

Affect Regulation Tools to Stop Runaway Emotions



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Overview

- This workshop teaches quick and practical interventions designed to facilitate the development of self-regulation.
- Specific focus will be given to anxiety disorders.

Over-Reactivity: Definition

- The distorted and *unnecessarily intense* reaction to routine stimuli of daily life and interpersonal contact.
- It is accompanied by psychophysiological hyper-arousal.

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What is the Experience of Affect Dysregulation?

- Internal experience of being overwhelmed with emotion and feeling out of control.
- Includes emotional, cognitive, somatic and/or behavioral manifestations of affect dysregulation.

(Daitch, 2007)

Emotions

- Emotions, in and of themselves, are neither good nor bad.
- Even intense emotions have a time and place in which their expression is adaptive (e.g., grief).

The Problems Occur When:

- The intensity of the response does not “match” the life event.
- One lacks the ability to dampen the emotional intensity.
- Leads to the loss of jobs, friendships, and romantic relationships.

The Harm of Affect Dysregulation

Affect dysregulation is at the core of almost all psychological disorders.

Affect Dysregulation

- Borderline personality disorder” (BPD). Narcissistic personality
- Histrionic personality
- Post Traumatic stress disorder

Emotions: The Big Three

1. Fear: a strong psychological response to perceived danger
2. Anger: a physical and psychological response that neutralizes natural defense systems to respond to perceived threats to well being
3. Sadness: a psychological response to loss or disappointment

Nature or Nurture?

The debate rages on:

Are we primarily determined by our genes?

OR

Does our environment play a significant role?

Genetics: Polygenic Transmission

Theory:

Weak contributions from many genes on different areas of different chromosomes converge to enhance an individual's genetic susceptibility to developing over-reactivity.

Temperament

Temperaments are a component of personality style and, as such, remain stable over time.



Behaviorally Inhibited Temperament

15-20% of children are born with a behaviorally inhibited temperament:

- Anxious in novel situations.
- Rapid heart beats.
- Above-average cortisol levels.

(Kagan, 1980)

Insecure Attachment

Infants pick up cues and have an implicit memory of their mother's responses.

"The quality of our bonds with our caregivers in the first years of life plays a crucial role in how our brain and body develops the ability to manage emotional stress."

(Siegel, 1999)

Trauma

- Trauma can prune neuro-networks.
- Lack of relational support impacts laying and trafficking of neurons.



Neurobiological Alterations from Early Trauma

Involves three major systems in brain:

- Stress response and HPA Axis
- The hippocampus
- The noradrenergic system

Modeling and Mirroring

- May be transmitted from one generation to the next by specific family environmental factors such as parental modeling.
- Mirroring: Some of the same neurons that are activated when an individual performs a motoric activity are also activated by the individual's simply *watching* another.

(Giacomo Rizzolatti, 2005)

Seeing is Believing

In light of the activity of motor neurons, seeing is actually being.



The Emotional Brain

- “The connections from the emotional systems to the cognitive systems are stronger than the connections from the cognitive to the emotional systems.”
(LeDoux J., 1996)
- It is easier to release emotions than to manage them with reason → it's very easy to get caught up in fear.

Busy

Sick at Heart

The Chinese word for "busy" is composed of two characters:

“Heart” and “Killing”



The Physiological Fall-out

Stress leads to strain on both body and mind:

- Muscle Tension
- Adrenaline and Cortisol Release
- Psychological Bracing
- Rumination



Cognitive Components

- Future focusing
- Maximizing (e.g., maximizing body signals)
- Worry to cope with uncertainty

Regulation & The SNS & PNS

The “gas” and “brakes” of self-regulation.



Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)



- When the SNS kicks in, adrenaline is released, eliciting reactions in almost every organ of the body.
- Mediates vigilance, activation and mobilization.
- Responsible for the fight, flight, freeze response.

Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)



- The PNS = “brakes” to the SNS.
- Associated with sleep and other states of relaxation.
- Activated by meditation, yoga, and *hypnosis*.

PNS

Important for clients to learn to engage the PNS:

- Decrease chronic levels of hyper-arousal.
- Lessen physical symptoms.

Prevalence of Anxiety

Anxiety disorders comprise one of the most common categories of psychiatric disorders present in the population today.

(Kessler et. al., 2005; Kessler, Chiu, Demler, & Walters, 2005)

Characteristics of People Vulnerable to Anxiety

- Sensitivity to bodily stimuli.
- Unusual capacity for vivid imagery.
- Excellent focused-attention, absorption.
- High hypnotic susceptibility.

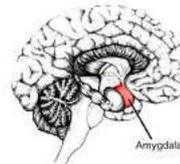
(Crawford & Barabasz 1993)

Components of the Anxiety Response

- Overestimates risks
- Underestimates available resources
- Repeats rigid behavior patterns
- Avoidance

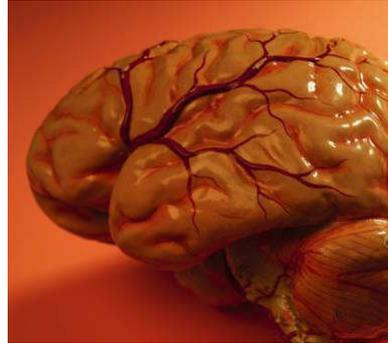
Fear Conditioning and the Amygdala

- Brain is adept at storing long-term memory events when it experiences fear
- Amygdala plays a crucial role
- Adaptive
- Trap for those with anxiety disorders

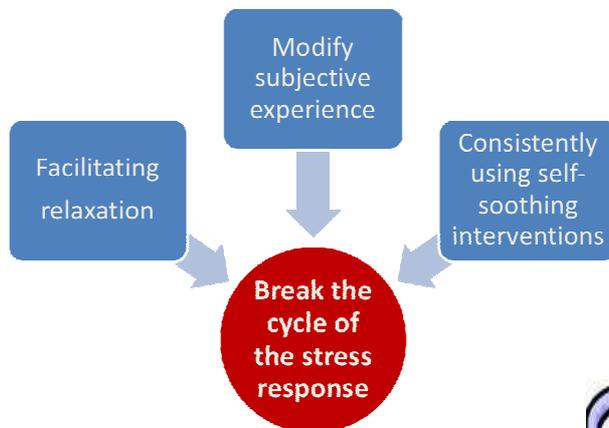


Getting Your Head Around the Brain

We are hardwired to react to many external stimuli with behavioral responses based on fear or anger.



Breaking the Cycle



Hypnosis **New Learning & Flexibility**

- Erickson suggested that hypnosis provides an opportunity for learning “special states of human consciousness that promote cognitive flexibility.” (Gilligan, p. 324, 2010)
- When you become flooded, you lose the emotional flexibility. With hypnosis, you regain cognitive flexibility. (Daitch, 2013)

The **STOP Solution for Emotional Calm**

The **STOP** Solution is a clear, concrete, and simple course of action that can transform the experience of emotional flooding, issuing a cease-fire to the midbrain gone rogue.

The **Stop Solution**

- Scan
- Time-out
- Overcome the Surge of Emotion
- Put the Tools into Practice

Catch the Flooding Early

Rather than being swept away in the flood of emotion, the first step is the willingness to scan for and recognize the precursors of emotional overwhelm.

STOP: SCAN

- Scan for somatic, cognitive and emotional cues that are precursors of affect dysregulation.
- Reframe these cues as opportunities to practice self-regulation.

STOP: Time-Out



- Take a time-out when one is emotionally flooded in order to calm and center self.
- Build a regimented habit of diffusing tension.

Selecting a Space for The Time-Out

- Private place where you can be uninterrupted, comfortable, calm and quiet.
- If you are in a public place, you can always go to the restroom to have some time alone.

STOP: Overcoming the Initial Surge of Flooding

Induction techniques used to focus attention and calm:

- Eye roll
- Tight fist
- Breathing
- Okay signal

STOP

- *Do you have the patience to wait til your mind settles and the water is clear?*
- *Can you remain unmoving til the right action arises by itself?*

Tao te Ching

Sequence of Interventions

Must master the first three self-soothing skills before learning the final part of the **STOP** Solution.

STOP: Putting the Tools into Practice

- Mindfulness with Detached Observation
- Dialing Down Reactivity
- Autogenics

STOP: Putting the Tools into Practice

- Positive Future Focusing (age progression)
- Juxtaposition of Two Thoughts/Feelings
- Wise Part of Self (ego states)

Video Demonstration of the STOP Solution

- Case of Nicole
- History of childhood neglect
- Diagnosis: panic disorder; GAD
- Overcompensates with son
- Intolerance of uncertainty

Wise Self

- When you are flooded with emotion, the wise self is usually dormant.
- When you are triggered in relationships, you need to access the wise part of self (a grounded, mature part).

Video Demonstration

- Parts of Self

Why is Mindfulness Helpful for Affect Regulation?

- Helps clients perceive feelings without getting lost in them.
- Promotes non-reactivity to inner experience (and can promote the diminishment of reactivity).

Directions for Mindfulness

- Observe thoughts, feelings or sensations.
- Name the thoughts, feelings or sensations, e.g., “there’s the frustration.”
- Take an attitude of curiosity about your experience, e.g., “as I observe how frustrated I am, I notice my jaw clenching.”
- Remind yourself that thoughts, feelings or sensations come and go.

Fostering Acceptance

- Imagine you are seeing a vulnerable, worried image of self.
- Look at this image of the suffering self with compassion.
- Imagine walking up to this suffering self, kissing self on the forehead and saying, “Yes, I know...I know.”



Mindfulness and Acceptance

- I notice my _____.
- I welcome my _____.
- I accept my _____ with compassion.
- I don't have to like it, I don't have to want it; I just let it be.
- And what do I notice now?

Dialing Down Reactivity



Positive Future Focusing: Age Progression

When you are no longer experiencing chronic emotional overwhelm.

“This too shall pass . . .”

Visualize a time in the future when you will be more comfortable, more calm, more at ease.

Juxtaposition of Two Feelings

- Tolerate the juxtaposition of two opposing feelings or thoughts.
- Learn that there is always more than one feeling available.

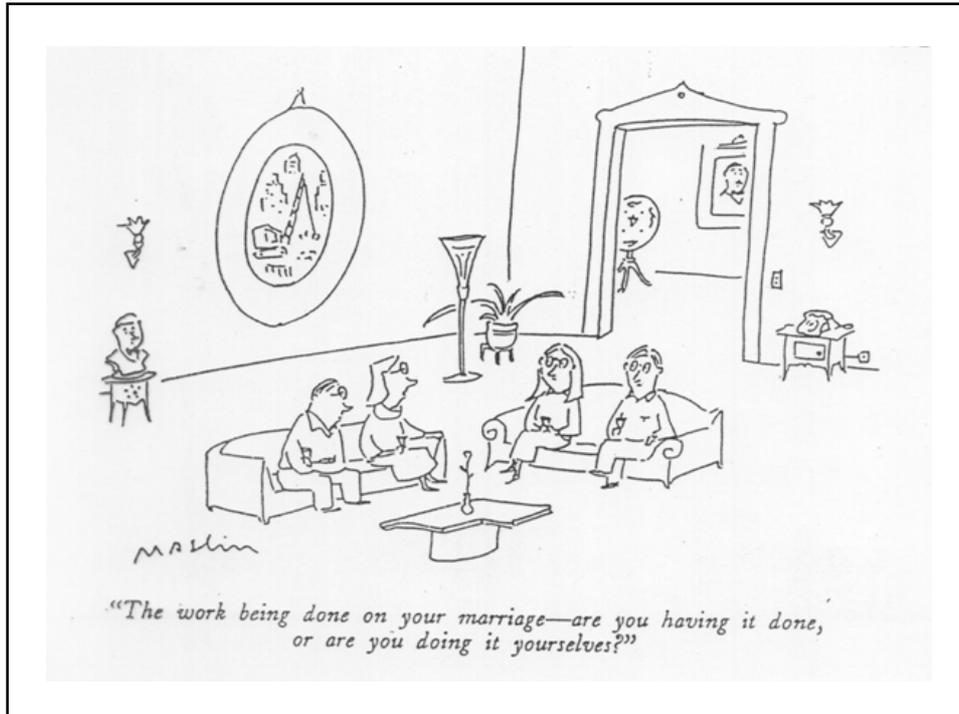
Alternating Hands: Practice



Rehearsal and Transfer

The rehearsal of the practice sessions is an essential feature and ritualized component of the session.

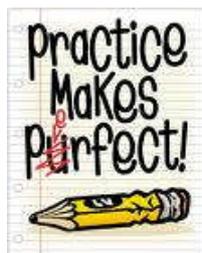




Practice

"With repeated practice, we retrain our neural pathways to respond differently."

(Daitch, 2011)



Visualize Regulating Affect

- Visualize situations that might elicit an over-reaction.
- Visualize using the **STOP** Solution.
- Reinforce self-efficacy.
- Promise to use the tools.
- Imagine life is smoother as a result.

Daily Stress Inoculation

- Establish a time and location for practice sessions.
- 20 minutes is optimal.
- Anticipate and circumvent resistance.
- Use parental ego state to support compliance.

Mini-sessions

- 1-3 minutes, 5 times a day.
- Increase resiliency to stress.
- Habituate to calming responses in order to be less reactive when emotionally triggered.

Unable to Take a Time-Out

Brief “circuit breakers” to be used discreetly in an emergency.

Wise Words from Viktor Frankl

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Q & A

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