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RESILIENCY DURING A PANDEMIC: SELF CARE FOR EMS AND FRONTLINE HEALTHCARE WORKERS

April 2020

WHO AM I?

- **LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER (M.S.W. EMPHASIS IN MENTAL HEALTH)**
- **WORKED FOR 2 MAJOR URBAN HOSPITALS OVER MY 22 YEAR CAREER**
- **4 1/2 YEARS VOLUNTEER CISM MENTAL HEALTH PRO FOR AMR COCO COUNTY**
- **PRIVATE PRACTICE 13 1/2 YEARS**
- **SPECIAL INTEREST IN FIRST RESPONDERS; RECENTLY SPOKE TO CALIFORNIA NARCOTICS OFFICER'S ASSOCIATION**
- **EFFECTIVE, QUICK TREATMENT FOR PTSI, ANXIETY; 2018 ARTICLE IN 65 DEGREE/57 DEGREE MAGAZINE**
- **RECOGNIZED AS A SPECIALIST IN THIS AREA BY MAJOR INSURANCE COMPANIES**

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

- I am heavily influenced by a number of phenomenal doctors, and psychologists
- I am passing along a lot of their thoughts and Ideas today, peppered with my own.
- Dr Daniel Amen, Amen Clinics
- Dr Frank Anderson
- Dr Laurel Parnell
- Dr Dick Schwartz, IFS Institute
- Dr Francine Shapiro, EMDR International Association
- Dr Bessel van der Kolk
- My yoga instructor, Sara Leyva

ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM

None of us want to be here now...we prefer this crisis wasn't happening. I already have my first friend, local RN, with Covid-19 Dx.

I may be the first therapist you've ever heard from: high levels of skepticism about people in my profession in EMS culture ...just give me 15 minutes before you decide to leave.

The most skeptical are those who have logged in today with screen names as Wonder Woman or Captain America :)

I'm not in "my element". I'm talking from my new home office: The Hall Closet

... as such, you may hear my dog barking or my kids loudly discussing differences of opinion or going up and down the stairs and I have no control 😬

We'll have a time for questions at the end.

TODAY'S TIME TOGETHER

- **Today: lots of practical back pocket tools to manage stress and anxiety**
- **Opportunity to practice some of these together**
- **Lots of ideas on self care that you can begin implementing immediately (aka psycho-education)**
- **What today is Not: this is not therapy, but I will provide some resources if you think you could benefit from meeting with a licensed therapist (more on that later)**

“THIS IS NOT MY EMERGENCY!!”

OR IS IT??

**“WE’RE IN THE SAME BOAT;
BUT WERE NOT IN THE SAME STORM”**

Some of us are in a heavy rain fall
some of us are in a thunderstorm
some of us are in a violent squall
some of us are in a hurricane, in open water

ALL OF US BENEFIT FROM A STRONG ANCHOR

DR. BESSEL VAN DER KOLK ON COVID-19

This scenario makes us ripe for trauma; currently we are in a pre-trauma phase, but there's much we can do to prevent ourselves from being traumatized.

THIS PANDEMIC IS A COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

We used to categorize trauma into two categories: Big T and little t traumas

I'm suggesting another category: small, **medium, large** and **extra large** trauma
maybe life isn't too different for you besides some difficulties getting your favorites from the grocery store

maybe you're balancing working from home and now also homeschooling your kids

maybe your roommate or spouse or partner has lost their job and you aren't sure how the rent or mortgage is going to get paid

maybe you have a loved one or coworker who is fighting for their life or who has already succumbed to the disease

OUR ANS & LIMBIC SYSTEM & SYMPATHETICS

- **The Mind/Body Connection: What we think has an effect on our bodies. Our Body only knows what the Brain tells it: if the brain tells it frightening things, the body will be frightened (increased HR, adrenaline dump, dilated pupils, etc.)**
- **Our Limbic systems are on overdrive; all kinds of stress hormones are being activated on a regular basis: cortisol, aldosterone, adrenaline**
- **The #1 and #2 functions of the brain are: to avoid death and avoid embarrassment: basically, these are the things you are facing daily! Have you been accused of over-reacting to your own safety during this time? That's prime fodder for even more stress hormone since your trying to stay alive & not get embarrassed; this puts you in double bind. The answer isn't to wear less PPE to avoid embarrassment. The answer is in self regulation.**

WHAT CAN WE DO TO SELF REGULATE? BACK TO BASICS

- * **SLEEP** - helps our immune systems, helps us process unresolved info from the day
- * **Eat well** - try and incorporate one or 2 positive diet changes during this time; no need to overhaul your entire diet right now; opt for complex carbs over simple carbs, 5 fruits/veg, avoid blood sugar crashes (physiological sx mimic panic sx)
- * **Schedules**- babies/kids need consistency. **SO DO WE.** (Control what you can) get up at the same time and to bed at the same time
- * **Exercise** - increases endorphins, burns off adrenaline, boosts blood flow to the brain and helps maintain clear thinking and good focus
- * **Limit alcohol to 2-3 drinks PER WEEK** (Dr. Daniel Amen's recommendation)
- * **Ask M.D.** about adding Vitamin D and B's.
- * **Relaxation breathing, meditation and yoga** - triggers parasympathetic nervous system
- * **Get into nature** - hands in the dirt, sunshine on your face, wind in your hair
- * **Kill the ANTs= Automatic Negative Thoughts**
- * **Learn about Flow States** and how to get into one!
- * **Limit social media or harness it for good; get your news from reputable sources only**
- * **Don't discount the importance of music, arts, and humor!**
- * **Kill WPTs= What People Think**

RELAXATION BREATHING

- It only take about two minutes to turn on your calming parasympathetic nervous system.
 - Goal: 6 breaths or less per minute.
 - Let's do this together for the next two minutes.
 - First, rate your overall anxiety level right now, on a 0-10, 10 being the worst.
 - Important: try and breathe through your nose only for this exercise
 - If the cadence I give you doesn't work for you, just adjust it to fit
 - Breathe in for a count of 4, hold for 2, and out for 6
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- Now, rate your anxiety level again on a 0-10.

HELPFUL THOUGHT PATTERNS FROM COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

- **What People Think (adapted from Dr. Howard Leibgold The Phobias Way)**
“It is said that up until age 20, people are very concerned about what people think. By age 40, we realize that it doesn’t matter what people think. By age 60, we realize that they weren’t thinking about us at all! In truth, it doesn’t matter what people think. What they think is based on their experiences, their level of understanding, their own childhood, their beliefs, their ability to empathize, their ability to express feelings, and their internal map..... and these things have absolutely nothing to do with you.”
- **Future Fears?** “If it happens, I’ll handle it.” or “If it happens, God will help me handle it”
- **ANTs:** what’s the negative thought? (write it down) Is it true? What’s the evidence for the thought? Is there a statement that’s more true? Don’t let ANTs go unchallenged because ANTs lead to adrenaline, too much adrenaline leads to panic. (Perhaps keep in mind some of your own ANTs to ask about during our Q&A.)

KEEPING PEACE ON THE JOB: PARTNER ISSUES

- WE ARE ALL DOING THE BEST WE CAN.
- EACH OF US HAS A DIFFERENT BAND WIDTH (THINK PAIN TOLERANCE DIFFERENCES WITH PATIENTS)... DON'T HOLD SOMEONE TO YOUR BANDWIDTH OR PAIN TOLERANCE (THAT GOES BOTH WAYS)
- STRIVE TO MEET YOUR PARTNER WHERE THEY ARE (ASSUMING THE NEEDS OF THE PATIENT ARE ALWAYS #1)

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- TRUE?
- HELPFUL?
- INSPIRING?
- NECESSARY?
- KIND?

- THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH, PROFESSIONALLY, BUT TIMING IS EVERYTHING
- PERHAPS KEEPING A LIST OF YOUR FRUSTRATIONS IS A GOOD IDEA, TO ADDRESS THEM WITH YOUR PARTNER AFTER THIS CRISIS IS OVER
- “AS IRON SHARPENS IRON, SO ONE PERSON SHARPENS ANOTHER”

ALL OUR FEELINGS ARE VALID RIGHT NOW

Fear?

Anxiety?

Frustration?

Anger?

Grief?

Self Preservation?

Skepticism?

Minimizing? (“What’s the big deal?” “Why is everyone freaking out?”)

IF ALL OF OUR FEELINGS ARE VALID, HOW DO YOU TOLERATE FEELINGS THAT ARE DIFFERENT THAN YOURS?

- 1. Starts with compassion for the struggle someone else is having.**
- 2. Feelings aren't always true, but they are a weather vane for what the environment is like for the other person.**
- 3. Compassion brings softening and allows us to validate the feelings that are different from our own. The fastest road to validation is to match your words with your non-verbal behavior. (Tone, eye contact, open body language, acknowledge the true parts of what exists in the differences of opinion).**
- 4. When someone feels heard, that someone *tends* to soften enough to take an invitation to consider your opinion and feelings as valid, too.**
- 5. Whoever is the most mature among you, should start #1 (Dr. Emmerson Eggerichs)**

IFS OVERVIEW

- We have lots of different internal parts of our psyche: who we are at work, who we are with our spouses/partners, who we are as children and as parents, who we are as friends, etc. These are our “parts”
- Often our parts are experienced as feelings in our bodies...the mind/body connection!
- Think the Inside Out movie by Pixar
- We can talk to our parts, directly.
- Goal is to get you in your SELF (functioning from our internal wisdom and our birthright which can't be damaged).
- We want our SELF driving the bus of our life, not our parts.
- SELF: 8 C's; Compassion, Curiosity, Courage, Connectedness, Clarity, Calmness, Creativity & Confidence

Internal Family Systems Meditation by Anderson, Sweezy & Schwartz from IFS Skills Training Manual, 2017

- All your parts are welcome!
- Focus on what's present now. Sometimes we notice our parts are thoughts, emotions, physical feelings in our bodies, images, or a combination of these.
- If it feels good, go ahead and take a deep breath and notice your heart in whatever way you experience it - this doesn't have to be your actual heart on the L side of your chest, just however you experience your heart.
- If it's available to you, close your eyes if you are comfortable and safe. If not, you can keep your eyes open
- I'm going to invite you to get to know your heart in a physical way and we're going to explore different qualities of your heart.
- We'll see about its condition. First, notice how open it is.
- Notice how tender or encrusted or callused it is.
- Notice if it is congested, fluid or flowing
- Notice how much space your heart has in there. Does it feel contracted and tightly packed or spacious?
- You might find in your exploration that different places in your heart are different in those ways. Maybe the front is closed but the back is open. Or the top is tender and the bottom is tough. Maybe energy can flow through some parts of your heart but not all. Maybe in some places our heart feels contracted while in other places it feels spacious.
- So where it feels extreme in any of those ways - closed, contracted, congested or calloused - you have located some protective parts. Thank them for being present.
- If you want, you can take a little time right now to meet those parts.
- If it's okay, just get a little curious about what those protectors are afraid would happen if they allowed you to open your heart fully. (If they let your heart be tender or didn't try to contract or compact it).
- In answer to that question, you are likely to learn about the vulnerable parts they protect who also live in or around your heart. Right now, don't go to those vulnerable parts, just hear a little about them from the protectors.
- As you get to know how vigilantly these protectors have guarded your vulnerability, just extend your appreciation toward them at whatever degree feels sincere.
- Notice how they react to the appreciation from you.
- Right now, we are not asking them to change anything. Nor do we expect them to change. We're just getting to know their fears and show them appreciation for the jobs they are doing for you. Someday, if they want, if they feel it's a good idea, they may let you go to those vulnerable parts to heal them.
- Often protective parts don't believe healing is possible. They feel condemned to do this with your heart for the rest of your life. So just be sure they know it is possible but there's no pressure.
- When this visit with your heart feels complete, you can begin to shift your focus back outside, but make sure before you leave to thank them for letting you know all this and thank them for their hard work to keep your heart safe.

GOT FAITH?

- **Multiple studies suggest that those with an active faith recover from traumatic life experiences more rapidly than those without, PTSD included.**
- **If you have a faith, DIG IN :) Connect online, stream your religious services & zoom your small groups**
- **If you don't have a faith, find one...it's good for your mental health :)**

HUMOR AS A SURVIVAL SKILL

- **“Humor is an important piece of my survival skills. Over time, if I took home the weight of everything that goes on every day here, I wouldn’t be able to get out of bed in the morning.” - Oncology physician, Penson, Partridge, Rudd, et. al., Update: Is Laughter the Best Medicine?, The Oncologist, Schwartz Center Rounds, 2005; 10: 651-660.**
- **Indulge in Laughter** (as long as it’s not nervous laughter ex: American River Fail)
- **Do you have friends who you can laugh with, laugh at, or who can laugh at you? Have conversations with them, OFTEN.**

GIFTS OF THE PANDEMIC:

- * REMINDING US WHAT AND WHO ARE IMPORTANT IN OUR LIVES
- * PERFECT STORM OF EVENTS SO THAT PEOPLE ARE ADMITTING FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE NEED FOR HELP OUTSIDE OF THEMSELVES
- * BRINGING US TOGETHER AS A NATION
- * SOCIAL MEDIA IS BEGINNING TO BE USED FOR MORE GOOD THAN HARM
- * SWITCH TO TELEHEALTH FOR MANY THERAPISTS: ALLOWING MANY MORE TO GET HELP THAT OTHERWISE WOULDN'T DO TO GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!

- You were trained for such a time as this, at this point in history, for such an event as this, with such a skill set as yours.
- Whatever you are doing to serve your community is better than what the community could do for itself. Trust your training, even when the situation seems overwhelming.
- Fred Rogers: “Look for the helpers”...YOU are the helpers he was referring to. Each of us has the capacity to help in our own ways, big and small. Your contribution is a

HUGE one, right now.

RESOURCES

HOTLINES:

SUICIDE/CRISIS HOTLINE 1-800-273-8255

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE: 1-800-799-7233

SOBRIETY SUPPORTS:

AA.ORG

[HTTP://AA-INTERGROUP.ORG/](http://AA-INTERGROUP.ORG/)

FOR HELP FINDING A CULTURALLY COMPETENT TRAUMA THERAPIST:

FRSN.ORG (FIRST RESPONDER SUPPORT NETWORK)

OR

PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM (LOOK FOR THERAPISTS WHO ARE TRAINED IN EMDR, IFS, NEUROFEEDBACK OR WELL TRAINED SOMATIC TRAUMA THERAPISTS)

OR

EMAIL JADE@BRENTWOODTHERAPIST.COM AND I CAN TRY AND HELP FIND A THERAPIST IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR WHO DOES TELEHEALTH

YOGA:

YOGAFORFIRSTRESPONDERS.ORG

SLEEP HYGIENE:

HEALTHYSLEEP.MED.HARVARD.EDU

FAVORITE APPS FOR MENTAL HEALTH:

HEADSPACE

BREATHE2RELAX

PFA MOBILE

Great Reads:

[The Body Keeps the Score](#) by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D. or besselvanderkolk.com

[Making a Good Brain Great](#), by Daniel Amen, M.D. or amenclinics.com or brainmd.com or the Brain Warrior's Way Podcast

[Self Therapy](#) by Jay Earley, Ph.D.

[EMDR: The Breakthrough Therapy for Overcoming Anxiety, Stress and Trauma](#) by Francine Shapiro, Ph.D. or emdria.org