

Treating Trauma Through Expressive Art



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- Mixed Media artist
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- MFA from Washington University
- Community Arts Trainer
- Siteman Cancer Center
- Kemper Art Museum
- Employee Assistance Program Association
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Erika Ottolini

- Licensed Professional Counselor
- Certified K-12 School Counselor and Teacher
- Master's of Arts in Teaching and Master's of Education in Counseling
- Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma
- Open Door International Mentoring program for immigrant youth in St. Louis
- Clinical therapist in private practice specializing in adolescence
- Trained at the University of Missouri - St Louis
- Nationally board certified

Art Therapy vs. Expressive Art



- Practiced by individuals with a Masters in Art Therapy
- Practiced by artists, educators, volunteers, therapists, students...

Art Therapy

- Requires knowledge of and skills in usage of visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, and other art forms) and the creative process
- Application of theories and techniques of human development, psychology, and counseling

Experience, Memory and the Brain

- Memories are “organizing framework” for neural development
- Repeated experiences strengthen neural pathways
- Pathways become sensitized which leads to memory development
- “Indelible impressions of the world” Bruce Perry, MD
- Different types of memories: motor, emotional and cognitive

How Trauma is Experienced, Stored and Re-experienced

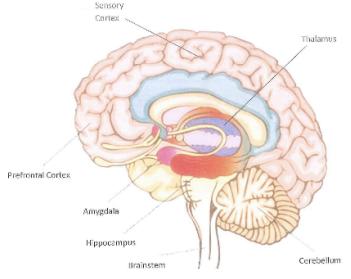
- Fragmented memories
- Implicit, episodic/non-narrative
- Imprints on nervous system (sensory impressions, emotions, motor patterns)
- Fight/flight/freeze mechanism stuck in repeat when memory gets triggered
- Continual pattern long after event has occurred
- Much of this unavailable to verbal recall

Trauma and Memory

- Chronic stress/trauma sensitizes neural pathways
- Over-develops certain regions of the brain involved in stress response
- Other parts of traumatized brain remain inaccessible to verbal interactions
- Alternatives to "talk" therapy must be used

Key Parts of the Brain Affected by Trauma

Areas of the Brain



- Amygdala (secret service/alarm system)
- Hippocampus (database of highly sensitive material)
- Pre-frontal cortex (executive officer, ie. president)

How Trauma Affects the Brain

- Polyvagal theory - threat is perceived
- Autonomic nervous system engages - all systems "go"
- Brain sends messages & physical symptoms occur
- 4 stages of arousal cycle: perception of threat, mobilization, defensive action (Fight, Flight) return to equilibrium

The 3 "F's"

If unable to fight or flee, we employ the 3rd action plan: the freeze response

Problem with "playin' possum"

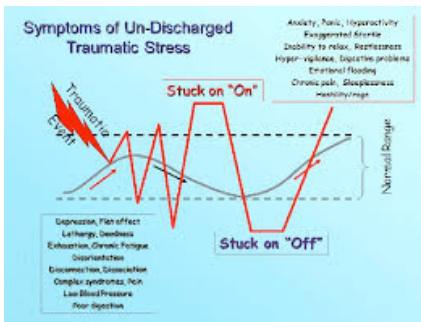
Although the body is immobilized and potentially safe from physical harm due to disassociation, the nervous system is still highly aroused.

Unable to discharge any of the fight-or-flight energy the body has mobilized, we are left in a state like that of a car whose accelerator and brakes are being floored simultaneously.

~ Linda Curran, LPC

The “Freeze” Response

- **Fight or flight energy does not get released**
- **Results in unhealthy states of hyper-arousal and hypo-arousal**



Biological Nature of Trauma

Animals who survive an attack by freezing simply allow for the biological discharge of excess energy:

- **They shake.**
- **They rattle.**
- **They roll.**
- **They tremble.**

All of this movement facilitates the completion of the arousal cycle and the reboot of the ANS.

Polar Bear Releasing Trauma

National Geographic: Polar Bear Alert: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5LyRjJimal>

Waking the Tiger

In his book, Peter Levine, MD asserts that the suppression of the ANS causes humans so much trouble.

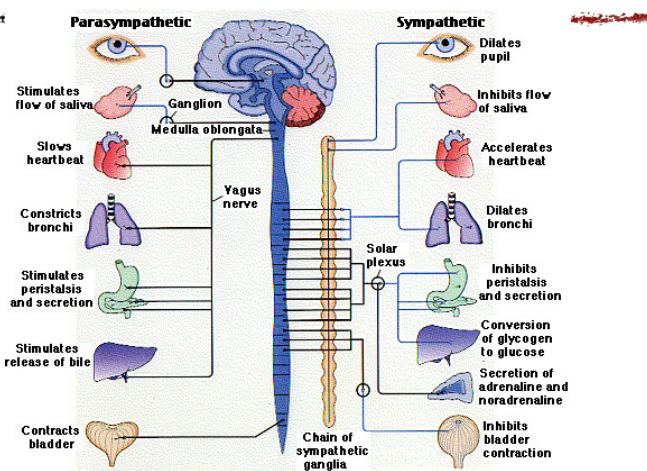
Why suppress?

- Intensity of the survival energy frightens us
- We are not comfortable yielding our conscious control to involuntary sensations

The rational part of brain tries to override the completion process, leaving the nervous system in state of high arousal (ON or OFF). Body and brain continue to respond as if threat were present, spewing our fight-or-flight chemicals.

Review ANS

Para-sympathetic (rest and digest) and Sympathetic (fight, flight or freeze) responses



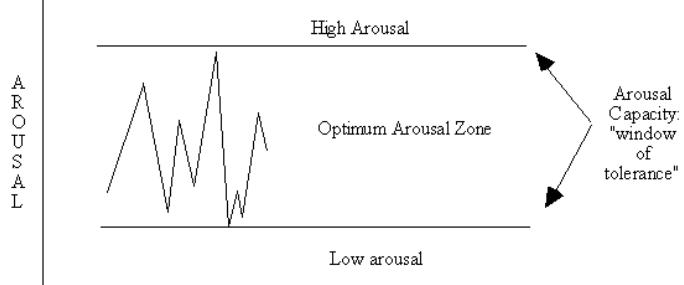
Healing the Traumatized Brain

- Key to healing from trauma is to open new neural networks
- Accessed through expressive arts
- Hebb's Principle – neurons that fire together, wire together (new memories created)
- Use concept of neuroplasticity - brain has huge capacity for growth, regeneration and healing

Treatments for Trauma

- CBT, CPT, TF-CBT
- Sensorimotor - Pat Ogden, PhD & Peter Levine, MD
- EMDR - Francine Shapiro PhD; Bessel van der Kolk, MD
- Attachment healing - Bruce Perry, MD
- Mindfulness - Ronald Siegel, PsyD

Window of Tolerance - Pat Ogden, PhD



How Art Can Positively Alter the Brain

- Puts brain within "window of tolerance"
- Achieves different brain states ideal for healing
- Accesses non-cognitive memories stored in body
- Amygdala calmed and reduced in size
- Cortisol and adrenaline levels decrease
- Dopamine and oxytocin levels increase
- Hippocampus regains normal size and regain recall capabilities
- PFC has access to more oxygen, dopamine receptors
- Pathways open up to executive functioning
- New neurons fire and wire together - creating new memories

Types of Expressive Art

- Visual arts: drawing, painting, sculpture, collages
- Movement/dance
- Mindfulness: yoga & breath work
- Language arts: storytelling, essays, poetry
- Drama
- Play/sand-tray therapy
- Music & drumming

Expressive Art

- Soften experienced trauma
- Gain trust and open conversation
- Examine loss or trauma by creating something physical
- Vehicle for personal expression and healing
- Change representation of feelings
- Express feelings that are beyond words

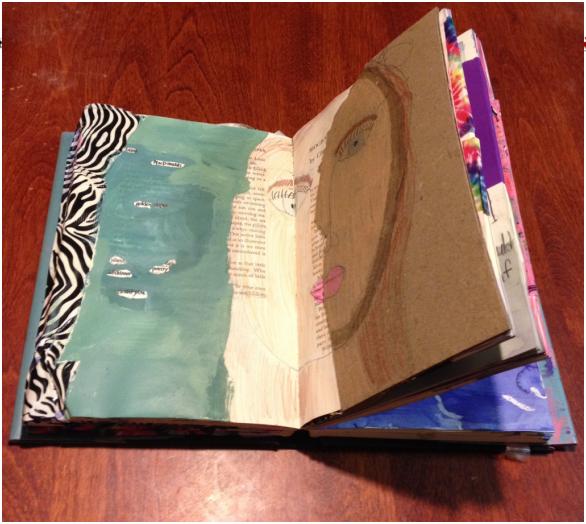


Soften Experienced Trauma



<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23415097>

Gain Trust and Open Conversation



Protective Factors

- **Strong attachment to central figure**
- **Strong social support**
- **Healthy coping skills**
- **Normal circadian rhythms**

Examine Loss by Creating Something Physical



Vehicle for Personal Expression and Healing



Change Representation of Feelings



"Art gives feelings a form. If we feel bad about something,... through art we can change the representation of those feelings." Eric Jensen, Arts with the Brain in Mind



Express Feelings that are Beyond Words



- "using the arts to try to express feelings about last week's marathon bombings for which even their parents do not have words"
- "...a place to express things that are beyond words, and using their hands and having a place to tangibly put their energy is really important."
- "No more hurting people. Peace."

Collage



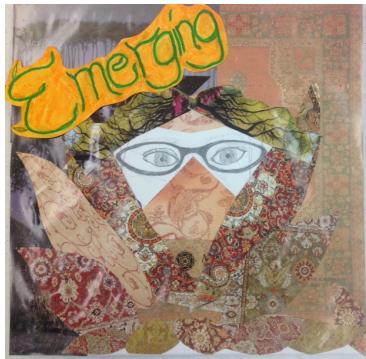
Basic Materials

- **Magazines**
- **Scissors**
- **Glue**
- **Paper**
- **Markers**
- **Pencils & Erasers**



Find

- 1 or 2 images
- 1 or 2 words
- 1 or 2 textures



Textures



Next...

- **Cut**
- **Glue**
- **Alter with color**
- **Be open and enjoy the process!**



Drawing is Thinking

"The only meaningful work that anyone ever does is work that is done while you don't know exactly what you're doing." Drawing is Thinking by Milton Glaser

Optional

- **Self-portrait**
- **Re-draw a word or image**



How to Use Project



Q & A

Going Forward

