De-stressing Family Life

Michelle Cassidy
April, 2015
Resiliency

A Core Feature of Mental Health
Holistic Approach
It is better to bend than to break.
Why is this important?

• Long term impacts of chronic stress

• Brain adapts to protect itself

• We can model coping strategies and stress reduction for our kids

• Reduced parental stress = Reduced child stress
A case of the....

Ya buts............
The Relationship to Mental Health

Wellbeing is not about absence of illness but about health and resiliency:

• Self regulation
• Self concept
• Self acceptance
• Connectedness/Belonging
Who we are and how we engage in the world are much stronger predictors of how our children will do than what we know about parenting. The question isn’t are you parenting in the right way? It is Are you the adult you want your child to grow up to be?

Brene Brown
Neurobiological Approach: The Power of the Brain
A bit about the brain

• Designed to keep our body in balance

• Our body craves homeostasis

• The brain supports *adaptive functioning*

• It is hardwired to protect us
Why is this important?

Flight,

Fight,

or

Freeze
A Helpful Brain Model for Families

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DD-lfP1FBFk
Self Regulation: Putting on the Brakes

• We need our brain to have the alarm system

• Dealing with escalating emotions
  – Higher level cortical functions
  – Self-awareness and coping stress

• Training our brain
  – **Plasticity** allows us to strengthen our brains
Changing Our Response
Responses to Stress: Mind-Body-Behaviour Relationship

- **Mind** (cognitive response): negative thoughts, attitudes and feelings
- **Body** (physiological response): physical symptoms and bodily reactions
- **Behaviour** (behavioural response): things you do to cope
Understanding the Triad

MIND
Thoughts/Feelings

BRAIN/BODY
Physiology

Behaviors
Exercise

You are sitting in your room at night reading.
You hear a noise/knocking at the window.....

Your first thought is.....
Exercise

What was your **thought**?  
i.e. animal, branch, person/burglar  
What did you say to yourself?  
i.e. “no big deal” (branch)  
   “oh no, I’ve got to get out of here” (burglar)

What **feeling** did your thoughts lead you to have?  
i.e. fear/dread (burglar)

How would that feeling influence your **behavior**?  
i.e. run/hide/shake/tremble
Understanding Our Needs

The foundation for finding the calm in the chaos
Caring Relationships and Belonging

- Brain is hardwired for belonging and connection
- Survival instinct
- This is a pivotal mediator in identity development
Connectedness and Belonging

The energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.

Brene Brown
Connectedness and Attachment

Dr. Gordon Neufeld

*Hold on to Your Kids*

Why kids need us more than their peers.
Competing attachment

What is happening?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlMkWJY5T_w
The Marshmallow Test Revisited
Increasing Connectedness

- One on One time (pick from the jar)
- Create structure, set your family up for success
- Tech Free Time
- Talk over problems in a relaxed way, not when your primal brain is driving the process
- Use scaling questions as a way to restore the calm
1. Schedule them if you have to
2. No technology, including answering the phone
3. Structure the conversation, must be positive
4. Play soothing dinner music, have each family member create a playlist and rotate them
5. Devote one meal month to each family member (choice of meal, pick the positive conversation starter, and 1 affirmation) **identity development**
What we *are* teaches the child more than what we say, so we must *be* what we want our children to become.

Joseph Chilton Pearce
Taking Care of You

How to integrate self care
We all own the responsibility

• Self care
• What does our behavior say about what we value most?
Managing your Own Response

• Your own brain’s response
• What attributions are you making?
• What reactions are you having when you feel powerless?
• How do you continue to convey acceptance for them when you are frustrated?
...teach me HOW to calm down
don’t just TELL me to...
Understanding the Triad

**S.O.S**

STOP....OBSERVE....SHIFT

**MIND**
Thoughts/Feelings

**BRAIN/BODY**
Physiology

**Behaviors**
Shifting the Triad: Modifying 
Physiology

Sensation/Physiology
Strategies: Take up Smoking

Just kidding!

Why this works:

- Taking a break physically from place/environment which generates stress
- Deep breathing
- 3 breath hug

Let’s practice...
Mindfulness

Strive to focus on the present
Mind, Body, and Behavior

Mindfulness

Paying attention to the present...

Without judgement
Without expectations
Without fear

Just accept it as it is....
Let’s practice
Mindfulness

- A seated meditation may be easiest OR a body scan
  
  **Seated Body Scan**

- MARC.ucla (Mindfulness Awareness Resource Centre) meditation recordings iTunes U
  
  **Guided Mindfulness**
  (free audio guided meditations)
Shifting the Triad: *Modifying thoughts*

Thoughts/Feelings
Man can alter his life by altering his thoughts.

William James
The Power of Mindset

Cultivating a mindset which promotes mental health
Neurons that fire together... Wire together

• Where you focus attention stimulates certain parts of the brain
• We are wiring our pathways
• Let’s learn how to control it
• CHOOSE to focus on the positive
“...wherever we focus our attention, we're making lasting change, for better or worse.”

@RuthBuczynski
Taming the Mind

✓ Cognitive reframing
✓ Interrupt the negative pattern
✓ Retrain the pattern

Car analogy—automatic to manual
Picture a Snow Globe

Many thoughts in our mind = Storm (Stress)

Settling our thoughts = Calm
Optimism

A True Optimist
The Power of Optimism

• Aim for Realistic Optimism
• Explanatory style:

Questions to change your “explanation”

➢ Was this out of my control, or did I cause it?

➢ What parts of the situation can I change?

➢ Is this something that affects all aspects of my life or just a part?

➢ How long will this really be a problem for?
## Cognitive Reframing
Adapted from: D. Bilsker, M. Gilbert, D. Worling & E. J. Garland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Thoughts Thinking Error</th>
<th>Realistic Thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All or Nothing Thinking</td>
<td>What proof do I have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overgeneralization</td>
<td>Would most people agree with this thought?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental Filter</td>
<td>If not, what would be a more realistic thought?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disqualifying the positive</td>
<td>What would I say to a friend in a similar situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jumping to conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magnification/Minimization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional Reasoning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Should statements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labeling and Mislabeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BEING HAPPY DOESN'T MEAN EVERYTHING IS PERFECT. IT MEANS YOU'VE DECIDED TO SEE BEYOND THE IMPERFECTIONS.
Practice Letting Go

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSrSemQUEvSI
If the day ever came when we were able to accept ourselves and our children exactly as we are and they are, then, I believe we would have come to an understanding of what "good parenting" means.

Fred Rogers
Self Compassion

Not about judging ourselves positively, but a way of relating to ourselves kindly, embracing ourselves lovingly flaws and all.
Self Compassion

The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself.

Anna Quidlen

http://www.self-compassion.org/

• Treating yourself as you would a good friend
Impact of Self Compassion on Self Regulation

• Particular impact on willpower
• Donuts and Dieters: resultant increase in ability to self regulate (Adams & Leary, 2007)
• The power of self compassion/forgiveness is demonstrated to prevent relapse:
  ✔ Alcohol
  ✔ Quitting smoking (more effective than the patch)
  ✔ Gambling
  ✔ Procrastination
Self Compassion Script

1. Notice your feelings (*self doubt, criticism etc.*)

2. Acknowledge common humanity (*all people struggle/give in sometimes, it is just part of change*)

3. Replace with encouragement over criticism (*what would you say to your best friend*)
Shifting the Triad: *Modifying Actions*
Your “You First” Day

• Who is there?
• Are you alone?
• Where are you?
• What is happening? (what would you eat, music or silence)
The Power of Healthy Relationships

Cultivating relationships which promote mental health
The Significance of Social Support

Research shows that people in toxic working conditions are more stress resistant and are less likely to get sick when they have a loving family and good friendships. [Those who are socially isolated] are more vulnerable to distressing conditions. Talking with friends and family diminishes the impact of difficulties and increases feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

~Al Siebert, The Resiliency Center
Social Support

• Is it social support or social stress?
• Toxic friendships: Mirror neurons
• Introversion vs. Extraversion
• Sensory Capacity: *HSP*
BEHAVIOR

- Keeping our social connections
- Not isolating ourselves when the going gets tough
- Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and seek support
- Integrating more joy giving activities into our lives
Are you ready to change the lens?

http://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work?language=en
The 21 day Challenge

Daily:

1. Write down 3 new things you were grateful for that day
2. Journal one positive experience
3. Exercise
4. Meditation
5. One random act of kindness
Take Care of You and You will take care of your family

- Make time for yourself
- Build a support network
- Practice stress reduction
- Get help if you feel your stress level is impacting you in ways you cannot manage
Applaud yourself

• Your job is HARD

• All parents are doing the best job they can with the skills they have

• Celebrate yourself
RESPECT YOUR PARENTS.
THEY PASSED SCHOOL WITHOUT GOOGLE
Resources

Websites:
Parents for Children's Mental Health
Anxiety BC
Anxiety BC Parent Toolkit
Mind Your Mind

Books:
- *Building Emotional Intelligence* (Linda Lantieri)
- *Flourish* (Dr. Seligman)
- *The Mindful Child* (Susan Kaiser Greenland)
- *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (Daniel Siegal)
- *The Highly Sensitive Child: Helping Our Children Thrive When the World Overwhelms Them* (Elaine Aron)