

THE COMMUNITY RESILIENCY MODEL (CRM)®

Developed by Elaine Miller-Karas, LCSW

www.traumaresourceinstitute.com

Nikki Tobeck, Regional Program Manager
Resilient Georgia

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Training Overview

- Community Resiliency Model
- Stress, Trauma & the Nervous System
- The Brain
- The Resilient Zone
- CRM Skills
  - Tracking
  - Grounding
  - Resourcing
  - Gesturing
  - Help Now!
  - Shift and Stay



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About Your Trainer

- Education and training in Psychology and Clinical Mental Health Counseling (B.S. Psychology from University of Illinois, M.Ed. From Georgia Southern)
- Previously worked with the Georgia APEX Project providing counseling to K–12 students
- Trauma-sensitive yoga (RYT-200) and fitness instructor
- Currently working on a somatic healing certificate to integrate body-based approaches to resilience-building in addition to being a CRM and Connections Matter trainer



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The Community Resiliency Model

- **What is CRM?**
  - An evidence-based, body-based framework developed by the Trauma Resource Institute that helps individuals understand and regulate stress responses.
- **Why CRM Works**
  - Strengthens nervous system regulation, builds resilience over time, and helps interrupt stress responses such as anxiety, anger, and somatic discomfort (e.g., headaches, upset stomach).
- **Evidence Base**
  - Research shows CRM is effective for healthcare providers, frontline workers, educators, and communities experiencing chronic stress, trauma, and burnout.



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The Community Resiliency Model wellness skills can be shared with anyone!



Across the lifespan



During or after a disaster



Across cultures

With people with different abilities





For community healing during recovery



With diverse groups

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CRM's Definition of Resilience



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Assumption	*Awareness*	*Action*	*Reflection*
CONVENTIONAL	**TRAUMA-INFORMED**	**RESILIENCY-INFORMED**	**TRAUMA & RESILIENCY-INFORMED**
"People are bad."	"People are suffering."	"People are resilient."	"People can change and grow."
"People need to be punished."	"People need to learn how trauma impacts a child's and adult's development."	"People need to learn how skills of well-being can be cultivated and how they can reduce suffering."	"People can learn to read their own nervous systems to build resiliency in themselves and others."
What is wrong with you?	***What happened to you?***	***What is right about you? What are your strengths?***	***People can learn that empathic listening to another's trauma leads to a balanced nervous system.***

A TRAUMA AND RESILIENCY-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE SHIFT

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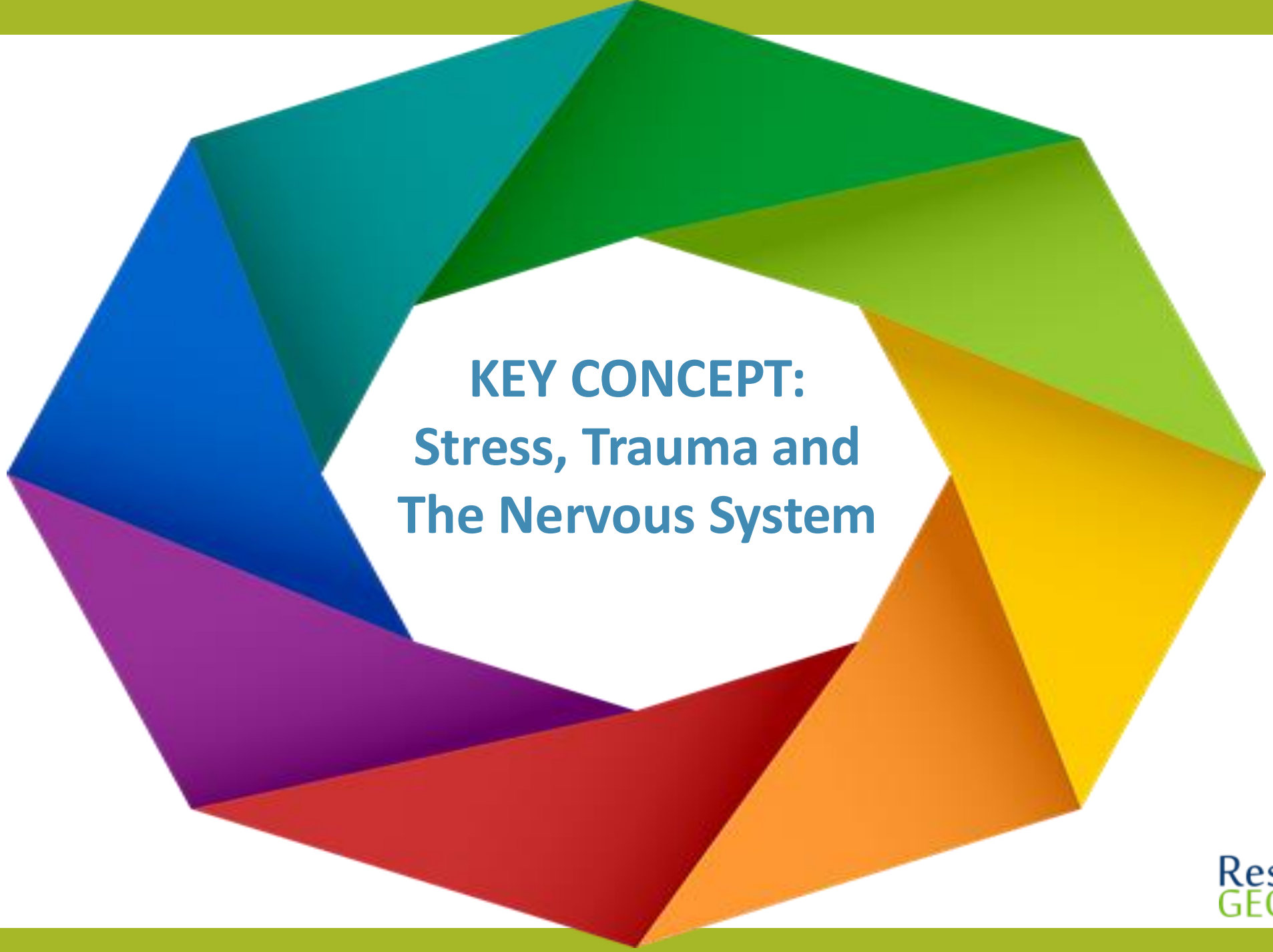
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ACTIVITY

- What or who helps you during difficult times?
- What or who uplifts you?
- Have there been moments of generosity that come to mind as you reflect on these challenging times?

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KEY CONCEPT:
Stress, Trauma and The Nervous System

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A Common Language

Key Definitions: Trauma, Resiliency & Three Types of Stress

- **Trauma:** Experience(s) that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope, disrupting a sense of safety and affecting the brain, body, emotions, and behavior. Trauma is determined by how it is *perceived by the individual.*
- **Resiliency:** The capacity to adapt, recover, and grow in the face of stress or adversity. Resiliency is not a trait people either have or don't have—it can be learned, strengthened, and supported through relationships, skills, and environments that promote safety and regulation.
- **Positive Stress:** Short-term, manageable stress that motivates growth and learning (e.g.,starting a new job, preparing for a presentation). Balance returns quickly.
- **Tolerable Stress:** Time-limited stress (e.g., illness, loss, or major life change) that can be buffered by supportive relationships, resources, and coping skills, preventing long-term harm.
- **Toxic Stress:** Prolonged or severe stress without adequate support, often linked to trauma or chronic adversity. Toxic stress can disrupt brain development, nervous system regulation, and long-term physical and mental health.

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Common Stress Reactions

Emotional Reactions

Rage/Fear
Nightmares/Night Terrors
Avoidance
Depression
Grief
Guilt
Shame/Blame
Anxiety
Overwhelm

Thinking Reactions

Paranoid
Nightmares
Dissociation
Forgetfulness
Poor Decisions
Distorted Thoughts
Suicidal/Homicidal

Physical Reactions

Numbness/Fatigue
Physical Pain
Rapid Heartrate & Breathing
Tight Muscles
Sleep Problems
Stomach Upset
Hypervigilance
Trembling

Behavioral Reactions

Disengaging from others
Self-Injury
Excessive working
Angry outbursts
Inability to act-numb
Addictions
Eating Disorders
Increase use of Substances

Spiritual Reactions

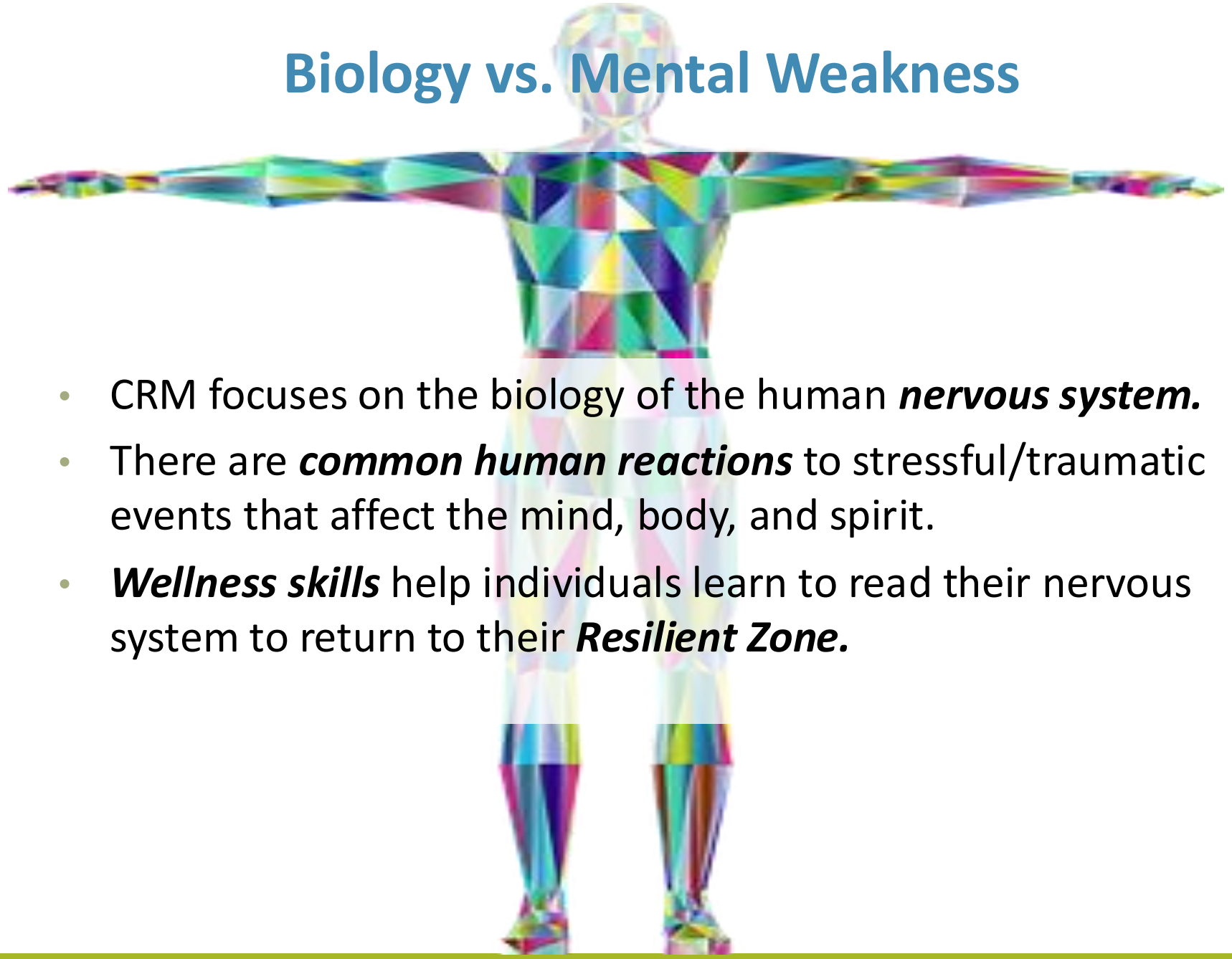
Hopelessness
Loss of Faith
Increase in Faith
Deconstruction of Self
Guilt
Doubt
Moral distress

Relationship Reactions

Anger at family/friends
Isolation
Missing Work
Overly Dependent
Irritability
Clinging
Regressive
Hypervigilance re: safety of family/friends

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Biology vs. Mental Weakness



- CRM focuses on the biology of the human ***nervous system.***
- There are ***common human reactions*** to stressful/traumatic events that affect the mind, body, and spirit.
- ***Wellness skills*** help individuals learn to read their nervous system to return to their ***Resilient Zone.***

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KEY CONCEPT:
The Brain

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Brain Networks



Frontal Cortex: Thinking Network

- Consciousness, speech, emotion, critical thinking, problem solving, language, and memory.

Limbic Area: Emotional Network

- Assesses risk
- Expression and mediation of emotions and feelings, including emotions linked to attachment.

Survival Network: Instinctual

- "Fight, Flight, & Freeze"
- Unconscious
- Digestion, reproduction, circulation, breathing - responds to sensation.

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The Survival Network

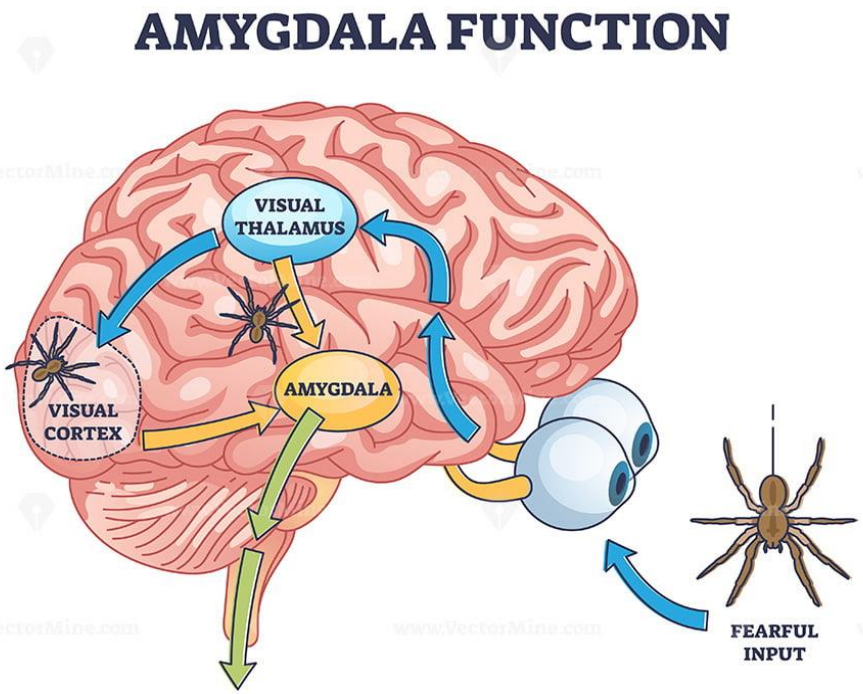


- Perceived life-threatening danger triggers an **automatic survival response**
- Response happens **without conscious thought** (Survival Network)
- Goal is **protection and survival**, not reasoning or logic
- This part of the brain **does not respond to talking**
- The Survival Network responds to **sensations, not words**
- Body-based skills help **notice sensations**, **reset the nervous system**, and **restore balance**

(c)Trauma Resource Institute/Miller-Karas (2024)

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The Emotional Network



- Limbic system houses the **amygdala** (brain's alarm system)
- Rapidly **detects and appraises threat**
- Signals the **nervous system to activate** when danger is perceived
- Uses **templates from highly charged emotional memories**
- **Generalizes cues** to warn of potential danger
- Organized by **past experiences** with a **negativity bias**
- With consistent trauma or toxic stress, the amygdala can become **overactive**, triggering alarms more easily

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The Thinking Network

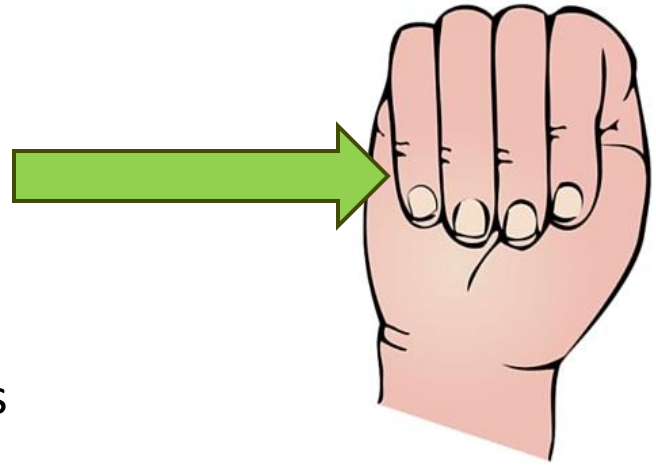


- **Prefrontal cortex**: thinking, reasoning, and decision-making center
- Helps **regulate emotions** and impulses
- Assesses context and **distinguishes past from present**
- Enables **empathy, perspective-taking, and self-reflection**
- Communicates with the limbic system to **calm the stress response**
- Stress **reduces activity** in the thinking brain
- Regulation skills help **bring the thinking brain back online**

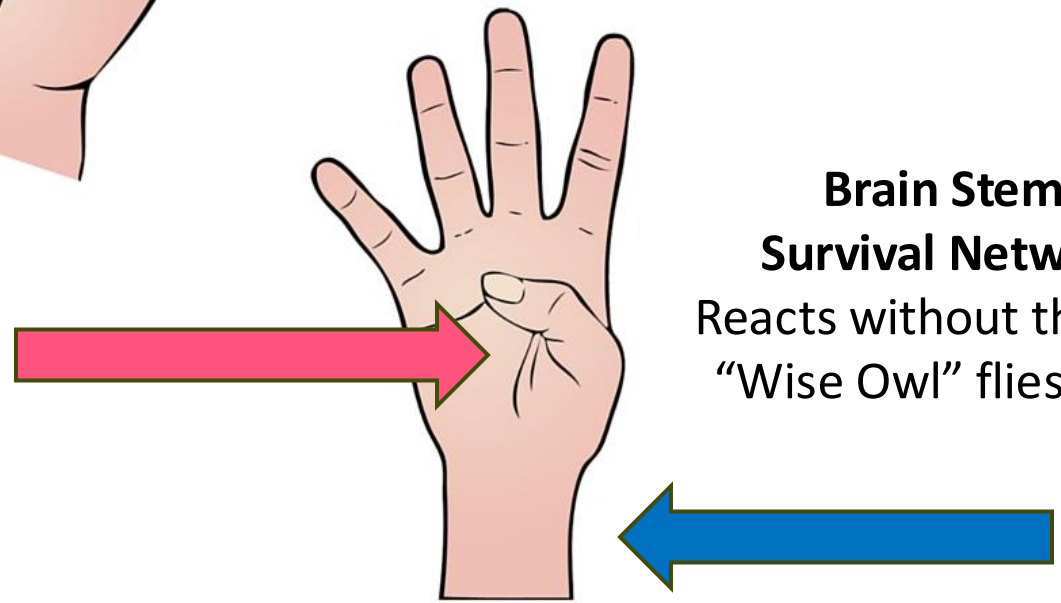
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Prefrontal Cortex:
Thinking Network
Helps us calm down
Helps us make good choices
Helps pay attention to others
"Wise Owl"



"Flipping Your Lid"=
High or Low Zones



Limbic Area:
Emotional Network
Amygdala sounds alarm
"Barking Dog"

Brain Stem:
Survival Network
Reacts without thinking
"Wise Owl" flies away

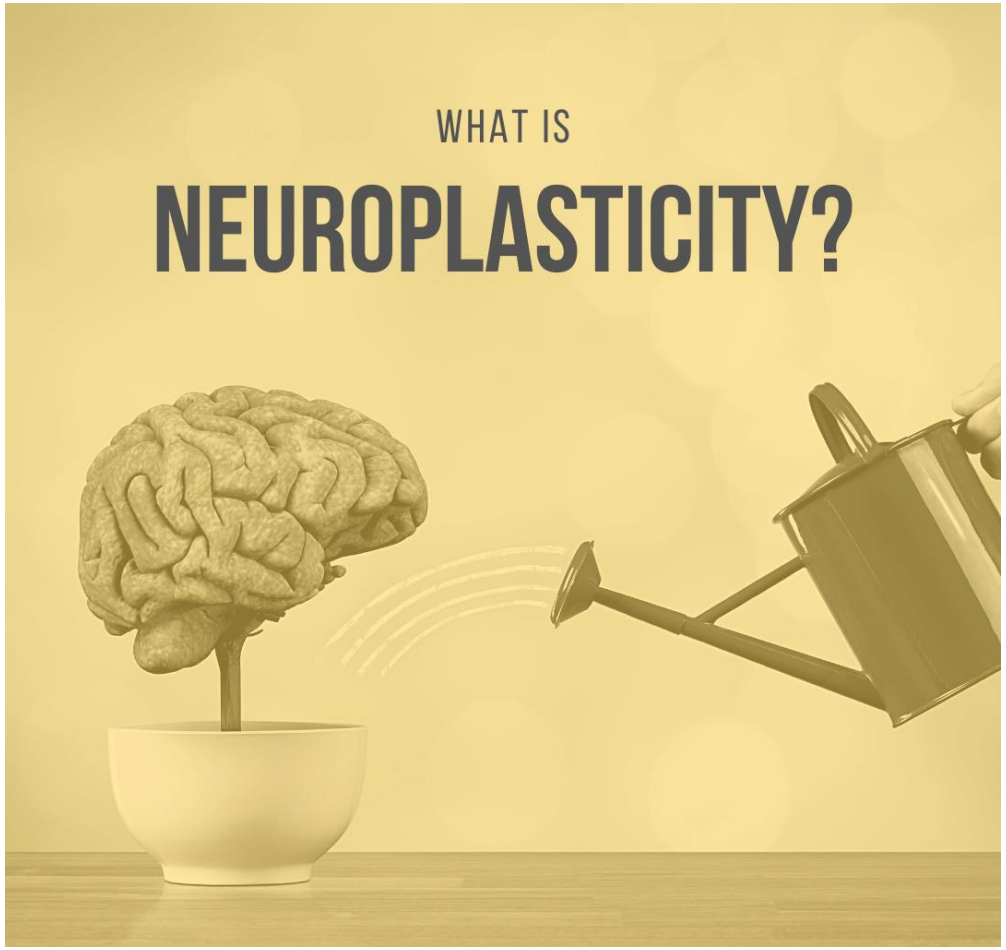
Adapted from Dan Seigel's Hand Model of the Brain (2010)

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Neuroplasticity

- The brain's lifelong ability to change and rewire through learning and experience
  - There is **HOPE**—the brain is always adapting. We can change!
- **"Neurons that fire together, wire together"**: what we practice grows stronger
  - **Tuning**: positive experiences strengthen and build neural connections
  - **Pruning**: unused pathways weaken over time ("use it or lose it")
- This is why **CRM works**—rewires our brain to support nervous system balance
  - Regular practice strengthens circuits for **regulation, connection, and resilience**
  - Small, consistent skills can **reshape individual and collective wellbeing**

Feldman-Barrett(2020)



Memory

- **Memory and Stress**
  - Trauma and extreme stress can significantly affect how memories are formed and recalled
  - Difficulty remembering parts of a traumatic event is a **common and normal response**
- **Why memory may be disrupted**
  - During high stress, the brain prioritizes **survival over memory storage**
  - Some traumatic experiences are **not encoded as explicit memories** due to their intensity
  - This can result in gaps or **sensory-based recall**



Trauma responses are shaped by biology, not personal weakness or failure. Understanding how the brain functions under stress supports self-compassion and healing.

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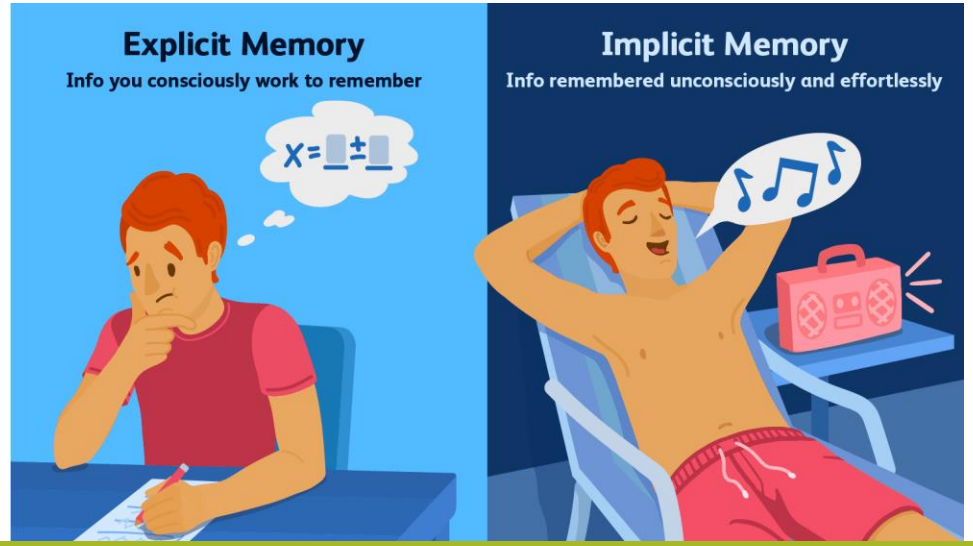
EXPLICIT VS. IMPLICIT MEMORY

Explicit Memory: Conscious, intentional memories. Includes facts, events, and narratives("what happened"). Relies heavily on the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex

- Accessed by our intention
- There is a sense of self & time
- Develops between 18-24 months of age

Implicit Memory: Unconscious, automatic memory stored as sensations, emotions, body responses, and habits associated with traumatic memories. Often activated without awareness

- Does not have a sense of self & time
- Develops before birth
- Can be set off out of the blue

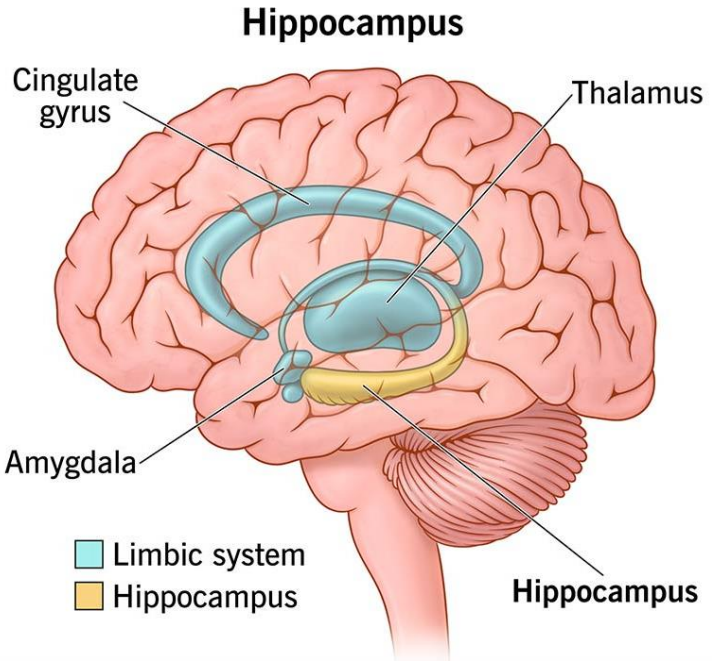


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Hippocampus and Memory

- **Hippocampus** works with the frontal lobes to process **explicit memory**
  - Helps organize experiences into a clear narrative
  - Stores memories in proper **context and timeline**
  - Highly **plastic**—its structure can change with experience (like reshaping Play-Doh)
- **Amygdala (threat detection)**
  - Becomes highly activated during trauma
  - Triggers release of stress hormones
- **Impact of high stress on memory**
  - Stress hormones **interfere with hippocampal functioning**
  - Memories may be **implicit, sensory-based, or fragmented** rather than explicit



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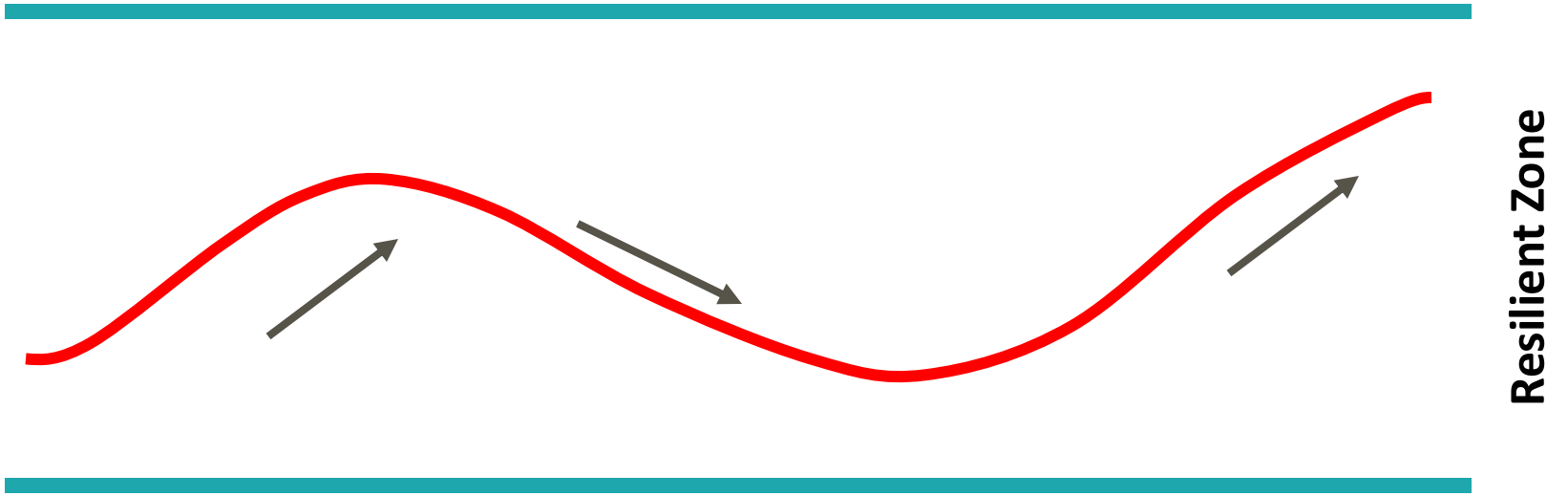


KEY CONCEPT:

The Resilient Zone

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The Resilient Zone- “OK” Zone

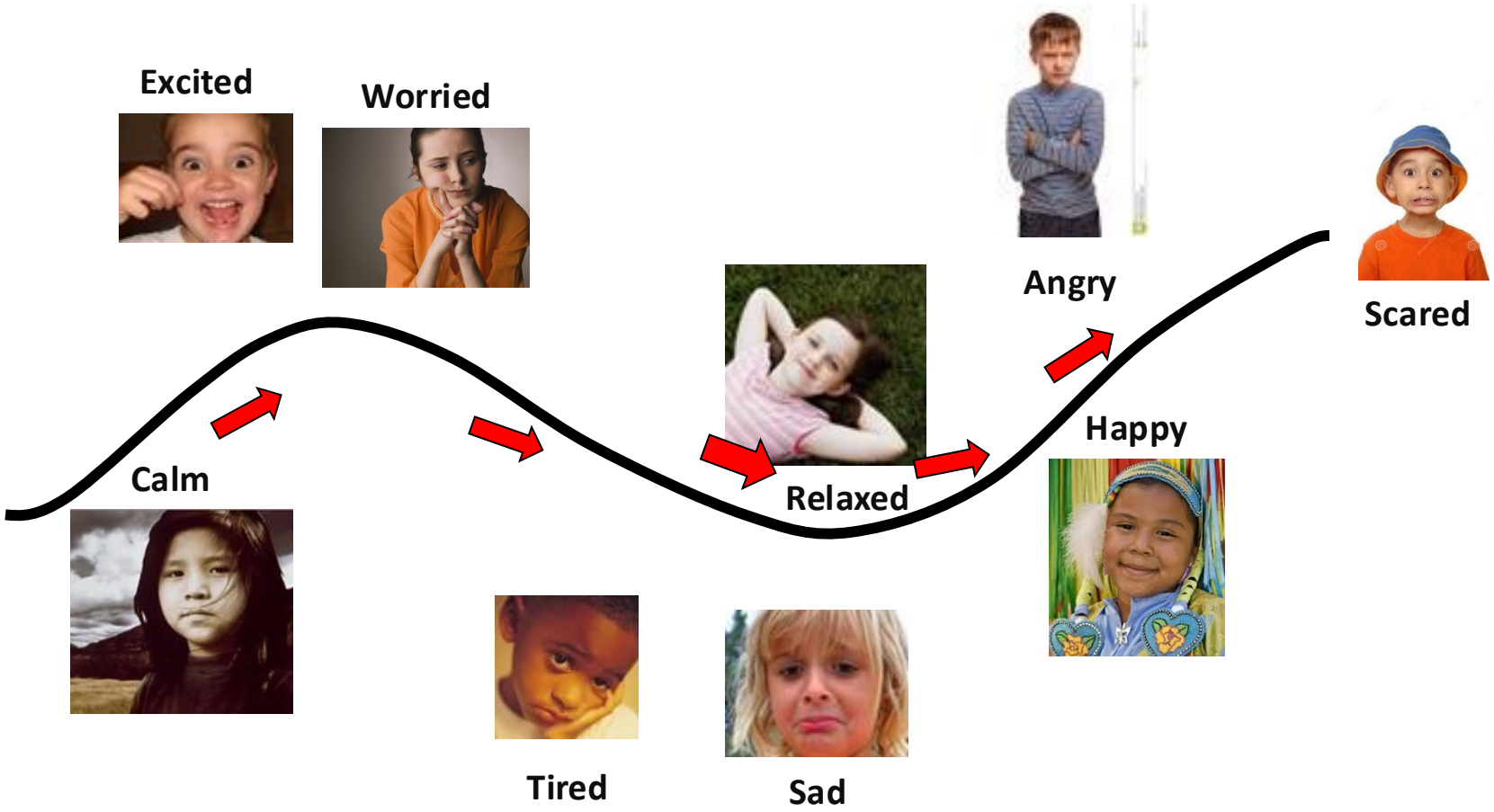


GOAL: TO WIDEN YOUR "OK" ZONE AND BRING YOURSELF BACK TO THE RESILIENT ZONE

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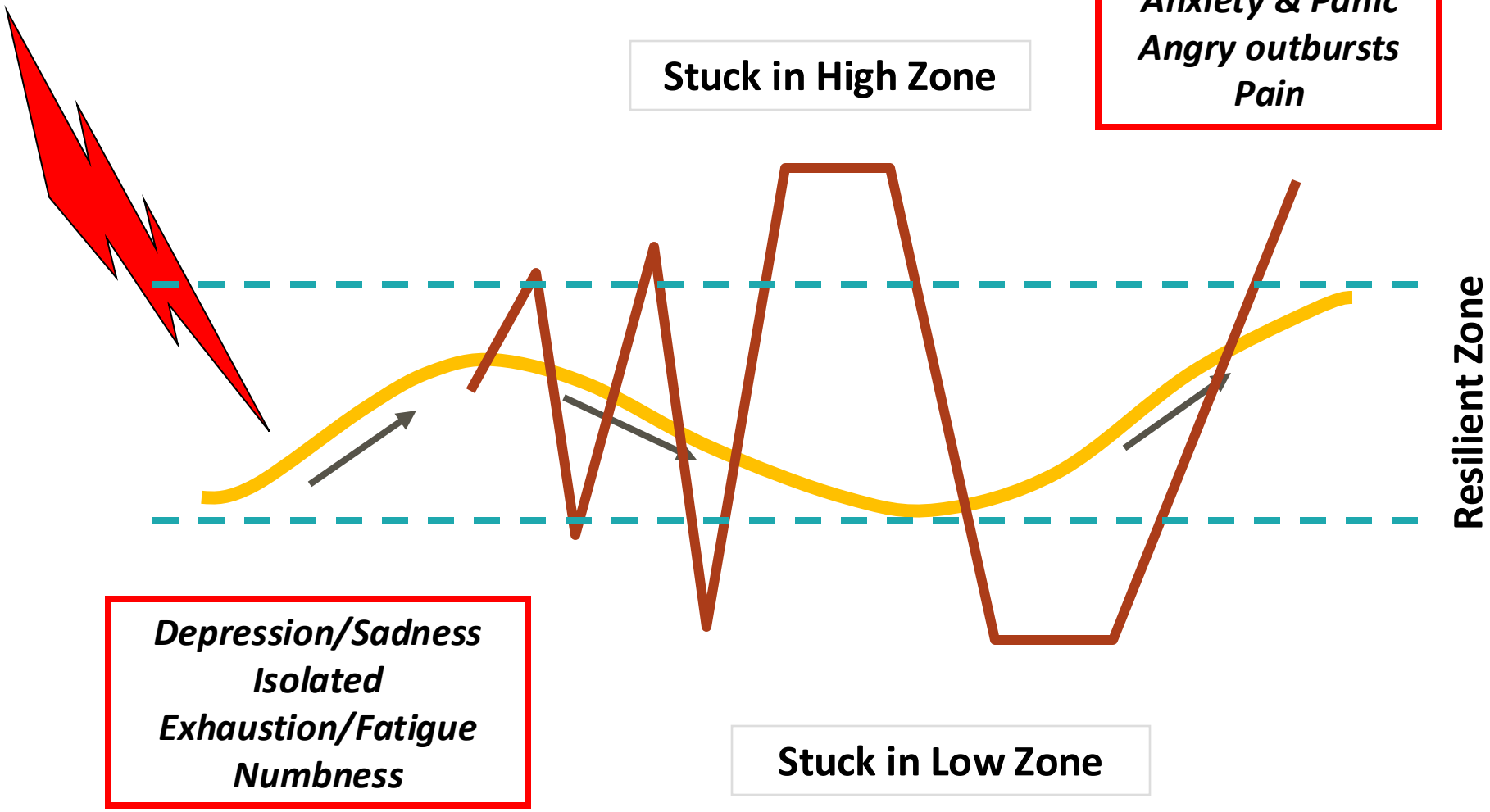
Things happen in life and our thoughts, feelings and reactions move around in the OK ZONE



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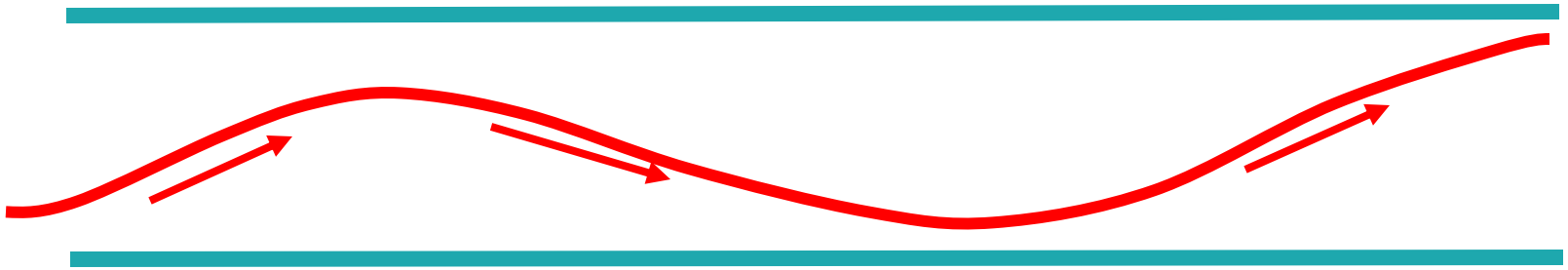
Traumatic/Stressful Event
or
Stressful/Traumatic Reminders



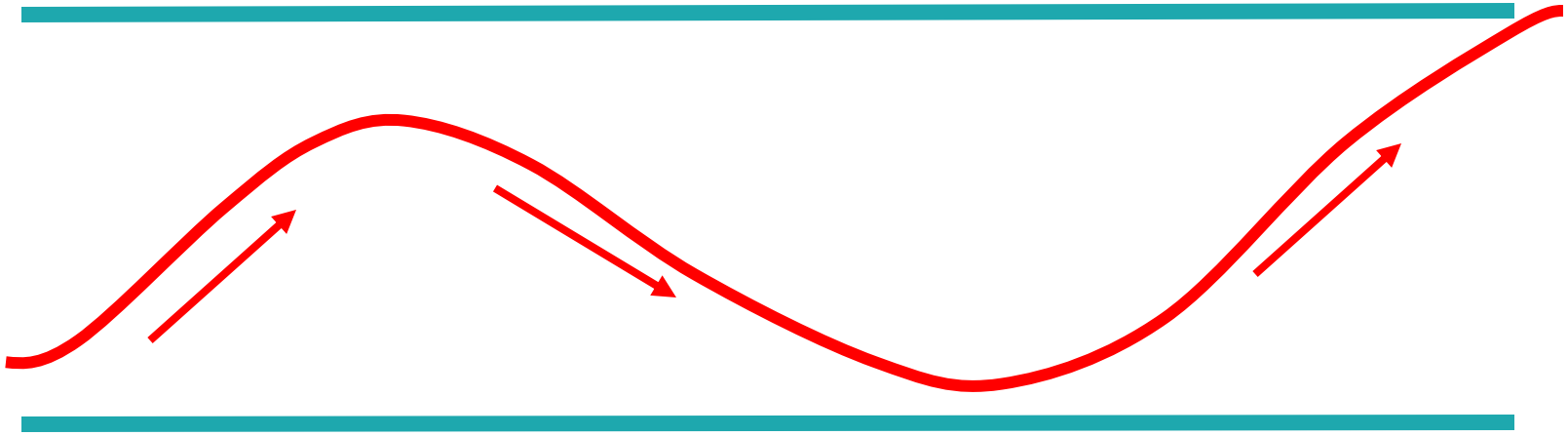
Graphic adapted from an original graphic of Peter Levine/Heller, original slide design by Genie Everett/Adapted by Elaine Miller-Karas

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Narrow Resilient Zone: Small stressors can bump a person into the Low/High Zone



Wider Resilient Zone: Greater capacity to stay within your Resilient Zone even when faced with life stressors

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THE CRM WELLNESS SKILLS



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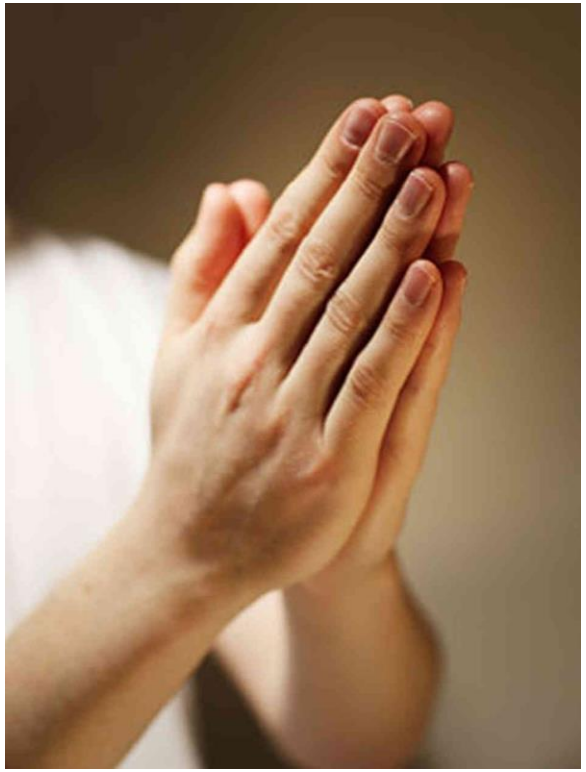
SKILL 1:
TRACKING
(READING SENSATIONS)



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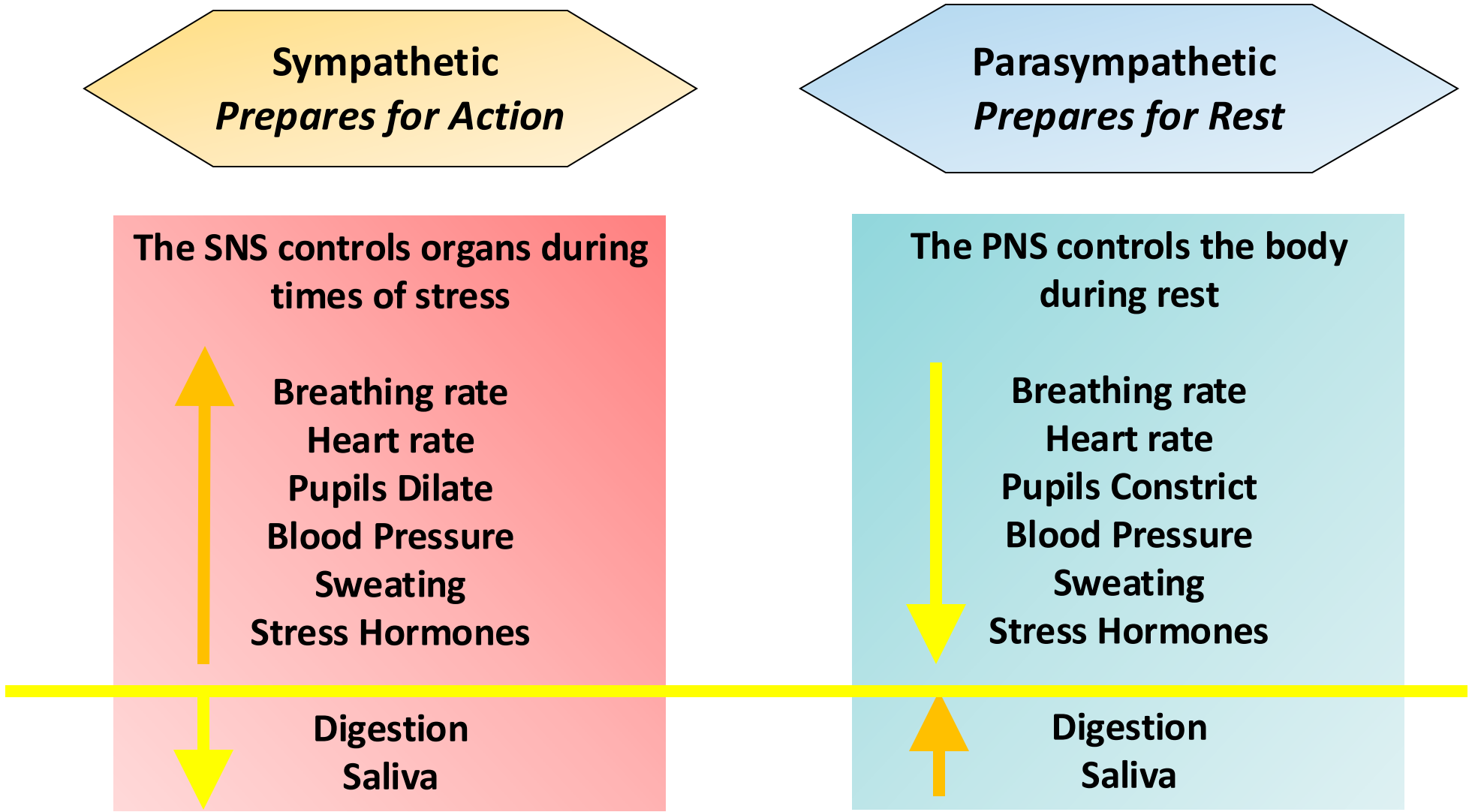
TRACKING AND BODY LITERACY

- **Body literacy**: ability to notice and understand internal body sensations. Similar to learning to read—this skill **develops with practice.**
  - Involves tracking sensations linked to the **autonomic nervous system**
  - Helps us understand how body signals influence **decisions and behavior**
- **Tracking:** Noticing what is happening in the body **right now**
  - Naming sensations as **pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral**
  - Gently sitting with **pleasant or neutral** sensations
    - Using curiosity: *What do I notice inside? Are the sensations pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?*



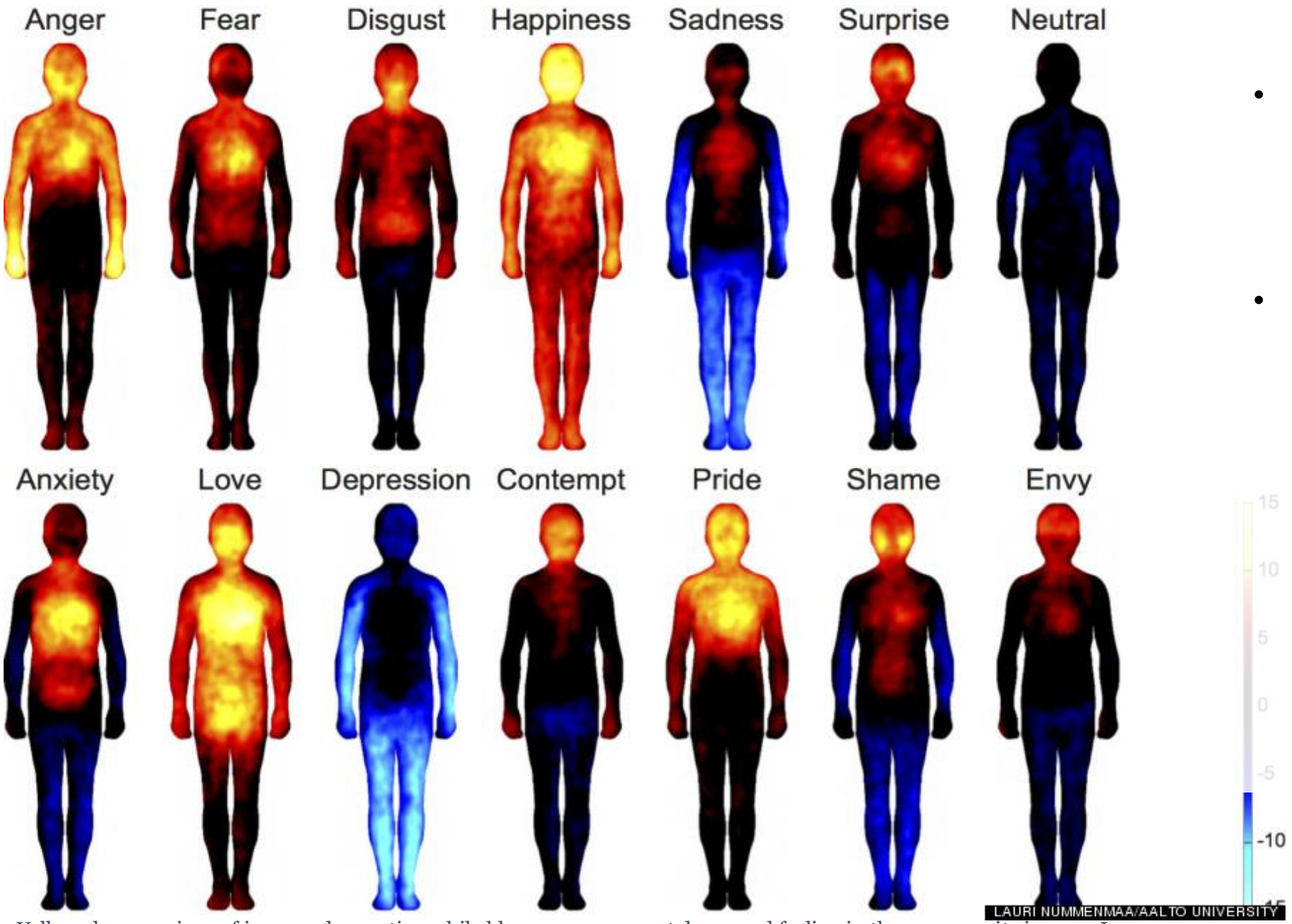
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Tracking the Autonomic Nervous System



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Yellow shows regions of increased sensation while blue areas represent decreased feeling in these composite images. Image created by Lauri Nummenmaa, Enrico Glerean, Riitta Hari, and Jari Hietanen.

- A sensation is a *physical experience* in the body.
- Life experiences, including our thoughts and emotions, have corresponding sensations in the body as shown in this graphic.

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Learning Sensation Words

VIBRATION	SIZE/POSITION	TEMPERATURE	PAIN	MUSCLES
SHAKING TWITCHING TREMBLING FAST/SLOW	SMALL MEDIUM LARGE UP/DOWN CENTER	COLD HOT WARM NEUTRAL	INTENSE MEDIUM MILD THROBBING STABBING	TIGHT LOOSE CALM RIGID

BREATHING	HEART	TASTE	DENSITY	WEIGHT
RAPID DEEP SHALLOW LIGHT	FAST SLOW RHYTHMIC FLUTTERS JITTERY	SPICY SWEET SOUR JUICY BLAND	ROUGH SMOOTH THICK THIN	HEAVY LIGHT FIRM GENTLE

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For some people, even sensing pleasant or neutral sensations can spark unpleasant, even painful sensations.

Learning and working with the CRM skills is a CHOICE. So if learning sensory language is too distressing, always give a person the choice to stop learning the skills.

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SKILL 2: RESOURCING



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Resourcing

- A Resource can be something or someone, real or imagined, internal or external.
- It can be a supportive person, a place, an idea, a favorite sport, an animal, one's family, a game, faith, a movie, a singer, a T.V. show, music, a prayer, or remembering an act of generosity or kindness…
- When the resource and its details are brought into conscious awareness with intention, it can result in an embodied sense of well-being.



Expanding the Sensory Experience of a Resource

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SMELL



SIGHT



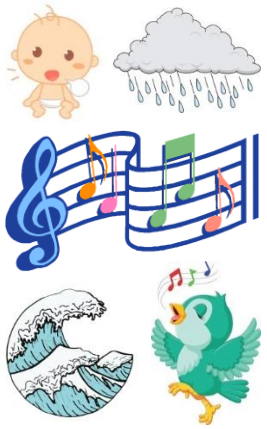
TOUCH



TASTE



SOUND



PLACES



PEOPLE



FRIENDS



TRADITIONS



ADAPTED BY TRI FROM AN ASPIRANET IDEA

***RESOURCES** can be anything that can give an individual a sense of joy, peace, or calm*

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DEVELOPING RESOURCES EXERCISE

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Resourcing Recipe





1. Can you take a moment to think about something that gives you a sense of calm, joy, peace, or comfort? It can be a memory, a person, a place, an animal, faith, an activity, or something about yourself that gives you strength or peace.

2. Describe three things about it. (For example, use your senses; is there a comforting sound or smell?—this is “resource intensification”).

3. As you think about this resource, notice what is happening on the inside.

4. Are the sensations pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? (Are there any changes in breathing, heart rate, or muscle tension?)

5. Stay with the sensations for at least 12-15 seconds if the sensations are pleasant or neutral.

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SKILL 3: GROUNDING



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GROUNDING

The direct contact of the body or part of the body with something that provides support in the present moment. Focusing on the 5 senses.

- Gravitational security is the foundation upon which we build our interpersonal relationships.
- If our relationship to the earth is not safe, then all other relationships do not develop optimally.
- When we are grounded, we have a sense of self in relationship to present time and space.
- We are not worried about the past or the future.
- Can be done in many positions: sitting, standing against a wall, lying down, walking and paying attention to steps, through a part of your body like hands or feet.



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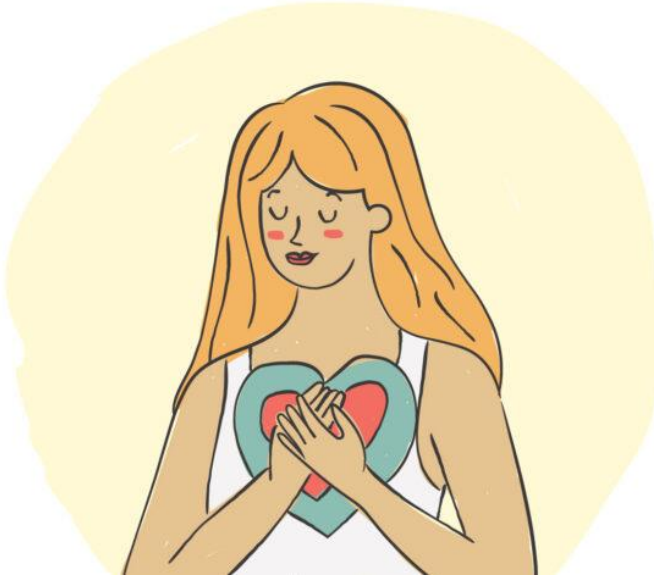
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GROUNDING EXERCISE

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SKILL 4: GESTURING & MOVEMENT



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Gesturing and Movements

- **Gesturing**: Self-soothing body movements that express feelings, communicate safety, and calm the nervous system
- Many gestures happen **automatically**, without conscious awareness
- Movements that express **comfort, joy, strength, or courage** support regulation
- Individuals can **identify and intentionally recall** soothing gestures when stressed
- Curiosity about gestures strengthens **self-awareness and resilience**



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Types of Gestures



Prayer hands or hand over heart



Giving yourself a hug or rubbing your arms.



Joyful movements or dancing



Muscles or superman pose

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SKILL 5:
HELP NOW!
RESET NOW!



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HELP NOW! RESET NOW!

DRINK A GLASS OF WATER, TEA OR JUICE.



LISTEN TO SOUNDS INSIDE OR OUTSIDE.

NOTICE VIBRATIONS.



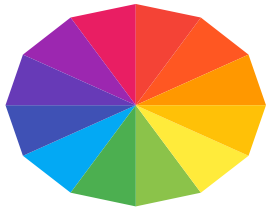
COUNT DOWN FROM 10 OR 20.



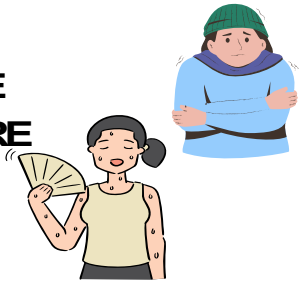
GO FOR A WALK, NOTICING YOUR FEET MAKING CONTACT TO THE GROUND.



NAME SIX OR MORE COLORS IN YOUR SPACE.



NOTICE THE TEMPERATURE INSIDE OR OUTSIDE.



TOUCH SOMETHING INSIDE OR OUTSIDE.





PUSH HANDS OR BACK AGAINST THE WALL.



NOTICE YOUR SURROUNDINGS.



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Conversational Help Now Skills

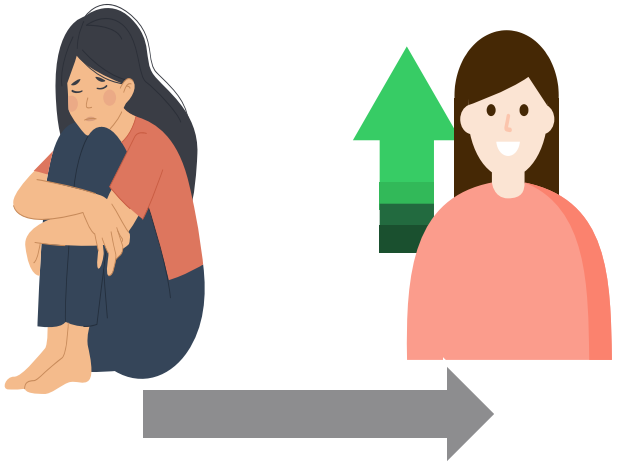
- Would it be helpful to go for a walk together?
- Sometimes it helps to get the energy of anxiousness out by pushing against the wall with our hands or pushing our back against the wall. Do you want to do it with me?
- Can I get you a drink of water?
- Sometimes it can help to look around the room, and see what catches your attention. Is there a color you like for example?
- When I am not feeling like my best self, I have found it helpful to remember a time in my life that was better than this moment.
- If I am really anxious, sometimes it helps me to count down from 20, would you like to try it with me?
- I found this app called iChill and I listen to it when I am down or too anxious. You might want to think about using it when you are stressed or down.

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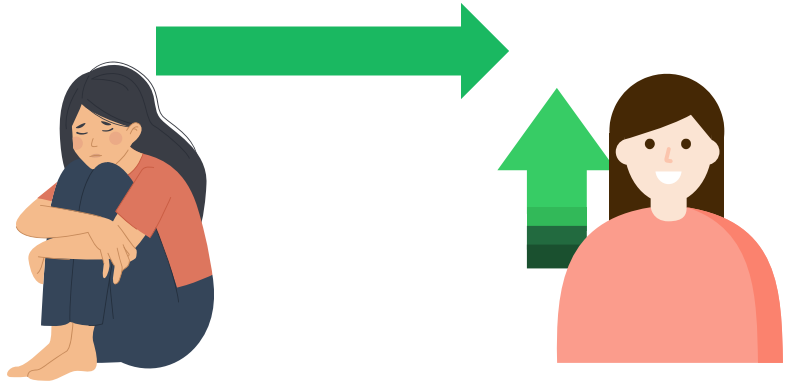
SKILL 6:
SHIFT & STAY



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Shift and Stay

- Shift and Stay uses all the five wellness skills of CRM.
- This 6th skill reminds a person to track and, while reading the nervous system, decide whether they are in the Resilient Zone or have moved into the High or Low Zones.
- A person can Shift and Stay away from unpleasant sensations to ones that are neutral or pleasant.
- The person is encouraged to stay with the pleasant or neutral sensation.



Track sensations: Numb
Feeling: Sad
Low Zone

Stay: Track sensations: Pleasant
Feeling: CALM
Resilient Zone

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Track Sensations
If unpleasant,
Shift to a Skill or
a place inside that feels
pleasant or neutral -



Track sensations - Heat and tension
Feeling-angry

High Zone

Track sensations-Stay with
pleasant or neutral sensations
Feeling: peaceful

Okay Zone

SHIFT & STAY

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Research & Randomized Control Trials

Community Mental Health Journal, (2021)
Size 57, Adults

Intervention: 5-day CRM Pilot Teacher Training
Six months post-training

Results:
Statistically significant decreases in hostility, anxiety, and somatic symptoms.
Increases in symptoms related to being more relaxed, being content, and presenting as friendlier.

Nursing Outlook, (2019) RCT
Size: 77
Nurses

Intervention: 3-Hour CRM Workshop
One year post-training

Results:
Improved Well-Being
Reduced Secondary Traumatic Stress
Reduced Physical Distress

Medical Care, (2021)
Size: 104
Front Line Workers

Intervention: 3 Hour CRM Workshop
One year post-training

Results:
Increased well-being and resilience scores
Decline in secondary traumatic stress scores and somatic symptoms

BMJ Open Quality, (2022)
RCT
Size:56
Health Care Workers

Intervention: One-hour CRM workshop
Three months post-training

Results:
Significant improvement in well-being and secondary traumatic stress scores
Improvement in Teamwork

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"When we bring awareness to the inner wisdom of our bodies, wellbeing can grow, even in times of great suffering. Moments of gratitude can be seen and sensed ."

-Elaine Miller-Karas (2020)



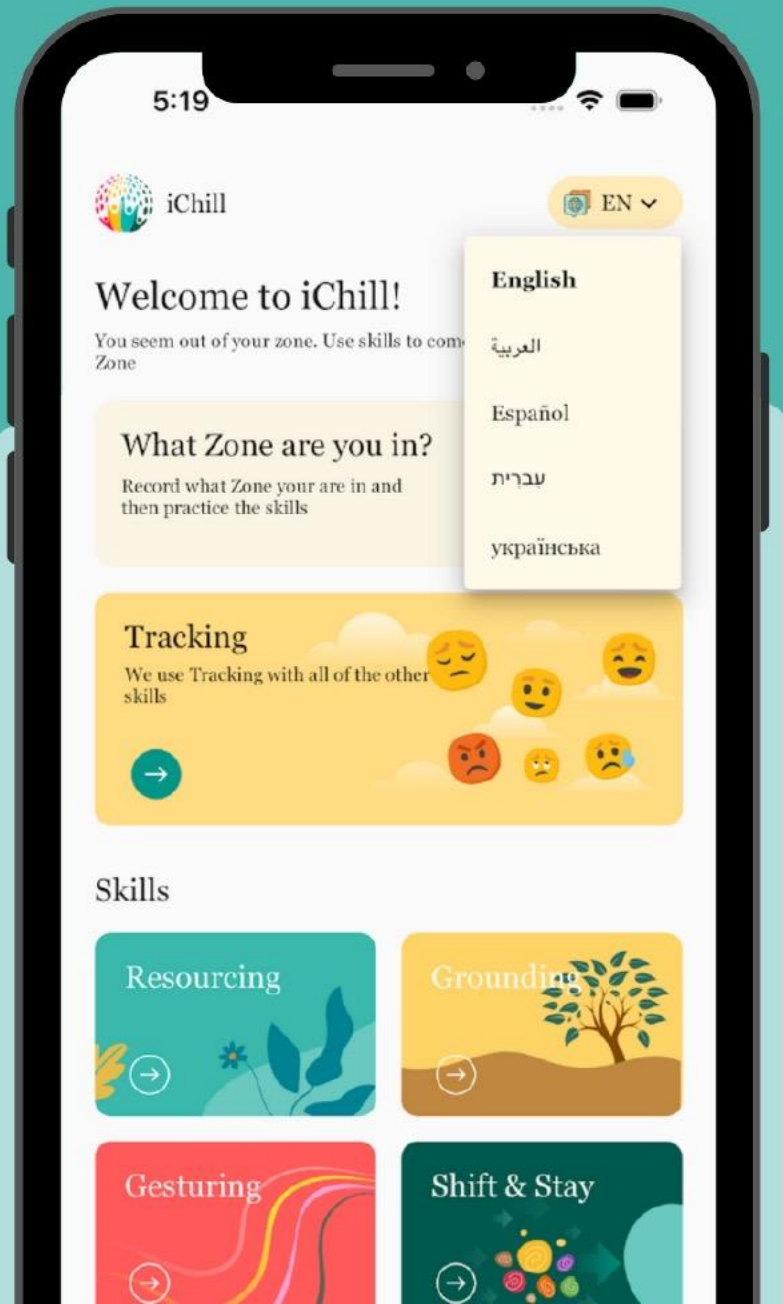
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- Email me at ntobeck@resilientga.org to inquire about training opportunities for your organization or community.





Nikki Tobeck, Regional Program Manager
Resilient Georgia