

4 Elements Exercises for Stress Reduction **(Earth -Air -Water -Fire)**

Elan Shapiro, 2012

INSTRUCTIONS

- **1-EARTH** : GROUNDING , SAFETY in the PRESENT /REALITY.... *“take a minute or two to “land”... to be here now... place both feet on the ground, feel the chair supporting you.... Look around & notice 3 new things...What do you see.... What do you hear ?”*
(don’t ask this if it draws attention to on-going dangers)
- [Attention is directed outwards to the reality of safety in the present]

- **2-AIR**: BREATHING for CENTERING

Breathing –you can do your favourite breathing exercise here. Option: *“breathe in through your nose (for abdominal breathing) as you count 4 seconds, then hold for 2 and then breathe out for 4 seconds. Take about a dozen deeper slower breaths like this”.*

[Attention is directed inwards to your centre]

- **3-WATER** : CALM & CONTROLLED -switch on the RELAXATION RESPONSE

“....do you have saliva in your mouth?...make more saliva....when you are anxious or stressed your mouth often dries because part of the stress emergency response (sympathetic N S) is to shut off the digestive system. So when you start making saliva you switch on the digestive system again (parasympathetic N S) & the relaxation response “– (that is why people are offered water or tea after a difficult experience- when you make saliva your mind can also optimally control your thoughts & your body).

[Attention is directed to producing saliva & becoming calmer, focused & more in control]

- **4-FIRE** LIGHT up the path of your IMAGINATION .

“Bring up an image of your SAFE PLACE (or some other RESOURCE such as a memory when you felt good about yourself) –what do you feel & where do you feel it in your body?” Install with brief slow BLS / butterfly hugs.

[Attention is directed to the feelings of safety/calm/etc. in your body]

• Additional Explanations

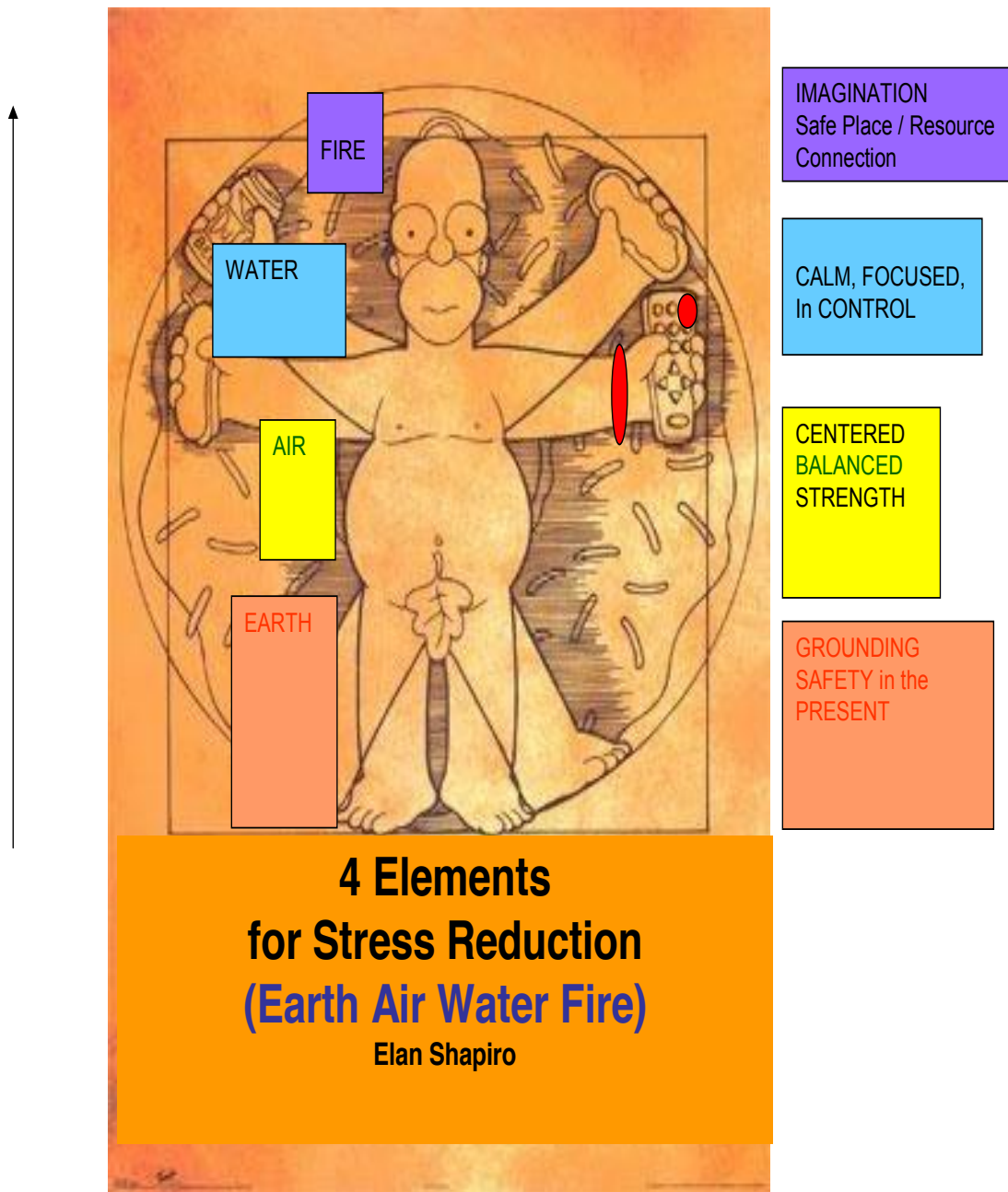
- ***Rationale:*** external and internal stress triggers have an accumulative effect during the day.
- **We cope better with stress when we stay within our arousal “window of tolerance”.**
- **An *antidote* to stress triggers:** frequent random monitoring of stress level with simple stress reduction actions to keep stress levels within our “window of tolerance”.
- **Wear a 4 Elements *bracelet** (coloured silicon band) on your wrist & every time you notice it take a quick reading of your current stress level (SUD) & perform the 4 Elements Exercises & then take a second SUD reading.**
*[Alternative: *place a small sticker or label on your watch or mobile phone*]
- **The (modest) goal is to reduce your stress level by 1 or 2 each time & to do this at random times & at various initial stress levels. By preventing your stress responses from accumulating, you may be better able to stay within your “window of tolerance”.**

Tips

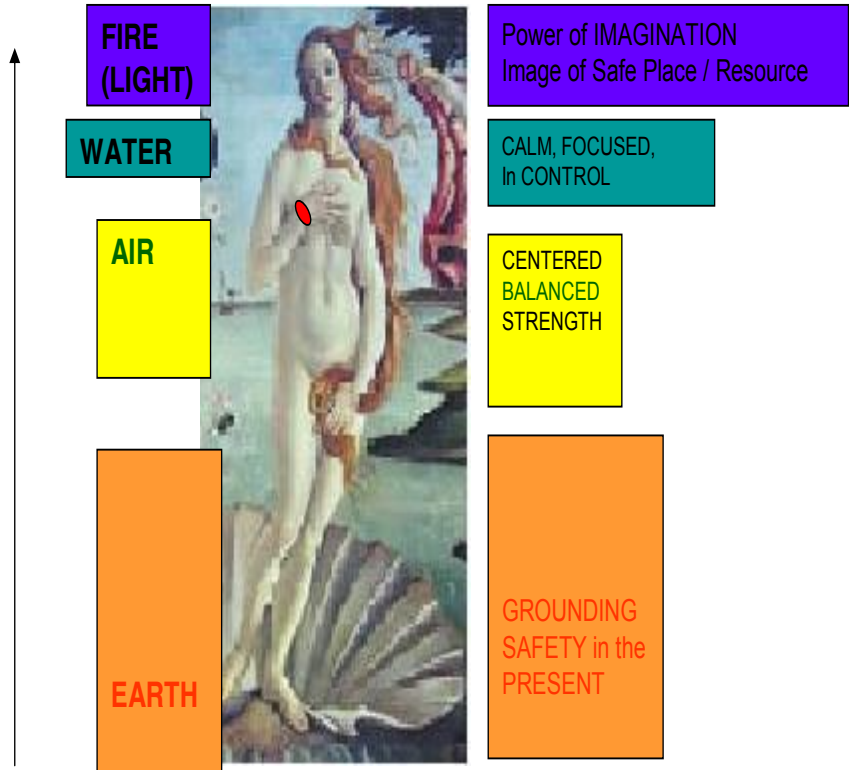
- In Phase 2 this can be a way of introducing the Safe Place exercise (as the 4th element), especially when client needs stabilisation first
- Anchor the Safe Place into the bracelet as well

- The sequence of the 4 Elements Earth-Air-Water-Fire is designed to follow the body up from the feet –to the stomach & chest- to the throat & mouth -to the head
- As each new “Element exercise” is presented briefly review the previous ones (“ as you continue feeling the SECURITY NOW of your feet on the GROUND; & feel CENTERED as you BREATHE in & out; & feel CALM & in CONTROL as you produce more & more SALIVA; you can let the FIRE LIGHT the path to your IMAGINATION to bring up an IMAGE of a place where you feel SAFE /or a memory in which you felt good about yourself.”)

- The rubber band can be stretched (gently) & released to stop negative thoughts & to ground quickly in the present (thought stopping).



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