

**GETTING UNSTUCK
FROM TRAUMA
WHEN STUCK
AT THE CONSOLE**

Stephanie M. Conn, PhD, ABPP
Licensed Psychologist

TRAUMA & RESILIENCE ARE....

Bio

Psycho

Social

The best prediction of how you'll be two years after a major disruption, whether as an individual or as an organization, is how you were doing two days before.

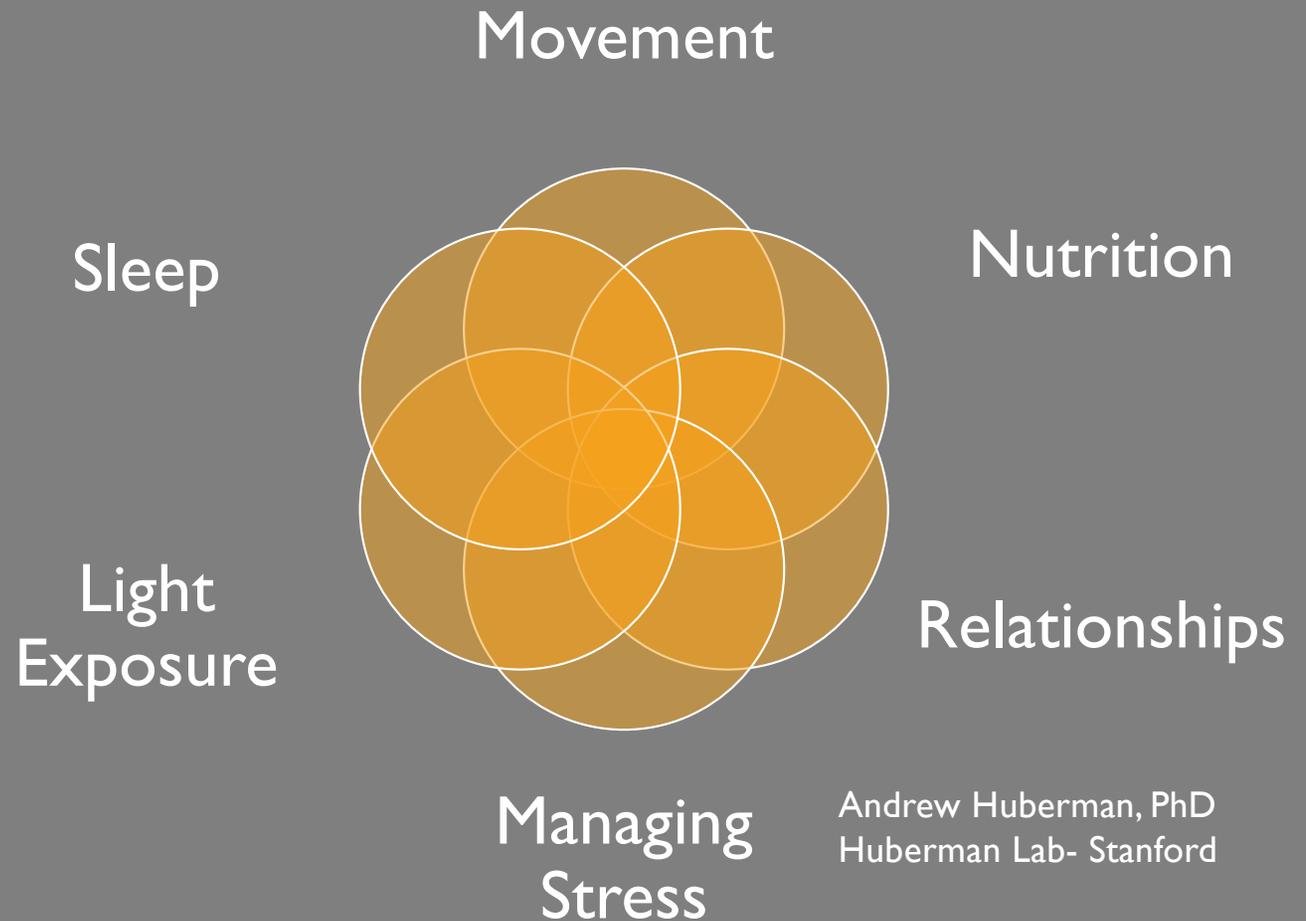
Build on the basics.

~Gist, Taylor, Watson & Leto (2019).
Understanding Suicide & Fire Service.



So....

What are
the basics?



Andrew Huberman, PhD
Huberman Lab- Stanford

DISPATCH WORK REQUIRES...

- **Focusing on 10 things at once**
- **Fast & ongoing judgments relating to harm, danger & deception**
- **Remembering & planning for danger, problems, etc.**
- **Chronic exposure to stress, dark side of humanity**

RESULTING IN “DYS-EVOLUTION”

*Adopting & passing on traits that are
damaging to our health*



Neuroplasticity +/-



Too much

Breathing, eating,
stressing, negativity, etc.



Multi-tasking

Lowers IQ, increases
stress & mistakes



Focus on the negative

Critical / evaluative of
self & others

POTENTIAL IMPACTS



**Habituating to the
"new normal"**

Even if it is chaos
Dis-ease with quiet



Decline in health



"Acquired ADHD"



POTENTIAL IMPACTS



Relationship- disconnection/ conflict



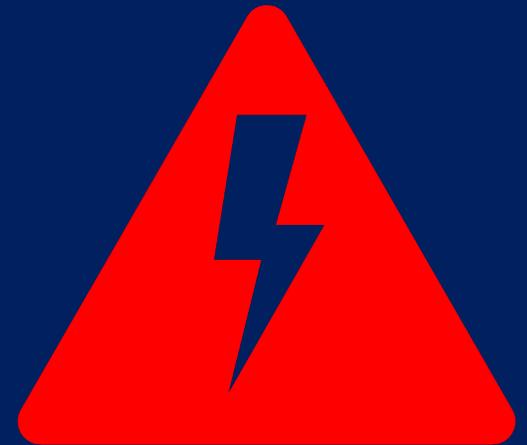
Increased Injury/ Harm

Inappropriate use of force
Driving decisions



Unhealthy coping methods

Substance use, avoidance,
overwork



TRAUMA: SIGNS



BIO: TRAUMA & THE BRAIN

- Amygdala, hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, & thalamus
- Memories are fragmented, stored as fragments
- Brain (limbic system) believes event is ongoing & sounds alarm



ZONE OF HYPERAROUSAL

- Hyperarousal - (High levels of arousal)
- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, highly stressed, or angry
- Body wants to fight/flee
- Sympathetic Nervous System Activation
- Heart increase
- Ready to move away from what we perceive as dangerous
- Faster breathing, blood pressure increases

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

- Optimal Arousal Zone
- Calm, but not tired
- Alert, but not anxious
- Ventral Vagal Pathway
- Successfully able to manage the stressors and soothers of the day without maladaptive behaviors or excessive dysregulation
- Connected, flexible, relaxed
- Able to communicate
- Ready for learning & problem-solving

ZONE OF HYPOAROUSAL

- Hypoarousal (Low levels of arousal)
- Feeling zoned out, spacey, numb
- Body wants to shut down/freeze/immobilize
- Parasympathetic/Dorsal Vagal Pathway
- Survival State
- Dissociative Collapse
- Shut down

@yesandbrain

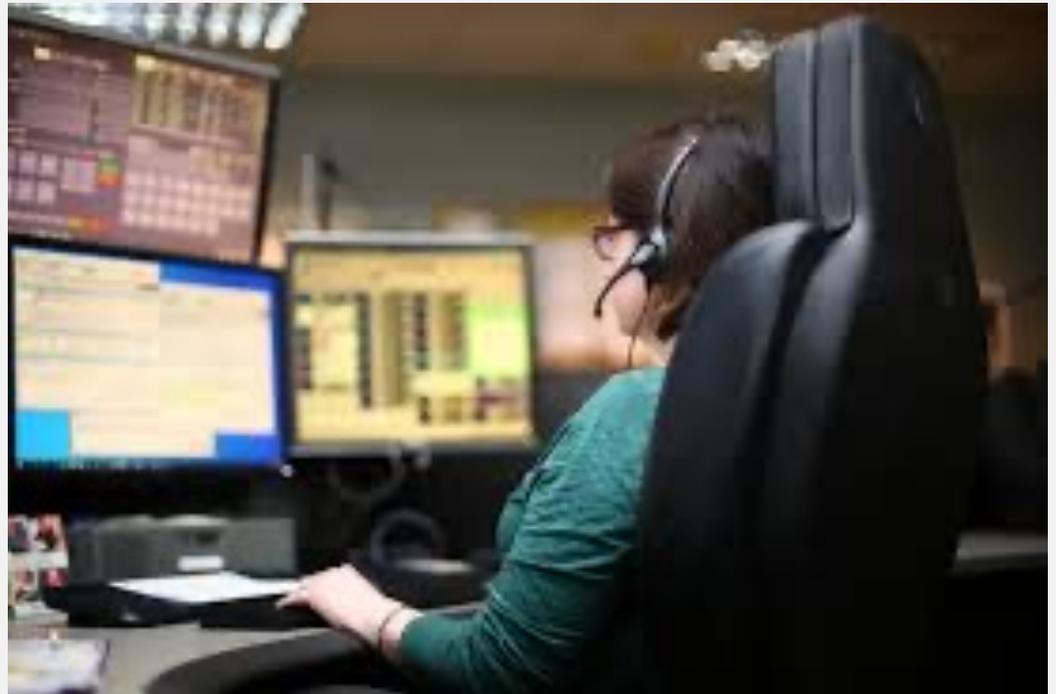
Results in illness, injuries, & pain
Increased threat perception
Inability to filter out information
GO!!!!

Sweet spot
Expand here

Blunted feelings – lack of imagination
Withdrawal & numbness
Difficulty focusing, forgetful, etc.
SLOW!!!!

COMMON PHYSICAL SIGNS OF SYMPATHETIC OVERDRIVE

- Sewing machine leg issues
- Workaholic
- Hard-charging
- Difficulty being still
- Digestive issues
- Headaches, chronic pain



FLIP-FLOP

Hyperarousal

- **Conflict with co-workers / citizens**
- **Results in illness, injuries, & pain**
- **Increased threat perception**
- **Inability to filter out information**
- **Difficulty being still**
- **Quick to Anger / Emotionality**
- **Difficulty falling/ staying asleep**
- **Thrill-seeking behaviors**
- **Workaholism**

Hypoarousal

- **Blunted feelings – indifferent, indecisive**
- **Withdrawn**
- **Avoiding calls**
- **Mistakes in paperwork, accidents**
- **Difficulty focusing, forgetful, etc.**
- **Sleeping often**
- **Zoned out- tv, internet, etc.**
- **Gilmartin's "usta syndrome"**

PSYCHO: THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF TRAUMA

Irritability to
Anger

Lack of
patience

Less
compassion for
self/others

Negativity bias
expanded

Isolation

- Physical
- Mental/ Emotional

STORY FOLLOWS STATE

Me to myself: This is annoying. This conversation is annoying, this person is annoying. I hope I'm hiding it well.
My face:



Pre-Annoyed
(adj.) You know this person is about to piss you off even before they say anything.

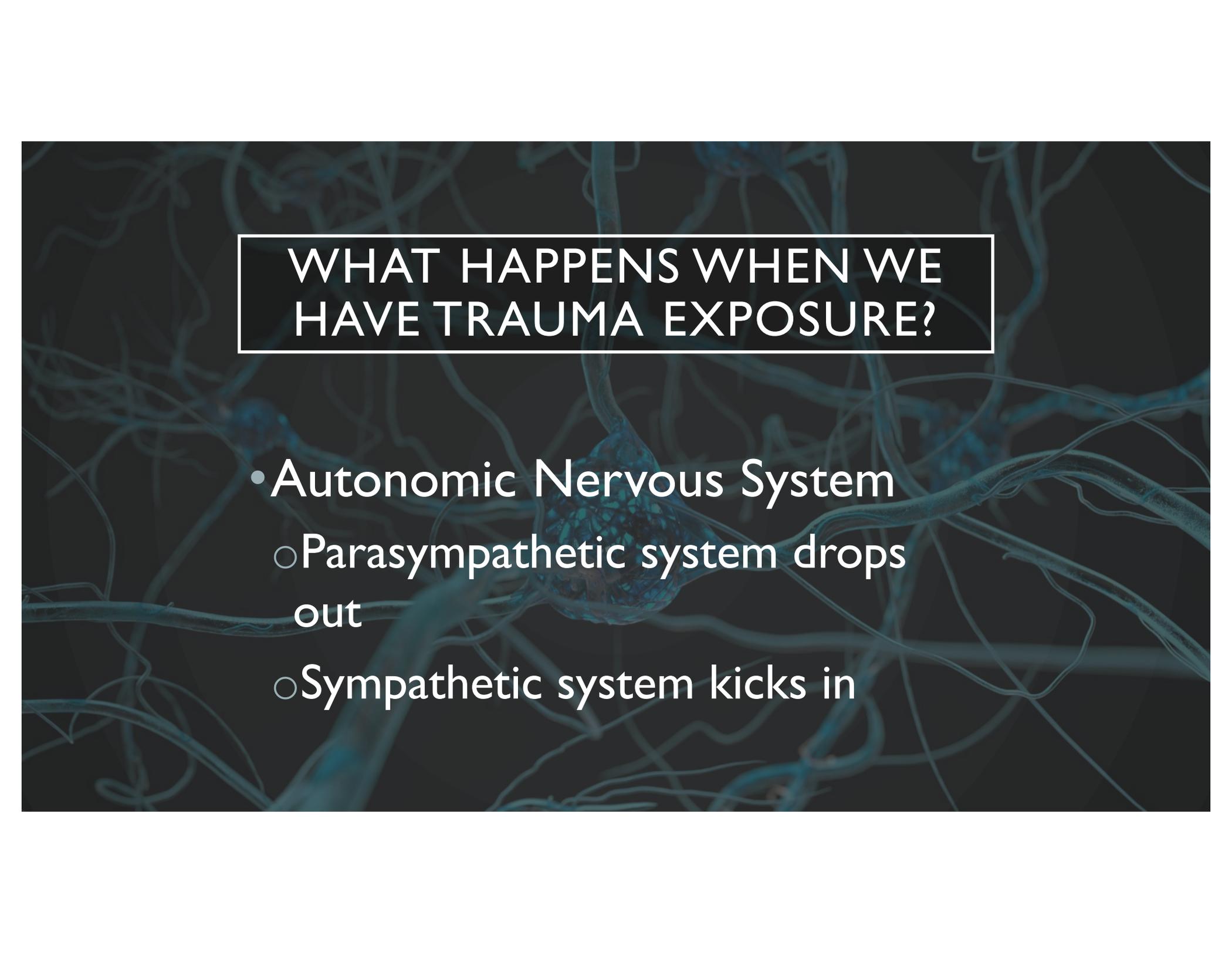
SOCIAL: RELATIONAL IMPACT

- Distance from others
 - Withdrawing/ Pushing Away
 - To avoid bringing others down
 - To avoid traumatizing others
 - Lack of energy
 - Decision fatigue



TRAUMA: SCIENCE





WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE HAVE TRAUMA EXPOSURE?

- Autonomic Nervous System
 - Parasympathetic system drops out
 - Sympathetic system kicks in

THREE STRESS PROCESSES



Habituation

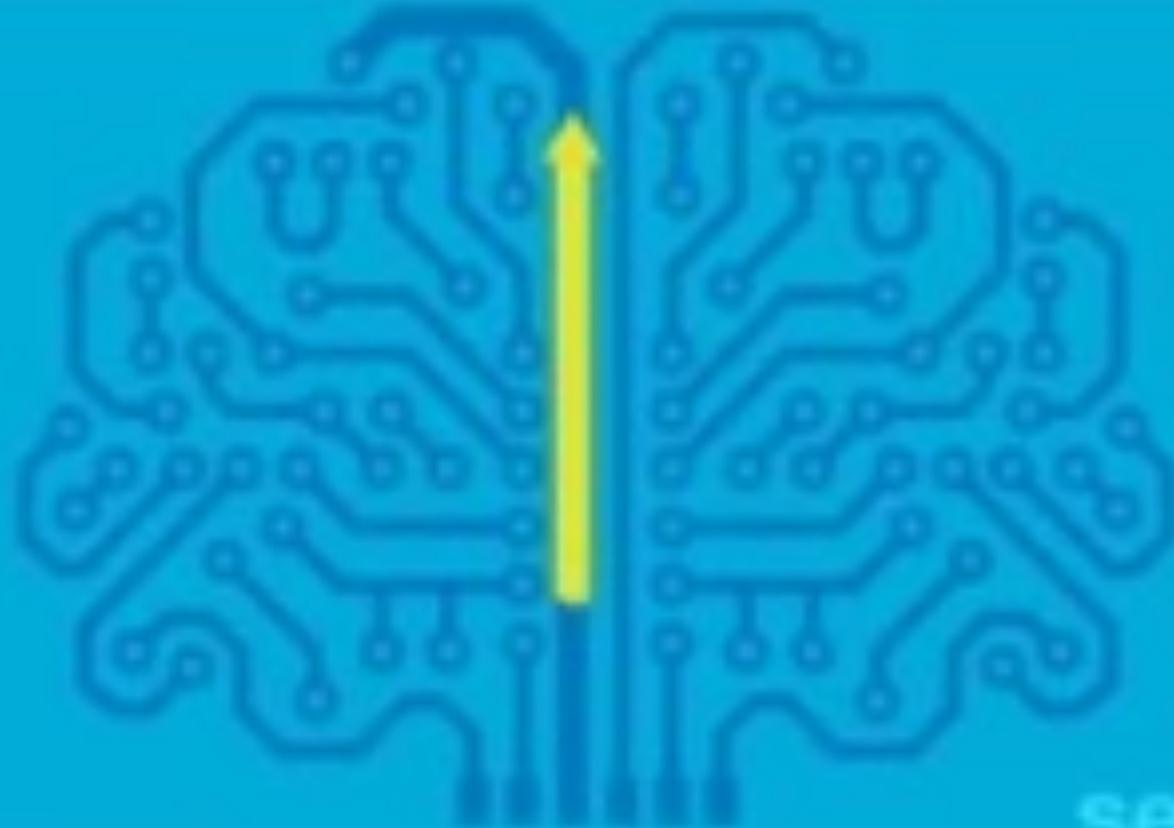


Sensitization



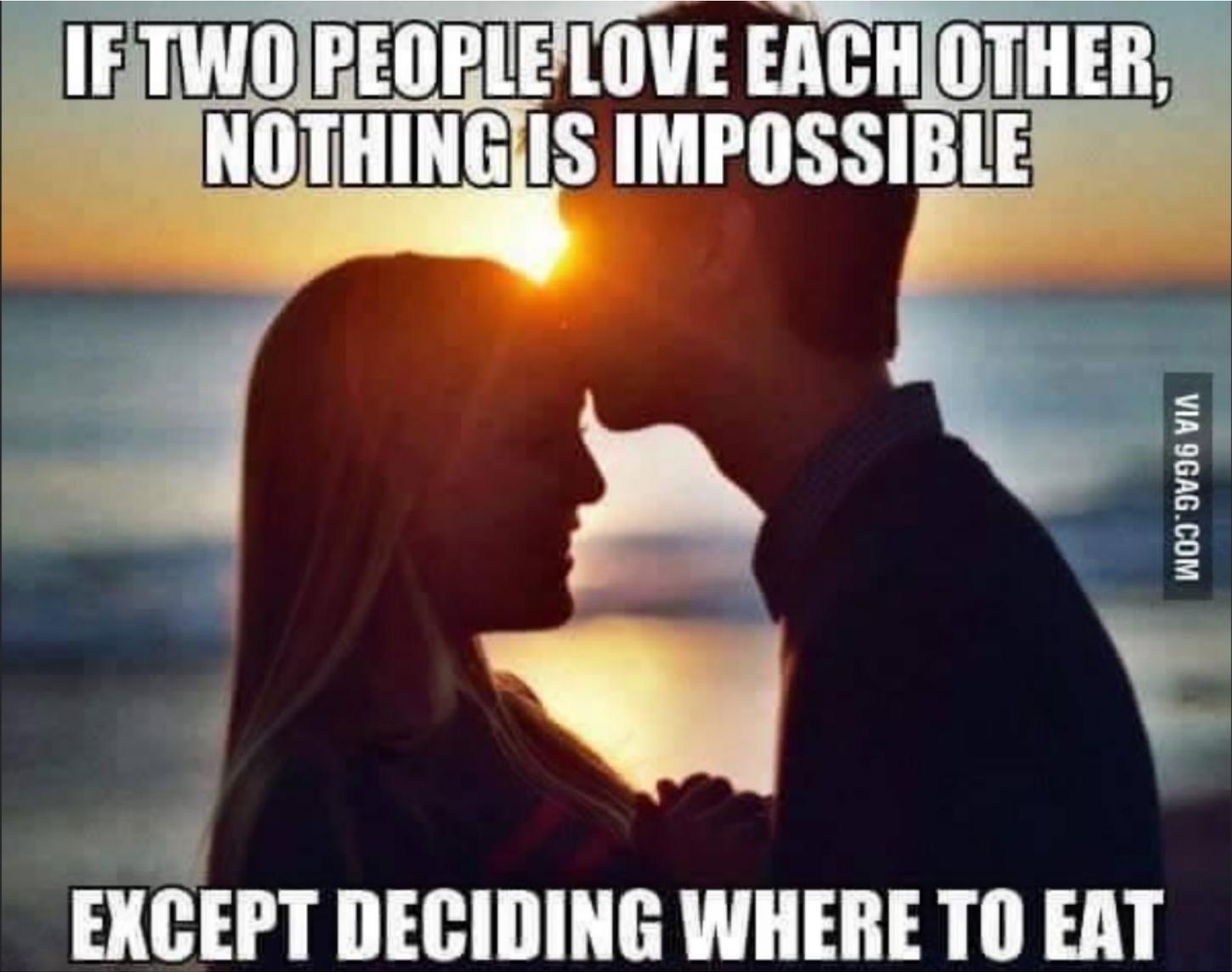
De-habituation

NEUROPLASTICITY



HOW DO THESE
PROCESSES AFFECT YOU
PSYCHOLOGICALLY &
SOCIALY?



A romantic couple is shown in silhouette, kissing on a beach at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that silhouettes the couple. The background shows the ocean waves. The image is framed by dark vertical bars on the left and right sides.

**IF TWO PEOPLE LOVE EACH OTHER,
NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE**

VIA 9GAG.COM

EXCEPT DECIDING WHERE TO EAT



**COULD YOU
REPEAT THAT TRAFFIC**

**IN A LOUD,
SLOW, SARCASTIC MANNER**



DOWNPLAYING OTHERS' CONCERNS

**You are just as dead from
drowning in 7 feet of water
as 20 feet of water.**

**By replacing
your morning
coffee with green
tea, you can lose
up to 87% of
what little joy
you still have
left in your life.**

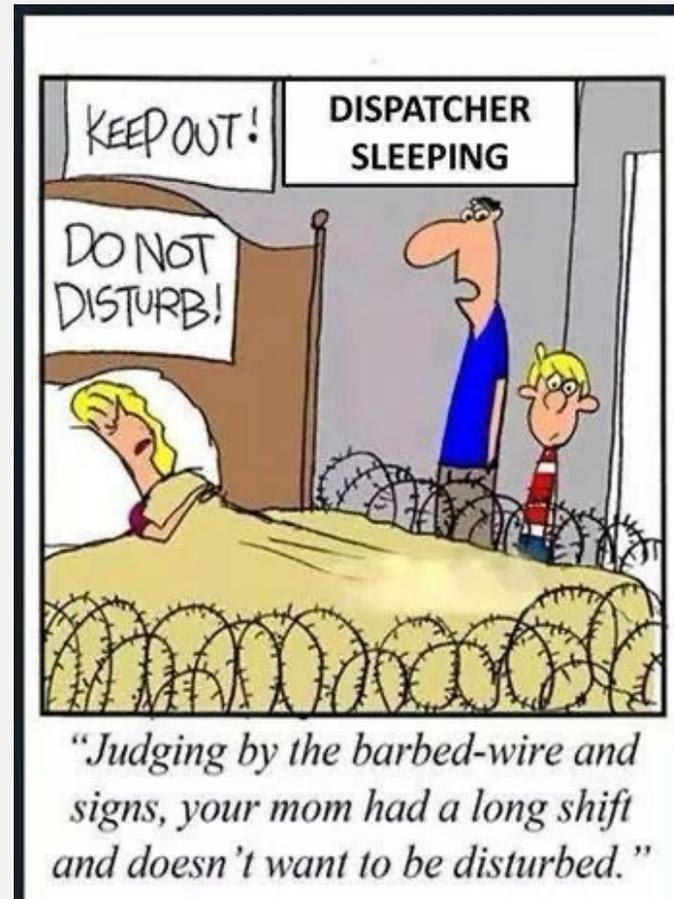
BREAK TIME

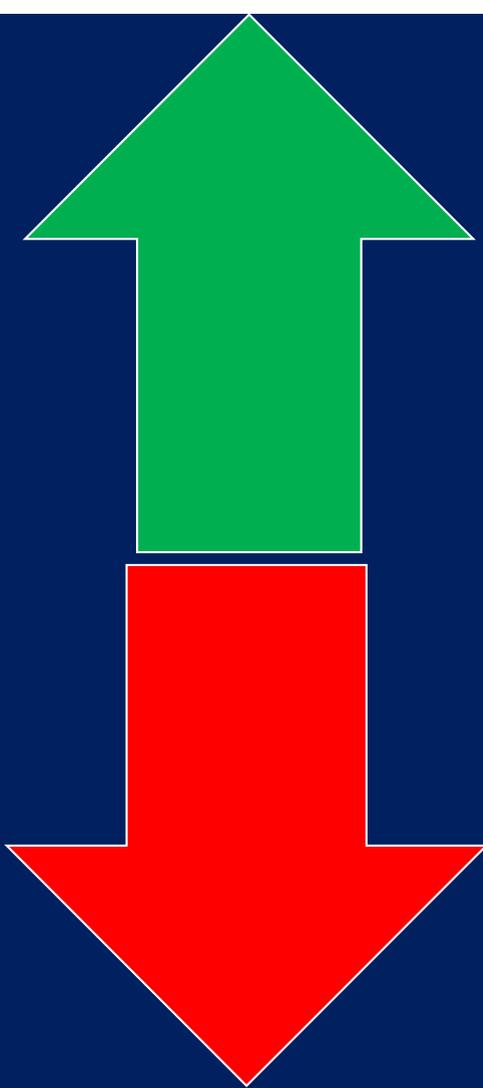
TRAUMA: STRATEGIES



HOW DO DISPATCHERS TYPICALLY COPE?

- Exercise
 - +- (HIIT- in short doses, improves focus & mood) (too much/ too long = damaging stress)
- Avoidance
- Busyness
 - Distractions
 - Alcohol





Awareness & Reflection Practices

Sleep, Exercise, Healthy Eating & Hydration

Quiet Time in Nature

Talking to a Friend / Confidant

Getting Bodywork / Massage

Enjoying a Hobby

Shopping

Habitual Eating

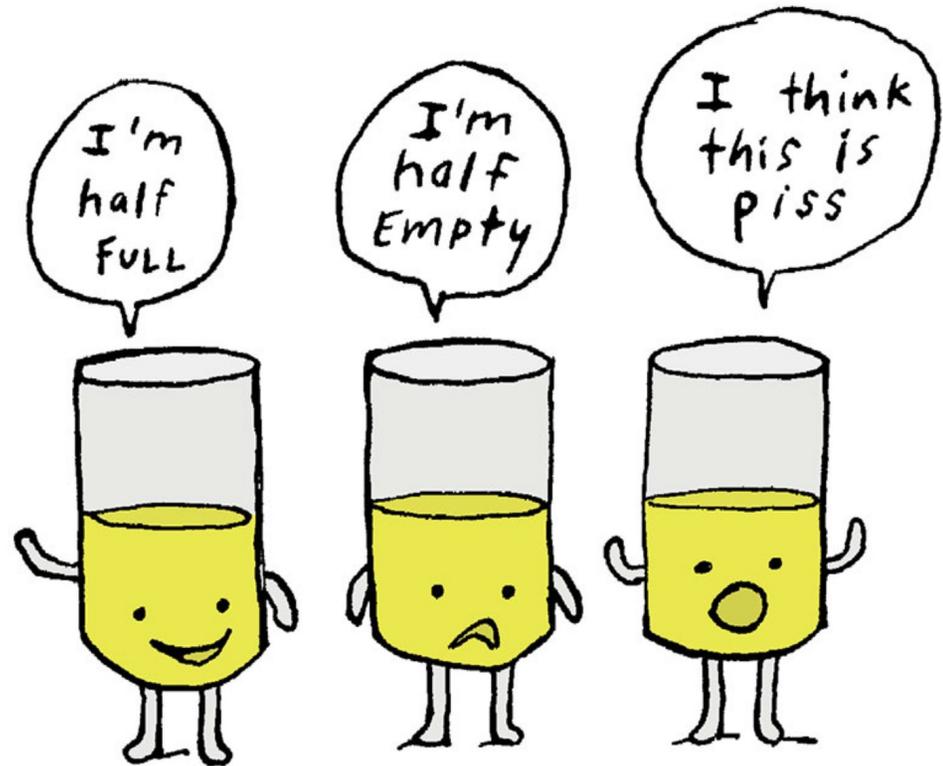
Binge TV Watching

Excessive Caffeine, Sugar, Tobacco, Alcohol or Other
Substances

Adrenaline-seeking, violent or self-harming behaviors

Elizabeth Stanley, PhD.
Widen the Window

Mindset



HOW DOES THE STORY END?

They met in a bar, where he offered her a ride home. He took her down unfamiliar streets. He said it was a shortcut.....



Pain does not result in suffering.
Thinking about pain repeatedly
results in suffering.

**GREITENS, AUTHOR OF *RESILIENCE:*
*HARD WON WISDOM FOR LIVING A BETTER LIFE***

*You'd rather feel
guilty than
helpless.*

FAULTY THINKING

(KIRSCHMAN, KAMENA & FAY, 2013)



Incident Envy

Downplaying own
incident / needs
problems

You're just as dead
from drowning in
7ft of water as 20



Curse of Omnipotence

Not
recognizing
own limits

*"If only I had
..."*



Rescuing Others

Don't want
to "burden"
others with
their
problems



Myth of Uniqueness

Comparing
their insides
to other's
outsides

THE STOCKDALE PARADOX

“You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end — which you can never afford to lose — with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

— Adm. James Stockdale



HARDINESS

Challenge

- Adversity is not a threat

Control

- What is/isn't in your control

Commitment

- Active, persistent, goal-oriented

WHAT DO FIRST RESPONDERS THINK WHEN YOU TELL THEM TO IMPROVE THEIR SELF-TALK?



PERFORMANCE LANGUAGE

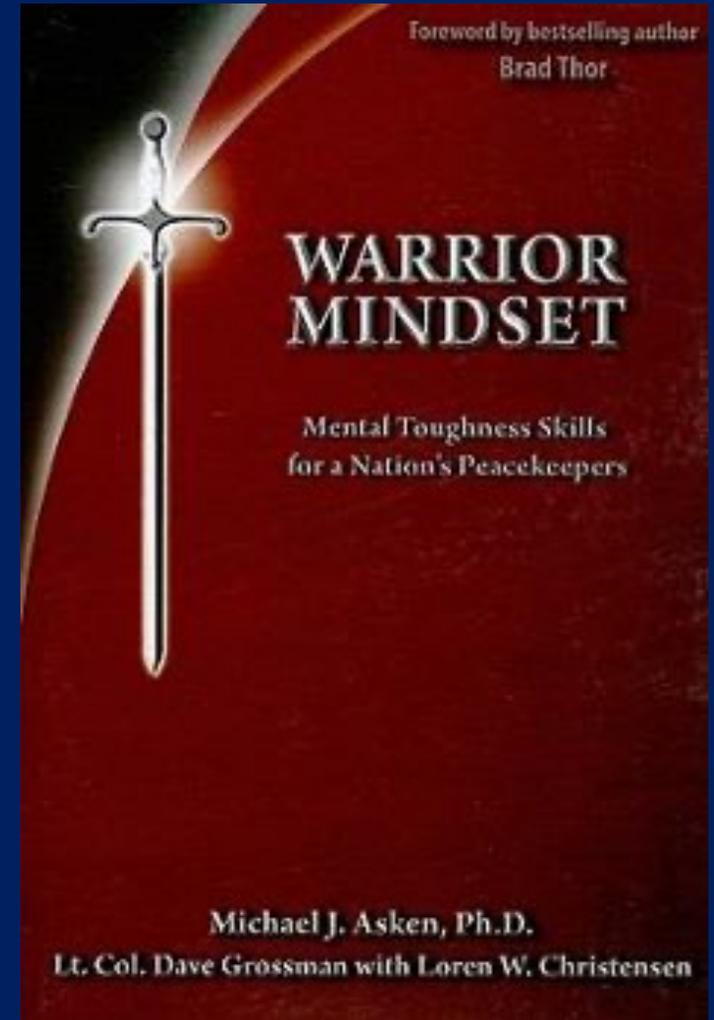
I do hard
things.

Work it,
step by step.

SELF-TALK FOR ENHANCED PERFORMANCE UNDER PRESSURE (STEP-UP)

~Dr. Michael Askin

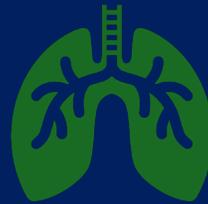
Instructive: Focus. Breathe.
Affirmative: You've got this.



ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES



Good job, do it again



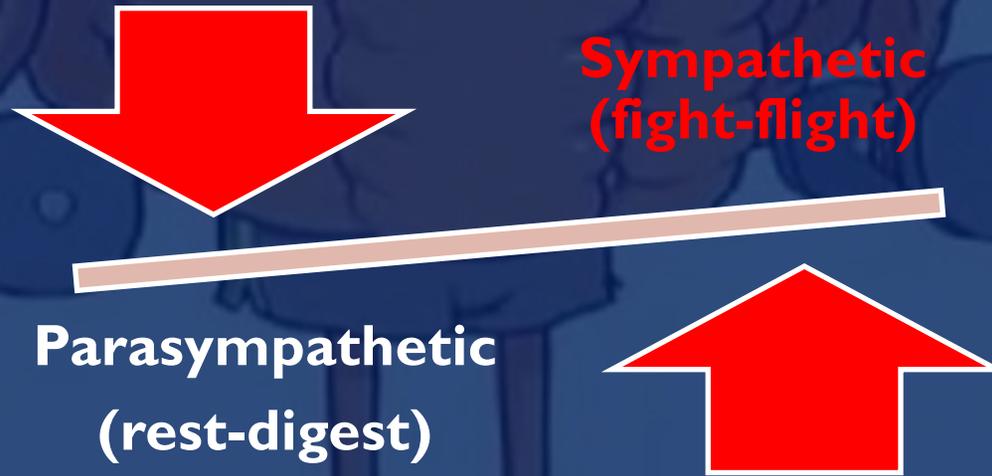
Concentrate. Breathe.



You've got this.

Greitens, 2015, p. 177

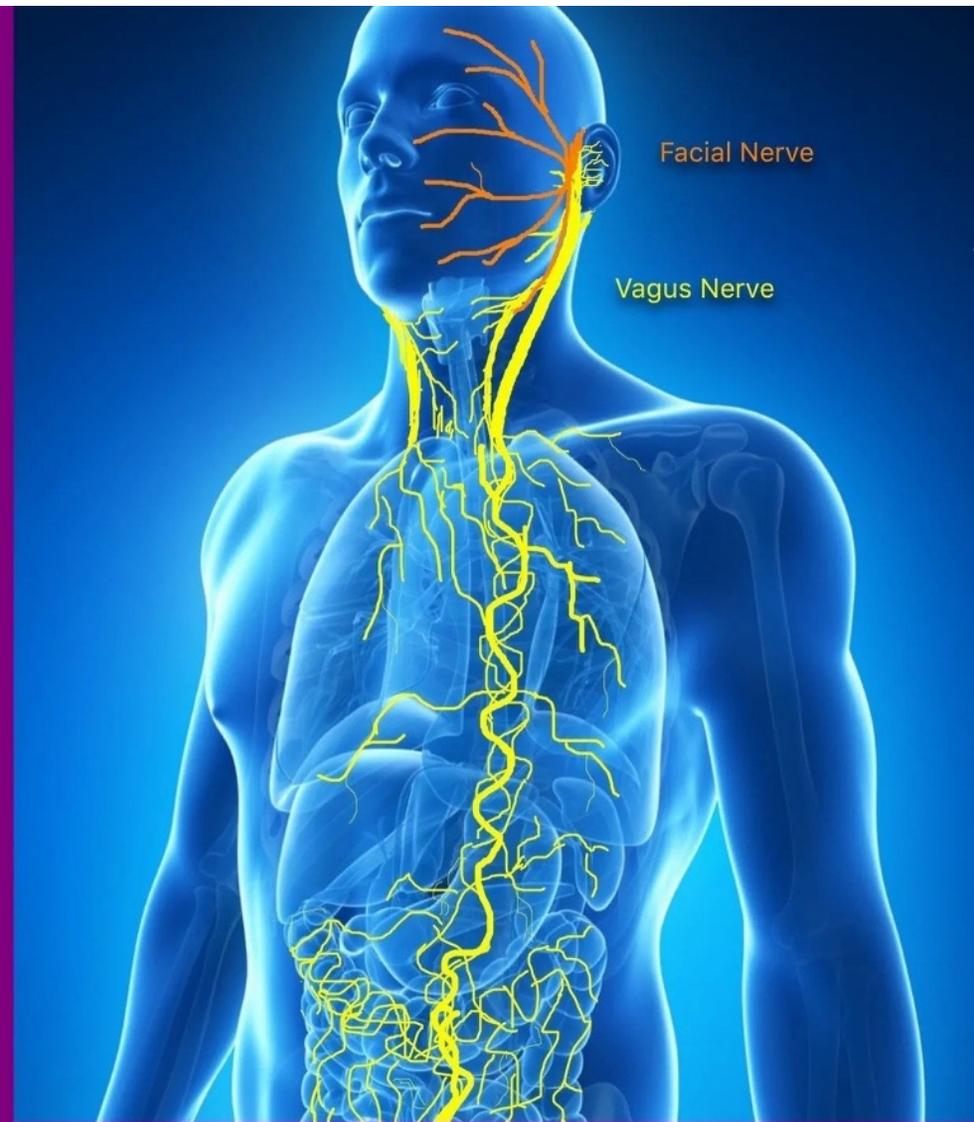
**A CALM MIND REQUIRES A CALM BODY:
THE FIRST RESPONDER NERVOUS SYSTEM**





55 Strategies Online Article
Dr. Linnea Passaler
Heal Your Nervous System

STRENGTHENING THE PARASYMPATHETIC



ACTIVATE YOUR VAGUS NERVE TO EASE STRESS

- Regulates HR, breathing, blood pressure, digestion & immunity
- Communicates from body to brain
- Humming
 - Humming increases the release of nitric oxide in the nasal passages 15-fold.
- Singing
- Gargling
- Neck turns w/ eye turns
- Ear pulls/ Ear Bone

CULTIVATE INTERNAL SITUATIONAL AWARENESS



Breathing rate/ quality



Muscle tension



HRV (watch trackers, etc.)



Thoughts



Frankl's "*Inner Hold*"- *rigorous control of his own inner state, a disciplined defense of his own integrity**

Where our
mind goes,
blood flows.

WHAT'S HEART RATE VARIABILITY (HRV)?

“ . . . a measure of neurocardiac function that reflects heart–brain interactions and autonomic nervous system (ANS) dynamics.”

(McCraty & Shaffer, 2015)



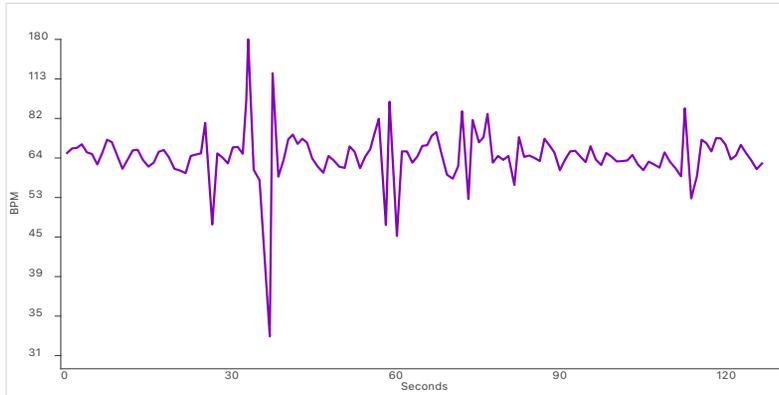
HeartMath®

Certified Practitioner

HRV Assessment

Name Class Demo Date February 13, 2024 9:44:01 AM PST
Gender Female Duration 2:05 Minutes
Age 51

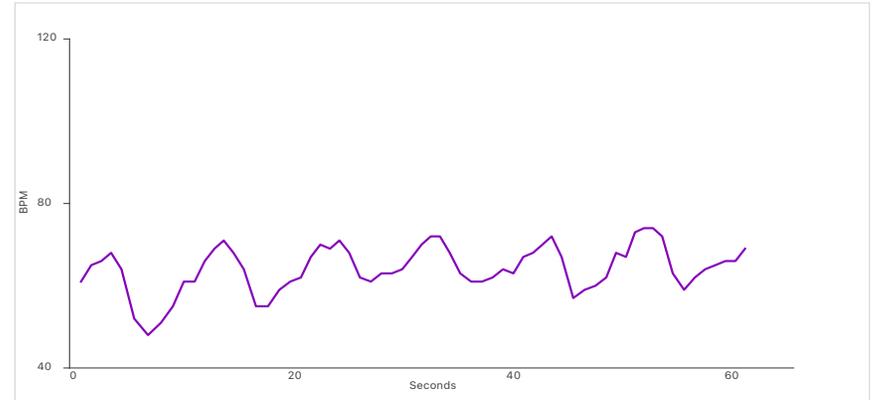
HRV



1-Minute HRV Deep Breathing Assessment

Name Class Demo Date February 13, 2024 9:47:04 AM PST
Gender Female Duration 1:00 Minute
Age 51

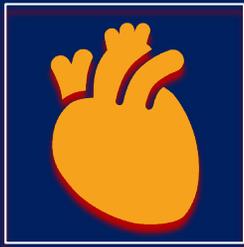
HRV



INCREASING HRV LEADS TO...

- Less physical pain
- Improved cognitive performance
- Improved focus
- Improved health (reduces 5 leading causes of death)
- Improved relationships via better communications

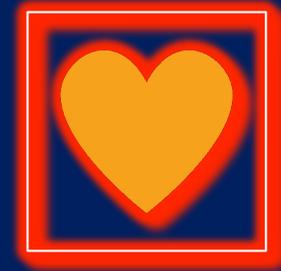
HEARTMATH BREATHING TECHNIQUE



Clear the heart

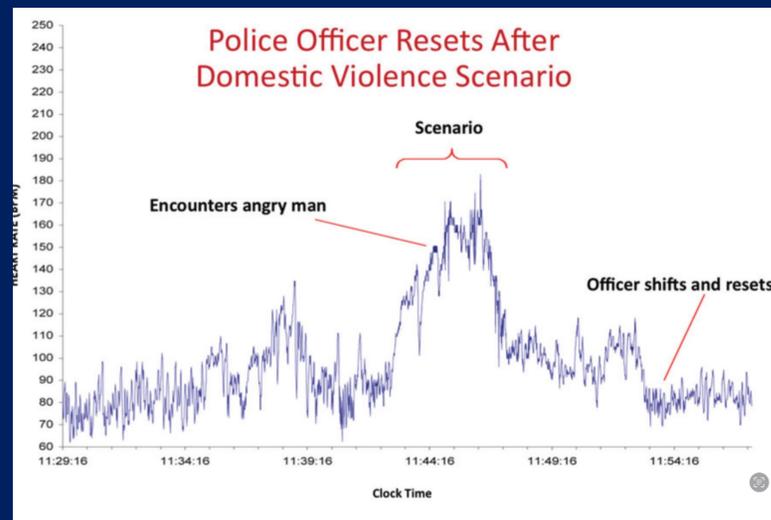


Clear the Mind



Shift the heart

Dr. Leah Lagos, Heart, Breath, Mind



NEUROSMART



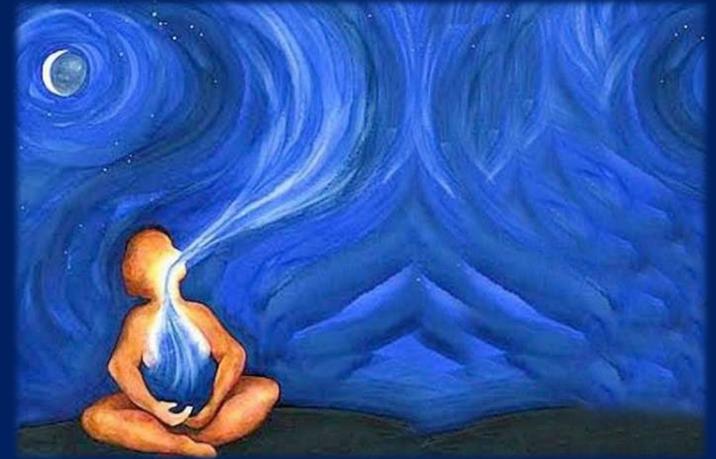
CONNECT WITH ANOTHER

- When safe, social engagement portion of the vagus nerve suppresses the fight/flight & the immobilization response
- When not safe, it disappears & fight flight/mobilization occur

Downshifting Your Nervous System



- Music
- Breath
- Mental imagery
- Savoring
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Tension Releasing Exercises (TRE)



STRATEGIES FOR BEING STUCK ON HIGH

Physiological sigh

5-second breath
(10)

4x7x8 breathing

Non-sleep deep
rest (NSDR)
(AKA Yoga Nidra)

Left or right
nostril breath



Huberman
NSDR Video

A silhouette of a man with a beard, looking out at a sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The man is on the left side of the frame, looking towards the right. The ocean is visible in the background, and there are some dark silhouettes of plants in the foreground.

NON SLEEP DEEP REST

10 MINUTE

HUBERMAN LAB



BREAK TIME

PHYSICAL DOWNREGULATION

**Cold
water**

**Shaking/
TRE**

**“Basic
exercise”**



EMOTIONAL STABILIZATION

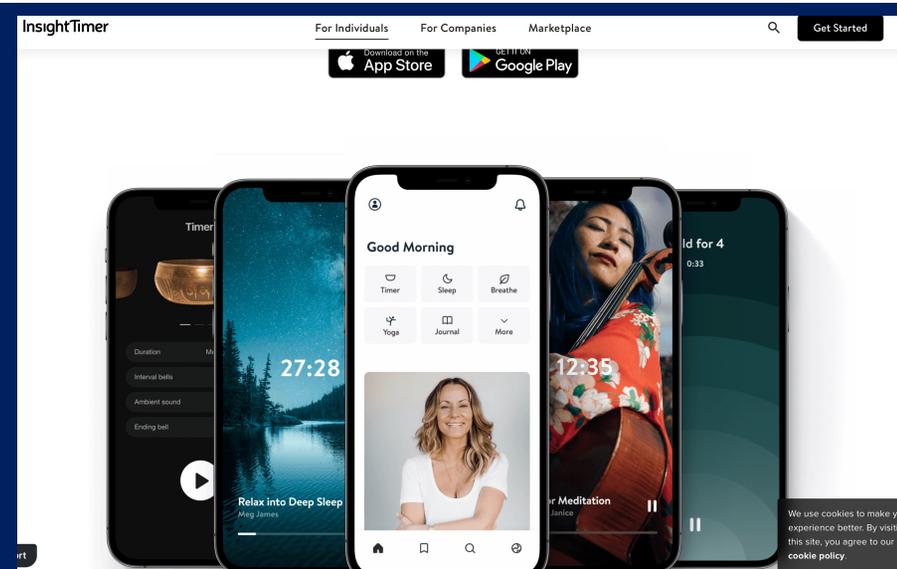
Immediate Stabilization Protocol
(ISP)
(Quinn, 2018)

Psychological First Aid based on
Adaptive Information Processing
Model of EMDR



STRATEGIES FOR BEING STUCK ON LOW

- Exercise
- Light therapy
- Alkaline breathing / Wim Hof breathing

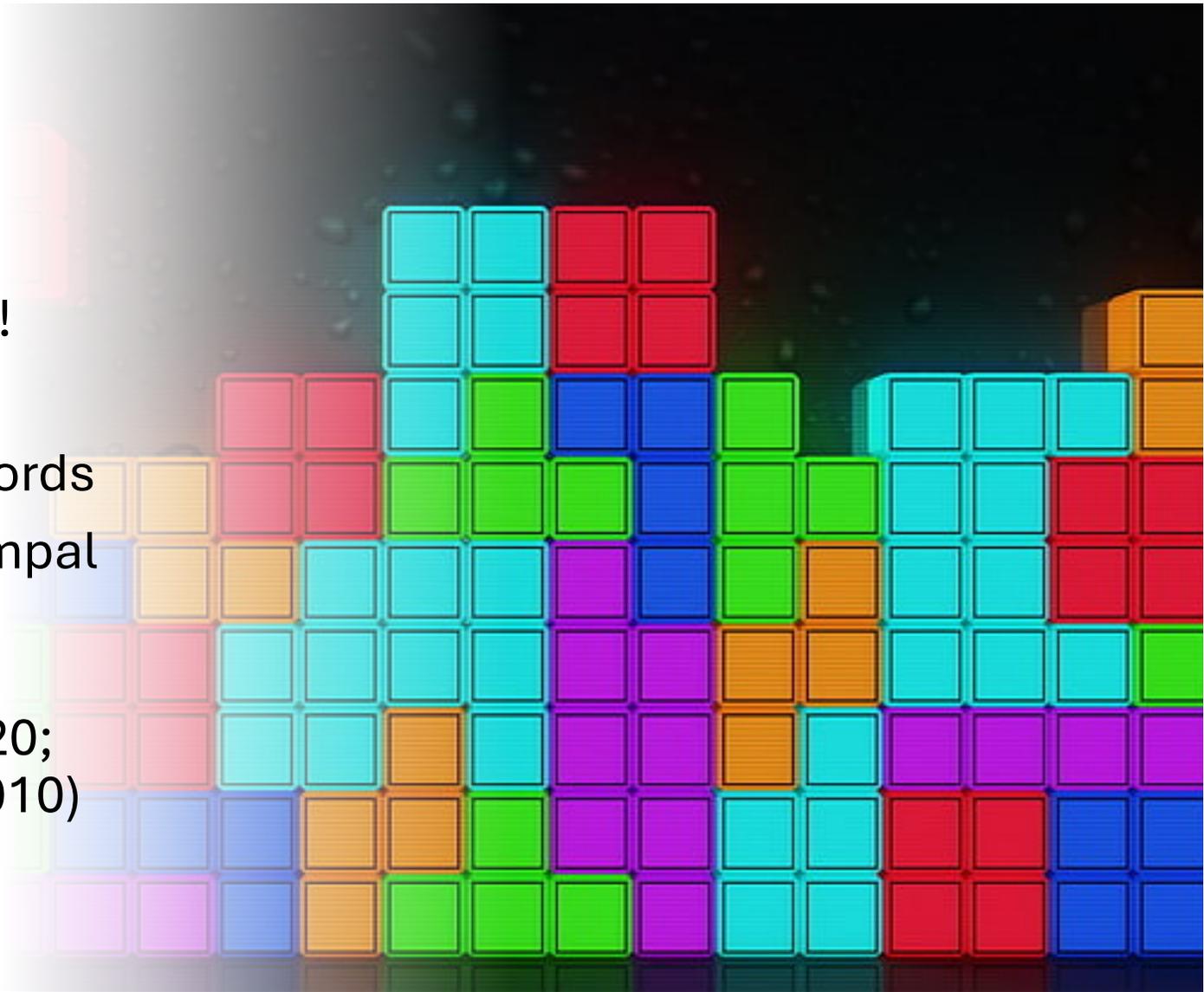


Insight Timer



Mental: Tetris

- What the what?!?!?!?
- Within 6 hours
- Visuospatial, not words
- Increases hippocampal volume
 - Reduces PTSD
(Butler et al., 2020;
Holmes et al., 2010)



AWAY FROM THE CONSOLE

BEFORE SHIFT

- Set intention
 - Self-fulfilling prophecy
 - Compassion-recipient
- Set up nervous system
 - Hydrate, nutrition, exercise, breathwork

AFTER SHIFT

- Balanced reflection of shift
 - Good, bad & values behaviors
- Shift & reset nervous system

AT THE CONSOLE

- Bio
 - Breath w/ isometric movement
 - Cold
 - Touch lips
 - Yawn
 - Stretch
 - Draw/Doodle
 - Valsalva Maneuver
 - Smell (lavender, rosemary, bergamot)
 - View Fractals
- Psycho
 - Shift Focus
 - Cognitive
 - Emotional
 - Screen door imagery- Observe, not absorb
- Social:
 - Compassion to caller, peer, or officer/ FF



This Photo by Unknown author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

The three hardest things to say are:

- **I was wrong.**
- **I need help.***
- **Worcestershire sauce**

E.M.D.R.

EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION & REPROCESSING

- Treatment of choice for trauma (police, fire, military, crime victims)
- Accelerated processing (faster /more effective than talk therapy)
- Integrates fragmented memories



ACUTE STRESS ADAPTIVE PROTOCOL (ASAP)



Created FOR first responder BY a first responder (peer supporter, chaplain, even clinician)

After 3 sleep cycles

Can be incident-driven or offered on a “drop-in” basis

Can be done as a group or 1-on-1

50-66% reduction in distress score after 1 session

44-50% reduction in PTSD scores after 4 sessions



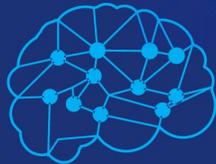
**6-Minute Video
on ASAP**

ALPHA-STIMULATORS

Mental sharpness and clarity are vital to the success of any job, but especially in the police world.

Just 20 min a day can reduce anxiety and insomnia.

Alpha-Stim® works with the body to help it regain a healthy circulatory current, simulate endorphin release, and rebalance neural firing patterns.



DEVICES ARE AVAILABLE FOR USE AT NORTH, CENTRAL, EAST, TRAFFIC, AND DETECTIVES

CONTACT FIRST RESPONDER PSYCHOLOGY TO GAIN APPROVAL **BEFORE USE**

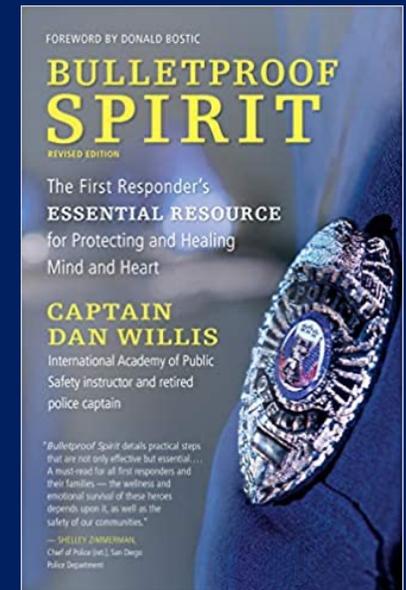
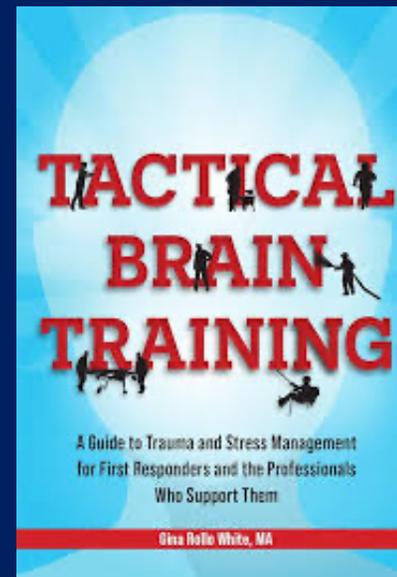
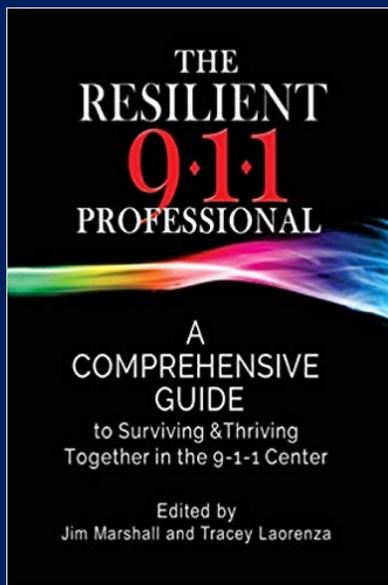
AVAILABLE FOR USE DURING WELLNESS HOURS

CRAIG DEARDORFF LCSW
971-727-4197
DR STEPHANIE CONN
971-250-1519

YOUR USAGE IS CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SHARED W/ SUPERVISORS OR WITH ANY PPB PERSONNEL.



FIRST RESPONDER RESOURCES





First Responder Family Handbook

A Guide to Thriving on a Daily Basis



Dr. Stephanie M. Conn



Within the Trenches Podcast

Within the Trenches was born from my own struggles in 911. For a long time I buried my calls. No one was talking about mental health and wellness of 911 dispatchers back then. I was afraid that I would be seen as weak for talking about my calls or asking for help. When it became too much I decided to finally start sharing my stories.

It was therapeutic! I started blogging about my calls, and eventually the podcast was born. I thought, "If this is therapeutic for me, maybe it would be for others." I worked in dispatch for 13 years and it was the most interesting job I ever had. I started this to let people know what it's like to be in this profession. The stories involve all types of calls. The show is meant to be informative, humorous, serious and all around eye opening to the world of 911 dispatch. The idea for this started back in 2010 as a college project and the video that started it all can be seen [here](#).

Dispatchers from all over the United States including other areas such as Australia, Canada and Ireland have been featured on the podcast. Whether you are new to the profession, seasoned, or retired, I want to share your story! I have been doing this for over a decade. It is my passion mission to open the eyes of the world to what you do, daily. Thank you for the support and your trust in me to share your stories.

Listen below or



[Episodes](#) ▾ [Video Episodes](#) [About](#) [Partners](#) [Resources](#) [Guests](#) [Contact](#)

Photos by Derek O. Healy/ODRP

Step into the world of RESPONDER RESILIENCE, an insightful podcast that sheds light on the challenges and triumphs of firefighters, EMTs, dispatchers, and law enforcement professionals. Hear firsthand accounts from our community's finest as they discuss critical issues on the job and explore mental and physical wellness topics with hosts Lt. David Dachinger (Ret.), Bonnie Rumilly LCSW/EMT and Dr. Stacy Raymond. Subscribe and watch it here on demand, with new episodes airing Wednesdays at 7pm ET on [YouTube](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Apple Podcasts](#) [Spotify](#).

On Scene First with Tracy Eldridge Podcast

The "On Scene First with Tracy Eldridge" podcast will allow public safety difference-makers to share entertaining, educational and empowering information and resources. In addition, each guest will share stories of growth and perseverance.

Are you interested in being on the podcast?

Submit here to be on the podcast

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First Responder Wellness Podcast

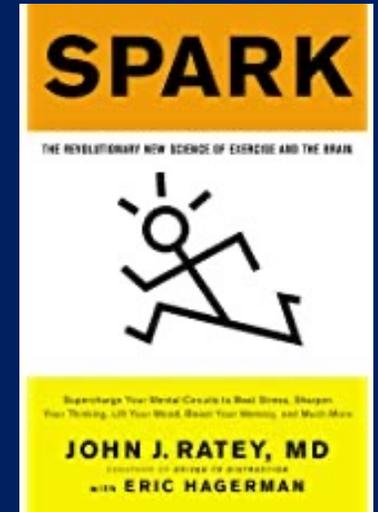
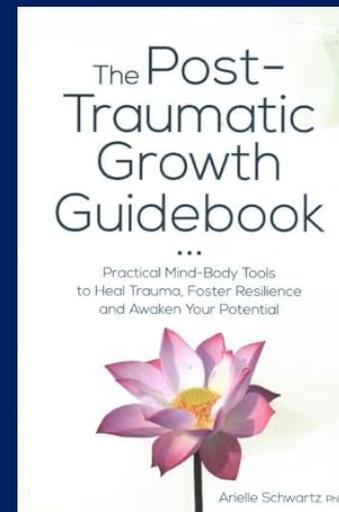
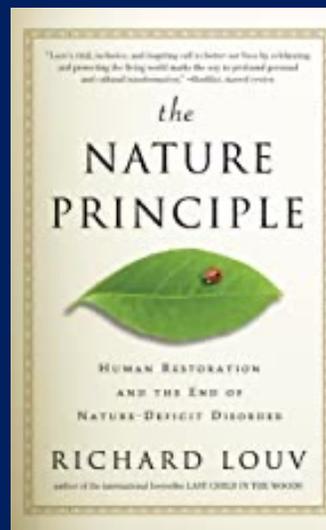
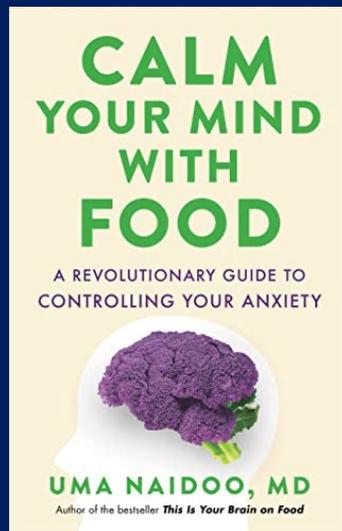
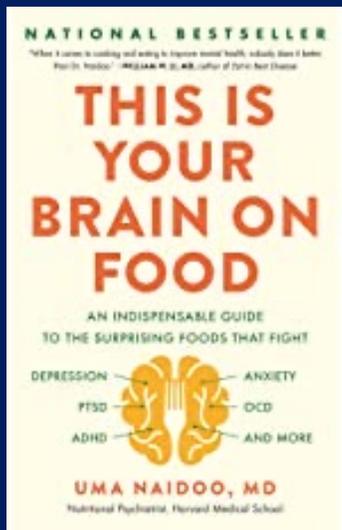
A podcast for first responders and the people who lead them. We focus on mental health, wellness, and leadership solutions within the first responder community.

Listen on:

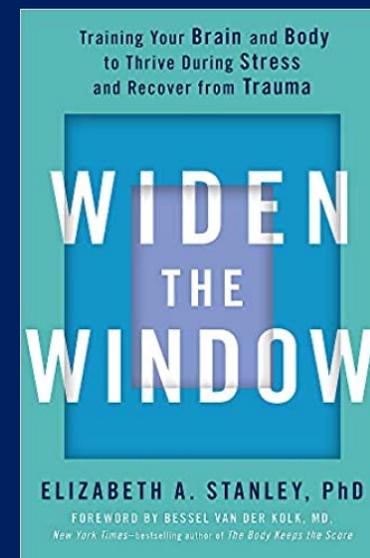
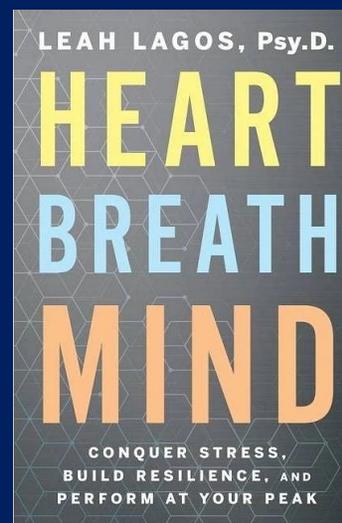
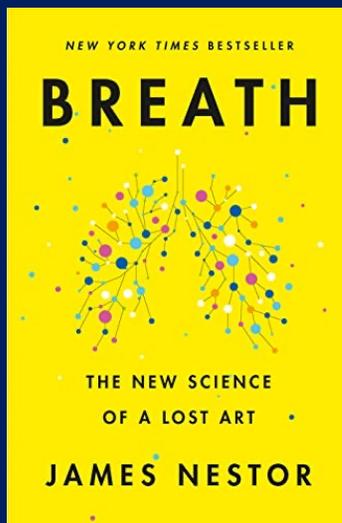
FIRST RESPONDER WELLNESS PODCAST

PODCASTS

HEALTH



HEALTH



QUESTIONS?
ASK ME
ANYTHING



Then, I have a question for you!

You get 8 \$hitty calls in a row,
what are you going to do?

When are you going to do it?



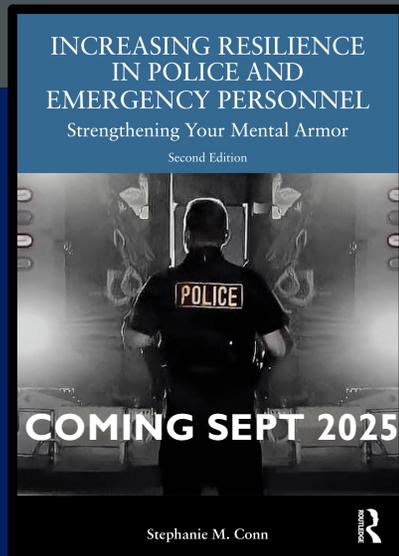
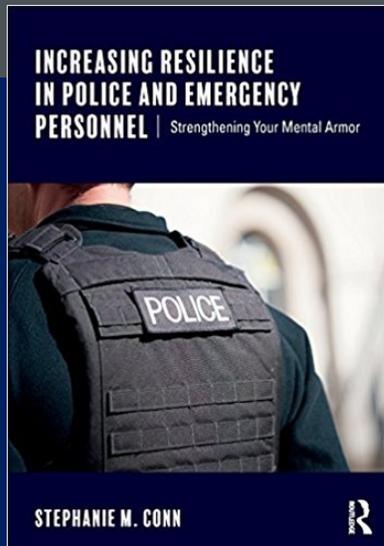
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[Website](#)