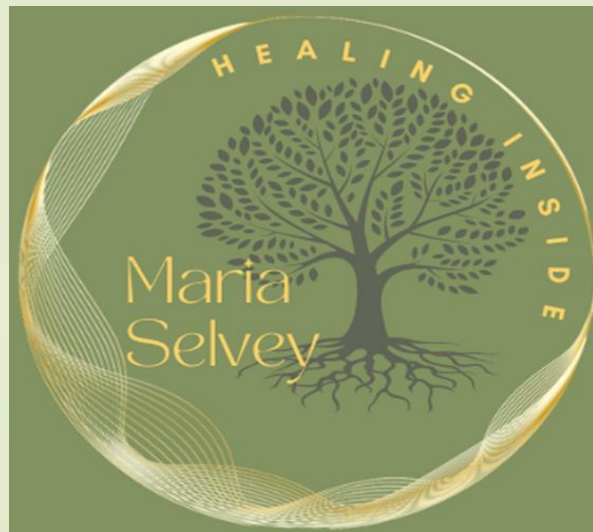


The Problem with Mindfulness: A Trauma –Informed Neurobiological Approach *...in making it work!*



Maria Selvey

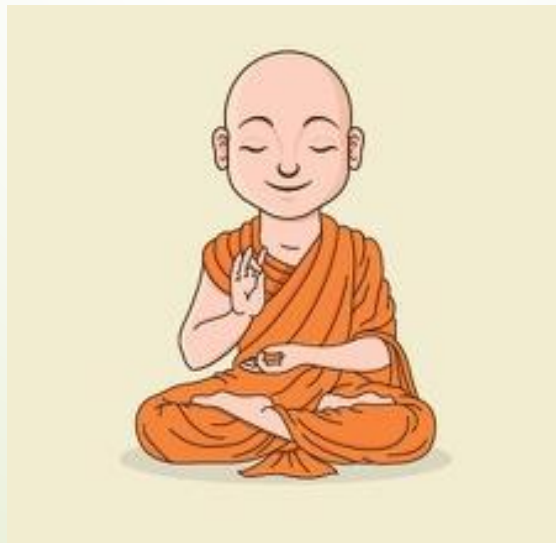
Psychologist

Uralla Psychology Clinic

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Mindfulness - Buddhist style

- Notice present thoughts, feeling and sensations without judgement. The aim is to create a state of “bare awareness”. (Raw and exposure therapy)
- Aim: to radically change our sense of self and perception of the world.



Western Style

- Breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress
- *Mindful Parenting, Mindful Eating, Mindful Therapy, Mindful Recovery, The Power of Mindful Learning, The Mindful Brain, The Mindful Way through Depression, **The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion.***

The stripping down and denaturing of mindfulness
(McMindfulness)



**Now lets add C-PTSD into the
mix**



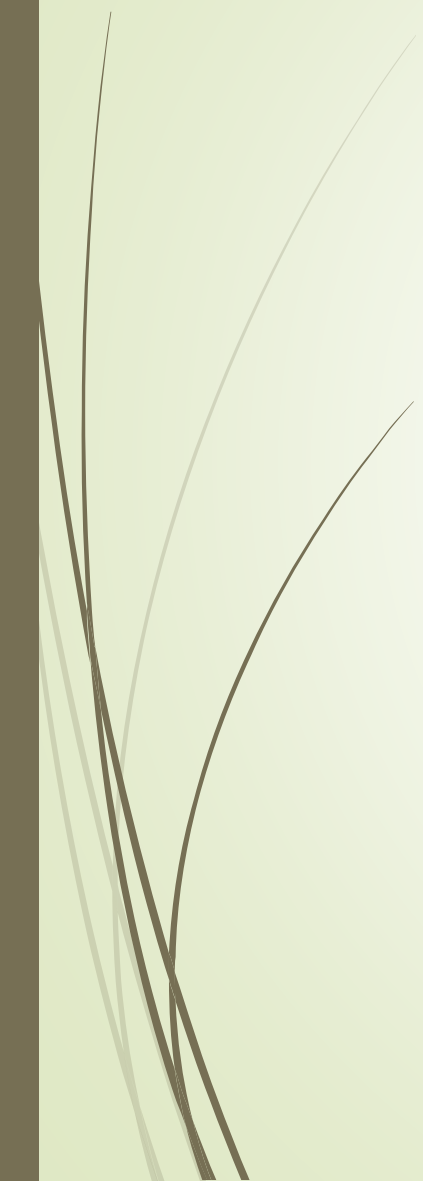
No effect

Or

Too much effect



Trauma-Informed (for want of a better term) Mindfulness.. Is..

- The merging of Eastern practice with knowing what trauma has done to the brain .. This makes the therapy unique to both Eastern and Western practice
 - Hard to do : we are guiding them through the maze that their trauma network presents
 - Involves concepts of titration – increasing or backing it off so it's therapeutic to not cause harm
 - Involves assessment and psychoeducation
 - Involves patience
- 



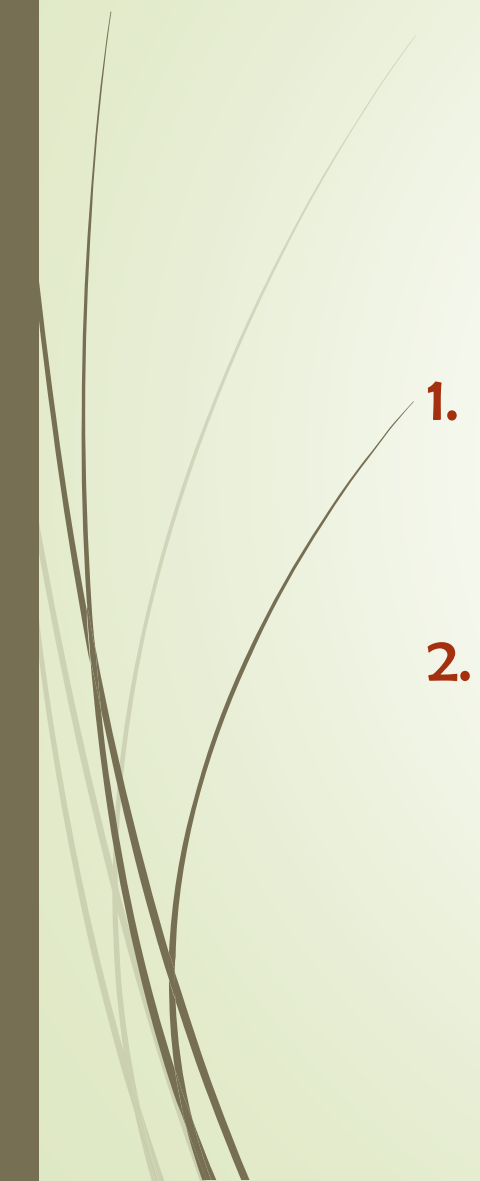
Quotes from clients and therapists:

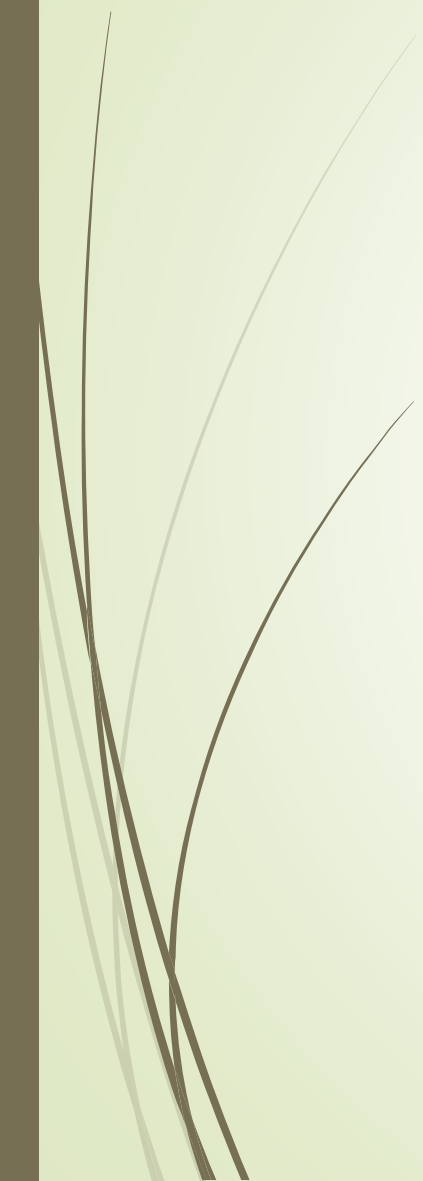

- “Mindfulness is harder than giving up drugs”
- “I’ve had counsellors do mindfulness with me and didn’t get it, it felt weird”
- “It’s just not for me”
- “I’ve been to retreats and just pretend”
- “I stopped doing it after my client had a panic attack” (therapist)
- “Oh no, I don’t believe in mindfulness” (therapist)

Then why do they keep raving on about it as an integral part of therapy?



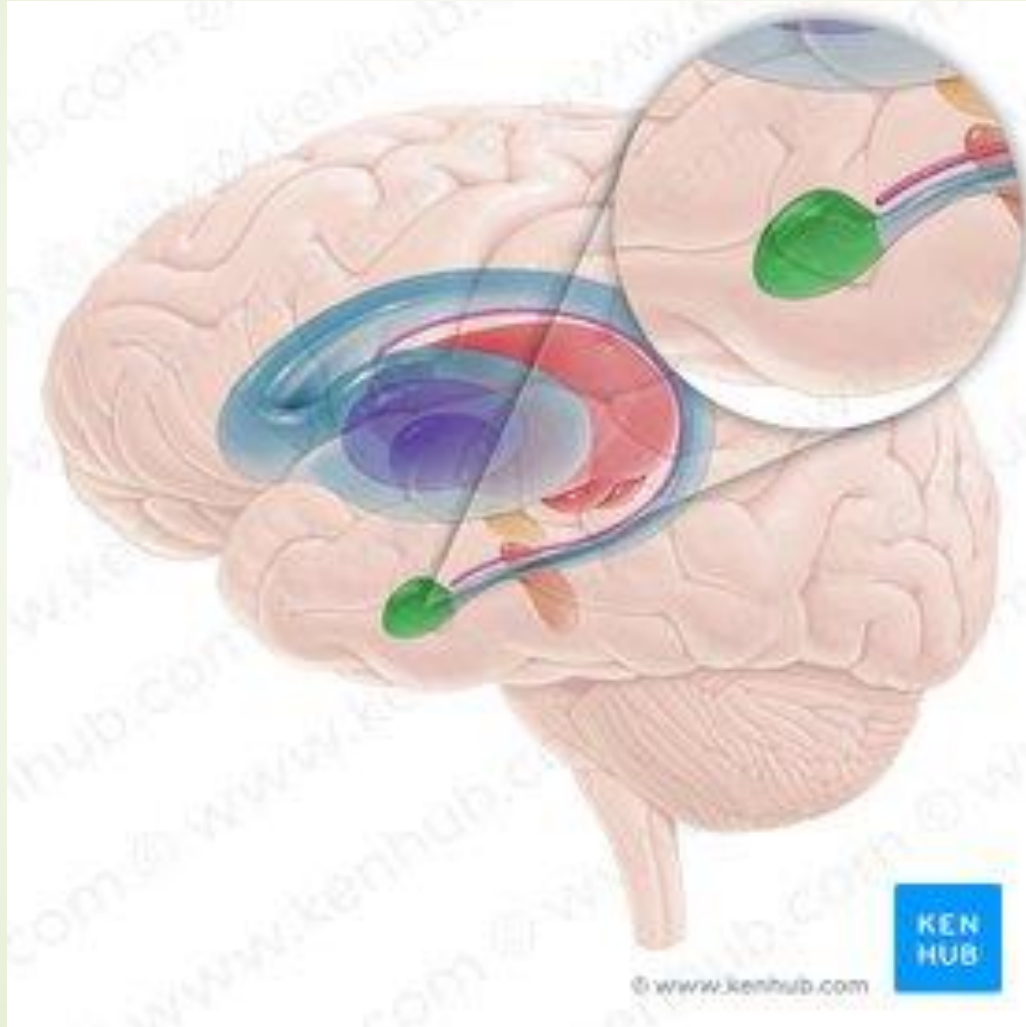
Two Neuro/bio Principles that have informed my practice

- 
1. The relationship between the F/Fl centre and mindfulness centre of the brain.
 2. Attentional system that is biased to threat



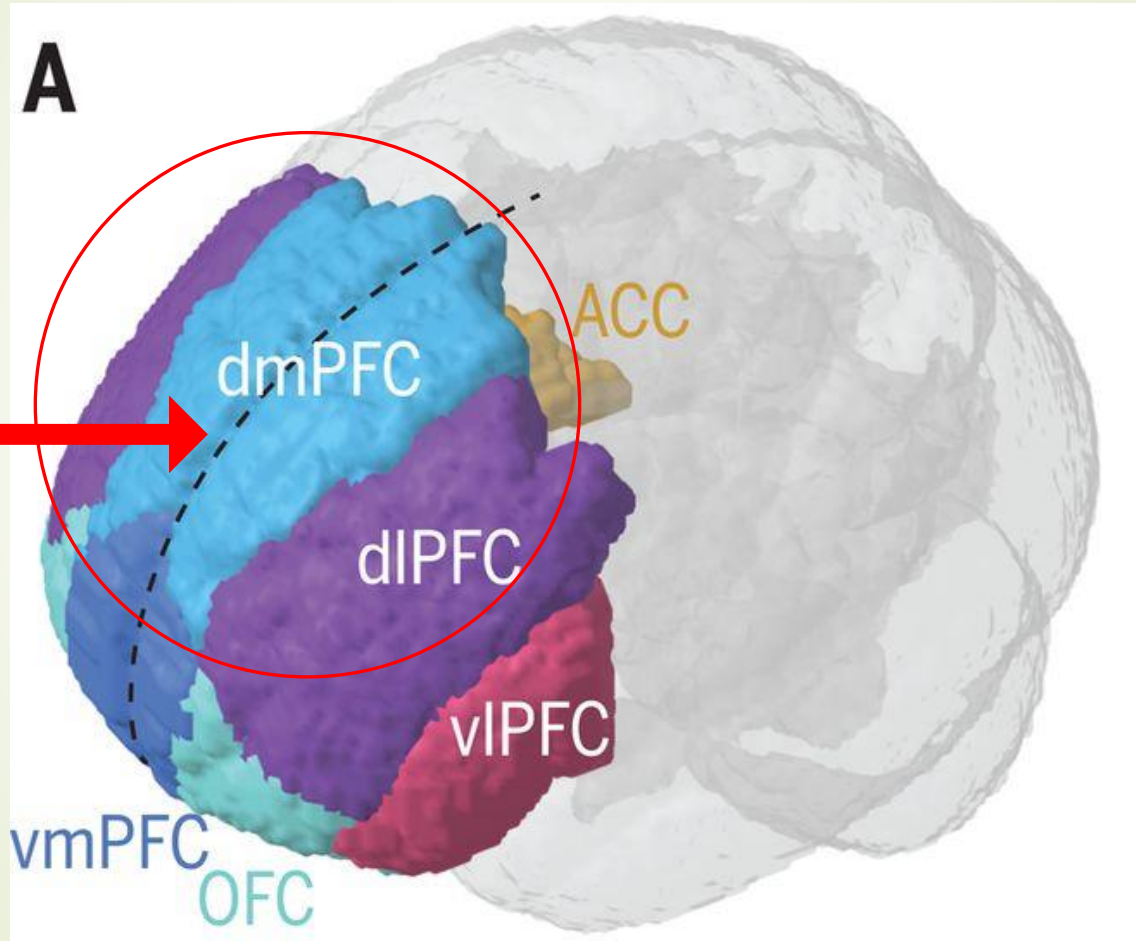
**1. The relationship between the F/Fl
centre and mindfulness centre of the
brain.**

Amygdala = Epicentre of the fear response



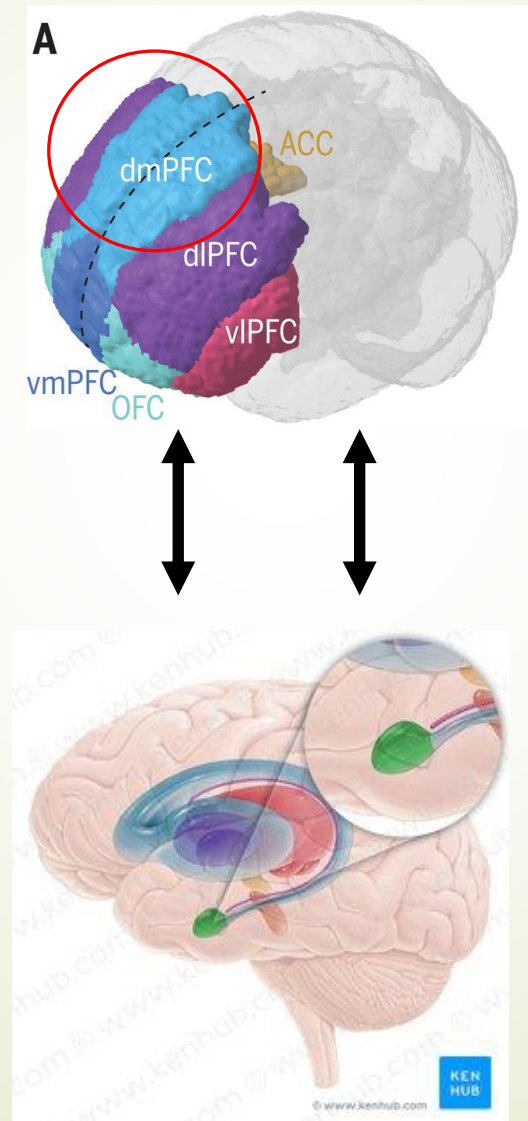
<https://www.kenhub.com/en/library/anatomy/anatomy-of-amygdaloidal-complex>

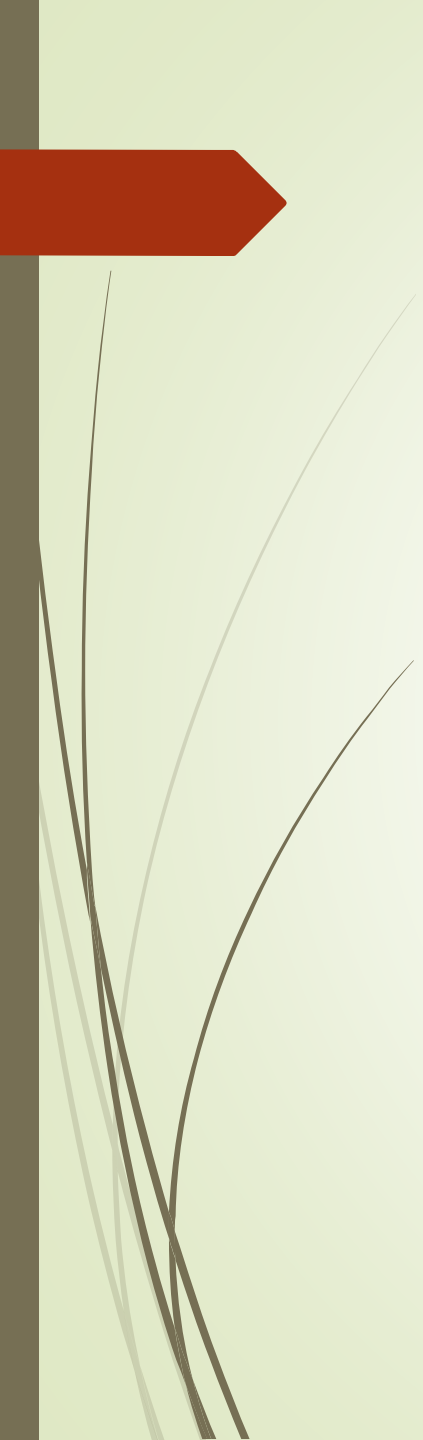
Dorsomedial prefrontal cortex = Activated
when we do a *Mindfulness activity*



<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aan8868>

Reciprocal Relationship Between Amygdala and Dorsomedial prefrontal cortex





Trauma and it's symptoms are the reason mindfulness is difficult

- **Trauma alertness and mindfulness are polar opposite states**
- **Trauma memory symptoms and mindful activity are using opposing parts of the brain**

**That's why mindfulness works..
but so difficult to do!**



What do we do?

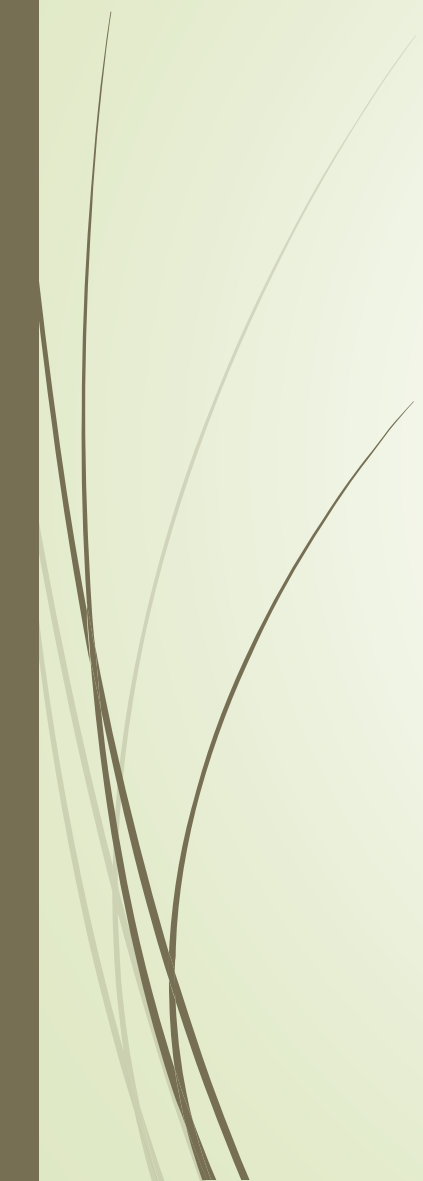

Psychoeducation

Anticipate

Encourage

Repeat

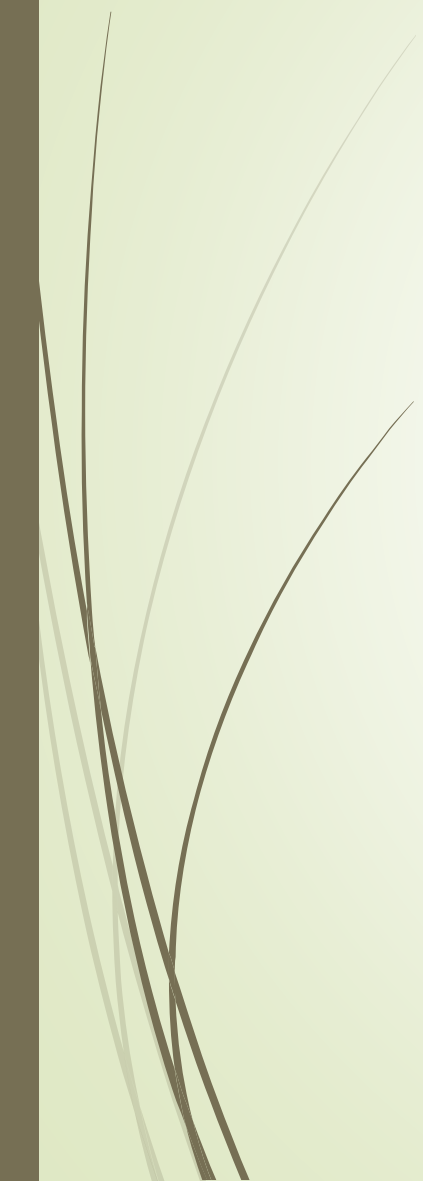




2. Attentional system that is biased to threat

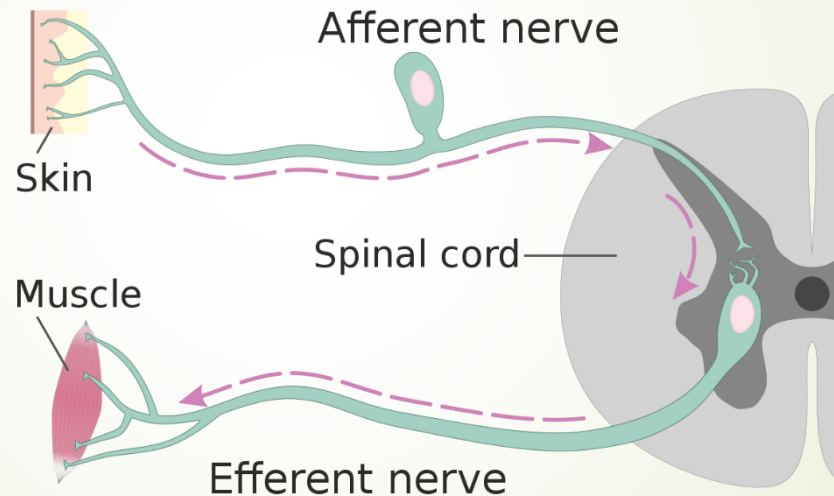


Symptoms can include:

- Hypervigilance
 - Sensory bias toward a given sense (eg: auditory)
 - Eye movement
 - Thought movement
 - Dissociation
 - Easy to do: exteroception (sensitivity to external stimuli)
 - Inability to interoception (notice internal sensations)
- 

How and Why??

- ▶ Their Afferent nerves (from sense organs to the brain) are well trained and rehearsed.. strong and fast...



And.... Here's the kicker.....



80% of nerves are afferent

RECEPTORS

that not only monitor our outside world

but (most important)

our MOVEMENTS

Now lets add C-PTSD into the mix



Attention that is hijacking the mindful experience





What do we do?

Assess Assess Assess

Teach to gently bring it back

Repeat





Quotes from Clients

- “I prefer this over DBT because I don’t have to go home and look up the words they use. It’s just as hard though”
- “I’ve done Buddhist practice all my life, you provided the tools to put this in practice..
...In the past I could find that peaceful place in myself, but it would only last as long as I practice, as soon as I finish it would come back again. I would describe this as enduring change”



Quotes cont..

- “I noticed when I got up I was making my cup of tea more peacefully without my hand shaking. This was quite consequential for me, the sun was shining and the trees were green and I sat and ate my toast and drank my tea and it was nice, and that’s something I’ve never done before” (72 year old)
- “For the first time I can play” (76 year old, h/o strong dissociative symptoms)



The Problem With Mindfulness – And How To Make It Work For Complex Trauma

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