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# Stress, Trauma & Mindfulness

Understanding Self-Care for  
Healthcare Professionals

Nicole Steward, MSW, RYT

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## Learner Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Explain stress and levels of stress, including symptoms, impacts, and trauma.
- Explain the basics of the three-part brain model and each level's attributes.
- Distinguish stressors and implement self-care tools to calm the brain and body.

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## Stress /stres/

(noun)  
a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances.

Stress is simply *a reaction to a stimulus* that disturbs our physical or mental equilibrium.

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## Stress

### Stress generally refers to:

- The psychological perception of pressure  
*and*
- The body's response to it, which involves multiple systems, from metabolism to muscles to memory.

Psychology Today

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## Levels of Stress

<input type="checkbox"/>	TOXIC
<input type="checkbox"/>	TOLERABLE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	POSITIVE

- Brief increase in stress response
- Limited/perceived “threat”
- Elevated heart rate & stress hormones
- Gone when “threat” has passed/problem solved

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## Levels of Stress

- TOXIC
- TOLERABLE
- POSITIVE

- Temporary increase in stress response
- Serious but temporary threat to safety
- Buffered by supportive relationships & resources
- Sometimes preventable or can become chronic

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## Levels of Stress

- TOXIC
- TOLERABLE
- POSITIVE

- Overwhelming stress response
- Serious, prolonged threat (real or perceived)
- Inability to cope
- Causes physical illness/disease
- Absence of supportive relationships/resources

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## Trauma

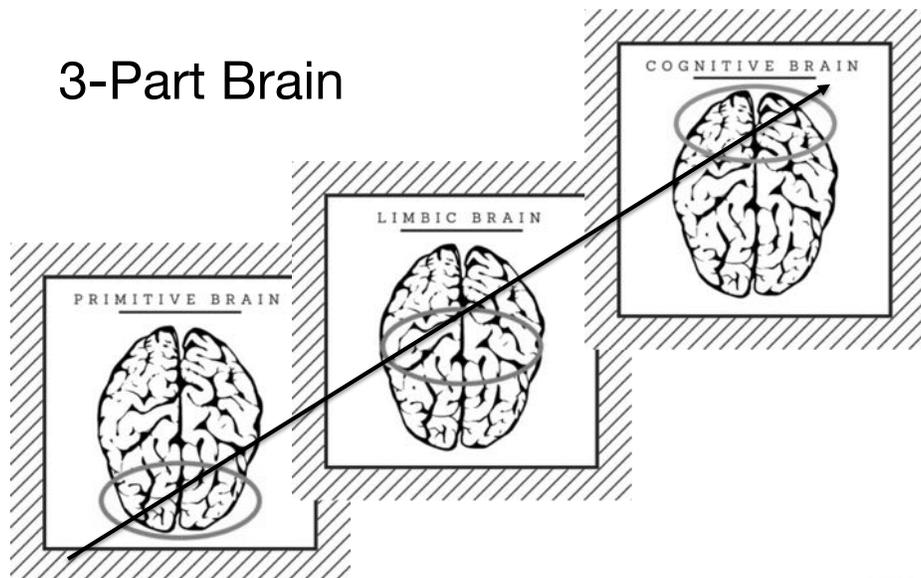
trau·ma (noun)  
a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

“Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.”

- Judith Herman, Trauma & Recovery

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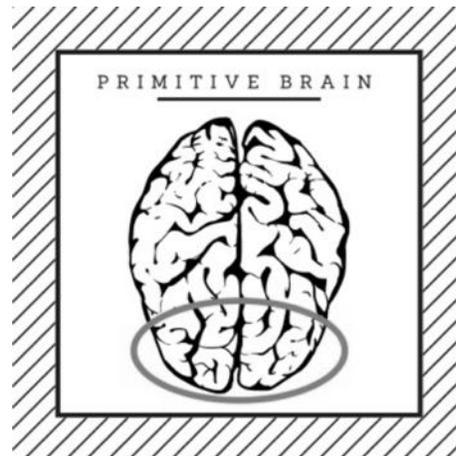
## 3-Part Brain



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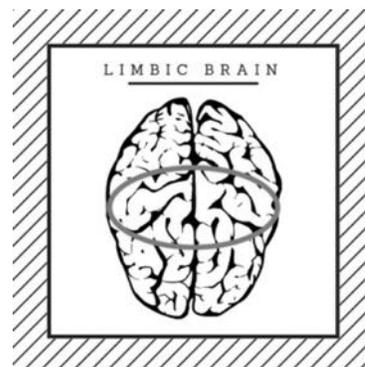
## Reptilian Brain

- Primitive brain
- Online at birth
- Brainstem & Cerebellum
  
- **REGULATE**  
body's vital functions
  
- Body temp
- Breathing
- Heart rate
- Balance



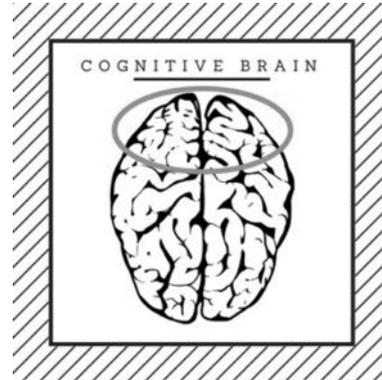
## Mammalian Brain

- Emotional brain
- Perceived emotions
- Amygdala, Hippocampus, and Hypothalamus
  
- **RELATE**  
connection to others
  
- Value judgments
- Emotional regulation
- Ability to relate to others
- Recorded memories & learning
- Unconscious influence on behavior



## Rational Brain

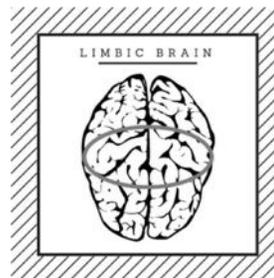
- Neocortex
- Thinking brain
- Accurate representation of the world/self
  
- RATIONAL  
what makes you YOU
  
- Abstract, rational thought
- Foresight, hindsight & insight
- Imagination, Judgement & Logic
- Development/understanding of human language



## Limbic System: Learning Center

### Amygdala:

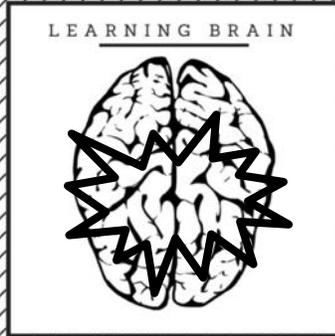
- Perception of emotions
- Fear response:  
Fight, Flight, Freeze
- Impulse control
- Memory creation
- Aggression control



### Hippocampus:

- Memory storage & recall
- Spatial memory
- Navigation
- Proprioception

## Stress Impacts the Learning Brain



### Webb's DOK Levels

1. ~~Recall~~
2. Skills & Concepts
3. Strategic Thinking
4. Extended Thinking

### Bloom's Taxonomy

- |                       |            |
|-----------------------|------------|
| ▪ <del>Remember</del> | ▪ Analyze  |
| ▪ Understand          | ▪ Evaluate |
| ▪ Apply               | ▪ Create   |

HEALTHY BRAIN





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“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”  
- Mahatma Gandhi

Burn out is the opposite of this...

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## Burn out

A build up of toxic stress that can lead to cynicism, depression, and exhaustion...Definition: physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.

- You're not in control of how you carry out your job (*may feel ineffective at work*);
- You're working toward goals that don't resonate with you (*sense of detachment*);
- You lack social support (*may lead to depression & isolation*).

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## Compassion

Sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.

Latin origins: "to suffer with"

## Compassion Fatigue

Indifference to charitable appeals on behalf of those who are suffering, experienced as a result of the frequency or number of such appeals.

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## Compassion Fatigue

"Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people...in distress; it is an **extreme state of tension and preoccupation** with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it **can create a secondary traumatic stress** for the helper."

Dr. Charles Figley  
Director, Tulane Traumatology Institute  
Tulane University, New Orleans, LA

## Compassion Fatigue

- A strong identification with helpless, suffering, or traumatized people
- Blaming others for their suffering
- Lack of strong supports for self-care/poor self-care
- Feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness
- Difficulty concentrating

## Vicarious Trauma

**vi·car·i·ous***adjective*

1. Experienced in the imagination through the feelings or actions of another person.

Vicarious trauma is a response to an accumulation of exposure to the pain of others (Figley, 1995).

## Self-Care

In order to prevent burn-out & compassion fatigue  
we must commit to Self-Care.

“Self-care is what people do for themselves to  
establish and maintain health [and] prevent and deal  
with illness,”

- Self-Care for Health: A Handbook for Community Health Workers & Volunteers, World Health Organization.

## 6 Domains of Self-Care

- Physical
- Professional
- Inter-relational
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Spiritual

## Notice it.

In order to treat toxic stress,  
we must first notice it & acknowledge it.

- How is it in my mind?
- How is it in my body?
- How is it in my heart?

Internal Weather Report: What weather pattern  
are you feeling within you *right now*?

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## Name it.

“Name it to tame it.”- Dr. Dan Siegel

Emotions activate the Amygdala,  
while naming our emotions deactivates  
the same brain region.

Naming our emotions tends to diffuse their  
charge and lessen the burden they create.

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## Move it.

Once we can notice and name our  
emotions, we must move them along.

MOVE the breath & the body.

- Increased blood flow, oxygen to the brain
- Hippocampus gets bigger: learning, memory
- Norepinephrine: increase heart rate,  
attention, motivation
- Serotonin: enhanced mood
- Dopamine: motivation, focus, learning

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## Mindfulness

“Paying attention, in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

Jon Kabat Zinn  
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Mindfulness, the practice of being fully present in the moment: noticing thoughts and letting them go, without judgment.

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## Mindful Movement

Move the Breath & Body

Moving the body & breath at the same time helps ground our brain stem (primitive brain), and allows us to pull into our cortex (thinking brain).

- Take 5 Breath
- Elevator Breath
- Lions Breath
- Birthday Cake Breath

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## Contact

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“If you’ve come here to help me  
you are wasting your time.  
If you’ve come because your  
liberation is bound with mine,  
let us work together”  
– Lila Wilson

## References/Resources

- All definitions from Oxford Dictionary
- Journal articles
  - Figley CR. Compassion fatigue as secondary traumatic stress disorder. Brunner-Routledge; New York: 1995. pp. 1–20.
  - World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia. Self care for health: a handbook for community health workers & volunteers. 2013.  
[http://apps.searo.who.int/PDS\\_DOCS/B5084.pdf](http://apps.searo.who.int/PDS_DOCS/B5084.pdf)
- Books:
  - Herman, J. L. (1997). Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. New York: Basic Books.  
<https://www.amazon.com/Trauma-Recovery-Aftermath-Violence-Political/dp/0465087302>

## References/Resources

- Links to websites:
  - Psychology Today  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>
  - American Counseling Association  
<https://www.counseling.org/>

## References/Resources

- Videos (YouTube links):
  - Emotions and the Brain  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNY0AAUtH3g>
  - Mindfulness as a Superpower  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4>
  - Name it to Tame it  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AJAe28xkvM>
- Articles:
  - Neurosequential Model in Education, The ChildTrauma Academy  
<https://www.attach.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NME-Presentation-SPG-0929-comp.pdf>

## References/Resources

- Books:
  - The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma (2015).  
<https://www.amazon.com/Body-Keeps-Score-Healing-Trauma/dp/0143127748>
  - Little Book of Big Emotions: How Five Feelings Affect Everything You Do (and Don't Do) (2004).  
[https://www.amazon.com/Little-Book-Big-Emotions-Everything/dp/1592850790/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1528826382&sr=1-1&keywords=little+book+of+big+emotions](https://www.amazon.com/Little-Book-Big-Emotions-Everything/dp/1592850790/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1528826382&sr=1-1&keywords=little+book+of+big+emotions)