



SESSION 1

Understanding Trauma & Adversity

What is trauma?

- A response to adversity, when a person feels deeply powerless or under threat, that encapsulates emotional, physical, existential, spiritual, interpersonal and social impacts.
- While vulnerabilities exist, it's important to recognize that we can all be stressed past our ability to endure.
- Consider impacts of "Big T" Traumas (*easily identifiable, concrete in time: war, assault, car accident*) and "little t traumas" (*less easily identifiable, often developmental, interpersonal, involve boundary violations over time: mentally ill or traumatized parent, abuse*).

Acute Reactions

- Engage: Face, Fight
- Disengage: Freeze, Flight

Adaptations to Trauma (Long-Term Reactions)

- Seeking coherence, safety, proximity.
- Conscious and unconscious.
- Exist on emotional, physical, spiritual, existential, interpersonal, intrapersonal realms.
- Consider: Life cycle, Culture/sociopolitical/historical impacts, loss history, medical history.

Even disordered responses have a protective function and healthy base!

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A Few Symptoms

(a very un-thorough list)

Typical

- Involuntary intrusive memories, replaying leads to desensitization
- Emotional dysregulation
- Some increased awareness of vulnerability, need for safety

Disordered

- Organize life around trauma/avoiding triggers, cannot integrate
- Replay leads to sensitization
- Struggles with arousal, attention, stimulus discrimination
- Starts out physiological, then becomes an intra- and interpersonal process
- Impacts on sense of time, presence
- Change in identity, no longer recognize "self"
- Dissociation between "dealing" parts and "feeling" parts
- Dysregulation leads to hyperarousal (*sympathetic*) and hypoarousal (*parasympathetic*)