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Art by Rachel Elise

“Finding Solid Ground”: **Transforming Treatment** **for Complex Trauma &** **Dissociation**

Bethany Brand, Ph.D.
Ruth Lanius, M.D., Ph.D.

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Acknowledgement & thanks:

- ❖ to **colleagues** Hygge Schielke & Francesca Schiavone
- ❖ **To the individuals who live with dissociation** who have given us crucial feedback throughout the development of *Finding Solid Ground*
- ❖ **to the TOP DD studies' research participants** whose input improved *Finding Solid Ground*

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TOP DD Study Researchers

- ▶ Bethany Brand, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Towson, Maryland, USA
- ▶ Hygge Schielke, Ph.D., Co-Investigator, Toronto, CA

Scientific Consultants:

- ▶ Karen Putnam, Ph.D. & Frank Putnam, M.D., Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA
- ▶ Ruth Lanius, Ph.D., M.D. and Paul Frewen, Ph.D., London, Ontario, Canada
- ▶ Richard Loewenstein, M.D., and Amie Myrick L.C.P.C., Baltimore, Maryland, USA
- ▶ Ellen Jepsen, M.D., Ph.D., Modum Bad, Norway
- ▶ Kathy Steele, M.N, C.S., Atlanta, Georgia, USA
- ▶ Suzette Boon, Ph.D., The Netherlands

- ▶ **TOP DD RAs:** Shae Nester, Nick Pierorazio & Jerrica Robertson

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Finding Solid Ground Program

Developed through

- 15 years of research
- Input from those with lived experience
 - In-person group participant feedback
 - Participants' feedback
- Neuroscientifically informed

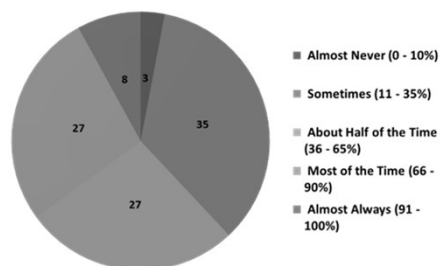
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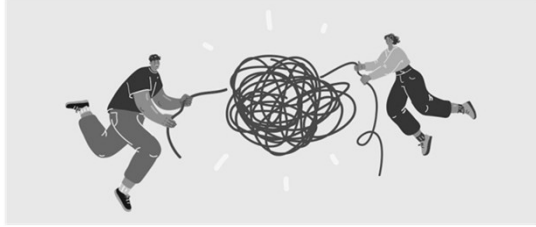
I experience my emotions as overwhelming and out of control.



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A Psychoeducational Program for Therapists and Traumatized Individuals



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Do Therapists Benefit From Using *Finding Solid Ground?*

Therapists answered 5 questions:

- ▶ *Why patients become unsafe*
- ▶ *Ways patients can cope with urges to be unsafe*
- ▶ *Warning signs that patients may become unsafe*
- ▶ *Ways patients can safely manage overwhelming feelings*
- ▶ *Ways dissociative patients can manage intrusive thoughts, feelings, or images about traumas*



Stabilization Knowledge Total Score

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Myrick, Schielke, & Brand, 2024

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Methodology

- Adjunctive education & skills training program
- *No patient excluded* based on severity of safety problems, co-morbid disorders, medications

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3 Key Elements of Program

- Videos: reasons traumatized people engage in risky or unsafe behavior
- Journaling: make a list of reasons why you engage in risky, unsafe behavior; make a list of healthier alternatives
- Skills Practice: use healthier coping list

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Finding Solid Ground (FSG) Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)

- 291 therapists participated with one patient and both reviewed FSG educational materials
- Therapist-patient teams had access to FSG for 1 year

(Brand et al. 2022; Schielke et al. 2022)

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The Importance of the Sequence

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Finding Solid Ground Program

Teaches patients 4 crucial skills:

1. Grounding
2. *Separating past from present*
3. *Healthy ways for emotion regulation*
4. *Getting healthy needs met safely*

(Brand et al. 2022; Schielke et al., 2022; Loewenstein, 2006)

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Finding Solid Ground Program

Teaches patients 4 crucial skills:

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(Brand et al. 2022; Schielke et al., 2022; Loewenstein, 2006)

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Grounding
Locating the
Eight Senses

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Where am I sensing things from?

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8 Modules - Finding Solid Ground

Grounding

Prevent getting overwhelmed by learning how to help yourself when feeling too much or too little

Separating Past from Present

Noticing when the present is safer than past, being aware of current resources, learning how to contain traumatic intrusions

Additional Foundations

How best to help yourself make progress towards getting and feeling safer

Getting and Feeling Safer, Part 1

Getting healthy needs met safely; learning how to recognize and interrupt patterns that can contribute to risky, unhealthy, or unsafe behavior, or get in the way of getting and feeling safer

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8 Modules - Finding Solid Ground

Addressing Trauma-Based Thoughts

Learning how to shift trauma-based thoughts to healing-focused thinking

Getting and Feeling Safer, Part 2

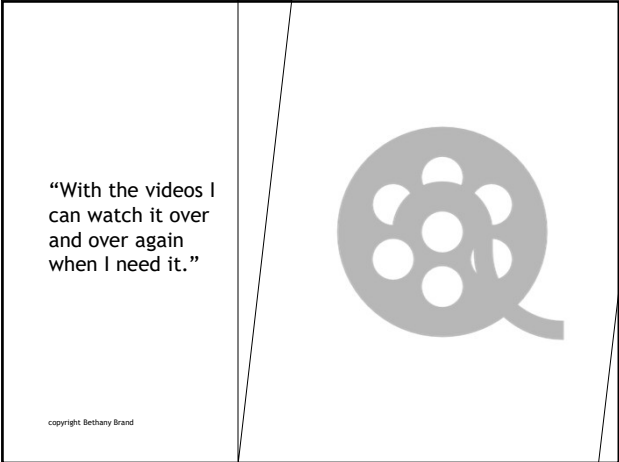
Learning more ways to help yourself recognize, interrupt, and reduce patterns that can contribute to risky, unhealthy, or unsafe behavior

Improving Your Relationship with Emotions, Body Sensations, Aspects of Self

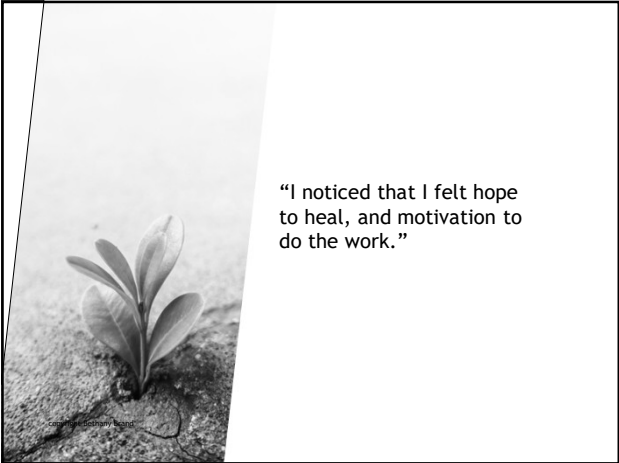
Sticking with the Process and Building on Progress

work together, learn together

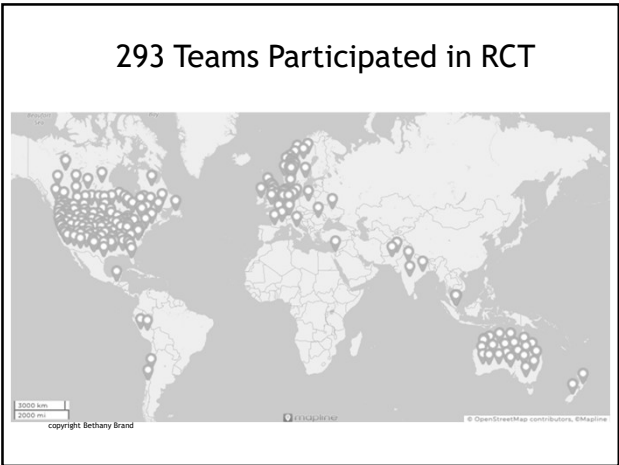
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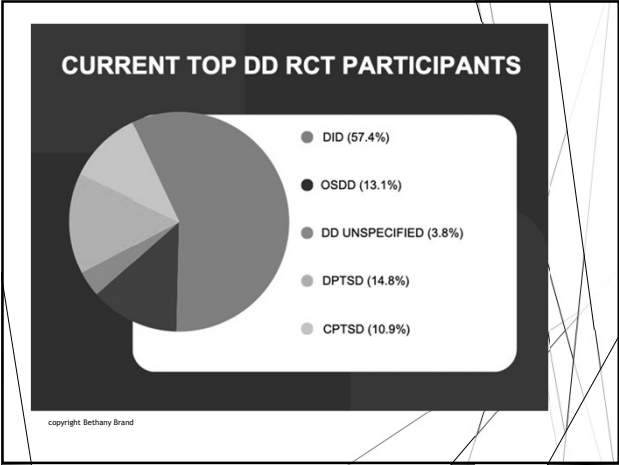
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Therapist Reported Initial Patient Safety

	Any	0	1	2	3 or more
Suicide attempts last 6 months	7.5%	92.6%	3.2%	1.1%	3.2%
Hospitalizations last 6 months	9.6%	90.4%	2.1% <1 week	3.2% Between 1 - 4 weeks	4.3% >4 weeks

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N = 92 preliminary sample

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Psychological Trauma:
Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy

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DOI: 10.1891/1081-1203.12.1.1

<https://doi.org/10.1891/1081-1203.12.1.1>

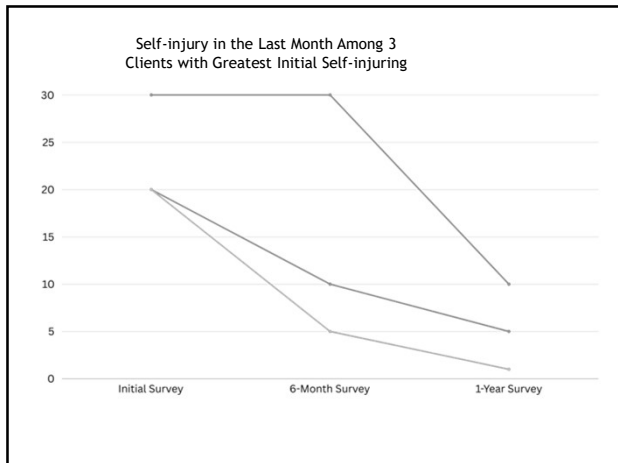
A Randomized Controlled Trial Assists Individuals With Complex Trauma and Dissociation in *Finding Solid Ground*

Bethany L. Brand¹, Hygge J. Schielke², Karen Putnam³, Nicholas A. Pierorazio⁴, M. Shae Nester⁵,
Jerrica Robertson⁶, Annie C. Myrick⁷, Richard J. Loewenstein^{8,9}, Frank W. Putnam¹, Kathy Steele²,
Suzette Boon¹⁰, and Ruth Lanius^{11,12}

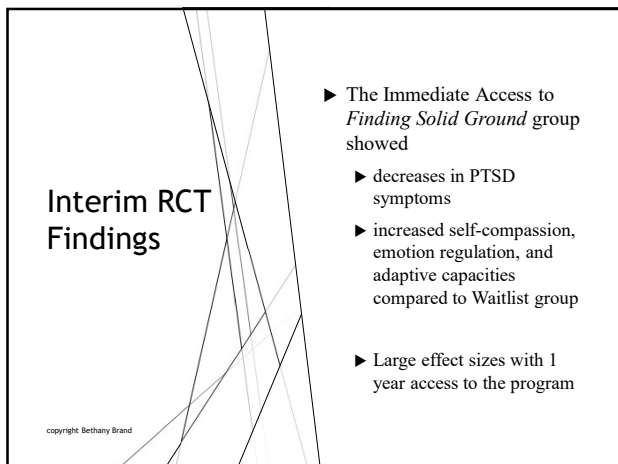
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Objective: Evidence-based treatments are urgently needed for individuals with trauma-related dissociation (TRD), including severe dissociative disorders, the dissociative posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) subtype, and complex PTSD (ICD-10). TRD is strongly associated with severe trauma, a more refractory treatment course, and high suicidality/did self-harm. We evaluated changes in symptoms and adaptive capacities in individuals with high TRD through participation in an adjunctive online program based on the *Finding Solid Ground* (FSG) psychoeducational program. **Method:** We provide an interim report on an ongoing, randomized controlled trial of FSG as an international sample of 291 participants with dissociative identity disorder, dissociative PTSD, other specified dissociative disorders, complex PTSD, or dissociative disorder, unspecified (ICD-10). Outpatient therapists continued to provide psychotherapy. Participants were randomly assigned to either receive immediate access to FSG or be on a 6-month waitlist before accessing FSG. We did not exclude for suicidality, non-suicidal self-injury, recent or concurrent hospitalization, or substance abuse. **Results:** Although initially comparable on outcome measures, at 6 months into the study, the immediate FSG group showed significant improvement in emotion regulation, PTSD symptoms, self-compassion, and adaptive capacities in comparison to the waitlist group. At 12

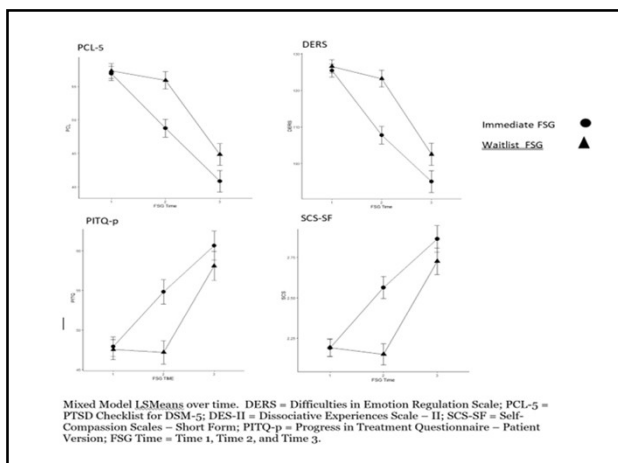
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Places Conducting Studies about Finding Solid Ground



Harvard's McLean Hill Center -
Drs. Kaufman, LeBois & Robison



Purdue University's Dr. Laura
Hawkins



Modum Bad hospital in Norway -
Dr. Ellen Jepsen

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What Do Clients Say about what in the FSG Program is Helpful?

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Change Facilitating Processes

- Subthemes:
 - Heightened Human Connection
 - Receiving External Empathy and Compassion
 - Contributing to Something Bigger
 - Improved Therapeutic Relationship and Work



(Pierorazio et al., 2025)

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Change Facilitating Processes

"I think the videos are very important - to also see a face telling you. It makes it more motivating, inspiring and encouraging, than just reading text. It was helpful to fill out the questions and the commitment to myself by participating in a the program. It means a lot to me to know that the program is based on experience working with many others who have experienced complex trauma and dissociative disorders. It gives me extra faith in the program. Thank you very much for creating this helpful program, for all the important work you do and for allowing me to participate. I hope many other traumatized people will have the opportunity to participate in the program. I really recommend it."



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"When I was a little girl, I never learned how to regulate feelings, what the feelings were named. I didn't know how to express or speak because of my neglect at home.
So in my mind I had a color chart for my feelings, and a system that I understood when feelings took over.

So when I was patient (at Modum Bad hospital in Norway where they had FSG groups and art therapy sessions), that was a groundbreaking moment for me! I could suddenly speak the language I understood and knew how to speak!!

After that, I developed and expressed my inner language/feelings on the canvas.

Colors, brushes and canvas saved my soul in a very a special way.

And I am so thankful!"

Ida Hellevammen

Ida Hellevammen




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FSG in Groups



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Join Bethany on
Instagram:



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Join my email list to get our publications and
future trainings:

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More about FSG:

BethanyBrand.com

FindingSolidGround.info

Thank you!

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