“Retraining the Triune Brain”

Gretchen Breyller Hegeman, Ph.D.
Triune Brain

- **Neocortex** – mental/thinking/perceptional
- **Limbic** – emotional/feeling/reads situations
- **Brain stem and cerebellum** – physical/primal/habitual
Thinking Brain

- The higher brain regions modulate and inhibit functions of the more primitive (primal) regions.
- Conscious section of brain.
- If neocortex in command, person has choices (adult brain).
Emotional Brain

- Plays a central role in the mind/body connection
- Modulates a feedback loop between the mind/body
- Amygdala analyzes information for emotional significance and survival
- If limbic system in control, chaotic lifestyle (child brain)
Physical Brain

- The primitive brain regions have a profound influence on the higher brain regions
- The unconscious section of brain
- If primal brain in control, shows through automatic/habitual behavior (infant brain)
Triune Brain

- **Thinking** = decisions – education
- **Emotional** = doing – resiliency
- **Physical** = being - behavioral
Why Important?

Need to be aware

“which brain in”

to survive
Survival Brain

The Autonomic Nervous System

- Sympathetic Branch – Accelerator
- Parasympathetic Branch – Brake

Two branches are reciprocal system
up or down – to maintain homeostasis
Sympathetic System

(survival)

- Increases – breathing rate, blood pressure, heart rate, sweating, stress hormones, energy to limbs

- Decreases – digestion, sex drive
Parasympathetic System
(parachute)

- Decreases - breathing rate, blood pressure, heart rate, sweating, stress hormones, energy to limbs
- Increases – digestion, sex drive
Stress vs Homeostasis

Functioning in this area speaks to how we handle options and opportunities. Some people function well with changes and adaptations; others need more stability and rules.
Chronic Stress

Patterns of the stress cycle

Stress without adequate recovery leads to becoming “stuck”
Overwhelming Experience

Get stuck on sympathetic - “HIGH”

- Physical – tachycardia, tachypnea, muscular tension, hyperstartle, hypertension, hot/flushed
- Emotional – rage, hyperactivity, mania, hypervigilance, anxiety/panic, high risk behaviors
Overwhelming Experience

Get stuck on parasympathetic – “LOW”

- Physical – muscle weakness, hypotension, constipation, cold/pale, sleepy/sluggish
- Emotional – numbness, exhaustion, disconnection, depression, hopeless, helpless
Plan of Action

- Grounding (lightening rod) – connection between you and surroundings, safety?
- Contain (oxygen mask) – calm self with slow/deep breathing, eye contact, touch if appropriate, create safety.
- Resource (blanket) – anything that elicits feelings of connection, support, strength, competence, confidence, trust, safety
Observing Self

Tracking the shifts

- in yourself – follow shifts in your nervous system
- the situation – follow changes in others behaviors

Just Notice
Why Important?

- **Thinking Brain** – you have to want and be committed to change “I’ll start tomorrow”

- **Emotional Brain** – rebels “This doesn’t feel right”

- **Physical Brain** – body has already learned a new way and restored homeostasis “Don’t want to change”
Success Cycle

- Create a Plan
- Visualize Possibilities
- Make a Commitment to take the Next Step
- Do It
- Celebrate and Reward Yourself
- Create or Capture a Plan
Thank you

Any Questions?

Gretchen.Hegeman@ceridian.com
207.205.7841