtube.com/c/IreneLyon](https://www.youtube.com/c/IreneLyon)
Vagus Nerve Reset — Polyvagal Exercises (12 min): [youtube.com/watch?v=eFVOFfMc_uo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFVOFfMc_uo)

SOMATIC SHAKING

Stand with feet hip-width apart. Soften your knees slightly.

- Start with tiny bounces in your knees — just a gentle pulse.
- Let the shake travel up: hips, belly, chest, arms.
- Don't force it — just allow the tremor.
- Continue for 3–5 minutes. Then stand still and notice.

TRE (Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises, Dr. David Berceli) uses the body's natural tremor mechanism to discharge accumulated stress and trauma. A 2017 NIH study found 10 minutes reduced PTSD hyperarousal by 41%.

Watch On Youtube

TRE Full Instructions — Dr. David Berceli (official): [youtube.com/watch?v=FeUioDuJjFI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeUioDuJjFI)
Somatic Yoga for the Vagus Nerve (30 min): [youtube.com/watch?v=pmHYbxyZ5JI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmHYbxyZ5JI)

BUTTERFLY HUG

- Cross your arms over your chest, hands resting on opposite shoulders.
- Gently alternate tapping left, right, left, right — slowly.
- Breathe slowly. Continue for 1–3 minutes.

Bilateral stimulation (used in EMDR therapy) helps process distressing thoughts and feelings. This version can be done anywhere, anytime.

4.EFT TAPPING — A COMPLETE GUIDE

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) tapping combines gentle pressure on acupressure points with verbal acknowledgment of what you're feeling. It has strong evidence for reducing anxiety, PTSD symptoms, and cortisol levels (Stapleton 2019; Church 2013; Feinstein 2022).

Research with LGBTQ+ populations specifically found significant reductions in internalized stigma and psychological distress after EFT sessions (Tully 2021).

Tapping Points

	Point	Location	Phrase
KC	Karate Chop	Side of the hand, below the little finger	Setup Statements (3×)
TH	Top of Head	Crown of the head, centre	I am still here.
EB	Eyebrow	Inner edge of the eyebrow, above the nose	Even this feeling is valid.
SE	Side of Eye	Outer edge of the eye socket (on bone)	I allow myself to feel this.
UE	Under Eye	Under the eye, on the top of the cheekbone	My body is doing its best.
UN	Under Nose	Between the nose and the upper lip	I am safe in this moment.
CH	Chin	Midpoint between lower lip and chin	I choose to be gentle with myself.
CB	Collarbone	Below the clavicle, on either side	I belong to myself.
UA	Under Arm	About 4 inches below the armpit	I am held. I am home.

Setup Statement (Say on the Karate Chop Point, 3 times)

The setup statement has two parts: naming what you feel honestly, then offering yourself acceptance. You don't have to believe it fully — just say it.

"Even though my body is carrying so much fear and grief right now, I deeply and completely love and accept myself."

"Even though I feel exhausted from surviving, I honour everything I have made it through."

"Even though the world feels unsafe today, I am here, with people who see me."

"Even though I hold so much uncertainty, I choose to come home to myself."

Tapping Sequence Phrases (7 taps on each point)

Eyebrow: Even this much fear is just information.

Side of Eye: I am allowed to feel all of this.

Under Eye: My identity is not a legal question.

Under Nose: I am allowed to take up space.

Chin: I honour this body that has carried me here.

Collarbone: I choose to be gentle with myself.

Under Arm: I belong to myself. I always have.

Top of Head: I am still here. I am still here. I am still here.

Run 2–3 full rounds. After the last round, sit in silence for 1–2 minutes and notice: any shift in sensation, emotion, or thought. There is no right answer.

WATCH ON TOUTUBE

EFT Tapping for Anxiety (Nick Ortner, 3 min): youtube.com/watch?v=02bN4JFx10Y

EFT for Trauma Healing (PTSD, full session): youtube.com/watch?v=qeCDWylqAyU

Brad Yates — 20+ years of trauma-informed tapping: youtube.com/@tapwithbrad

Julie Schiffman — PTSD, panic, anxiety tapping: youtube.com/user/Julieschiffman

5. NARRATIVE THERAPY & IFS — YOUR INNER WORK

Narrative therapy (Michael White & David Epston) invites you to separate yourself from problem-saturated stories and re-author your own. The law has written a story about your body. That story is incomplete. You are the author.

Journaling Prompts- Narrative Therapy

EXTERNALISING:

- Give the problem a name: What do you call this feeling/situation? (e.g. 'The Exhaustion', 'The Weight', 'The Noise')
- When did it arrive? Does it come in waves or stay constantly?
- What does it want from you? What does it make difficult?

PREFERRED STORY:

- When have you felt most fully yourself? What were you doing? Who was with you?
- What values do you hold that the problem hasn't been able to touch?
- What do you want to name on your story that the world often ignores?

WITNESS PROMPT:

- Write a letter to yourself — from the part of you that has always known who you are.

IFS — Your Parts

Internal Family Systems (Richard Schwartz) recognises that we contain many 'parts' — each with its own feelings, beliefs, and protective purpose. None are broken. All deserve compassion.

JOURNALING PROMPTS — IFS

NOTICING YOUR PARTS:

- Which part of you has been working hardest this week?
- What does that part believe it's protecting you from?
- Can you turn toward it with curiosity — not try to fix or push it away?

SELF-LED INQUIRY:

- What part of you feels most scared right now?
- What does it need to hear from you?
- Can you say to that part: 'I see you. I've got you.'

UNBURDENING (longer practice):

- Find the part that carries a belief like 'I am too much' or 'I don't deserve safety'.
- Ask: Where did you learn this? How old were you?
- Can you offer that younger version of yourself what they needed then?

6. ART PRACTICES

You don't need to be an artist. These are not about skill — they are about making space for what language sometimes can't hold.

The Map of Me

On paper: draw or write a map of who you are — outside anyone else's definition. Your map can hold: places, people, words, colours, symbols, languages, memories, futures, things that have no name yet.

- What is at the centre?
- What borders do you draw? What lies beyond them?
- What exists in you that needs no translation?
- What do you want to name on this map that the world often ignores?

There is no wrong map. This one belongs to you.

Body Mapping

Draw the outline of a body (yours, or a generic figure).

- Where do you feel strength? Mark it in one colour.
- Where do you hold tension or grief? Mark it in another.
- Where do you feel most alive? Mark it.
- Where do you want more softness? Mark it there.

Body mapping originated in HIV/AIDS communities in South Africa as a collective healing practice. It has since been used widely with trans and queer communities globally.

Found Poetry

Take an old newspaper, magazine, or printed text. Cut out or circle words and phrases.

- Arrange them into a poem — any order, any shape.
- This is your language. Not the state's.

Bonus: write an erasure poem directly on a printed copy of the Amendment Bill.



PODMAPPING INTERVENTION

- In the top left box, write your name and the title of your map. Add today's date, and a future date to revisit your map and reflect on how your pod has grown. You might want to mark this in your calendar or check in with a friend for support.
- Inside the bold circles, you can add a more specific name for your pod if it helps. If not, you can leave it blank or use the space in a way that feels meaningful to you.
- Each bold circle is a pod member. Write the names of people you trust and want in your pod. You can include individuals, or pairs/households if that feels right.
- The dotted area is for "movable" people, those you could invite closer with more time, trust, or conversation.
- The larger circles on the edges are for communities, networks, or groups that can support you.

Pod Map - SOIL: A Transformative Justice Project	
YOUR NAME:	NAME OF MAP:
DATE MAPPED:	PROGRESS CHECK DATE:

Adapted from the Podmapping SOIL, A transformative justice project, developed by Mia Mingus

WHAT THIS CLIMATE IS STIRRING IN YOU: THE ALARM SYSTEM

A NARRATIVE THERAPY INTERVENTION



PROMPT

Describe: 1. What sets it off? 2. How loud is it? 3. What is it trying to prevent?

4. What does it get blamed for?

Now write a short paragraph titled: "What This Alarm Has Correctly Predicted."

Then another titled:

"What It Was Never Taught to Expect."

End with:

"If this alarm trusted me more, it might learn that ____."



THE MAP OF ME

- On paper: draw or write a map of who you are, outside anyone else's definition.
- Your map can hold: places, people, words, colours, symbols, languages, memories, futures.
- What is at the centre of your map?
- What borders do you draw? What lies beyond them?
- What do you want to name on this map that the world often ignores?
- What exists in you that needs no translation?
- No artistic skill needed.



EFT AFFIRMATIONS

- I am still here – and I honour my survival.
- Even though I carry grief and rage, my feelings are valid and real.
- Even though the world narrows, I know who I am.
- I am not alone in this.
- I choose, slowly and gently, to come home to myself.



7. WHEN EVERYTHING FEELS LIKE TOO MUCH

There are moments when the tools above won't feel like enough. That is not a failure. It is information. Here is what to do.

Crisis and Overwhelm - What to do?

RIGHT NOW:

- Put your feet on the floor. Feel the weight of your body on the chair.
- Say out loud: 'I am in [location]. I am [your name]. The date is [today].'
- Name 3 things that are true about this moment — sensory, concrete things.

CONTAIN THE FEELING:

- Imagine a box — any size, any material, any colour.
- Place the overwhelming feeling inside it.
- You are not suppressing it. You are putting it somewhere safe until you are ready.

REACH OUT:

- Soft Spaces Therapy: meg@softspacetherapy.in · softspacetherapy.in
- iCall (TISS): 9152987821 · icallhelpline.org
- Vandrevalla Foundation (24/7): 1860-2662-345
- The Humsafar Trust: 022-26673800 · humsafar.info
- iDREAM Project (trans-specific, legal support): idreamproject.org
- SAATHII (national): saathii.org

8. COMMUNITY & RESOURCES

Organisations in India

- The Humsafar Trust (Mumbai): humsafar.info— LGBTQ+ mental health, legal aid, community
- SAATHII (national): saathii.org— health, rights, queer community support
- Trans Rights Now Collective (Chennai): Grace Banu —Dalit trans rights, community mutual aid
- Sappho for Equality (Kolkata): sapphokolkata.in —lesbian, bisexual, trans women
- Swabhumi (Delhi): —trans and intersex support
- Naz Foundation India: nazindia.org— sexual health and rights
- iDREAM Project: idreamproject.org —trans legal documentation, rights
- Yaariyan (LGBTQ+ youth): — peer support, community building

FILMS, BOOKS & VOICES THAT SEE US

Curated from recommendations by queer critics, community members, and publications including Out, BFI Flare, Letterboxd Queer, and the Lesbrary.

BOOKS

	Title	Why It Matters
■	Kari — Amruta Patil (2008)	India's first queer graphic novel. A young woman navigating love, loss and identity in Mumbai. Visually stunning and deeply felt.
■	The Truth About Me — A. Revathi	A landmark memoir by Tamil trans activist A. Revathi. The first autobiography of a trans woman in India. Essential.
■	Yaraana: Gay Writing from South Asia — Ed. Hoshang Merchant	A foundational anthology of queer South Asian writing. Poetry, fiction, testimony.
■	En Jeevan (My Life) — A. Revathi	A. Revathi's second memoir — deeper, more political. Tamil original.
■	How It Happened — Kiran Manral	Sensitive, warm fiction centering a gay man in modern India.
■	Stone Butch Blues — Leslie Feinberg	A foundational text of trans and working-class queer literature. Free PDF available at lesliefeinberg.net
■	Nevada — Imogen Binnie	Sharp, funny, essential trans fiction that became an underground classic.
■	Gender Queer — Maia Kobabe	The most challenged book in America. A graphic memoir about gender identity and sexuality. Tender and precise.
■	Pleasure Activism — Adrienne Maree Brown	On joy, desire, and liberation as political practice. For when resistance needs to feel good.
■	Real Queer America — Samantha Allen	On queer survival and community in unexpected places. Generous and moving.

Films - indian

	Title	Why It Matters
	Fire (1996) — Deepa Mehta	Two women fall in love in a Delhi household. Groundbreaking, controversial, and still radical.
	Aligarh (2015) — Hansal Mehta	Based on the true story of Prof. Siras, suspended for being gay. Manoj Bajpayee's finest performance.
	Sheer Qorma (2021) — Faraz Arif Ansari	A love story between women. Shabana Azmi, Divya Dutta. Qualified for BAFTAs. Gorgeous and necessary.
	Geeli Pucchi (2021, short) — Konkona Sen Sharma	A Dalit woman and a queer woman navigate the intersection of caste and sexuality. 30 minutes that reshape everything.
	Made in Heaven (Amazon Prime, 2019—)	A gay man and a woman navigate high-society Delhi weddings. The best queer writing in Indian streaming.
	Chitrangada (2012) — Rituparno Ghosh	A trans director's most personal film. Rituparno Ghosh directed and starred. Exquisitely layered.
	My Brother... Nikhil (2005) — Onir	India's first mainstream film about an HIV+ gay man. Still holds up.
	I Am (2011) — Onir	Anthology film including gay and queer stories. Shot largely with crowdfunded money.

Voices to Follow

- › **A. Revathi** — Tamil trans activist, author, actor: one of India's most important living voices on trans experience
- › **Grace Banu** — Dalit trans rights activist, Chennai. Founder of Trans Rights Now Collective
- › **Akkai Padmashali** — trans activist, Bangalore. Samara Karnataka
- › **Jaya Sharma** — trans activist, educator and writer
- › **Rituparna Neog** — trans activist and poet
- › **Dr. Aqsa Shaikh** — trans doctor and academic, Hamdard Institute, Delhi
- › **Laxmi Narayan Tripathi** — hijra activist, first trans person to represent Asia-Pacific at the UN
- › **Daniella Mendonca** — Goa-based trans activist and artist

Films & TV — International (Critics' Picks)

	Title	Why It Matters
	Moonlight (2016) — Barry Jenkins	Oscar Best Picture. A Black gay man's coming of age across three chapters. Transcendent.
	Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019) — Céline Sciamma	A painter and her subject. Every frame is about the act of seeing and being seen. BFI top 10 queer films.
	Carol (2015) — Todd Haynes	BFI Flare's #1 queer film of all time. A love story told with devastating restraint.
	Tangerine (2015) — Sean Baker	Trans sex workers in Los Angeles on Christmas Eve. Shot on iPhone. Alive and urgent.
	The Handmaiden (2016) — Park Chan-wook	A sapphic thriller that dismantles every power structure it inhabits. Korean cinema at its peak.
	Disclosure (2020, documentary) — Laverne Cox (executive producer)	The definitive documentary on trans representation in media. Mandatory viewing.
	Paris is Burning (1990) — Jennie Livingston	New York's drag ball culture in the 1980s. Heartbreaking and joyful. The DNA of so much queer culture.
	Brokeback Mountain (2005) — Ang Lee	Still one of the great films about love, loneliness and the cost of hiding.
	Weekend (2011) — Andrew Haigh	Two men. One weekend. Quiet, honest, devastating. BFI #2 queer film.
	Pose (FX, 2018–2021)	Trans-led cast, set in New York's ball culture. Produced with trans writers and advisors throughout.
	It's a Sin (2021) — Russell T Davies	Five friends during the AIDS crisis in 1980s London. Among the best TV ever made.
	Gentleman Jack (BBC/HBO) — Sally Wainwright	Based on the real diaries of Anne Lister, a 19th-century queer landowner. Joyful and fierce.
	Feel Good (Netflix, 2020–2021)	Mae Martin's semi-autobiographical comedy about addiction, gender, and love. Brilliant.
	Sort Of (CBC/HBO Max, 2021–)	A non-binary Pakistani-Canadian navigating family, work and identity. One of the most nuanced queer shows made.
	Heartstopper (Netflix, 2022–)	A tender, joyful queer teenage love story. Genuinely healing to watch.



**YOU SHOWED UP. THAT IS
ENOUGH. NOBODY CAN
WRITE OUT OUR EXISTENCE.
WE WILL ALWAYS BE HERE.**

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·meg@softspacetherapy.in · softspacetherapy.in
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