



# *Soul Compass*

*If your soul hurts...*

**KommMit**  
für Migranten und Flüchtlinge e.V.

# If your soul hurts...

...because you, or people who are close to you, have experienced something very threatening and painful, deep emotional wounds occur. These wounds are called *trauma*.



- You prefer to be alone, feel depressed and sometimes even numb and strange among people.
- You don't sleep well, too many thoughts go through your head, you are worrying too much.
- Or you don't sleep well, because nightmares torment you and terrible memories catch up on you.
- Also when you are awake, painful memories pop-up in your mind, sometimes triggered by a certain smell, noise or sensation.
- You are trying to avoid anything that reminds of the painful event e.g. you don't want to sleep, because you are afraid of nightmares, you avoid situations, places, news, or you take drugs or alcohol to avoid bad memories.
- You get upset more easily than before and cannot control your anger.
- Maybe you have also become more anxious and nervous, you have the feeling that something bad could happen at any moment.
- You have trouble concentrating and your memory has gotten worse, e.g. it's really difficult for you to remember words in the new language.
- Your body reacts too, you have a constant headache, you feel restless and physically agitated.

## Where do these emotional injuries come from?

These reactions of your body and soul are so-called symptoms. They are normal responses on abnormal, inhuman experiences. During a so-called traumatic event...

...maybe your life or that of a family member or friend was in danger.

...have you been harmed, mistreated or tortured.

...you had to watch someone else being harmed, tortured or even murdered.

...you could neither flee nor fight.

...you felt defenseless and helpless.

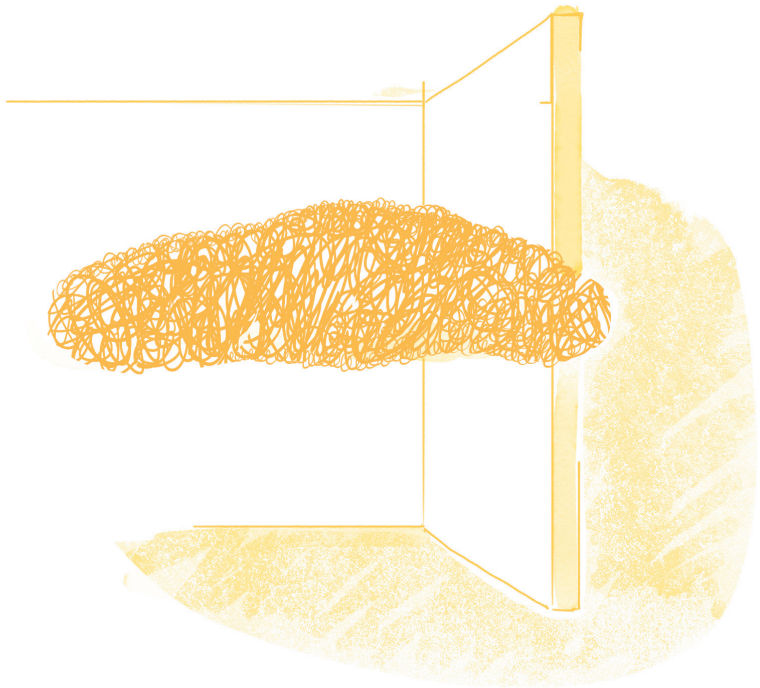
...you were frightened.

Events or experiences of that kind would provoke in almost everyone feelings of impotence, fear, shame and desperation.

In cases of harm caused on purpose by another person, as for example through any kind of violence, torture, imprisonment or rape, the pain feels often worse than the one caused through accidents, severe illness or natural disaster.

Our soul cannot cope with such cruelty and we therefore may even lose the trust in other humans. If a person experienced more than one act of violence or was exposed to violence over a longer period of time, the wounds on the soul are often the worst.

The bad experiences can unfortunately no longer be undone, they are now part of your life story. But you can heal the psychological injuries that result from it, like a wound, so that only scars remain.



## Why do body and soul react with symptoms?

After experiencing a traumatic event, your own body remains in an alarm state and does not come to rest. Therefore, many people feel permanently stressed and tense. Trauma means extreme stress for body and soul. It signals a great threat that our mind cannot stand. Therefore, our mind tries to protect itself and goes into an alarm state. Because when there is danger, we are ready to fight or flee, we are energized, the muscles contract, we are wide awake and ready to react at lightning speed. In fact, this alarm condition is a natural, protective response to survive.

Sometimes we can also be paralyzed, because we can neither flee nor defend ourselves - similar to when a circuit breaker in a fuse box trips. Our consciousness switches off briefly and we don't really feel that we are present anymore, even though our body is still there. This is also a protective reaction to a situation, which is so bad that our mind cannot stand it.

This phenomenon is called dissociation. It can also occur when there is no longer any danger.

These symptoms therefore are a completely natural part of the human organism, which only tries to protect itself from the traumatic experience.

We speak of a post-traumatic stress disorder when the symptoms persist and continue to bother you over a longer period of time.

Unfortunately, it is often the case that upon entering Germany other problems emerge which cause severe stress: the country is foreign to you, you do not understand the language or the culture. You are accommodated in a collective accommodation centre where it is difficult to relax. Many different people live there and you may not get along with everyone, there may be conflicts. You miss your home, your family and your friends, who



have stayed behind. To make matters worse, you do not know what will happen in the future, how you will live or whether you can stay in Germany.

Even though external circumstances can often not be influenced, luckily you can do something yourself to heal the wounds on your soul. However, you need patience and practice.







# What can you do to get better?

In a way how we humans function is very simple: A body that is doing well, is relaxed, well-nourished and well rested, also has a positive effect on the soul. A calm mind on the other hand, with calm thoughts and feelings, has a positive and relaxing effect on the body.

The following example illustrates this mutual influence: Picture a large, fresh lemon as you cut it open and bite into one of the pieces. Do you notice the saliva in your mouth? This means, that our thoughts have a direct impact on how we experience things and on the sensations we feel in our bodies.

What kind of thoughts do you have? Are you worried about the future, are you brooding about the past, or have memories of bad events. You have probably already had the experience that these negative thoughts do not leave a good feeling, in some cases even affect your body, e.g. in the form of a headache, stomach pain, or a feeling of numbness.

The good news is that we have a direct impact on our body and mind. We can learn to control and calm our thoughts as well as to take care of our bodies. This requires a certain change in everyday habits, a lot of patience and personal commitment.

This means that a great deal of our well-being is in our hands.

In the following we will look at some important exercises that help us to care for and calm our body and mind:

# Sleep

In order for us to have the strength to manage our day, a healthy sleep is very important. For most people, 6-8 hours are enough. When the day-night rhythm gets mixed up, there are some rules that will help you find that rhythm again - the internal clock. It is important to strictly follow these rules for the first few weeks so that your organism gets used to the natural rhythm.



**1<sup>st</sup> rule** Try not to sleep during the day, and if really necessary not longer than 30 minutes.

**2<sup>nd</sup> rule** Try to go to bed at the same time every night and to get up at the same time every morning.

**3<sup>rd</sup> rule** Try to exercise a lot or do sports during the day.

**4<sup>th</sup> rule** Try to slowly calm your body down, at least 2 hours before you go to sleep i.e. no sports, no heavy meals, no activating drinks like black tea, cola, energy drinks or alcohol.

**5<sup>th</sup> rule** Try not to expose yourself to bright light just before sleeping and during the night, e.g. the cell phone, otherwise your brain thinks it's daytime.

**6<sup>th</sup> rule** Try to use the bed only for sleeping.

**7<sup>th</sup> rule** Try to perform a ritual before going to bed. Repeat every night the same action that signals your brain and body that it's time to sleep. e.g. a relaxation exercise, reading a book, writing something down, drinking tea or hot milk with honey, reading the Bible / Quran.

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Problems with falling asleep or sleeping through the night are very often related to the fact that many thoughts, memories and images are circling in our heads and we cannot rest as a result. This problem is often compared to a crazy monkey in one's head, which jumps from one tree to another. There are relaxation exercises that help us to calm this monkey down. The most important exercises are presented on the following pages.

# Relaxation exercises

Relaxation exercises have a very large effect on our psyche. They help us to calm and relax mind and body, reduce stress, anxiety and even pain. It often takes time to feel a lasting effect, so it takes patience and regular practice.

We are not used to controlling and calming down our thoughts, so they keep coming up. For all exercises, it is therefore very important, as soon as you notice that your mind is wandering away, to bring your attention very gently back to the exercise, without getting frustrated.

Learning how to control your attention is like a muscle you are training and is an important part of the exercise. In this way you will learn how to control yourself and your thoughts in the long run.

You can close your eyes during all exercises, open them slightly, or point them at a point on the ceiling or on the floor.

You can do the exercises lying down, e.g. to fall asleep, or in a seated position.

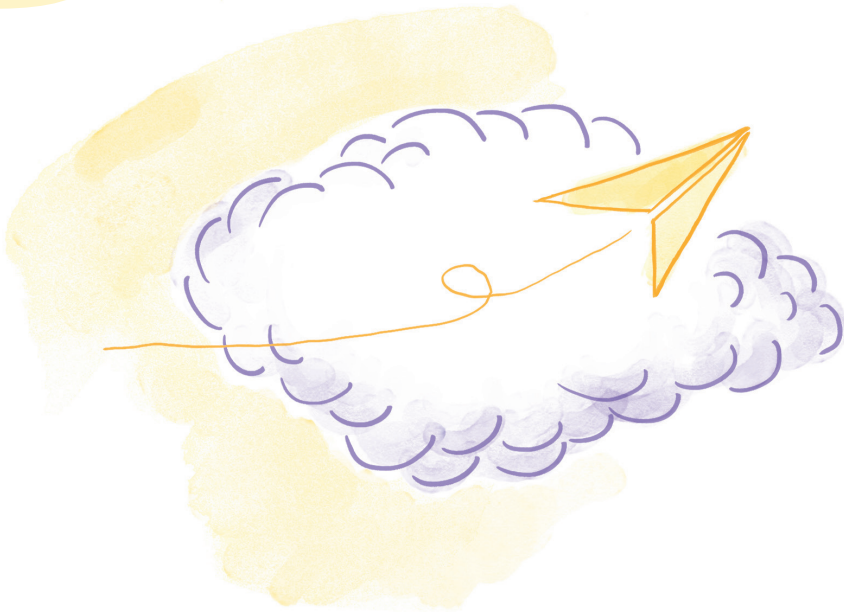
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You can also listen to the audio version of the exercises online. The Psychosocial Center Düsseldorf has translated all exercises into your language under the name "Nawa". You can find the address here:

<https://psz-duesseldorf.de/wir-fuer-sie/nawa/>

## 1st Exercise: Breathing Exercise

Our breath has been our constant companion since we were born. Therefore, we can feel our breath anytime, anywhere. Breathing and our level of tension are directly connected to one another: Deep, slow breathing reduces tension and stress. Shallow, rapid breathing is a sign of restlessness and nervousness. Practicing breathing is worth it, as you will quickly be able to calm down in critical and stressful moments with the help of your breathing.



**For the exercise** you sit or lie down, your eyes are closed or half open, and you start to notice the rhythm of your breath. There are a number of ways that you can watch yourself breathing in and out. It depends on what you feel like doing or what is particularly easy for you:

- You can feel the air flowing in and out through your nostrils.
- You can perceive how your abdomen rises when inhaling and falls when exhaling.
- You can perceive how your chest rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.
- You can put one or both hands on your stomach or chest and feel the inhalation and exhalation.
- You can count inside each time you exhale. Count to 10 and start again at 1.
- You can make your breathing deeper: Breathe in deeply through your nose and deeply out through your mouth. Then take a short break before taking a deep breath.

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You can combine the exercises. For example, counting or deepening your breathing with your hands on your stomach works very well for many people. You can do the exercises until you fall asleep or as long as you like. And if thoughts appear and you get distracted, be patient and gentle with yourself and just let the thoughts pass like the clouds in the sky.



## 2nd exercise: Muscle Relaxation

In this exercise, also called deep muscle relaxation after Jacobson, individual muscle groups are first tensed and then specifically relaxed, starting with the hands over the head, then down the body to the feet. The transition from tension to relaxation releases all stress in the body and the nervousness decreases. This also makes you more relaxed and calm, and you can sleep better. Even pain in the body will decrease over time.

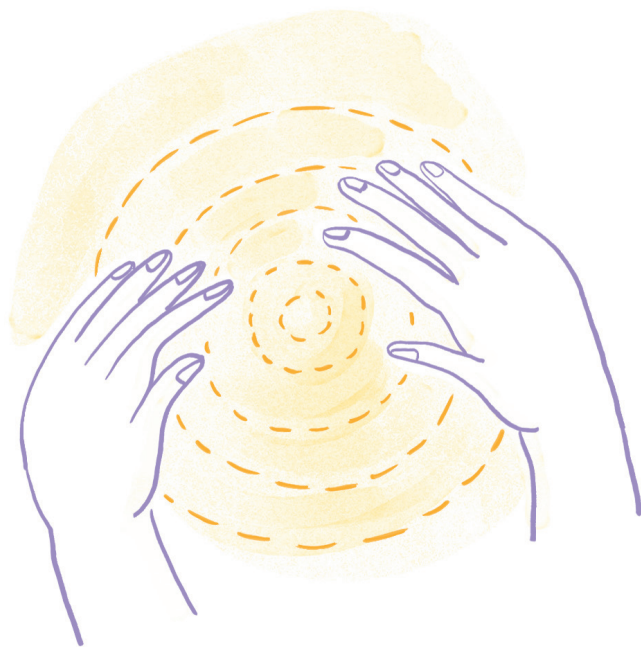
The relaxation exercise works as follows:

Find a relaxed position, lying or sitting. In a seated position it is important to stand firmly on the floor with both feet. The eyes can be open or closed. Inhale and exhale deeply and calmly.

With the next inhalation, clench your **hands** into fists, hold the tension and take a deep breath in and out and in again. When you exhale afterwards, you let go and feel how the hand becomes loosened and relaxed. Allow yourself about 10 seconds. Repeat the exercise.

Then you move the attention to your shoulders. Pull your **shoulders** up to your ears, hold the tension and consciously breathe in, out and in again. When you exhale, you release all tension and observe how the relaxation flows through this area. Allow yourself about 10 seconds for this observation. Repeat this a second time.

Now feel your **face**, try to tense all of your facial muscles and, above all, squeeze your eyes tight, breathing deeply in and out and in again. When you exhale, you release the tension and feel how your face becomes very soft and relaxed. Give yourself about 10 seconds. Repeat this again.



Now move your attention down the back to the **buttocks**, pinch your buttocks, deliberately breathing in, out and in again. As you exhale, you release all tension and watch the relaxation flow through this area. Allow yourself about 10 seconds. Repeat this one more time.

Now tense your **legs**, lift your legs a little and pull your toes towards you, hold this tension and take a deep breath in, out and in again. Release all tension as you exhale and watch how the warm, soft feeling of relaxation flows through your legs. Allow yourself about 10 seconds. Repeat this a second time.

Finally, clench your **toes** into tight foot-fists, hold the tension and breathe deeply in and out and in again, and as you exhale you let go and feel how your feet become loosened and relaxed. Give yourself about 10 seconds. Repeat that again.

Now the pleasantly warm feeling of relaxation has spread throughout the **body**. Feel into your body and notice how it becomes more and more relaxed and heavy.

# Imagination exercises

Ideas and inner images trigger something in our body and in our mind - as the example with the lemon has already shown. They have great power because they directly affect our feelings.

Brain research has even shown that ideas can influence and shape the brain almost as much as real experiences. With the help of imagination exercises, you learn to deal with the overflowing feelings, nightmares and the accompanying physical reactions.

You use your imagination to strengthen the self-healing powers: YOU decide, when you want to experience the feeling of absolute security and comfort, when you want to push the traumatic memories out of your consciousness or when you want to say goodbye to your soul pain. You are the boss in your head!

It is important to relax before each exercise, as described in the exercises. That means finding a comfortable posture - lying or sitting - to consciously perceive the body, keep your eyes closed or half open, and to feel your body breathing for a while.

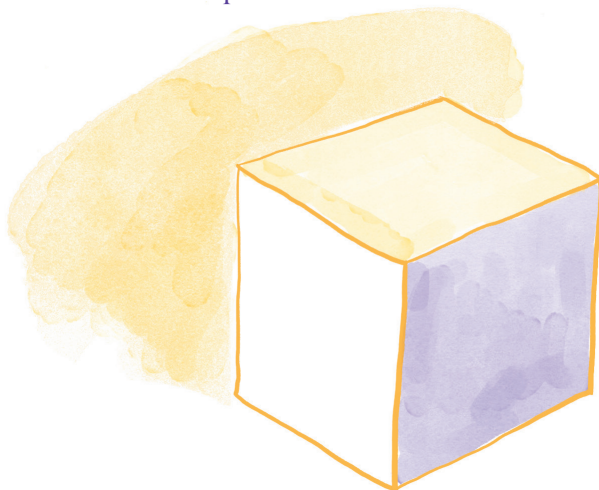
### 3rd exercise: The safe

Imagine a place to keep your unpleasant, painful memories, pictures and sensations. It can be a safe, a locker, a safe box or a large chest, on the seabed or hidden in the basement.

Take the time to find such a lockable place. Imagine it in its size, shape and material, where it stands and how it can be locked. Get a clear picture of this place.

When the bad pictures and thoughts come, go with your imagination to this place, pack them up there and tell them: "Right now you are bothering me! I put you away and decide for myself when I think of you!" Imagine how you open the container and put in all these unpleasant sensations and images and lock them up. If something is still missing, open the container again and put it in as well.

You alone decide when to open and close this container. You have the key and you have access to this place at all times.



## 4. Exercise: "Place of Security"

Use your imagination to imagine a place where you feel safe and secure. A place where you can find peace and quiet.

It can be a place near you or far away, somewhere in the universe. A place that could be your home or maybe a place in nature, e.g. by the sea, in a forest or in the mountains, on a flower meadow or in a cave. Perhaps you already know this place or it comes from your imagination.

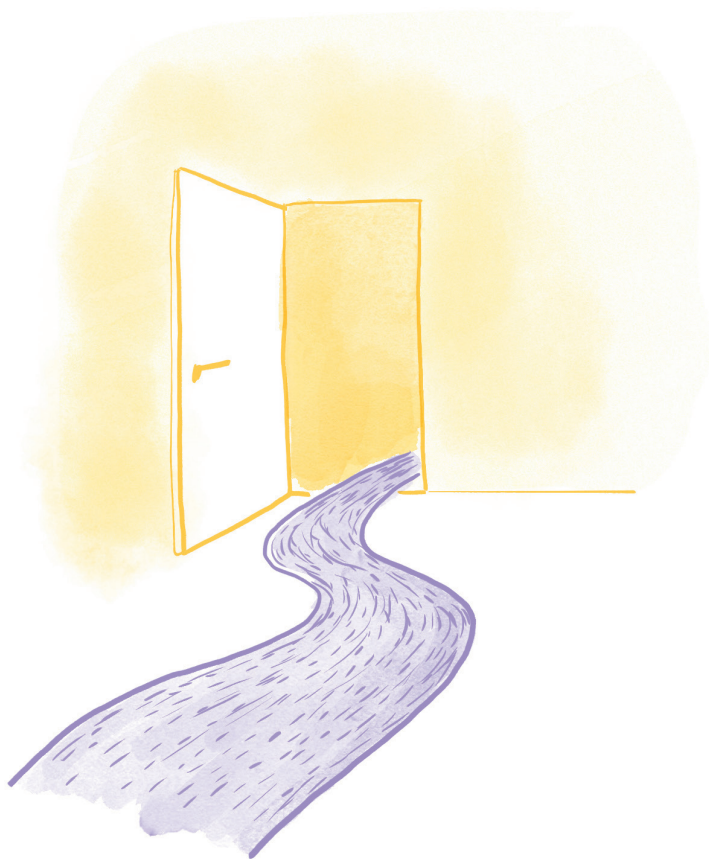
What can you see? What colors and shapes - what can you hear? A rustling, flowing, chirping or murmuring? No matter what sounds and noises, listen carefully. - What can you smell? Which fragrance is in the air? - What can you feel? Are you lying on soft ground, do you feel the wind or the warmth of the sun?

Put your two hands together on your heart - one on top of the other - and feel the good feelings that this place of security gives you. Feel how this power flows into your heart. When you slowly come back from your journey from the place of security, feel the warmth and the strength in your hands, on your heart.

Now, every time you put your hands on your heart, you can connect to this place, feel the peace and quiet, the feeling of security and comfort that this place gives you.

# Help yourself in everyday life

Coming from rigidity back into the flow of life.





The following has helped many people to start over:

In order to cope with trauma, it is essential to get a **feeling of security** and calm. Therefore, allow yourself some peace and quiet in everyday life, and always make yourself aware that you are safe.

**Express your feelings** - communicate, get in touch, talk about everything that depresses you, about your thoughts and feelings. Talking to other people, laughing and crying has a liberating effect.

**Get yourself moving again** - so that life can flow again. Exercise is a very effective medicine, whether walking or dancing, hiking or running, cycling or swimming, the effect shows immediately.

**Creativity helps** - because we exist to create. Whether preparing a delicious meal, writing down our thoughts, painting or doing handicrafts, singing or dancing, playing with children or making something with your hands, it feels good and right.

**Treat yourself to everyday joys** - small everyday things that are good for you. Whether listening to music or reading a verse, holding your face in the sun or walking barefoot across a meadow, helping someone or lighting a candle, whether praying or observing, playing or fixing things, the possibilities are infinite.

**Good food** - preparing something tasty and especially healthy for yourself means caring for yourself, taking care of yourself and getting in touch with yourself. Healthy eating gives us strength and more energy.

**Everyday tasks help** - whether cleaning up, shopping or looking after your children, whether working or learning German, taking care of yourself, instead of giving yourself up. That means participating in life.

## Who can help you?

Sometimes the emotional injuries are extremely severe, so that you may need additional professional help. As with physical injuries, there is also proper treatment for your emotional wounds.

Some chemical and also herbal medicines like Johannis herbs and valerian can help calm you down. They support you over a period of time to regain your strength. It is important to use this effect to start further (self) treatment, because at some point, the medicine alone will no longer help.

If you have the feeling that you might need help, share your feeling!

Talk to your doctor, the social workers in the dormitory or the staff of the service/advice centres for migrants. They are sensitized to your situation and can pass you on.

As a rule, you will be referred to a psychosocial counselling centre or trauma centre, psychotherapists, psychologists or psychiatrists. You can also contact them directly. They are well-versed in trauma and can help you.

Psychiatrists are doctors and often work in clinics. They can prescribe medication for you. They often do not have enough time to carry out in-depth therapy and refer you to a psychotherapist or psychologist.

You will have longer conversations with your psychotherapist or psychologist. He/she can help you recognize and process things, can develop strategies with you to master your everyday life.

And when you are ready, you can look at your experiences together and work through them, so that they become part of your past.

Psychotherapists and psychologists are obliged to maintain confidentiality, i.e. they are not allowed to tell anyone what you tell them (this is like

doctors, lawyers, pastors or imams). If you want you can tell them things that nobody knows and nobody should know. It can be a great relief to talk about everything and can help take some of the burden off your soul.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to find psychotherapists or psychologists who have the time or are within easy reach. That shouldn't make you despair, because one thing is important to know: Healing starts within ourselves and everyone has a self-healing power in them. Ultimately, we are responsible for ourselves, other people can only support us in our healing.

Don't forget: You have incredible powers and abilities in you. You have experienced a lot of bad things and yet you have survived!

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#### ADDRESSES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING CENTRES IN BERLIN AND BRANDENBURG:

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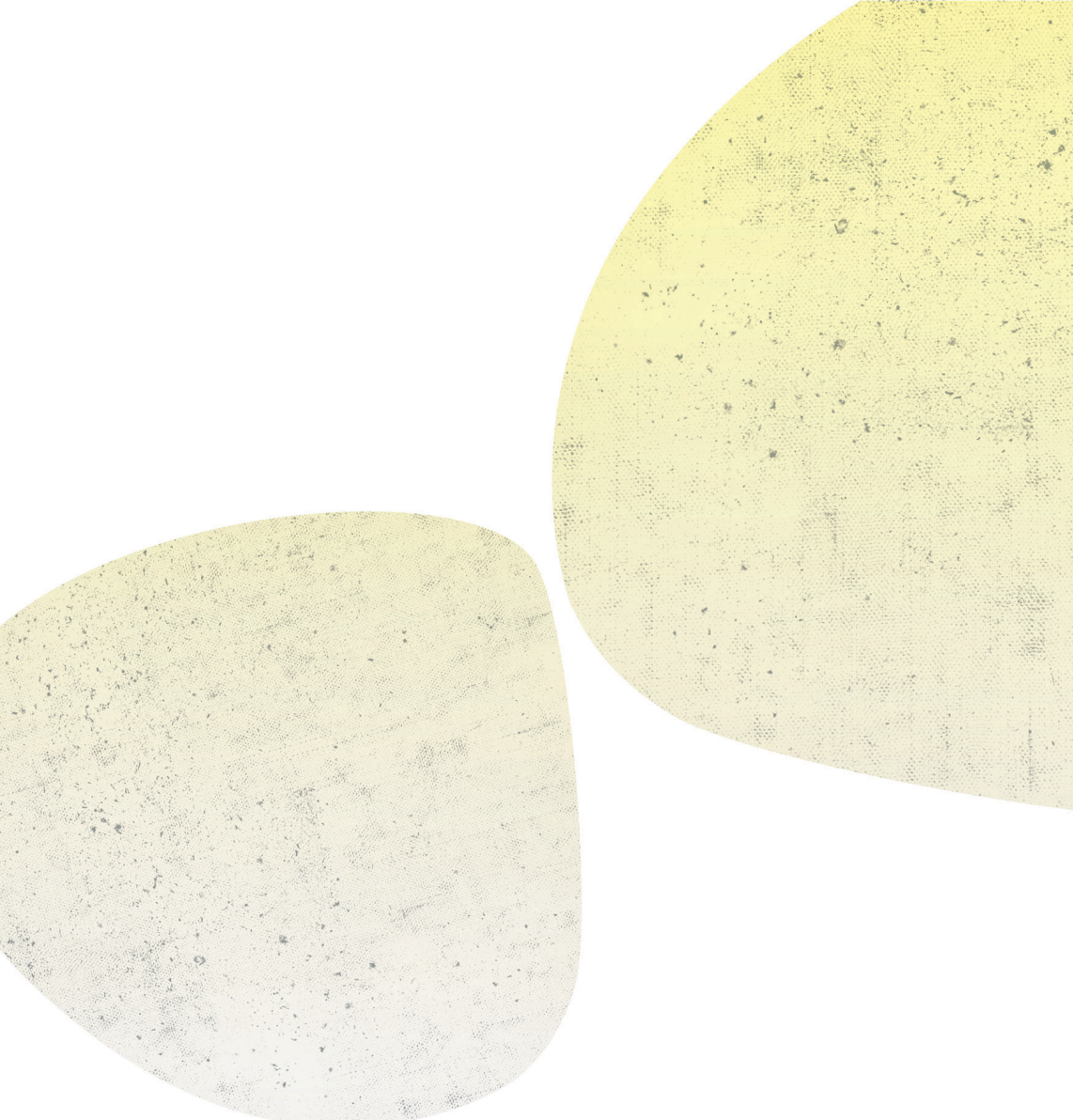
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##### **Kassenärztliche Vereinigung Brandenburg**

The "Kassenärztliche Vereinigung" Brandenburg helps you to find doctors and/or psychotherapists in your area.

Mon-Fri from 9am to 12pm • Tel.: 0331 / 98 22 98 51



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