

BRIGHTER LIFE

Gentle Movement. Real Choice. Body-Based Healing in Community.

ACC SCS FUNDED TRAUMA- SENSITIVE YOGA & CREATIVE ARTS THERAPY GROUPWORK



Kia ora from

JESS & AMY



Kia ora koutou, we're Jessica Dziwulska and Amy Benjamin, the dynamic duo behind Brighter life. We share a deep commitment to healing and, together, bring over three decades of experience in whole-person, client-centred care across a range of therapeutic modalities.

Jessica leads our sessions. She has been practicing yoga for nearly 3 decades and has trained in Trauma Centre Trauma Sensitive Yoga (TCTSY), Expressive Art Therapy, Somatic Movement Therapy, Dance Movement Therapy, and Restorative Movement Psychotherapy for survivors of trauma. She is currently working toward her Master of Dance Movement therapy and is writing her thesis on body-based/somatic approaches to working with trauma, PTSD, and Complex PTSD.

Jess has enjoyed working with trauma survivors for the past 7 years, both 1:1 and in group settings. She is passionate about creating and facilitating in trauma-informed spaces where diversity, choice, and agency are held in the highest esteem.

Amy Benjamin is an NZAC registered holistic counsellor and a Sensitive Claims provider, offering online and in-person sessions. She blends relational counselling ('talk therapy') with body-centred practices including mindfulness, breathwork, and gentle movement to help kiritaki build self-awareness and regulate their nervous system.

A unique aspect of Amy's practice is ecotherapy, where stepping outside and connecting with the intrinsic healing power of nature can significantly enhance the therapeutic process.

Amy looks forward to walking alongside you on your path to recovery, growth, and empowerment.

OUR OBJECTIVES

Our aims:

1. **Provide a Safe, Accessible Space** – Offer a compassionate and trauma-informed environment where you can explore your experience at your own pace.
2. **Support Nervous System Regulation** – Helping you develop skills for reducing symptoms, along with grounding in the present moment, & increasing emotional resilience.
3. **Enhance Interoception and Body Awareness** – We encourage a non-coercive exploration of bodily sensations to rebuild a sense of safety and connection with your body.
4. **Foster Choice and Agency** – We focus on empowering choices in movement and breath, reinforcing autonomy in a way that counteracts the disempowerment of trauma.
5. **Reduce Trauma-Related Symptoms** – We support you in alleviating symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and dissociation through evidence-based practices.
6. **Cultivate Self-Compassion** – We share tools to develop a kinder, more accepting relationship with oneself, fostering healing and resilience.
7. **Create a Supportive Community** – We offer a gentle and non-judgmental space where you can experience connection while maintaining control over your level of participation.



Introducing TC-TSY



Considered among the most rigorously studied methods of third-wave psychotherapies, Trauma Center Trauma Sensitive Yoga (TCTSY) is a clinically proven intervention designed for individuals grappling with complex trauma or enduring treatment-resistant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). TCTSY integrates trauma theory, attachment theory, and neuroscience with yoga philosophy and practice. Research studies into TCTSY have clearly demonstrated reductions in PTSD symptoms within 8 weeks. Our TSY facilitator, Jessica, has completed all levels of TCTSY training.

Our approach focuses not on achieving physical forms or specific yoga postures, but on fostering awareness and reconnection with physical sensations, a vital attribute for addressing trauma. TCTSY places the power with you rather than with the facilitator, and all shapes and practices offered are invitational, making them optional at all times.

By prioritising interoception (the felt sense of the body) to guide decision-making, TCTSY enables participants to restore the connection between their mind and body and reclaim a sense of agency, which is often compromised by trauma.

Our programs offer a gradual and manageable introduction to these practices, acknowledging the potential discomfort that can arise when exploring body sensations. Each class offers a range of choices while maintaining consistency and predictability to support a safe and transformative healing journey.

Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TCTSY) isn't your typical yoga—it's a practical journey back to self. Grounded in trauma-sensitive principles, our groups offer a space for you to reconnect with yourself, learn to befriend your body, explore inner experiences, and tap into somatic resources for wellbeing.

TERM FOUR 2026 & TERM ONE 2027

TERM FOUR 2026

TERM ONE 2027

****PLEASE NOTE:** No classes during the week of November 30 - December 4th

MONDAY - ONLINE GROUP (9:45 - 11:15 am)

ALL GENDERS - 8 weeks

From Mon 12 October - Mon 7 December

MONDAY - ONLINE GROUP (9:45 - 11:15 am)

ALL GENDERS - 7 weeks

From 22 February - 5 April

TUESDAY - GREY LYNN GROUPS

8 weeks

From Tues 13 October - Tues 8 December

WOMEN'S Group: 10:45 am - 12:15 pm

LGBTQIA+ ALL GENDERS Group: 12:30 - 2pm

TUESDAY - GREY LYNN GROUPS

7 weeks

From 23 February - 6 April

WOMEN'S Group: 10:45 am - 12:15 pm

LGBTQIA+ ALL GENDERS Group: 12:30 - 2pm

WEDNESDAY - ONLINE GROUP (6:30 - 8pm)

ALL GENDERS - 8 weeks

From Wed 14 October - Wed 9 December

WEDNESDAY - ONLINE GROUP (6:30 - 8pm)

ALL GENDERS - 7 weeks

From 24 February - 7 April

THURSDAY - ROTHESAY BAY (11-12:30 pm)

WOMEN ONLY - 8 weeks

From Thurs 15 October - Thurs 10 December

THURSDAY - ROTHESAY BAY (11-12:30 pm)

WOMEN ONLY - 7 weeks

From 25 February - 8 April

TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMING TRAUMA DAY RETREATS

Sat Nov 14 Rothesay Bay 10:30-4:30pm

WOMEN ONLY

Sat Dec 12 Rothesay Bay 10:30-4:30pm

WOMEN ONLY

TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMING TRAUMA DAY RETREATS

Sat 13 March, Rothesay Bay, Akl, 10:30am-4:30pm

WOMEN ONLY

Sat 3 April, Rothesay Bay, Akl, 10:30am-4:30pm

WOMEN ONLY

Kiritaki are welcome to attend one or more day retreats per term - each day retreat is a standalone experience. Clients are also welcome to attend a weekly group AND a day retreat if they choose.

WHAT KINDS OF GROUPS WE OFFER

WE OFFER 3 TYPES OF GROUPS:

1. **IN-PERSON WEEKLY GROUPS** WITHIN THE AUCKLAND AREA (FEMALE ONLY, LGBTQ+ AND ALL GENDER OPTIONS AVAILABLE)
2. **ONLINE GROUPS** FOR KIRITAKI FROM ANYWHERE IN AOTEAROA (ALL GENDERS)
3. **DAY RETREATS** CENTRAL & NORTH SHORE OF AUCKLAND (FEMALE ONLY)



WHAT TO EXPECT IN OUR GROUPS

All our groups and sessions are non-hierarchical and non-directive, meaning you are always in control of your own practice. There is no expectation to talk, perform, or follow instructions exactly—everything is invitational.

Weekly IN-PERSON Groups:

Each session follows a consistent, trauma-sensitive structure that prioritises safety, choice, and empowerment:

Welcome and Grounding

- a. Reminder of group agreements (confidentiality, choice, safety, no expectations).

TCTSY Practice

- a. Guided, invitational movements based on TCTSY principles.
- b. Emphasis on interoception, choice-making, and self-paced exploration.
- c. Simple, accessible shapes and movements, easily modified for each person's unique needs.

Rest and Integration

- a. Guided relaxation practice.
- b. Space for stillness and reflection.

Optional Cup Of Tea, Social Engagement & Personal Reflections

You are warmly invited to share a cup of tea and kai in a relaxed, supportive space. During this time, we offer simple, engaging art activities for those who wish to take part, creating an atmosphere of creativity while encouraging connection. In previous sessions, these moments of togetherness have been essential in fostering belonging and reducing the isolation that is often felt by those navigating life after trauma.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN OUR GROUPS

Weekly ONLINE Groups:

Each session follows a consistent, trauma-sensitive structure that prioritises safety, choice, and empowerment:

Welcome and Grounding

- a. Reminder of group agreements (confidentiality, choice, safety, no expectations).

TCTSY Practice

- a. Guided, invitational movements based on TCTSY principles.
- b. Emphasis on interoception, choice-making, and self-paced exploration.
- c. Simple, accessible shapes and movements, easily modified for each person's unique needs.

Rest and Integration

- a. Guided relaxation practice.
- b. Space for stillness and reflection.

Optional Sharing, Questions or Personal Reflections

DAY RETREATS – TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMING TRAUMA

Each Tools for Transforming Trauma day retreat follows a structured yet flexible framework. The program blends movement, mindfulness, creative arts, psychoeducation, Ecotherapy principles, and reflective practices to provide a holistic approach to healing.

Our intention is that our day retreats are enjoyable, relaxing, and practical. We've drawn from trauma theory, counseling, and neuroscience to address the impacts of trauma, which touches every facet of a survivor's existence—physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally. At the heart of our approach lies a commitment to trauma-informed principles, fostering an environment of safety, trust, and empowerment. Our facilitators are trained in an array of modalities, including TCTSY, Expressive Arts Therapy, Somatic Therapy, Counseling, and Ecotherapy. We use these modalities and techniques to create experiences that honor the individuality of each participant, recognising and embracing your unique journey.

Through nurturing practices, resilience-building, nervous system regulation, and cultivating self-compassion, our day retreats support you to connect to your body in reparative ways. We'll explore mindful movement, safe social connection, and support for developing healthy coping strategies. You'll come away from the day with a range of practices you can take into your daily life as you continue on your healing journey.

We believe every person deserves access to holistic, integrated, and empowering avenues for trauma recovery; our program serves as a beacon of hope and offers a compassionate, evidence-based roadmap toward integration and healing.

TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMING TRAUMA

Sample Session Plan (changes to suit season, intentions & group needs)

10:30 – 10:45 | Arriving & Setting the Space

- Welcome, introductions, and orientation to the session.
- Overview of the day's schedule and expectations.
- Group discussion: What do we need to feel safe enough today?

10:45 – 11:45 | Trauma-Sensitive Yoga & Movement

- Gentle, guided, choice-based movement designed to support embodiment and self-awareness.
- Focus on nervous system regulation through choice making, interoception, and mindful movement.

11:45 – 12:15 | Tools for Self-Regulation & Resilience

- Psychoeducation on trauma and self-care strategies.
- Practical tools for self-soothing, grounding, and emotional regulation.

12:15 – 1:15 | Nourishment & Optional Creative Exploration

- Lunch break with opportunities for self-guided activities:

1:15 – 1:30 | Guided Relaxation

- Trauma-informed relaxation practice to encourage restful digestion, ease and integration.

1:30 – 2:15 | Trauma-Sensitive Yoga & Mindful Movement

- A second movement session to deepen embodiment and integration.
- Emphasis on choice, comfort, and intuitive movement.

2:15 – 2:45 | Journaling & Self-Reflection

- Guided writing prompts to process insights and experiences.
- Space for personal reflection and meaning-making.

2:45 – 4:00 | Creative Self-Care Resource Making

- Art for self-care: creating a tangible resource (e.g., affirmation cards, vision boards, grounding objects) to support participants beyond the session.

4:00-4:30 | Reflections & Closing

- Group sharing of takeaways from the day.
- Closing ritual to support a smooth transition back to daily life.

CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

"I love that the classes are so gentle and discreet. I have found having the freedom to choose which moves I engage in and being offered the freedom to experiment with different positions really empowering. I have also treasured the opportunity to take time out to engage in the practice and to focus on connecting with my body. Hugely therapeutic." (online TSY participant)

"I loved the retreat. I was surprised at how much art therapy and yoga assisted in helping me feel centered, and I can now see how much I try to control the outcome of a process, which I recognise is an illusion of safety. I really appreciate this insight. Loved how it was facilitated. Highly recommend." (day retreat participant)

"I found the retreat really amazing in many ways, but I was most nervous about the interaction with others aspect, and the fact that that wasn't forced or expected of us was amazing. We could sit in our own experience, which is important for me as an empath who holds others' experiences and can be attuned to the negative impact that has on me. You were both awesome facilitators who made the experience safe and enjoyable - I appreciated the experience more than I can say." (day retreat participant)

"I am also so thankful to be able to attend these classes as they are so incredibly peaceful, respectful, inviting, calming, grounding and beautifully orchestrated. It is so comforting to feel how passionate Jess is about transforming trauma through yoga and group therapy sessions like this. Every time I go to these I come out feeling so relaxed, happy and grounded. It has been a very beneficial part of my healing process and I look forward to being able to attend more of these." (day participant)

"From the bottom of my heart thank you Jess & Amy. You are both beautiful people doing extraordinary work. Thank you for playing a role in my healing journey." (8 week in-person participant)

"The last 8 weeks have been amazing and so helpful for me in so many ways. I cannot thank you and ACC enough. I am really looking forward to continuing with the sessions next term." (8 week in-person participant)

"Just wanted to pass on a huge ngā mihi for the weeks of yoga. I truly looked forward to it each week, with the deep value in discovering my relationship with my body. It has been a real empowering process whilst provoking some more challenging reflections, which I have been able to share each week with my therapist and help grow in. The invitation to stillness was a newness to me, so it has taught me a sense of mindfulness which I have been applying beyond yoga too. So again, thank you so much." (online TSY participant)

FAQS

“Do I need to be fit, or have practiced yoga before?”

No. These groups are designed to be accessible to a wide range of bodies and experiences. No previous yoga experience or level of fitness is required. All movements are invitational and can be adapted to suit each person's needs on the day.

“What if I have a pain condition, physical limitations, or learning differences?”

Participants are always invited to work within their own range and comfort zone. Choice is central to the practice. Clients can adapt, modify, or skip any movement or activity that doesn't feel helpful. We offer clear information and guidance on different options so that each person can participate in a way that feels safe and manageable for their body and learning style.

“How do you ensure safety in your online sessions?”

Before joining an online group, each client has an individual triage call. In this call, we explore:

- What resources they already use to help regulate if they become distressed
- What helps them feel grounded and safe in their own space
- Who they could contact at home or nearby if they need additional support

We ask that clients have someone available in the house, or a trusted contact they can reach if they need more support than we can offer online.

At the start of each online session, we provide the ACC-registered therapist's phone number in the Zoom chat. If a client needs extra support during or immediately after the session, they can text the therapist, who will then call them back.

At the end of each session, we invite everyone to “sign off” in the chat box so we know they are okay. If someone does not sign off, our therapist will follow up with them after the session to check in.

In rare situations where we have concerns about a client's wellbeing, and with the client's prior consent (given in the triage call), we may contact their treating therapist to let them know that additional support could be helpful.

“Will I be asked to talk about my trauma during the group?”

No. This is a trauma-resourcing practice, not a trauma-processing or talk-therapy group. The focus is on building body-based resources such as grounding, choice, and present-moment awareness. Because these groups are offered as an adjunct to therapy, we encourage you to share anything that arises in the sessions with your ACC-registered therapist. This supports continuity of care and helps integrate body-based work with your ongoing talk therapy.

FAQS

“Does Ineed to bring or own a yoga mat?”

No. We provide all yoga equipment needed for the sessions. Clients are welcome to bring their own mat or other items if they prefer. They may also bring personal comfort items (for example a favourite blanket, cushion, or soft toy) if they find this supportive.

“What if I dissociate during the practice?”

Some level of dissociation or “checking out” is a common trauma response and is understood and normalised within this space. We offer gentle, choice-based invitations that can help you stay connected to the present moment. However, this group may not be suitable for individuals who frequently experience intense dissociative states that significantly affect their ability to remain aware, oriented, or engaged. During our triage process, we will explore together whether this group is the right level of support at this time.

“How do you support clients if they need it?”

An ACC-registered therapist is available throughout every session. Before each group starts, we have a detailed triage call with each client. In this call, we discuss:

- How they might let us know if they need support
- What “support” looks like for them in practical terms

Support might include bringing a glass of water or a hot drink, offering a blanket or eye pillow, quietly checking in, or stepping aside for a brief conversation. If needed, we might also pause with them or take a short walk outside to help them re-orient and ground. The aim is to collaborate with each person so that support feels safe, respectful, and manageable.