



Adopting a Trauma Informed approach: Skills, Strategies and Self-regulation in Social Care Practice

Jennifer McGarr, TU Dublin Tallaght

To begin...

- A little bit about me
- A shift from “what’s wrong with you?” to “what’s happened to you?”
- Behaviour as adaptive
- The unique role of social care work in supporting people with complex trauma or life histories
- Relationships as a pathway to healing



Emotional regulation

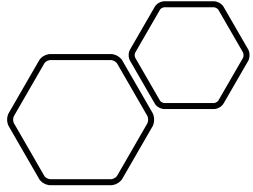
What does it mean to emotionally regulate? How do we do that?

Learning to emotionally regulate

Co-regulation and self-regulation- through these repeated interactions of assisted regulation we develop the skills to regulate ourselves

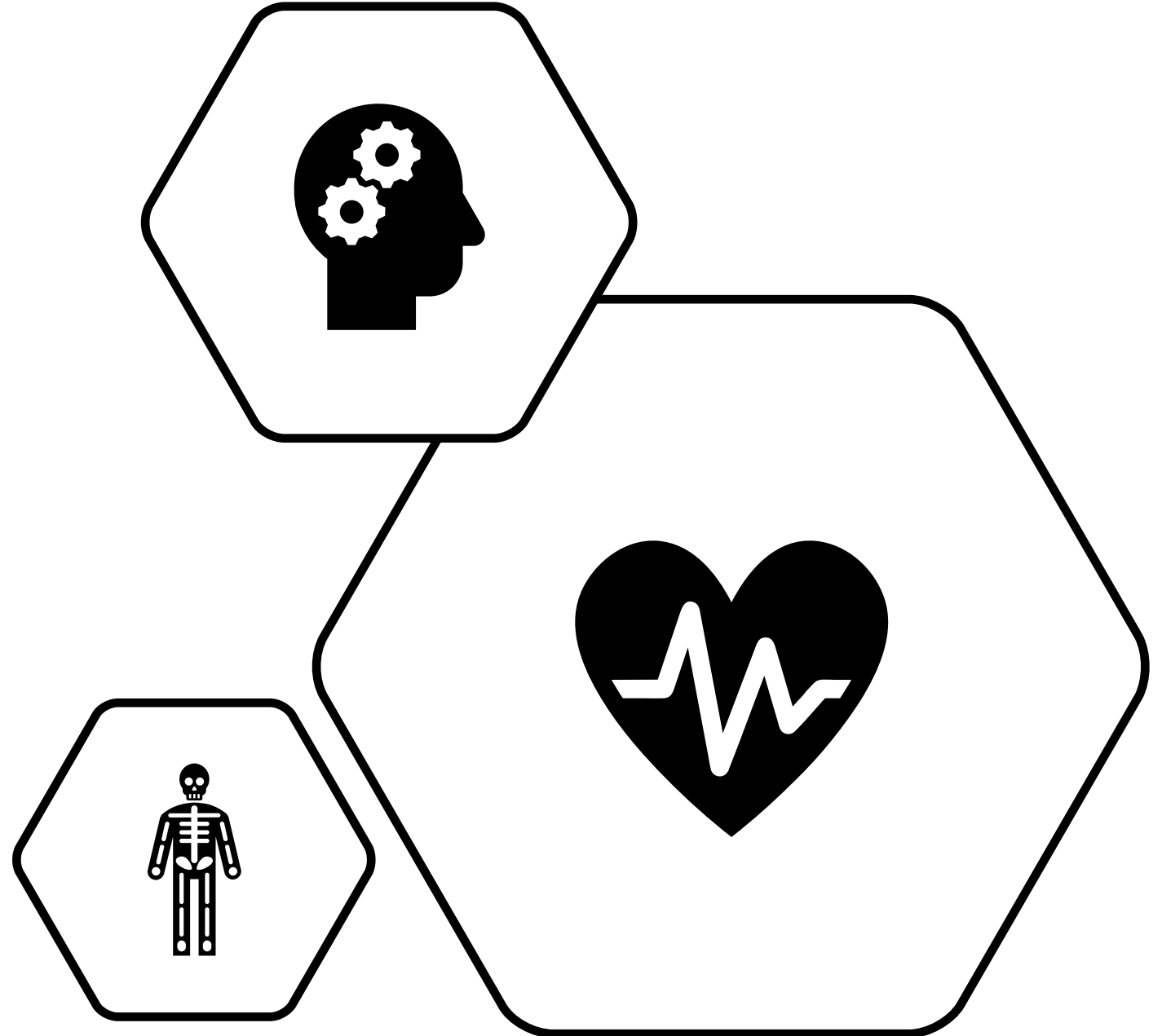
Traumatic stress tends to evoke two emotional extremes- feeling too much or feeling too little

Behaviour that challenges us- What is the function of that behaviour?



Trauma

- Adversity reasonably common across the lifespan
- So what makes an event traumatic?
- Any experience that overwhelms your thoughts, emotions, or body
- State of helplessness
- A unique experience
- Adaptation and survival



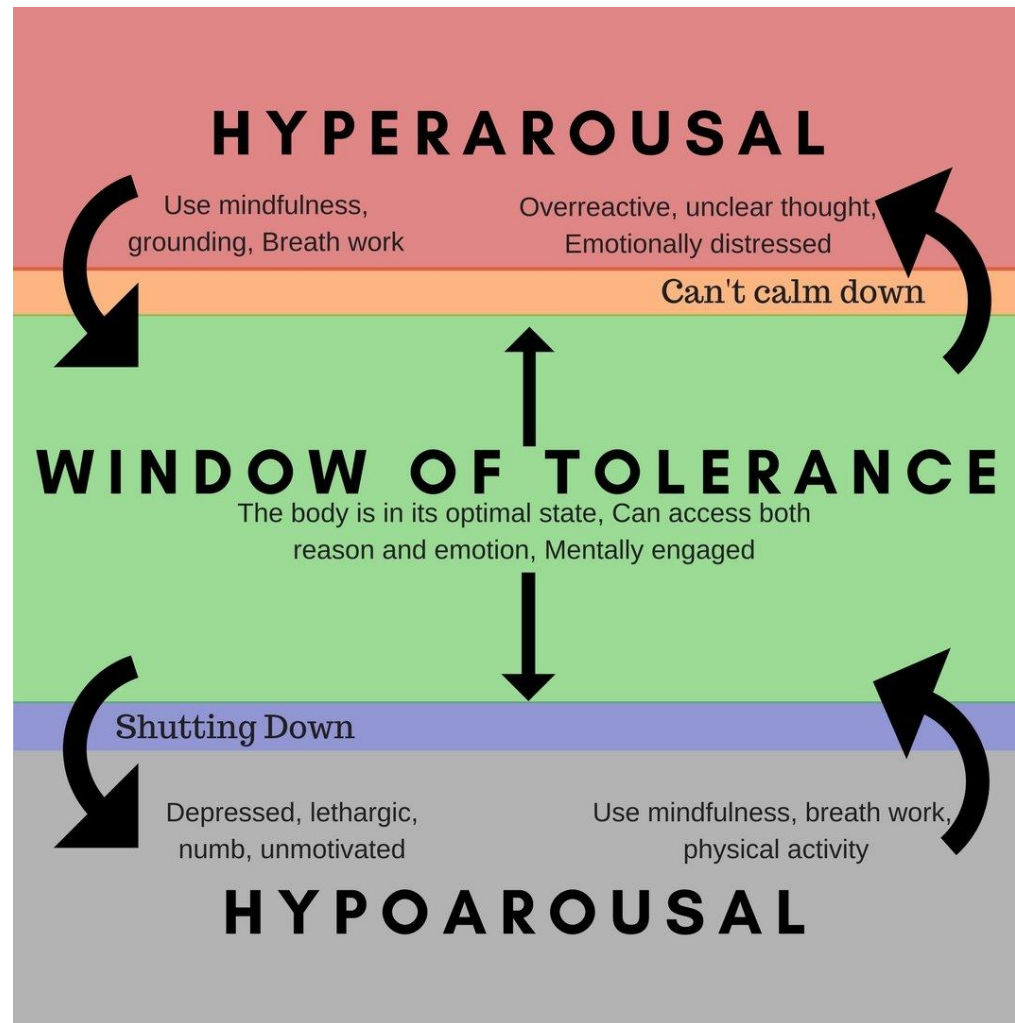
- Neuroception
- Feeling unsafe and helpless-
the body's protective instincts
kick in
- Help you to survive the event-
a complex adaptive response
to an environmental threat
- Flight, Flight, Freeze Response-
now Fawn
- For some, once the actual
threat has passed, the body
continues to produce this
stress response- body does
not return to homeostasis



Survival instincts



Emotional regulation and the **Window of Tolerance** (Dr. Dan Siegel)



- Brain integration-tuned in, balanced, flexible
- Flipping our lid-dysregulation
- Some people spend all their time in this zone-trauma is a felt experience
- What is causing that person to feel unsafe right now?
- Case example

Image from Richardbranfordtherapy.co.uk, 2021

The role of the worker

- How do you self-regulate?
- Co-regulation: Focused attunement can shift us out of disorganized and fearful states
- Visceral feeling of safety
- What are you conveying in your body? In your relationship?
- Case example
- Healing through relationship- rewiring the brain



Grounding techniques: bringing someone back to the 'hear and now'

Immediate grounding techniques

- Focus on where they currently are
- Clenching and unclenching fists
- Doing something rhythmic
- Focus on external environment e.g. name every red item in the room
- Focus on recent and future events e.g. "to do" list for the day
- Counting
- Breathing techniques

Regulating physiology

- Meditation, guided imagery, yoga
- Exercise
- Opportunities to connect with body and breath

Creating safe environments

- Creating a visceral feeling of safety
- Emotional safety-responsive, warm, sensitive to the individual's needs, approachable
- Resisting the busyness- 'being' rather than 'doing'
- Environmental safety- the role the environment plays in containment. Routines, boundaries, expectations that also contribute to people feeling safe
- Interactions focusing only on empathy and compassion do not allow the individual to feel 'held'. Interactions focusing solely on stability, security and routine so not create relationships to help the individual to heal.
- Safe, secure, looked after.
- Managing transitions- small and big

A balancing act

For therapeutic and healing interactions

Relationship

Stability

Compassion

Security

Empathy

Routine



Some resources that may interest you....

Van der Kolk, B. (2015). *The Body Keeps the Score*. USA: Penguin Publishing

Some Ted Talks that may interest you:

'Good relationships are the key to healing trauma' Dr. Karen Treisman

<https://youtu.be/PTsPdMqVwBg>

'ACES Study' Dr. Nadine Burke Harris

<https://youtu.be/nx-tLOtRwyk>

'The voices in my head' Dr. Eleanor Longden'

https://www.ted.com/talks/eleanor_longden_the_voices_in_my_head?language=en

Dr. Dan Siegel also has some short videos on 'naming it to tame it' and 'connect to redirect' that some may find useful.



THANKS FOR LISTENING



QUESTIONS??