



# TRUST: Activating positive emotions in patients facing cancer or death

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## INTRODUCTION

Being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness is a trauma and causes corresponding psychological reactions. About a third of all people with acute cancer show psychological symptoms that require treatment.

Life threatening diseases activate ego- states of helplessness and hopelessness.

Activating positive emotions in the context of cancer or death is not easy. It needs careful and empathic psychoeducation. It is key to support clients finding their individual way towards posttraumatic growth and flourishing even facing death.

TRUST is an integrative resource-oriented and resilience-strengthening approach, developed in psychotraumatology and in the work with cancer patients.

TRUST is based on current neurobiological findings and has the following three concepts as the foundation:

- Salutogenesis
- Resilience
- Positive Psychology

## TRUST INTERVENTIONS

TRUST interventions focus on strengthening resilience and prevent clients from being flooded by uncontrollable distress. They include working with imagination, metaphors, symbols, artwork and cognitions. Bilateral stimulation (BLS), an element of EMDR therapy is used for:

- resource installation and anchoring
- reducing distress
- creating new chains of associations
- finding new perspectives

TRUST interventions aim to:

1. bring the brain back from fear mode into a state of balance
2. draw attention to concrete (new) experiences
3. discover and strengthen subjective and objective resources in everyday life
4. identify and, if required, change evaluation processes and attitudes

## TRUST TOOLS - trust and go

The motto *trust and go* highlights the need of active interventions to facilitate new experiences. Activated ego-states direct perception. If trauma or crisis networks are constantly activated in the brain, the environment is constantly scanned for danger. If resource states are activated, the environment is perceived differently.

Here are some of the TRUST tools:

### The A to Z of wellbeing

This simple exercise "forces" the brain to carry out an intensive search process. This process is incompatible with maintaining a high level of fear. The brain is automatically put into another, stress-reduced state. "Incidentally", this also activates resource networks. This is how it works: Select a letter from the A to Z spontaneously. Then, for this letter, imagine three to five things that, for you, are associated with pleasant experiences, that bring you joy, that you like thinking about, e.g. "p": positivity, Philadelphia, power, pancakes...

### TRUST resilience strengthening protocol

This protocol activates personal resources in five steps:

1. Describing the current problem
2. Exploring helpful attributes/competencies
3. Activating and anchoring resource experiences from the past
4. Validating the new experience
5. Symbolizing and anchoring the new way of experiencing

### RAF Questionnaire - Resources Against Fear

This questionnaire gives an opportunity to think about personal experiences in three areas of resources: trust in own abilities, in social relationships and in the world/spirituality, from the perspective of the present, the distant past and the far future.

### TRUST resilience questionnaire

The 15 +1 Items questionnaire focuses on psychological resilience in everyday life.

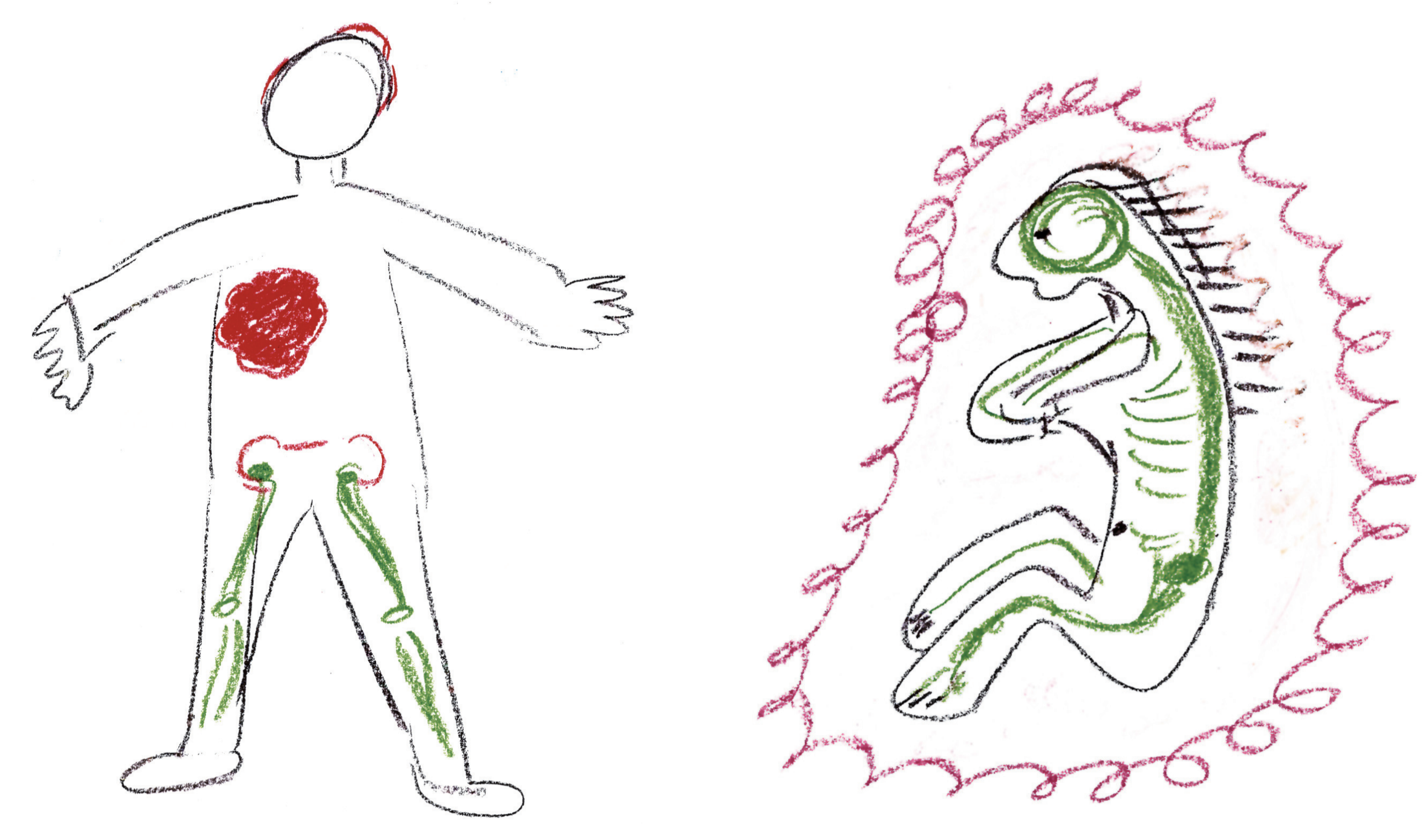
downloads:  
[www.idinstitut.de](http://www.idinstitut.de)

## TRUST CASE EXAMPLES

### Body-scan using BLS

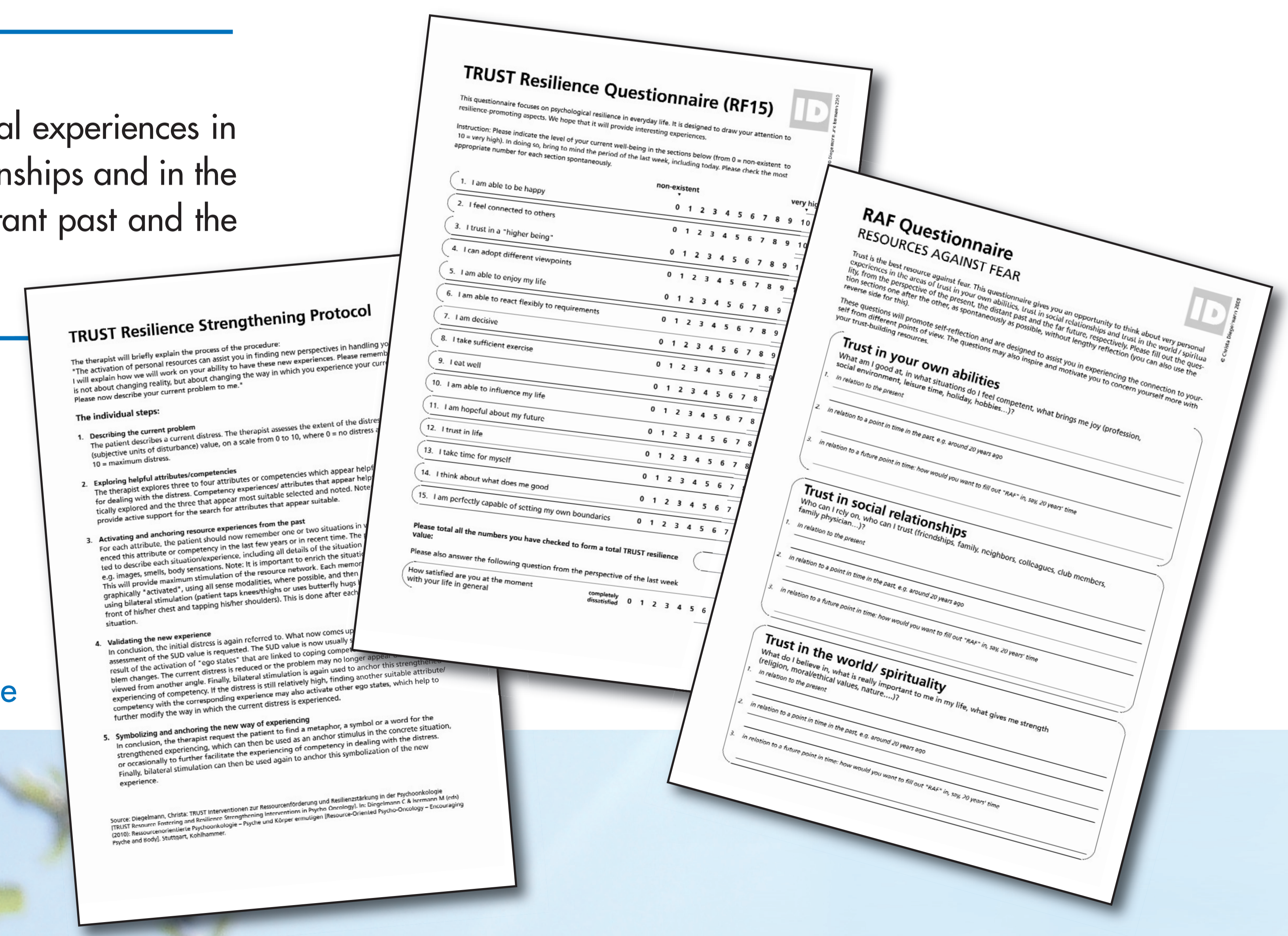
1. Draw your body outline
2. Create the inner surface with symbols, colours etc. (body-scan 1)
3. Close the eyes, add BLS, let come up an image/ a vision of what could be good/better or helpful for this body
4. Draw whatever is coming up spontaneously on an extra sheet of paper (body-scan 2)

**Case example:** Second therapy session with a 49 year old woman, suffering from breast cancer, bone-, brain-, and lung metastases. In the first session she defined her goal to become 70 years old and to see her grandchildren growing up.



Body-scan 1: First she draws her metastases, green means: the pain is controllable by drugs, red means: this is too much.

Body-scan 2: Spontaneously she draws an embryo-like figure, everything is green without pain, around this figure she draws a pink line, "like pack all in pink fluffy". For her this was like a door opener. This made it possible for her to speak about her death for the first time. She was able to adjust to her own death. She died three weeks later in peace. Even in only two therapy sessions it is possible to open up new fundamental pathways of experience.



### Trustcards

50 cards provide stimuli on various topics. The stimulated associations activate individual resource networks and contribute to modifying accustomed thought schemata, [www.trustandgo.de](http://www.trustandgo.de).



**Case example:** At the close of a therapy session, ten days before the husband's death: The wife pulled a random trustcard for the 47-year-old husband, who is suffering from prostate cancer and dies: "Liveliness". Association of the spouse: "During his whole life he was very creative and lively and he even plans the details of his funeral".

Often the use of the trustcards are helpful to communicate more easily about feelings and thoughts in extreme situations.

## CONCLUSION

TRUST interventions can strengthen healthy adaptation and provide better coping behaviour for distressed cancer-patients and their relatives and also for good selfcare of therapists themselves.

Especially the activation of positive emotions, the use of BLS and nonverbal interventions have the power to bridge forward to ego-states which enhance client's affect tolerance and resilience.

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