

Outline

Using Neuroscience in Treatment of Stress and Trauma

Positives: - Science gives authority, evidence, de-stigmatizes mental health problems
- Increased motivation and hope for change

Concerns: - Oversimplification, unrealistic expectations, changing state of science, see self as damaged or different

The Promise of Neuroplasticity

Describe neuroplasticity in everyday language
Therapy is about creating a new, more resilient brain

We are changing views - don't have to be stuck in rigid views of self

Teach brain to be less reactive to stress and triggers

"Rewiring" as a metaphor for change

Changing "raw," unprocessed memories to organized narratives

The Brain's Stress Response

Historical view - Hans Selye

The brain's stress response "fight, flight, freeze"

The triune brain - reptilian, mammalian, human

The amygdala and the prefrontal cortex

How the amygdala "hijacks" the brain into emergency mode

How the Stress Response is Spread Throughout the Body

Neurotransmitters - Epinephrine, norepinephrine and cortisol

The HPA axis and role of cortisol

The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems

The dorsovagal "freeze" response to unavoidable threat

The Upside and Downside of Stress

Increased motivation and engagement - "flow" state

Can create mental toughness and resilience to future stressors

Inflammatory response to chronic stress

Stress and health risk behaviors (excess alcohol use, smoking, overeating etc)

Stress and cellular aging (telomeres)

Traumata - Effects on the Brain

Cortisol attacks the hippocampus - center of narrative memory

Amygdala response increases in strength

Impaired anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) and prefrontal cortical function

Cortisol halts production of BDNF - fewer new brain cells formed

Link to depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD

Cognitive rigidity and inability to take in new information

Changes in sense of self and dissociation

Long-Term Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The ACE Study (Kaiser and the CDC)

Addictive and unhealthy ways of managing anxiety & negative emotions

Disease, mental health issues, behavioral problems, PTSD

Explaining Neuroscience Concepts to Clients

Use drawings and images

Individualize to the type of difficulty (e.g., disengaged vs reactive - different brain areas)

Redirect vs eliminate

Help client label & recognize when happening (e.g., freeze, flooding, negative thinking, rigidity, impulsivity)

Find coping strategies for each type of brain difficulty

Stress-Proofing the Brain - Overview

Calming the amygdala - Grounding, mindfulness, self-compassion, perceiving control

Moving forward with the prefrontal cortex -

Cognitive reappraisal, priming positive mindsets and, growth focus, health psychology tools

Grounding Strategies for Clients with Trauma or Attachment Injuries

Yoga, relaxation, breathing, present-moment focus, soothing with the senses, pets, drawing, gardening, walking

Mental imagery - safe place, boundaries, energetic, times they felt strong/competent

Left-brain strategies - task focus and engagement

Mindfulness Strategies

Qualities of mindfulness states - open, nonjudgmental, fluid, deliberate,

Observing and accepting inner experience (thoughts, feelings, sensations)

Using the senses to self-regulate

De-fusing from negative thoughts and self-images

How mindfulness changes the brain

Mindfulness practices - breathing, watching thoughts, urge surfing, open awareness

Application to anxiety, depression, addictions, PTSD

Self-Compassion Strategies

Self-kindness, common humanity, focus on unmet needs

Application to depression, anxiety, stress-management, trauma, insecure attachment

Link to Schema Therapy - healthy adult mode

Practices - Metta meditation, soften, soothe and allow, dialogues with inner critic

Cognitive Strategies

How stress and anxiety narrow attention, create cognitive rigidity

Depression and negative thinking

PTSD and internalized negative appraisals (helpless, unworthy, unsafe etc.)

Worry and rumination cycles - link to prefrontal cortex and default mode network

Why thought suppression doesn't work

De-catastrophizing and probability estimation

Exposure and tolerating negative thoughts

Using metaphors (monsters on the boat, bouncy ball underwater)

Creating Positive States of Mind to Counter Stress

How our brains are wired to the negative

Positive emotions can promote physiological recovery from anxiety and fear

Reappraising anxiety as excitement

Gratitude diaries

Commitment, control, and challenge;

growth mindset

Living Healthy in the Face of Stress

Sleep disturbance - behavioral strategies

Healthy coping strategies - exercise, meditation, yoga

Dealing with emotional eating

Live Seminar & Webcast Schedule (Both Days)
(Times listed in Central)

7:30 Registration/Morning Coffee & Tea

8:00 Program begins

11:50-1:00 Lunch (*on your own*)

4:00 Program ends

For locations and maps, go to www.pesi.com, find your event, and click on the seminar title.

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Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this workshop, participants should be able to:

1. Determine the neurophysiology of the stress response, including the roles of the amygdala, hypothalamus, sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and the effects of cortisol and adrenaline.
2. Discriminate among acute stress, major life events and chronic stressors, and the longer-term effects of chronic stress on mind and body.
3. Implement grounding strategies to help clients who experience "freeze" states or dissociative symptoms.
4. Communicate the concept of mindfulness, how it affects the brain, and how to use mindfulness-based interventions in therapy.
5. Critique the concept of self-compassion and research on its benefits.
6. Design practical exercises to increase self-compassion in clients facing stress.

7. Analyze the importance of perceived control to the impact of stressors and learn how to help clients differentiate controllable and uncontrollable aspects of stressors.
8. Explore how stress and anxiety narrow cognitive focus and create thinking traps and learn techniques to help clients be more cognitively flexible in the face of stress.
9. Evaluate the research suggesting that positive emotions can undo the physiological effects of negative emotions.
10. Investigate how rumination exacerbates the effects of stress and how to help clients curtail ruminative cycles and de-fuse from negative thinking.
11. Appraise how a growth mindset differs from a fixed mindset and how to help clients adopt a growth mindset and a gritty attitude towards their stressors.
12. Assess the application of a brain-based, neuroscience approach to treating clinical disorders like GAD and PTSD.

