

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

TARA COUSINEAU, PHD

WHAT KIND OF STRESS IS IT?



Compassion Fatigue

Rapid onset of stress caused by exposure of traumatic experiences

Vicarious trauma | Empathic distress | Professional grief



Burnout

Gradual impact of a stressful workplace or organizational system



Moral Injury

Effects of engaging or witnessing actions that transgress one's own moral beliefs/values

CHECK THE LIST: HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY OF THESE SIGNS?

Physical

Exhaustion
Poor Sleep Quality
Appetite Changes
Illness/injury

Emotional

Irritability
Moodiness
Avoidance
Interpersonal Distress

Mental

Negative thoughts
Rumination
Loss of Enthusiasm
Anxiety/Depression

Spiritual

Doubt/Guilt
Loss of Faith
Lack of Meaning or Purpose

Save Room for What Helps

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

TARA COUSINEAU, PHD

ANS HEIRARCHY LADDER

Ventral Vagal

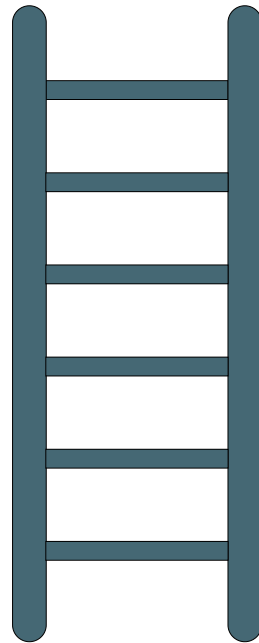
- safe
- social

Sympathethic

- mobilized
- fight/flight

Dorsal Vagal

- immobilized
- collapsed



States of wellbeing involve flexibly moving up and down the ladder with majority of experiences and practices in the top and middle of the ladder. What skills support maintain balance?

NOTE: The autonomic nervous system doesn't make a judgment about good and bad; it simply acts to manage risk and seek safety.

States of distress (using ANS resources for defense) lead to overwhelm and chronic stress, make one vulnerable in the bottom half of ladder. What skills support healing and moving toward activation?

Map Your System

What do you need to move up or down?



Ventral Vagal: Calm & Connected

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
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Sympathetic Mobilization

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
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Dorsal Vagal: Immobilization

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
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MANAGING DIFFICULT MOMENTS

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EMOTIONAL COURAGE

Tuning toward what is difficult or painful requires emotional courage because humans are wired to avoid pain and discomfort. By practicing skills in being present to your own discomfort and pain, with pacing, begins to expand the "window of tolerance" for emotional discomfort and cultivates emotional balance. Cultivating mindfulness and compassion skills are key. "Kindfulness" is my favored term and means "being aware of the present moment with heart."



THE R.A.I.N. SKILL

The acronym R.A.I.N. is a helpful "kindfulness" tool for difficult moments. It can be a salve for those times when you are caught under a spell of negativity, experience difficult emotions, or become consumed with anxiety, fear or uncertainty. You can use RAIN in a difficult moment to cultivate a deeper connection and direct experience to the world.

R stands for Recognize – Recognize what's going on in the body, and consciously noticing the strong emotions, or sensations that are arising in any given moment... and doing so in a way without judgment. Recognizing can be as simple as a silent nod, or a mental whisper, noticing that a reaction is occurring. It can be helpful to name the experience such as: "This is anger" or "I'm feeling frustrated" or "I'm just so tired." "Oh, that's my inner bully acting up."

A stands for Allow – Allowing means letting the thoughts, emotions or sensations simply be there and applying loving attention to your body. It doesn't mean we have to agree with the inner critic or like the situation at hand. It simply means that we can honestly acknowledge the arising of any judgment, as well as the uncomfortable or painful feelings that percolate underneath. Instead of trying to suppress the experience, or resist, avoid or repel, we can soften into it with the quality of kindness, and not get caught up in the thoughts or the emotions. Rather, it is about saying: "Yes, this is what's happening right now." "It's OK." "Take a moment here and just be."

I stands for Investigate – Investigate your experience with kindness and care. Once we recognize and allow what is arising we can become curious, and call on our natural ability to inquire. Tapping your inner detective and asking yourself, "What most wants my attention right now?" "How am I experiencing this reaction in my body?" "What is my inner critic telling me, or trying to warn me about? Am I believing it? Is it true?" You can reflect: "How can I bring kindness to this moment?" It is essential to practice a non-judgmental attitude and move away from trying to interpret or overthink.

N stands for Nurture or Nourish –We can intentionally care for the vulnerable and wounded places inside. You can ask: "What does this place deep inside me need most?" Reassurance? Respect? Forgiveness? Friendship? Love? Calm
N can also stand for what some meditation teachers call non-attachment. This means cultivating an ability to take a step back and having some distance from the reactivity. This means not getting hijacked by difficult emotions (the brain's flight or fight reaction) or being harassed by mind's incessant commentary. Instead, you can be a benevolent caretaker just as you might care for a small child. In this way, you're not fused with or defined by the reactivity; instead you adopt a sense of care, ease and compassion.

<https://www.taracousineau.com/finding-comfort-in-an-emotional-storm-the-r-a-i-n-technique/>



GROWING INNER RESOURCES

TARA COUSINEAU, PHD

TAKING IN THE GOOD

We can purposely cultivate positivity in our life in spite of the attention grabbing negative stuff. If you want to cultivate more calm, peace, happiness, and joy in your life, then you need to first experience moments of calm, peace, happiness and joy! Not only that, you must engage in these activities consistently so the brain learns from them and creates new neural highways.



THE H.E.A.L. SKILL

The acronym H.E.A.L. is a helpful "kindfulness" tool for amplifying the positive moments.

H. Have a positive or beneficial experience - Notice the positive experiences you are already having, in the foreground of attention, in the background of attention. Or create a positive experience by looking for good facts in your immediate situation, in current or recent events, in enduring conditions, in your own character, in your past, in future events, in reframing facts to recognize what is good about them, in the lives of others that you feel glad about, in your imagination, caring about others (wishing them wells, making contributions to them, directly evoking a positive experiences, producing good facts, sharing good facts and your experience of them with others

E. Extend or enrich it - To activate a positive experience, intentionally sense, savor, and embody the experience to make it more lasting and intense. This embodiment helps to build up inner resources (or traits) over time, like resilience, emotional balance, happiness, mindfulness, and compassion. But we need to start with the positive mental states first! Pay attention to the positives in your life.

You can strengthen the encoding of a beneficial experience into neural structures through increasing:

1. Duration - helping it last, protecting it, creating sanctuary for, it coming back to it;
2. Intensity - opening up to it, letting it pervade your mind, dialing it up;
3. Multi-modality - increasing elements in your experience, and especially sense it in your body;
4. Novelty - looking for what is fresh, new or having a "don't know mind";
5. Salience - seeing what's personally relevant and why it would help you to take this in.

A. Absorb it - Intentionally let it sink into you. Really take in the experience and let it seep into you, like creating a really rich stew, or having a mental snapshot of a beautiful sunset with the intention of remembering it. This helps make your brain's memory system "stickier" by extending and sensing that the experience is sinking into you as you sink into it. Some people can visualize an experience being absorbed like a gentle rain, or sense sun rays warming their face, or sipping a hot cup of cocoa. For others it's having a knowing that this experience is becoming a part of them and they can take with them wherever they go. Find what works for you.

L. Link the positive and the negative. We all have negative experiences in daily life, like getting a bad grade or being rejected, or making mistakes. There's nothing shameful or embarrassing about this. It just means that you are a normal human being. Remember though, that as long as negative stuff is active in your mind, it starts to stick the longer you dwell on it. So in this optional linking step, see if you can hold BOTH the positive and negative in awareness (both the sweet and the sour), so that the positive gradually eases in and brings perspective to what is negative, and can soothe it, and maybe even replace the negative over time.

Resources: Books by Rick Hanson PhD: Resilience; Hardwiring Happiness www.rickhanson.net



BEING A FRIEND TO YOURSELF

TARA COUSINEAU, PHD

SELF-COMPASSION

Inner compassion is the daily practice of directing kindness and understanding toward yourself, just the way you might behave toward someone you love or care about who is suffering or having a moment of struggle.

3 ELEMENTS OF SELF-COMPASSION

- Mindfulness - being aware of one's painful experiences in a balanced way, without judgment
- Common humanity - recognizing and understanding that pain and suffering are universal, and part of the shared human experience.
- Self-kindness - being caring toward yourself



MINI SELF-KINDNESS BREAK

When you are experiencing a moment of suffering or distress, or recall a situation in your life that is difficult and is causing you stress, you can give yourself a self-compassion moment. Notice the stress and emotional discomfort in your body.

1. Now say to yourself, "This is a moment of distress" (pain, difficulty). Use whatever statement feels most natural to you, e.g., "This is hard." "This hurts." "Something needs to change."
2. Next, say to yourself, "Distress is a part of being human." This is a recognition of your common humanity with others—that all people have trying experiences, and these experiences give you something in common with the rest of humanity rather than mark you as abnormal or deficient. You could also say, "This is how my body is signaling to me," "Other people feel this way," "I'm not alone," or "We all struggle in our lives."
3. Now say, "May I be kind to myself." This is a way to express self-kindness. It can help to put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch on your chest, or fold your arms or some other soothing gesture. You can also consider whether there is another specific phrase that would speak to you in that particular situation. You could use a power statement or phrase of encouragement. You might try a loving kindness statement. Some examples:
 - "May I give myself the compassion that I need."
 - "May I accept myself as I am."
 - "May I learn to accept myself as I am."
 - "May I forgive myself."
 - "May I be strong."
 - "May I be patient."

Resources:

The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook (Germer & Neff); www.self-compassion.org;

The Kindness Cure: How the Science of Compassion Can Heal Your Heart And Your World (Cousineau)

www.taracousineau.com/21days



BEFRIENDING THE INNER CRITIC

TARA COUSINEAU, PHD

NOTICING THE INNER CRITIC

Describe the words, tone, attitude and feeling when you judge or criticize yourself.

WHAT MIGHT THIS INNER CRITIC BE PROTECTING YOUR FROM?

NAME THIS PART OF YOURSELF

Be creative: Judge Judy, Inner Cop, Nagging Ned, FOMO, etc.

BEFRIENDING THE INNER CRITIC

What might you say to a friend who was struggling or suffering in a similar way? What words might you say? What kind of tone or gesture?

BEFRIENDING YOURSELF

In cultivating a wise, kind inner voice, what words might you need to hear to feel understood and supported?

POWER STATEMENTS

Create a statement, mantra or affirmation to draw upon when needed.

1. Be clear
2. Be authentic
3. Use a kind tone

"If compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete." ~Jack Kornfield