



Stewards of Trauma

So many Terms...

Secondary Traumatic Stress: A traumatizing event experienced by one person becomes a traumatizing event for another person. Symptoms nearly identical to PTSD. (*Figley, 1995*)

Vicarious Trauma: The transformation that occurs within the therapist (or other trauma worker) as a result of empathic engagement with traumatized clients. Focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on cognitive changes that follow cumulative exposure to another person's traumatic material. Primary symptoms are disturbances in cognitive frame of reference in the areas of trust, safety, control, esteem and intimacy (*National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Committee, 2011*)

Compassion Fatigue: The profound emotional and physical exhaustion that helping professionals and caregivers can develop over the course of their career as helpers. It is the gradual erosion of all the things that keep us connected to others in our caregiver role: our empathy, our hope and of course our compassion-not only for others but also for ourselves." (*Mathieu, 2012, p. 8*)

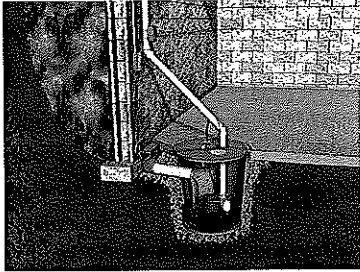
Empathic Strain: We all get tired physically and emotionally. There are signs of "too much" empathic engagement: physical/emotional exhaustion, insomnia/hypersomnia, anger/irritability, problems in personal relationships, somatization, and exaggerated sense of responsibility.

Compassion Satisfaction: The positive feelings derived from competent performance as a trauma professional. This is characterized by positive relationships with colleagues, and the conviction that one's work makes a meaningful contribution to clients and society. (*Stamm, 2009*)



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Our Lens: The Trauma Pledge



The Sump Pump Method

The Journey Back to Us

- How did we come to do this work?
- How are we affected by it?
- Where do we go from here? (how do we make sense of our experiences and grow)

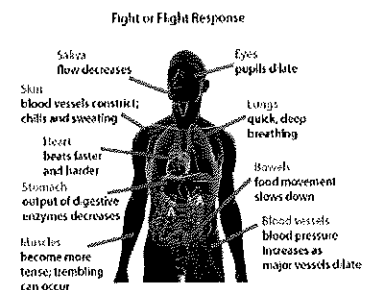
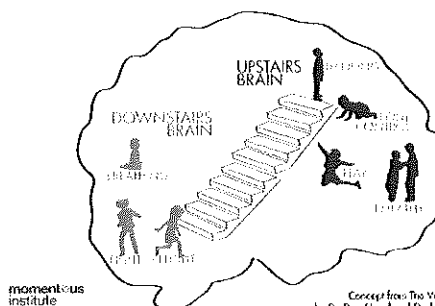
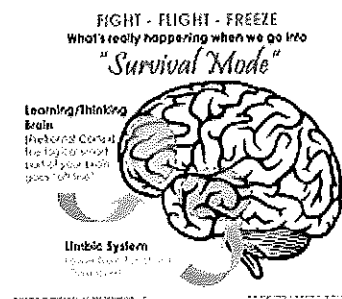
Stress describes a set of psychological and/or physical reactions in response to a specific event, experience or image. Simply put stress is what arises when something you care about is at stake. People interpret stress differently depending on factors such as past experiences, coping strategies, the presence or absence of cumulative stress, and personal resilience.

Resilience is the ability to recover or bounce back from and effectively adapt to life changes and challenges. It is also about a deep knowing that we can handle anything that comes our way. Anyone can strengthen their resiliency.

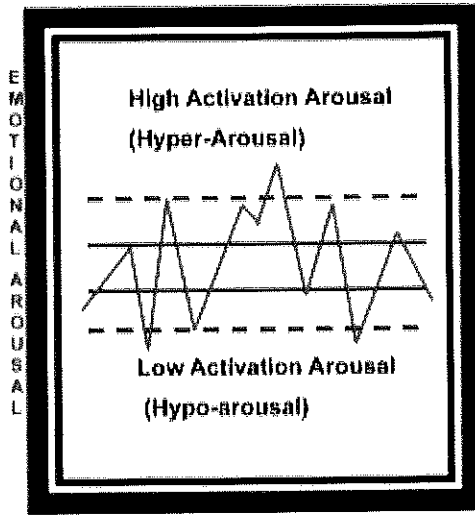
Stress Response:

When you feel stressed, whether you face a real threat or merely *think* that you are facing a threat, your body experiences a collection of physiological changes known as your stress response, or your fight-or-flight-or-freeze response. It is important to remember that the strength of the stress response is related to the level of *perceived* threat rather than actual, physical threat. This is why two people can experience the same situation and have different stress reactions to the same thing; some people perceive a threat where others don't.

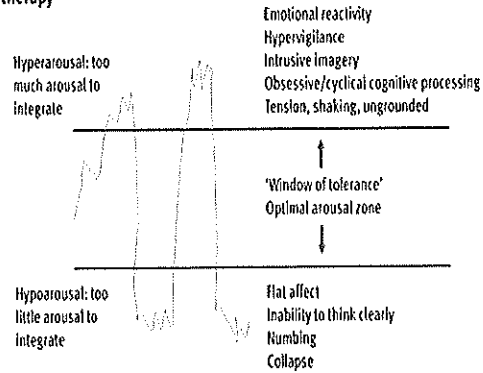
It is also important to recognize that how we *think* or a threat is often not under our conscious control due to our past experiences and possible triggering of related memories. We can gain more control by recognizing when we may be over or under reacting to a situation. In pausing to reflect, we can often become more aware of our stress triggers and work them through using some of the tools below.



Concept from The Whole-Brain Child by D. Dan Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson



The 'window of tolerance': maintaining optimal arousal for trauma-focused therapy



(Adapted from Ogden and Minton 2000)¹⁵

The window of tolerance (adapted from Ogden and Minton 2000) represents an emotional band, it illustrates the degree of emotional experience we can tolerate without becoming completely dis-regulated. It is a useful tool to use to check in with ourselves to continuously monitor our emotional state. Checking in with our body can assist us in this as our body is a good barometer for our stress level. What am I like when I am stressed, upset, or overwhelmed? Are these hyper or hypo arousal symptoms? What am I like when I am the best version of myself?

Hyper	Optimal	Hypo



Hyper-arousal Signs:

- Tension, shaking
- Emotional reactivity
- Defensiveness
- Racing thoughts
- Intrusive imagery
- Emotional overwhelm
- Feeling unsafe
- Obsessive/cyclical thoughts
- Hyper-vigilance
- Impulsivity
- Anger/rage

Optimal Zone:

- Feel & think simultaneously
- Experience empathy
- Feelings are tolerable
- Present moment awareness
- Feel open and curious (versus judgmental and defensive)
- Awareness of boundaries (yours & others)
- Reactions adapt to fit the situation
- Feel safe

Hypo-arousal Signs:

- Relative absence of sensation
- No energy
- Reduced physical movement
- Can't defend oneself
- Disabled cognitive processing/"can't think"
- Numbing of emotions
- Disconnected
- No feelings/Flat affect
- Ashamed
- Feeling "dead"
- Shut down
- Passive
- Can't say no

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Hit the Reset Button

- WTF: Walk, Talk, Flush
- Notice where holding tension in body and release with each exhale ☐ straw exhale-inhale and breathe out like breathing through a straw so exhales are longer than inhales
- Rectangular breathing—breathe in to count of 5, pause to count of 3, breathe out to count of 5, pause to count of 3, repeat ☐ count backwards from 100 by 7s
- Chant/drumming/sing/dance
- Yoga or stretching ☐ count every breath for 1 minute
- Feet on the floor



- Centering through breath—slow down breathing, breathe into your belly 5,4,3,2,1
- 5 things you see, “I see... 5 things you hear, “I hear... 5 body sensations or tactile description, “I feel... repeat all steps with 4, than 3, 2, and 1
- Release oxytocin-give self a hug, contact with significant other
- Savoring, reminding self-what is good in your life or in this moment
- Massage a sore area of your body or scalp
- Random acts of kindness
- Inspirational quotes, images, music
- Rumination: goodwill wish of kindness to person, imagine who you would be without the thought/story, concentrated focus on present
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Three Steps to Self-Compassion Break (Kristen Neff: www.self-compassion.org)

Helpful when experiencing difficult or intense emotions

Three Steps- Self Compassion Break:

1. Mindfulness—become aware of the emotions you are feeling, label and just notice them-“This is a moment of suffering”
2. Identify feelings as normal human experience-“Suffering is part of life”
3. Treat yourself with loving kindness—be gentle and caring with yourself-“May I be kind to myself”-what do you need right now

Other Strategies

Resourcing—what memories, images, symbols, tokens, words, movies, songs, etc. represent and remind me of:

- My own internal strengths and qualities
- The things in life that are important to me

Un-mirroring—being aware that my body posture does not exactly reflect/mirror the body posture of someone who is distressed

How do I protect myself during traumatic content—shields, bubble or something else?

How do I make sure that I am not picturing a traumatic story too vividly?

Other Influences on Trauma Work:

- Organizational Culture
- Societal Forces

