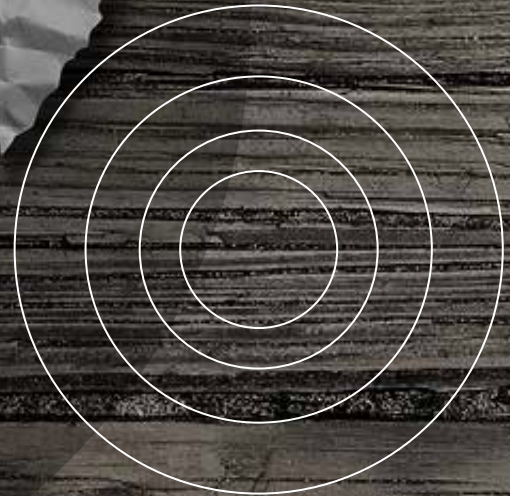




Healing from Trauma

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.





Welcome!

Lisa Firestone

Director of Research and Education – The Glendon Association
Senior Editor - PsychAlive

[www. Glendon.org](http://www.Glendon.org) www.PsychAlive.org



In this Webinar:


- Introduction to psychological first aid, which can be used in or following a crisis
- Description of the use of creating a coherent narrative as a method to resolve trauma
- Toolkit of techniques for calming down overwhelming emotional reactions
- Emphasis on the practice of self-compassion
- Approach to enhancing emotional resilience to reframe thinking around a traumatic experience





Poll #1:


Have you:

- 1 Worked with people who've experienced trauma?
 - 2 Experienced trauma?
 - 3 Both?
 - 4 Neither?
- 

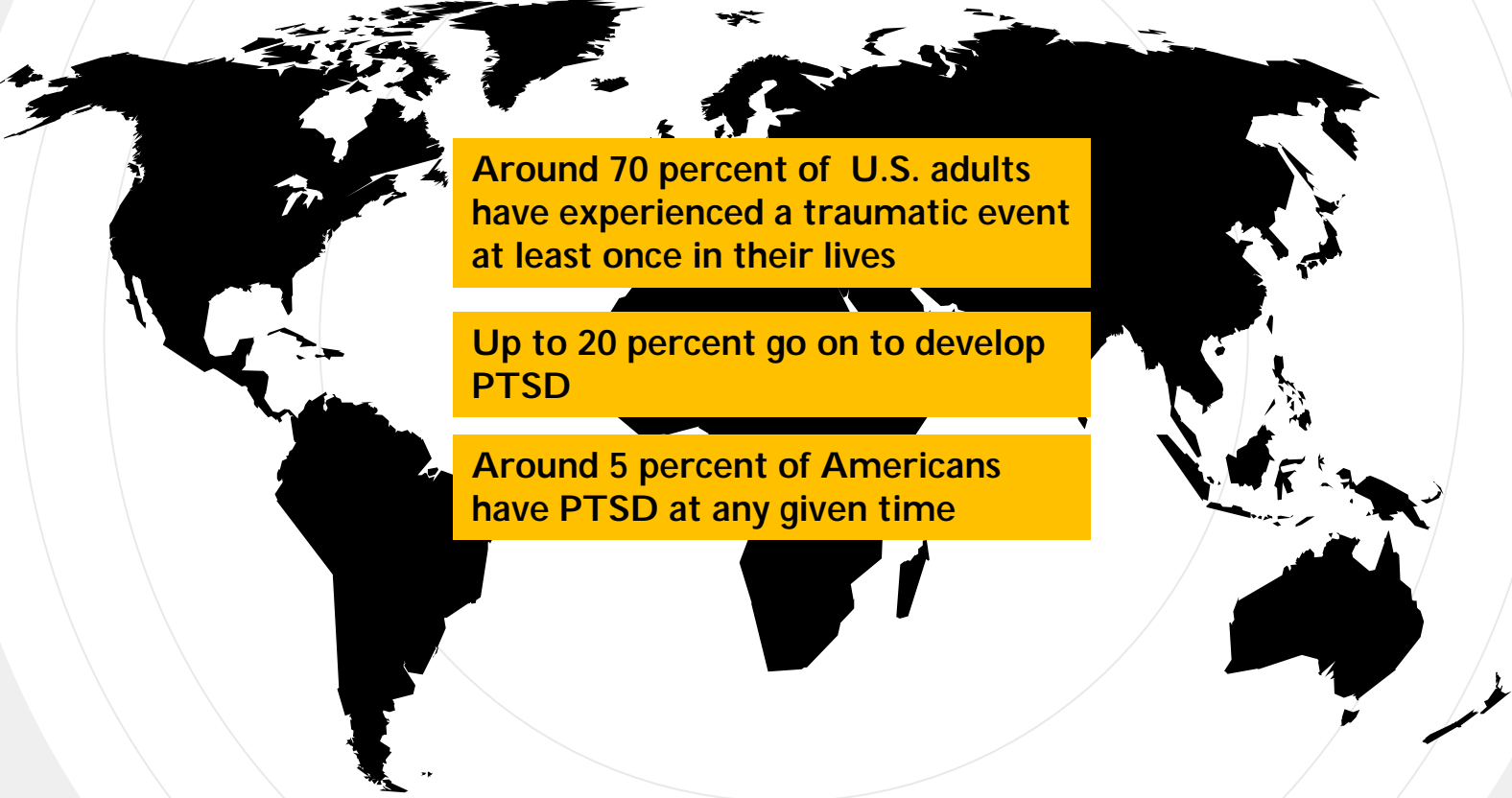


Poll #2:

Did you experience
trauma in a/an:

- 1 Interpersonal relationship?
 - 2 Natural disaster?
 - 3 War?
 - 4 Assault?
 - 5 Other?
- 

Prevalence of Trauma



**Around 70 percent of U.S. adults
have experienced a traumatic event
at least once in their lives**

**Up to 20 percent go on to develop
PTSD**

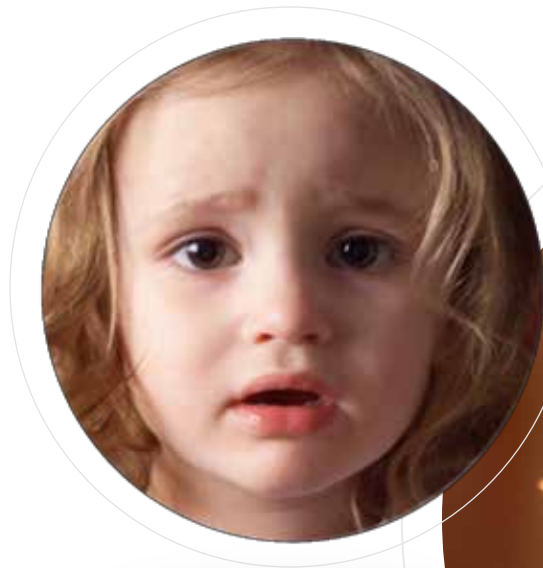
**Around 5 percent of Americans
have PTSD at any given time**



The background features a dark blue field with numerous out-of-focus yellow and orange light spots, creating a bokeh effect. Overlaid on this are several geometric elements: a large white circle in the center, a smaller grey circle with a white outline to its upper left, and a series of four concentric white circles to its lower right.

Definition of Trauma

Deeply distressing or disturbing
experience that overwhelms the mind and
central nervous system



Complex Trauma

- Psychological disorder resulting from prolonged exposure to interpersonal trauma
- “Repetitive, prolonged, or cumulative”



Big T and little t trauma

Big T Trauma

- Serious loss, abuse, or life-threatening event

Little t trauma

- Causes distress, fear, or pain and, therefore, changes the way you see yourself, others, or the world



What does trauma do to us?

Reactions to trauma differ depending on the characteristics of the individual and the meaning of the trauma to the individual.



What does trauma do to us?

Initial Reactions: exhaustion, confusion, sadness, anxiety, agitation, numbness, dissociation, confusion, physical arousal, and blunted affect.

More Severe Responses: continuous distress without periods of relative calm or rest, severe dissociation symptoms, and intense intrusive recollections that continue despite a return to safety.

Delayed Responses: persistent fatigue, sleep disorders, nightmares, fear of recurrence, anxiety focused on flashbacks, depression, and avoidance of emotions, sensations, or activities that are associated with the trauma, even remotely.





What does trauma do to us?

Foreshortened future: Trauma can affect one's beliefs about the future via loss of hope, limited expectations about life, fear that life will end abruptly or early, or anticipation that normal life events won't occur (e.g., access to education, ability to have a significant and committed relationship, good opportunities for work).



What does trauma do to us?

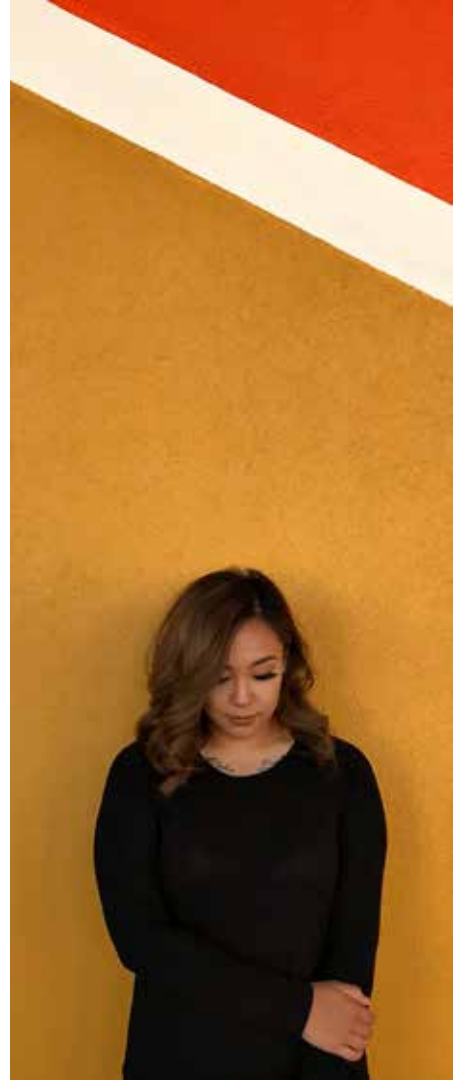
- **Cognitive Reactions:**
 - Cognitive errors:
 - Excessive or inappropriate guilt:
 - Idealization
 - Trauma-induced hallucinations or delusions
 - Intrusive thoughts and memories
- **Hyperarousal and sleep disturbances**
- **Feeling different**
- **Triggers and flashbacks**



The Body Keeps Score

Bessel van der Kolk

“*Traumatized people do not recognize their bodies as a source of pleasure and comfort or even as part of themselves that needs care and nurturance. When we cannot rely on our body to signal safety or warning and instead feel chronically overwhelmed by physical stirrings we lose the capacity to feel at home in our own skin and, by extension, the whole world. As long as their map of the world is based on trauma, abuse and neglect people are likely to seek shortcuts to oblivion anticipating rejection, ridicule and deprivation they are reluctant to try out new options certain these will lead to failure. This lack of experimentation traps people in a matrix of fear, isolation and scarcity where it is impossible to welcome the very experiences that might change their basic world view.*



Trauma in the Body

Peter Levine

“ *The bodies of traumatized people portray "snapshots" of their unsuccessful attempts to defend themselves in the face of threat and injury. Trauma is a highly activated incomplete biological response to threat, frozen in time. For example, when we prepare to fight or to flee, muscles throughout our entire body are tensed in specific patterns of high energy readiness. When we are unable to complete the appropriate actions, we fail to discharge the tremendous energy generated by our survival preparations. This energy becomes fixed in specific patterns of neuromuscular readiness. The person then stays in a state of acute and then chronic arousal and dysfunction in the central nervous system. Traumatized people are not suffering from a disease in the normal sense of the word- they have become stuck in an aroused state. It is difficult if not impossible to function normally under these circumstances.*



Definition of PTSD

A psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault.

Source: What Is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder? (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>

PTSD

DSM-5 now categorizes it as a trauma and stressor-related disorder as opposed to an anxiety disorder

May come from one of four sources:

- Direct exposure
- Witnessing trauma
- Indirect exposure (friend or relative)
- Repeated or extreme indirect exposure to aversive details of the event



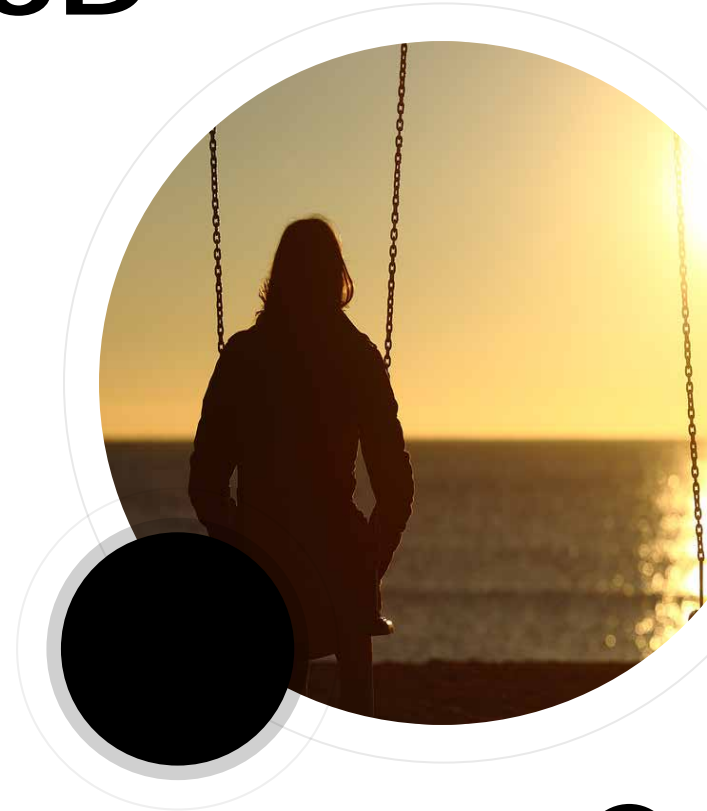
PTSD Symptoms

- Intrusive memories
- Avoidance
- Negative changes in thinking and mood
- Changes in physical and emotional reactions



Who Gets PTSD and Why

- Development
- Age
- Historical (ACEs)
- Socio-cultural
- Stress response
 - Fight or flight
 - Tend or befriend





Psychological First Aid

When a trauma occurs, how can we help people avoid adverse consequences?

Caring Presence

The first step



Psychological First Aid

PFA is an evidence-informed modular approach to assist children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism.





What are PFA's Principle Actions?

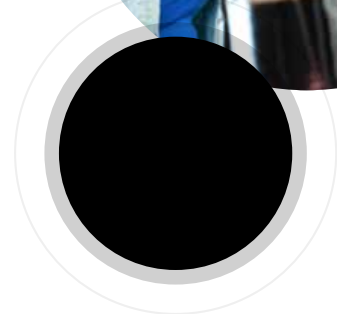
PFA's principles actions are to:

- Establish safety and security
- Connect to restorative resources
- Reduce stress-related reactions
- Foster adaptive short-and long-term coping
- Enhance natural resilience (rather than preventing long-term pathology)



What is PFA? Core Actions

1. Engage with the person
 - Make contact and offer help
2. Provide safety and comfort
 - Ask what would make them feel safe and comfortable
3. Stabilize the person
4. Gather information
 - Meet the person's basic needs and ask about their concerns
5. Help connect them to practical assistance
6. Connect them with social supports
7. Give information on coping strategies
8. Link them with collaborative services
9. Create coping groups



Don'ts of PFA

- **Don't** force people to tell their stories. Focus on keeping them calm and meeting their needs.
- **Don't** offer false reassurance with statements like, "Everything will be okay."
- **Don't** instruct people on what they should be thinking or feeling.
- **Don't** make promises that cannot be kept.





Coherent Narrative

as a Method to Resolve Trauma

Why is it important to make sense of your trauma?

- 🕒 Research shows that with self-reflection and understanding, we can free ourselves from the effects of our trauma.
- 🕒 Making sense of our story by writing a coherent narrative allows us to have a sense of who we've been, who we are now, and who we'd like to become.
- 🕒 *"When we create a narrative of who we are, we link past and present so we can become the active author of a possible future, too."*
~ Dr. Dan Siegel



Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative

James Pennebaker & Janel Seagal, Journal of Clinical Psychology, 1999

- “Writing about personal experiences in an emotional way for as little as 15 minutes over the course of three days brings about improvements in mental and physical health.”
- “...writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences.”
- “...the formation of a narrative is critical and is an indicator of good mental and physical health.”
- “Forming a story about one’s experiences in life is associated with improved physical and mental health across a variety of populations.”
- Ongoing studies suggest that writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences.



Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic. They are experienced by the survivor as inflicted, not chosen – as flashbacks to the events themselves.

In contrast, narrating memories to others (who are strong enough and empathic enough to be able to listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma.

Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather , it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self.

Tips for Writing a Coherent Narrative

- ▷ Write as an adult.
- ▷ Write rationally.
- ▷ Write autobiographically.
- ▷ Write intuitively.
- ▷ Write with feeling.
- ▷ Write about how the past influences your present.
- ▷ Write with balance.
- ▷ Write with self-compassion.





Identifying Traumas

List some emotional or physical traumas or traumatic events that have happened in your life. These do not have to be “Big T” traumas. A trauma can be any significant, distressing event or incident that shaped you as a child – things that made you feel bad, scared, ashamed, etc.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____



Understanding Your Triggers



How elements from our past trigger us in the present



Think about a recent time that you got triggered...

- How did you feel at the time?
- What event or feeling in your childhood do you think led you to feel triggered in the recent situation?
- Write a story that makes sense out of why you felt triggered.



Choose Your Words

Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up when you get triggered emotionally. This is often some kind of fear about yourself or how others feel about you. It may be some kind of anguish or hurt.



Lonely

Dismissed and Unimportant

Frustrated and Helpless

On Guard and

Uncomfortable

Scared

Hurt

Hopeless

Helpless

Intimidated

Threatened

Panicked

Rejected

Like I Don't Matter

Ignored

Inadequate

Shut Out and Alone

Confused and Lost

Embarrassed

Ashamed

Blank

Afraid

Shocked

Sad

Forlorn

Disappointed

Isolated

Let Down

Numb

Humiliated

Overwhelmed

Small or Insignificant

Unwanted

Vulnerable

Worried

Integration



Interpersonal Neurobiology

Curious

Open

Accepting

Loving



Self-Compassion

“Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering”

From Kristin Neff:

Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.

Three Elements:

1. **Self-kindness** Vs. Self-judgment
2. **Mindfulness** Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. **Common humanity** Vs. Isolation



Mindfulness

Key Findings:

- Mindfulness-based therapies are effective in reducing PTSD symptomatology.
- May be effective in restoring connectivity between large-scale brain networks in individuals with PTSD
- May mitigate the negative effects of stress and trauma related to adverse childhood exposures, improving short- and long-term outcomes
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction enhanced psychological functioning and improved inflammatory biomarkers in trauma-exposed women.



SOURCES: Gallegos, A. M., Lytle, M. C., Moynihan, J. A., & Talbot, N. L. (2015). Mindfulness-based stress reduction to enhance psychological functioning and improve inflammatory biomarkers in trauma-exposed women: A pilot study. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 7(6), 525-532. doi:10.1037/tra0000053

Boyd, J. E., Lanius, R. A., & Mckinnon, M. C. (2018). Mindfulness-based treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder: A review of the treatment literature and neurobiological evidence. *Journal of Psychiatry & Neuroscience*, 43(1), 7-25. doi:10.1503/jpn.170021

Ortiz, R., & Sibinga, E. (2017). The Role of Mindfulness in Reducing the Adverse Effects of Childhood Stress and Trauma. *Children*, 4(3), 16. doi:10.3390/children4030016



The background features a solid blue gradient. In the upper left, there are several autumn leaves in shades of yellow and orange. A large, semi-transparent dark blue circle is positioned in the upper left, partially overlapping the leaves. In the lower right, there are several concentric white circles of varying sizes.

Coping Strategies

to help with feelings that
arise from trauma

Toolkit

- Name It to Tame It
- Wheel of Awareness
- RAIN Approach
- Balancing the Mind
- 4-7-8 Breathing

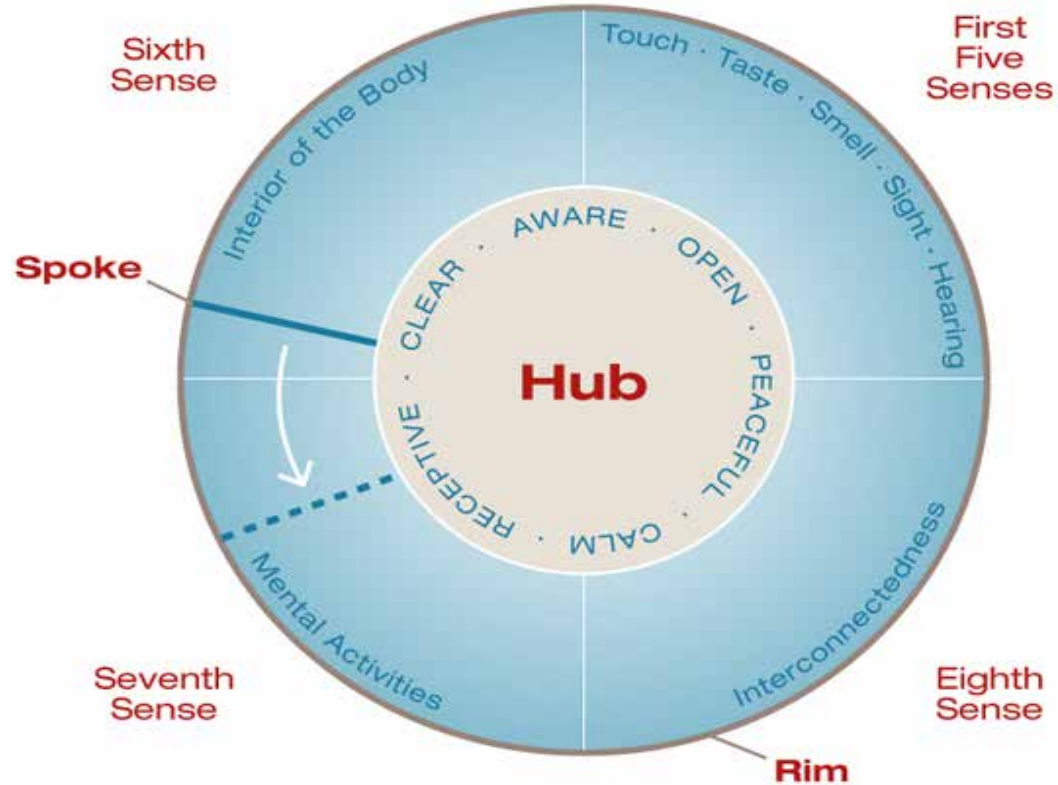


Name It to Tame It

Helps strengthen the left hemisphere of our brain's language capabilities and link them to the more raw and spontaneous emotions on the right side of our brain (integration)



Wheel of Awareness



The RAIN Approach

Recognize

Accept/Acknowledge/Allow

Investigate

Non-Identification



Balancing the Mind

Can help you achieve more calm and balance during times of chaos or stress.

Step 1: Place one hand on your chest over your heart and one hand on your abdomen.

Step 2: Apply a gentle amount of pressure with each hand and see how you feel.

Step 3: Try switching the position of your hands, so that the hand on your chest moves to your belly and vice versa.

Step 4: Again, place a gentle amount of pressure with both hands and notice how this feels.

Step 5: Place your hands in whichever position feels best and simply breathe in and out slowly until your body starts to relax, and your mind becomes calmer



4-7-8 Breathing

Been shown to help relieve stress, lower blood pressure, and induce sleep.

Step 1: Put the tip of your tongue to the top of your mouth just behind your two front teeth.

Step 2: Breathe in through your nose for four seconds.

Step 3: Hold your breath for a count of seven seconds.

Step 4: Breathe out through your mouth for eight seconds.

Step 5: Repeat at least five times.



Enhancing Emotional Resilience: Techniques

1. Hardiness
2. Mindset Interventions
3. Post-traumatic Growth



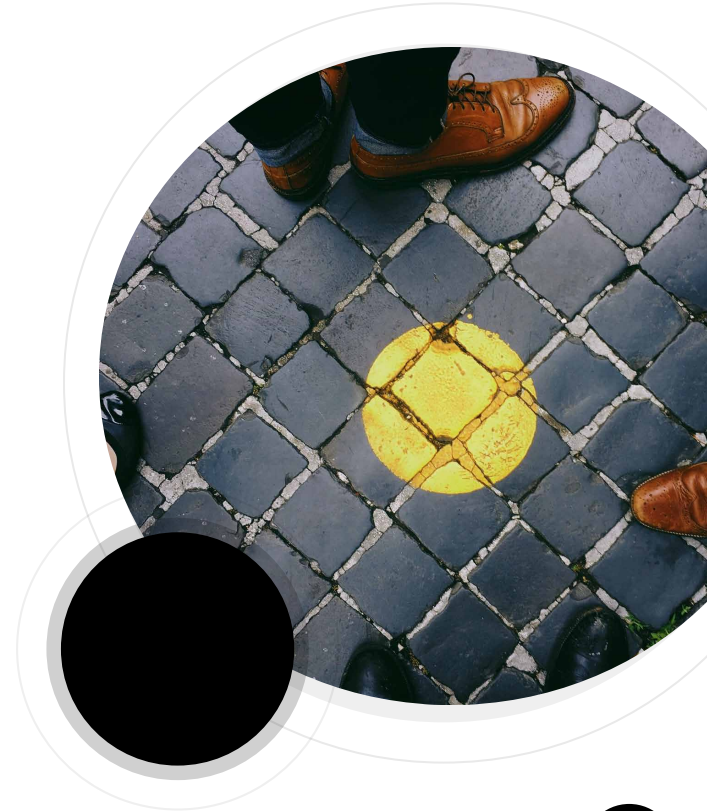
3 C's of Hardiness

Salvatore Maddi, Ph.D.

1. Commitment
2. Challenge
3. Control

ü Improves resilience

ü Can be learned



4 C's of Self-Renewal

Cynthia Scott and Dennis Jaffe

1. Commitment
2. Challenge
3. Control
4. Connection



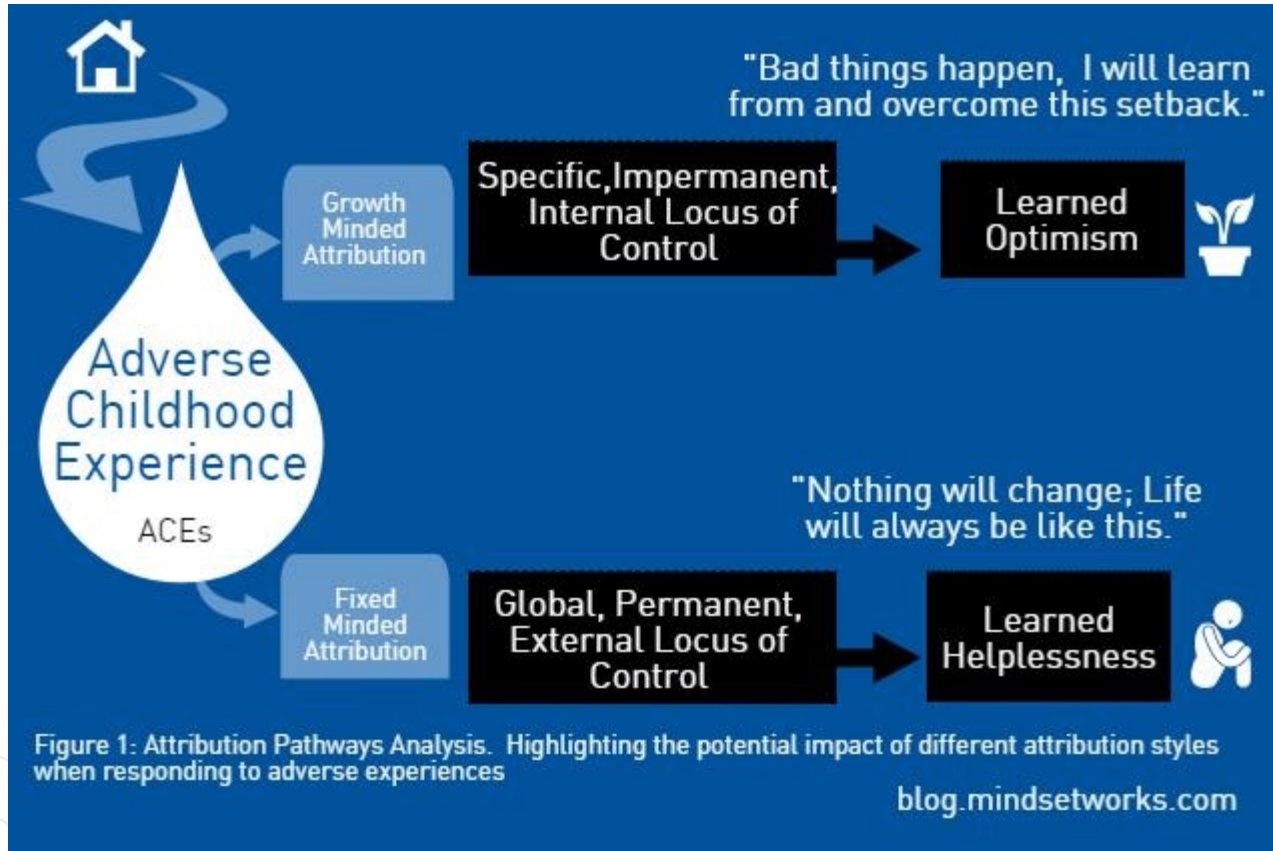
Mindset Interventions

Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck

“the understanding that abilities and intelligence can be developed”



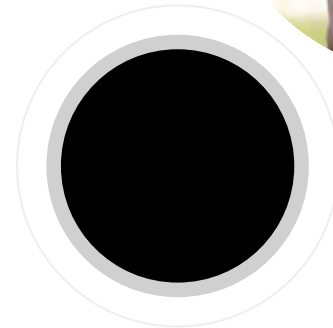


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The Road to Resilience

APA

- Make connections
- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems
- Accept change is a part of living
- Move toward your goals
- Take decisive actions
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery
- Nurture a positive view of yourself
- Keep things in perspective
- Maintain a hopeful outlook
- Take care of yourself



Post-traumatic Growth

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

“PTG is the ability to experience positive personal changes that result from the struggle to deal with trauma and its consequences. PTG highlights that strengths can emerge through suffering and struggles with adversities. Individuals may develop a renewed appreciation of life and a commitment to live life to the fullest, valuing each day; improved relationships with loved ones; a search for new possibilities and enhanced personal strengths and new spiritual changes.”

Source: Meichenbaum, D. (n.d.). *IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT RESILIENCE: A CONSIDERATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ABOUT RESILIENCE and IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT* [PDF]. Miami, FL: Melissa Institute.



Post-traumatic Growth

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

- Experience positive emotions, regulate strong negative emotions
- Adopt a task-oriented coping style
- Be cognitively flexible
- Undertake a meaning-making mission
- Keep fit and safe
- Change your thinking (Challenge your critical inner voice)

Source: Meichenbaum, D. (n.d.). *IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT RESILIENCE: A CONSIDERATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ABOUT RESILIENCE and IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT* [PDF]. Miami, FL: Melissa Institute.



Pathways to Resilience

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

- The perceived availability of social relationships
- The degree of perceived personal control
- The degree to which they can experience positive emotions and self-regulate negative emotions
- The ability to be cognitively flexible
- The ability to engage in activities that are consistent with one's values and life priorities that reflect a stake in the future

Source: Meichenbaum, D. (n.d.). *IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT RESILIENCE: A CONSIDERATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ABOUT RESILIENCE and IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT* [PDF]. Miami, FL: Melissa Institute.



Post-traumatic Growth

Challenge Your Critical Inner Voice

- **Victimized:** *"Bad things will always happen to you."*
- **Damaged:** *"You're damaged goods. You will never be okay."*
- **Contaminated:** *"This is part of you now. You're ruined."*
- **Unworthy:** *"You don't deserve anything anymore."*
- **Guilty:** *"It's your fault this happened. You deserved it"*



Post-traumatic Growth

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

“

Resilient individuals tend to tell coherent stories that create meaning out of their stressful life experiences and in which they see themselves as “personal agents” often with the assistance of others, of the positive changes that they have been able to bring about.

Source: Meichenbaum, D. (n.d.). *IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT RESILIENCE: A CONSIDERATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ABOUT RESILIENCE and IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT* [PDF]. Miami, FL: Melissa Institute.





Tend and Befriend vs Fight or Flight





Psychological Treatment for PTSD

Treatment

Meta-analysis demonstrates efficacy of:

- Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
 - for post-trauma nightmares
- Cognitive Processing Therapy
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)



Body-focused Therapies

- Pat Ogden
 - Sensorimotor Psychotherapy
- Peter Levine
 - Somatic Experiencing
- Bessel van der Kolk
 - Wide variety of methods to deal with complex trauma





Compassion-focused Therapy



Reduce shame and self-criticism by developing a compassionate understanding of themselves in relation to their trauma.

Thanks!



Any questions?

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