Using Language to Empower
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Areas of Interest:
Public Health System Reform; Foster and Adoptive Advocacy and Education; Residential and Group Home Standardization of Care; Relationship Focused Therapy; Traumagenic Family Dynamics; Child & Family Trauma; Paraprofessional Trauma Informed Care; Empowerment and Resiliency Treatment Structure; Childhood Adverse Experience (ACE) Study implication and applications

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Traditional Types of Trauma

- Natural disasters
- Mass interpersonal violence
- Domestic fires
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Rape & Sexual assault
- Physical assault
- Partner/Family battery
- Torture
- War
- Child Abuse
- Emergency worker exposure
None of these **ARE** trauma

- None of these are really the cause of trauma, all of them however impact the Central Nervous System (CNS) and when the CNS gets out of balance, the we see symptoms.
Safe vs Unsafe

- Physical
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Social
- Spiritual
- Occupational
Am I Safe or Unsafe?

The system learns from its environment through experience.

my parents never smoked pot in college.

neither did i.

I’ll confess when they do.

After my parents got divorced, I sent my dad a letter that said “If you still care about me, send me a letter back.” It’s been three years. I still haven’t gotten a reply.
So what is happening?
Symptoms of Body Activation

**Sympathetic/Hot:**
- Accelerate the heart rate
- Constrict blood vessels
- Raise blood pressure, muscle tension, physical sensation amplification.
- Inhibition of insulin production to maximize fuel availability

**Parasympathetic/Cool:**
- Promote digestion
- Intestinal motility
- Fuel storage (increases insulin activity)
- Resistance to infection
- Circulation to non-vital organs
- Release endorphins
- Decreases heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature
What is the nature of the Sympathetic Nervous System?

- Dilates pupils
- Inhibits salivation
- Relaxes bronchi
- Accelerates heartbeat
- Inhibits peristalsis and secretion
- Stimulates glucose production and release
- Secretion of adrenaline and noradrenaline
- Inhibits bladder contraction
- Stimulates orgasm
Nature of the Hot (Sympathetic) System

- Immediate
- No future
- Impulsive
- Irrational/Illogical
- Non planned outside of the immediate activity
- Little self reflection
- Little evaluation

Absolutely correct behavior!!!!

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Stress is stored in the body!

- This is not minimizing the emotional and psychological impact
- Overactive physiological systems lead to symptoms, not the events themselves.
- Trauma is a reaction to Hot System dominance
The Brain in Sympathetic Dominance is bathing in a hormonal and neurochemical cocktail

“Our brains are bathing in these things that are catabolic, which means they break down protein, stop protein synthesis and that breaks down the brain”.

*Louis Cozolino Ph.D. 2011*
What will you see when the brain is bathing in the cocktail??

- Low or no self-awareness
- Low or no capacity to self-evaluate
- Low or no ability to self-regulate
- Low or no facility to establish goals and act consistently to obtain them
- Poor self-image
- Likely reacting to rather than being intentional
- Self-centered and Narcissistic is correct behavior

Absolutely correct behavior!!!!
These are not bad behaviors – just proof of what system is currently in use (action oriented behaviors fight or flight)

- Angry
- Aggressive
- Defensive
- Reactive
- Impulsive
- Hostile
- Irrational
- Self-centered
- Poor focus
- Inattention
- Sleep disturbances
- Coercive
- Bossy
- Tantrums
- Name calling
- Hitting
- Fidgety
- Hyperactive
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Delays in reaching physical, language, or other milestones on time

Absolutely correct behavior!!!!
These are not bad behaviors – just proof of what system is currently in use
(passivity oriented behaviors related to mitigating behaviors)

- Freezing, stuck, paralysis of action
- Dissociation
- Emotional numbing
- Distraction
- Self-soothing
- Reactive
- Impulsive
- Emotional and psychological distancing
- Self-centered
- Sad
- Withdrawn
- Whining
- Crying
- Sulking
- Clingy
- Reluctance to explore the world

Absolutely correct behavior!!!!
Threat/Stress Response System of the Body

Polyvagal System and the Anterior Cingulate of the Cortex (ACC)
The Body’s Radar System: Anterior Cingulate of the Cortex (ACC)
Radar System

Automatic
- Studies the environment using sensory input

Filters
- Sensory input from the body

Calibrated
- Based on life experience & memory
- Sensitive to “danger”
Scheme of the brain functioning

Neocortex

Left Hemisphere
- Specific
- Verbal
- Logic
- Deductive
- Abstract
- Rational

Right Hemisphere
- Global
- Visual
- Sensitive
- Intuitive
- Imaginative
- Creative

Emotional Intelligence

Limbic System
- Emotional Memory

Reptilian Brain
- Memory of the Humanity
- Survival Instinct

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First 4 Essential Interventions

I. The professional must self-regulate their own threat/stress response system

II. Create an environment of felt and real safety

III. Regulate the client when with the professional

IV. Help client regulate self when not with the professional
The Social Dominance Game

Social Dominance Game
- **Competition (Sympathetic)** or **Acquiescence (Dorsal)**
- **Competition:**
  - Irritability (not going to make me)
  - Anger, frustration, aggression (assertiveness)
  - Unrelenting demands
- **Acquiescence:**
  - Fear (this could hurt me)
  - Distancing (Lie low, and hope to be ignored)
  - Unresponsive/apathetic (there is nothing I can do)

*If you are confronting someone -- adult or child who is in the hot system they will react as if you are initiating the Dominance Game..... It doesn’t matter if that was your intent or not.*
The Social Dominance Game

The Social Dominance Game invitations

- Activation of dominance and control behaviors
- Restrict movement and action
- Force attention or focus on dominant members approved area of focus and interest
- Dominance is a characteristic of humans triggering intense competition with one another.
- Primitive mind logic would suggest that the easiest way for individuals to resolve dominance is to have a fight.
- The winner gets what he wants and the loser, well, loses.
Activity: playing the dominance game

In groups of 5-6 please answer the following and give examples:

- What are the signs that you have joined the game?
- When has the dominance game benefited you?
- When has the dominance game interfered with what you want to achieve?
- How much of your personal conflicts with others are clearly related to the dominance game
Turning on Behaviors
When people are in survival mode they are not looking at the scenery
No matter the reality of the view
At the activation point

- **No future focus**...consequences are meaningless and not related to action.
- Everything is about this moment in time!
- **All nonessential systems are turned down** (suppressed)
- **The integrator of our experience becomes scrambled** --- the mPFC integrates associations between context, locations, events, adaptive, emotional responses and memory consolidation. mPFC also acts like a time-keeper that sequences experience.
What are some of the suppressed systems?
What are some of the suppressed systems?

- **Sub-diaphragmatic systems**
  - a. Gastro-intestinal functions
  - b. Reduced nutrition from foods eaten
  - c. Elimination difficulties
  - d. Inflammation leading to a host of illnesses and pain
  - e. Painful sexuality

- **Relational/social engagement system**
  - a. Poor quality attachments
  - b. Self-centered and narcissistic behaviors
  - c. Poor understanding of social cues
  - d. Unstable friendships and family relationships

- **Executive function**
  - a. Poor problem solving
  - b. Irrational and reactive
  - c. Failure to be self-reflective
The suppressed executive function system is distracted with survival demands.
**Parasympathetic**
- Constricts pupil
- Stimulates salivation
- Inhibits heart
- Constricts bronchi
- Stimulates digestive activity
- Stimulates gallbladder
- Contracts bladder
- Relaxes rectum

**Sympathetic**
- Dilates pupil
- Inhibits salivation
- Relaxes bronchi
- Accelerates heart
- Inhibits digestive activity
- Stimulates glucose release by liver
- Secretion of epinephrine and norepinephrine from kidney
- Relaxes bladder
- Contracts rectum
Unmet Basic Human Needs

Activate the Hot System

- Not feeling capable
- Not successful or achieving at something
- Not feel cared for
- Not belong to a group
- Not have power to and influence in environment/world
- Not control in one’s life
- Not stimulated in mind and body
- Not have fun and pleasure
- Not understand reality
- Not appear competent to others
- Not be seen as being worthwhile or held in esteem by others
- Not feel safe
- Not feel secure in our attachments to others
- Not have a sense of meaning or purpose in life

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Fears & worrisome fantasies activate the threat/stress response!

- Being judged
- Not measuring up
- Not being liked
- Not being loveable
- What if I fail
- What if I can never get better
- Not being competent
- What are they thinking about me

- Thought to be stupid
- Being criticized
- Not meeting other important folks expectations and demands
- Will they still like/love me
- Being asked questions
- If this doesn’t work what am I going to do
- What if I can’t do this
Stress is a Body Thing!!!

- Imagine that you’re head-less
- What do you notice IN YOUR BODY?
  - First, Second, Third
  - Slower, faster
  - Bigger, smaller
- Look for exceptions
  - Where ISN’T it?
  - Where do you notice it less?
Sympathetic vs. Parasympathetic
Responsive vs. Reactive

- **Sympathetic (HOT)**
  - Fast System (police)
  - Helps us fight, flee, or freeze
  - Speeds up bodily symptoms
  - Neurochemistry
    - Adrenaline - burns in unconscious memories
    - Dopamine

- **Parasympathetic (COOL)**
  - Slow System (court system)
  - Helps us rest
  - Slows down body systems
  - Maintains balance
  - Neurochemistry
    - Cortisol
    - Serotonin
    - Endorphins - Numbing
Preparing to React
Ramping up the System

- **Sympathetic: Fast System**
  - Fight, Flight, Freeze Chemicals
  - Prepare to body to React
    - Increased Blood Pressure
    - Increased heart rate
    - Sweating
    - Decisiveness
    - Impulsiveness

- **Parasympathetic: Slow System**
  - Prepares to sustain Stress with release of chemicals
  - Get system back under control
Down-Regulating
Ramping back the System

- Sympathetic: Fast System
  - Responds to slow system chemicals
  - Reduces freeze, fight, flight

- Parasympathetic: Slow System
  - Ramp up to lower blood pressure
  - Ramp up to lower heart rate
  - Get some distance from threat
  - Dull the pain
  - Numb out
Integrating Concepts into Practice: Illustrating Hot System Dominance

The Goal is to add in more steps
We use subtext in intimate relationships

**Typical statements:**
- The trash is full
- If you really loved me you wouldn’t waste . . . .
- If you really cared you wouldn’t . . .

**Subtext??**
- Some action should be taken to change this status
- Someone should take the action to change the status
- Assumes one’s knowledge of a process of moving from empty to full
- Assigns some value to fullness/emptiness
- You really don’t love me
- You don’t love me because you are disappointing me
- I shouldn’t be disappointed by you
- I am afraid you really don’t care
- You need to prove that you love me
- You prove that you love me by doing as I wish
Building Capacity

- Think of 3 incidents that are mildly annoying (less than a 4 on the SUDS)
- Write them down
- Rank each using the SUDS scale
- Choose the least annoying of the bunch and as you sit here in this room and imagine that incident, what do you notice shift in your body first?
- What do you notice next?
- Pause and shift
Cool vs Hot System Adaptation

- Calm
  - Regulated
- Cool System Active
- Choice and intentional action
- Growth Change empowered

Environment reacts to:
- Aroused for Action
  - Increased arousal and irrational action
  - Impulsive reactive survival actions
- Hot system Active

Choice and intentional action leads to:
- Growth Change empowered
- Calm Regulated
Resources
