

Resilience in the Face of Violence and Abuse

*International Conference on
The Jewish Community Confronts
Violence and Abuse - December 1, 2014*

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All the world is full of suffering;

It is also full of overcoming.

- Helen Keller

6 C's of Coping

- Calm
- Compassion
- Clarity
- Connections to Resources
- Competence
- Courage

Calm

- Manage disruptive emotions
- Tolerate distress
- Down-regulate stress to return to baseline equilibrium

Compassion – Self-Compassion

- Compassion: care and concern in the face of other people's pain and suffering
- Self-Compassion: care and concern for one's own pain and suffering
- Mindful Self-Compassion:
 - Awareness of experience of suffering
 - Kindness toward self as experiencer of suffering
 - Felt sense of common humanity; all human beings suffer

Clarity

- Focused attention on present moment experience
- Improves cognitive functioning
- Self-awareness, self-reflection
- Shifting perspectives
- Discerning options
- Choose wise actions

Connections to Resources

- People, Places, Practices
- Counter-balance brain's negativity bias
- Strengthen inner secure base
- Access resources

Competence

- Empowerment and mastery from changing old coping strategies, learning new ones
- Embodying, “I am somebody who CAN do this.”

Courage

- Using signal anxiety as cue to:
- Try something new
- Take risks
- Persevere to achieve goals

Neuroscience of Resilience

- Neuroscience technology is 20 years old
- Meditation improves attention and impulse control; shifts mood and perspective; promotes health
- Oxytocin can calm a panic attack in less than a minute
- Kindness and comfort, early on, protects against later stress, trauma, psychopathology

Neuroplasticity

The brain changes itself – lifelong.

- Growing new neurons
- Strengthening synaptic connections
- Creating and altering brain structure and circuitry
- Organizing and re-organizing functions of brain structures

Conditioning

- Experience causes neurons to fire
- Repeated experiences, repeated neural firings
- Neurons that fire together wire together
- Strengthen synaptic connections
- Connections stabilize into neural pathways

- Conditioning is neutral, wires positive and negative

Stress Impacts Body-Brain

- Health – compromised immune system
- Function – higher brain offline, inability to regulate emotions
- Structure – damages brain cells; impairs learning, memory

Trauma Impacts Body-Brain

- Trauma memories stored in body
- Function – contraction, constriction
- Structure – compartmentalization, can't integrate experience

Violence/Abuse Impact Body-Brain

- Shattering of safety and trust
- Disorganizes-fragments psyche; dissociation
- Mistrust – harder to receive help from safe others

Mindfulness and Compassion

Awareness of what's happening

(and our reactions to what's happening)

Acceptance of what's happening

(and our reactions to what's happening)

Two most powerful agents of brain change known to science; both foster response flexibility

All trauma therapy done in context of mindful empathy

Attachment Develops Brain

- Secure
- Insecure-Avoidant
- Insecure-Anxious
- Disorganized

...and shapes coping strategies

Attachment Styles - Secure

- Parenting is attuned, empathic, responsive, comforting, soothing, helpful
- Attachment develops safety and trust, and inner secure base
- Stable and flexible focus and functioning
- Open to learning
- inner secure base provides buffer against stress, trauma, and psychopathology

Insecure-Avoidant

- Parenting is indifferent, neglectful, or critical, rejecting
- Attachment is compulsively self-reliant
- Stable, but not flexible
- Focus on self or world, not others or emotions
- Rigid, defensive, not open to learning
- Neural cement

Insecure-Anxious

- Parenting is inconsistent, unpredictable
- Attachment is compulsive caregiving
- Flexible, but not stable
- Focus on other, not on self-world,
- Less able to retain learning
- Neural swamp

Disorganized

- Parenting is frightening or abusive, or parent is “checked out,” not “there”
- Attachment is fright without solution
- Lack of focus
- Moments of dissociation
- Compartmentalization of trauma

Pre-Frontal Cortex

- Executive center of higher brain
 - Plan, discern, make decision
- Development kindled in relationships
- Evolved most recently – makes us human
- Matures the latest – 25 years of age
- Most integrative structure of brain
- Evolutionary masterpiece

- CEO of resilience

Functions of Pre-Frontal Cortex

- Regulate body and nervous system
- Quell fear response of amygdala
- Manage emotions
- Attunement – felt sense of feelings
- Empathy – making sense of experience
- Insight and self-knowing
- Response flexibility

Window of Tolerance

- SNS – explore, play, create, produce.... OR
Fight-flight-freeze
- Baseline physiological equilibrium
- Calm and relaxed, engaged and alert
- WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
- Relational and resilient
- Equanimity
- PNS – inner peace, serenity.... OR
Numb out, collapse

Mechanisms of Brain Change

- Conditioning
- New conditioning
- Re-conditioning
- De-conditioning

New Conditioning

- Choose new experiences
 - Gratitude practice, listening skills, focusing attention, self-compassion, self-acceptance
- Create new learning, new memory
- Encode new wiring
- Install new pattern of response

Re-conditioning

- Memory de-consolidation – re-consolidation
- “Light up” neural networks
- Juxtapose old negative with new positive
- Neurons fall apart, rewire
- New rewires old

Modes of Processing

- Focused Attention
 - Tasks and details
 - Deliberate, guided change
 - New conditioning and re-conditioning
- De-focused Attention
 - Default network
 - Mental play space – random change
 - De-conditioning

De-Conditioning

- Imagination
- Guided visualizations
- Guided meditations
- Reverie, daydreams
- Brain “plays,” makes own associations and links, connect dots in new ways
- Reflect on new insights

Shift Brain Functioning

- From: contraction of lower brain
- To: openness, engagement of higher brain


- From: victim, at the effect of
- To: empowered, becoming an agent of change

Practices to Accelerate Brain Change

- Presence – primes receptivity of brain
- Intention/choice – activates plasticity
- Perseverance – creates and installs change

Bouncing Back from Adversity

- Somatic Intelligence
 - body-based, rewire trauma
- Emotional Intelligence
 - from survival responses to thriving
- Relational Intelligence
 - heal heartache, access havens and resources, navigate peopled world
- Reflective Intelligence
 - conscious awareness; catch the moment, make a choice



*I am no longer afraid of storms,
For I am learning how to sail my ship.
- Louisa May Alcott*

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