

# Trauma, Resilience & Mindfulness

New Mexico Voices for Children

And Ngage New Mexico

***Childhood Trauma: From Symptoms to Systems Change!***

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# What is Trauma?

- Trauma happens when we perceive or experience our boundaries being threatened or violated and we feel overwhelmed and helpless to respond or protect ourselves.
- Trauma is the loss of safety
- Trauma occurs on a spectrum from the individual level and up to the macro/institutional level.

# Macro Level Trauma



- Historical
- Collective
- Cultural
- Generational
- Poverty
- Oppression
- Institutional trauma

# Individual/Collective /Cultural



# Institutional Trauma

- Institutions can create trauma if they induce fear, increase the sense of helplessness or restrict agency.
  - Banks - hi fees, inability of some to get loans
  - Medical/Mental Health facilities - involuntary holds, cold environments, separating kids and parents, etc.
  - Legal system - poor police policies, unfair court sentencing, racial profiling
  - Media - violence increases sales, induces fear
  - Schools - bullying, detention, lack of staff/resources, burn out
  - Government policies - voter suppression, health care, immigration policies and enforcement

# ACES

- The more adverse childhood experiences a child has, the higher the risk for chronic illness, mental health and substance abuse, poor academic performance, violence and legal issues.
- Generational trauma - a mother who survived the Holocaust may have a daughter with higher possible risk for PTSD. (*Scientific American*, 3/1/2015)
- Epigenetics - the environment has a powerful affect on which genes get turned on or off. This makes childhood programs extremely important to offset ACES

So ... all this trauma can be  
overwhelming! What can we do?

# Speedometer Exercise

A Mindfulness exercise to become aware of your “body speed”

- If your body/mind had a speedometer, what is the reading, right now, sitting here? What sensations are you experiencing at this speed?
- Is this an appropriate speed for the activity you are in right now? If not, imagine either speeding up or slowing down your body.
- What sensations do you notice now?
- Use this exercise anytime of the day/night to help with self-regulation.

# Self Regulation Skills

- We ask children to “pay attention” but never teach them focused attention skills!
- We tell children to “calm down”... but never show them how! (the key is learning about body sensations!)
- We encourage children to be kind but don't give them skills 'how' to do this.
- Adults and parents often don't model mindfulness and self regulation ... so how would children learn it?

# What is Mindfulness?

*Mindfulness* is being aware of what is happening in the present moment with curiosity, openness, non-judgment and kindness. It is not about having a blank mind and it's not about religion.

Practicing mindfulness skills actually increases neuronal growth in the prefrontal cortex areas.

Mindfulness skills increases our ability to self regulate and come back to balance.

# Understanding the Nervous System

- Trauma is not in the event, it is in our nervous system.
- Understanding the physiology of trauma is critical for working with traumatized individuals.
- When there is understanding of our fight, flight and freeze defensive systems, we can more appropriately respond to our clients or students.
- Move from *“What’s wrong with her”* to *“What’s happened to her”*

# Trauma Disorganizes the Nervous System

Trauma **disorganizes** the survival responses in the lower brain structures and **disorganizes** the nervous system

## Forebrain

### (Neocortex)

Thinking, Language  
Higher brain functions,  
conscious control

## Mid Brain

### (Limbic Area)

Feeling/Emotions

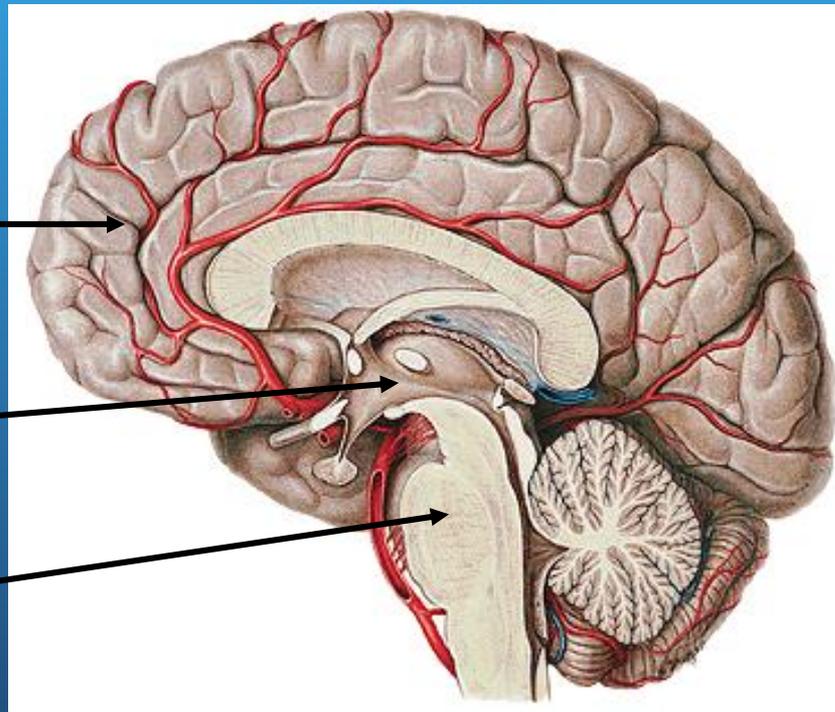
## Hindbrain (Brainstem)

### (Reptilian Brain)

Sensing Autonomic &

Instinctual Centers:

breathing, circulation, digestion, reproduction,  
fight/flight responses -unconscious control



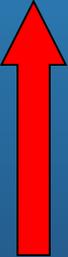
Organization of the Brain

# The Autonomic Nervous System

## Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

### Sympathetic Branch (Accelerator)

Causes the organs to prepare for action

- 
- breathing rate
  - blood pressure
  - heart rate
  - pupils dilate
  - sweating
  - stress hormones

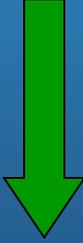
- 
- digestion
  - saliva

The Sympathetic and the Parasympathetic branches act together to maintain homeostasis.

The 2 branches are reciprocal systems -when one is up the other is down.

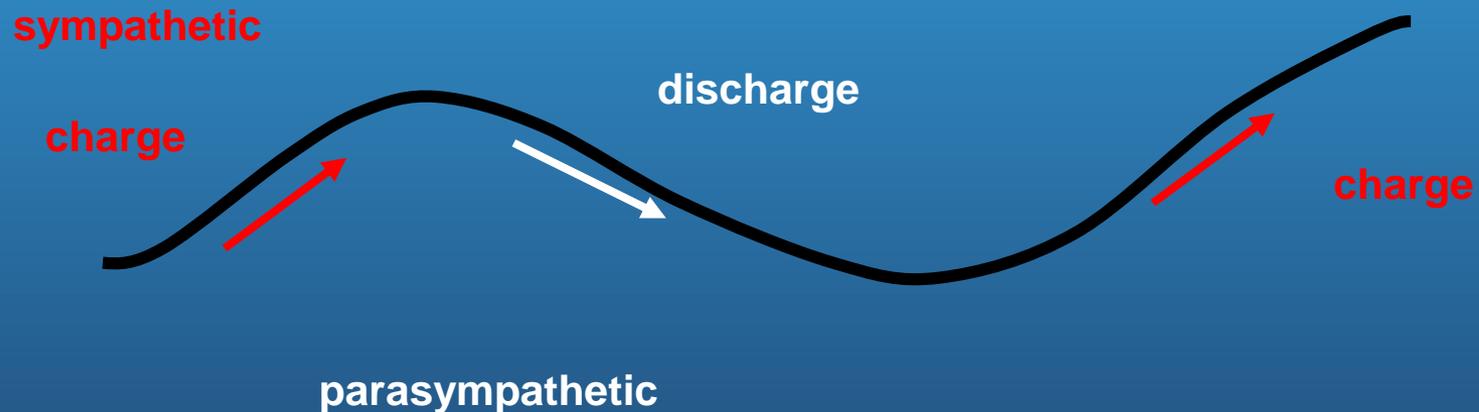
### Parasympathetic Branch (Brake)

Causes the organs to slow and rest

- 
- breathing rate
  - heart rate
  - blood pressure
  - pupils constrict
  - sweating

- 
- saliva
  - digestion

# The Reciprocal Relationship of the Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Branches of the Autonomic Nervous System



# Overwhelming Experience!

# Experience!

Stuck on "High"

Rage  
Tachycardia  
Hyperactivity  
Hyperventilation  
Dyspepsia  
Elation / Mania  
Muscular Tension  
Anxiety / Panic  
Hyperstartle  
Hypertension  
Risk Behavior  
Hot/flushed

Muscle Weakness  
Depression  
Hypotension  
Disconnection  
Constipation  
Hopeless/hopeless  
Sleeping  
Exhaustion  
Sluggish  
Numbness  
Cold/pale

Stuck on "Low"

Normal Range

# S-T-O-P Exercise

Let's **S**top for a moment...

**T**ake a breath.

**O**bserve what is happening - in your body

in your mind

in your heart

Let's **P**roceed



**Fight, Flight - STUCK ON HIGH**  
**Angry, Anxious, Hypervigilant, Hyperactive**

**Alertness and Social connection**

**Freeze/Collapse/Disconnect - STUCK ON LOW**



**Fight, Flight**

**Alertness and Social connection - PFC**

**Freeze/Collapse/Disconnect**  
**Depressed, Tired, Hopeless, Shy, Disengaged**



**Fight, Flight    TOO HIGH/FAST**

**Alertness and Social connection  
High Resilience**

**JUST RIGHT**

**Freeze/Collapse/Disconnect    TOO LOW/SLOW**

# What Children Need

All children have these needs for secure attachment:

1. Protection - knowing they are safe
2. Attunement - being seen by another
3. Reassurance & soothing - to grow in self regulation
4. Expressed delight - increases their self worth
5. Guidance & Mentoring - increases confidence
6. Learning to not take life too personally
7. Repairing conflict - enhances strength of relationship

-Deirdre Fay, LCSW

# Safety is Critical

When we perceive safety, we move into 'pro-social' green zone behavior - we are more relaxed, more social and learn better

- When we perceive threat, we withdraw or get anxious/angry - going into red or yellow
- How safe do you feel ... at work? at home? at school? How safe do children feel ... at home? at school? ...

# Attention and the Negativity Bias

We are born with circuitry that pays more attention to negative stimuli rather than positive for increased survival especially when there has been trauma.

The downside is that we pay more attention to bad things.

We can change this by actively shifting our attention.

*“Where attention goes, neural firing flows and neural connection grows”*

*- Dan Siegel*

# Breathing to Increase the Green Zone

Inhale for the count of 6

Exhale for the count of 6

On next inhale, relax your brow

On exhale, relax your jaw

On next inhale, think of a dear friend/family member/pet, feeling the warmth and connection in your chest

On next exhale, have appreciation for them

Now breathe normally while feeling the sensations of the breath

# Growing the Green Zone

Brainstorm with your students/families about activities or people in their life that bring them peace or calm. These are their *resources* and can include:

Being with friends

Exercise

Good food

Dancing

Singing

Being with your animals

Journaling

Hot baths

Music

Praying

Nature

Making art

Laughing

Breathing

Learning

Playing

Deep sleep

# Key to Self Regulation

In order to create a change in the

- - body physiology
- - emotional states
- - thought processes

The key is to feel the sensations of the experience in our bodies.

For example: “As I focus on the glitter settling to the bottom of the jar ... what is happening in my body?” Then give yourself time to notice.

# Self Care

- As professionals, we must first learn to be regulated ourselves
- Our students/clients will attune to our regulation
- Practicing mindfulness exercises and enhancing our self care through resources is vital to prevent vicarious traumatization and burn out.
- Remember to breathe ...

# Up Next: Mindful Eating Practice

After the closing short video we will remain silent and move into getting our lunch.

If you do need to talk or make a phone call, please do it outside of this room.

As you are silent, notice whatever it is you are feeling about the morning. As you serve your food ... notice the aromas, the colors, notice your body ...

Quietly get your lunch and return to your table. I will lead a short mindful eating practice.

After that ... you are free to connect and speak!