

The Foundation of Trauma Treatment

Emotional Regulation

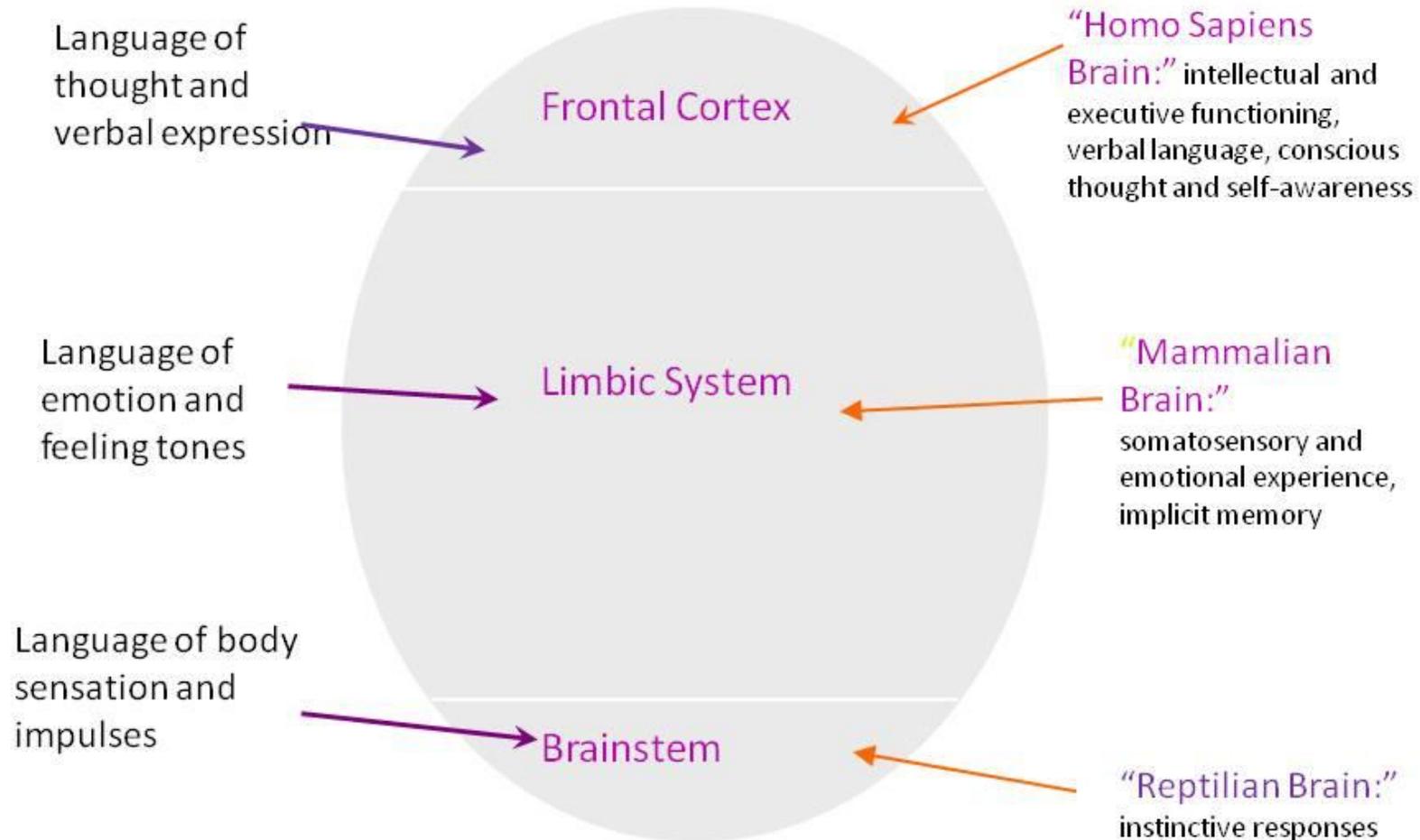


Let's Begin With an Activity . . .



“The Triune Brain:”

One Mind, Three Brains [McLean, 1967]





Emotions in the Brain

- The limbic system is considered “the seat of emotions, the monitor of danger, the judge of what is pleasurable or scary, the arbitrator of what is or is not important for survival purposes. It is also the central command post for coping with the challenges of living within our complex social networks” (van der Kolk, 2014)

The Brain's Alarm System

- We take in sensory information from our environment through our five senses; when danger is perceived an alert is sent down to the amygdala and up to the frontal cortex
- The amygdala's role is to determine if our survival is threatened; if so it will secrete stress hormones that initiate instinctual responses to keep us safe – fight or flight
- The frontal cortex's role is to assess the situation, predict what is going to happen and make a choice as to how we will respond
- The amygdala works much faster than the frontal cortex; often we begin to react before we realize that we are not in danger

The Impact of Trauma on the Brain's Alarm System

- During traumatic events, if the normal response system is blocked and effective action cannot be taken, the brain keeps secreting stress hormones because it thinks there is still danger
- The body remains on high alert long after the danger has passed
- The nervous systems of people who experience chronic trauma adjust to high levels of stress hormones and they organize their lives as if the trauma were still going on – always in survival mode



- When the nervous system is chronically overstimulated by the stress response system an individual either overreacts or shuts down.
- The functions governed by the frontal cortex are unavailable – symbolic thought, executive functions of inhibition, working memory and problem solving ability

- Warner et.al. 2013





Emotions and Attachment

- Emotions are an experience of the body and attachment relationships are the context within which we learn to regulate emotions (Wallin, 2007)
 - Attachment is an interactive psychobiological regulation that teaches us to translate body sensations into feelings that can be recognized, named, contained and interpreted (Krystal, 1988)
 - We learn how to regulate our emotions in our early attachment relationships
- 

Emotional Dysregulation

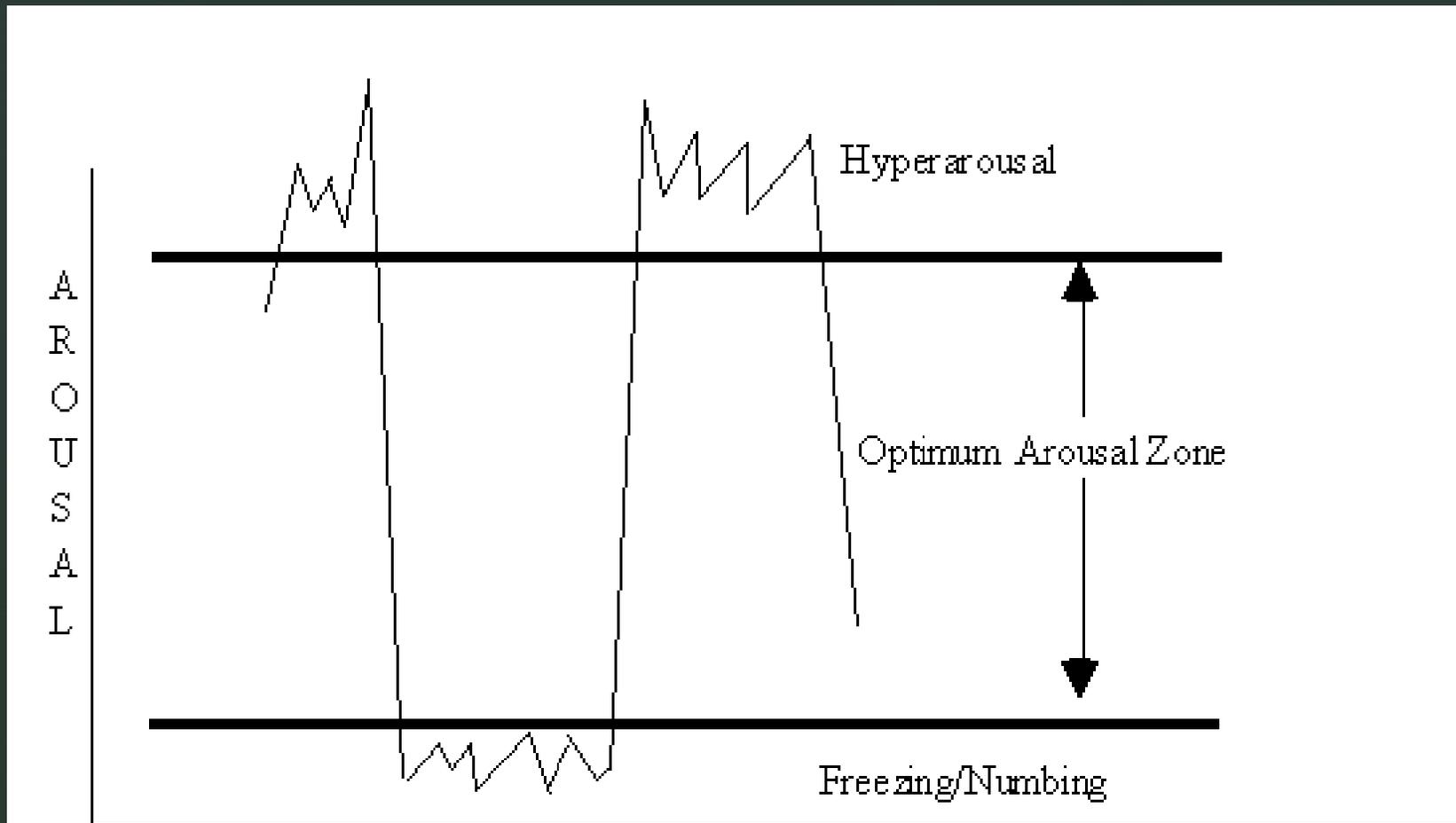
- Trauma increases the risk of misinterpreting whether a particular situation is dangerous or safe
- This faulty alarm system leads to emotional explosion or shut down in response to situations, comments, facial expressions, body language etc. that prompt feelings connected to original trauma.

(van der Kolk, 2014, p. 61-62)

Emotional Dysregulation

- Studies have shown that maltreated children have disruptions in their brain development created by trauma that ultimately compromises the ability to experience, tolerate and manage emotional states (Siegel, 2013)
- Emotional dysregulation happens when one cannot stay inside their "window of tolerance" – the band of tolerable levels of emotional arousal that we function in (Siegel, 2010)
- Relationships can trigger dysregulation

Window of Tolerance





Emotional Regulation

- The ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience by using strategies in-the-moment that keep you inside your “window of tolerance”
 - Engaging in broader on-going self care strategies that widen our “window of tolerance”
 - Since emotions are controlled by the limbic brain it is best addressed through a bottom up approach
- 



Bottom Up Strategies

- “Higher” structures of the brain are often dominated by lower ones – neural “traffic” is much heavier from the bottom up – from the amygdala to the cortex – than from the top down (LeDoux, 1996).
 - Merely thinking aloud about difficult emotions with traumatized clients may be useful but insufficient. Helping clients attend to their internal experiences (body, breath) can strengthen capacity for emotional regulation (Wallin, 2007)
 - Bottom up regulation involves recalibrating the autonomic nervous system through breath, movement or touch (van der Kolk, 2014)
- 

Talk Therapy is a Top-Down Strategy

- "Psychologists usually try to help people use insight and understanding to manage their behavior. Neuroscience research shows that very few psychological problems are the result of defects in understanding; most originate in pressures from deeper regions in the brain that drive our perception and attention. When the alarm bell of the emotional brain keeps signaling that you are in danger, no amount of insight will silence it"

(van der Kolk, 2014, p. 64)



- For cognitive behavioral therapies to be effective, the client needs to be sufficiently regulated, organized, grounded and present so that language, imagination and symbolic expressive function can emerge.

- Warner, et al. 2013



Promoting Emotional Regulation in our Clients

- Co-regulation strategies
- Self-regulation techniques

Co-regulation

- Parents are frequent co-regulators as children gradually develop the ability to autoregulate their emotional states without parents present.
- As clinicians, we can co-regulate our clients by
 - Remaining regulated in emotional situations
 - Engage in rhythmic, repetitive motion with our clients such as breathing together, walking, or tossing a ball back and forth
 - Create a safe, soothing environment – soft, low lighting; pillows and blankets; quiet, calm space



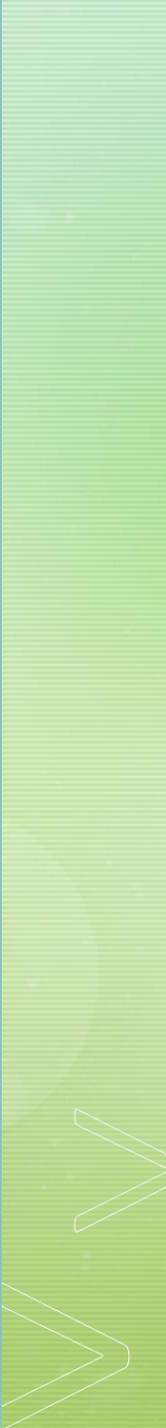
Self-regulation

- Teach and practice a variety of emotional regulation strategies
 - Mindfulness
 - Breathing
 - Guided imagery
 - Grounding with the five senses
 - Somatic Resourcing
- 



When Things Fall Apart – Heart Advice for Difficult Times

By: Pema Chodron



Is Mindfulness Just Hype?

- In order to self-regulate emotions one must be aware of them – that is where mindfulness comes in
- According to Jon Kabat-Zinn mindfulness emerges through paying attention “on purpose,” in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding experience moment by moment
- Virtually all studies found mindfulness treatments were connected to far greater substance misuse treatment outcomes at both post-treatment and follow-up assessments (Li, et al., 2017)

- 
- Mindfulness treatments are also superior in reducing psychiatric distress and negative affective states, stress, and dissociation experiences
 - Mindfulness treatments significantly increased emotional regulation, attentional control, and self-efficacy to refuse substance use
 - Neurobiological findings suggest that mindfulness treatment could modify brain and psychophysiological functions associated with addiction and reduce the risk of relapse

(Li, et al., 2017)



Emotional Regulation in Practice at CGE

- 52 year old, single, lesbian, African-American woman referred by Parole
- Spent a total of twenty years incarcerated
- Long history of severe marijuana and alcohol use
- Multiple traumatic experiences beginning in childhood
- Previous diagnoses of Bipolar Disorder II and Generalized Anxiety
- Emotionally shutdown and often times combative during first two months of treatment

Emotional Regulation Skills

- Breathing
 - “Square” breathing
 - Extended exhale
 - Counting
 - Diaphragmatic breathing



Emotional Regulation Skills

■ Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Notice your body in your chair, uncross your legs. Get comfy, take your shoes off if you want
- You can close your eyes or keep them open. Don't worry about looking silly. We will all look silly together.
- Scrunch your toes - tight.....tighter.....tighter.....relax
- Bend your toes up toward your face – tight....tighter.....tighter.....relax
- Calves, hold your lower legs up under your chair
- Tighten your thighs and your bottom and feel yourself rise up in your chair
- Tighten your abdominal muscles
- Pull your shoulders in toward each other
- Scrunch your hands into a fist
- Now pull your hands in and cross them while scrunching your shoulders up toward your ear
- Tighten your jaw
- Scrunch up your face real tight – tight....tightertighterrelax
- Now go back through your whole body and let go of any tension you might still feel in each place as you move through it. Notice the difference in places that are still tight and relax.



Emotional Regulation Skills

- Guided Imagery
 - Safe space (often used in EMDR)
 - Apps like Calm and Headspace
 - Youtube.com
 - Podcasts



Sensory Motor Psychotherapy: Somatic resourcing

Ogden & Fisher, 2015

- Somatic resources reside in the body- internal resources
 - The physical functions, actions, and capacities that provide a sense of well being and competency on a physical level and can positively affect how we feel
 - Working with posture, movement, gesture and our senses to regulate emotional responses
- 



Unconscious Somatic Resources

- We unconsciously develop somatic resources as children
 - Rocking, rubbing, moving,
- As adults we intuitively use physical actions and engage in physical activities that are calming or energizing to regulate our emotional state
 - Rubbing your neck, stretching, going for a walk, bouncing legs, hugging ourselves



Centering Resources

Ogden & Fisher, 2015

- Regaining a sense of being connected with ourselves when we are distressed or "off center"
 - Locating and sensing the physical center of your body
 - Placing hand on your belly
 - Placing hand on your heart
 - Hugging pillow close to your belly or heart
 - Posture adjustments
- 



Containment Resources

Ogden & Fisher, 2015

- Help us to sense the physical container of our bodies
 - Allows us to contain feelings so we can regulate before expressing ourselves
 - Allows us to decide how much or how little to express
 - Strategies
 - Wrapping in a blanket or sweater
 - Pressing back into chair
 - Cross arms and press palm into opposite knees
- 



Movement Resources

Ogden & Fisher, 2015

- Stroking own skin
 - Rubbing tops of thighs
 - Pacing
 - Rocking
 - Stretching
 - Dancing
- 



External Somatic Resources

Ogden & Fisher, 2015

- Warm baths
 - Massage
 - Pleasant scents
 - Sounds
 - Favorite foods; textured foods
 - Touch soft fabric
- 

▶ The Importance of Managing Your Affect

- Caregiver Affect Management is a term used to describe a “building block” within The ARC Model (Attachment Regulation Competency)
- The term describes the caregiving system (staff) first understanding, managing, and coping with their emotional responses so they are better able to teach and support those they treat
- The term does NOT infer the caregiver should not have emotional responses or reactions but rather understand those reactions, their impetus and how they affect the client

Blaustein and Kinniburgh, 2010



We're Going to Make it Rain!



Resources

- Book: *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency.* Margaret E. Blaustein and Kristine M. Kinniburgh
- Book: *Emotional Regulation in Psychotherapy: A Practitioner's Guide.* Robert Leahy, Dennis Tirch, and Lisa Napolitano
- Book: *101 Trauma-Informed Interventions: Activities, Exercises, and Assignments to Move the Client and Therapy Forward.* Linda Curran, Bcpc, Lpc, Cacd, Ccdpd
- Website: <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/dbt-emotion-regulation-skills>
- Apps: Calm, Headspace, Simplehabit



Questions?



References

- Blaustein, M., Kinniburgh, K. (2010). *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency*. New York: The Guilford Press
- Krystal, H. (1988). *Integration and self healing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press
- LeDoux, J. (1996). *The emotional brain: The mysterious underpinnings of emotional life*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster
- Li, W., Howard, M.O., Garland, E.L., McGovern, P., Lazar, M. (2017). *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 75, pages 62-96. *Mindfulness treatment for substance misuse: A systematic review and meta-analysis*. New Brunswick, NJ: Elsevier
- Ogden, P. & Fisher, J. (2015). *Sensorimotor psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Norton & Company.
- Siegel, D. (2010). *Mindsight*. New York, NY: Random House
- Siegel, J. (2013). Breaking the links in intergenerational violence: an emotional regulation response. *Family Process*, 52(2), p. 163-178.



- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score*. New York, NY: Viking Penguin
- Wallin, D. (2007). *Attachment in psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Guilford Press
- Warner, E., Koomar, J, Lary, B., Cook, A. (2013). Can the body keep the score? Application of sensory modulation principles in the treatment of traumatized adolescents in residential settings. *Journal of Family Violence*, 28: 729-738