

THE SCIENCE OF SELF-CARE

How it helps and why it matters

GOALS

1.To understand the concerns about compassion fatigue and burnout and why it is important to take care of ourselves as helpers.

2.To understand the science of self-care including our physiological and neurological responses.

3.To become familiar with authentic self-care techniques.





MEET YOUR GUIDE

Cary Hopkins Eyles

What draws us to this work?

Wanting to help

Being caring and giving

We know someone with a substance use disorder or are recovering ourselves

We lost someone with a substance use disorder

We want to make a significant impact



Personal Traits

Compassionate

Empathetic

Giving/generous

Want to share our experiences and hope

Personally invested

Strengths as Risks

Our caring nature, our histories, our backgrounds can all create risk factors

Transference/countertransference

Trigger types (e.g., victim)

Giving too much

Getting our sense of self from the work

Burnout

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout as an occupational phenomenon that results from chronic workplace stress that *has not been successfully managed*

It is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;

- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job

- reduced professional efficacy

(ICD-11)



Compassion Fatigue

“A state experienced by those helping people in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper.”

Compassion Fatigue



Compassion fatigue is an evolving concept in the field of traumatology

Compassion fatigue is a form of traumatic stress resulting from repeated exposure to traumatized individuals or aversive details of traumatic events while working in a helping or protecting profession

This indirect form of trauma exposure differs from experiencing trauma oneself but can express itself in similar symptoms


Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is considered to be the result of working directly with victims of disasters, trauma, or illness, especially in the health care industry


Individuals working in other helping professions are also at risk for experiencing compassion fatigue

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma, also known as secondary trauma, is indirect exposure to a traumatic event through first-hand account or narrative of that event



People in the helping professions such as counselors and therapists, rescue workers, police officers, doctors, and lawyers may be at risk of vicarious traumatization



Vicarious trauma is the emotional residue of exposure that counselors have from working with people as they are hearing their trauma stories and become witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured

The Why

You are a self so you need care

Beings need to take care of their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and psychological health just as we have to care for our homes, cars, material items

But I have realized that people need to be convinced

The givers struggle to care for themselves

The Why

Virtually impossible to be effective with others (as a counselor, educator, parent, friend) if we are not cared for ourselves

If you do not have anything to give, you will get irritable, resentful, and struggle when you cannot help others

The Science



Symptoms of CF and VT are similar to that of PTSD and can include:



- Hyper arousal



- Anxiety



- Depression



- Avoidance and withdrawal



- Intrusive images and thoughts



- Sleeplessness



- Reduced concentration

The Science

In our roles, we are expected to provide high-quality, person-centered care in an empathetic and compassionate way

Compassion fatigue is associated with insomnia, exhaustion, depression, lower job satisfaction, loss of hope, lack of nutrition, lack of spiritual awareness, and poor judgment



The Science

The brain is wired to avoid pain – both physical and emotional; both our own and others

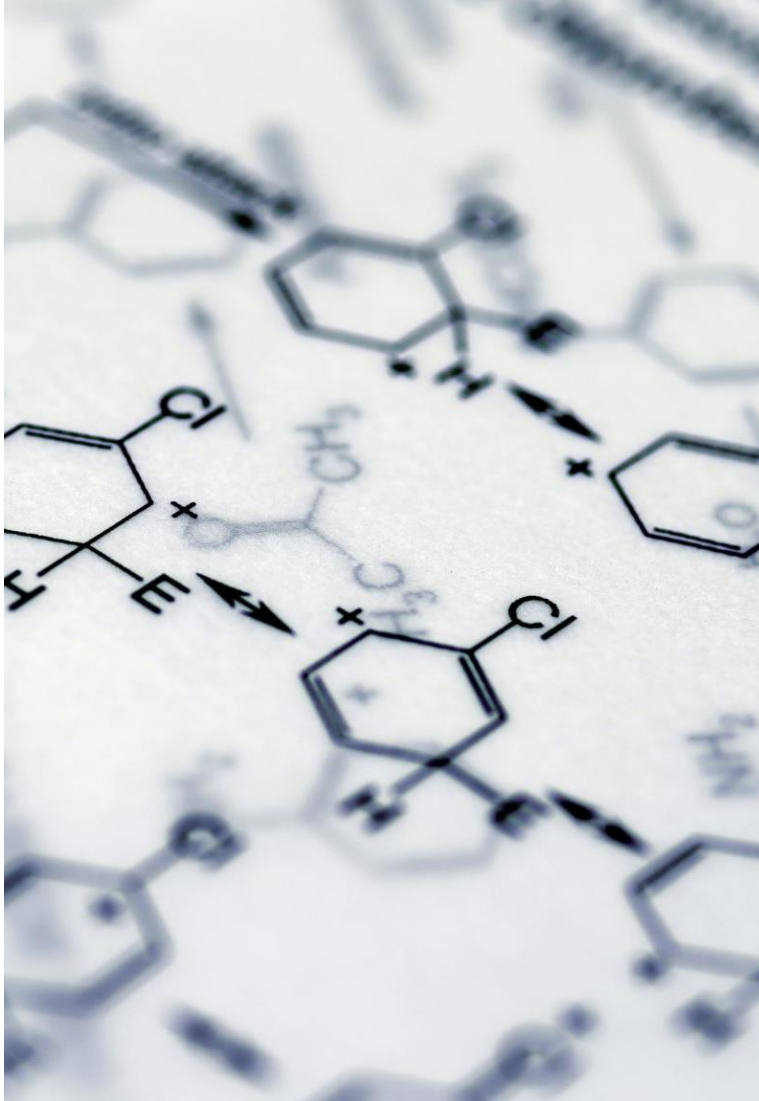
So we are fighting our own instincts on a daily basis by doing our work

Alarm System

Dealing with vicarious trauma can make your body/brain feel that it is in danger which sets off an alarm system in the body

Fight or flight or another response is triggered for survival purposes

Normally that passes but when it does not, the effects can be terrible for the body



Physiological Effects of Trauma

Trauma affects the body's central stress response system – the HPA axis

This makes us more reactive to stress and more likely to create the stress hormone cortisol

Cortisol is necessary but can be toxic when chronically high

Physiological Effects of Trauma

Cortisol can lead to increased risk of depression and heart disease

Normally we have a stressor, cortisol comes and then the stressor passes and cortisol reduces

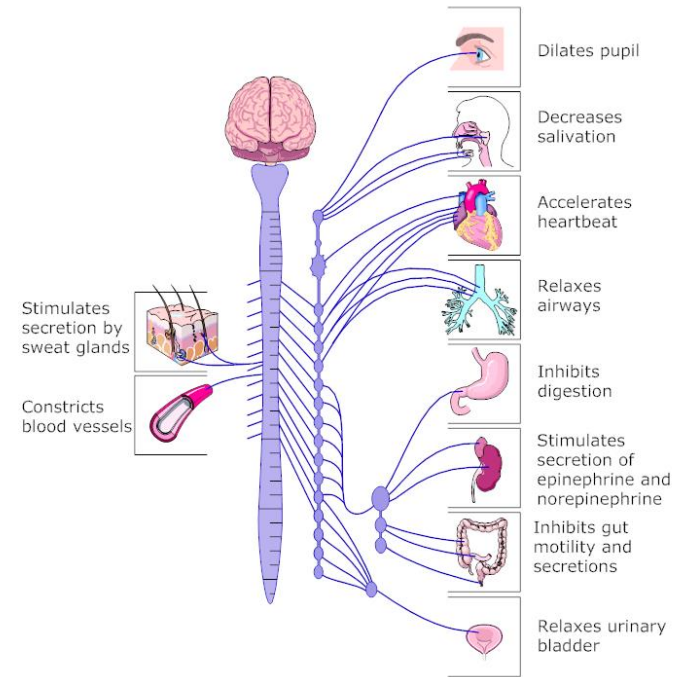
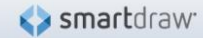
Someone with trauma may continue to produce

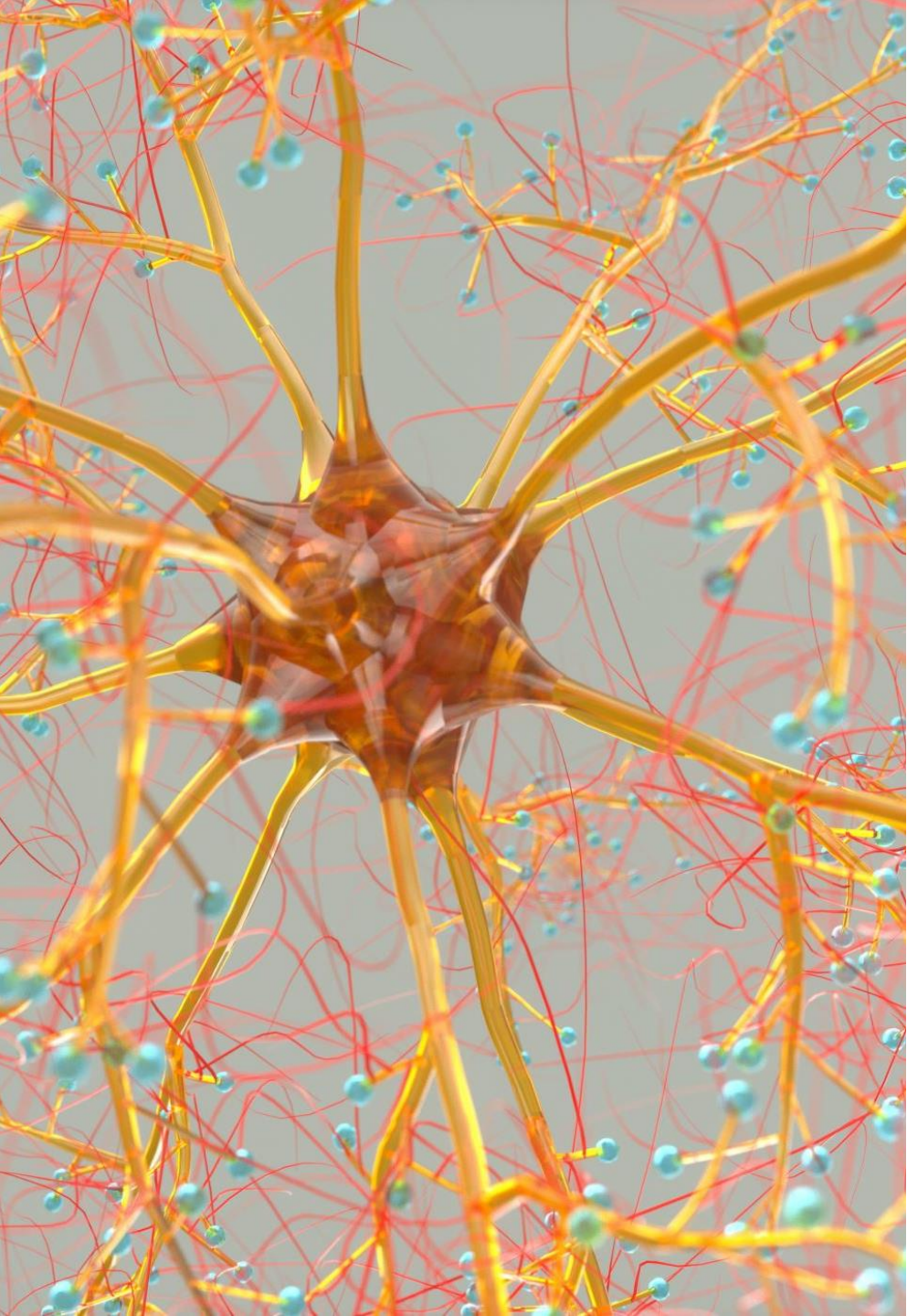


Nervous System

When experiencing what is perceived as a threat, a physical and emotional reaction is evoked, which activates Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) aka the fight or flight response

Sympathetic Nervous System





Nervous System

The SNS remains activated keeping the body and mind on high alert

The brain and nervous system get stuck in trauma and the brain can ultimately get rewired

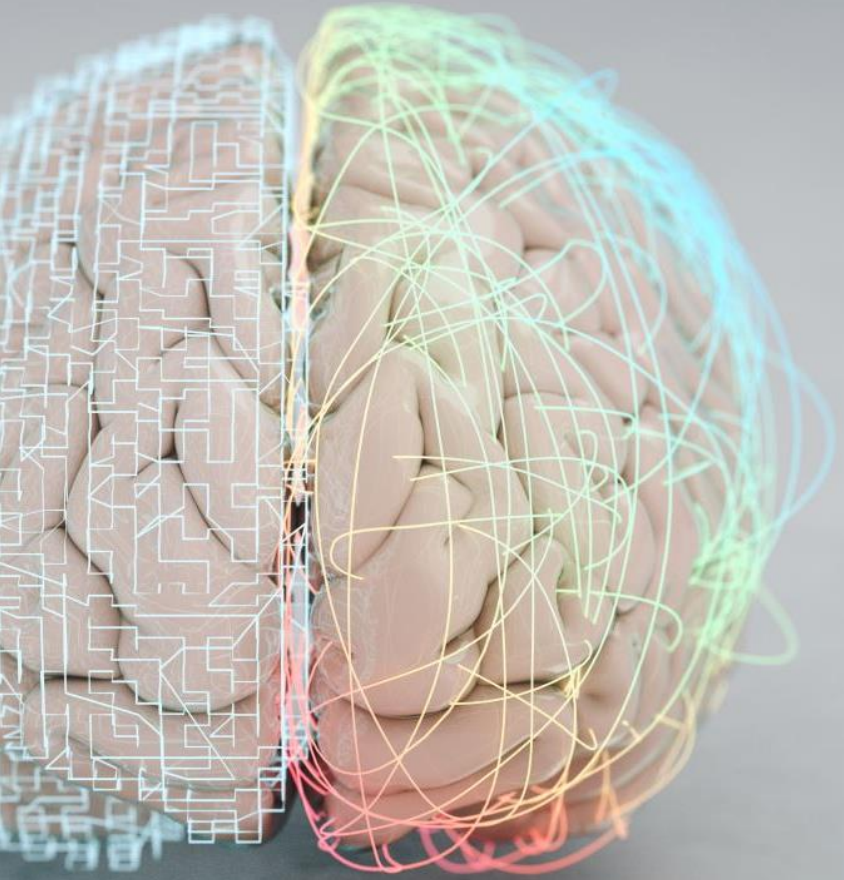
Brain Science

Three parts of the brain:

Reptilian (brain stem): Responsible for survival instincts and autonomic body processes

Mammalian (limbic, midbrain): Processes emotions and conveys sensory relays

Neo-mammalian (cortex, forebrain): Controls cognitive processing, decision-making, learning, memory, and inhibitory functions



Brain Science

The reptilian brain is activated during trauma and alerts the body to go into survival mode

Usually we can shift into normal functioning and return to standard cognition

But sometimes we get stuck in survival

Brain Science



The stress and hormones stay in survival mode



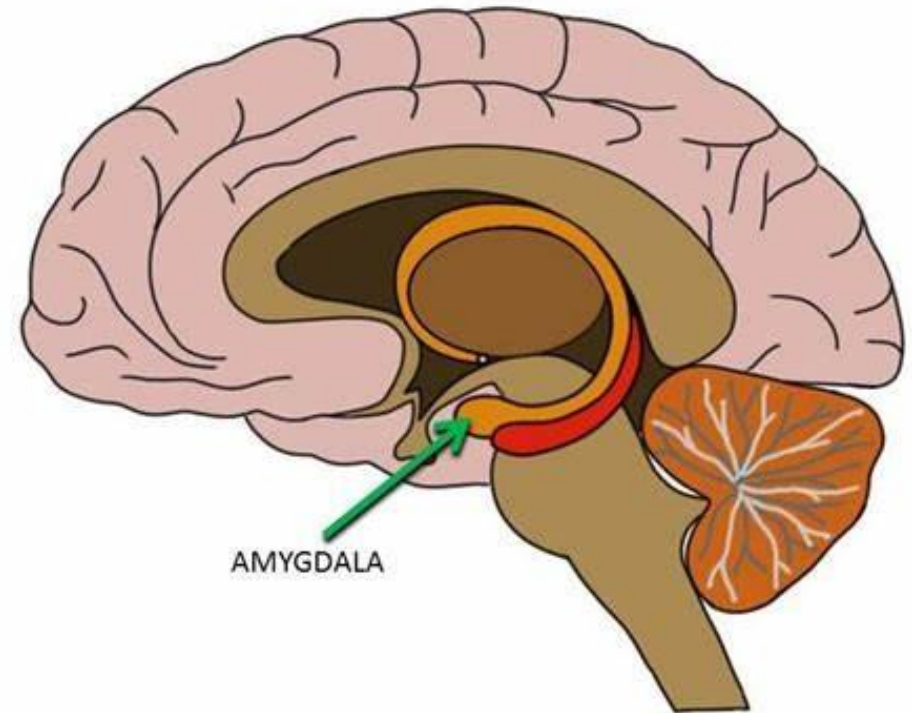
The reptilian brain stays primed for threat



The survivor remains in a reactive state which means constant stress mode

Brain Dysregulation

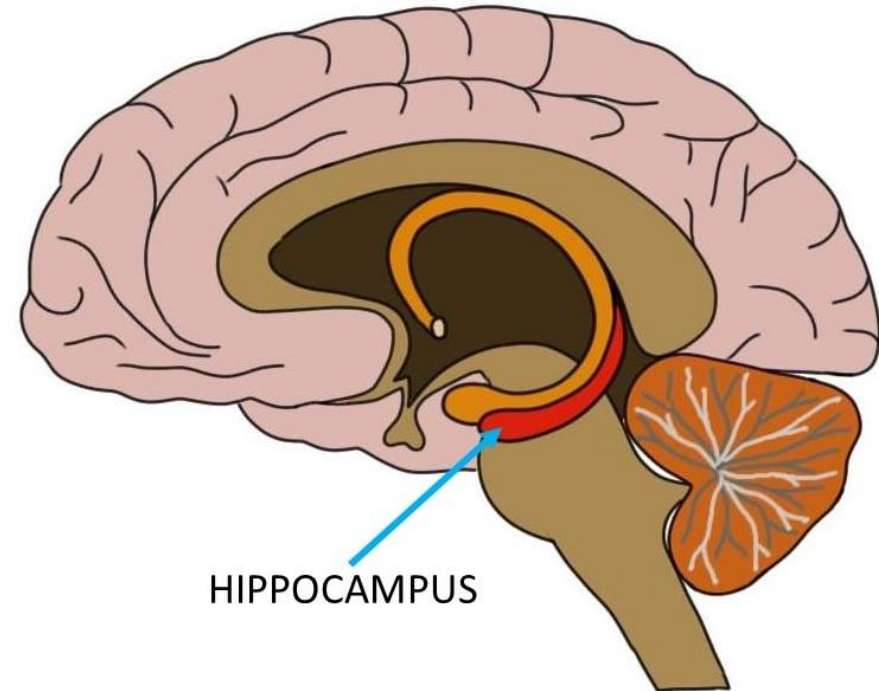
Overstimulated amygdala: Can get caught up in a highly alert and activated loop and perceive threats everywhere



Brain Dysregulation

Underactive hippocampus: Less effective in making synaptic connections necessary for memory consolidation

The body and mind stay reactive because they don't understand the threat is in the past

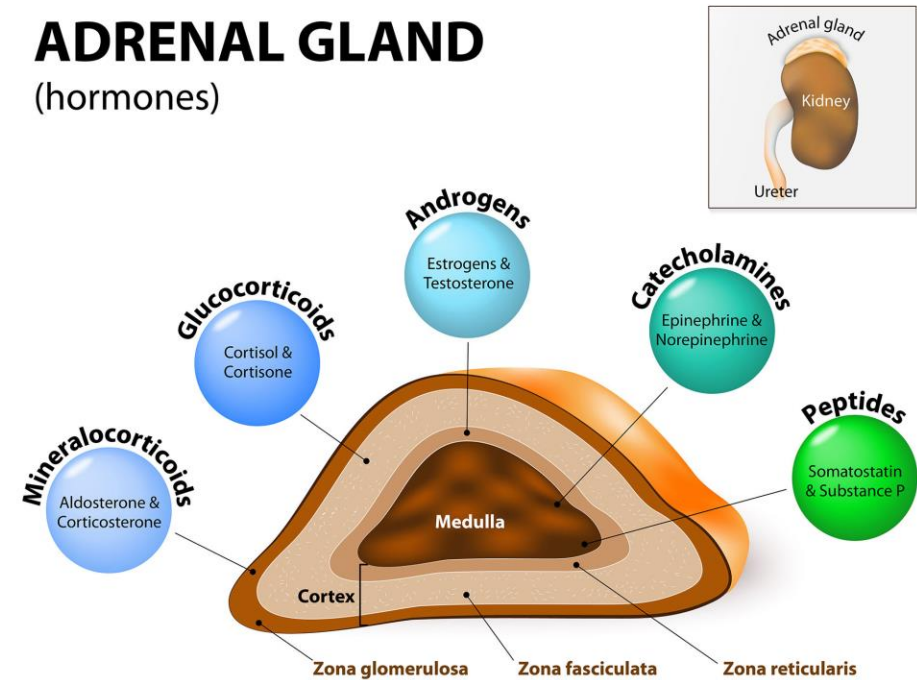


Brain Dysregulation

Ineffective variability: Constant elevation of stress hormones

SNS remains highly activated which leads to fatigue of many systems including the adrenal

ADRENAL GLAND (hormones)



Brain Dysregulation

GABA: This is a calming agent produced by the brain; during stress GABA is lowered and adrenaline increased

GABA needs to be regulated so the nervous system can calm down

Thinking Center

In addition the PFC, or thinking center in the brain, can be affected by (vicarious) trauma

This area is responsible for rational thought, problem-solving, planning, personality, empathy

This allows us to make good decisions, think clearly and be aware of ourselves and others

Emotion Regulation Center



The ACC is responsible for regulating emotions and works closely with the thinking center



A strong ACC can manage difficult emotions without letting them take over



1. The thinking center is underactivated



2. The emotion regulation center is underactivated.



3. The Fear Center (amygdala) is overactivated.

Traumatized Brain

Traumatized Brain

The primitive brain is in charge while the more evolved “higher function” parts of the brain are passive

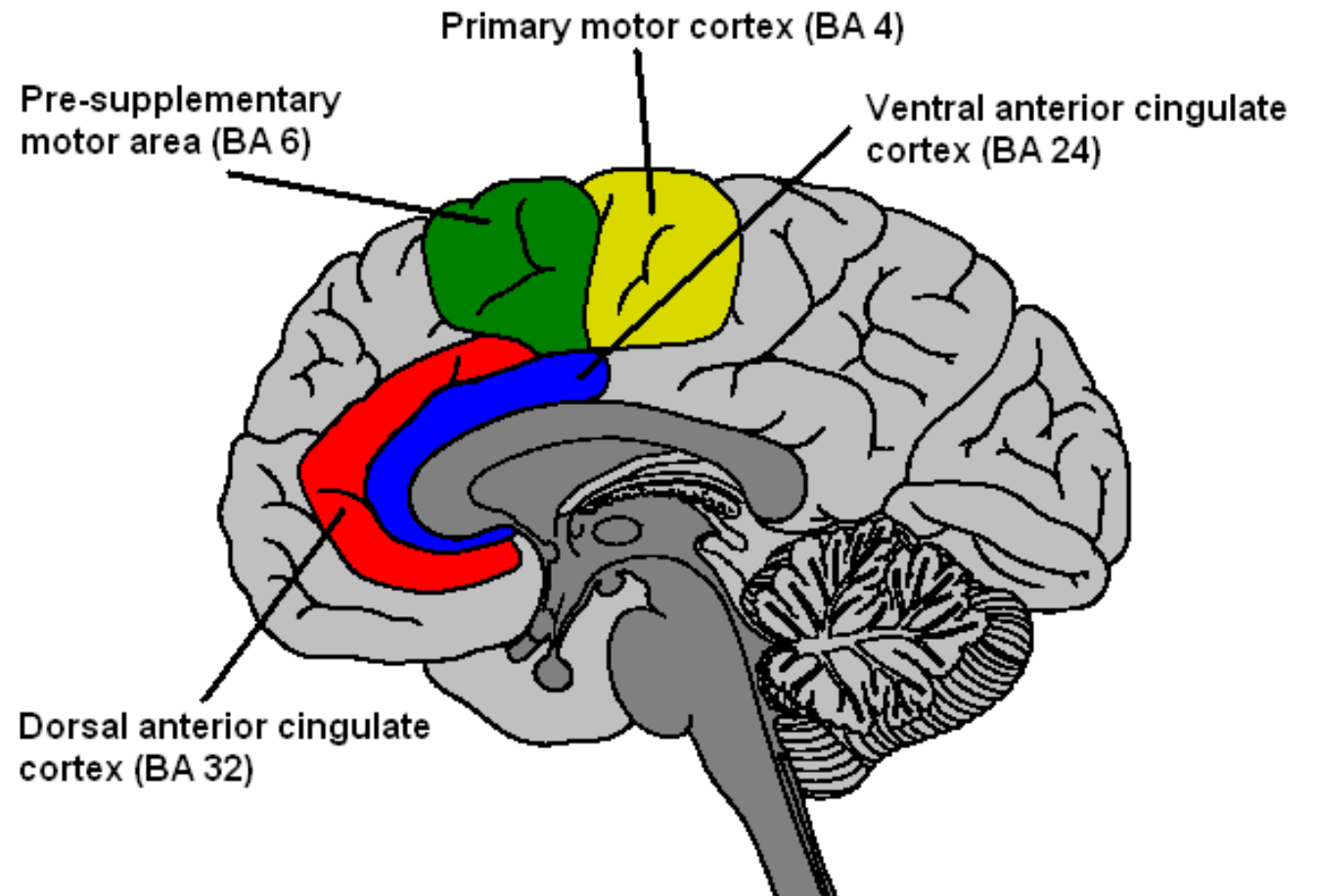
It may feel impossible to manage emotions, have difficulty letting go, or to calm down



The Brain

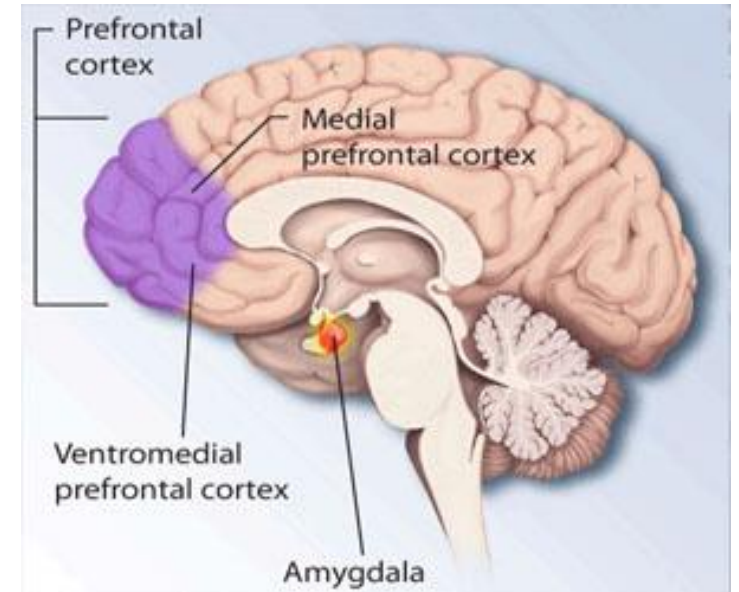
Recent work shows a distinct network centered on the anterior insula (ai) and the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC) engages when individuals experience affective responses to others' suffering – i.e., compassion

DACC

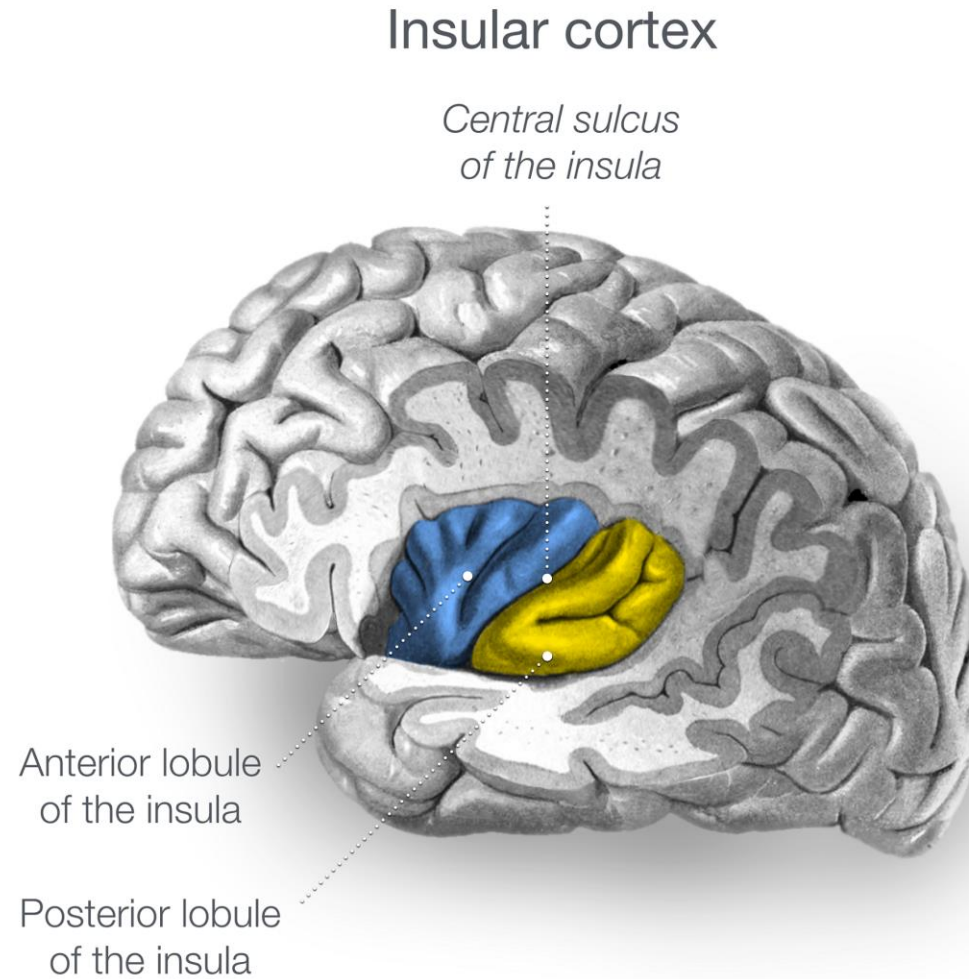


The Brain

The valuing of others' welfare and consequent prosocial motivation seems to be supported by a medial prefrontal-striatal network constructing (potentially compassionate) emotional meanings



Anterior Insula



What To Do



There are ways to both prevent and respond to the threat of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma



Much of what we need to do is rooted in protective factors and self-care techniques

What Self-Care Is

About being deliberate in taking time for the betterment of your mind, body, and soul

Necessary self-preservation

Includes any intentional actions you take for your physical, mental, & emotional health.

Self-nurturing methods that affirm and protect helpers as they undertake the care of others

“An essential underpinning to best practice in the profession of social work”

Research carried out by John Adams, one of the leading experts on Occupational Stress, has indicated that the four most effective strategies of coping with stress were of a “work less hours and work smarter in your lifestyle” type of solution. In order of effectiveness he found that we should try to:



1. Build resistance through healthful lifestyle: deep relaxation, nutritious diet, supportive friendship



2. Compartmentalize work life and home life



3. Engage in regular physical exercise



4. Interrupt strained situations and withdraw physically from them if they become exhaustive

Authentic Self-Care

Does the idea of doing yoga or meditation make you ill?

Do you hate meeting new people or being in crowds?

Does a massage sound like torture rather than self-care?





Authentic Self-Care

Authentic self-care means ensuring that all of our needs are met

Spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical needs

It requires self-knowledge and courage to listen to our needs

Takes setting boundaries, being able to say no

Is unique; no “one size fits all”

We must know ourselves

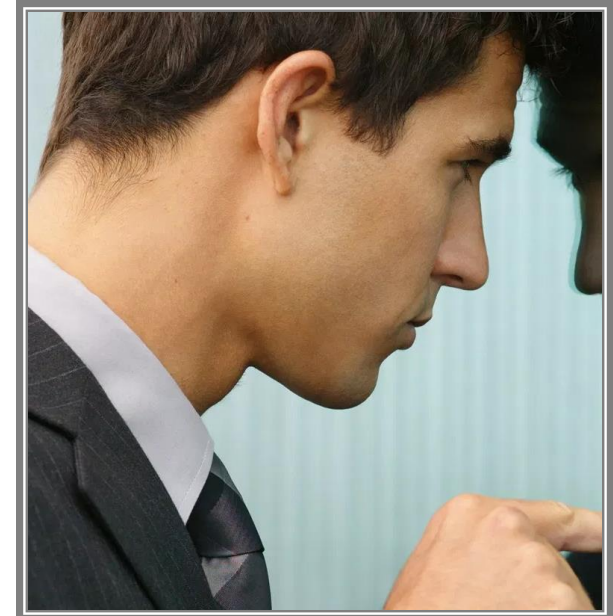
What areas of life may be in need: relationships, work, physical health, spirituality, social, emotional wellbeing...

What is the impact in my life if these needs go unmet?

What is the cost of not meeting these needs?

How can I go about meeting these needs?

What feeds my soul? How do I recharge?



Self-Care at work



Meeting with clients
one after another all
day



Working with toxic co-
workers



Handling a difficult
boss



Challenging client
issues



Not feeling appreciated
or fulfilled

Self-Care is a Skill

Requires practice

Can be improved

Can be prioritized

Can become second nature

Can be modeled

Must be taught especially in certain populations/cultures

Is not expensive

Can be done in any circumstance to some extent

Clear, firm
boundaries

Personal
fulfillment

Healthy
detaching

Regular social
interaction

Gratitude
practices

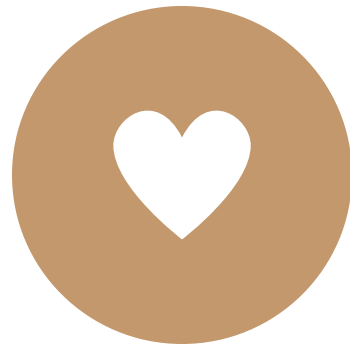
Find your
spiritual
practice

Watch your
exposure (what
you let in)

Self-awareness

Self-Care Skills & Habits

Key Practices

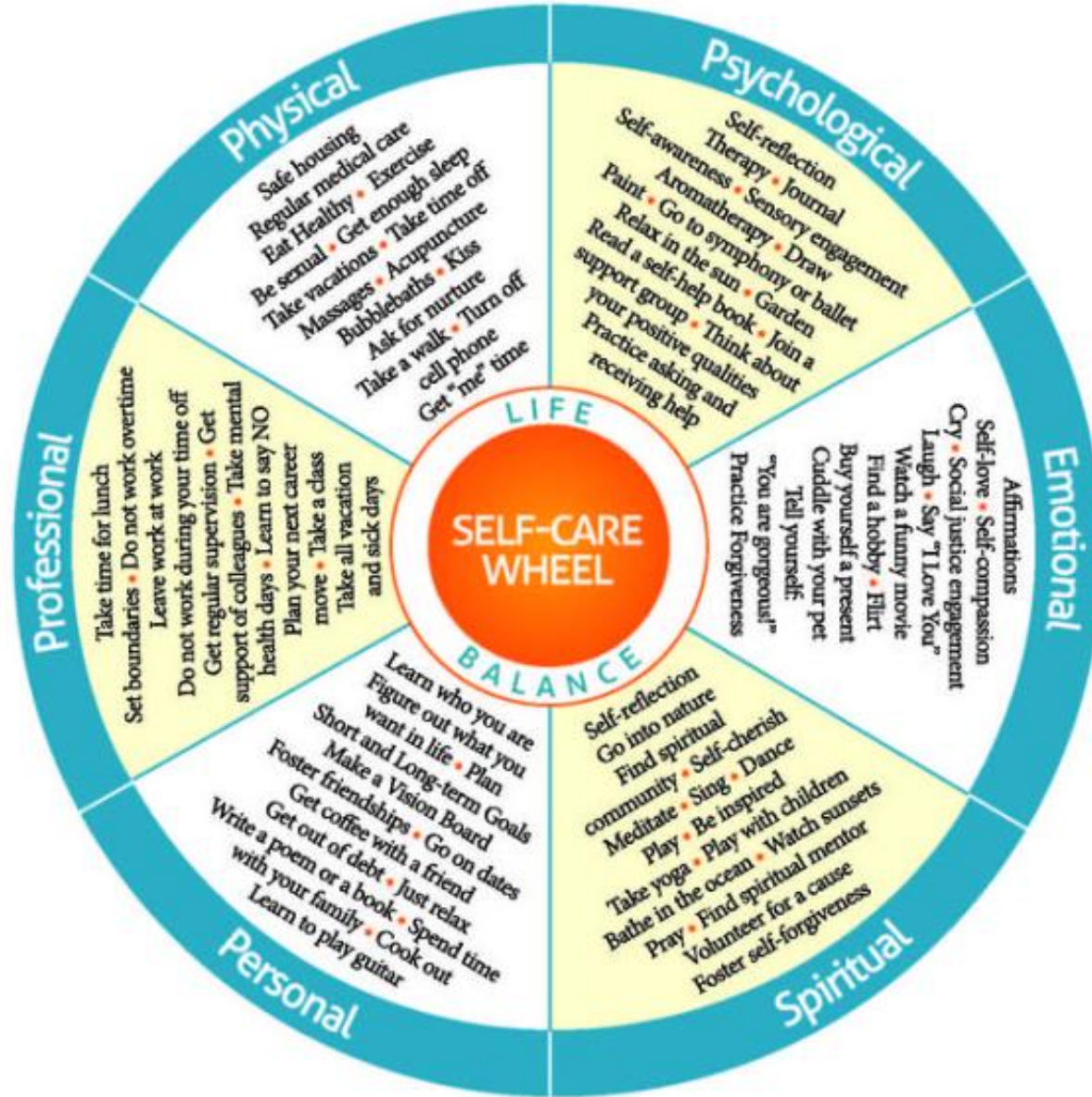


GRATITUDE



MINDFULNESS

SELF-CARE WHEEL





Cat Videos

What brings a sigh to you?

Laughter, humor, lightness

Connection

Volunteering

Sports

Music, art, dance, creativity

Your Self-Care Plan

As your self-care activities will be individual and unique, so will the way you plan

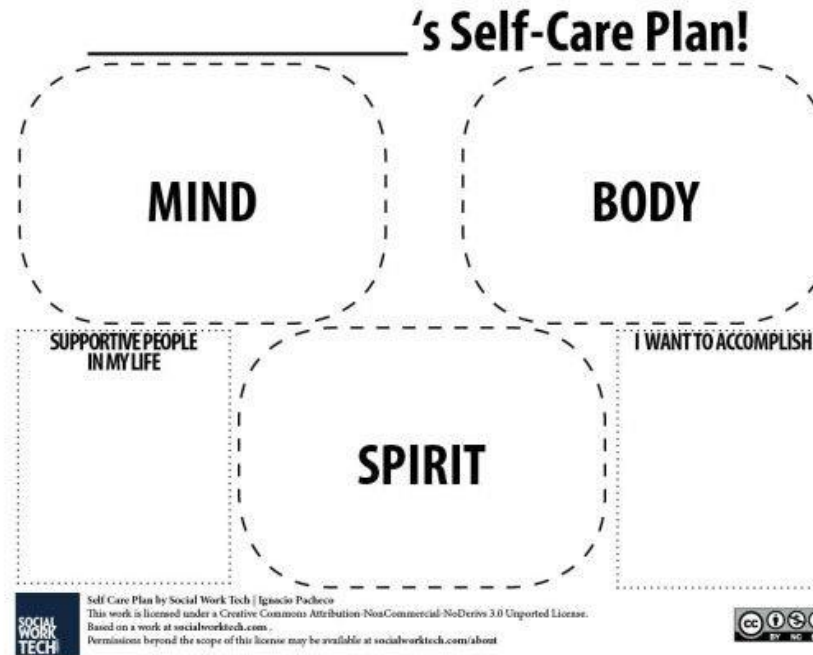
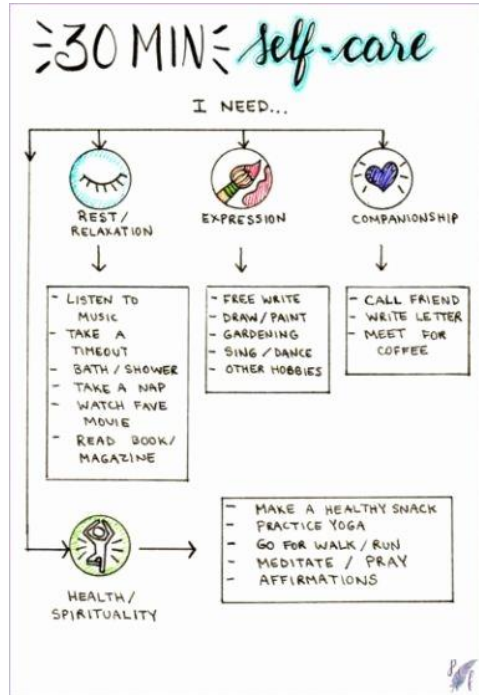
You may schedule a certain amount of time every day to do self-care activities; maybe with your lifestyle it has to be weekly; ideally some moments daily – and a mindset!

Many options – the important thing is that you do it

Be creative and persistent



Your Self-Care Plan



10 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR LIFE BETTER



CARE
ABOUT YOURSELF
AND THE WORLD
AROUND YOU



START
A GRATITUDE
JOURNAL



SET
INSPIRING
GOALS



EAT
HEALTHY
FOOD



DRINK
MORE
WATER



TRAVEL
AROUND
THE WORLD



READ
INTERESTING
AND USEFUL
BOOKS



LEARN
SOMETHING
NEW
EVERY DAY



LOVE
YOURSELF
AND SOMEBODY
SPECIAL



CREATE
SOMETHING WITH
YOUR MIND
AND HANDS

Bringing it all together



Hopefully we understand now:



- What the threats are to our health as helpers



- What happens in the brain when we deal with these situations



- What we can do to avoid and respond



Questions?



Reflection & Contact

Reach out any time!

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Questions

Thoughts

Reflections