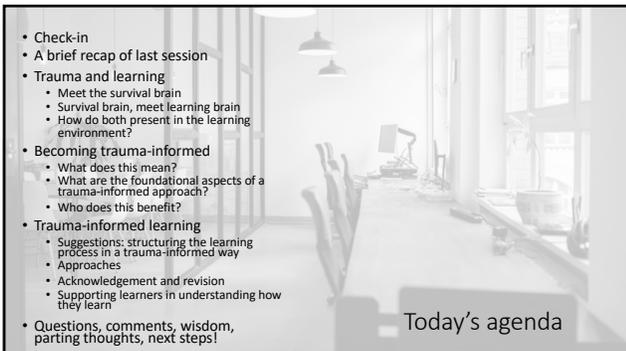


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Defining Trauma

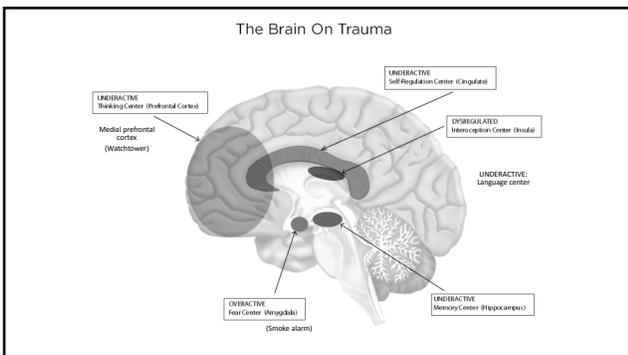
- Psychological trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring conditions, in which:
 - The individual's ability to integrate their emotional experience is overwhelmed and/or
 - The individual experiences (subjectively) a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity. (Herman & Hirschman, 1981, p. 50)
- Thus, a traumatic event or situation creates psychological trauma when it overwhelms the individual's ability to cope emotionally, cognitively, or physically.

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Trauma and the brain

Our brain will prioritize survival above all else.

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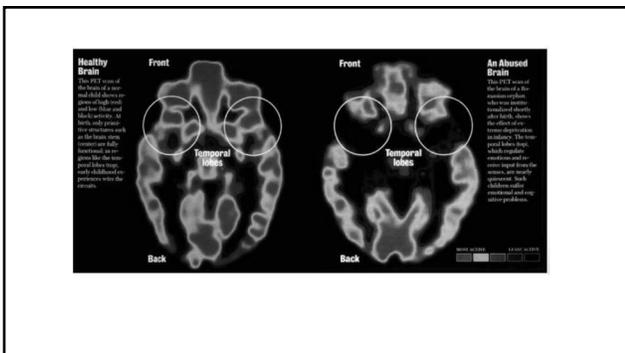


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The Residue of Trauma in the Brain

- Neurons that fire together wire together: shortcuts are built.
- Brains become stuck and unable to integrate new experiences.
- Nervous system changes:
 - Arousal
 - Body attempts to control physiological reactions.
 - Physical symptoms result.
 - Illness; chronic pain.

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The survival brain vs. the learning brain

- **Learning brain:**
 - Is open to new information.
 - Is comfortable with ambiguity.
 - Grey areas are okay and even exciting!
 - Can see the big picture.
 - Can see possibilities. Can imagine!
 - Is calm, peaceful, excited about what's ahead, playful, fun, curious.
 - Is not afraid of making mistakes—that's what learning is all about!
- **Survival brain:**
 - Is hyper-focused on threat. Trust is not easily given.
 - Views ambiguity as dangerous. Seeks certainty.
 - Is panicked, fearful, obsessive, fixated on small details.
 - Is afraid of getting things wrong; defensive about mistakes.
 - Mistakes = disaster or death.
 - Lacks the patience to learn—wants to get things over with.
 - The longer the learning process takes, the more fear builds.
 - Is afraid of looking stupid- doesn't want to volunteer or be called on; filled with doubt about abilities.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Feq4UAGv2w>

- Survival brain will always overrule learning brain for a trauma survivor—can't risk a mistake.
- The longer a person is in survival brain, the harder it is to get into learning brain.
- The more stress a person is under, the more likely they are to slip back into survival brain.
 - Any threat is interpreted as DANGER. This makes the stakes so much higher.

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Trauma and memory

"Trauma survivors have symptoms instead of memories."
(Harvey, M.R. J Trauma Stress (1996))

- "Under ordinary conditions these two memory systems—rational and emotional—collaborate to produce an integrated response. But high arousal not only changes the balance between them but also disconnects other brain areas necessary for the proper storage and integration of incoming information, such as the hippocampus and the thalamus."
- "As a result, the imprints of traumatic experiences are organized not as coherent logical narratives but in fragmented sensory and emotional traces: images, sounds, and physical sensations." (Van der Kolk, 2006, p. 178)

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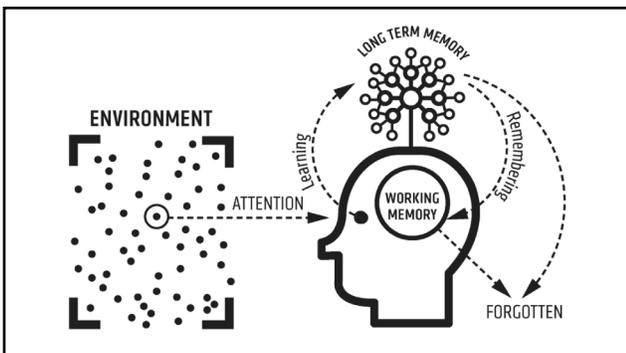
Verbally Accessible Memory:

- Information initially stored in hippocampus (center of emotion, CNS, memory).
- Through rehearsal becomes consolidated into the long-term autobiographical memory store.
- Memory enhanced by moderate levels of arousal but impaired by very high arousal.
- Constructive process supporting explicit memory, strategic retrieval, meaning-making, sense of self, and social interaction.

Situationally Accessible Memory:

- High levels of fear create indelible non-hippocampally-based representations.
- Remains informationally isolated (dissociated).
- Triggered automatically in all-or-none fashion.
- Unresponsive to social situations.
- Supports flashbacks, performance on implicit memory tasks.
- Information directed very rapidly to amygdala.

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Learning and the Brain

A few Quick Facts

- Short-term memory has evolved from a simple system to a complex system at the Working Memory Model (Baddeley, 1986).
- The Working Memory Model explains the chunking of information as a good practice to promote retention of information (Miller, 2011).
- Some argue that a single unit of information retention (Miller, 2011).
- Information must be meaningful. Meaningful learning "occurs when the learner encounters information related to their goals" (Showerman, 2000, p. 258).
- Information stored in visual memory produces a "primary mental image of objects" (Showerman, 2000, p. 258).
- More recent research has suggested that information moves back and forth between the two systems of memory (Miller, 2011).

by: Mia MacMedin

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What does it mean to be trauma-informed?

A trauma-informed approach is *grounded in and directed by* a thorough understanding of the neurological, biological, psychological and social effects of **trauma** and the prevalence of these experiences in persons who are in any given system.

Alternately, and perhaps more importantly, by the question "what supports can be put into place/ what alternatives can be reasonably offered to best support the experiences of all who have experienced and are experiencing trauma?"

These principles are applicable and adaptable to different systems.

Trauma-informed approaches benefit **everyone**.

Trauma-informed = systemic empathy

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Trauma-related Challenges in the Learning Brain

Learning Task:	Trauma Challenge:
1. Presence/ attention/ awareness	1. Being "in the body"
2. Noticing	2. Availability for present moment
3. Effective use of short-term memory	3. Survival-focused short-term memory
4. Comparing/ contrasting	4. Attention to non-sensory detail
5. Accessing long-term memory	5. Structure of long-term memory
6. Integrating	6. Like with like: where does this information go?
7. Recalling and reproducing	7. Retrieval process for memory altered
8. Performing in multiple contexts	8. New challenge of safety in every context

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What trauma-informed IS NOT/ DOES NOT:

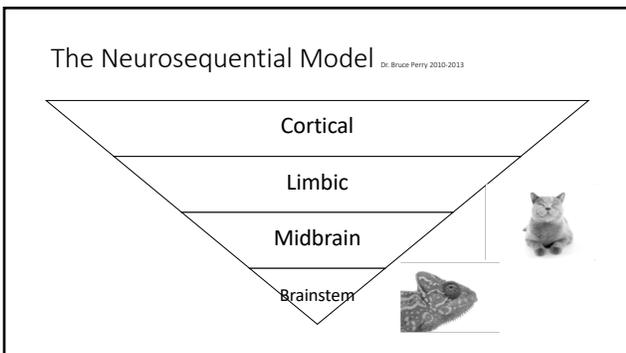
- It is not being *nice*.
- It is not compromised hopes or expectations.
- It is not boundaryless.
- It is not group therapy.
- It is not less rigorous or rewarding.
- It does not de-emphasize mastering subject-matter content.
- It does not enforce a hierarchical structure.

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Trauma-informed approaches ARE:

- Safe.
- Transparent.
- Authentic.
- Appropriately bounded.
- Trustworthy.
- Human.
- Collaborative.
- Empowering.
- Present and aware.
- Contextualized.
- Mutual.

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The Three R's: Reaching The Learning Brain

Dr Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us that to help a vulnerable child to learn, think and reflect, we need to support them in a sequence which prioritises regulation first so that the brainstem can be calmed.

Healing starts for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

Dr. Bruce Perry, courtesy of Beacon House, 2018

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The Three Rs in Adult Learning and Advising

o Regulate:

- o Grounding
 - o Using non-dominant hand to do anything
 - o Share an image
- o Checking-in
 - o One word
 - o Here, getting here, nowhere near here
- o Orientation is every day
- o Consistency
- o Connect to the senses
- o Relaxation exercises (always offer a choice):
 - o Breathing
 - o Stretching
 - o Noticing
- o Shame-proof the space:
 - o "For those of you who haven't completed the exercises for today..."
 - o "I know you have been having a tough time lately. I want you to know that we are meeting today to....."
- o View behavior as communication

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The Three Rs in Adult Learning and Advising

o Relate:

- o Reflect what you value in what is valued
- o Demonstrating consistency
- o Boundaries: establish, re-establish, remind, review, revise, reenforce
- o I do—we do—you do
- o Nothing (or very little) about without
- o Attend to process over outcome
- o Monitor for ruptures: identify, process, repair
- o Validate and reflect
- o Provide clear and specific feedback, often
- o Ask for clear and specific feedback, often
- o View behavior as communication
- o Partner for learning

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The Three Rs in Adult Learning and Advising

- o Reason: (learning)
 - o Let people know what to expect. "On the first meeting, we typically..."
 - o Agenda setting. "What are you most hoping to leave with today?"
 - o Be clear with instructions and repeat often
 - o Explain possible outcomes
 - o Check for understanding
 - o Make everything transparent
 - o Mirror the skills needed to learn in all settings
 - o Foster an atmosphere of curiosity and experimentation
 - o Look for lower stakes
 - o Offer choices whenever possible
 - o When not possible, allow for processing
 - o Look for exceptions
 - o Follow up with summary (you/ them)

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Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)'s Trauma Framework

- o Name: there is trauma and trauma symptomology in many adult learners.
- o Tame: contribute to relieving the symptoms of trauma in learning environments.
- o Frame: focus our attention on trauma, its importance, how to be prepared to address it.

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Through a trauma-informed lens

- o What's wrong? (with you?) ----> What happened? (to you?)
- o Disengaged ----> unsafe
- o Aggressive ----> protective
- o "Good student"----> empowered learner
- o "Bad student"----> this is not working/ seeking alternatives
- o Blame/ shame----> accountability and awareness of choices
- o "This is the way..." ----> this is one way
- o Helplessness ----> collaboration
- o "Too many people aren't paying attention."----> "This is how I am experiencing our class today."

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Keeping Trauma-Informed Safe Spaces

- Pay attention to common signs of trauma-based reactivity.
 - Aggressive actions, elevated voice, pressured speech, shame reactions, etc.
- Try not to mirror the reactions.
- Keep a calm tone of voice, encourage others to do the same.
- Acknowledge the feelings being expressed.
- Encourage taking a break; inviting others to do the same.
- Re-engage the cortex: simply counting to ten is a great place to start.
- Don't pressure the other person to de-brief.
 - Offer an open door to talking about what happened.
- Ease the re-entry.

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Appreciating the survivor brain

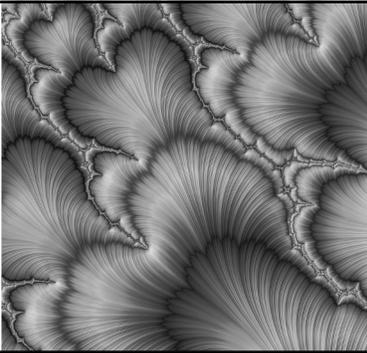
- Strength of resiliency.
- Transferability of survival skills.
- Attending not to the output but to the root:
 - What is at the core of this set of actions?
 - What traits/ capabilities can be mined from this and refocused towards learning?
- Presence of neuroplasticity.
- Stance of the observer → the learner.
- Reintroducing (or introducing for the first time?) the role of trust in learning.
 - "It would make a lot of sense if you don't know if you can really trust me or this process."
- Ability to recognize the temptation of all-or-nothing and to verbalize the process.

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Helping students learn how they learn:

1. What is something you have enjoyed learning in your life?
2. What was that process like?
3. Was there ever a time that you felt shamed or embarrassed in school? What happened? What is it like to think about that now?
4. When did it feel like for you to come here for your first class/meeting? What was challenging? What could have made it easier?

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5. What was this (meeting, quiz, class, etc.) like for you?

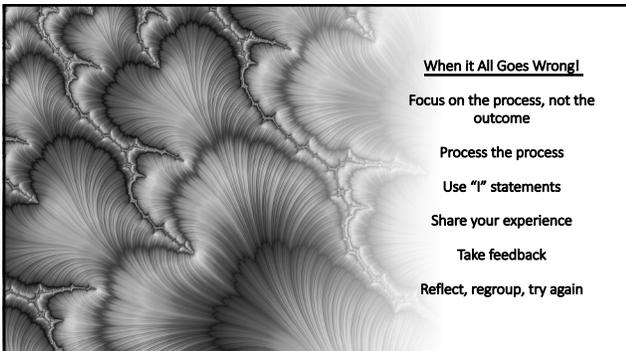
6. Which part felt easy? Stressful? Confusing?

7. What happened before you felt _____?

8. What happened after you felt _____?

Required viewing:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KogaUANGvpA>

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When it All Goes Wrong!

Focus on the process, not the outcome

Process the process

Use "I" statements

Share your experience

Take feedback

Reflect, regroup, try again

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Your comments, ideas, questions, wisdom!

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