

# **Hodgepodge of Trauma and Building Resiliency**

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# Mindfulness in Relation to Trauma

- This is awareness that occurs through paying attention on purpose in the present moment without making judgments
- It helps to regulate emotions
- It calms the body, mind, and spirit
- It also provides specific skills that can be practiced between contacts
- It empowers the individual to take responsibility for healing



# Mindfulness

- Through mindfulness the brain can develop new neural firing patterns so new patterns of behavior can occur; new firing and wiring of neurons
- Our brains are plastic so they are capable of growing new neural networks and making old networks obsolete
- This is very helpful in the treatment of trauma because individuals can learn new thought patterns, regulate emotions, develop new problem solving skills, develop new behaviors, and reframe painful experiences



# Mindfulness

- Was founded by Jon Kabat Zinn in 1979
- It is considered behavioral medicine because it treats the mind, body, emotions, spirit, and behavior
- Can be effective in a short period of time and during the crisis period of trauma
- Effective with all age groups
- Need to determine if the client is appropriate for this model of treatment
- Ensure that the person has a working knowledge of their symptoms and how they feel in relation to trauma
- The skills and concepts have to be practiced in times of good and bad; want to reboot brain to use healthier coping than old survivor skills; move them out of victimization into survivor-hood and then thriver-hood



# Mindfulness

- This has to be experienced and felt
- Want to develop an inner peace amidst the storm
- Monkey Mind
- Wise Mind
- Beginners Mind
- Big Mind



# Mindfulness

- Develop the senses; believe what you see, feel, and hear
- Practice compassion of self and others
- Radical Acceptance: don't judge, resist, or attempt to change things out of one's control; this only makes things worse; STEP BACK AND JUST BE!!!!!!!
- It's only a problem or stress if you name it that; "I have known a great many troubles, but none of them ever happened." Mark Twain



# Mindfulness

- Don't believe everything you think because it may be traumatized thinking
- Perculate: things have a way of working out if we let it be
- Flow: intro to guided imagery
- Move towards the sharp points in life; they are our real gifts
- Uni-task early in recovery; helps to keep us in the present moment
- GET BEYOND ME!!!



# Mindfulness

- Don't chase goat number 3
- Beware of barking lions
- Don't be deaf
- Mindful Brick



# Mindful Exercises

- The exercises we will provide today have been found to calm the autonomic nervous system
- Can be used with a wide variety of age groups
- It is important to provide services that fit the individual and their needs so not everyone will benefit from mindfulness
- Our agency has been researching and studying this approach for the past 10 years and have adopted it as our primary treatment philosophy and feel that it fits within trauma informed services



# Exercises

- Window of Tolerance
- Epilogue/Mantra/ Anthem(s)
- Dual Awareness for emotional regulation and flashbacks
- Mind in a Bottle
- Snapping/ Rhythm
- Five Finger Exercise
- Breathing
- Stretching and TRE
- Tapping



# Window of Tolerance

- Our autonomic arousal system fluctuates throughout the day depending on what activity we are engaged in
- When there is an actual or perceived threat of harm the traumatic experience begins
- When we feel threatened or in a traumatic situation, our arousal system quickly escalates
- The brain's alarm system called the amygdala is set off



# Window of Tolerance

- There are actual bodily changes such as increase in heart rate and blood pressure, eyes dilate, heightened sense of perception, blood pumps at a faster rate in arms and legs, digestion stops, tunnel vision occurs, blood clotting process speeds up in case of injury
- Dissociation may occur and continue
- After the trauma the body seeks to find a balance or equilibrium
- The individual adjusts and moves on due to protective factors, develops acute stress disorder, or develops PTSD; substance abuse or other addictive or high risk behaviors



# Window of Tolerance

- The hippocampus in the brain sends the signal of fear
- The body releases high levels of stress hormones
- The fight, flight, freeze, submit, play dead traumatic response is activated as a survival mechanism



# Trauma and the Brain

- The Prefrontal Cortex in the brain shuts off
- Primitive impulses control the person
- Values are lost
- Can't think logically
- Ability to focus and attention span is lost



# Parent with the Brain in Mind

- **Integration:** there are many different parts of the brain that do different jobs; **the left side of the brain** is for reasoning and thinking logically; the **right side** is emotions, creativity, and reading nonverbal cues; it's almost like the brain has multiple personalities with some parts rational and other parts not rational, some parts reflective and others parts more reactive
- No wonder you or your child behave different and seem different at different times
- Integration or getting the whole brain to work together is necessary to thrive



# Parent with the Brain in Mind

- **Integration:** linking different areas of the brain together so it can function well as a whole
- In the body the lungs are to breath air, the heart is to pump blood, and the stomach is to digest food; if any one of these body organs is not properly working the body is not properly working; this is the same concept with the brain; each area of the brain needs to be coordinated and work together
- **Dis-integration:** tantrums, confusion, chaos, aggression and other challenging behaviors



# Parent with the Brain in Mind

- **Horizontal integration:** left brain logic works with right brain emotion
- **Vertical integration:** higher parts of the brain, which allows the child to thoughtfully think of their actions, work with the lower parts of the brain which is concerned with instinct and gut reactions
- The way integration takes place is fascinating; new developments in brain scanning show that the **brain is plastic or moldable**; this is a new development which has changed all of neuroscience  
What molds our brain is **EXPERIENCE**; even into old age our experiences actually change the physical structure of the brain



# Parent with the Brain in Mind

- Provide diverse opportunities for your child
- Encourage activities that produce integration
- Be present with your child
- This promotes mental health in your child/"**River of Well Being**"; float peacefully in a river; lose control of canoe and hit a bank which is **chaos/feel confused**, feel turmoil; steer back in middle of the river but hit the other bank which is the **bank of rigidity/can't adapt** or compromise; being out of control versus being too controlling
- The closer you get to either bank you leave mental health; being in the middle is the **river of well being**
- This also applies to our children; they have their own river of well being and the banks of chaos and rigidity
- When in a state of chaos or rigidity your child is out of brain integration



# Two Brains are Better than One

- The brain is divided into **2 hemispheres/right and left**; they are anatomically separate, function differently, and have their own distinct personalities
- **Left Brain**: loves order, logical, literal, likes words, is linear in that it puts things in order, loves lists, loves detail
- **Right Brain**: nonverbal, attune to nonverbal communication, cares about the big picture and not detail, focuses on feelings, memories and images, **“heart felt sense”**, intuitive, more influenced by the body, interprets information



# Two Brains are Better than One

- **Young children are right brain dominant:** they have not yet learned words/meanings/logic; live in the moment; time and responsibility does not exist for them; when your child starts asking “Why?” all the time then the left brain is starting to kick in
- The 2 hemispheres of the brain are connected by the **corpus callosum**: this is a bundle of fibers which allows the communication between the 2 hemispheres to work together as a team or integrated
- You want your child to value both logic and emotions
- We have these 2 sides of the brain which assists us in completing specialized and complicated tasks and problems
- We don't want to live in **an emotional flood or in an emotional desert**
- **Older children tend to function more in an emotional desert/won't show or share emotions/don't care**



# Whole Brain Strategies

- **Strategy 2:**

- **Name it to Tame it/Telling stories to calm big emotions:** it helps for the child to tell their story of a painful or uncomfortable situation; this helps to tame the emotional brain and integrates with the left brain; puts it into words and order/logic; act as a **facilitator** of your child telling their story

- Respect your child's desires about when to talk about it

Children are more likely to share when engaged in another activity

Telling the story helps to identify feelings

Name it to tame it instead of **dismiss and deny**

"I fell and hurt my knee." "Don't cry. Don't be sad. You will be fine. Just be more careful."

"I fell and hurt my knee." "That can hurt. I saw you running and you tripped and scraped your knee. Is that what happened?" "I ran and fell and hurt my knee. I started crying and yelled for you. You came and rocked me which helped me feel better."



# Staircase of the Mind

- We have talked about the 2 hemispheres of the brain so now we will look at the **top and bottom of the brain**.
- Imagine your brain having a downstairs and an upstairs
- **Downstairs:** brain stem, limbic region; this runs from the top of your neck to the bridge of your nose; this is a primitive area because it is responsible for basic functioning such as breathing blinking, innate reactions/impulses such as the fight/flight/freeze response, and strong emotions
- Your face turns red when embarrassed
- The downstairs of the brain is like the downstairs of a house where basic needs are met such as the kitchen, dining room, bathroom



# Staircases of the Mind

- **Upstairs brain:** cerebral cortex system
- Highly sophisticated; imagine light filled, plenty of windows, skylights, library
- This is where intricate mental processes take place such as thinking, imagination, decision making, control over emotions and body, self awareness, empathy, and morality
- When working well there is less impulsivity, thinks before acts, in control of emotions, care about how others feels
- When both parts are working together there is **vertical integration** which means the upstairs can monitor the actions of the downstairs, help calm strong reactions/emotions/impulses and the downstairs makes good bottom up contributions



# Staircase of the Mind

- **The bottom staircase** is developed even at birth but the upstairs is not
- It is not fully developed until mid-twenties
- It is the last part of the brain to fully develop
- Same as building a house; complete the downstairs before moving upstairs; the upstairs brain is in construction as a child; gets a remodel as a teenager and young adult
- Therefore your child's brain cannot be expected to fully function so kids can get trapped in the downstairs brain so they may fly off the handle, have a tantrum, not listen, not see cause and effect, show lack of empathy for others



# Staircase of the Mind

- **The baby gate of the Mind:** the **AMYGDALA**; My amygdala made me do it!!!!
- Resides in downstairs brain; it is the watchdog or alarm in the brain, always on alert for threats and when feels threats it hijacks the upstairs brain so we act before we think
- There are definitely times when we need to react instead of going through a logical sequences to determine what to do; example is snake
- The amygdala can go off even when not in danger and **we flip our lid**
- In children it is like there is a baby gate between the upstairs and downstairs brain; the amygdala keeps going off and the baby gate is latched separating the downstairs from the upstairs
- It is up to parents to provide experiences to build the upstairs brain



# Staircase of the Mind

- 2 types of tantrums
- **Upstairs tantrum** is deliberate, makes the choice to have a tantrum to get what wants; can turn it off quickly if thinks has gotten what wants or the parent gives in; the child knows what they are doing
- This calls for the parent to never give in/negotiate, to set clear boundaries, to discuss expected and appropriate behaviors; if consistent then the child will see that this strategy does not work in getting them what they want
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# Staircase of the Mind

- **Downstairs tantrums:**
- The child becomes so upset they can no longer access their upstairs brain; the amygdala takes over and hijacks it and stress hormones are rapidly moving through the child's body
- So momentarily the child is actually out of control of emotions and body sensations, can't think rationally/make good decisions; has flipped lid, **lost mind** literally
- Total state of dis-integration
- Use **connect and then direct**; soothing touch, soft tone of voice, hold close, go to a different scene
- **Nurture** to take back to the middle of the mental health river
- Can't process consequences or behavior until calmed down and upstairs brain is accessible



# Staircase of the Mind

- Whole Brain Strategy # 3: **Engage and don't enrage**/appeal to the upstairs brain
- Are you engaging your child's upstairs brain?
- Are you triggering your child's downstairs brain?
- Convince me or come up with a solution we can both live with engages the upstairs brain
- "I hate you mommy." "That is not ok to say and I don't ever want to hear you say that again."
- "I hate you mommy." "Wow you really are mad at me." "Yes I hate you." "Is it because I didn't buy you the necklace you wanted?" "Yes and you are so mean." "That necklace was not for sale. It's ok if you want to keep feeling upset but if you'd rather, we can be problem solvers and think of another way that we can feel better." "How do we do that?"



# Staircase of the Mind

- Strategy #4: **Use it or lose it:** Exercising the upstairs brain
- It's like a muscle so if exercised it becomes strong; if ignored it gets weak
- Watch for times where your child can develop their upstairs brain
- Give them the **chance to make decisions** instead of always making decisions for them; or for very young **children give them options** then allow them to choose
- Giving an allowance is also a good way of building this part of brain for older children
- Resist rescuing all the time/allow natural consequences
- Help them to control feelings and body sensations through MBSR skills
- Help them to identify and express feelings
- Ask your child questions in an effort to develop self awareness, empathy, morals
- If of age, art and journaling are positive ways of developing the Upstairs brain
- Give hypothetical situations
- What are you modeling with your own behavior???
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# Staircase of the Mind

- Strategy #5: **Move it or lose it:** move the body in order to not lose the mind
- Body movements have a direct affect on the brain' chemistry
- When we change our physical state through movement it changes our emotional state
- It calms the amygdala
- It produces integration of the brain and builds the upstairs brain
- Teach your kids about the upstairs and downstairs brain
- Watch for your downstairs moments/keep mouth shut and hands behind back/remove self from the situation/movement etc./reconnect with your child by **repairing**



# Integrating Memory

- Strategy #6: **Use the remote of the mind**; Replaying memories
- Tell child they have an internal DVD player which has a remote control so they can replay any experience they want to; can rewind, forward, or pause at any time; then go into a narrative or story about it
- Example: “You want to cut the wood this time?” “I’ll just watch.” “You are not still afraid of knives are you?” “No I just don’t feel like it right now.” “That was a long time ago. It shouldn’t still bother you. Try to forget it.”
- “You want to cut the wood today?” “I’ll just watch.” “Are you thinking about what happened at the park?” “No. I just don’t feel like it.” “It can help to talk about it.” “It was a long time ago.” “I know buddy but it looks like it still bothers you. I think talking about it could really help. Just tell me what you remember.”



# Integrating Memory

- **Remember to Remember:** Making recollection a part of daily life
- Give your children time each day to tell their stories so implicit can become explicit memory
- During experiences promote your child to talk about the experience
- Ask questions; keep it simple
- Journaling
- Photo albums, pictures, videos, scrap book, other activities
- As a parent, how is your memory integration? Children can pick up on your feelings of inadequacy, sadness, anger, abandonment etc.; You may then act in ways that are undesirable



# The United States of Me

Strategy #7: **Let the clouds of emotions roll by:** Feelings come and go; Feelings are changing and temporary conditions

- Strategy: paying attention to what's going on inside: paying attention on purpose to bodily sensations and feelings
- helps them to **sift through** all of the parts of them; hunger, tiredness, sadness, anger, grumpiness, their thoughts and emotions
- Develop the mindsight/understanding your mind and the mind of others; requires empathy
- Pay attention to self talk; hostile thoughts lead to increase in anger
- Feelings Chart



# The United States of Me

- Strategy #8: **Mindsight**; Getting back to the hub
- Use Mindsight exercises; this appears to be the same as Mindfulness based stress reduction skills; breathing, guided imagery, tapping, snapping, getting in rhythm, imagining a safe place and drawing it, music, movements, etc.
- As a parent what is your level of mindsight? What is on your rim? Can you sift and focus on purpose?



# The Me-We Connection

- Strategy #8: **Increase the family fun factor:** make a point to enjoy each other; use playful parenting
- Strategy #9: **Connection through conflict:** teach kids to argue with **we** in mind by:
  - Help your child to see another's point of view
  - Teach your child what is not being said; learning nonverbal communication
  - Teach your child to make things right after a conflict
  - As a parent how well connected are you???



# No Drama Discipline

- **Redirect:** what you do as a parent plays a major role in the outcome; keep calm and connect
- 1) R- reduce words
- 2) E- embrace emotions
- 3) D- describe, don't preach
- 4) I- involve your child in the discipline
- 5) R- reframe a no into a conditional yes
- 6) E- emphasize the positive
- 7) C- creatively approach the situation
- 8) T- teach mindsight tools



# No Drama Discipline

- **Four Messages of Hope**

- 1) There is no magic wand
  - 2) Your kids can benefit even when you mess up
  - 3) You can always reconnect
  - 4) It's never too late to make a positive change
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- The inappropriate behavior needs to be on the back burner while your child is always on the front burner



# Enlivening

- 1100 studies show that the relationship you have with clients has more impact than the intervention you use
- It takes more than just being an empathic listener
- It takes being **charismatic and influential** that mobilizes them emotionally
- New research also indicates that clients want the service provider to be engaging and responsive; actively participates and collaborates with them
- Research also shows that you can build an “**earned attachment**” by being attuned to their emotional states



# Enlivening

- Most communication with a client is **nonverbal** which is tone, posture, facial expressions; 93% of communication; 7% is verbal
- The right brain connects with the nonverbal communication
- Be **attuned** to your clients facial expressions, gestures, **skin color changes**, tone, etc.
- Also pay close attention to how your body responds to the client and your intuition
- People come to services generally wanting to change and may know this from their left brain but the right brain does not follow
- Paying closer attention to “**feeling felt**” will help the client move towards right brain change



# Window of Tolerance

- The individual may not be able to accurately assess safety versus danger due to responding in the traumatic survival state of fight, flight, freeze, play dead, or submit; after the trauma the nervous system remains prepared for danger
- The individual may develop a pattern of hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal
- In the Window of Tolerance you want to assist the individual in identifying their pattern of response and to develop regulated arousal or the Window of Tolerance



# Window of Tolerance

- Hyper-arousal: impulsive, easily agitated, emotionally overwhelmed, aggressive, reactive, defensive, angry, racing thoughts

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Window of Tolerance/regulated arousal

“New Normal” or “New Program of the Mind”

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- Hypo-arousal: passive, depressed, withdrawn, lack of energy, difficulty making decisions, hopelessness, play dead, or submit, can't think



# Window of Tolerance

- Assist the individual to develop regulated arousal or a new normal within their window of tolerance
- Identify patterns and triggers and then identify specific mindfulness skills that help the individual to calm and relax
- Assist the individual in understanding bodily sensations, thoughts, or feelings that take them out of the Window of Tolerance



# Epilogue

- Often start with tell me what happened or tell me your story
- The story is not just about the trauma but the individual's journey to the present day; what got them here and how they survived
- It resets the brain/amygdala and hippocampus
- May reduce the intensity of traumatic memory



# Epilogue

- Calculate how many days, months, and years since last abuse episode/for each type
- Start epilogue from now to past or past to now
- List events, accomplishments, etc since trauma; be detailed; may add different things during and after services
- Develop a Mantra
- Develop a ritual/celebration of recovery
- Develop anthem(s)