

# Resiliency & Wellness: Reclaiming the Self

- Workshop Presentation on PTSD, MEMORIAL  
UNIVERSITY Newfoundland
- Leslie B. Block Clinical Psychologist August 1,  
2016



# BIO

30 years private practice

Clinical & Forensic Psychology

Emphasis on trauma recovery

First responders (police, correctional, military)

Aboriginal mental health, IRS evaluations

Criminal psychology, victimology,

Mental injuries

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed;  
we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted,  
but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

# Topics

- Resiliency and wellness continuum
- Stress and Trauma spectrum; Posttraumatic Distress or Growth/Opportunity
- Obstacles to wellness (e.g., Dissociation, Magical Thinking, Depression, Distraction/Avoidance, Addiction)
- Removing barriers, aiming for peak performance
- Mind-Body Communication: a new language
- Taking Stock; Goal setting; Attitudes, Self-talk, Forgiveness; Practice and rehearsing resiliency
- Rebuilding relationships; caring for others and self

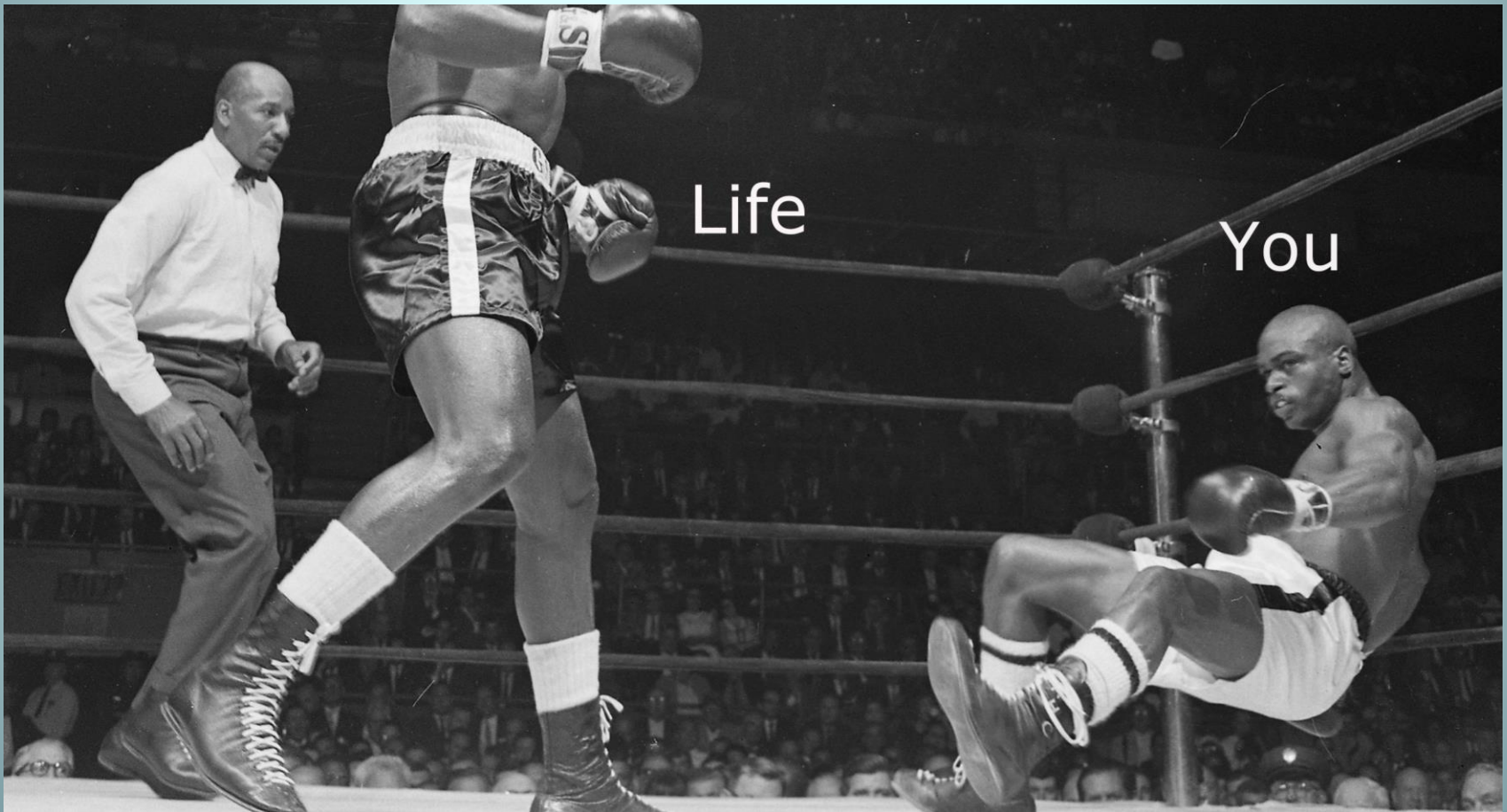
# Reality

- The reality of tragedy, crises, chaos, and evil is both startling and sobering.
- Facing the unspeakable: shattered assumptions of humanity and safety
- Unexpected events that people like Celeste Corcoran faced at the Boston Marathon in 2013
- Some of these events change our lives forever and with the ripple effect of altered human relations
- Still there is hope for recovery, wellness, and growth (liberation from oppressive forces)

# Evil

- Evil needs to be addressed as a concept and a reality
- How it affects us from within and without
- For our first responders, it is a critical inevitability
- How do we prepare for it so that the member can maintain composure, recharge from it, and sleep at night??

# Kills you or makes you stronger?



# Faith, Hope, Forgiveness

- What is hope, in the face of adversity? Police are regularly exposed to evil. Without hope have you lost?
- Survivor's guilt, refusal to enjoy life; the need to suffer
- Giving self permission to live fully and enjoy
- In the face of evil it is often difficult to maintain the hope and optimism that propels/defines resilience
- Examine your tool-kit, what is needed?

# Stress, Trauma, PTSD

- The spectrum of stress, from loss to promotion to retirement to child's wedding, to white water rafting, to financial worries
- "Stress is the pattern of specific and nonspecific responses an organism makes to stimulus events that disturb its equilibrium and tax or exceed its ability to cope." (APA)
- Developing strategies and coping methods to effectively deal with life exigencies

# Stress

- “Every stressor leaves an indelible scar, and the organism pays for its survival after a stressful situation by becoming a little older.” Seyle
- Single catastrophic event or Death by thousand cuts

# Seyle's GAS

The body passes through three universal stages of coping. First an “alarm reaction,” the body prepares itself for “fight or flight.” No organism can sustain this condition of excitement, and a second stage of adaptation ensues (provided the organism survives the first stage). In the second stage, a resistance to the stress is built. Finally, if the duration of the stress is sufficiently long, the body eventually enters a stage of exhaustion, a sort of aging “due to wear and tear.”

# Traumatic Stress

- Trauma often includes helplessness and sense of impending doom. “Small t” and “Large t” trauma
- “What single catastrophic, life-threatening event happened to you?” recited the insurance agent asked to the shocked correctional worker
- Trauma and peritraumatic dissociation
- PTSD is where the past is the present (where is the future?)

# PTSD

- PTSD is a possible outcome of exposure to trauma
- Involves intrusive events such as thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, body reactions
- Avoidance and Dissociation
- Impaired sense of self and others
- Mood disturbance and emotional dysregulation
- Cognitive problems (memory/concentration), sleepless, jumpy/easily startled, unable to relax

# Trauma Spectrum

- Different types of trauma exposure leads to different responses
- From everyday stress to events that result in permanent changes
- Eventual acceptance is desirable but for some, the *past is the present*
- Mild, moderate, severe reactions to traumatic events
- From normalcy to PTSD to DID

# Tentacles of Trauma

- Far reaching and debilitating web of overlapping symptoms; synergy, reactivating old wounds
- Prodromal: something not right
- Symptomatic: Feeling anxious, depressed (FIGHT-FLIGHT)
- Intensity: states of confusion, apathy, frustration, helplessness/hopelessness, slowed thinking, disrupted sleep, unusual aches/pains

# Tentacles con't

- Dissociated States (-FREEZE); identity changes (not the person I once knew); Rumination; zoning out and detachment
- Interpersonal problems (trust, avoidance, lashing out).  
Needing my space
- Cognitive alterations (memory/concentration)
- Physical discomfort leading to chronic pain

- Long-lasting responses to trauma result not simply from the experience of fear and helplessness but from how our bodies interpret those experiences.”
- —Rachel Yehuda

# Secondary symptoms

- Hypertension, gastro-intestinal, musculo-skeletal
- Apnea, headaches, migraines, eating disorder
- Bruxism, TMJ, dental erosion
- sleep disorder, alcohol abuse
- Lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, muscular sclerosis, heart disease, skin disease (e.g., Dermatillomania, psoriasis)

# Trauma Symptoms

- Memory is compromised
- You cannot recall an important part of the past; you cannot forget a part of the past
- Becoming increasingly forgetful, trauma memory is entrenched in the mind, body, heart
- Unable to recall or unable to forget memories remain vivid and intrusive
- You try to avoid reminders
- Try as you might, you remain symptomatic

# Trauma Features

- Unique type of stressor in which the stakes are much greater and pain/injury/death seems imminent
- Original trauma remains in background
- The organism prepares for the worst
- Recovery takes some work at overcoming the resistance to change
- It does not end just because it is over!

# Range of responses

- In part based on type of trauma; also on past life experiences, personality features
- Responses to trauma varies (no right way), for some shutting down, others become compulsive/hyper
- PTSD, Dissociation, peritraumatic Dissociation
- Other associated problems (anxiety, depression)
- Interpersonal Relationships are affected
- Substance use pattern changes
- Emotional regulation is altered, anger is discharged

# Work Patterns

- The compulsion to cross the finish line for police is normally set at 25 years of service; this overshadows other variables such as personal wellness.
- Dichotomous absolute thinking (all or none), keeps one trapped.
- How do you know when it is time to get out, or to change careers? This overtakes the compulsion to cross the finish line at all costs

# Refusal to let go

- Letting ideals over-ride reality (obsessional)
- Retirement myths (landing the jet)
- The future will be better
- Resiliency counters destructive myths, wishful thinking, and is sobering
- Resiliency is listening power (inner ears), reminding you to take stock, proactive

# Crossing the finish line...



# Being equipped and prepared for now



# Resilience

- Symptoms can be managed; the sufferer can lead a more productive, meaningful life
- Resiliency is the fuel powering the recovery
- Resiliency helps navigate the white waters
- Liberation from these malignant inner forces allows for the resumption of human relations

# Q & A

# Wellness

- Wellness is not just the absence of ill health. It becomes a priority and requires ongoing effort
- You decide on priorities and assess your progress
- Balancing life forces; aging is setting the speed limit
- Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual forces need ultimately to be aligned
- Wellness requires resiliency, the endurance to run the course

# Wellness is shaped by your beliefs

- Set of beliefs about yourself, the world, and how they interact (As you think in your heart, so it is)
- It takes shape as a sense of personal commitment to what you are doing, a sense of control over your life, and a feeling of challenge (for growth)
- Commitment (curious, involved), Control (belief that you can influence events instead of being a victim), Challenge (belief that change brings a chance for growth, not fear)

# Resilience/Hardiness

- “In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.” (See also Ungar, 2008 and Ungar, 2011)

# Block's Model

- Resiliency is a naturally occurring internal process that aids in adjustment to the exigencies of daily life and sustains wellness
- Resiliency is not a single entity and is different for each person; personality factors and history shapes this capacity
- Some people seem to adapt relatively easily while others need more support/help in the face of change. Find in crisis the opportunity for growth
- Resiliency can be enhanced or depleted, needing ongoing attention, monitoring, and repair work
- Collective resilience means we can join forces but retain individuality (alone and together)
- Spirit of resiliency necessitates a spiritual mindset

# Resiliency and Stress

- Resiliency often remains hidden until we are taxed, challenged, or pushed to act in ways that defy our expectations
- Stress, whether positive or negative, pushes us and tests our limits
- Resiliency allows us to adapt to the circumstances and navigate the perilous white waters
- External supports are usually needed; Fatigue, depletion, is not a bad thing if we listen to the lesson

# Set In Motion

- Only through adversity do we see resiliency
- In states of homeostasis there are no demands for change on the system
- Choices to grow, recover, adapt, or fail at the challenge
- Life progression involves series of disruptions to the homeostasis, allowing for change

# Facing the unexpected expectedly



# Contextual forces

- Disruptions and traumas in childhood affect development and attachment
- In turn, disease proneness can occur
- Social functioning is impacted by these early disturbances
- Unconscious guilt is mobilized and becomes a malignant force, perpetuating further symptoms and destructive patterns
- Intergenerational transmission of stress and pain

# Self Review

- Identify your core beliefs/values; learn how to change them when necessary
- Listen to your moral compass; don't shortchange yourself; talk, write, share
- Asking for help is not a crime
- Practice, rehearse, meditate, and cogitate
- Take action
- Entitled to make mistakes

# Negative Forces

- Complacency and apathy erodes resilience
- Dissociation takes us to a forgotten land (he just stared out the window, not a word uttered)
- Avoidance only hides the inevitable (keeping secrets from ourself)
- Staying busy, “everything is fine”, ignoring the signs, refusal to listen to the self (type of addiction)
- Magical thinking

That reminds me of a story

# Damaged goods

- Imperfections are magnified
- Dwell on past mistakes and lost opportunities
- Refusal to accept oneself; attitude of what could have/should have been happening
- Refusal to see the positives
- Why me? Massive guilt
- Misery, suffering, and punishment
- Sitting on the curb of life vs soaring with the eagles

# Emotional

- Many people refuse to face, experience, express, and process their emotions (crippled)
- Feelings are taboo. How do YOU feel? Fine, good, does not count, is not feelings. Face your feelings
- Task to overcome the self-made barriers and face the (ugly) truth of the unconscious
- Being liberated from the forces of guilt and rage that otherwise ferments in the basement of the soul.

# Physical

- The body bears the burden
- Internalization of pain, torment, grief, suffering is not gone; it takes a life of inner suffering, depression, and guilt
- Aches and pains, GI, Musculo-Skeletal, are the obvious; other more subtle bodily
- Body is the innocent bystanders of your stress
- Staying fit or overdoing it?

# Wisdom of the Body

- Do you have poor sleep, unexplained aches and pains, headaches, general malaise, digestive issues, high blood pressure?
- Do you know how to listen to the body? The language it speaks is not English

# Mental

- Concentration, memory, and reasoning is altered in the face of stress and trauma
- Confusion and slowed thinking
- Processing information changes over time
- Keep sharp, use your brain/mind and stay active
- Unlearning incorrect assumptions and beliefs including early messages

# Spiritual

- Enlightenment & Bigger picture
- Inspiration and Recognition of God
- The journey becomes faith-based, greater than all the other dimensions
- Vision
- Love

# Case Study

- Tom, not his real name, was a crack veteran of the RCMP. He did not respect those who could not hold up in the face of pressure. He thought of them as weak and puny. He took on anything and everything. Until one day he was the only one left to take photos of a little boy who doctors were unable to save, having just died from a gunshot wound. And this being father's day made it so much more difficult to face his same-age son that evening.

# Holding the self hostage

- Refusing to feel or to grieve, or face the pain
- Fearing the release of anger, rage, and fury, (loss of control)
- The struggle is submerged hidden, but the damage is present at an internal level (cesspool of pain)
- Shadow of burnout and unresolved grief
- Pain and suffering take the dominant position

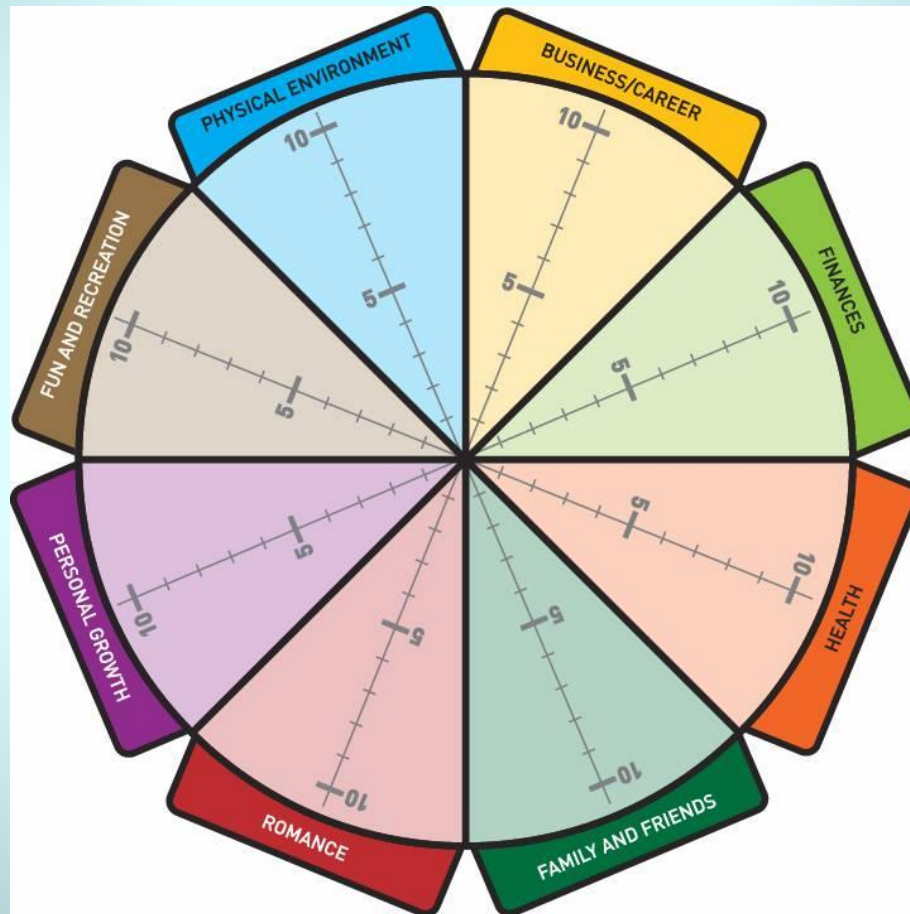
# Human variability

- We each view the world uniquely and how we face adversity, challenge, tribulation, and decrement
- Making sense out of suffering, learning to forgive, and to be at peace
- Grudges and frustration, resentment and bitterness, pouring out onto others

# Self Assessment

- Balance; Optimism; Faith; Hope; Acceptance
- The greatest potential is LOVE
- I accept my circumstances although don't understand. I will try to decipher the meaning
- Gauge your resiliency
- What changes do you need to make changes to achieve optimal balance and resiliency?
- Caring for others

# Self Assessment



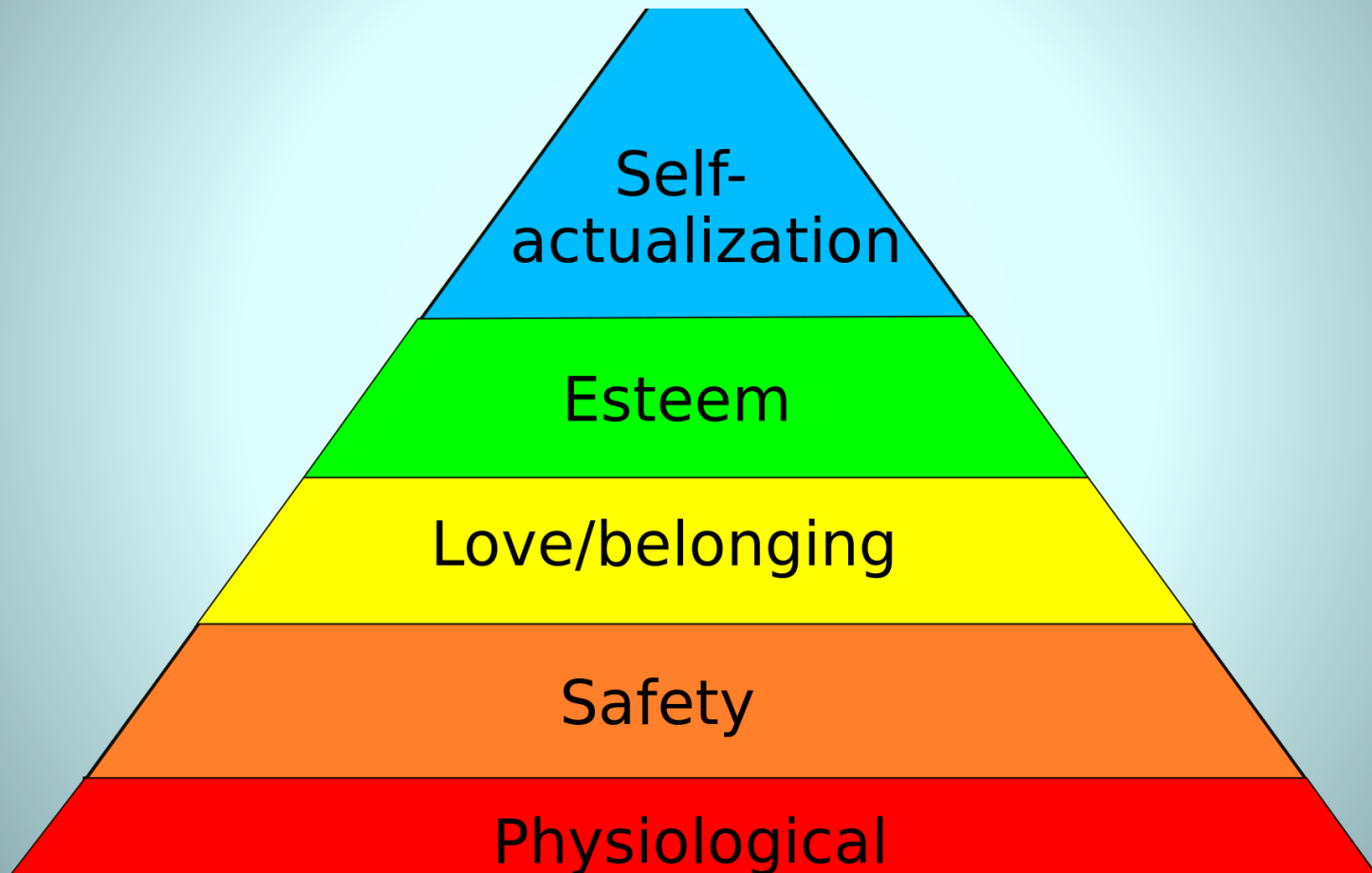
# Jobs/Stress

- Priorities: We spend a lot of time focusing on the job, but less effort/time is for self and family
- Time Management: Balancing time and energy as they are both in limited supply
- Planning: Duties are demanding, depleting, and often thankless; strategies for rejuvenation (Laws of energy). Putting too many things in a day
- Recognition and awareness of needs and inherent limitations

# Balancing Act



# Maslow's Hierarchy of needs



# Balance

- The forces within our psyche need to be harnessed
- The wisdom of the mind-body connection
- The spiritual pathways
- The heart is central; the mind-brain dualism
- The body has to be respected; listening and responding
- Awakening from oblivion to find the innermost place of healing

# Take this pill

- Proactive (choices and focus)
- Priorities, Balancing the demands
- Learning appropriate time management
- Improve communication skills including openness
- Self-renewal: four parts of wheel
- Learn from the past, make attitudinal changes

# Discussion

- Tap in for a moment: What are you aware of?
- How are you feeling?
- How is your energy?
- Body?
- Take a moment to recalibrate, start with a deep rejuvenating breath; clear your head; relax your body

# Mind Body

- As stress impacts the emotional status with anxiety, and emotional dysregulation, so too does the body get altered in this wear and tear. Often with PTSD is concurrent ailments including headaches, apnea, sexual difficulties, musculo-skeletal, gastro-intestinal, bruxism, fatigue, sleeplessness.
- Unusual or unexplained medical anomalies in the face of PTSD should alert us to this nexus
- Learning to listen to self and understand the mind-body language

# Mind-Body Communication

- The body remembers everything and stores things
- The Ultradian Rhythms are noteworthy
- What is the message? Needs translation and action

# The Body never forgets

- Symptoms replace or overshadow memories
- Symptoms tell the story; body is scoreboard
- There have been alterations in the organism's biochemistry
- Ripple effect: all systems are impacted
- Frontal lobes get disarmed and the Limbic system is activated. The amygdala (sounds the alarm); brain stem activity (heart rate increases, breathing changes, muscles tense up)

# 20 Minute Break

- Ernest Rossi: “People learn how to listen to the message that their stress induced symptoms may be telling them. They learn how to convert their so-called "symptoms" into "signals" of how and when they need to do their own inner healing. By heeding the message of their symptoms they gradually acquire their own insights and "enlightenment" about how to better their lives and facilitate their own healing.

# Mind Body

- Take a moment and notice where you feel the comfort
- As you find yourself becoming more relaxed, think of a time you resolved an important issue or overcame an important problem.

# Tests

- "The ultimate measure of a person is not where he or she stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where she stands in times of challenge and controversy."
- Who said that?
- What does it mean to you?

# Martin Luther King

- My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force.

# Opportunity in crisis

- I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation, which now obtains. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.

# Resiliency

- Style of response to extreme situations
- Early life resiliency
- Adaptability, flexibility
- Inner resiliency and spirituality
- Attitudes/Beliefs of the self (taking stock)
- From “I don’t know” to “I am worthy”

# CONTROL

- The need for control of life diminishes as we find order and control at the inner level
- This implies a sense of inner peace and calm
- When adversity strikes we are poised to patiently and caringly face the challenge and adapt our mindset and locate the opportunity
- Practice makes patient

# RELAXATION

- Not the same as killing time
- Television is the great deadener
- Active relaxation may involve right brain activities (art, play, music, meditation)
- Creative relaxation restores and refuels

# Outcomes

- Empathy vs numbing
- Transformation and renewal vs hopeless despair
- Pain map, meaning, identity
- Integration and emotional attunement

# Types of resiliency

- Aware of and responsive to the true nature of crises as opportunities for change
- The role of personal intuition
- The innate ability to adapt and heal from wounds and ailments, whether body mind or heart
- Insight can also adapt and improve, guiding the process. Lack of insight can lead to blame and projection.

# Attitudes & expectations

- If we are negative about the future, resiliency in the now gets altered (self-fulfilling prophecies)
- If we remain optimistic, resiliency can flourish
- Pollyannish; Magical Thinking; Distortions
- Cynical and sarcastic = rage
- Complacency and apathy
- Hope and Faith

# Heckler within

- That nagging critical inner voice
- No Win, whatever I do, it is never good enough
- Guilt at the primitive level
- Second guessing, wondering what would have been or could have been; looking back at mistakes
- Learning to silence these critics

# Stigma

- Shame about self and one's flaws
- Fear of condemnation or projection?
- Denial and minimization
- Avoidance of emotional expression

# The Past is the Present

- When the past will not stay quiet
- The noise it generates distracts and keeps one awake at night
- Keep living it as if it was occurring
- During the day we drown out the noise being busy
- Reliving/re-experiencing something from the past
- Failure to integrate and process the memories

# Repetition Compulsion

- “I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost... I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.
- I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I am in the same place. But, it isn't my fault. It still takes me a long time to get out.
- I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It's a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.  
I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
- I walk around it. The next day I walk down another street.”

# Debriefings

- Formal CISM
- Informal and ongoing
- Seeking assistance
- EMDR, CBT, Exposure
- Holistic approach
- Self help, staying fit

# Early warning signs

- Emotional exhaustion, cynicism and an inability to disengage from work or engage in activities fully
- Cynicism or deadening of emotional experience
- Others may notice you have checked out, become distant/detached
- Feeling listless, less interested in things that you used to enjoy doing, less productive

# Limit setting

- Limits between self and organization; self and inmate; self and others
- When the boundaries are blurred, the problems of others become our problems (and vice versa)
- Solutions are harder to find when we take the weight of the world onto our shoulders
- Sometimes it is a fine line and seems like indifference or lack of empathy (not my circus)

# Frankl's Experiences

- Death Camp survivor
- Witnessing the most grotesque war crimes and human rights violations
- He survived because he did not hate the enemy
- He learned about his attitude as a key to survival

# Master-Slave

- Frankl was able to exercise the freedom to determine his own attitude from which he tapped into spiritual well-being. No SS guard was able to take that away from him or control the inner-life of Frankl's soul. One of the ways he found the strength to fight to stay alive and not lose hope was to think of his wife. Frankl clearly saw that it was those who had nothing to live for who died quickest in the concentration camp.

# Inner Power

- "Again and again I therefore admonish my students in Europe and America: Don't aim at success - the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself.

# Peace/Love

- Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long-run - in the long-run, I say! - success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think about it."

# Fruits of the Spirit

- According to Apostle Paul, these fruits are: Love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance
- Against such there is no law

# Do I have what it takes?



# Resilience in motion



# FINALLY

- Taking stock of your accomplishments daily
- Learning patience; being proactive
- Learning to be still, quiet, respectful
- Putting self ahead of plans and goals (ego)
- Clean up the past spills
- What one thing can you provide for yourself today (self-nurturance)