



Building Personal and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Resilience for Climate Change

**Introductory Workshop for the American Public Health Association as Part of
Mental Wellness and Psychosocial Resilience Month
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Trauma and Toxic Stress are Epidemic Today

**Personal and Family Trauma
Including ACEs**

**Racism, Bigotry, Xenophobia &
Other Systemic Oppressions**

**Threat of Terrorism
and Hate Crimes**

**Distress of
Living in Poverty**

Workplace Stress



**Medical Costs and
Access to Health Care**

**Wage Stagnation, Lack of Jobs
& Underemployment**

**High Personal and Family
Financial Debt**

**Compassion Fatigue and
Burnout in Helping Professions**

To This Add the Growing Disasters & Toxic Stresses of Climate Change!

**Global Temps. Will Rise by at Least 1.5 C and Likely Much Higher,
Leading to More Frequent and Extreme...**

Historic Storms



Flooding



Heat Waves



Droughts



Sea Level Rise & Acidification



Wildfires



...and many other disasters and stressful events.

The Outcomes Include Rising Traumas & Toxic Stresses

Acute Traumas from Extreme Weather, Floods, Wildfires, and Other Disasters

- Damage or loss of property & valuables
- Loss of business, place of work, jobs
- Personal injury
- Serious injury or death of loved ones
- Physical damage or loss of community or neighborhood
- Injury or death from disaster-triggered crime or violence
- Black Swan & other surprise traumas

Chronic Toxic Stresses From Seeing, Experiencing, or Worrying About...

- Anxiety about our children's future
- Water, food & other resource shortages
- Economic disruptions and job losses
- New illnesses and diseases
- Threat of injury from crime or violence
- Family disruption, forced migration
- Disruption of social support networks
- Loss of sense of place and culture
- Many other persistent toxic stresses

As temps rise

the impacts will not just be one time events followed by long calm periods...

It seems likely they will often be ongoing, synergistic, and cumulative.



Without Sufficient Knowledge, Skills, and Community Support People Can...

Harm themselves

Harm others

Harm the natural environment

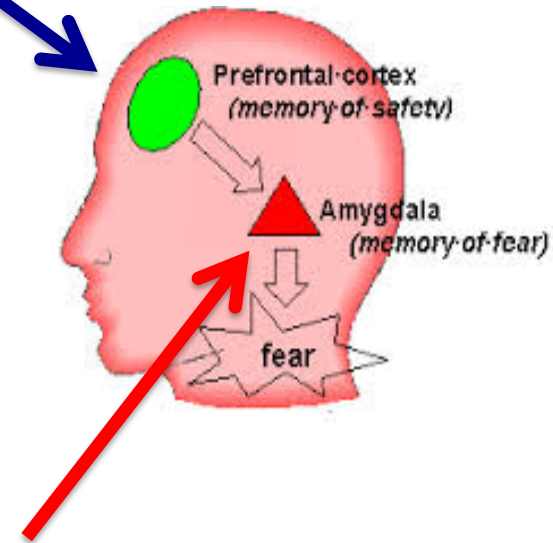


Why Are These Reactions Seen In Every Culture and Society?

A Simplistic Description of the Psychobiology of Trauma and Toxic Stress

Prefrontal-Cortex: The "Executive Center"

- Can regulate, but not control, the Fear & Anxiety Center.
- Chooses between responding with cognition or reacting with emotions and can release or delay discharge of hyperarousal.



Amygdala: The "Fear and Anxiety Center"

- Fear-based reaction occurs automatically when we sense a threat and releases neurochemicals into body producing hyperarousal to prepare us to fight, flee, freeze.
- Works like smoke detector—a false alarm is better than mistake— but can lead to dysregulation.

The Personal and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Impacts of Trauma & Toxic Stress

Reaction From Cortisol & Adrenaline

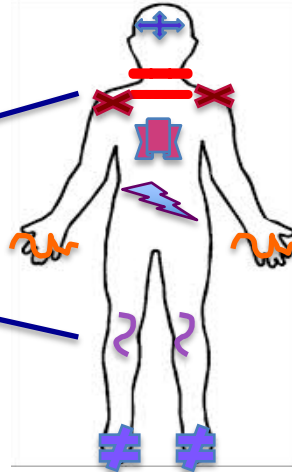
• Physical Reaction:

Blood pressure, pulse rate, difficult breathing, cold sweats, muscle tension, head and stomach aches, sleep disorders

• Mental Reaction:

Mind racing, excessive worry, tension, fear, anxiety

Trauma and Toxic Stress



Trauma-Organized Communities and Societies

- 'Us vs Them' fear, hatred, extremism
- Racism and systemic oppressions
- Despair, loneliness, meaninglessness
- De-individualization
- High crime. and family and interpersonal violence
- Disregard for ecological impacts
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing

If overwhelming and/or persistent



Self-Destructive Coping

- Dissociation, denial, reenactment
- Legal & illegal substance abuse
- Food, alcohol, tobacco abuse
- Overworking, hyper-vigilance
- Avoidance or danger seeking
- Mindless consumption and other ecological impacts
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing

If it
continues



Personal Breakdown

- Physical health problems (cancers, heart disease)
- Psycho-emotion problems
- Spiritual problems (loss of hope)
- Cognitive problems
- Behavioral problems (aggression/violence/withdrawal)
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing

If many people
experience it



Trauma-Organized Groups & Organizations

- Inter-group conflict
- Short-term, quick-fix thinking
- Groupthink
- Rigid rules and regulations
- Dissociation, denial, reenactment
- Oblivious to ecological impacts
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing



If many individuals and
groups experience it

Most public health, mental health, disaster preparedness, community resilience, and climate programs ignore these issues!



The Adverse Mental Health
and Psycho-Social-Spiritual
Impacts of Climate Change

Left unaddressed they will undermine the safety, health, and wellbeing of individuals, families, organizations, and communities...

And

Because fearful people often retreat into a self-protective survival mode they also threaten our ability to reduce warming to manageable levels!

Mental health, psycho-social-spiritual, & humanitarian crises are often **Closely Connected**

(UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee—IASC 2007)

The acute traumas & toxic stresses produced by climate change create a wide range of interlinked problems for:



The Adverse Mental Health
and Psycho-Social-Spiritual
Impacts of Climate Change

- Individuals
- Families
- Informal groups and formal organizations
- Neighborhoods and communities
- Entire societies

...because they can erode critical personal and social protective systems, amplify pre-existing mental health, social justice, & inequality problems, and generate new surprising psycho-social-spiritual maladies.

A Whole New Way of Thinking is Needed To Respond to a 1.5C or More Temp Rise!



The Adverse Mental Health
and Psycho-Social-Spiritual
Impacts of Climate Change

A Whole New Way of Thinking is Needed to Respond to 1.5C + Rise

As Temps Rise To 1.5C or Much Higher...

Disaster mental health & resilience programs—while vital—will be

Increasingly overwhelmed (most are already fragile)

and

Inadequate because most are short term, only seek to stabilize people, and do not help people deal with chronic toxic stresses.



The Adverse Mental Health
and Psycho-Social-Spiritual
Impacts of Climate Change

A Whole New Way Of Thinking Is Needed To Respond to 1.5 C+ Rise

Most concepts of “vulnerability” will be inadequate because:

- Every person or group is at risk, and yet
- Not everyone in any group will develop problems



The Adverse Mental Health
and Psycho-Social-Spiritual
Impacts of Climate Change

In fact, many so-called “vulnerable” populations will be more psychologically and socially resilient than others.

A Whole New Way of Thinking Is Needed to Respond to a 1.5 C+ Rise

Traditional concepts of “Resilience” will be inadequate because...

it will be impossible to “bounce back” to pre-crisis conditions....

and many people *don't want this!*



The Adverse Mental Health
and Psycho-Social-Spiritual
Impacts of to Climate Change

Traumatized and stressed people want to increase their sense of wellbeing substantially above previous levels!

A Whole New Way of Thinking Is Needed to Respond to a 1.5 C+ Rise

Similarly, “bouncing back” to pre-existing socio-economic patterns is not desirable...

due to high material resource & energy use and GHG emissions.



The Adverse Mental Health
and Psycho-Social-Spiritual
Impacts of to Climate Change

Most people want to experience a sense of wellbeing
without harming the climate and biosphere.

A Whole New Way of Thinking is Needed to Respond to a 1.5 C+ Rise

Resilience vs. Preparedness



**Traditional Disaster
Preparedness Programs,
While Important,
Will Not Be Sufficient**

Prevention Is The Only Solution!

And It Works!

Preventative Personal and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Resilience Building Initiatives
Are Urgently Needed in Every Community to Enhance the Capacity To:

Enhance the capacity of to

- ❖ Constructively respond rather than automatically react to traumas and toxic stresses with fear-based fight, flight or freeze actions when they are not needed,
- and
- ❖ Use adversities of all types as transformational catalysts to learn, grow, and increase personal, social, and ecological wellbeing (post-traumatic growth).



Prevention is Everyone's Job!

- » Public health programs
- » Health care organizations
- » Educational systems
- » Faith-based organizations
- » Mental health and other social service providers
- » Senior programs
- » Racial and social justice and equity groups
- » Environmental and climate groups
- » Community planning organizations
- » Disaster planning and management
- » Police and security officers
- » Justice system
- » All types of public agencies
- » Private sector
- » Civic leaders
- » Elected officials
- » Many other respected community leaders



Prevention Requires Expanded Frames

- **Focusing on the traumas and toxic stresses of climate change is relatively new for the public health community.** However, it is consistent with and advances traditional public health focuses on health, wellness, and preparedness.
- **This is also new for climate mitigation and adaptation programs.** However, human resilience building activities can be incorporated into climate programs, will help staff and activists, and is essential for success.

Three Pillars of Community-Level Personal and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Resilience

Trauma-Informed and Skilled Citizenry

- Widespread knowledge of the psychobiology of trauma and toxic stress.
- Every adult and youth has opportunity to learn and continually practice Presencing skills.
- Every adult and youth has opportunity to learn and continually practice Purposing skills.



Robust Human Relationships

- Widespread and robust bonding, bridging, and linking social support networks.
- Social narratives from respected leaders encouraging safe, equitable, just, & healthy behaviors.
- Strong links and communications among diverse organizations in the community.

Supportive Organizations and Communities

- NGO, private, public, and civic leaders know how to shift from trauma-organized to human resilience-enhancing enterprises.
- Easy access to physical and mental health and emergency preparedness services.
- Sufficient job & financial opportunities, and healthy safe public spaces for interaction.

“Transformational Resilience” Using the *Resilient Growth*[™] Model

Framed Around The Knowledge That Humans Are



Pushed by drives

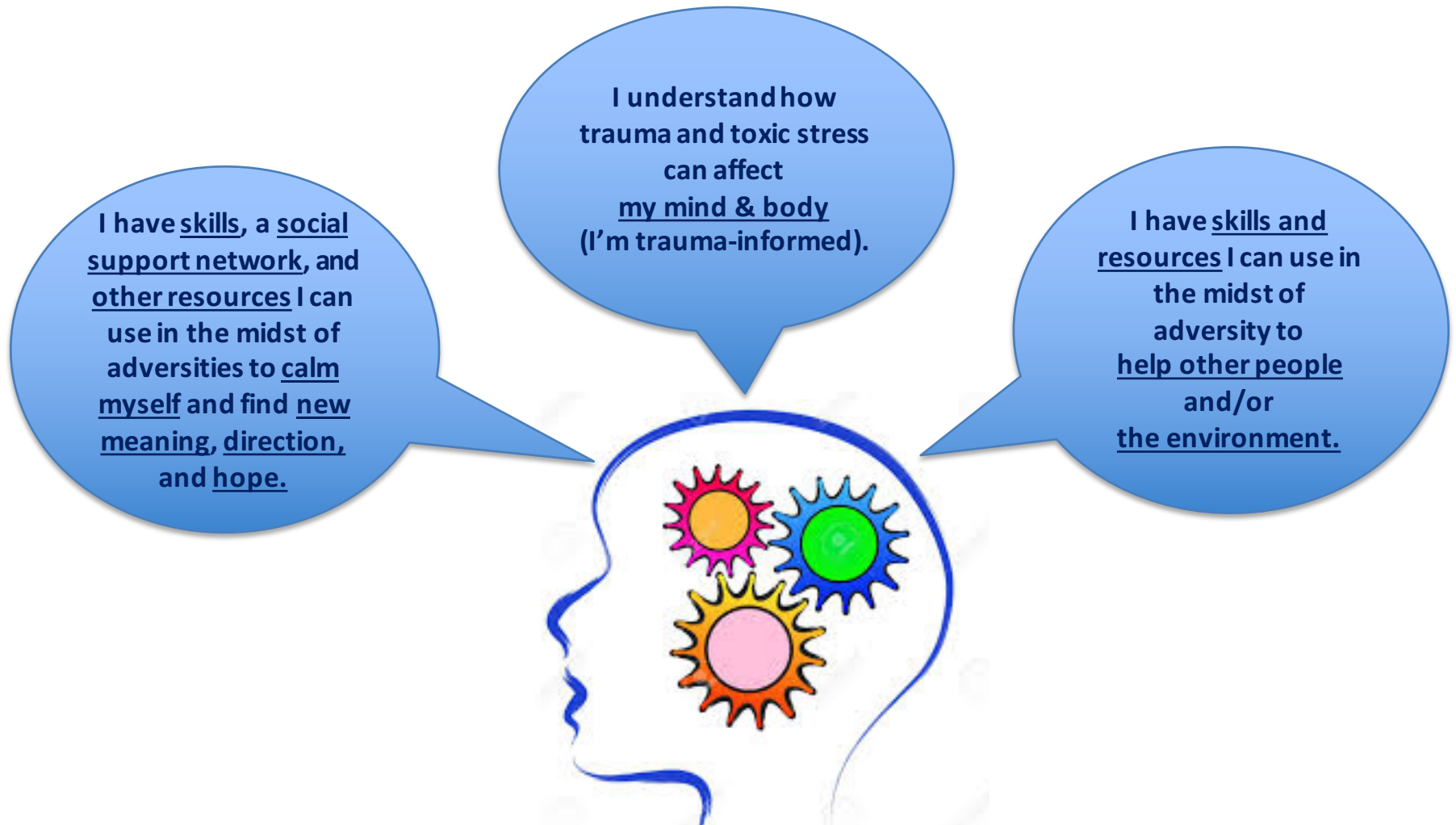
and



Pulled by meaning and purpose!

(Quote by Viktor Frankl)

Transformational Resilience Seeks to Cultivate a *Resilient Mindset*



What if every adult and youth developed a *Resilient Mindset*?

The *Resilient Growth*™ Model for Transformational Resilience

Focus: *Presencing* skills to calm your emotions and thoughts

Ground—and center yourself by stabilizing your nervous system.

Remember—your personal skills, resources, and social support network.

Observe—your reactions to and thoughts about the situation non-judgmentally with self-compassion.

Focus: *Purposing* skills to find meaning, direction & hope in adversity

Watch—for insight and meaning in climate-enhanced and related hardships.

Tap—into the values you want to live by in the midst of adversity.

Harvest—hope for new possibilities by making choices that increase personal, social, and environmental wellbeing.



Presencing Goals:

Develop Skills to Moderate the "Push" of our Psychobiological Drives

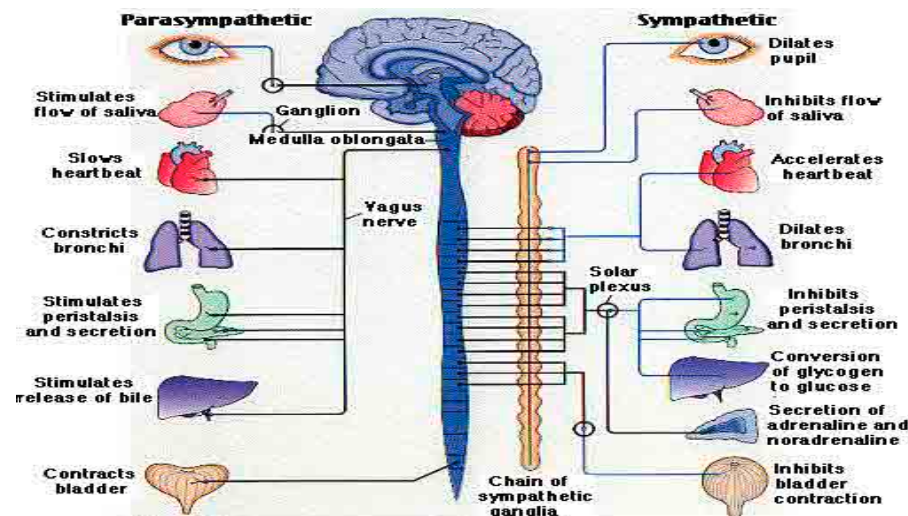
- Learn how trauma and toxic stress affect the body, emotions, and mind and simple self-administered skills to stabilize the nervous system in adversity.
- Learn simple self-administered skills to create psychological flexibility by observing our thoughts non-judgmentally without being captured by them.

The knowledge that we can manage our emotions and thoughts in any situation provides enormous confidence and peace of mind.

Presencing Activates the Parasympathetic Nervous System

The Autonomic Nervous System

- The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) operates like a gas peddle in a car:
It triggers the fight or flee response by providing a burst of energy to the body to respond to the threat.
- The Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) acts like the brake system in a car:
It promotes a “rest & digest” response that moderates the SNS & calms body.



The Resilient Growth™ Model

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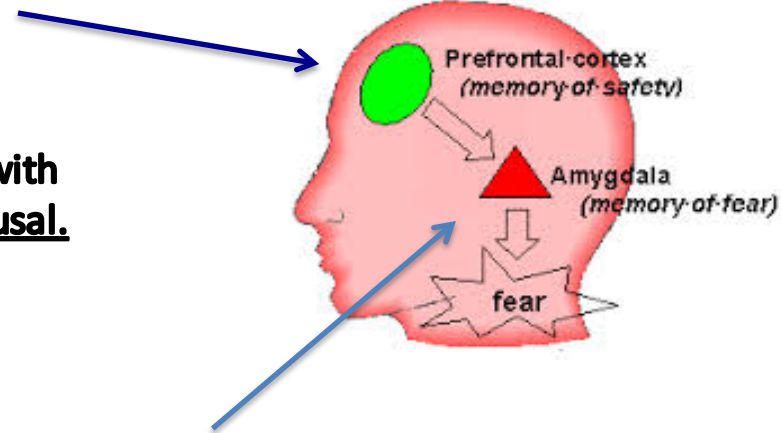
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Start By Teaching Everyone the Psychobiology of Trauma & Toxic Stress

Let's Create a "Trauma-Informed" Nation!

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Ground—and center yourself by stabilizing your nervous system

Body-Based Skills

(Trauma Resource Institute)

- Tracking
- Resourcing
- Grounding

Breath-Based Skills

- Controlled breathing
- Six-Second breathing

Awareness-Based Skills


- Mindfulness of breath, thoughts and emotions
- Mindful eating, walking, movement

Culturally-Based Skills

- Music
- Dance
- Eating/food

Combo Skills

- Reset Button



Help all adults and youth learn and continually practice one or more of these age and culturally appropriate skills and methods.

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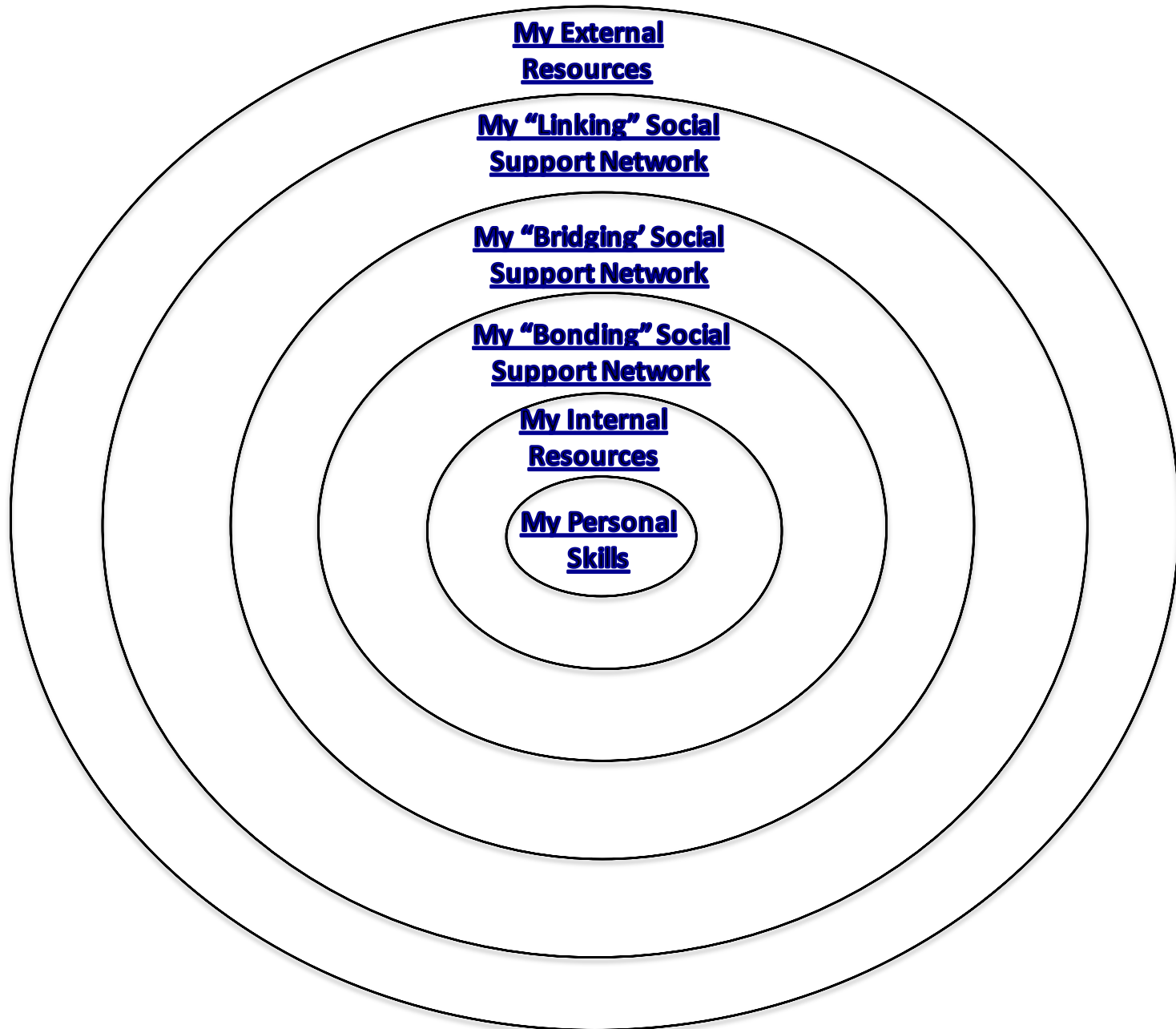
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CIRCLES OF SUPPORT EXERCISE



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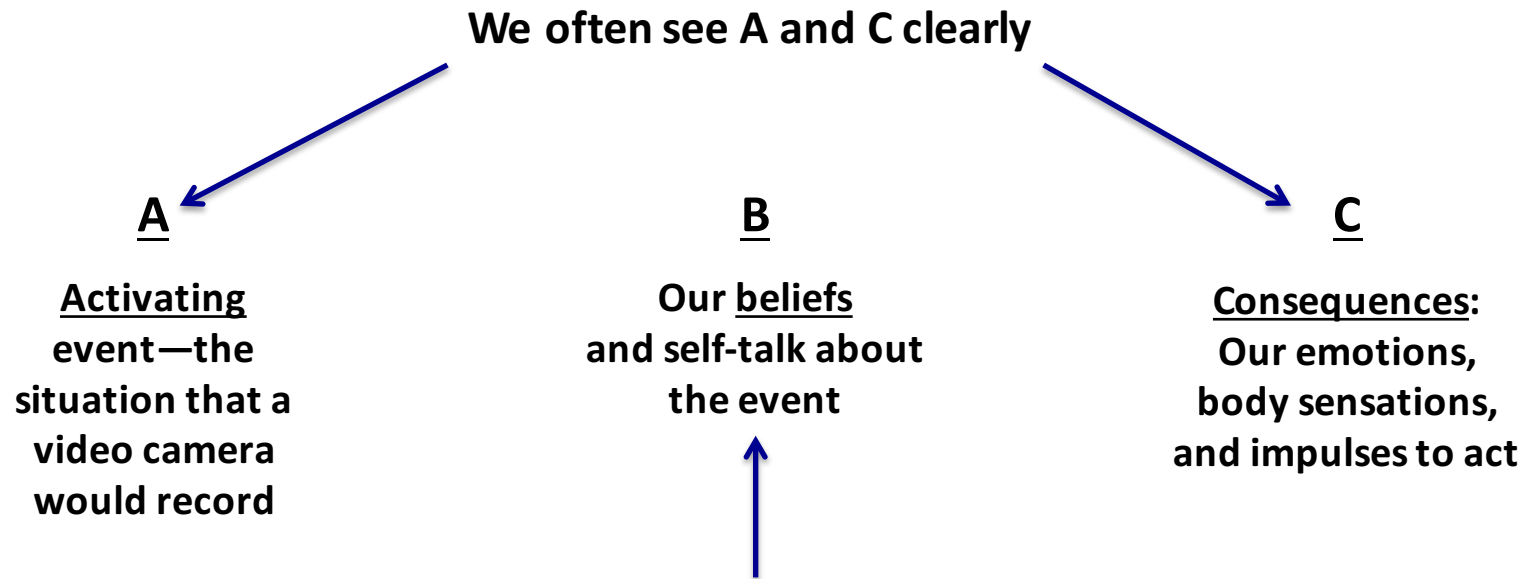
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Observe—your reactions to and thoughts about the situation
non-judgmentally

The ABC Model of Observing Your Thoughts and Emotions

(G. Schiraldi)



But We Are Often Not Aware of B: Our Beliefs and Automatic Self-Talk

We think the event caused our reaction, when it was our *interpretation of it* that did, which usually includes some true and many erroneous beliefs and stories.

TEN COMMON "THINKING DISTORTIONS"

- 1. Fixated on Flaws**
- 2. Dismissing the Positive**
- 3. Assuming**
- 4. Labeling**
- 5. Over-generalizing**
- 6. All-Or-Nothing Thinking**
- 7. Catastrophizing**
- 8. "Should" and "ought" statements**
- 9. Personalizing**
- 10. Blaming**

Help Every Adult & Child Develop a Personal “Presencing Safety Plan”

I Will Watch For These Signs That I Am Outside of My Resilient Growth Zone

Examples

Physical Signs: rapid breathing, heart beat, or pulse; head or stomach ache; muscle tension.

Mental Signs: racing mind, anxiety, fear, excessive worry, sleep troubles.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

When I See These Signs I Will Take These Actions

Examples

Practice tracking, grounding, controlled breathing, mindfulness of breath, thoughts & emotions, Circles of Support, ABC Model of Thinking Distortions, Self-Compassion

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



Remember, humans are not only

Pushed by psychobiological drives



We Are Also

Pulled by meaning and purpose!



Quote by Viktor Frankl



Purposing Goals

Learn Skills To Intensify The "Pull" of Meaning and Purpose

- *Presencing* is necessary, but insufficient, because it doesn't guarantee a principled, vital, or meaningful life in the midst of ongoing traumas and toxic stresses.
- *Purposing* is about developing positive meaning, direction & hope in life and making values-based choices that enhance personal, collective and environmental wellbeing.

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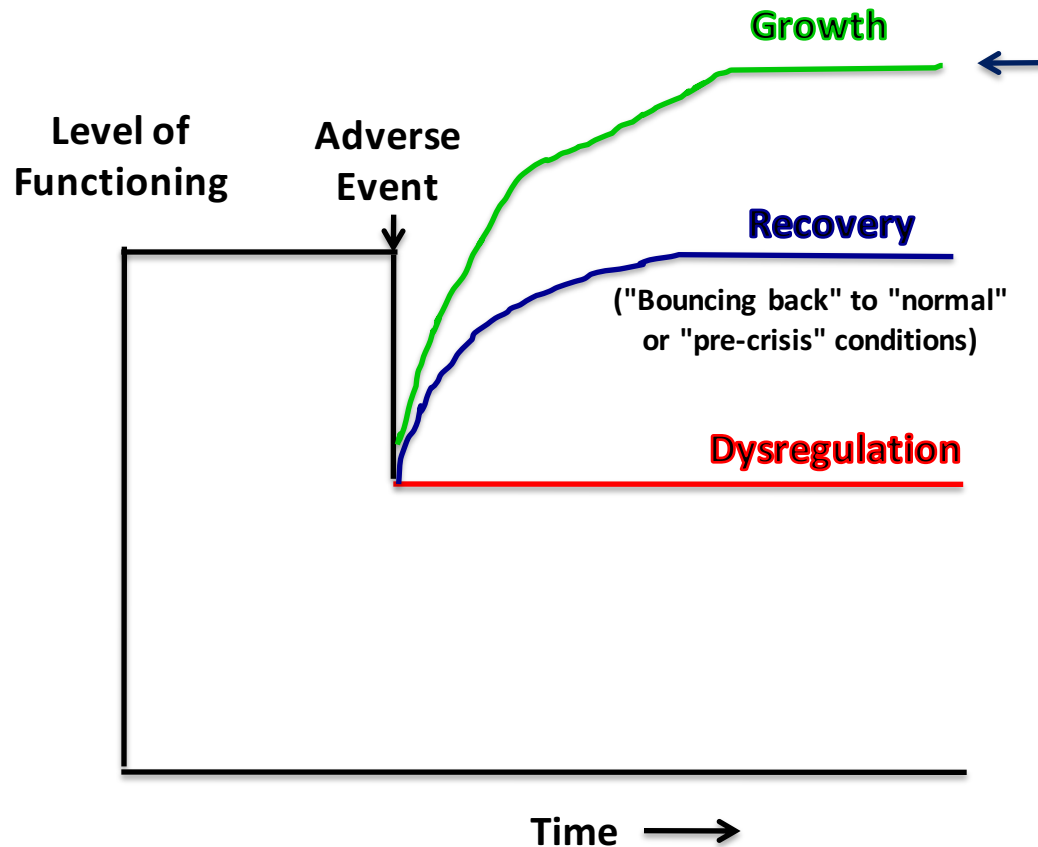
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Using Adversity as a Catalyst to Learn, Grow, and Increase Wellbeing



Post-Traumatic Growth:
using adversity as a transformational catalyst to increase wellbeing above pre-crisis levels and find new meaning, purpose, and hope in life.

Self-Transcendence is Key:
Research shows PTG often involves moving beyond personal self-interest to assist others and/or nature (i.e. eudemonic wellbeing)

Help everyone learn how to use climate adversities as transformational catalysts to learn, grow, and increase wellbeing.

If There Is A Silver Lining in Climate Change

It is a primal truth that, as painful as it can be, adversity is often our greatest impetus for personal & collective growth



Watch—for insight and meaning in climate-enhanced and related hardships.

Common Changes Seen In Post-Traumatic Growth

(Tedeschi, Calhoun, Joseph)

- **Personal**
- **Philosophical**
- **Relational**

Leading to These Common Benefits

- **Better mental health**
- **Improved positivity**
- **Improved physical health**
- **Shift from "Me to We"**

Exercise

Identify 1-2 times when you used adversity as a catalyst to learn, grow, and find new purpose and meaning in life.

Examples

- Re-dedication to a goal or mission after a setback
- Develop new priorities in your life after trauma
- Eat better, get more exercise, or in other ways take better care of yourself after illness
- Greater empathy for others after your own tragedy
- Identify new personal strengths by observing your response to hardship
- Deepened understanding of others as result of seeing how you were affected by adversity
- More desire to help others due to help you got
- Start of a new spiritual quest after trauma

Help them realize they already know how to do it!

Exercise: Learn, Grow and Find Meaning in Adversity

- Describe a recent stressful situation and how you reacted.
- Describe how your reaction affected other people, you, and also the natural environment.
- Re-imagine the situation and answer these questions:
 - ✓ What insights about myself and the world can I gain if I used this as an opportunity to learn rather than react by fighting, fleeing or freezing?
 - ✓ How can I increase the wellbeing of other people and the environment through this experience rather than diminishing them?
 - ✓ How can I find new meaning and direction in my life through this experience?

Watch—for insight and meaning in climate-enhanced and related hardships.

Grieving Can Be Important

Finding new meaning and purpose in life often means we must give up something important.

Normalize and teach everyone age and culturally appropriate ways to grieve.

The Resilient Growth™ Model

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Tap—into the values you want to live by in the midst of adversity.

Help People Grasp That Living Out The Values They Hold Dear Gives Their Life Purpose



- Values refer to Actions--- not ideals, morals, or goals.
- Values are about how you act during life, not what you accomplish.
- Because our values tend to remain constant they can serve as a compass to guide our actions during climate related and other types of adversities

Tap—into the values you want to live by in the midst of adversity.

1. Go through the list of values & identify the top 3 values that would allow you to be the person you want to be and live with meaning and purpose in the midst of adversity.

Personal responsibility

Honesty

Fairness

Patience

Compassion

Simplicity

Protection of nature/climate

Generosity

Gratitude

Independence

Family

Community

Professional achievement

God

Reverence for human life

Honor

Loyalty

Social justice

Respect for authority

Humility

Self-sufficiency

Kindness

Personal safety

Rank and power

Self-awareness

Diligence

Public recognition

Love

Social equity

Integrity

Charity

Mercy

Respect for others

Status

Brotherhood

Selflessness

Wealth

Forgiveness

Open mindedness

Success

Insert other_____

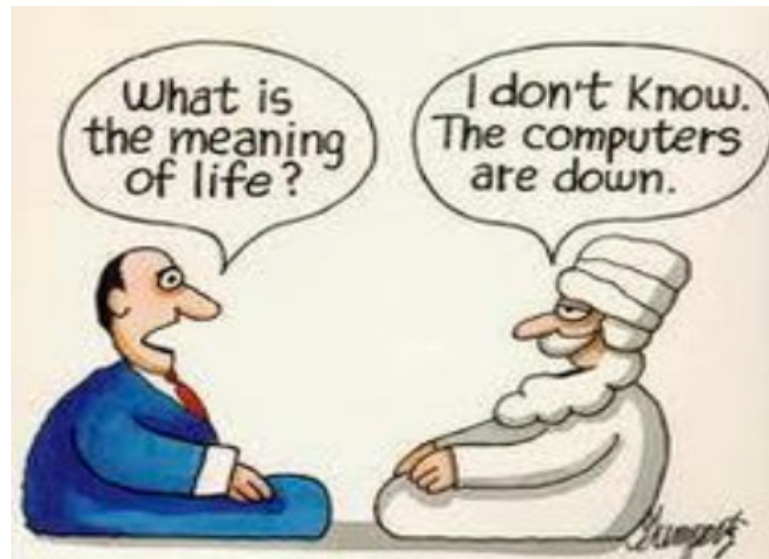
2. Look back at the distressing event you described and consider what might have changed if you lived your core values during that time?

Tap—into your the values you want to live by in the midst of adversity.

Humor & Gratitude Are Key To Finding Purpose and Living Our Values

In the midst of serious or ongoing adversity we tend to only see bad things.

Focusing on humor and gratitude reminds us of positive things in our lives that are forgotten and provides a more complete life narrative.



The Resilient Growth™ Model

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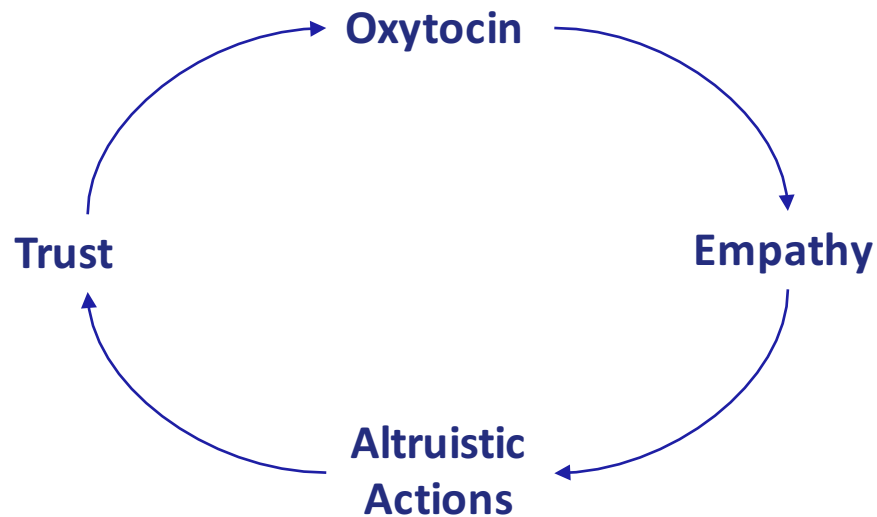
HARVESTING HOPE

One of the best ways to find hope in the midst of climate adversity is to take concrete steps with others to help other people and/or nature.

This activates the release of oxytocin, which makes us more “empathetic” which produces more “altruism”

Harvest—hope for new possibilities by making choices that increase personal, social, and environmental wellbeing.

Remember the Oxytocin Virtuous Cycle



Harvest—hope for new possibilities by making choices that increase personal, social, and environmental wellbeing.

Research Shows That When People Become More Empathetic and Altruistic They Exhibit:

More:

Honesty
Kindness
Love
Gratitude
Fairness
Forgiveness
Modesty
Prudence
Leadership skills
Social intelligence
Bravery
Creativity
Good Judgment



Leading To:

- More hopeful and positive attitude
- Better mental health
- Better physical health
- Extended life-expectancy
- Greater capacity to deal with future adversities.

(From: Paul Zak, *The Moral Molecule: How Trust Works*, and many others)

Harvest—hope for new possibilities by making choices that increase personal, social, and environmental wellbeing.

Sample Exercise

Note a time when you helped someone else or offered your services—without any concern for yourself or feeling of obligation.

Describe how you felt afterwards.

Harvest—hope for new possibilities by making choices that increase personal, social, and environmental wellbeing.



**Researchers Have Found that Hope Emerges Most Readily When
Three Closely Related Factors Are Present:**

- 1. People have a vision of a place they want to arrive at or condition they want to achieve**
- 2. A sense of how to get to their destination**
- 3. And the commitment to work toward that end even when obstacles block their way**

**Engage people in action planning around these 3 factors
using “Ends-Planning”**

HARVESTING RADICAL HOPE

As climate change worsens, many deeply held beliefs about the world and our role in it will be shattered---but this also offers possibility of a new form of hopefulness.



Public Health Practitioners Can Use Climate Adversities for *Revival*...

garner hope for the emergence of new ways to live that are not yet fully understandable but will be more sustainable, equitable & healthy

(From: Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*)

Help Everyone Develop a “Purposing Action Plan”

My Strengths and Passions:

My Core Values:

Goals To Enhance My Personal Wellbeing:

Goals to Enhance the Wellbeing of Other People and The Natural Environment:

<u>Immediate Actions</u> (within 30 days) to Achieve My Goals	* Barriers I Will Experience	Strategies For Barriers	# Benefits of Action	Date(s) Done
1.				
2.				
3.				
<u>Mid-Term Actions</u> (within 3 Months) To Achieve My Goals	Barriers	Strategies for Barriers	Benefits of Action	Date(s) Done
1.				
2.				
3.				

*** Barriers include internal challenges as well as external barriers.**

Three Pillars of Community-Level Personal and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Resilience

Trauma-Informed and Skilled Citizenry

- Widespread knowledge of the psychobiology of trauma and toxic stress.
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Robust Human Relationships

- Widespread and robust bonding, bridging, and linking social support networks.
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- Strong links and communications among diverse organizations in the community.

Supportive Organizations and Communities

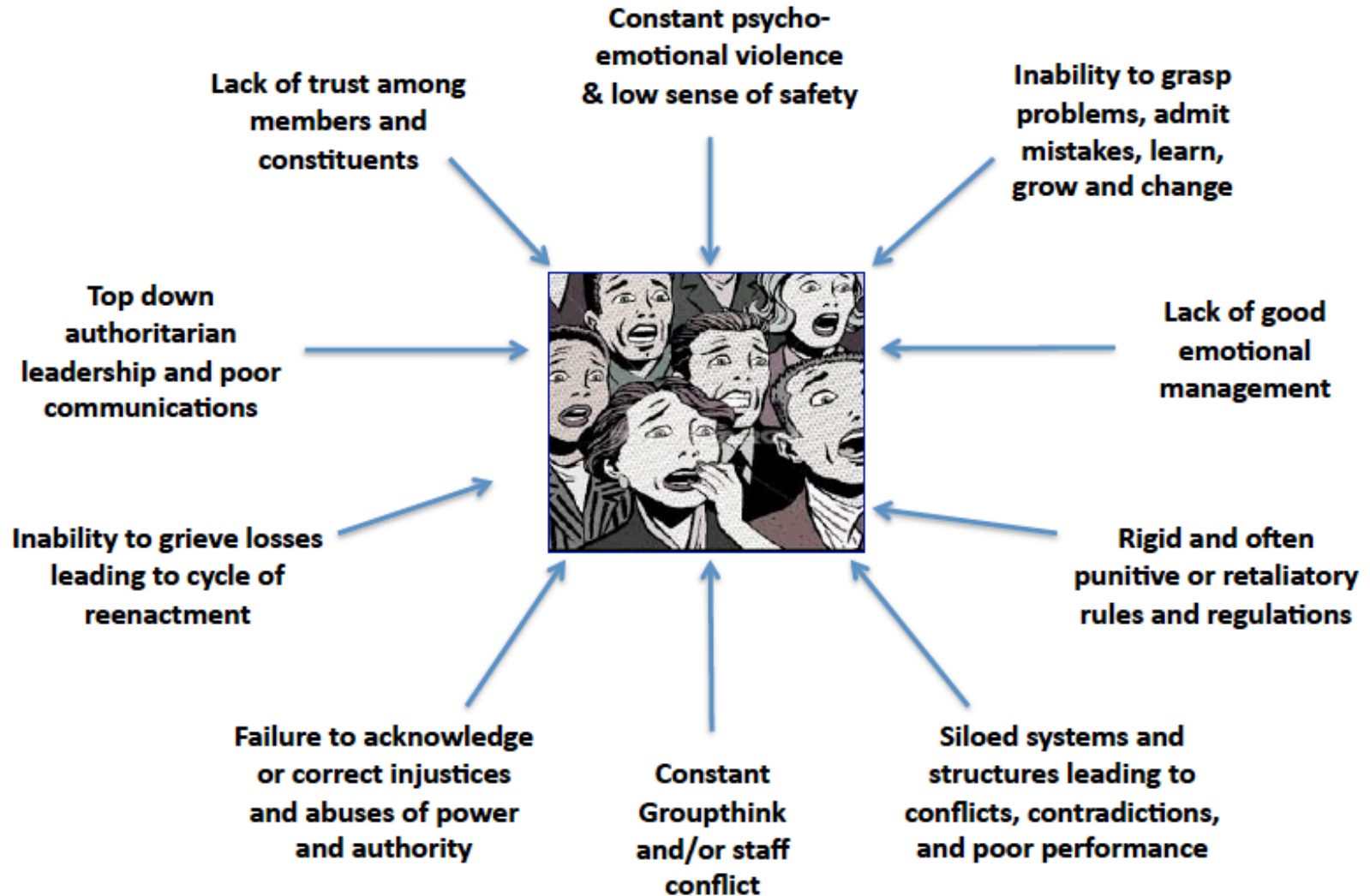
- NGO, private, public, and civic leaders know how to shift from trauma-organized to human resilience-enhancing enterprises.
- Easy access to physical and mental health and emergency preparedness services.
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Public Health Programs Can Help Organizations and Communities Shift From “Trauma-Organized” to “Trauma-Informed Resilience-Enhancing Enterprises”



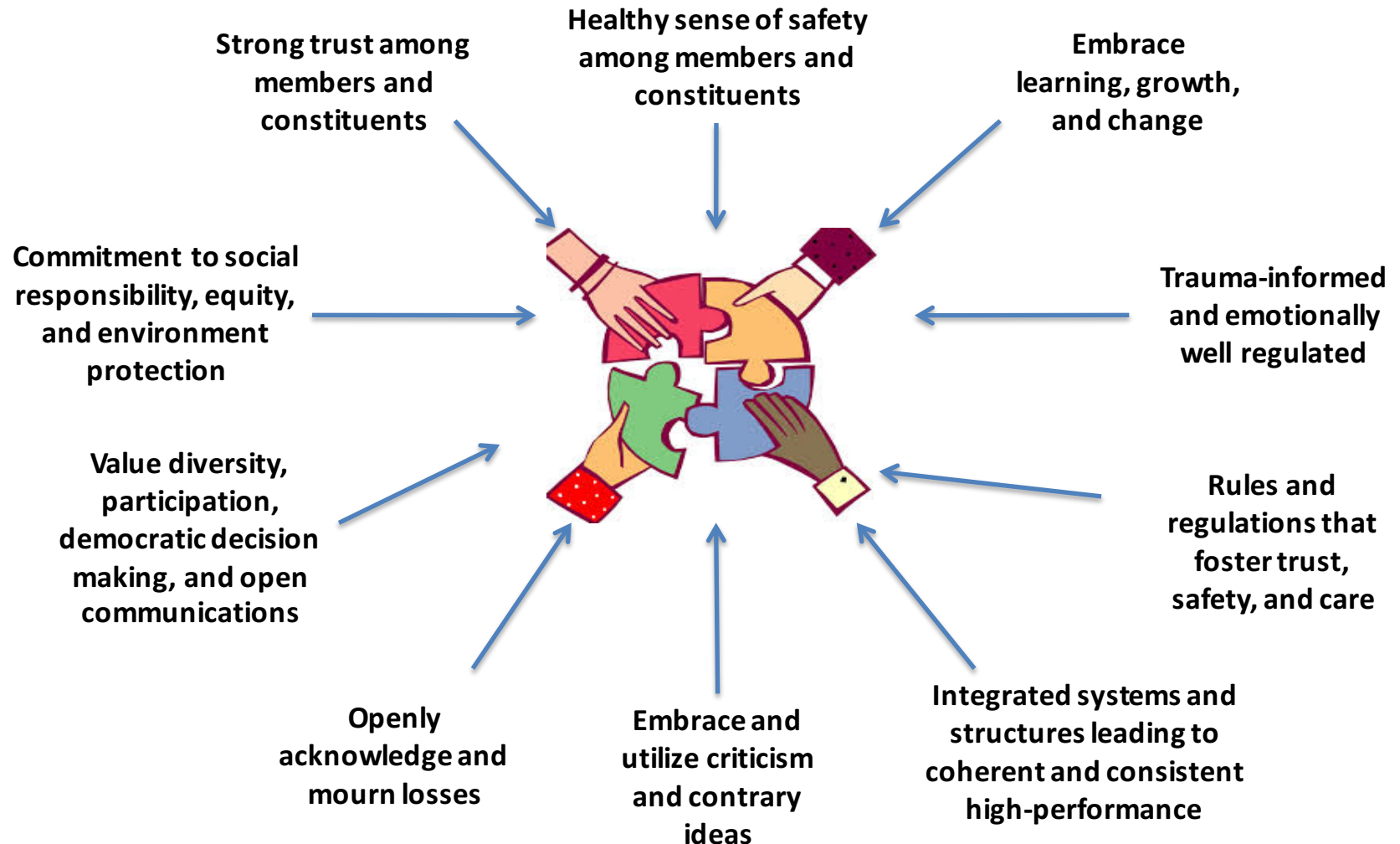
Common Traits of Trauma-Organized Organizations and Communities

Chronic trauma or toxic stress trigger ongoing fight, flight, freeze reactions that destabilize cognitive, emotional, and ethical foundations leading to loss of physical, psychological, social, and moral safety.



Common Traits of Resilience-Enhancing Organizations & Communities

They adopt principles, practices, and policies that promote safe, equitable, just, and healthy norms and behaviors.



Launching and Maintaining Preventative Transformational Resilience Initiatives

- Organize “Resilience Leadership Councils” composed of respected senior leaders in every organization and community to lead effort.
- Complete Resilience Assessments: current level of resilience, gaps in types of resilience education & training programs offered & populations served, & dominant social narratives.
- Then, help expand existing or launch new Transformational Resilience education and training programs so that:
 - Every adult and youth can learn the psychobiology of trauma and toxic stress (create a Trauma-informed organization and community).
 - Everyone learns age & demographically appropriate Presencing & Purposing skills.
 - All group, organizational, and community leaders can learn how to shift from a trauma-organized to trauma-informed human resilience enhancing group.
- Help respected community leaders (Resilience Leadership Council) jointly promote social narratives supporting safe, equitable, just, and healthy norms and behaviors.

Resilience Education and Skills Building Should Become as
Common as Learning to Read and Write!

The Multiple Benefits of Building Capacity for Transformational Resilience

- **Greater capacity to regulate and calm the nervous system when distressed leads to:**
 - Less drug & alcohol use & other harmful attempts to self-anesthetize when distressed.
 - Less depression, anxiety, PTSD, lower suicide rates and other mental health problems.
 - Less heart attacks, strokes, cancers, and greater physical health and wellness.
- **When combined with building social capital and engagement of respected leaders that promote social narratives emphasizing safe, equitable & healthy norms & practices:**
 - More robust social support networks & trusting relationships with neighbors & others.
 - Reduced crime rates.
 - Reduced aggression and interpersonal violence.
 - Less Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) resulting in greater learning capacity of youth and reduced mental and physical health problems in adulthood.
- **When combined with promotion of Post-Traumatic Growth & new sense of purpose:**
 - Greater awareness of context leading to more support for social--and health--equity.
 - Less contraction into a defensive self-protective survival mode leading to enhanced support for and engagement in climate solutions and a greater sense of hope.

Thank You!

About the Presenter

Bob Doppelt is Executive Director of The Resource Innovation Group, a social science climate change and sustainability non-profit affiliated with Willamette University. As part of his job he organized and coordinates the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC). Bob is trained as a counseling psychologist and in environmental science and has combined the two fields throughout his career. He is also a long-time mindfulness teacher and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Instructor. In 2015 he was named one of the world's "50 Most Talented Social Innovators" by the CSR World Congress.

Bob is the author of 4 best-selling books on the processes involved with altering human thinking and behaviors to enhance social-ecological wellbeing. His more recent book *Transformational Resilience* (Greenleaf Publishing, 2016) describes the need, methods, and benefits of building human resilience for climate change with a specific focus on "Presencing" and "Purposing" skills and other tools to build personal resilience as well as psycho-social-spiritual resilience within organizations and communities for climate change.

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