

# A Trauma-Informed Approach to Toxic Stress in the Workplace

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## Objectives

- Describe the effects of toxic stress on the brain and nervous system
- Develop strategies to counteract the effects of toxic stress in the workplace



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## Self-Care Alert

- Step out and take a break.
- Talk to someone you trust.
- Do something relaxing.



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## Stress Response Cycle

### Sympathetic Nervous System

#### Stress Response

*Prepares you for fight, flight or freeze.*

- Heart rate increases.
- Breath is fast and shallow.
- Pupils dilate.
- Digestion is inhibited.
- Increased blood to muscles.

### Parasympathetic Nervous System

#### Relaxation Response

*Calms you down, prepares you to rest.*

- Heart rate slows.
- Breath is full and slow.
- Pupils shrink.
- Digestion is active.
- Hormones rush in, lifting mood.

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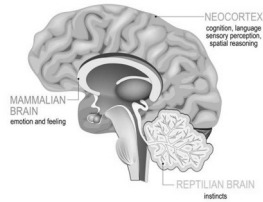
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## Trauma and the Brain



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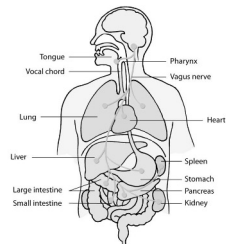
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## Vagus Nerve



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## Polyvagal Theory

**Ventral Vagal**  
Social Engagement System  
Social bonding, interest and attentiveness  
concentration, focus and determination  
feeling safe in body, you, people, "outside",  
world and inclined to present oneself.

**Sympathetic**  
Mobilization System  
Fight and flight - responses to  
danger: emotions of rage, anger,  
irritation, frustration, fear, nervous  
panic, restless, anxious and worried

**Dorsal Vagal**  
Immobilization System  
Feeling, freeze, shutdown,  
dissociation, numbing  
and death, energy  
conserved for  
vital organs

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## Trauma Impact



- Shock trauma
- Chronic stress
- Complex trauma
- Adverse environments
- Neglect

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## Trauma Responses

<p><b>FLIGHT</b></p> <p>Workaholic Over-thinker Anxiety, panic, OCD Difficulty sitting still Perfectionist</p>	<p><b>FIGHT</b></p> <p>Anger outburst Controlling "The bully" Narcissistic Explosive behaviour</p>
<p><b>FREEZE</b></p> <p>Difficulty making decisions Stuck Dissociation Isolating Numb</p>	<p><b>FAWN</b></p> <p>People pleaser Lack of identity No boundaries Overwhelmed Codependent</p>

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### Co-regulation

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### Trauma-Informed

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**SAMHSA Definition**

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

- **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery.
- **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system.
- **Responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.
- Seeks to actively **resist** re-traumatization.

Trauma-Informed Care (Webpage) | SAMHSA 11

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### Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

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 <p><b>Safety</b> Throughout the organization, patients and staff feel physically and psychologically safe</p>	 <p><b>Trustworthiness + Transparency</b> Decisions are made with transparency, and with the goal of building and maintaining trust.</p>	 <p><b>Peer Support</b> Individuals with shared experiences are integrated into the organization and viewed as integral to service delivery.</p>
 <p><b>Collaboration</b> Power differences — between staff and clients and among organizational staff — are leveled to support shared decision-making.</p>	 <p><b>Empowerment</b> Patient and staff strengths are recognized, built on, and validated — this includes a belief in resilience and the ability to heal from trauma.</p>	 <p><b>Humility + Responsiveness</b> Biases and stereotypes (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geography) and historical trauma are recognized and addressed.</p>

(Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care.") 12

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### Example



Shifting our language, our presence, and our listening, and expanding our empathy and capacity for compassion, can generate positive results and outcomes and make a return on investment.

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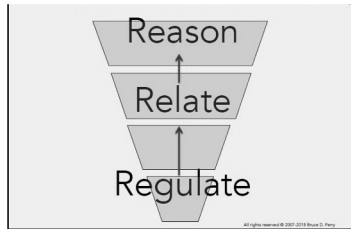
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### Sequence of Engagement



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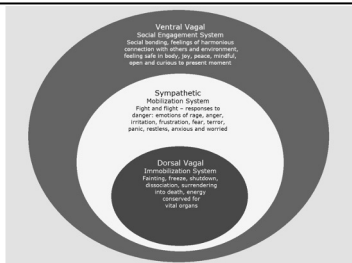
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### Stress Response Cycle



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### Emotions



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### Complete the Stress Cycle



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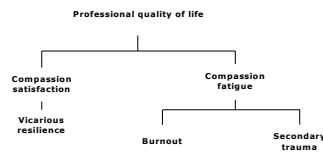
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### Compassion and Empathy



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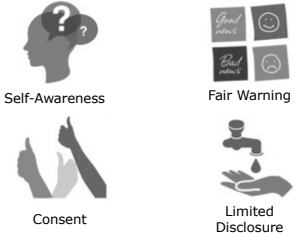
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### Low Impact Debriefing



Self-Awareness

Fair Warning

Consent

Limited Disclosure

Low Impact Debriefing - The TEND Toolkit

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### Coping and Resilience



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### Self-Care Strategies

Small, daily acts	Larger, more elaborate acts
Event-based self-care	Crisis self-care

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**Daily Coping and Self-Care**

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Enjoyable	Competent and effective
Mindfulness	Gratitude

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**Final Thoughts**

With appropriate supports and intervention, people can overcome traumatic experiences.

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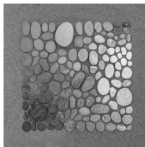
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**Resources**

- [Mental Health Texas](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- [Polyvagal Institute](#)
- [Alberta Family Wellness](#)
- [South Southwest Mental Health Technology Transfer Center](#)
- [One Moment Meditation](#)
- [Low Impact Debriefing](#)
- [Self-Compassion Exercises](#)



**Questions?**

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**Thank you!**

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