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A neurobiological map for resilience centered counseling

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The primary function of the brain is to assist with connecting to our environment and lived experience in order to adapt to the present moment. Central to this function is the stress response system that allows the brain to move from a state of arousal in response to a perceived threat and/or demand, and then back to a state of homeostasis. It is this "bouncing back" from adverse circumstances that defines the nature of resilience and those abilities needed when adapting to disruptive life events. When this process is interrupted or dysregulated, not only is the mental health and wellbeing of individuals at risk, but the neural pathways required for resilient response patterns in the face of stress producing situations become underdeveloped; and over time, unavailable. It can make people vulnerable to distorted imagination, faulty logic, and maladaptive reactions to everyday stress. The purpose of this presentation is to provide mental health professionals with an understanding to the neurobiology of dysregulation and strategies for activating resilient health markers in the brain. Supported by neuroscientific outcome research, a model for resiliency centered counseling will be presented. This will include an overview to the therapeutic intentions needed to activate the natural healing properties of the brain, including learning experiences associated with: self-regulation, strengthening, inoculation, engagement and envisioning. In contrast to symptom reduction approaches to anxiety and depression, an outline of how resilience centered counseling model can be applied to enhance the resilient response patterns and neuroplasticity with clients. Handouts and interview guides will be provided. If time permits, recommendations for applying this model to organizational and systemic distress will also be addressed.

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