

# FOCUS | Healing Depersonalization (30-60 min)



## OBJECTIVE |

Explore **depersonalization**, the workplace conditions and chronic stressors that contribute to **emotional distancing** from work and those we serve, and the personal and relational practices that help restore connection, meaning, and engagement.  
See Module 3 | Soul Buoys

## OVERVIEW |

**Depersonalization** is a protective psychological response that can develop when chronic stress or burnout causes individuals to **emotionally distance** themselves from their work and the people they serve. It often emerges when prolonged demands and emotional labor overwhelm one's capacity to remain fully present, leading the mind to create distance as a way to cope.

- Sounds Like - *"I just feel disconnected from the people I'm helping."*
- Feels Like - *Emotional numbness, cynicism, irritability, or a sense of going through the motions.*
- Looks Like - *Detachment from students or colleagues; reduced empathy; impatience; or interacting with others in a more mechanical or impersonal way.*

## HEALING |

We heal and protect against **depersonalization** by restoring connection where chronic stress has created emotional distance. Healing happens through intentional recalibration, reconnection with purpose and people, and relief from sustained pressure that erodes relational presence.

- REST | Recalibrate the nervous system so the body can shift out of stress and return to a regulated state that supports presence and empathy.

## OPENING | Grounding the Circle (10-15 minutes)

### 1. Come into Circle (Introductions) (2-3 minutes)

Invite a quick round

Prompt:

- Name
- One word (or short phrase) for how you're arriving today

### 2. Share Circle Focus & Objectives (2 minutes)

Depersonalization happens when chronic stress and emotional overload create distance between us and the people, work, and purpose we once felt connected to. It's not about not caring—it's often what happens when the nervous system has been caring for too long without enough restoration, safety, or support. It can:

Sound like: "I just feel numb." "I don't feel like myself anymore."

Feel like: Disconnection, emotional flatness, cynicism, distance

Look like: Going through the motions, irritability, withdrawal, loss of empathy or relational presence

### 3. Review Core Values & Core Commitments (1-2 minutes)

- Briefly walk through the Core Values and Core Commitments

Prompt: (no need to share aloud)

- What value helps ground you in your work?

### 4. Quick Reflection (1-2 minutes)

Invite participants to quietly consider:

- Where do you notice depersonalization showing up for you right now?

### 5. Somatic Practices (5 minutes)

(See Guide Resource Portal for modeled practices in the REST Resources page)

#### Breathe and Tap & Sway

Invite awareness:

- What shifts in your body when you give yourself even a moment to reset?



REST

Regulate Nervous System

Gather in circle, check-in, engage simple **somatic (body) movement practices** designed to soothe the nervous system, alleviate tension, and create community connection.



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## HEALING |



- RESTORATION | Repair by reconnecting with meaning, purpose, and the values that first drew you to this work and the people

## TRANSITION | Rose, Thorn, Bud + H.E.A.L. (15-30 minutes)

### Set-Up and Framing

This activity is an opportunity to notice what is restoring your energy and helping you sustain your work, and to move toward practices that are more aligned, renewing, and supportive of your capacity.

### ROSE | What's Nourishing You -- Pair Share (3-5 minutes)

Prompt:

- What is one moment, relationship, practice, or experience in your life right now that is helping you feel more connected—to yourself, others, or your sense of purpose?

### THORN | What's Draining You -- Pair or Whole Circle Share (3-5 minutes)

Prompt:

- What is one ongoing stressor, experience, or pattern right now that is causing you to feel emotionally distant, disconnected, or less like yourself in your work or relationships?

### H.E.A.L. | Repair + Re-Align (8-12 minutes)

#### Guided Reflection + Pair Share

Think of a specific moment recently where you noticed yourself feeling emotionally distant, disconnected, numb, or unlike yourself.

#### Honor the Trigger (2-3 minutes)

- What might this moment of depersonalization be revealing about your need for connection, restoration, or emotional safety right now? How could this moment become an invitation to reconnect with yourself, others, or the deeper purpose beneath your work?

#### Embody the Breath (2-3 minutes)

- What physical cues—such as slowing your breath, adjusting your posture, or grounding your body—might help you return to a regulated state when you notice yourself becoming detached or emotionally distant?

#### A | Align Thoughts and Emotions with Values (2-3 minutes)

- As you reconnect with your core values, what does authentic connection and meaningful presence with the people you serve look like when it is rooted in steadiness rather than emotional depletion or disconnection?

#### L | Lean toward Love (2-3 minutes)

- What is one small, value-aligned action you could take in moments like this that helps you reconnect—with yourself, others, or your sense of purpose—while also protecting your emotional well-being and capacity to care?



RESTORATION  
Process & Make Meaning

Discuss a foundational concept of the core curriculum, share personal experiences, and engage our signature HEAL strategy to create meaning, gain insight, and generate wisdom.

#### E | Embody the Breath

"I am safe. I am relaxed.  
I am in control."

E  
Cognitive  
Appraisal  
BREATH

#### L | Lean Toward Love

"My calm, compassionate  
presence is potent and  
positively influential."

#### H | Honor the Trigger

"I am experiencing a  
stressor/trigger.  
This is an opportunity/  
challenge, not a threat."

H  
Emotional  
Appraisal

#### A | Align Thoughts and Emotions

"I can re-frame this  
situation from a  
perspective of curiosity  
and compassion."



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## HEALING |

We heal and protect against depersonalization through less disconnection and more meaningful connection. We heal through recalibration, repair, and renewal.

- REVITALIZATION | Create healthy boundaries and sustainable work practices that protect energy and **restore** capacity for engagement and care.

## BOUNDARIES |

Boundaries are not barriers to connection; they are protection for it. Staying engaged in relationship-centered work does not require us to give more than we can sustain. We must remember:

- Our emotional presence, empathy, and attention are finite resources.
- Meaningful connection is most sustainable when it is supported by regulation, reflection, and shared responsibility.
- Recognizing when emotional distance is forming—and intentionally reconnecting—is an act of professional wisdom.
- Healthy caregivers remain compassionate and present while protecting the energy that allows them to stay relationally engaged.
- Rest, reflection, and reconnection are not luxuries—they are essential practices for sustaining authentic presence in relationship-centered work.



### REVITALIZATION

Renew Energy & Reinforce Boundaries

Close the circle by sharing **boundary setting practices** that protect against chronic stress fatigue and nurture mental health and well-being.



## CLOSURE | Bud Reflection (5-10 minutes)

### 1. Frame (2-4 minutes)

Creating boundaries that protect against depersonalization is not about caring less or becoming emotionally distant. It is about protecting your capacity to remain present, compassionate, and relational in ways that are sustainable over time.

Here are common patterns that contribute to depersonalization:

- Prolonged emotional strain without enough restoration or support
- Constant exposure to stress, conflict, or others' emotional pain
- Feeling pressure to stay emotionally available at all times
- Carrying unresolved frustration, numbness, or cynicism over time
- Losing connection to your sense of purpose, meaning, or relational presence
- Moving through interactions on "autopilot" without feeling fully connected

Here are common practices to help protect against depersonalization:

- Taking intentional pauses between interactions to reset and reconnect with yourself to engage emotional recovery without guilt
- Creating small rituals that help you release emotional residue and return to presence
- Prioritizing relationships, experiences, and practices that help you feel human, grounded, and emotionally alive again

### 2. Individual Bud Prompt Reflection (1-2 minutes)

#### Bud Prompt:

- What is one predictable trigger, interaction, or pattern that tends to leave you feeling emotionally disconnected, numb, or less present—and what is one intentional practice, boundary, or moment of reconnection you could turn toward the next time you notice it happening?

### 3. Whole Group Close (2-4 minutes)

Go around the circle and invite participants to share a takeaway or intention.

- What is one boundary you want to carry forward this week?