

# Interrupting the Impact of Trauma on the Workforce

a Resilience Building Workshop

Sponsoring Partners:

**OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE**

An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

**SECONDARY  
TRAUMATIC  
STRESS  
TAKING CARE  
OF YOURSELF  
AND YOUR  
TEAM**

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# Learning Objectives

1. Understand the difference between chronic work stress, secondary traumatic stress (STS), compassion fatigue, and burnout.
2. Understand the term emotional labor.
3. Understand secondary resilience.
4. State the mechanisms at work in the brain post trauma.
5. Understand the individual, team, and organizational symptoms of trauma.
6. Identify strategies to intervene at each level of impact (individual, team, organization).



# Stress and Chronic Stress

## When Stress Helps...

Positive stress produces the release of adrenalin at just the right moment to help us react quickly or concentrate more acutely when needed.

Ex. Situations can include

- Being cut off on the freeway or
- Butterflies when speaking in public or test taking.

**Stress and Trauma can be historic, primary, or secondary!**

## When Stress Hurts...

Repeated, or chronic, stress that piles up. Chronic stress means your body's adrenalin system doesn't return to normal, and you feel it. Any person can become the victim of chronic stress, especially now.

Ex. Symptoms can look like

- Insomnia,
- Anxiety,
- Feeling keyed-up,
- Lack of concentration,
- Feeling depressed,
- Body aches, and even
- High blood pressure.

**Historic Trauma:** When an entire group of people are affected by trauma resulting in structural oppression and behavior changes over generations (ex. Indigenous People, Japanese Americans, African Americans, Holocaust Survivors)

## Layers of Adversity



Adapted by Stan Sonu, MD

Health & Medicine  
POLICE RESEARCHER

# What is “Secondary Traumatic Stress” (STS)\*?

When people work with others who have been hurt, the ‘helpers’ may experience emotional stress or stress as a result of seeing or hearing about the trauma of others.

Other terms you may have seen:

Compassion fatigue

Vicarious trauma

\* we settle on STS to be inclusive of varying definitions as we continue to develop more exact measures each of these experiences.

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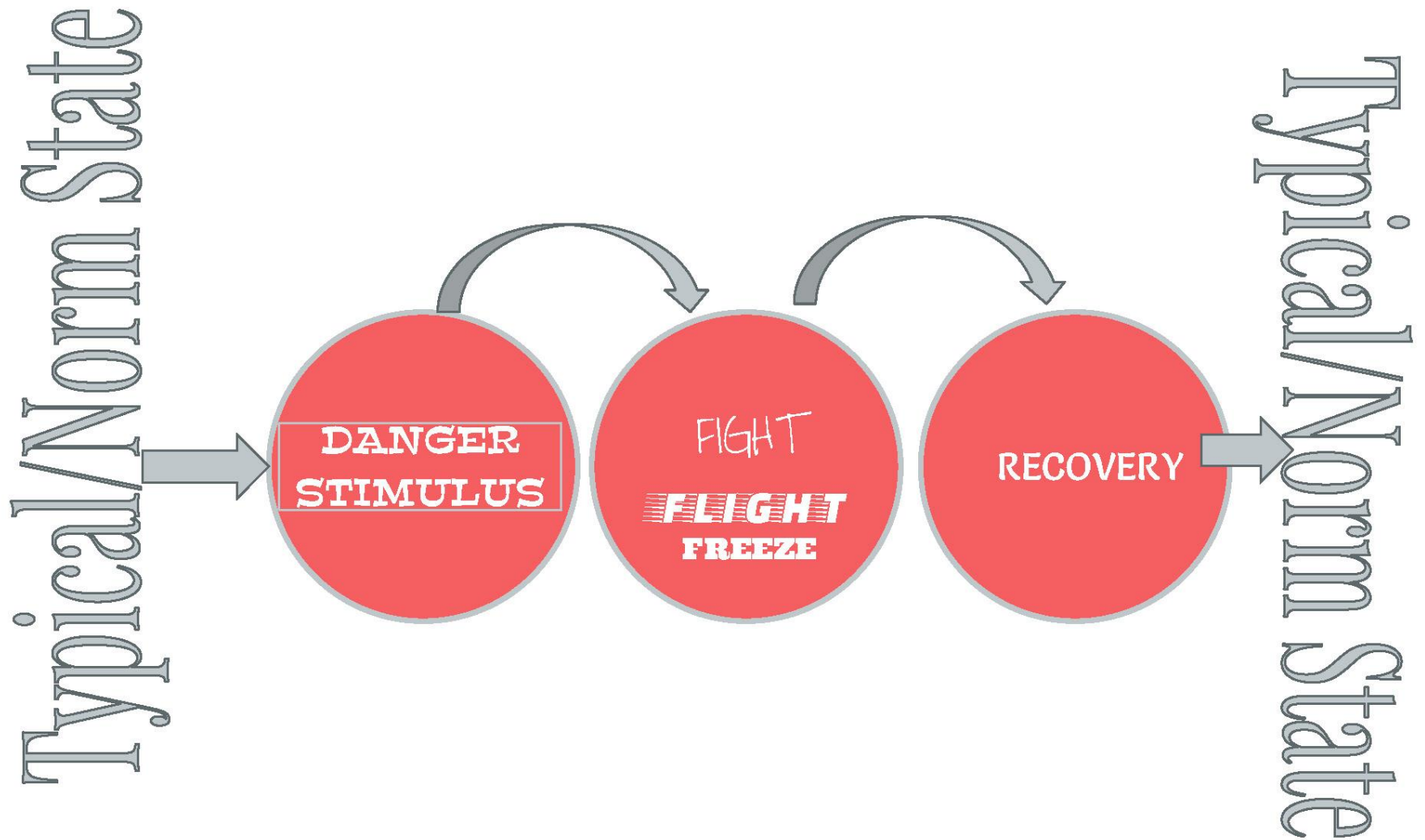


# The Brain and STS

How the Brain Responds to  
Trauma

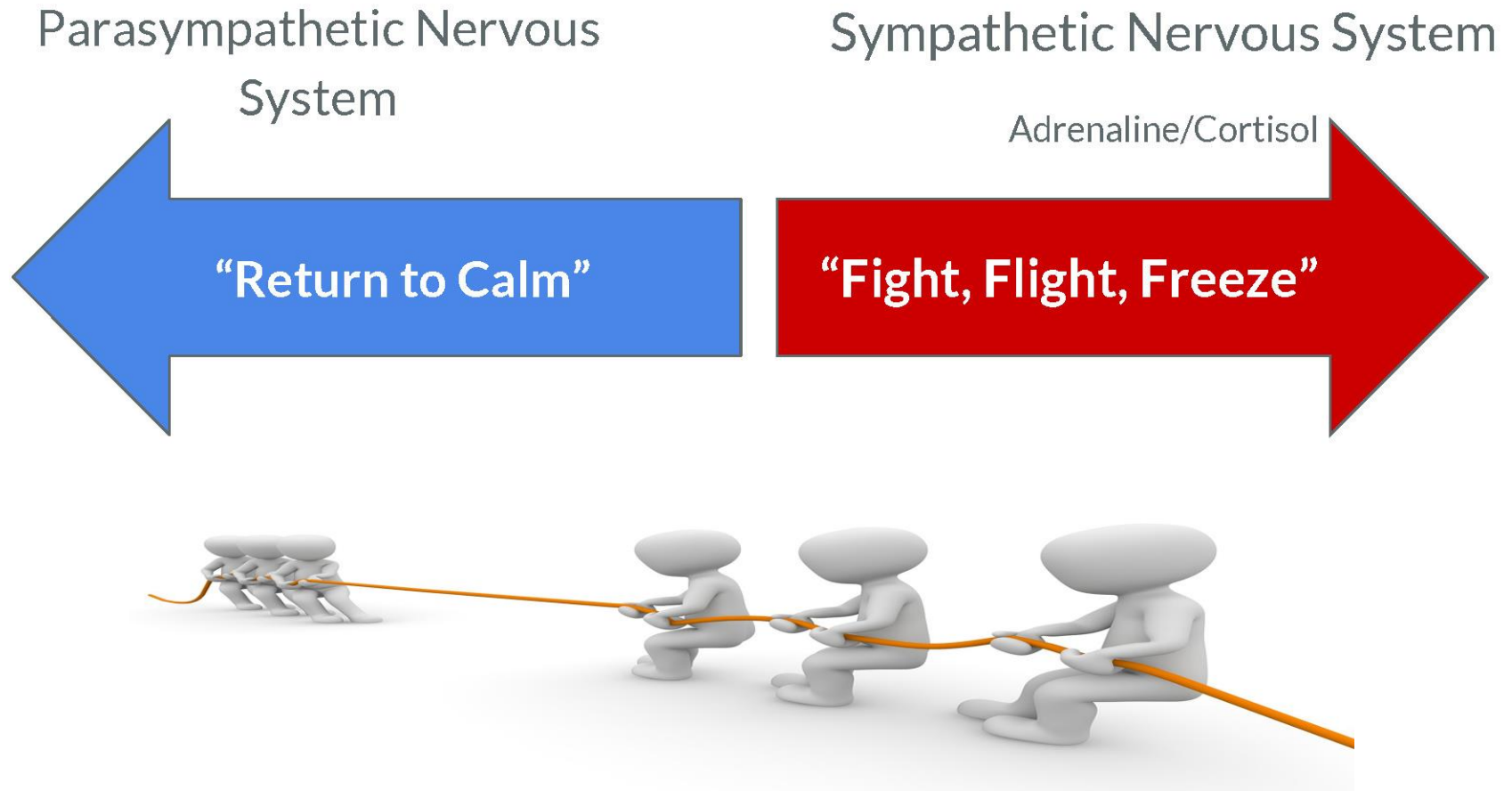
- Fight, Flight, Freeze
- Autonomic Nervous System
- Stress-Brain Loop
- “Allostatic Load”

# From Stress to Relaxation: Fight, Flight, Freeze





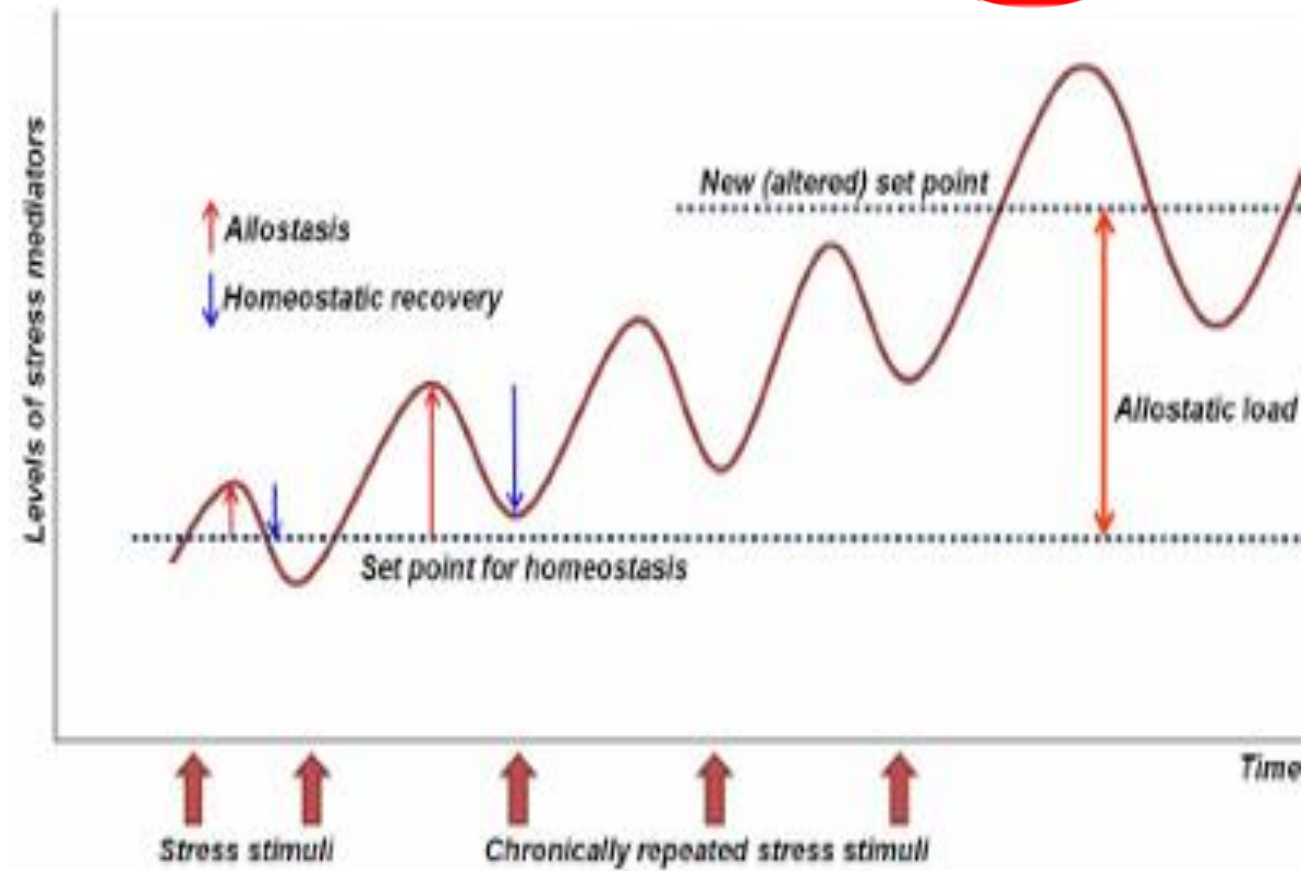
# Autonomic Nervous System: The Tug of War



# Allostatic Load: Why It Matters



- Repeated stress stimuli **decreases** the brain's ability to return to "set point homeostasis"
- Repeated stress **increases ALLOSTATIC LOAD**
- Heightened allostatic load **increases wear and tear on the body** over time



# STS Symptoms

## Individuals



Anxiety



Fear and Worry



Isolation



Sadness



Changes in sleeping and eating patterns



Illness flares



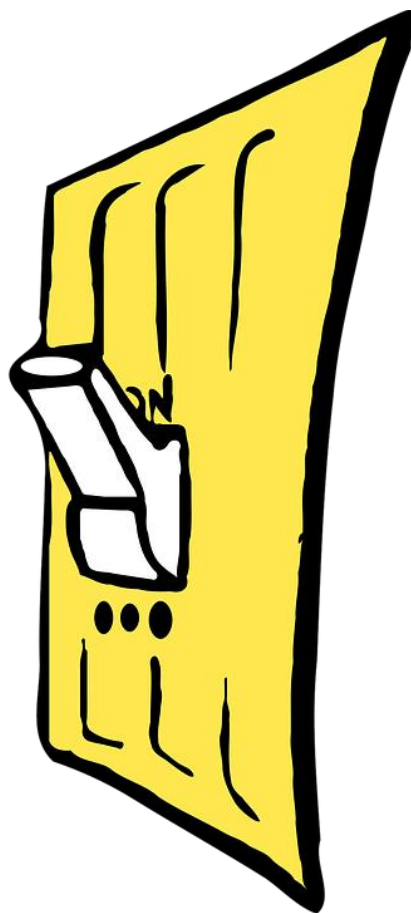
Trouble focusing or intrusive thoughts



Relational conflicts

# TRIGGERING

- The split second decision the amygdala part of your brain makes to keep you safe... even when you may not need it!!!
- A learned behavior
- Can happen at any time unexpectedly



## Signs of emotional dysregulation

- Anger
- **Loss of focus**
- **Increased heart rate**
- Muscle tension
- **Feel overwhelmed, vulnerable**, out of control
- **May become physically** out of control or violent

# STS

## Symptoms

### Teams

- Increased pressure on the team due to worker absenteeism
- Increased work conflicts/**short tempers** flare
- **Withdrawal** from colleagues on the team
- **Avoidance** of stressful or traumatic tasks
- **Stress, negativity, and fear** in workers can spread like poison ivy
- Inability to hear or respond to supervision or support
- **Low morale**

# STS Symptoms

## Organizations

- Constant change in work relationships
- **Diminished inter-team relations**
- Staff break work rules due to **apathy**
- **Lack of vision** for the future
- Lack of flexibility
- **Decrease in work output**
- Negative attitude toward clients
- Decreased progress toward outcome indicators
- **Increased turnover**
- **Increased costs** to agency
- Increased mental health and other costs to clients
- **Lack of respect** for **deadlines**
- Negativity toward management
- Reluctance to change
- Belief that improvement is not possible

# Resilience

Resilience Is Bouncing Back!

Symptoms

Interventions

Strategies

Individuals

Teams

Organizations

# Secondary Resilience Symptoms

- Optimism
  - Hopefulness
  - Gratitude
  - Able to use support around you
  - Understand that this too shall pass (time bound)
  - A sense you can learn from the struggles around you and/or see the positive in those around you.
- Ex: Firefighters/EMTS respond to severe accidents yet see the humanity that those incidents can bring out in others, like Hurricane Katrina.



# Dimensions of Resilience



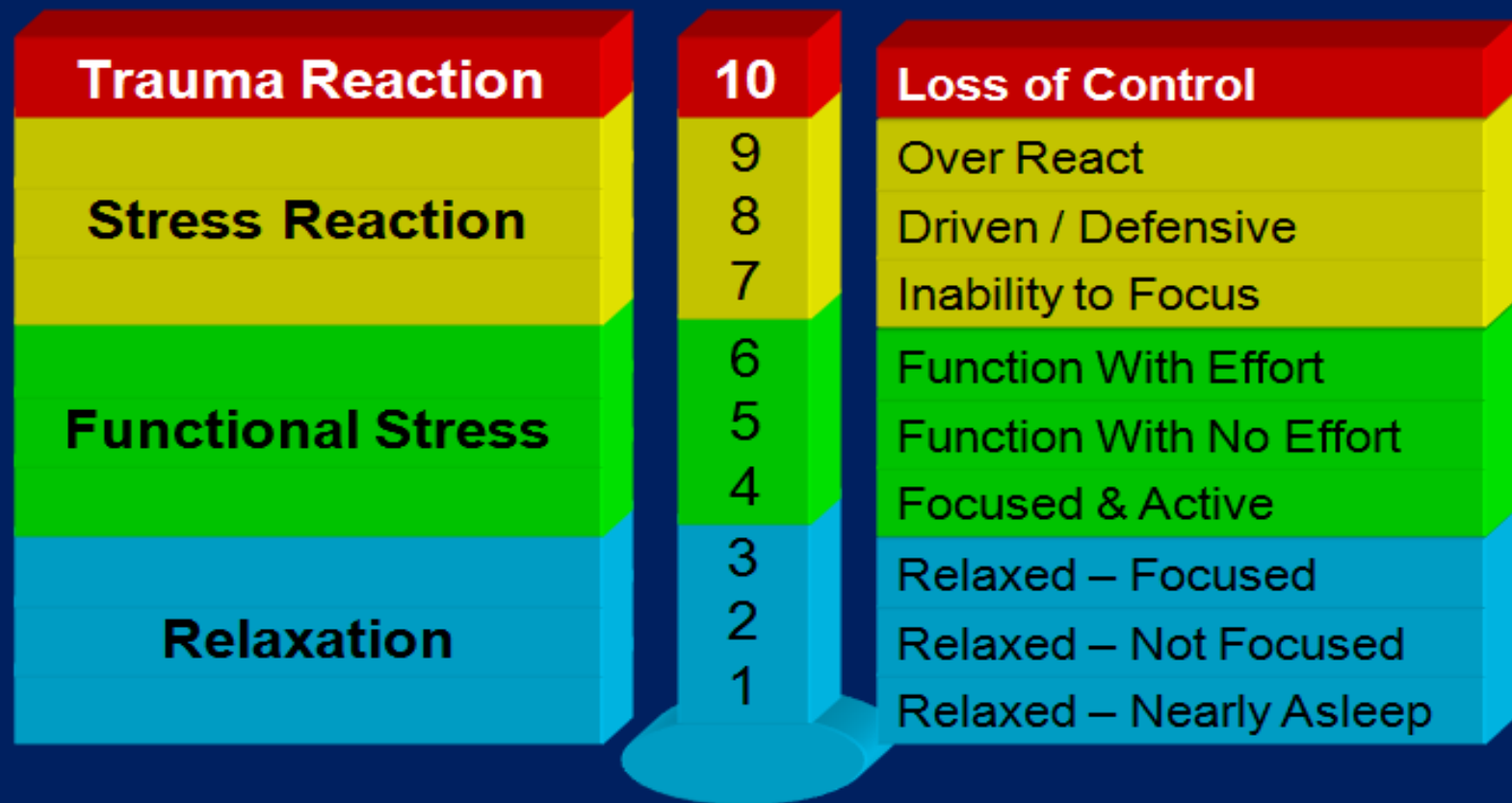
*Southwick & Charney's 10 Essential Resilience Capabilities, (Mark Trezona, 2014)*

# Interventions: A Multidimensional Approach

**TAKE NOTE...**  
**REFLECTION, SELF-  
AWARENESS, OPTIMISM,  
SEEKING AND USING  
SUPPORT ARE THE MOST  
IMPORTANT TOOLS FOR  
RESILIENCY ON THE JOB.**

**TAKING CARE OF ALL  
OF YOU-MIND, BODY,  
AND SOUL-IS  
ESSENTIAL!**

# Stress Thermometer



© Terence T. Gorski & Stephen F. Grinstead

# Individual Interventions: Personal Responsibility

## Physical

- Exercise
- Eat well
- Drink more water
- Get adequate sleep
- Midday walks

## Mental

- Healthy work-life balance including learning to set limits in both worlds
- Mindfulness training
- Be proactive rather than reactive-plan for what you will cope with during the day
- Take time off when needed (mental health day)
- Time management

## Emotional

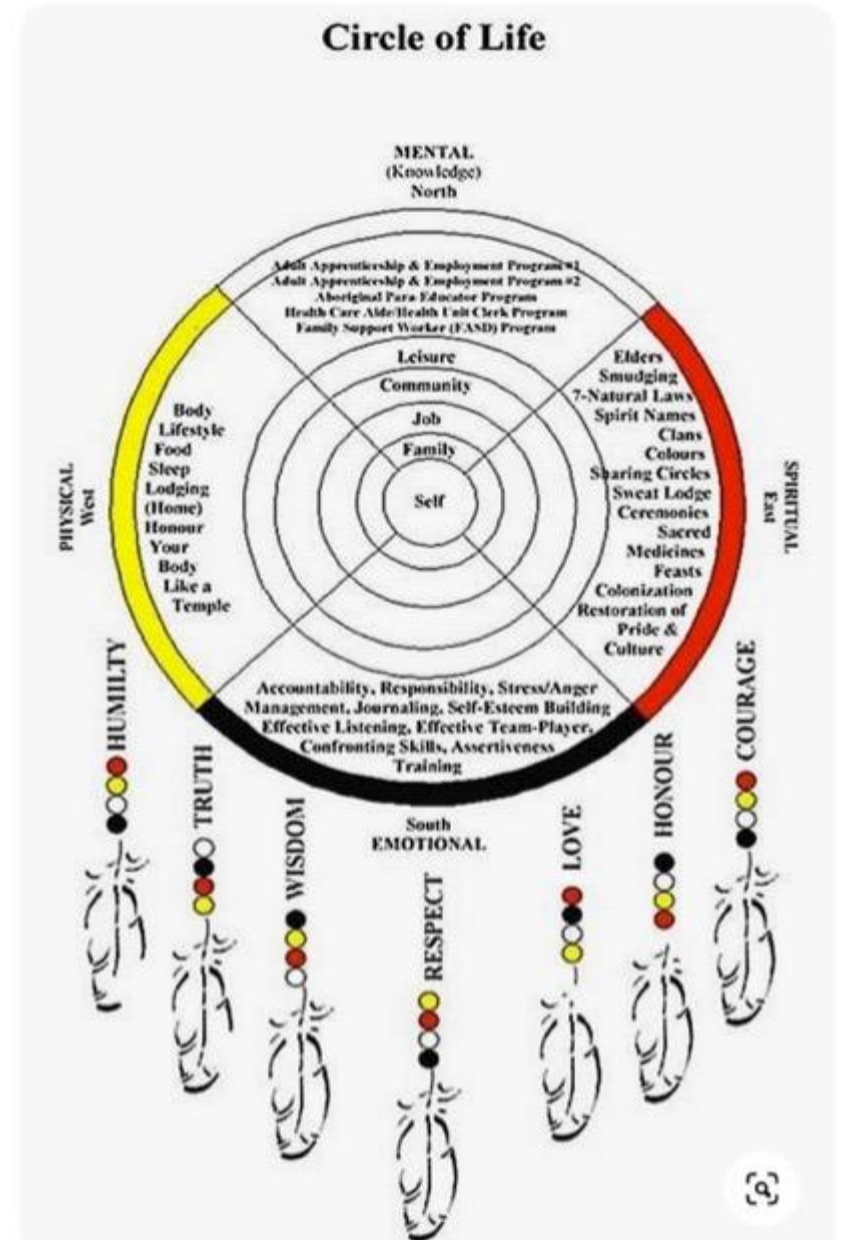
- Learn to reach out to others particularly supervisor and co-workers
- Recognize the signs of STS and take responsibility for your own self care
- Relaxation and guided and imagery
- Vacations
- Spend time with friends/family to recharge

## Spiritual

- Meditate or pray
- Take time for reflection
- Connect to a larger purpose beyond yourself



# Personal Responsibility





# Teach 5 Minute Self Awareness Breaks (Activity)

Take 5 minutes  
periodically to  
notice what is  
going on around  
you. Be self  
aware-feelings,  
thoughts,  
behaviors

**S**top and Pay Attention!

**O**bserve/Feel what is going on inside and  
outside of you

**C**onsciously choose a new way of being  
and doing NOW!

The Resilience Alliance, ACS-NYU  
Children's Trauma Institute, Sept.  
2011.

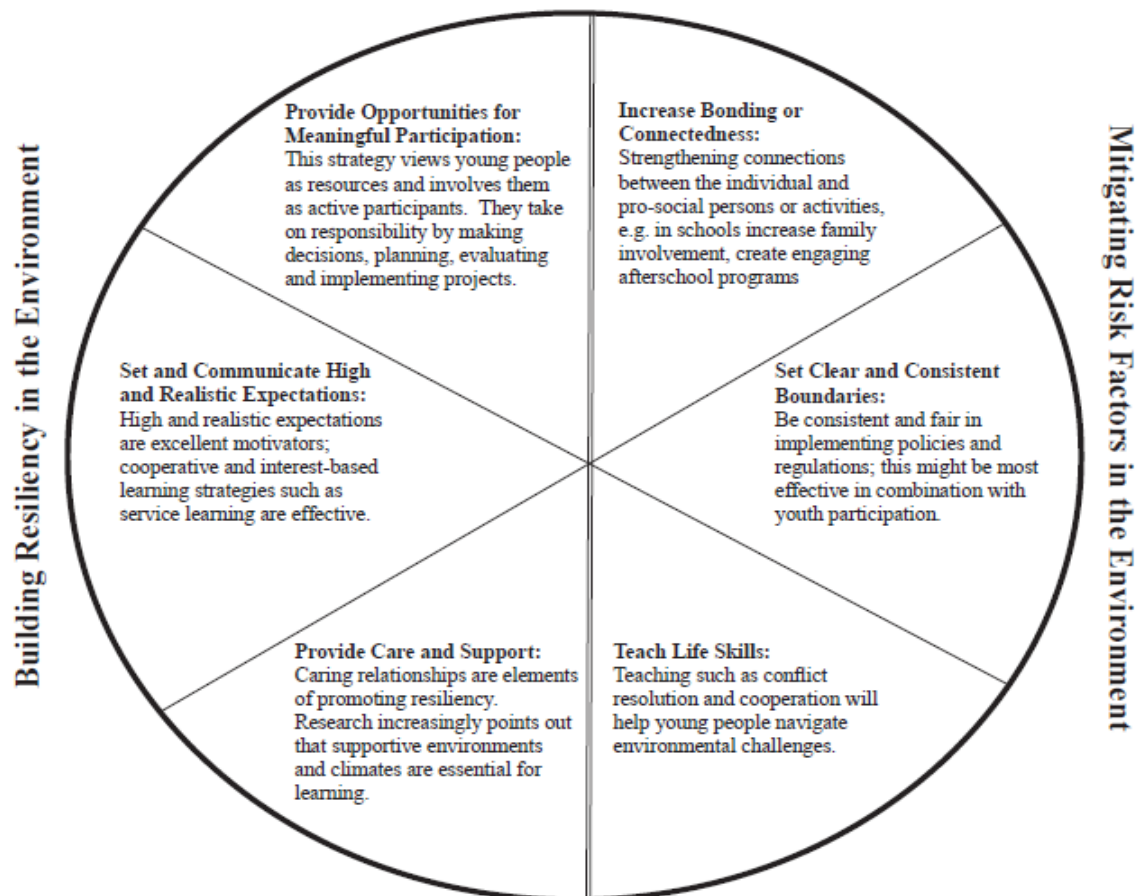


# Supervisory Responsibility (Team)

- Assess workers STS and discuss what you see
- Encourage self care and use of EAP or professional assistance if available
- Flexible scheduling
- Encourage breaks and vacations
- Encourage weekly check-in or self-care sessions with the entire team
- Encourage a team approach to the job
  - Pair workers in difficult situations
  - Don't allow a worker to go it alone
  - Institute the "Self-care Buddy System"
- Clinical/reflective supervision!
  - The number one intervention that helps workers is clinical supervision. The supervisor can help to identify and ameliorate STS in workers during supervision. There MUST be a focus on the clinical/casework aspect of the job.
- Supervisory support helps with STS and retention!
- Supervisors get STS, too!
  - Take care of yourself and discuss with your manager.

- Resiliency is for everyone!

## The Resiliency Wheel



Wheel/Headings Source: Nan Henderson and Mile Milstein. *Resiliency in Schools: Making it Happen for Students and Educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2003.  
Descriptive Text Source: Nan Henderson, et al. *Schoolwide Approaches for Fostering Resiliency*. San Diego, CA: Resiliency in Action, 2000.



# Coping with Stress and Trauma

A special note to Supervisors, Managers, CEOs, Tribal Chairs, etc.

- Provide a physically and emotionally safe work environment for everyone!!
- The most important aspect of coping with any trauma is to receive social support
  - Even with Covid-19 thru virtual means reach out to offer support
- Send out weekly coping tips or self care reminders
- Send a clear message from executive team expressing an esprit de corps, support, and acknowledgement of how difficult many things are right now
- Make sure all supervisors and middle managers understand de-escalation techniques
- Set up sacred safe space listening times or even social times for work teams using the “Vegas” rule
- Supervisors can have team meetings for listening and support specifically directed to what’s going on around you, i.e., racial concerns, Covid-19, etc.

# What Can I Say To My Staff?

## Acknowledge Pain and Trauma

*"I hear your pain and acknowledge that this has been so hard and even traumatic. I see you doing the very best job for the families we serve. If you ever need to talk, I am here. If you feel you need other help, we can help you get it."*

## Empathize

*"I hear your fears about Covid-19 and I see what it can do. We are doing everything we possibly can do to mitigate the spread and to keep you and all of our employees healthy."*



# Organizational Responsibility: Leaders Set The Climate!

- Be **the person you want them to be!**
- Be open and available
- Be supportive
- Be **proactive rather than reactive**
- Be a model
  - Positive emotional labor
  - Open communication
  - Culture of hope, meaning, purpose
  - Use humor and whimsy
  - Model appropriate supervision at each level
- Institute shared governance
- Bottom up-include workers in decision-making
- **Be open to suggestions and to change**
- Always remember to **be sensitive to a climate of trauma** in which workers are and can be again traumatized by any given client interaction.
- Do not contribute to the trauma
- Advocate for mindfulness training
- Get to know everyone and take an interest in their work and their lives (**FORM A SENSE OF COMMUNITY**)



## From idea to practice...

If you could wave a magic wand, what would you put in your resilience self care kit?



# Resilience Review

Take a moment...  
gather your thoughts  
review your notes

- What can I build with or build on from today's workshop?
- What energized, inspired me? Or, soothed/solved a problem for me?
- Where can I make the biggest difference for myself, team, and organization?

# Map It Out: My Resilience Kit



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Journal responses to following prompt:

Of what I heard today...

- ...how can I support my OWN resilience?
- ...how can I enable my team's resilience?
- ...how can I create more safety, support, and resilience in my organization?



# Resources & References

- ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute (2011). Promoting resilience and reducing secondary trauma among child welfare staff. New York, NY. Retrieved from: [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/resilience\\_alliance\\_training\\_manual.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/resilience_alliance_training_manual.pdf).
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# Resilience Builder's Toolkit

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UxXn6QREaeUey2p4KUNqzMRS9kPYYHr5\\_N4GKnX8uB8/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UxXn6QREaeUey2p4KUNqzMRS9kPYYHr5_N4GKnX8uB8/edit?usp=sharing)



# Thank You

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