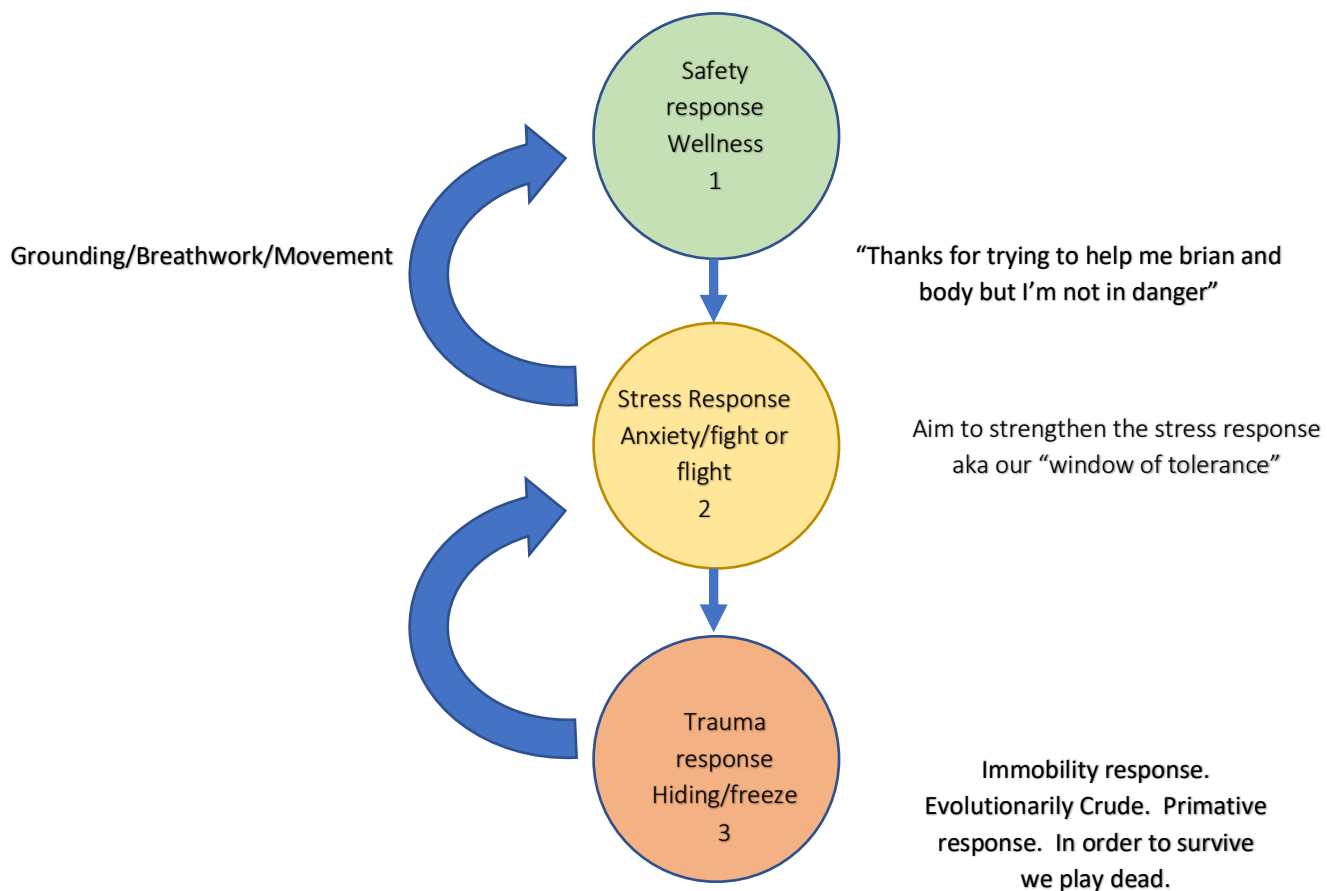


Your Brain and Trauma

Trauma is a **response** to a **deeply distressing or disturbing event** that **overwhelms the body's natural coping mechanism**, causing feelings of helplessness, diminished sense of self and inability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.

Meaning that it is natural. This is something your brain does to help you to survive. Our natural coping mechanism is the fight or flight response.

How you react to things might be BRAIN DRIVEN not WILL DRIVEN.



People can get stuck going back and forth between 2 and 3. Also when you are healing from trauma being in 2 can feel horrible as you are used to being numb to everything and there are a lot of feelings and bodily sensations that come with 2. However, this is linear so you have to pass through 2 to get back to 1.

FYI some research shows that you can inherit Trauma. E.g if a parent has some Trauma this propensity towards the trauma response being activated in the child is stronger than if there was no trauma in the parent.

Some symptoms of 2 or hyperarousal are;

- Hypervigilance

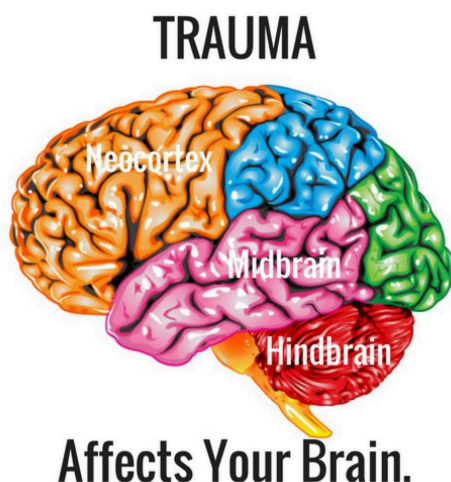
- Intrusive imagery or flashbacks
- Hyperactivity (ADHD)
- Abrupt mood swings (such as rage reactions, temper tantrums, anger or crying)
- Nightmare and night terrors
- Low stress threshold
- Difficulty in sleeping
- Shame and lack of self-worth
- Panic attacks, phobias and anxiety
- Attraction to dangerous situations
- Addictive behaviours (such as, over/undereating, drinking, smoking, etc.)
- Avoidance behaviours (such as avoiding places, memories, people or activities)
- Mental blankness or spaced-out feelings

Some symptoms of 3 or Hypoarousal are;

- Depersonalisation (feeling detached from one's life, thoughts and feelings)
- Problems with handling intense emotions (EUPD or BPD)
- Sudden and unexpected shifts in mood
- Derealisation (feeling as though the world is distorted or not real)
- Dissociative amnesia (localised, selective, generalised or systematised)
- Feeling compelled to behave in a certain way (OCD)
- Immobility, freezing and overwhelming feeling of helplessness

The Brain

Trauma stops different areas of your brain from communicating properly. Meaning when you are in the trauma response your brain isn't behaving as it normally would. You aren't doing this deliberately your brain is just doing what it does to help you survive.



In very simplified terms.

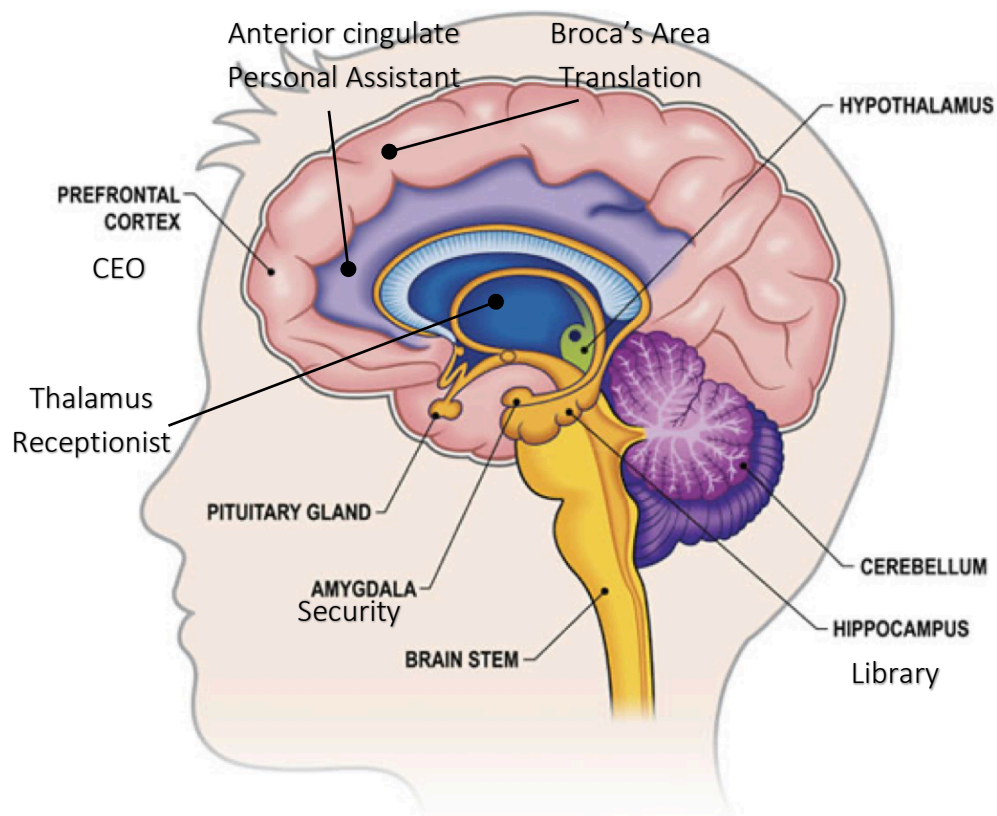
We have 2 primitive or survival brains.

The Red and Pink on the picture opposite are the survival brains. Red deals with danger. Pink deals with feelings.

Our only sophisticated brain is the orange one, which is supposed to supervise the other 2, but when we are traumatised, it is like the supervisor has gone on a break and the others take over.

The Orange brain is in charge of impulse control, focus and organisation so if you struggle with these blaming yourself is pointless as it might be that, that part of your brain is offline!

An analogy to try and help make this easier to understand. Again this is very simplified.



Imagine the brain as an organisation. Below are the roles each part plays.

1. The Prefrontal Cortex is the CEO – they are meant to be in charge of everything that happens in the company.
2. The Anterior Cingulate is the CEOs PA – their job is to control who gets to come in to see the CEO.
3. The Broca's area is the translation and language department – their job is to make sure that everyone understands what is being communicated and they also help with language. So when you can't find a word you are looking for your Broca's area might be on lunch!
4. The Amygdala is Security – it is their job to make sure everyone in the organisation is safe.
5. The hippocampus is the library – their job is to keep accurate and full records of everything that happens.
6. The thalamus is the receptionist – their job is to direct people to the right parts of the building.

There are lots of consequences for different parts of the brain when we experience trauma.

Research has shown that trauma shrinks the brain and the part that primarily shrinks is the PFC and other parts of the sophisticated brain meaning that we start to rely more on the primitive survival brains. For example, the CEO is on holiday, what do the employees do when the boss is away? Whatever they like there are less consequences! Some people over work and others under work. This will appear differently for different people.

Some people with Boderline Personality Disorder or Complex PTSD have been shown to have smaller amygdalas. So the security team works so hard that people leave because they can't keep up the pace anymore and those that are left become less and less effective as they get more and more overworked.

Smaller hippocampus have been found in people with stress related psychiatric disorders e.g. PTSD- the library lays of staff as they are seen as the least needed in the business. This means that there is lots of information stored in random places around the business and these cannot be easily accessed or understood as everything is fragmented.

The emotions associated with trauma cause the thalamus to shut down meaning other areas of the brain activate to deal with the emotions. The reception is where all sensorial data comes in to first (except smell this can go straight to the CEO). If all of this is coming in and no one is there to direct it, it can quickly go to the wrong place. Take it back to the organisation. A visitor is coming in and the receptionist is not there to greet them, they just wonder around the building aimlessly and end up in some places they are not meant to be.

The CEO also has a side office (the Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex) which is known as the timekeeper of the brain. If this office stays locked people can become trapped in the past without any sense of past, present or future, which plays a role in flashbacks or reliving with PTSD.

Healing from Trauma

You need 3 broad things. Safety, Integration and Reconnection. Safety is about making sure your brain and body knows you are safe from the trauma now. Integration is about feeling all the emotions and processing the trauma so it can be appropriately stored in the brain. Reconnection is a lifelong thing where you need to make sure you are maintaining your safety and forward planning in your life to encourage you towards being the best version of you. Safety first. If you are not safe it is actually retraumatising to try to work through the emotions of a trauma. Take it slow and go at your pace. Get support and help. Build yourself a community of safety where you can deal with this.

You are not defective or weird. You are a trauma survivor!