
Understanding Trauma and Creating Connection

“We never know how our small activities will affect others through the fabric of our connectedness.” - Grace Lee Boggs

— Kestrel Feiner-Homer, MSW, LGSW —
December 9th, 2021

Welcome!

Mindfulness practice

Objectives

- Develop a shared understanding of Trauma
- Understand how Trauma impacts childhood development
- Identify signs that a student is dysregulated
- Think creatively about strategies you can use to help students regulate.

"Trauma in a person, decontextualized
over time, looks like personality.

Trauma in a family, decontextualized
over time, looks like family traits.

Trauma in a people, decontextualized
over time, looks like culture."

RESMAA MENAKEM



How does this quote land
for you?

Please share reflections,
questions and reactions
this in the chat

What is trauma?

“Trauma is when we have encountered an out of control, frightening experience that has disconnected us from all sense of resourcefulness or safety or coping or love”.

(Tara Brach, 2011)

“the experience we have not being able to metabolize experiences that were “too much, too soon, or too fast” for us to process.

(Karina Bell- <https://www.karinebell.com>)

Types of Trauma

- Single Incident (little t and BIG T)
- Complex Trauma
- Historical Trauma/Racialized Trauma
- Vicarious Trauma/Secondary Trauma

Resmaa Menakem video on racialized trauma-

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmENK5Fb_nU&ab_channel=VICENews

Study of children of Holocaust survivors's genetic stress response

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/aug/21/study-of-holocaust-survivors-finds-trauma-passed-on-to-children-s-genes>

Characteristics of Trauma

- Unique to the individual
- Cumulative
- Stage in development
- Response from caregivers

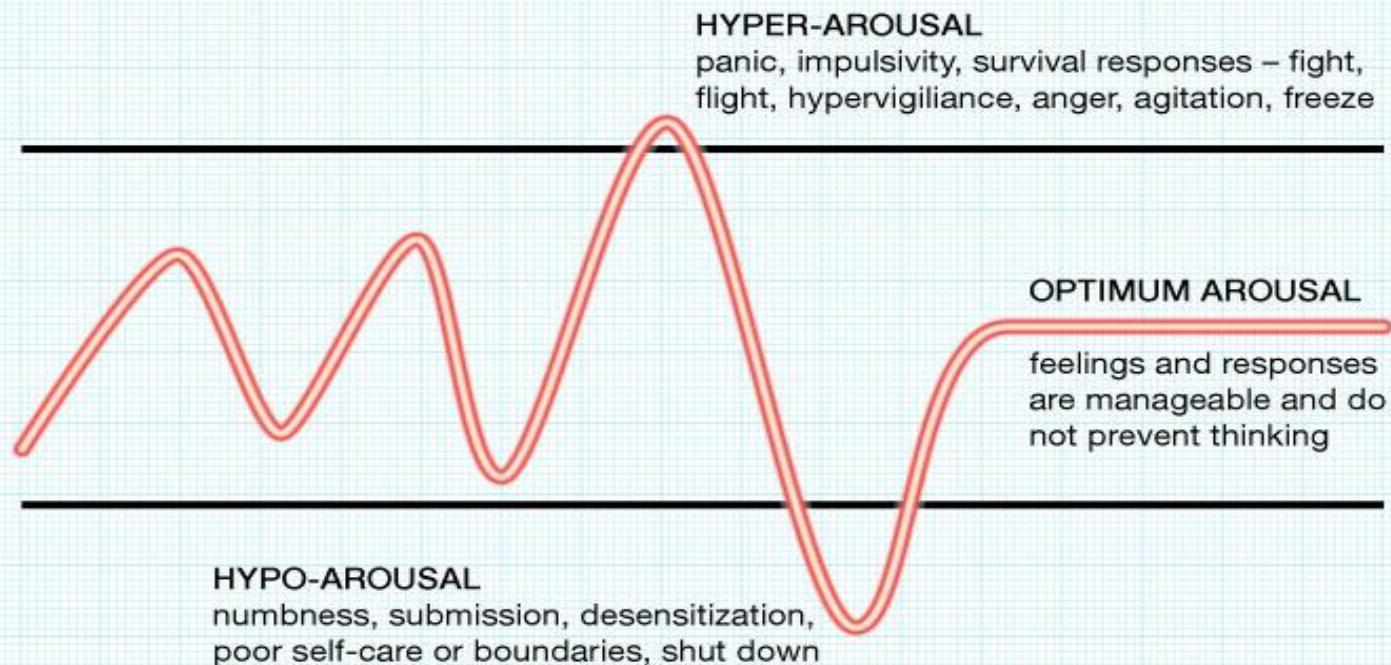
ACEs Study

<https://vimeo.com/139998006>

Reactions?

Please share in the chat

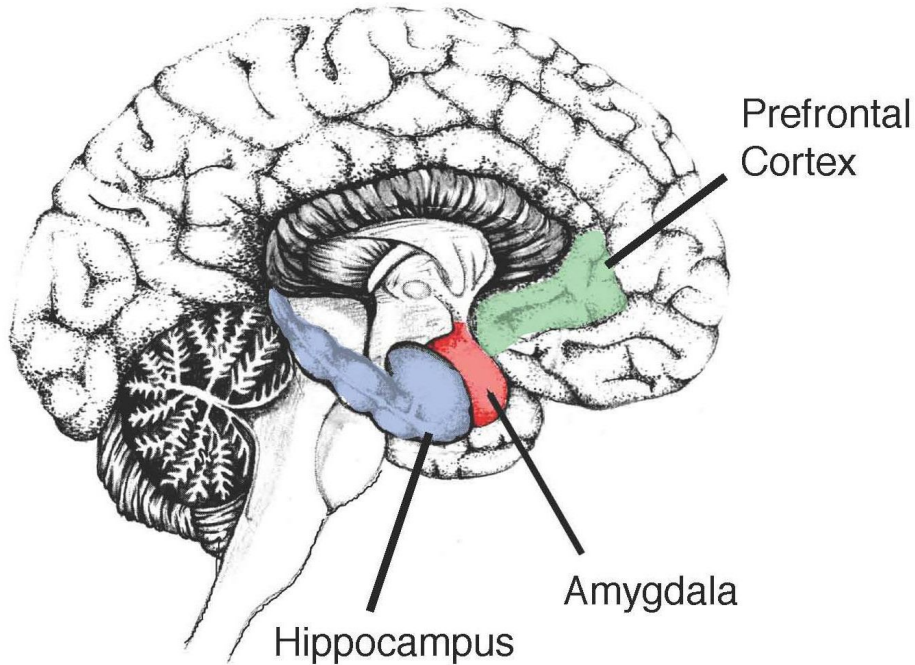
Window of Affective Tolerance



The Story of the Wise Owl and the Guard Dog



Poor Executive Functioning and Difficulty Learning



Amygdala- Assesses for threat. Activates fight, flight or freeze response. Over developed in children who experience high levels of trauma.

Hippocampus- Stores memory and links memory to emotion.

Prefrontal Cortex- Executive functioning: *rational thinking, focused attention, connecting actions to consequences.* ***The brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses.***

Impaired Social Functioning



- Misinterpret social interactions as threatening.
- Mistrust of adults.
- Difficulty taking on perspective of others.
- Social isolation due to lack of self-regulation.
- Power struggles

Behavior Challenges

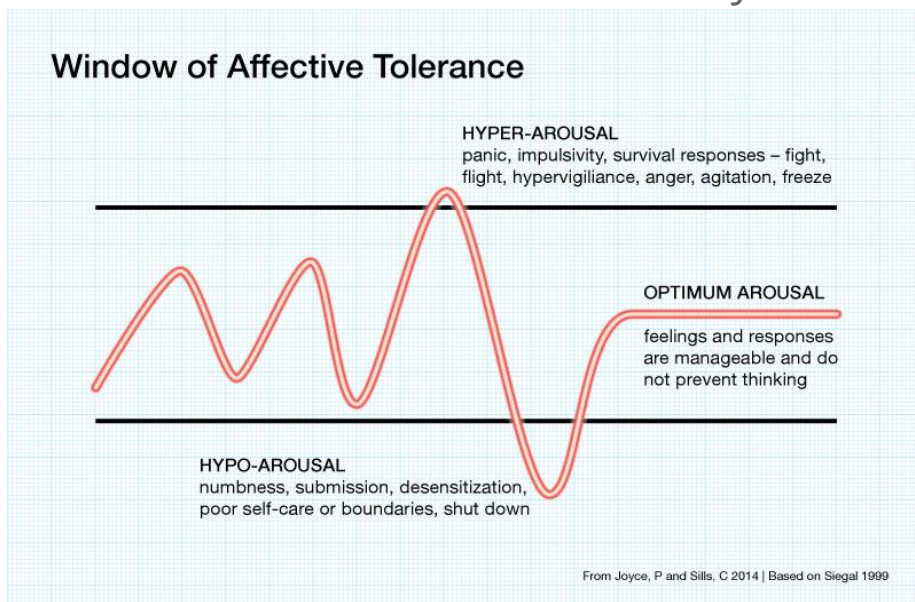


- Hypervigilance
- Externalizing behaviors: impulsivity, reactivity, aggression. (Hyper-arousal)
- Internalizing behaviors: withdrawn, disengaged, flat affect. (Hypo-arousal)
- Poor self-regulation: small stressors cause disproportionately large reactions.
- Reactions last long.
- Weakened response to positive feedback and consequences

Reflection:

Think back to the challenging student interaction you identified in our opening activity. What clues (ie behaviors, body states, tone, emotions) did you see that they were leaving their window of tolerance?

Please share in the chat

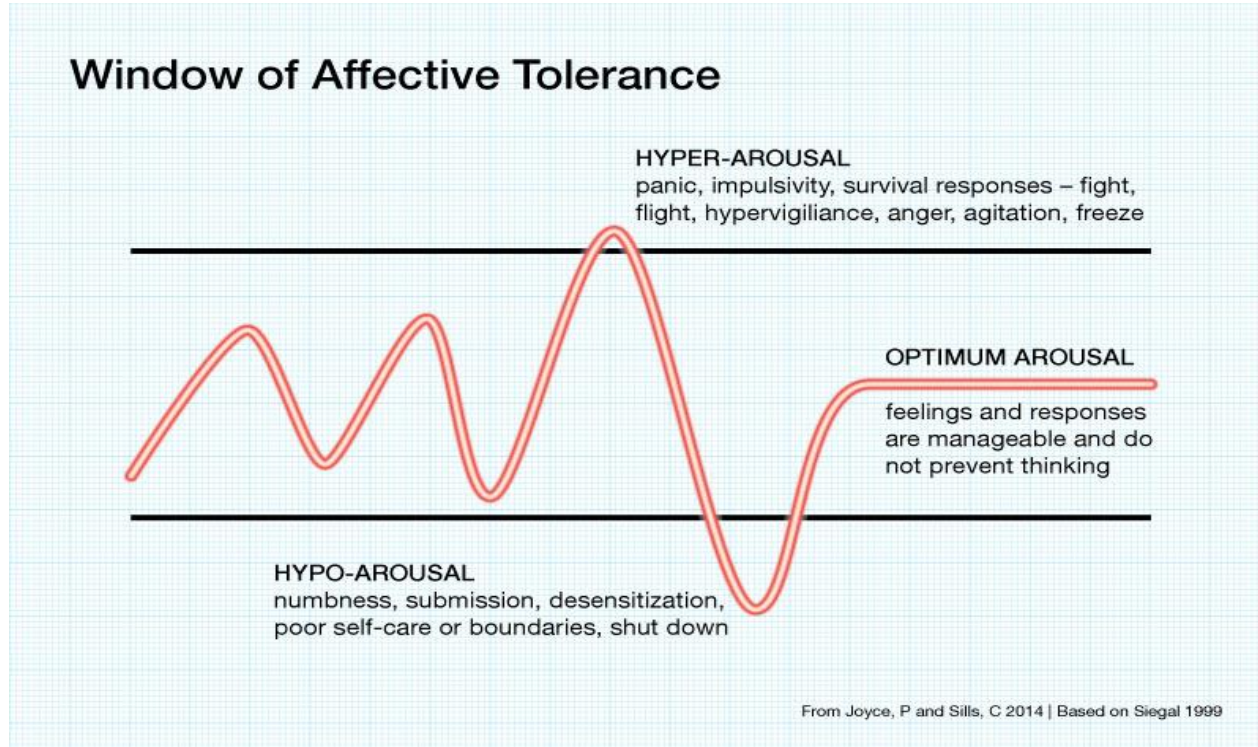


Paradigm Shift: Furious to Curious

What is wrong with you? vs. What happened to you?



Co-Regulation- The magic of relationships



3 C's

- Connect
- Calm
- Correct (or problem-solve)



“Healing is a practice. It’s not a one time thing or an idea. If I get up and do a bunch of exercises and repeat them, over time my muscles will grow stronger. Healing is a practice just like that”

- Marinta Schroedl

TIPS to Connect and Calm

- Get down on their level (or lower). Notice your body language. Is it threatening or is it inviting?
- Reflect back what you are hearing them say *"You don't think it's fair that you were asked to switch groups. Did I get that right?"*
- Give your full attention and LISTEN
- Help them name their emotions- *"you are really angry right now...you have a lot of energy in your body right now"*
- Validate- *"It makes sense you are really angry about ____"*
- Give a hug or an arm around their shoulders (always with permission)
- Distract by talking about something else, asking a question about their interests, going for a walk, asking them to help you with something etc.
- **OTHER IDEAS? Share in the chat!**

Calm Kids Start with Calm Adults: Dealing with our own Trauma and Triggers

- We all have our own histories and experiences that we bring into our work with children.
- We are impacted by caring for and interacting with students experiencing trauma, even if it is not explicit.
- When do we leave the 'Window of Tolerance' and how do we get ourselves back in it?

Thank you!

Please reach out with any questions!

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References

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