



# Essentials Strategies to Keep Helping Professionals Grounded and Centered

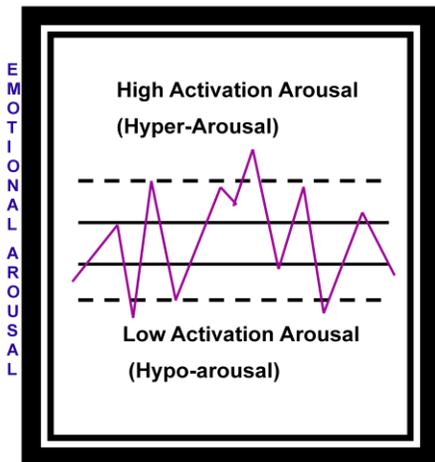
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**Stress** describes a set of psychological and/or physical reactions in response to a specific event, experience or image. Simply put stress is what arises when something you care about is at stake. People interpret stress differently depending on factors such as past experiences, coping strategies, the presence or absence of cumulative stress, and personal resilience.

**Resilience** is the ability to recover or bounce back from and effectively adapt to life changes and challenges. It is also about a deep knowing that we can handle anything that comes our way. Anyone can strengthen their resiliency.

## Window of Tolerance (WTF) adapted from Ogden and Minton 2000



The window of tolerance represents an emotional band, it illustrates the degree of emotional experience we can tolerate without becoming completely dis-regulated.

It is a useful tool to use to check in with ourselves to continuously monitor our emotional state.

Checking in with our body can assist us in this as our body is a good barometer for our stress level.

What am I like when I am stressed, upset, or overwhelmed?

Are these hyper or hypo arousal symptoms?

What am I like when I am the best version of myself?

## Stress Response

When you feel stressed, whether you face a real threat or merely *think* that you are facing a threat, your body experiences a collection of physiological changes known as your stress response, or your fight-or-flight-or-freeze response.

It is important to remember that the strength of the stress response is related to the level of *perceived* threat rather than actual, physical threat. This is why two people can experience the same situation and have different stress reactions to the same thing; some people perceive a threat where others don't.

It is also important to recognize that how we *think* or *perceive* a threat is often not under our conscious control due to our past experiences and possible triggering of related memories. We can gain more control by recognizing when we may be over or under reacting to a situation. In pausing to reflect, we can often become more aware of our stress triggers and work them through using some of the tools below.

## FIGHT - FLIGHT - FREEZE

What's really happening when we go into

"Survival Mode"

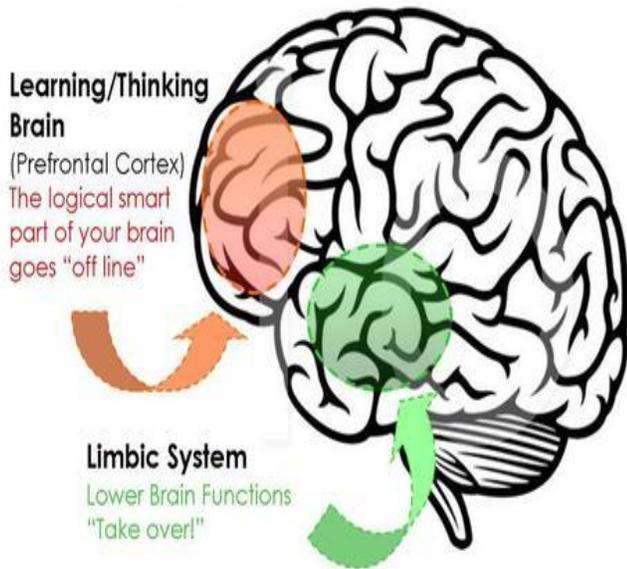


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## Resetting Quickies:

- ❖ **PAUSE**—Present Awareness Using Senses to Experience
- ❖ Notice where holding tension in body and release with each exhale
- ❖ straw exhale-inhale and breathe out like breathing through a straw so exhales are longer than inhales
- ❖ rectangular breathing—breathe in to count of 5, pause to count of 3, breathe out to count of 5, pause to count of 3, repeat
- ❖ count backwards from 100 by 7s
- ❖ chant/drumming/sing/dance
- ❖ yoga or stretching
- ❖ count every breath for 1 minute
- ❖ Feet on the floor
- ❖ Centering through breath—slow down breathing,
  - breathe into your belly
- ❖ 5,4,3,2,1
  - 5 things you see, "I see..."
  - 5 things you hear, "I hear..."
  - 5 body sensations or tactile description, "I feel..."
  - repeat all steps with 4, than 3, 2, and 1
- ❖ WTF: Walk, Talk, Flush
- ❖ Release oxytocin-give self a hug, contact with significant other
- ❖ Savouring, reminding self-what is good in your life or in this moment
- ❖ Massage a sore area of your body or scalp
- ❖ Random acts of kindness
- ❖ Inspirational quotes, images, music
- ❖ Rumination: goodwill wish of kindness to person, imagine who you would be without the thought/story, concentrated focus on present
- ❖ Breath regulation
  1. Deceleration-longer exhale than inhale
  2. Acceleration-longer inhale than exhale
- ❖ Release oxytocin-soothing touch, contact with significant other

- Helpful when experiencing difficult or intense emotions

### Three Steps- Self Compassion Break:

1. Mindfulness—become aware of the emotions you are feeling, label and just notice them—**“This is a moment of suffering”**
  2. Identify feelings as normal human experience—**“Suffering is part of life”**
  3. Treat yourself with loving kindness—be gentle and caring with yourself—**“May I be kind to myself”**—what do you need right now
- Practice breathing “one for me, one for you” when in conversation with someone

## Other Strategies

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- ❖ Resourcing—what memories, images, symbols, tokens, words, movies, songs, etc. represent and remind me of:
  - my own internal strengths and qualities
  - the things in life that are important to me
- ❖ Un-mirroring—being aware that my body posture does not exactly reflect/mirror the body posture of someone who is distressed
- ❖ How do I protect myself during traumatic content—shields, bubble or something else?
- ❖ How do I make sure that I am not picturing a traumatic story too vividly?

## Resource List

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### Relaxation/Meditation CDs:

*Creating Inner Calm* CD by Mark Berber, *Meditation for Beginners* by Jack Kornfield, *Mindfulness Meditation* by Tara Brach

### Life/Work Balance

*Take Time for Your Life: a 7 Step Program for Creating the Life you Want* by Cheryl Richardson (1999)

### Self Care/Stress Reduction

*Self Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself up and Leave Insecurity Behind*, by Kristin Neff, *The Mindful Path to Self Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions*, by Christopher Germer  
*The Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom*, by Rick Hanson et al, *Mindfulness @ Work: Reduce Stress, live in the moment and be happier and more productive at work, Living in the Moment, or The Little Pocket Book of Mindfulness*, all by Anna Black  
*Little book of stress relief* by David Posen

### Resilience

*Resilient* by Rick Hanson, *Bouncing Back: Rewiring the Brain for Maximum Resilience and Wellbeing*, *Resilience: Powerful Practices for Bouncing Back from Disappointment, Difficulty and even Disaster*, both by Linda Graham, *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy*, by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, *Rising Strong* by Brene Brown

### Apps

\*numerous apps are available to help you reach your fullest potential--spend some time exploring such apps as Personal Zen, Pacifica, GPS or the Soul, Stop Breathe Think, Calm, Headspace, My Fitness Pal, Happify, 7 Minute Workout, Smiling Mind, Pay it Forward, Gratitude Journal, The Worry Box, Insight Timer, etc.