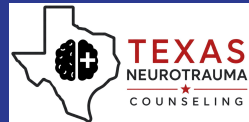


Understanding Medical Trauma

Families Affected by Brain Injury and Neurosurgery

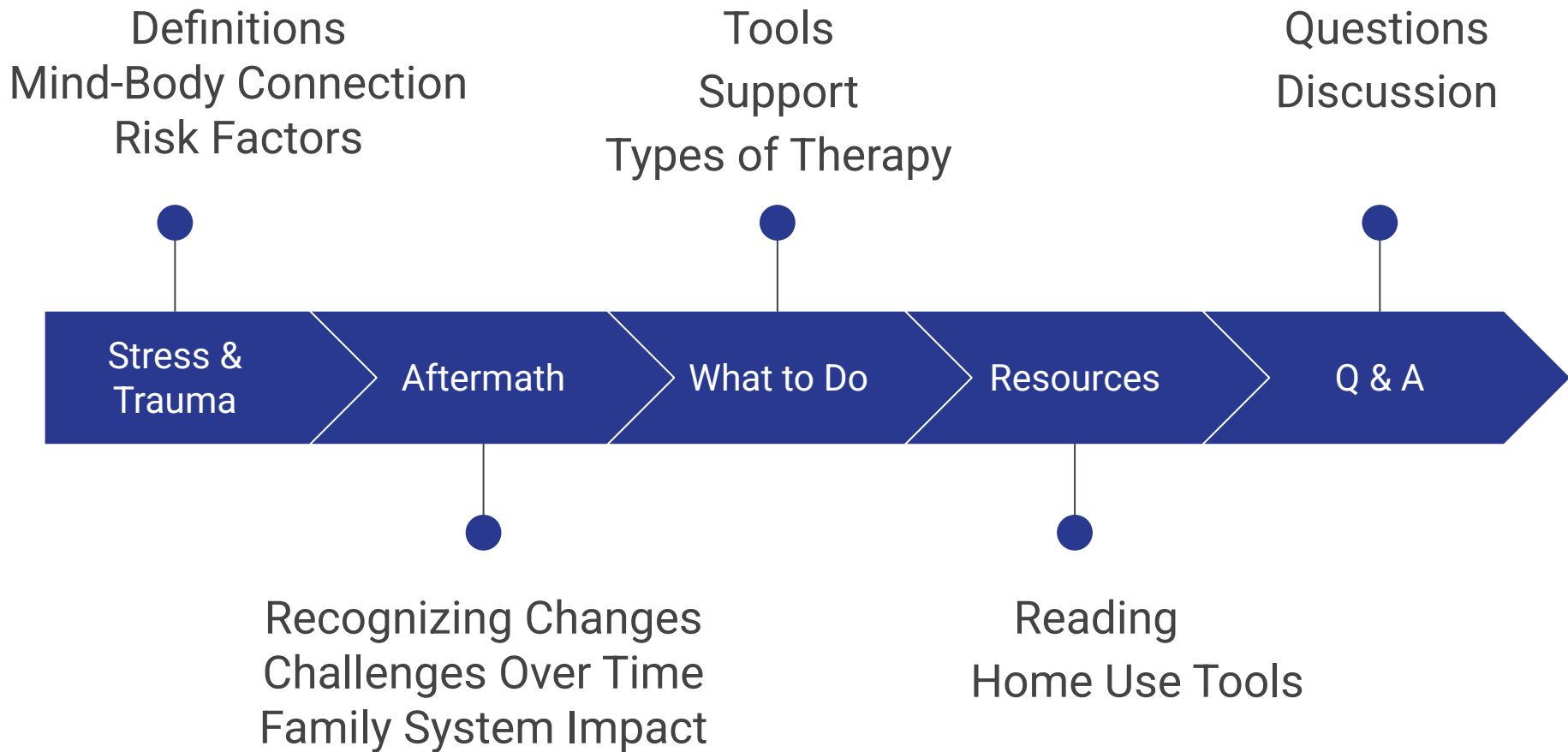
Jennifer Bommer, LPC, CBIS



Topic Roadmap

Objectives





Adversity Spectrum

Challenge

An event or situation that can be met with appropriate skills, support, or tools.

Viewed with confidence, resilience, and growth mindset

Stressor

An event or situation that is appraised as uncertain, overwhelming, or threatening

Viewed with anxiety, frustration, or helplessness

Trauma

A distressing or dangerous event that overwhelms one's ability to cope

Can lead to significant impairment in functioning

Mind-Body Connection: The Stress Response

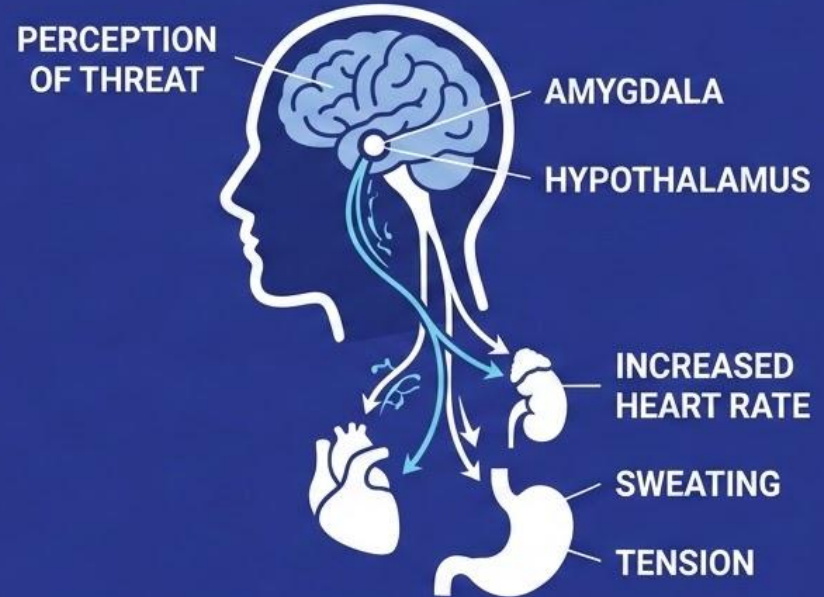
THE CONNECTION

When the mind perceives a threat, it triggers a cascade of physical changes in the body. This is often called the “fight-or-flight” response.

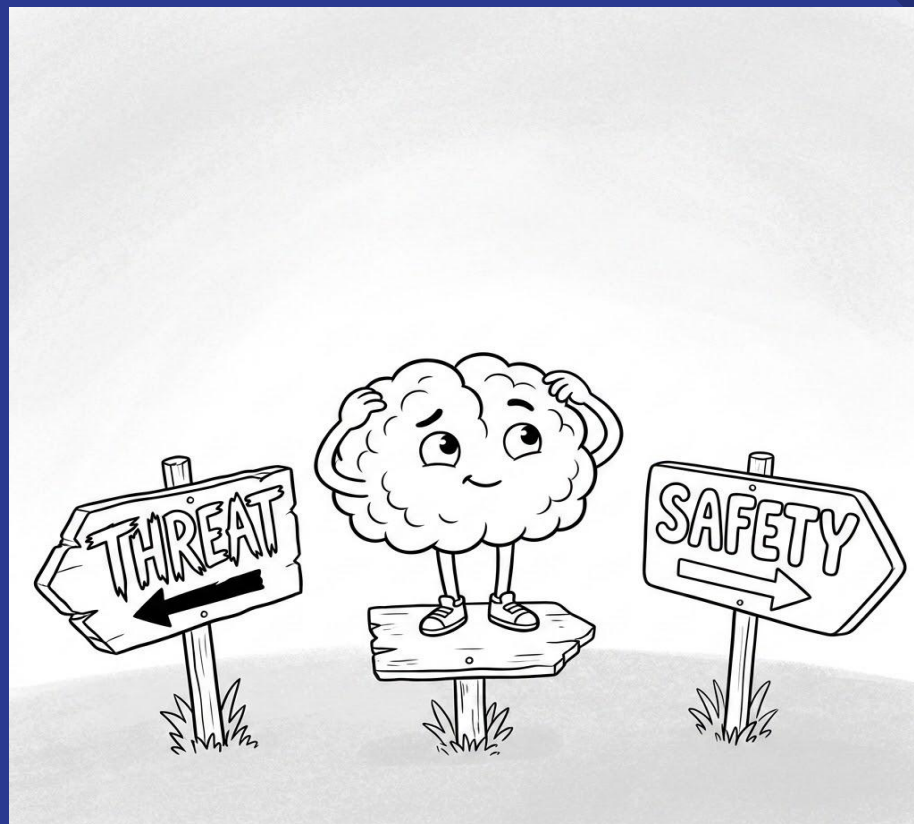
KEY PROCESSES

1. Perceived Threat (Mind)
2. Nervous System Activation
3. Hormonal Release (Adrenaline, Cortisol)
4. Physiological Changes (Body)

THE HPA AXIS & PHYSIOLOGY



—— The mechanism linking mental appraisal and physical reactions.





“An abnormal
reaction to an
abnormal
situation is normal
behavior.” -Viktor
Frankl

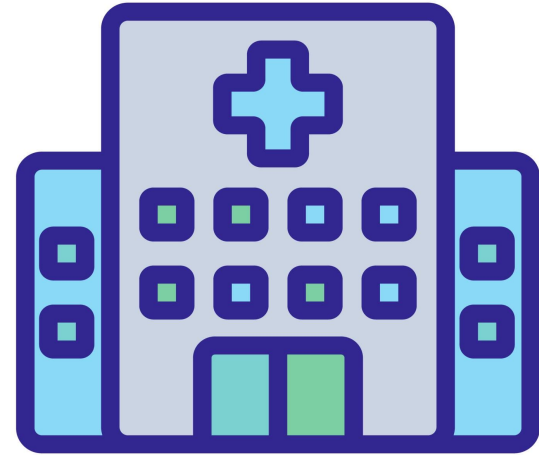
Risk Factors

- ❖ Event severity
- ❖ Personal injury/loss of life
- ❖ Proximity
- ❖ Intensity of emotion
- ❖ Pre-existing mental health struggles
- ❖ Prior traumatic experiences
- ❖ Limited resources
- ❖ Isolation



Medical Trauma

- ❖ Loss of autonomy/bodily integrity
- ❖ Delayed or incorrect diagnosis
- ❖ Pain
- ❖ Not feeling heard
- ❖ Vigilance
- ❖ Isolation
- ❖ Lost sense of normalcy
- ❖ Near death experience



Signs & Symptoms

- ❖ Anxiety/panic
- ❖ Insomnia
- ❖ Nightmares
- ❖ Hypervigilance
- ❖ Irritability, angry outbursts, “meltdowns”
- ❖ Self-blame
- ❖ Detachment, numbness
- ❖ Memory loss
- ❖ Poor focus/attention
- ❖ Avoidance of triggers or thoughts/feelings
- ❖ Flashbacks



A medical success can
coexist with post traumatic
stress

Key Life Domains: Challenges Over Time

- ❖ Developmental
- ❖ Vocational
- ❖ Existential
- ❖ Relational

- ❖ Occupational
- ❖ Spiritual
- ❖ Intrapersonal

The Family System Impact

Parents

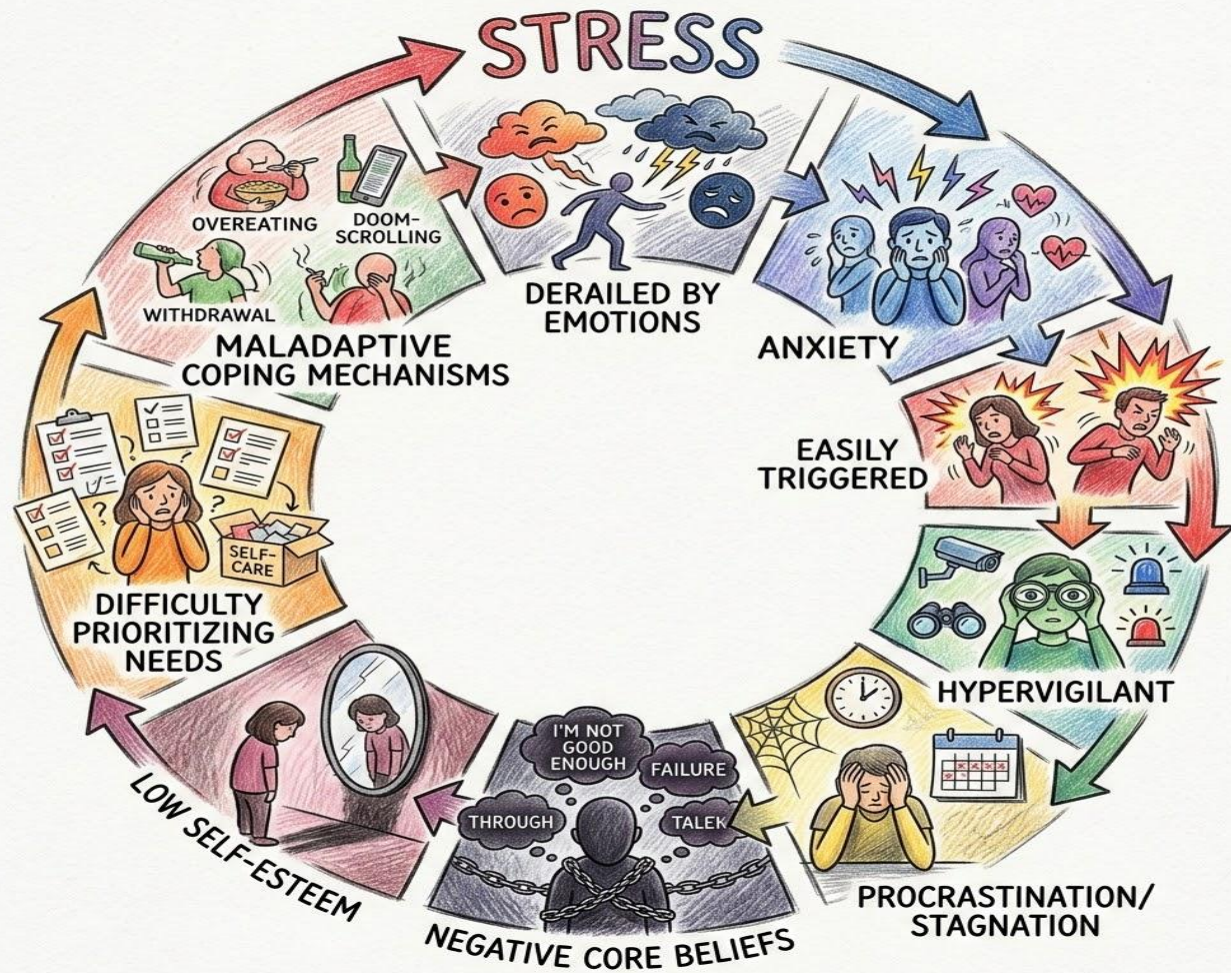
- Grief
- Anxiety & Depression
- Vigilance
- Financial Stress
- Guilt
- Caregiver Burnout
- Marital Strain
- Career Loss/Change

Siblings

- Anxiety
- Resentment/Frustration
- Hyper- Independence
- Caretaking Role
- Disrupted Routines
- Missed Events/Experiences
- Social Withdrawal

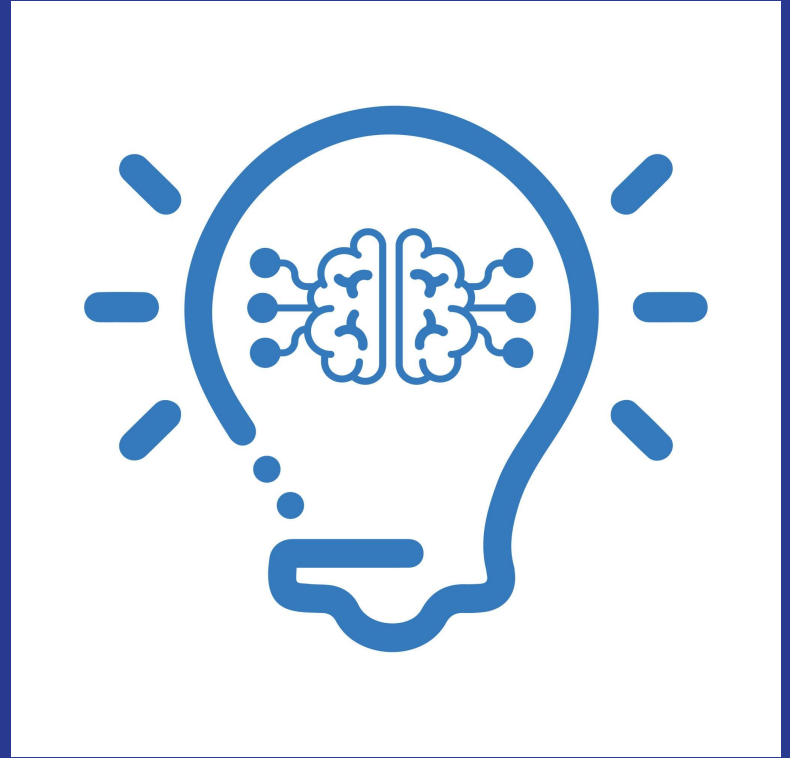
Health Crisis Survivor

- Disrupted Education
- Isolation
- Medical Fatigue
- Shame
- Anticipatory Anxiety
- Feeling “Behind”



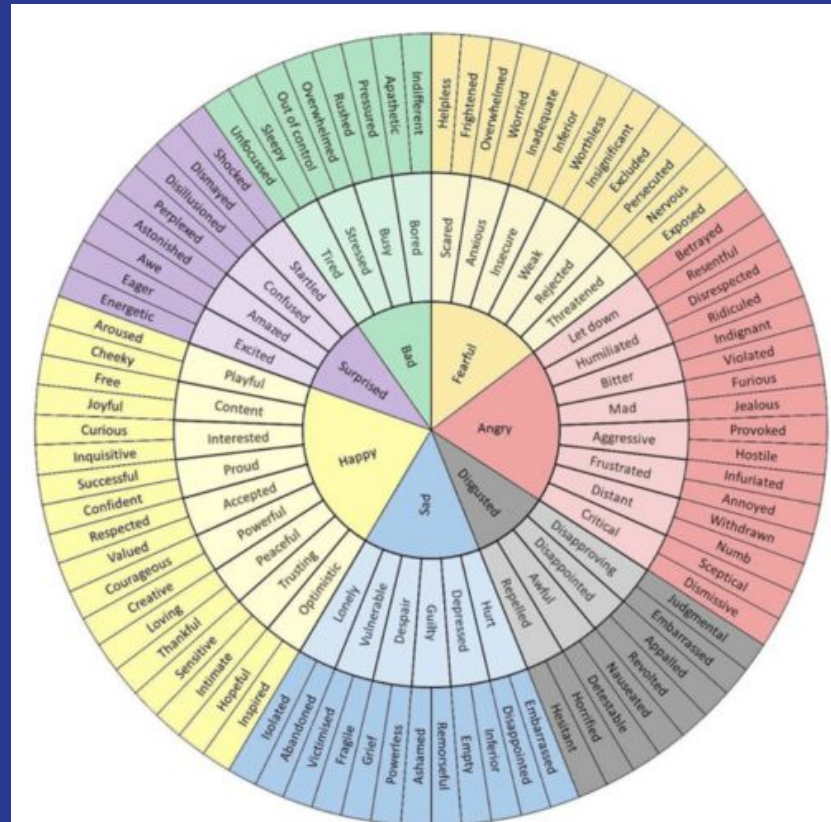
Trauma Therapy

1. Re-establish safety to shift from crisis mode
2. Gain skills to reduce symptoms and increase emotional regulation
3. Reappraise traumatic memories
4. Use new insight and understanding to move towards meaningful future



Therapy Targets

- ❖ Communication skills
- ❖ Emotional literacy
- ❖ Adaptive coping skills
- ❖ Cognitive flexibility
- ❖ Stress management
- ❖ Mindfulness
- ❖ Distress tolerance
- ❖ Defining values



Therapeutic Approaches

- ❖ Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- ❖ Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)
- ❖ Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- ❖ Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- ❖ Play Therapy
- ❖ Medical Family Therapy
- ❖ Somatic Therapy

The 5 Rs of Rehab & Recovery

- ❖ Healthy **Relationships**
- ❖ Manageable **Responsibility**
- ❖ Meaningful **Roles**
- ❖ Adequate **Resources**
- ❖ Appropriate **Rest**

Resources

- ❖ Therapy Card Decks (ACT, CBT, DBT, Somatic)
Amazon
- ❖ *Anger Management After Brain Injury* by Leon Edward
- ❖ *The Body Remembers* by Babette Rothschild
- ❖ Family Caregiver Alliance
- ❖ Johns Hopkins Mindfulness Program



Discussion & Questions