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Neurobiology of Self-care

Understanding and responding in culturally safe ways to be trauma aware and implement healing informed ways for self and staff wellbeing:



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Learning outcomes

- ✓ Understand what vicarious trauma and recognize symptoms of vicarious trauma in myself and others
- ✓ Explore strategies for wellbeing and support
- ✓ Understand the impacts of culturally specific trauma
- ✓ Explore concepts of integration and healing
- ✓ Developing and inventing creative strategies to promote change, insight, and well-being.




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We acknowledge you bring

- Cultural Knowledge
- Practice skills
- Experience
- Passion
- Compassion
- A desire to bring about change
- Life experience




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3

Safety

Your emotional safety is paramount
Our learning is about shared wisdom
Curiosity and learning build our brains

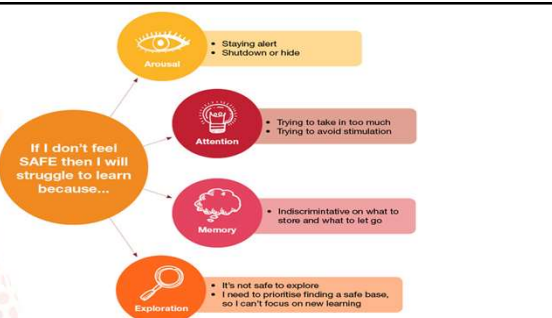


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If I don't feel SAFE then I will struggle to learn because...

- Anxious**
 - Staying alert
 - Shutdown or hide
- Attention**
 - Trying to take in too much
 - Trying to avoid stimulation
- Memory**
 - Indiscriminate on what to store and what to let go
- Exploration**
 - It's not safe to explore
 - I need to prioritise finding a safe base, so I can't focus on new learning



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...We can't practice compassion with other people if we can't treat ourselves kindly.

— Brené Brown



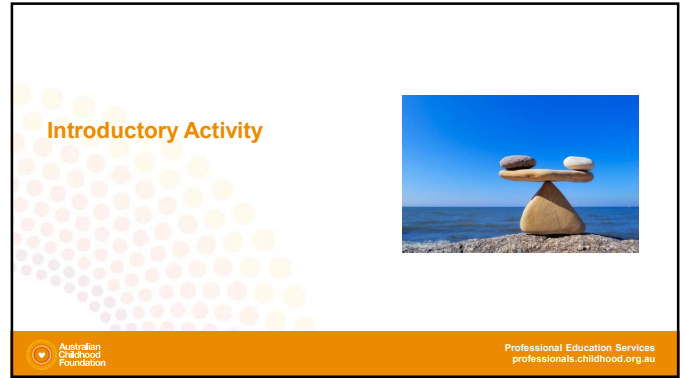
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6



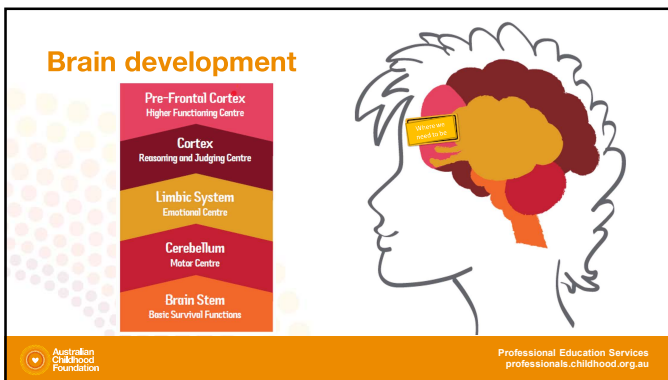
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Introductory Activity



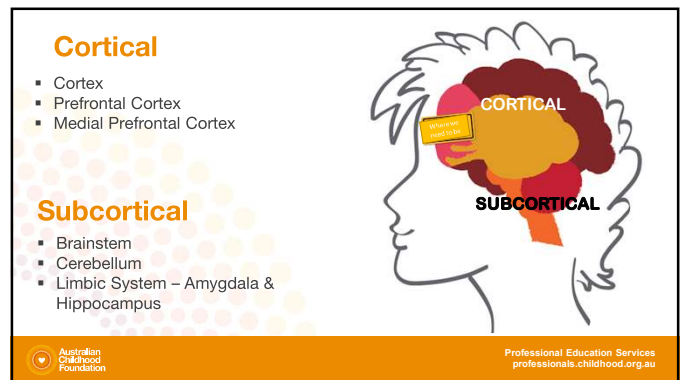
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Brain development



9

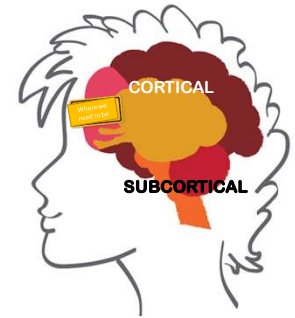


Cortical

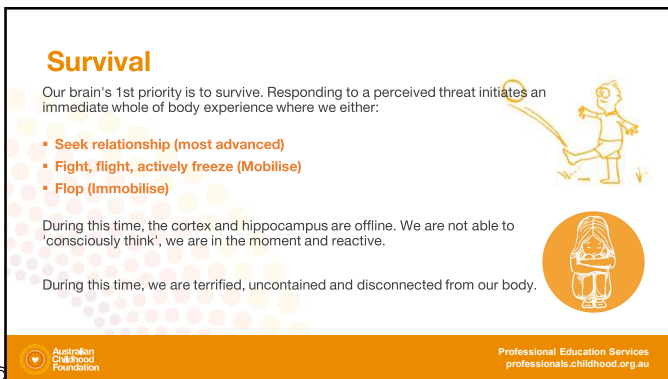
- Cortex
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Medial Prefrontal Cortex

Subcortical

- Brainstem
- Cerebellum
- Limbic System – Amygdala & Hippocampus



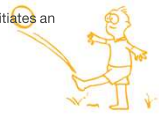
10



Survival

Our brain's 1st priority is to survive. Responding to a perceived threat initiates an immediate whole of body experience where we either:

- Seek relationship (most advanced)
- Fight, flight, actively freeze (Mobilise)
- Flop (Immoblilise)



During this time, the cortex and hippocampus are offline. We are not able to 'consciously think', we are in the moment and reactive.

During this time, we are terrified, uncontained and disconnected from our body.

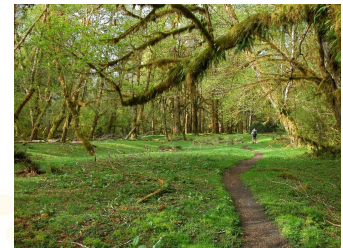


11



Activity

- Breathing
- Movement
- Tactile
- Smells
- Co-regulation
- Fidgets
- Nature
- Walk and talk



12

I need connection to my CULTURE

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Trauma:

- Historical Trauma
- Cultural Trauma
- Intergenerational Trauma

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14

Cultural Mapping:

- My Name is?
- I come from?
- My people are?

In groups map who you are, where you come from and who your people are. Identify common themes. Discuss and feedback

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History – Policies and Practices

- Colonisation and Dispossession (1770's onwards)
- Protectionism (1800's)
- Separation and Segregation (1900's)
- Integration (1920's)
- Assimilation(1930's)
- Self-Determination (1970's)
- Reconciliation (1990's)
- Closing the Gap (2010)
- Recognise campaign (2013 onwards); Uluru Statement from the Heart

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16

Cultural Trauma

- Fear
- Suspicion
- Anger and resentment
- Denial of Aboriginal identity
- Feelings of self worth, power and control
- Learned helplessness
- Dependency on the 'welfare'
- Isolation
- Loss and grief

Activity: Cultural loads

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17

Trauma issues

- Grief and Loss
- Housing and Homelessness
- Domestic and Family violence
- Incarceration and legal/law
- Mental Health
- Alcohol and Drug misuse
- Removal of children – abuse and neglect
- Poor health
- Poor education
- Lack of employment

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18



19

"We know we cannot live in the past but the past lives in us"

Dr Charles Perkins

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Intergenerational Trauma

Judy Atkinson's (2002) six-generation traumagram successfully linked the historical events associated with the colonisation of Aboriginal lands ('accidental' epidemics, massacres, starvations, and the removal of people to reserves) to increases in the rates of family violence, child sexual abuse and family breakdown in Indigenous society.

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21

Healing – Cultural, Spiritual, Family, Country

Judy Atkinson:

- Healing is an awakening to the unmet inner need of the Self, acknowledging the layered unexpressed pain of being unheard; In the Aboriginal context – people do not heal alone;
- Transforms pain and provides meaning and purpose to life

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Healing – Cultural, Spiritual, Family, Country

Rosemary Wanganeen:

- Seven Phases of Healing
- Holistic Approach
- Includes three parts – the Past, Present and Future

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Conceptual Framework

Connection
(family, community, country, self and culture)

Deep Listening
(healing, understanding)

Stories
(identity, belonging, purpose)

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Yarning and Telling Stories:

- Yarning – is story form
- Oral Tradition
- Storytelling as part of Indigenous culture
- Is cultural protocol
- Process of listening and learning

"Storytelling is in our life force. We think in story form, speak in story form to bring meaning to our lives through story" (Atkinson; p. 224).

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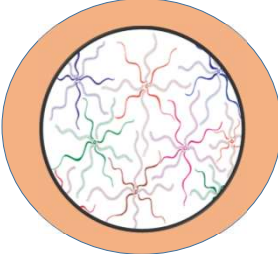
25

OUR STORIES MATTER SO OUR HISTORY LIVES ON

26

Our Story Circle

- Our story begins with a pre-selected title or subject to guide the improvisation
- One person begins a tale and stops after a few sentences
- The next person picks up the story thread and continues it, then stops
- The next person adds to it and so on until the tale comes to a resolution



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27

What is your story/journey?

- Cultural
- Spiritual
- Family
- Country
- Connection
- Relationships

Review Cultural Mapping



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Kaadaninny – Listen and Learn

- Cultural aspects of listening and learning – koort, kaart, wirren (Michael Wright)
- Stories, Storytelling, Restorying
- Making connections and building relationships

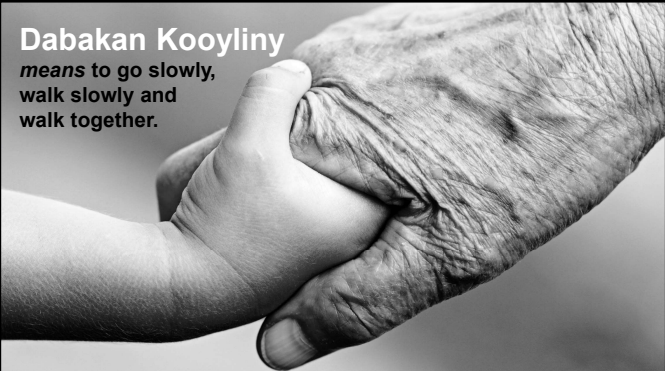
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29

Dabakan Kooyliny

means to go slowly, walk slowly and walk together.



30

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Reflection

- Connection
- Relationship
- Stories
- Listening and Learning




Photo by Shane Rouse

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31

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Vicarious Trauma

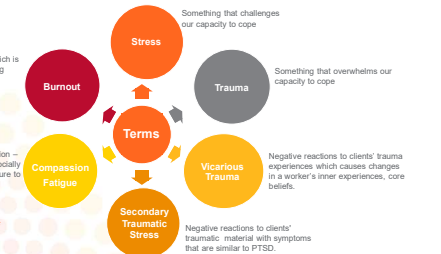
What is it?
Why might I experience it



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Defining the terminology



Stress: Something that challenges our capacity to cope

Trauma: Something that overwhelms our capacity to cope

Vicarious Trauma: Negative reactions to clients' trauma experiences which causes changes in a worker's inner experiences, core beliefs.

Secondary Traumatic Stress: Negative reactions to clients' traumatic material with symptoms that are similar to PTSD.

Compassion Fatigue: A state of exhaustion & dysfunction – biologically, psychologically, & socially – as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress (Figley)

Burnout: Feelings of being overloaded which is related to complexity and ongoing nature of client problems. Can occur in any profession

'Compassion fatigue', 'Secondary Traumatic Stress' & 'Vicarious Trauma' are often used interchangeably. (Figley 1995, McCann & Saakvive, 1995)

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Why don't we want to admit it?

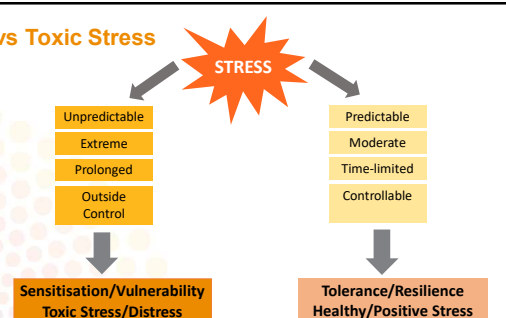
- Self-blame - It's just me!
- Shame - I'm embarrassed to admit it
- Denial - It'll pass if I ignore it!
- Self-sacrifice - Don't want to bother co-workers
- Job security - I can't expose my weaknesses
- Pressure - I don't have time to deal with it
- Cost - I can't afford to take time off and spend money for help



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Healthy vs Toxic Stress



Unpredictable
Extreme
Prolonged
Outside Control

Predictable
Moderate
Time-limited
Controllable

Sensitisation/Vulnerability
Toxic Stress/Distress

Tolerance/Resilience
Healthy/Positive Stress

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Vicarious Trauma

- When there is repeated exposure to traumatic material, professionals can develop vicarious trauma.
- Vicarious trauma is the impact of empathically engaging with traumatic stories and experiences without mitigation and having a traumatic response that can mirror the responses we see impacting on our communities and individuals

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36

Vicarious Trauma - Possible indicators

Can include:

- Fatigue
- Loss of libido
- Loss of sense of humour and fun
- Impaired immune system
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Anxiety
- Hyper vigilance/control issues
- Decreased self esteem
- Loss of interest in tasks
- Anhedonia
- Avoidance – avoiding client contact or supervision, avoidance of friends and family

Not all indicators in isolation will determine vicarious trauma. However, experienced collectively, these can have a significant impact on the individual, the team and organisation.




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37

Activity

- Attuned listening



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Vicarious Trauma

How do I know if I or someone else might need support?


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Compassion Fatigue

An absolute exhaustion that stems from the ongoing experience of hearing, seeing, the stories of the people and communities we work with.

Figley has defined it as 'A state of exhaustion & dysfunction – biologically, psychologically, & socially – as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress'.



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Stress, Trauma and The Brain

- Trauma switches off the cortex and makes higher order thinking more difficult.
- Trauma means we rely more on sub-cortical functioning , meaning a professional may be more likely to react rather than respond.
- Trauma impacts our capacity to form and recall narrative and episodic memories.
- Trauma often means we feel out of control and are looking to control our environment. This could present as shutting down or losing flexibility in our responses.

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41

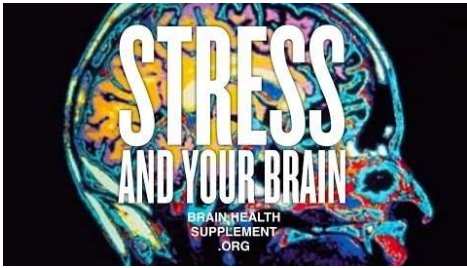
REFLECT ON...

- What are some ways that you have changed over time because of your work?
- What sort of problems or people do you find it especially easy to empathise with?
- What sort of problems or people do you find it especially difficult to empathise with?
- What are some ways that caring about people who have been hurt affects you?

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42

Stress and your brain



43

Cognitive capacity

Different stresses impacting workforce:

- Impact of Covid
- International situation
- Resignations of experienced staff
- Department changes and challenges
- Life situations
- Rising cost of living



Consider what is your cognitive capacity to stay focused, implement changes and to feel that workload is manageable?

Rock D 2022
Levensen N 2020

44

Preventing and reducing stress and burnout

There are two main ways to prevent and reduce stress and burnout among First Nation's workers.

1. The first way is for the branch, teams and the systems within which they are located to provide better support for their workers.
 - Measures that can be introduced include:
 - ✓ Having flexible working arrangements
 - ✓ Recognising the importance of connections and obligations to land, community and kin
 - ✓ Branch activities adopt First Nation's ways of working
2. The second way is for workers to do things that reduce their own stress and burnout

45

Strategy Suggestions

- **Build Calm & Predictability:** Focus on strategies that build calm as well as strategies that enhance predictability and routine in the workplace.
- **Access Available Supports:** Ensure staff can access available supports in the workplace.
- **Identify the Concern:** Just naming your concerns for yourself, discussing with a colleague or supervisor can be helpful as it reduces stigma and may help engage cortical resources.
- **Somatic informed workplace-** create neural safety-think senses- quiet retreat spaces, connection to nature, visual escape, pictures and windows, no visual yelling.
- **Declutter:** Use lists and planning tools, (EAT the Frog) reward your brain.

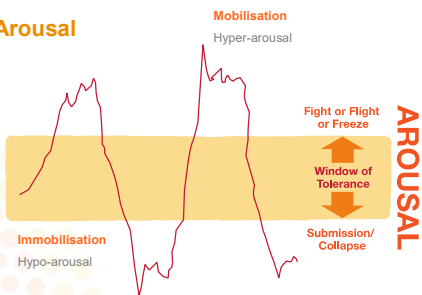


46

Dys-regulated Arousal

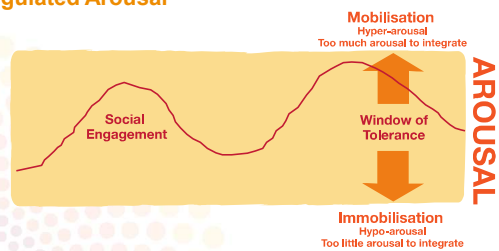
- **Fight or Flight** hyper-vigilant, action-orientated, impulsive, emotionally flooded, reactive, defensive, self-destructive
- **Freeze** Physically immobilized, frozen, tense musculature
- **Submit** Collapsed, weak, defeated, flat affect, numb, empty, helpless, hopeless

Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006



47

Regulated Arousal



48

Reflect on a time when you were out of your Window of Tolerance

- How did you know you were outside your WoT?
- What were the causes?
- How did you come back into your WoT?
- What strategies do you use to stay within your WoT?

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49

Staying regulated at work

- **IN THE MOMENT:**
 - Physically (regulate our body systems)
 - Mentally (keeping our cortex online)
- **AFTER THE MOMENT:**
 - Debrief (social engagement system!)
 - Physically - regulate body systems
- **BEFORE THE MOMENT (and all the time)**
 - Effective self care
 - Organizational culture



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Triggers and anchors in the storm


Your heart is racing, your palms are sweating, and your thoughts are in an anxious jumble – you've just been triggered. Preparing for triggers and having an array of techniques ready to manage them, can help minimise the impact they have on your life.

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51

Triggers

- Trauma is a biological and emotional response to a stressful experience. That biological and emotional response is triggered by the amygdala, one part of the limbic system in our brain. When the amygdala senses danger, it reacts one of four ways: fight, flight, active freeze, or collapse, submit feign death, this is its way of protecting us.
- To focus on survival, our brain pauses memory storage, which is why our memories of traumatic experiences are often foggy. These responses aren't something we choose.
- Triggers are responses from the body/senses that takes us back to that trauma. During a stressful experience, we don't have control over what our body does because it is our instinctive brain that responds.
- A trigger is a person, place, feeling or thing that immediately induces a stress-based physical or emotional response based on a past traumatic experience. Triggers can be internally generated by feelings of stress, anger or sadness, or have causes rooted in the external environment



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Internal and external triggers

Internal Triggers	External triggers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Anger •Memories •Loneliness •Feeling vulnerable or abandoned •Sadness •Anxiety •Frustration •Tension •Feeling out of control •Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Break-up or end of a relationship •News •Anniversaries •Smells •Specific places •Witnessing another accident or similar event •Holidays •Arguments •Seeing people that remind you of the event •Movies or books that remind you of the event

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Anchors in the storm

In trauma-informed services "trust and safety, rather than being assumed from the beginning, must be earned and demonstrated over time."

Learning grounding activities can be important for staff in trauma-informed organizations and systems. They can help to manage a trauma response, increase feelings of safety, and support the development of the skills needed to begin healing.

Grounding activities can increase awareness of trauma responses, help build relationships, be included in planning and offer validation.

For staff, grounding activities can help you remain present when working and be included in your own self-care practices.



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54

Anchors in the storm

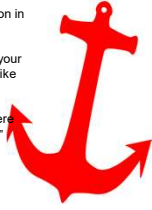
Butterfly Hug. Try a butterfly hug by crossing your arms (as if giving yourself a hug) and alternately tapping your left and right upper arm. Breathe and gently tap for a minute or two.

Listen to your voice. Say the words to an inspiring or comforting poem. Feel the vibration in your throat and listen to the sound in the air around your face.

Ocean Waves. Try breathing in and out like ocean waves. As you breathe out through your mouth, make a sound like the waves reaching land. Feel the rhythm of your breathing, like ocean waves moving in and out.

Be Kind to Yourself (Self-soothing). Whisper gentle reminders to yourself: "I am safe here and now. I can get through this. I am strong. I am loved. I am a good person. I am kind."

Say Your Name. Remind yourself of who you are now. Say your name. Say your age. Where are you now? What have you done today? What will you do next?



55

Activity

- Triggers



56

Rewarding aspects of the work I do

What are the rewarding aspects of the work you do?



57

Empathy – a strength and a vulnerability

If empathy is to 'walk a mile in someone's shoes' we need to ensure we step out of those shoes at the end of the mile or we will wear those shoes all the time...and that is vicarious trauma.

You do not just have empathy you have to build it as a skill set.

1. To see the world as others see it, or perspective taking
2. To be non-judgemental
3. To understand another person's feelings
4. To communicate your understanding of that person's feelings
5. Mindfulness (paying attention)



Adapted from Brene Brown Dare to Lead

58

Limbic Resonance & Cortical Empathy

"Caring deeply about others makes us emotionally vulnerable to the catastrophes that affect them" (Charles Figley)

Somatic empathy (Sub cortical)

Mirroring body states

Limbic Resonance (SUB-CORTICAL)

Our emotional state adjusts to match the emotional state of the person or people we are with

Cortical Empathy (PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX)

Our attempts to step outside our own experiences and imagine the experience and perspective of others

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59

Mirror Neurons

- Mirror neurons not only fire when we perform a particular action but also when we watch someone else perform that same action.
- They are involved in learning new skills including language through imitation and emulation.
- Mirror neurons are the basis of our cognitive ability to understand another's intentions or feelings.
- Mirror neurons play a key role in our ability to empathize and socialize with others.



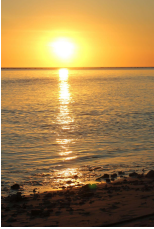
Photo by Nick Dunn -Unsplash

60

10

Activity

- Proqual questionnaire




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Healing, integration and self care



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Keep Yourself Healed- Self Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workers



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63

Activity

Organisational Professional Personal




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Organisational factors that help

- Predictability and Flexibility
- Shared vulnerability – vicarious trauma is understood and acknowledged
- Acceptance rather than judgement
- Humour and fun
- Reflective supervision – accessible, regular and effective
- Supportive environment with shared goals and meaning
- Policies & procedures – protect workers, allow for flexibility, support healthy boundaries
- Recognition




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65

Healing concepts

- Traditional things - Take time out to participate in traditional activities
- Connect to community and to land
- Practice your spiritual understanding of the world
- Integrate your own trauma – explore and make meaning of your experiences
- Build attachment-hugs, smiles and laughter
- Understand your somatic responses
- Change your self talk
- Build a healthy brain
- Be kind to you



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Neurobiology of self-care

- How would you rate your overall wellbeing at the moment?
- How do you or could you look after your wellbeing throughout each day?
- How do we support each other as a team each day?

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A key step – self-care

- Chat to the person next to you about your thinking about self care and what your results tell you.

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68

The role of Mindfulness in Self Care

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69

Prevention: Personal level

- Maintaining self care and prioritising healthy lifestyle/personal wellbeing
- Life outside of work incorporates: social, relaxing, spiritual, cultural, fun aspects
- Supportive and healthy relationships
- Work-life balance : maintaining healthy boundaries
- Personal & professional values align with the work
- Have a wellbeing plans

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70

Management: Personal level

- Maintain self care routine and increase activities that promote wellbeing where possible
- Acknowledge impacts and practice self compassion
- Utilise leave entitlements, supervision, de-briefing
- Review boundaries and consider any changes that need to be made
- Regular mindfulness practice (set realistic goals for implementing this if not already part of daily routine)

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71

Repair: Personal level

- Access therapy/counselling and/or external supervision
- Remember that VT is diagnostically almost identical to PTSD, so consider what you would recommend for a client with PTS response
- Activities/strategies that promote nervous system regulation
- Prioritise sleep, rest, healthy lifestyle (reduce/avoid alcohol, caffeine, etc)
- Remain socially connected

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72

Taking the next steps



- What are the things I need to do next for my self-care?
- What are the things we need to do as a team?
- What are the things we would like NIAA to do?




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73

Thank you and questions

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74

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76