

# Healthy Futures News + Views

An Educational Newsletter Covering Eating Disorder Treatment and Other Mental Health Issues ~November 2014 Vol. 3, Issue 3

## What is Somatic Experiencing?

The form of therapy known as “Somatic Experiencing” (SE) is designed to help people reconnect with their bodies and move toward healing. It was developed by Dr. Peter Levine and introduced in his groundbreaking book *Waking the Tiger* in 1997.

Healthy Futures is a national leader in the incorporating SE therapy within its eating disorder treatment program.

“(Dr. Levine) watched animals in the wild and noticed how they weren’t traumatized. And so he applied that into therapy sessions where a person could complete self-protective responses in order to release blocked energy – blocked energy from different kinds of traumas,” said Healthy Futures team member Kim DiRé, a certified Somatic Experiencing practitioner (SEP).

Healthy Futures director, Mia Elwood, also an SEP, recently teamed up with DiRé to create a series of short videos to help explain Somatic Experiencing and dispel some myths surrounding it.



**Kim DiRé, left, and Mia Elwood offer a series of short video presentations about Somatic Experiencing. The videos can be seen on Healthy Futures’ Youtube channel.**

“SE is not voodoo. It’s not something made up. It’s based on science,” Elwood said.

While SE often can be similar to traditional psychotherapy, an SE practitioner is specifically skilled to observe slight changes to a patient’s physiology, which can indicate where trauma has negatively affected a person’s natural responses. It is often described as “blocked energy.”

This unresolved energy can then manifest in other symptoms – physically, behaviorally or mentally.

“A lot of people think trauma is some really horrific event that happens, but from the SE perspective we really look at it more globally as anything that disrupts the natural healing abilities of our nervous system,” Elwood said.

SE is not about re-experiencing the trauma, Elwood emphasizes, but letting the body discharge the unresolved energy naturally. “SE is a very gentle, natural treatment that helps to release bound up energy.”

To learn more, visit

the Healthy Futures Youtube channel at [Youtube.com/HealthyFuturesAZ](https://www.youtube.com/HealthyFuturesAZ), or click on the Resources page at [www.HealthyFuturesAZ.com](http://www.HealthyFuturesAZ.com).

*Healthy Futures offers Arizona’s longest-running Intensive Outpatient Eating Disorder Program.*

*It is located at 8065 N. 85th Way in Scottsdale, Arizona. For more information, see [HealthyFuturesAZ.com](http://HealthyFuturesAZ.com) online, or call (480) 451-8500.*

# ARFID patient writes about therapy process

*Below is an essay written by a Healthy Futures client about the first steps of treatment for her eating disorder. We print it (with full permission) because it wonderfully captures the range of strong emotions that coincide with seeking treatment and beginning the process.*

*There's hope and some happiness about naming the disorder, but also trepidation, worry and fear of the unknown as a difficult-and-rewarding journey toward a healthy future begins.*

I don't belong here. This isn't me. I don't fit in. ARFID. Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder. Or in other words – my eating disorder.

For as long as I can remember, I've been a picky eater. I only eat certain foods and I tend to restrict most foods.

After 15-plus years of having this "ARFID" it was time for me to get serious help. I felt the need to go inpatient, by my mom found a better solution – Healthy Futures. Being like this for about 16 years is far too much for me. It was time for me to change. It was time for me to join intensive outpatient (IOP) and group therapy.

I stepped out of the car and the hot Arizona air burnt my skin. I was a quick, nerve-wracking car ride. I had no idea what to expect. I walked up to the small office building and opened the door. I didn't know what I was about to walk into.

To my surprise, it was a really cozy environment. After a long, agonizing wait, out walked a cheerful woman named Mia. She guided me into a room with two couches and directed me to sit anywhere.

I sank into the soft, plush couch with my heart pumping out of my chest. She opened her laptop and started bombarding me with questions. I summarized my life story to her and she sat there nodding and typing away. After what seemed like an eternity and felt like I was on trial, Mia came to a conclusion.

"You have ARFID."

I sat still and speechless.

"Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder," she continued.

I kept staring blankly at her.

"In other words, an extreme picky eater," she finished.

I had an eating disorder. And I had to join Healthy Futures, which provided me with an individual therapist, a dietitian, and a group of six or so other adolescents with eating disorders.

The next Monday was the beginning of group therapy. I had to show up at Healthy Futures a few hours before the group actually started. My anxiety shot through the

roof as I opened the door to that small building again. I was pulled into an office room in the back of the building where I was besieged with even more paperwork.

My eyes filled with tears as I wrote in each answer. I was shaking, nervous, and afraid. I heard the subtle tick of the clock in the back of the dead silent room.

When my time was up, it was time to go back in the lobby to wait for group to start. I sat peevishly in the corner of the lobby with my parents.

When a sweet girl, no older than 15, walked up to me and welcomed me, she took a lot of the stress away, but I was still overly anxious.

Group started at 5:30 and I plopped down in the plush couch again and sat awkwardly and silent. I didn't know how I was going to do this for 20 weeks.

After an hour of what my therapist called "processing," we went into the kitchen for dinner. I picked at my soggy peanut butter sandwich in silence, trying to hold back tears. After dinner we went back into the room and finished therapy.

I was completely silent on the car ride home, choking back my tears and swallowing a lump in my throat. But I know I couldn't quit. I had to do this for my health. Even if I was scared to death.

I have been in the intensive outpatient therapy for 10 weeks now. I am halfway done. Every Monday and Wednesday I have group therapy. Once a week I meet with my individual therapist and every other week I meet with my dietitian.

Therapy isn't easy. Ever since I was little I've been to countless therapists and doctors but nothing helped. I lost all hope – until I joined Healthy Futures.

Healthy Futures has changed my life immensely. I am less anxious and I am opening my palate up and trying new foods. I feel blessed to have found Healthy Futures. I am not 100 percent recovered and I know I may never be 100 percent recovered, but I will spend the rest of my life recovering and fighting to stay healthy.

Having an eating disorder has brought many challenges in my life, but it also has its good side. I have met a lot of inspirational people and I've learned a lot about myself.

Ten hours of therapy a week is really stressful but I still manage to live every day with a smile on my face and try to stay positive about everything in life.

Everything in the world happens for a reason and me getting my eating disorder has made me a stronger person. I continue to make progress every day and hopefully I will graduate on my set date and I can live the rest of my life eating disorder free!