“INCREASE THE HAPPINESS FACTOR”
Supporting Stressed-out Kids
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SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

• We are social creatures: Attachment Needs

• Changing our Mind: from stressed-out to happy

• Body Brain Connection
AROUSAL/RELAXATION CYCLE

NEEDS
- safety
- belonging
- esteem
- proximity

Attachment & Trust

Avoidant Attachment
- Relaxation
- Need Met
  (By caregiver)

Ambivalent Attachment
- Arousal

Disorganized Attachment
- Dr. Vera Fahlberg, 1979
SAFETY

- Physically safe from harm
- Psychological/social-emotional
- Absence of toxic shame
- Reliability
BELONGING

• DO YOU NOTICE ME?

• DO I HAVE COMMONALITIES WITH THIS GROUP?

• WOULD I BE MISSED IF ABSENT?
ESTEEM

• WHAT AM I WORTH TO YOU?
• AM I VALUED?
• DO YOU DELIGHT IN ME?
PROXIMITY

• CLOSENESS TO OTHERS NEEDED

• MUTUAL GAZE

• TOUCH PRODUCES OXYTOCIN

• PRESENCE – MOM AND DAD AT ALL MY BALLGAMES
• Mutual gaze for 60 sec with stranger
EXPERIENTIAL

• PRIMARY ATTACHMENT EXPERIENCE: CAR ACCIDENT
THE PROBLEM: MORE STRESS, LESS HAPPINESS
TOP 12 THINGS THAT CULTIVATE HAPPINESS

1. Gratitude activities
   - Think of someone to express deep gratitude to and write them a one page letter. Present them with a laminated copy. Read it to them slowly with eye contact.
   - Keep a gratitude journal.
   - Discuss blessings with partner or family regularly.

2. Cultivate optimism
   - Pessimism: interpreting bad events as permanent, pervasive, and personal.
   - Optimism: occasional, impersonal, specific.
   - Victor Frankl: “When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves.”
3. Avoid over thinking and social comparison (rumination)
   - use self-distraction with positive activities
   - set aside time to think and write about it later
   - discuss it with a friend
   - clear out triggers (Therapy)
   - put it in perspective
4. Practicing acts of Kindness
   - self-chosen activities (pace yourself and don’t overdo)
5. Nurturing Relationships
   - five hours a week together and talking
   - five minutes a day expressing gratitude for specific behaviors
   - 5/1 ratio of positive to negative comments
6. Coping strategies
   - Social support
   - Absorb yourself in activities that change the brain state
   - Find meaning in suffering through writing and talking

7. Forgiveness
   - REACH: Recall, Empathize, Altruism by gift of forgiveness, Commit to let go, Hold on to forgiveness.

8. Flow
   - Achieved when a task is challenging, requires skill and concentration, gives immediate feedback, and sense of control and is deeply effortless. Sense of time vanishes
9. Savoring
- Pleasures need to be spread out over time and varied.
- They need to be shared with someone
- and looked forward to!
- We need to record with mental or real photographs and or souvenirs
- and we need to reminisce

10. Goals
- Those who succeed make adequate preparation by setting clear and specific goals,
- and they go public with their intent.
- They control their environment by reducing triggers/increasing reminders
- They track progress with a reward system
- and build a support system to help with them.
11. Practicing religion and spirituality
- Do something that improves your relationship to God/the Universe
- Practice open mindedness
- Practice mindfulness through quiet and meditation
- Allow yourself to believe in things not easily explained
- Fast – not necessarily from food

12. Take care of your body
- Have an appropriate fitness and nutrition program
- Sleep enough
- Laughter
THREE GRATITUDES: STATE SHIFT
PENN RESILIENCY PROGRAM FOR SCHOOLS

1. Help students’ ability to handle day to day stressors common to adolescents
2. Help students to think more realistically and flexibly
3. Teaches assertiveness, brainstorming, decision making, relaxation, and other coping skills.
4. Three good things exercise (we just did it!)
5. Helps students find out their signature strengths and how to apply them. (Go on to https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu and take the strengths survey yourself!)
THE TRIUNE BRAIN
## State of Hyper-Arousal

Sympathetic system activated: Acceleration of autonomic nervous system response—increased heart rate and blood pressure, increased blood flow to large muscles, etc.

Fight/flight response activated: State of hyper-vigilance, anxiety, perception of challenge & danger

Thinking & either rigid & chaotic

Prefrontal cortex is activated—processing through limbic/brainstem/survival mechanisms & the brain

No new learning & an awake place

### Optimal Zone of Arousal—Window of Tolerance

Ventral vagal serve/parasympathetic system stimulated: Deceleration of autonomic nervous system response—body regulated, ear modulated, greater access to intuition & insight

Social engagement system activated (connectedness with others, mindsight”, etc.)

Self-soothing/ emotion regulation system activated

Full activation of prefrontal cortex

State of mind & calm, alert, relaxed, aware, mindful, flexible, accepting, energetic, coherent, empathetic

Experience full range of emotions (joy, grief, anger, etc.) with a sense of control & awareness of options

New learning & an awake place

## State of Hypo-Arousal

Dorsal vagal serve/parasympathetic system activated: Extreme deceleration of autonomic nervous system response—decreased heart rate and blood pressure, dissociation of awareness, etc.

Depression

Isolation/withdrawal, stop/shut down response

No new learning & an awake place
SHIFTING THE STRESS BASELINE
EXPERIENTIAL: GET IN YOUR BODY

• Balloon Play
• Be a Volcano
• Making Spit Wads Useful 😊
• Run/Jump/Slide
• Brain Gym
• Belly Breathe
• Laughing Together Creates Connection
REFERENCES

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- Mindsight by Dr. Daniel Siegel
- Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain by Dr. Daniel Siegel
- The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van der Kolk