



Emotional Well-being

PTSD Desensitization & Triggers' Prevention

"Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think."

Bessel A. van der Kolk

Class 3– Resource 1



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1

Prevalence of PTSD in People with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities

Given most relevant findings and studies* it would appear that there is a reasonable probability that PTSD sufficient to cause maladaptive behaviours effects **one out of every two to three supported people.**

* Reference Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study of 17421 individuals Felitti V., Stevens, J.E., 2001



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2

2

Abuse Data Implications for People with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities

Autism Speaks

"It is estimated that children with developmental disabilities are **more than twice as likely to be physically or sexually abused** as their typically-abled peers." (Petersilia, J., 2001).

Reference Sullivan and Knutson 2000 reports (from 55,000 studied) children with intellectual disabilities are **3-4 times more likely to experience sexual abuse before age 18** than children in the general population.

Kerry's Place

"**As children they are 5 times more likely to be abused** than neurotypical individuals." (Monsell and Sobsey, 2001).



3

3

People with Developmental Disabilities Hypersensitivity to Non Traumatic Life Events (i.e. Emotional Dysregulation (ED))

It may well be that the fear created by:

- Sensory irregularities causing overwhelm
- Isolation and lack of socializing
- Inability to cognitively comprehend and assess the safety of many normally stressful situations
- 'Normal' levels of yelling, shouting and criticism
- Exclusion, boredom and being bullied
- Other

....could result in traumatic stress for people who have autism or other developmental disabilities.

(Reference American Academy of Neurology 2002)



4

4

Symptoms of a Triggered Traumatized Emotional Brain That Often Causes Challenging Behaviour

- sensory irregularity
- inattention, anger, aggression
- gut wrenching sensations
- loss of control of bowels and urination
- head pounding
- breathing becomes fast and shallow
- intense feelings of heartbreak, emptiness, sadness
- speaking with an uptight and reactive argumentative voice
- not speaking at all
- body movements that signal collapse, rigidity, rage or defensiveness
- reactive and disorganized
- "self control strategies" stop working
- sounds and lights are intense and therefore fearful
- unwanted images from the past take control of the mind
- ADHD like symptoms
- panic, fear, rage
- shut down
- feel numb in body and mind
- thinking becomes slow and sluggish
- trouble standing up

5

Triune Brain Theory

Thinking brain: reasoning, problem solving, verbal expression, memory for events and facts

Mammalian brain: non-verbal, emotional and relational experience, feeling and gut memories, and traumatic memory

Reptilian brain: instinctive responses, heart rate, breathing

6

Trauma response

Brain Scan Research shows when we remember a traumatic event, memory centres in **the frontal lobes shut down**, and we get overwhelmed by feelings and impulses instead of recalling events.



7

7

Trauma response

The Limbic system **responds to memories with increased activity**, especially the amygdala, the brain's smoke detector and emotional memory centre. **The amygdala sounds the alarm as if we were in danger right now.**



8

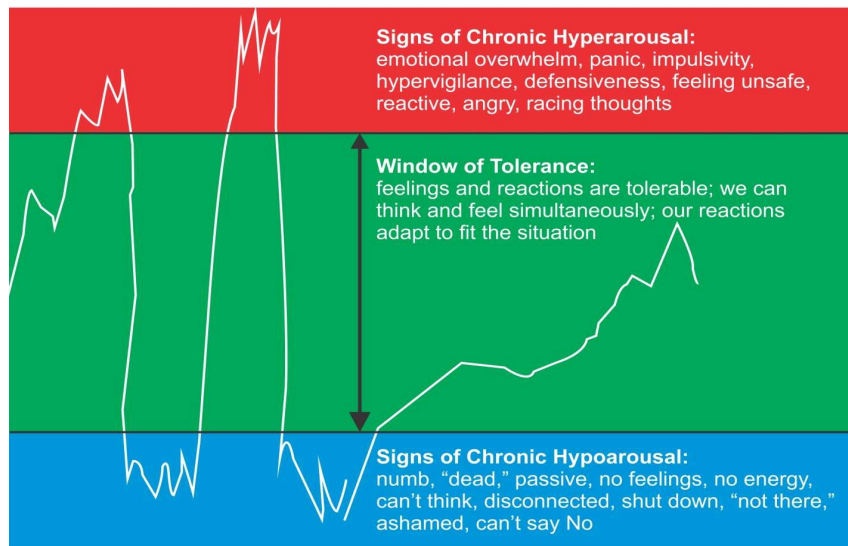
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Trauma response

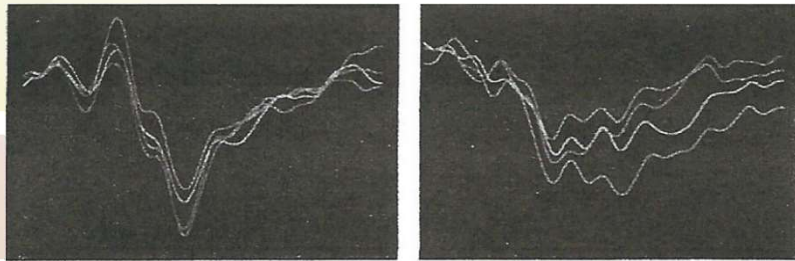
- The reptilian brain reacts to the amygdala's alarm.
- Heart rate increases.
- We stop breathing or hyperventilate.
- Muscles tense.
- We either speed up or shut down.

Trauma Closes The Window of Tolerance

After trauma, the nervous system remains prepared for danger (Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006)



At Its Roots, PTSD Behaviour Is Not Based On Social Motives Such As Task Avoidance, Attention Or Power And Control



Above is a comparison between a normal versus a PTSD brain. **Normally all regions of the brain collaborate in a synchronized pattern** (left), while the brainwaves in PTSD are less well coordinated; the brain has trouble filtering out irrelevant information, and has problems attending to the stimulus at hand. This causes anxiety that leads to agitation, anger and aggression especially if brain waves are destabilized through inadvertently triggering PTSD symptoms.

(Adapted from "The Body Keeps The Score" - Bessel A. van der Kolk)

11

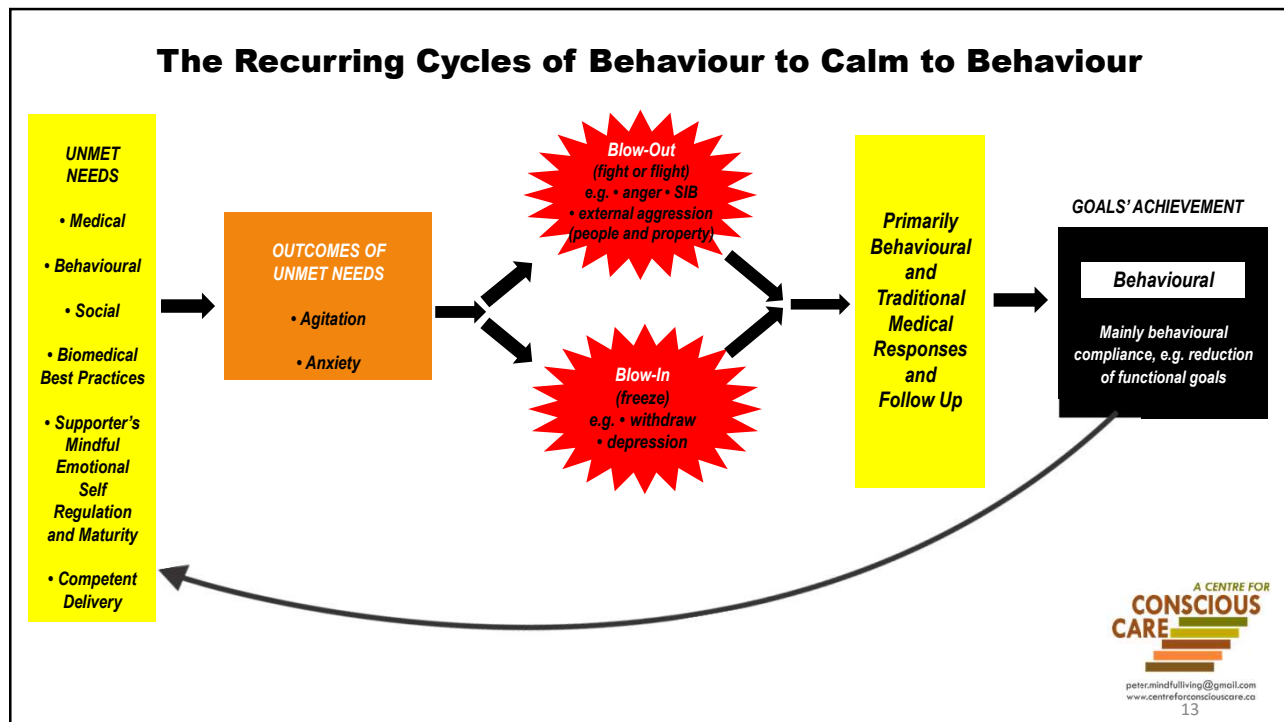
How PTSD Changes Body And Brain Hard Wiring

"Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think."

"The act of telling the story doesn't alter the automatic physical and hormonal responses of the body that remains hyper vigilant as it prepares to be assaulted or violated at any time."

Bessel A. van der Kolk

12



13

Supporters – first do no harm

Let us ensure that Supporters do not become part of the reactive trauma response.

- The Supporter must catch and calm themselves (become Mindful) to avoid fearful **entrainment** of the student. "Fear begets fear, calm begets calm." (Reference CCS five step model)
- Reduce/eliminate environmental triggers e.g. overwhelming stressors, people, places, situations etc. until coping skills are adequate.
- Interact calmly - Power for example yelling, always creates fear and manifests as challenging behaviours or withdraw.

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14

14

“Bottom Up” Supporting Strategies to Heal the Brain, Body and Being

1. Cardio Exercise e.g. mini trampoline, platform swing.
2. Be intentional with positive emotions e.g. body, eyes, smile i.e. entrain positive.
3. Bilateral, Biomeridian Awareness Based Calming as much as is possible.
4. Provide prescribed sensory integration exercises.
5. Hand massage.

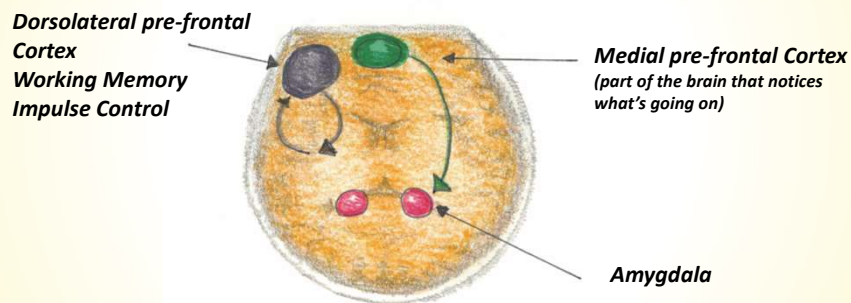


15

15

Mindful Emotional Self Regulation

The main way we can consciously access the emotional brain is through self awareness*, i.e. becoming mindful. Mindfulness increases connections in the medial pre-frontal cortex. This reduces anxiety for the Supporter and the Person Supported.



(*Research reference: J. LeDoux, "Emotion Circuits in the Brain", Journal of Neuroscience 33, no. 9 (2013) 3815-23)



16

16

“Bottom Up”

Support Strategies to Heal the Emotional Brain cont’d

Teach/Model individual to do Calming Breathing Exercises

Exercise:

Mindfully inhale as arms are lifted to shoulder height.
Mindfully exhale as arms are lowered to side.
Let exhale be slower than inhale

NOTE: Mindful feeling body awareness activates the Vagus nerve. 80% of the fibres of the Vagus nerve run from the body into the brain. This means that one can directly calm an aroused (emotional brain) system by mindful movement practise, like Nei Yang Gong.

(Reference *Spark*, Ratey, J.)



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17

17

Engaging Family and Professionals

Engage the services of professionals.

e.g.

- A Qualified “Bottom Up” PTSD Counsellor e.g. EMDR Therapist
- Occupational Therapist
- Naturopath
- Psychiatrist
- Neurofeedback Specialist
- Other



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18

18

Supporting Others Through Mindful Connecting

As we quiet our mind and heart while supporting others,
Our stillness nurtures their calm and courage.

Now they can peacefully manifest more of their complete
Being, in part because of our mindful presence.



19