

Trauma, The Brain's Response and Helping Survivors Recover

Resilience is like.....

Trauma is like.....

Trauma Is All Around Us

1 in 10 people in the US have been sexually abused as children

1 in 10 people have been beaten by their parents

1 in 10 partners engage in physical abuse

1 in 10 people have grown up with alcoholic relatives

1 in 10 people have witnessed their mother being beaten.

Van der Kolk (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score*

Thinking About and Characterizing Trauma

Trauma is:

-
-
-
-

Scale and Impact:

Neurobiology of Trauma:

Causes of Trauma

Influencers:

-
-
-
-

PTSD Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- 1) The Experience of a Major Threat (to me, to someone I witnessed, to someone who told me)
- 2) Continue to experience unwanted reminders, reexperiences of that experience (nightmares, flash backs, exposure responses)
- 3) Active Avoidance of trauma-related thoughts or feelings
- 4) Negative alterations in mood (self-blame, depression, sense of isolation)
- 5) Changes in arousal and reactivity (irritable, hypervigilance, difficulty sleeping)
- 6) Symptom duration more than a month
- 7) Changes in our ability to function

Stress A Continuum

Eustress

Distress

Trauma

Autonomic Nervous System

Sympathetic NS

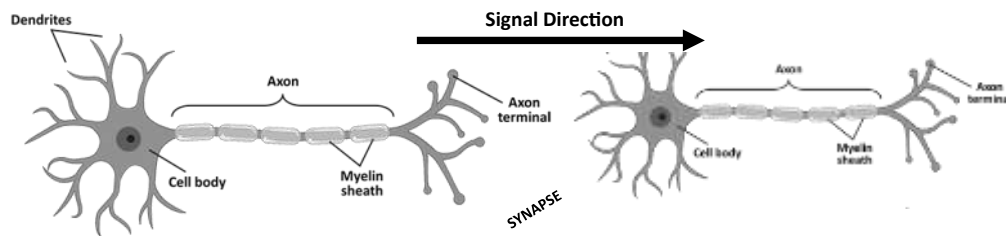
Parasympathetic NS

Our Stress Response

Brain-Related Changes:

Body-Related Changes:

The Brain and It's Response to Experience



How does the brain change in response to experience?

The Prefrontal Cortex:

Amygdala:




Responses To Trauma

| EMOTIONAL | COGNITIVE | BEHAVIORAL | PHYSICAL | SPIRITUAL |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Fear/Terror | Confusion | Social Withdrawal | Dry Mouth | Emptiness |
| Anxiety | Hypervigilance | Self Harm | Twitches/Tremors | Loss of Meaning |
| Panic | Suspiciousness | Violence towards others | Weakness | Doubt |
| Paranoia | Flash Backs | ↑Substance Use/Abuse | Nausea/Vomiting | Looking For a Magical Cure |
| Anger/Rage | Difficulty Focusing | Appetite ↑↓ | Chest Pain | I am Being Punished |
| Depression | Memory Changes | Sleep ↑↓ | Blood Pressure ↑ | Loss of Direction |
| Shame | Decision Making ↓ | Always on Edge | Heart Rate ↑ | Cynicism |
| Guilt | Overly Critical | Startle Response ↑ | Shallow Breathing | Bargaining With God |
| Sadness | Blaming Others | Without Words | Diarrhea | Crisis in Faith |
| Numbness | | Suicidality | Exhaustion | |

Emotional/Cognitive/Behavioral Indices of PFC and Amygdala Normal vs. High Stress or Trauma

| Emotional/Cognitive/Behavioral Effects | PFC and Amygdala In Correct Balance | PFC and Amygdala Out of Balance |
|--|--|--|
| Anxiety | Low | High |
| Startle | Normal | Exaggerated |
| Fearfulness | Normal | High |
| Threat Monitoring | Normal | Hypervigilant |
| Decision Making | Normal | Unable or Making Rash Decisions |
| Critique of Self and Others | Normal | Overly Harsh |
| Assessment of Risk | Able to Detect Risk | Poor—either risk avoidant or running towards high risk |
| Emotional Regulation | Normal | Hyper- or Hypo-aroused |
| Assessment of Emotion in Another's Face (also about empathy) | Able to Detect and Connect | Misreading cues and often to the negative |
| Entering Fight/Flight/Freeze | Normal (High threat necessary) | Easily activated regardless of stimulus |

The Window of Tolerance

| HYPO-AROUSAL | WINDOW OF TOLERANCE | HYPER-AROUSAL |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Flat affect Sleepy Foggy Shut down mode Not able to problem solve Limited body awareness Numb Confused Faint</p>  | <p>Calm Alert Able to concentrate Focused Able to problem solve Aware of body/self/mind Present Able to communicate Able to make decisions</p>  | <p>Overwhelmed Anxious/agitated/panic Shaking Sweating Impulsive Breathing increases Heart rate increases Angry Can't sit still</p>  |

Notes:

5 SENSES GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

Sometimes our hearts or minds feel like they are racing. Sometimes we might feel a bit anxious. Grounding techniques help us practice slowing down, and help us reconnect to the here-and-now.



Sit or stand still. Remember: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

Take a deep breath, and right in this moment, say out loud:



5
things
you can
see



4
things
you can
touch



3
things
you can
hear

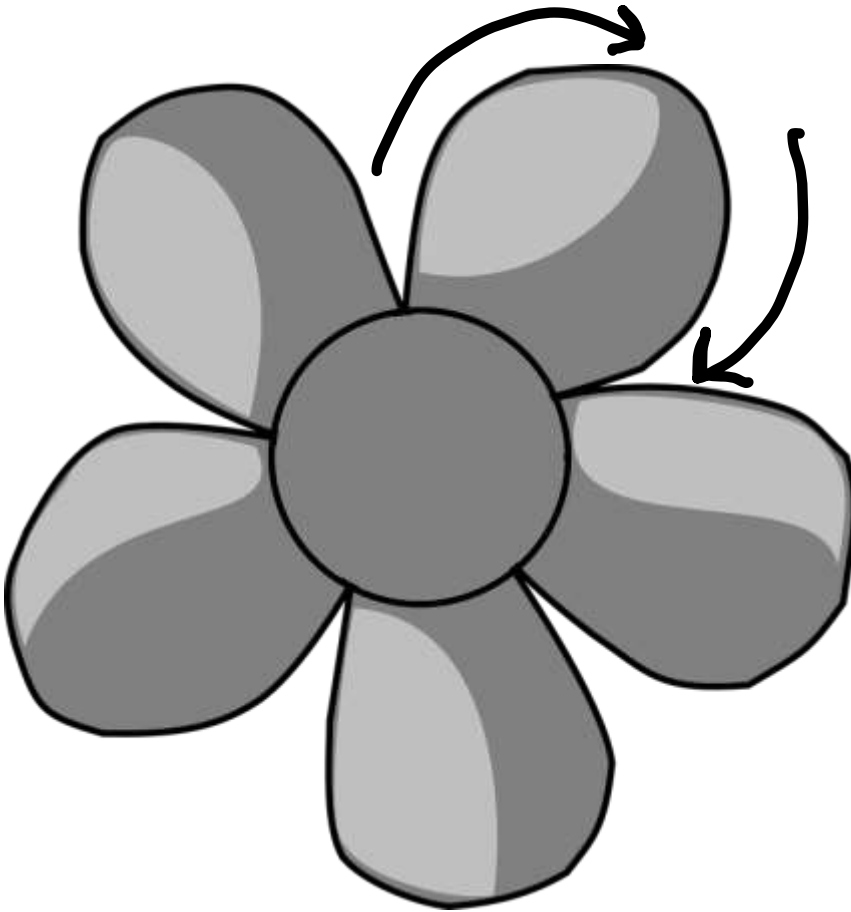


2
things
you can
smell



1
thing
you can
taste

Breath and Draw

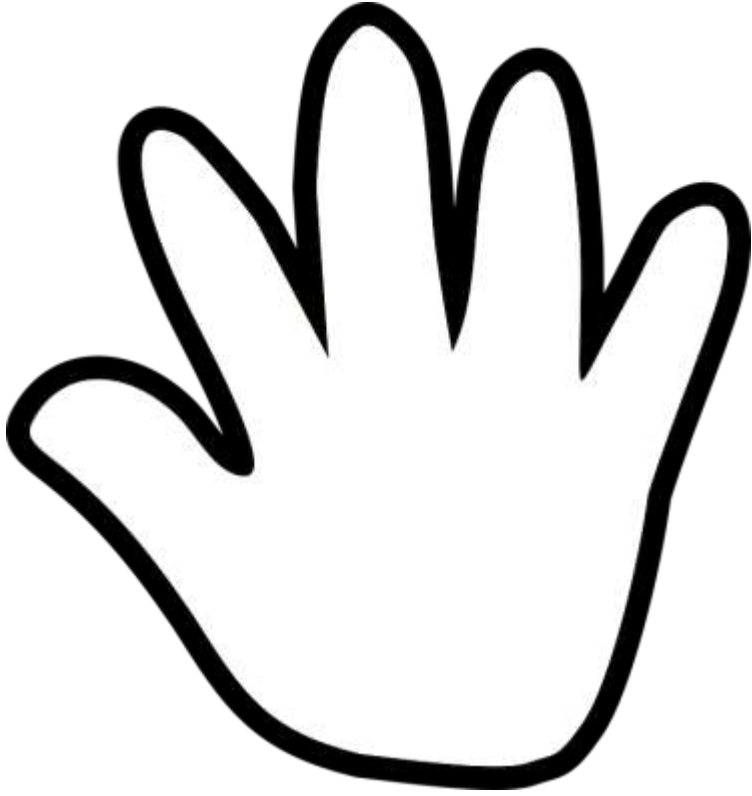


Why Might This Help Us Return to
The Window of Tolerance?

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Resource Hand



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How Do We Get Back Into The Window of Tolerance

| | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Singing | Dancing to music | Making a cup of tea |
| Artistic Activities | Sitting quietly and coloring | Finger painting |
| Drumming | Listing all my supports | Working with clay |
| Breathing | Listing my happy places | Using a stress ball |
| Grounding Exercises | Crunchy foods | Using resistance bands |
| Rocking chair | All kinds of exercise | Swinging |

Activities that help us feel safe in our bodies, help us to engage our senses (see, hear, smell, taste, touch and smell) help us return towards calmness. It actually helps the brain to recover.

What Does the PFC Do For Us?

Notes on Resilience

Some References

Trauma Stewardship: An Every Day Guide to Caring for Self While Caring For Others (2009). Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk. An excellent book for all who serve others who have survived trauma.

Trauma is Really Strange (2015). Steve Hanes. A graphic depiction of how trauma affects us. May be very useful especially with teenagers or for people who don't do a lot of reading.

A Terrible Thing Happened (2000). Margaret M Holmes. A non-triggering book about how trauma affects us. Written for children but also affective with adults. Contains a reference section about working with children who have been traumatized.

The Body Keeps the Score (2014). Bessel Van Der Kolk. This book holds more material about trauma, its effects and how to move towards recovery than any other.

Try Softer: A Fresh Approach To Move out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode and into a life of Connection and Joy. (2020) Aundi Kobler. Trauma in childhood often leaves us with the capacity to white knuckle through life, but long term this is not sustainable. Written from a Christian perspective by a survivor who is also a therapist.

<https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/research-publications/singing-lions>

Singing with Lions is a several day course created by Catholic relief services to help children who have faced trauma. It is gentle and beautiful and can be downloaded at the above website.

<https://www.firstaidarts.org/>

A 3 day training program that uses art to help trauma survivors recover. Very user friendly and helpful. They offer courses on the west coast and some other cities too.

<https://emu.edu/cjp/star/>

Five day training program that helps people understand what trauma is, what it does, and how we can help others heal.



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