



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy (TARGET) Groups

TARGET is a manualized psychoeducational and therapeutic intervention developed by Julian Ford and colleagues to prevent and treat traumatic stress and co-occurring problems. It was built for populations facing multiple challenges at once, people with PTSD and substance use, justice-involved adults, parents in child welfare, and veterans, and was designed for group delivery from the start. It centers on a seven-step skill sequence, the FREEDOM Steps, that people apply when triggers and stress responses arise. Distinctively, it reframes PTSD symptoms not as damage but as biological alarm reactions that were adaptive survival responses, and can be regulated in safe environments.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A fit where a practical, accessible, skills-based approach is needed.
- Helpful where exposure-based approaches face engagement barriers.
- Not a substitute for PE or CPT in severe, already-stabilized PTSD.

What it's for

Adults with PTSD, complex PTSD, and co-occurring substance use or anger.

Validated in correctional, addiction, child welfare, and veteran settings.

Suited to high-stigma settings where pathologizing framing blocks engagement.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 Groups of 6 to 12 meet weekly for 60 to 90 minutes over 8 to 12 sessions.

2 Each session teaches and practices the FREEDOM Steps with homework.

3 A brief 4-session version (T4) exists where full treatment isn't feasible.

TARGET shows solid results, with notable engagement strengths.

- A pilot RCT in combat veterans found TARGET matched Prolonged Exposure on PTSD, emotion regulation, and hope, with **significantly lower dropout**.¹
- A study of 213 adults in addiction treatment found group TARGET improved **PTSD, anxiety, depression, emotion regulation, and hope**.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

Symptoms as survival. The reframe from "damaged" to "adaptive" is the engine.

FREEDOM in daily life. The steps are meant to be used between sessions, not just learned.

Recovery you can see. Watching peers regulate offers proof, not just theory.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is this the full 8 to 12 session program or the brief T4 version?
- 2** Is the facilitator TARGET-trained?
- 3** Is it offered for my setting (addiction, reentry, veteran)?

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



Sources

Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy (TARGET) Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Ford, J. D., Grasso, D. J., Greene, C. A., Slivinsky, M., & DeViva, J. C. Randomized clinical trial pilot study of prolonged exposure versus present centred affect regulation therapy for PTSD and anger problems with male military combat veterans. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy* (2018), 25(5), 641–649.
- 2 Frisman, L., Ford, J., Lin, H.-J., Mallon, S., & Chang, R. Outcomes of trauma treatment using the TARGET model. *Journal of Groups in Addiction and Recovery* (2008), 3(3–4), 285–303.

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