A Neuropsychotherapy Approach with Couples

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Everything is Inter-connected
Intra-personal interaction

IF

THEN

COPING MEANING WORTH

CONTENT

INTER-personal PROCESS

COPING MEANING WORTH

Inter-personal interaction

Intra-personal

Intra-personal
Neuropsychotherapy

- Neuropsychotherapy: Theoretical Underpinnings and Clinical Applications
- The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy: Healing the Social Brain
- Clinical Insights from The Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe

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Neuropsychotherapy Principles

1. The Two Primary Tasks of the Brain
2. The Bottom Up Approach
3. The Power of Procedural Learning
4. The Brain’s Response to Perceived Threats
5. The Critical Nature of The Polyvagalal System
6. The Window of Tolerance
7. The Pillars of Neuropsychotherapy
Neuropsychotherapy Principle #1

SURVIVE & THRIVE
Neuropsychotherapy Principle #2

Bottom Up Approach

THE 3 PART BRAIN
Survival Brain

- the first part of the brain to develop
- fastest part of the brain
- runs automatic functions that keep us alive i.e. breathing, heartbeat, digestion
- its #1 job is our survival
Emotional & Experiential Brain

- next fastest part of the brain
- runs on past experiences & emotions
- fear is its fastest trigger
- fires up our defences
- learns by repetition
- the last part of the brain to develop
- slowest part of the brain
- helps us to think through decisions
- the first to switch off when under stress
- has the power to override the impulsive brain
- last part to mature
When my **Impulsive Brain** FIRES UP my **Smart Brain** Switches OFF
Fight & Attack
Freak Out & Panic
Freeze & Play Dead
UP Regulate

DOWN Regulate
THE POWER OF PROCEDURAL LEARNING
Procedural Learning

Procedural memory does not involve conscious thought.

- talking
- walking
- playing a musical instrument
- sport skills
- riding a bike
- driving a car
Procedural Learning Facilitates Automatic Responding to Unconscious Future Predictions

“[Procedural] memory shapes how we experience the present and how we anticipate the future, reading us in the present moment for what comes next based upon what we have experienced in the past.”

(Siegel, 2006. cited by Fisher, 2014)
Procedural memory does not involve conscious thought

Including our responses to PERCEIVED THREATS

FIGHT
FLIGHT
FREAK
FREEZE
Neuropsychotherapy Principle #4

THE BRAIN’S RESPONSE TO PERCEIVED THREATS
THE CRITICAL NATURE OF THE POLYVAGAL SYSTEM
The Social Engagement System

Brainstem

Facial Movement

Vocalisation

Head Movement

Our Environment

Adapted from Porges SW., Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine. 2009 Apr; 76(Suppl 2): S86–S90
Neuroception: A Subconscious System for Detecting Threats and Safety at a Glance

- **Neuroception** is the process of perception & evaluation
- **Neuroception** is how neural circuits distinguish whether situations or people are safe, dangerous or life threatening
- This rapid response hardware and software integration takes place in the primitive parts of our brain that work at a sub-conscious level
- **Our neuroception** determines our response of immobilization, mobilization, and social engagement/communication

http://stephenporges.com/index.php/component/content/article/5-popular-articles/20-neuroception-a-subconscious-system-for-detecting-threats-and-safety-
Neuropsychotherapy Principle #6

THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
The Window of Tolerance
Adapted from Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006. p.27,32; Corrigan & Nutt, 2010, p.2

Sympathetic Hyper-arousal:
Too much arousal to integrate

Parasympathetic Hypo-arousal:
Too little arousal to integrate

Window of Affect Tolerance:
Moderate, regulated arousal
Sympathetic HYPER-arousal

Window of Tolerance
Optimal Arousal Zone

Parasympathetic HYPO-arousal

“FIGHT or FLIGHT” (Spin Out)
- Increased sensations
- Emotionally reactivity
- Hypervigilance
- Intrusive Imagery
- Disorganized cognitive processing

“IMMOBILISATION” (Shut Down)
- Minimize sensations
- Numbing of emotions
- Disabled cognitive processing
- Reduced physical movement

Process & Respond
- Uncomfortable Emotions can be tolerated
- Cognitive processing & integration of information

Adapted from Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006, p.27,32; Corrigan & Nutt, 2010, p.2

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E M O T I O N A L

Spin Out

Dysregulated

Window of Tolerance
‘The Sweet Spot’

Over-regulated

Shut Down

Uncontrollable Incongruence

Adapted from Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006. p. 27, 32; Corrigan & Nutt, 2010, p. 2
Uncontrollable & Controllable Incongruence

Uncontrollable Incongruence

A Sense of DISEMPOWERMENT

Increase in DYSREGULATION

We Move Backward RETREAT

Patterns of AVOIDENCE

Shrinking World

Controllable Incongruence

A Sense of EMPOWERMENT

Increase in REGULATION

We Move Forward RESILENCE

Patterns of APPROACH

Expanding World
Therapy that stays in the middle (too safe) will not access dysregulated arousal and subsequent regulation.
Emotional Maturity involves Managing my Impulsive/Survival Brain & Engaging my Smart Brain so that I Change my Procedural Learning & Respond from a position of Emotional Security (the best in me) not Reactivity (often the worst in me)
Neuropsychotherapy Principle #7

THE PILLARS OF NEUROPSYCHOTHERAPY
Integrated model of Neuropsychotherapy

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Top Structure
(Actualisation)
Thriving, Learner

Socially Integrated

Pillars (Needs)

Attachment (Connection)

Control

Motivation (Pain/Pleasure)

Environment

Actualisation

Connect

Control

Motivation

Compromised

Safety (Physical/Emotional)

Enriched

Foundation SAFETY
Base materials genetic make up

Bottom -up development
What Clients Bring to the Room

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason to Choose</th>
<th>Power to Choose</th>
<th>Motivation to Choose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Validation</td>
<td>ILOC</td>
<td>Self-Soothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic Alliance &amp; Validation</td>
<td>Controllable Incongruence Options</td>
<td>Controllable Incongruence Regulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Clients Experience in the Room

SAFE

Connect
Control
Motivation

UNSAFE

Abandonment Disconnection Grief & Loss
Disempowered Lack of Options Uncontrollable Incongruence
Overwhelmed buy Life's Challenges Stuck in Dirty Pain Uncontrollable Incongruence
Putting it All Together
With Couples
The Christian Wholeness Framework

Dr John Warlow (2010)
www.christianwholeness.com
Behavourially Opposite

IF

THEN

COPING
MEANING
WORTH

CONTENT

INTER-personal
PROCESS

COPING
MEANING
WORTH

Same Themes
COPING MEANING WORTH

IF THEN

CONTENT

INTER-personal PROCESS

IMPULSIVE BRAIN

SURVIVAL BRAIN

Coping Behaviours

MEANING

Circuit Break
Calm Down

Connect & Challenge

Clarify
Wanting & Desire Now

IMPULSIVE BRAIN

SURVIVAL BRAIN

Coping Behaviours

MEANING
Circuit Break
Calm Down By
1. Not reacting
2. Not taking it personally
3. Breathing

Connect & Challenge
1. What is the meaning for me?
2. Is this valid for here & now?

Clarify & Share
What I Want
Without Demanding
Window of Tolerance

MUSH
Case Illustration

- Early 30's
- Early 40's
- M 2yrs
- CSA
- Infant
- Young Teen

Left

Controlling, passive

Jail CSA

Left

Amicable
• Early sessions focused on safety and understanding as well as normalising her responses & the 3 part brain
• Exploring her overshooting the window & hypervigilance, his avoidance in relation to procedural learning. Also the underlying themes around worthlessness.
• Session around finances
• Next session around Red Zone/ Black Zone
• Next session the flow diagram
**Automatic Survival Brain**

- Self Blame
- Beat myself up
- Spiral down

**Future**

- I want a future together

**Smart Brain**

- Now

**Connection**

- Control

**Lack of Safety**

- Fear
- Powerless
- Helpless
- Harm
- Others control
- External control

**Connection**

- Unloved
- Unworthy
- Guilt
- Unlovable
- Unworthy
- I don’t deserve

**Control**

- Empowerment
- Take the rebond
- Face fears
- Self control
- Internal

**Motivation**

- We are in control of us
If OP (Ongoing Process) then avoid death/lack of meaning and worth. Someone has to circuit break. Control, love, respect, in security. Being a priority = 'safe'.
References & Readings


References & Readings

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