Amy Carlson, LCSW

TURNING POINT COUNSELING SERVICES

Mindful Stress Reduction
TO DAY’S PRESENTATION

¬ How to recognize symptoms of stress in the body and stress in the brain.
¬ The long-term effects of stress on the body and on the brain.
¬ Be able to explain the difference between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system.
¬ Understand neuroplasticity and the role it plays in changing behaviors.
¬ Have applicable mindfulness tools to help build vagal tone.
¬ Gain an understanding of the interaction between neuroplasticity and mindfulness tools to effectively cope with rumination, thinking errors, emotions, anger and fear, trauma, perfectionism, ideas for healthy boundaries, and how to achieve lasting happiness.
What is Stress?

* Can’t be avoided.
* Normal part of life.
* Normal physiological response. Instinctive for survival.
* Exists on a Continuum
  Bad stress • <------> • Good stress
* Good Stress (Eustress)
* Bad Stress (Distress)
* Short-term stress - Acute

Stress Response – Adrenaline - Can be beneficial.
* Long-term stress – Chronic - Cortisol – Long Term Vigilance.
* We have the same body – but different stressors
* We don’t use our body the way nature intended
Autonomic Nervous System

- The Autonomic Nervous System is responsible for instinctive responses that are out of conscious control. This includes: heart rate, breathing rate, skin temperature, metabolic rate, awake-sleep cycles, hormone production and metabolism.

- All the ways our body keeps us going without needing our conscious input or approval.

- Two systems: Sympathetic and Parasympathetic.

- Sympathetic is responsible for fight, flight, or freeze. It is our survival instincts.

- Parasympathetic is responsible for “rest and digest,” “feed and breed,” relaxation and ease.
Alarm Reaction – Short-Term Stress

- Adrenalin
  - Increased heart rate
  - Increased breathing
  - Slowed digestion
  - Saliva decreases
  - Eye dilate
Alarm Reaction

* Symptoms

- Inability to Focus or Concentrate
- Tunnel Vision
- Blushing
- Tightness in Chest
- Butterflies in Stomach
- Need to Urinate
- Sweating
- Dizzy or Light-Headed
- Dry Mouth
- Difficulty Breathing or Swallowing
- Heart Pounding
- Nausea or Diarrhea
- Muscle Tension
- Trembling or Shakiness
Long-Term Stress

- Cortisol
  - Retention of sodium and water by kidneys
  - Increased blood volume and pressure
  - Increased blood glucose
  - Suppression of immune system
  - Increased fat storage

- Long-term exposure to stress:
  - Damaged arteries, high blood pressure
  - Depressed immune system
  - Obesity, diabetes
  - Difficulty thinking
  - Heart damage
Stress and the Brain

- **Hippocampus** regulates memory and enables use to convert new information into long-term storage. 
  - **Shrinks** under extended periods of stress.

- **Amygdala** involved in emotions and fear processing.
  - **Increased activity**

- **Prefrontal cortex** is the center for rational thought and processing.
  - **Decreased activity**
Prefrontal Cortex Regulation

During non-stress conditions

* The prefrontal cortex
  * Flexible regulation of emotions and behavior
  * Enables us to properly respond to a changing environment
  * Monitors errors, giving us the insight to shift strategies

* Highly sensitive to the neurochemical environment.
  * Stress hormones (cortisol) and other chemicals hinder its function.

During stress conditions

* We default to certain ways of thinking and behaving.
* This includes addictions.
Amygdala Regulation

During stress conditions

✧ The prefrontal cortex loses control

✧ Amygdala (emotions, fear, anxiety) takes over as part of the fight/flight response to prepare to survival.

✧ Emotions run the show
  ✧ Our behaviors, thoughts follow our emotions (not logic)
  ✧ We begin to treat emotions as factual
Vagal Tone

- The 10th Cranial Nerve
- Two-way communication between the brain and the body.
- 80% receives information from the body. 20% transmits information to the body.
- Influences the parasympathetic nervous system.
Rumination Gap

- Evolved as a survival technique.
- "I’m here and I want to get here." Past and present thinking = survival.
- "I must DO something." – Doing Mode.
- Even if it is figure out what it wrong.
- The act of trying to “fix” or “understand” keeps us stuck. (Hamster Wheel)
- We stay stuck in the sympathetic nervous system.
- Works on primitive problems, not on modern day maladaptations. When we are in a constant state of stress, the brain is in a constant state of “fixing,” “understanding,” “analyzing,” - which becomes rumination.
Thoughts, Thinking, and Metacognitions

• What we say to ourselves matters.

• Auto pilot/default mode, and thinking errors.

• Metacognitions – the value judgments about one’s thoughts.

• A 2010 study of 2,250 people suggests that we spend 46.9% of our time in “mind wandering mode.” Mind wandering turns out to be a better predictor of happiness than actual activities.

• Mindfulness helps us choose with conscious awareness.

• Our narrative circuitry becomes our world filter.
Neuroplasticity

- Neurons that wire together, fire together. We get good at what we practice.

- The structure of the brain is constantly undergoing changes – called neuroplasticity.

- You can consciously make daily choices of mindset and behavior that will improve the structure and connectivity of your brain.

- Two effective ways to reduce stress and lower cortisol.
  - Regular physical activity
  - Mindfulness meditation

- Lifestyle choices that reduce stress and lower cortisol can improve brain structure and connectivity.
Mindfulness Practice

- 4-4, 4-8, and 4-7-8 Breathing Practice
Emotions

* You see someone crossing the street. (example about judgment)

* Our judgment about situations may not be accurate. They reflect our interpretation (thoughts) about a situation, rather than the situation itself.

* Thoughts are not facts, they are mental events. Emotions are not facts, they are sensations.

* Past and future can come to the present, they are supposed to, but we can reset to the present.
Anger and Fear

- Aversion takes different forms in different people.
- In general, **aversion** is an overall feeling of “not wanting.”
- We feel we **need** things to be different.
- Aversion is the drive to avoid, escape, get rid of, numb out, or destroy things we experience as unpleasant.
  - Anger - “I want **XYZ** to go away.”
  - Fear - “I’m afraid of **XYZ** and need things to be different.”
Studies in this area have conflicting findings, but in general:

- **Stress in early development** is associated with increased cortisol and norepinephrine responsiveness.
  - Also associated with alterations in hippocampus, increased amygdala function, and decreased medial prefrontal cortex function.

- **Stress in adulthood** is associated with normal to low resting cortisol, but higher cortisol and norepinephrine in response to stressors (compared to non-traumatized controls).

- Hyper reactivity to stress, brain changes.

- Antidepressant treatments have been shown to block the effects of stress and/or promote neurogenesis (new neurons).
  - Serotonin, norepinephrine
Perfection and Self-Compassion

- Perfectionism is:
  - A form of violence towards self.
  - It is seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.
  - Linked to Anxiety and Depression.
  - We are a rough draft.
  - Good, bad, who knows.

- Self-Compassion is:
  - Notice you are suffering. Be moved by your feelings so that you can respond to yourself with warmth, caring, and the desire to help yourself. Offer understanding or kindness to yourself when you fail or make mistakes, rather than judging harshly.
  - Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings – after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect? – Dr. Kristin Neff

- It is also:
  - Seeing the similar experiences of self and others
  - Recognizing interconnectedness to others and the world
  - Taking actions that make you happy and healthy in the long-run (versus short-term self-indulgence or pleasure seeking).

When there is perfectionism, there is a harsh inner critic. So we cycle between radical self-soothing (short-term indulgence, pleasure seeking, numbing out, trying harder) and radical self-punishment. That which we use to avoid our pain (radical self-soothing techniques) ends up becoming the source of pain.
Healthy Boundaries

- Personal boundaries are the physical, emotional and mental limits we establish to protect ourselves from being manipulated, used, or violated by others.

- Boundaries are a skill.

- The person we have the worst boundaries with is ourselves.

- Knowing yourself allows you to ask for what you need and know that you deserve it.

Lasting Happiness, Mindfulness

- I can be happy when life gives me what I don’t want, and when it doesn’t give me what I do want.

- Reality is perfect, it is my perception of reality that causes my suffering.

- Mindfulness is present tense, non-judgmental awareness, being in the here and now.

- Practice makes progress.

- Neurons that fire together wire together.

- Neuroplasticity.

- People who practice mindfulness can tell what path they are on: autopilot, “mind wandering” vs. present in the moment.
Rain

- Recognize - difficult emotion is present.
- Accept, Acknowledge, Allow – Accept means to Acknowledge what is present in this moment and to Allow what it already here to be here.
- Investigate with kindness – Physical, Emotions, Thoughts.
- Non-identification – This does not belong to me, not taking emotions personally, label but recognize this is not enduring.
Beginners Mind

- Beginners mind is: "I don't know," open, playful, curious, no attachment to outcome, failure is expected and part of the process, low ego, high spiritual state, each moment is new.

Mastering Beginner's Mind

"In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few." – Zen Master Shunryo Suzuki

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginner’s Mind</th>
<th>Expert’s Mind</th>
<th>Master’s Mind</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t know”</td>
<td>“I know”</td>
<td>“I don’t know”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, playful, curious</td>
<td>Closed, rigid, fixed</td>
<td>Open, playful, curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No attachment to outcome or</td>
<td>High ego attachment to outcome and process</td>
<td>No attachment to outcome or process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process</td>
<td>Is not interested in anything that disrupts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure is expected and</td>
<td>what I know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>welcome as part of the learning</td>
<td>Lots of ego is invested in being</td>
<td>Not knowing is exciting! New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience</td>
<td>the expert, in knowing, in being RIGHT</td>
<td>approaches and potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low ego: open to new</td>
<td>Lots of energy is used to maintain Expert</td>
<td>outcomes is exciting!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approaches</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High spiritual state for learning</td>
<td>Other people are regarded as a threat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each moment is new</td>
<td>Each moment is a repeat</td>
<td>Each moment is new</td>
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</tbody>
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The space between stimulus and response is the space of freedom: FREEDOM to CHOOSE.....choose being in Beginner's Mind.
## Doing Mode vs. Being Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOING MODE</th>
<th>BEING MODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automatic Pilot</td>
<td>Conscious awareness and choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing</td>
<td>Sensing, feeling, Beginner's Mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striving</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Approaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental time travel, pre-living and pre-feeling, re-living and re-feeling</td>
<td>Living in this present moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-tasking</td>
<td>Single tasking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depleting activities</td>
<td>Nourishing activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*How one lives is far more important than what one does.*
Practice

★ 4-4, 4-8, 4-7-8 breathing
★ “Cook’s Hook Up”
★ Other tools: Meditation, Yoga, Coloring, Walking, Exercise, Music, Other Mindfulness Based Ideas.