



Reach out
take a step

find hope



Care to change

Counseling to help you move forward.

Leading with Compassion: Trauma-Informed Ministry Basics

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5-4-3-2-1 grounding

This exercise helps bring the mind out of anxiety or overwhelm by focusing attention on the present moment through the senses, which signals the brain that you are safe right now. ❤️

				
5	4	3	2	1
things you can see	things you can touch	things you can hear	things you can smell	thing you can taste

Goals for Today

- Define Trauma
- Impact on Spiritual and Emotional Health
- Apply Trauma-Informed Principles to create a Safe, healing-centered environment



What Is Trauma?



What is Trauma?

Definition

- Most literally: an injury, wound, or shock
- Psychological trauma refers to an “experience of emotional distress resulting from an event that overwhelms the capacity to emotionally digest it.”
(Psychology Today, 2025)



What is Trauma?

Definition

- Can be individual (acute), repeated over time (chronic), or a combination of types (complex)
- Everybody experiences trauma differently; it is based on how it affects your nervous system

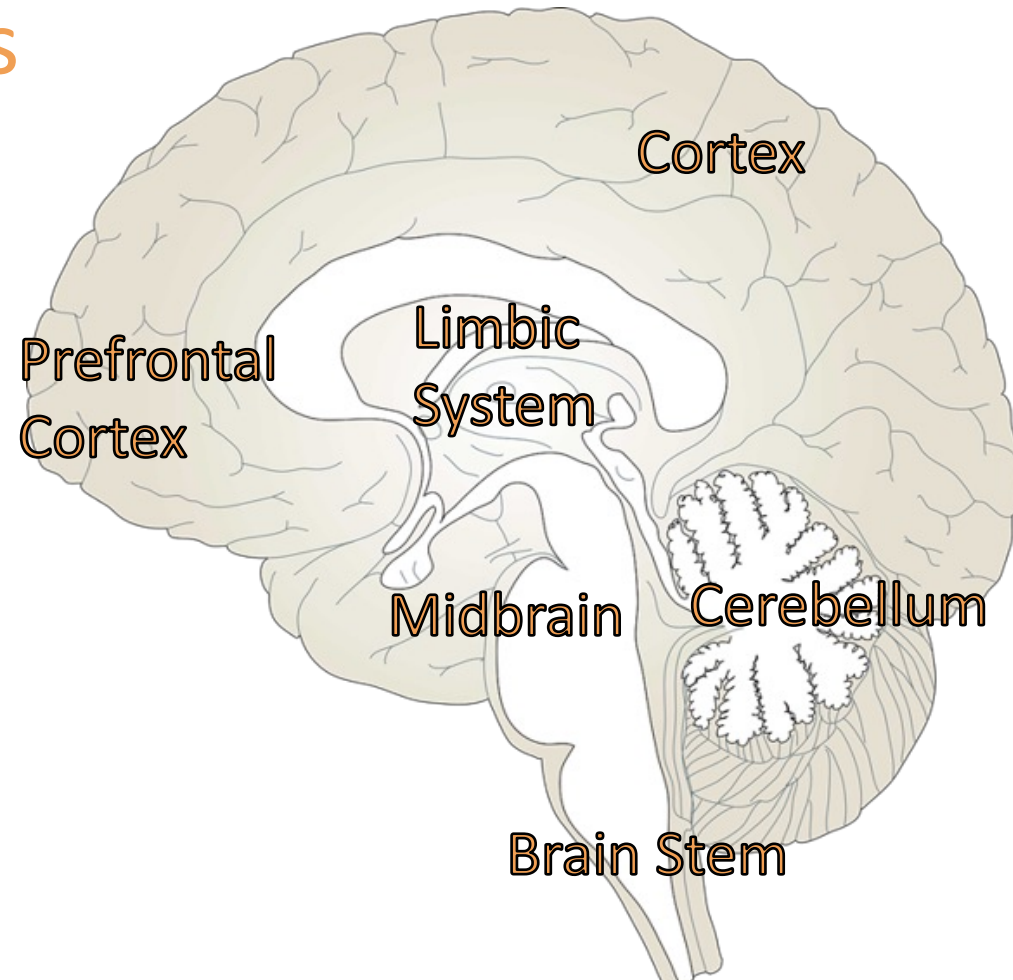


How Trauma Affects Your Brain and Your Body



What Causes Trauma?

Brain Basics



What Causes Trauma?

Levels of Functioning

Prefrontal/Right Temporal Cortex – seat of reason, emotional regulation, conscious decision-making, emotional memories

Limbic System – responds to emotional perception, most often threats to physical or emotional safety

Midbrain – subconscious functions for perception & bodily response

Cerebellum – Coordinates body processes & movements

Brainstem – regulate what keeps you alive (O₂, heart rate, blood pressure, vomiting/swallowing)



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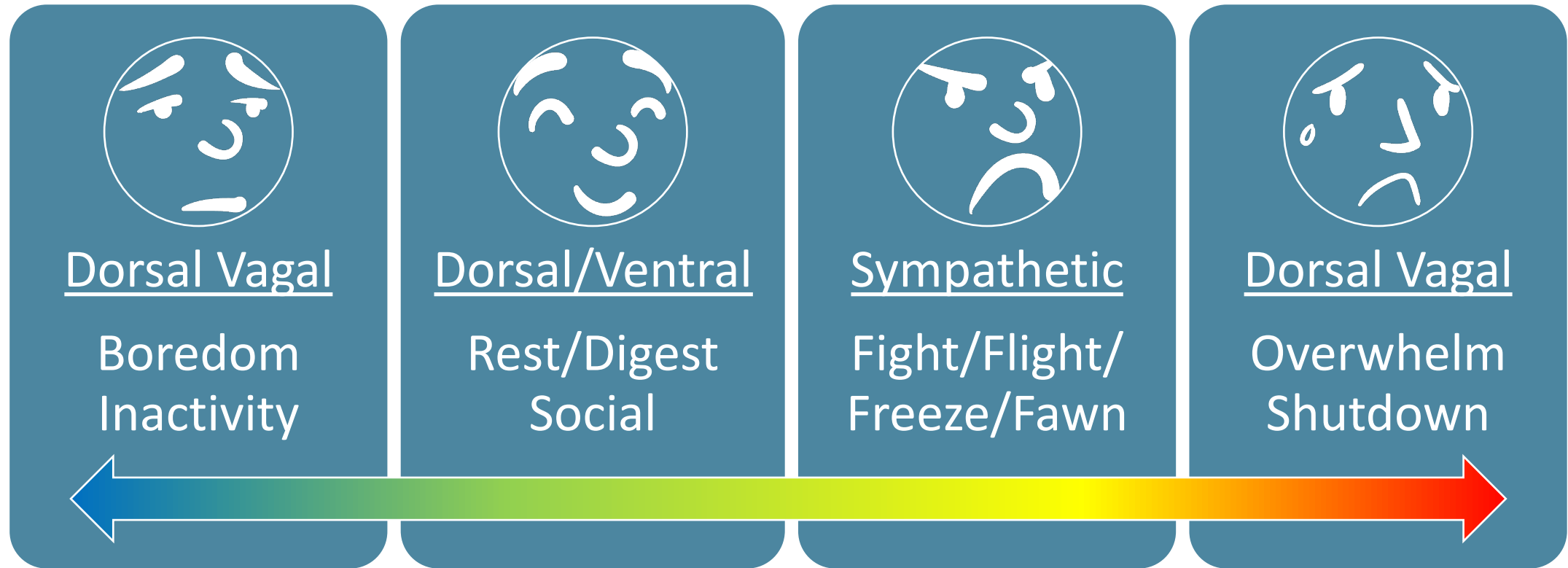
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Basement



What Causes Trauma?

The Polyvagal Theory



Impact on Spiritual and Mental Health



Trauma and Impacts to the Soul

- Trauma breaks down our sense of felt safety and control; “Survival Mode”
- Trauma changes the way we think about ourselves...and God
- We can't spiritually grow while constantly protecting ourselves from false danger



Trauma and Impact to Mental Health

- Our brain cannot properly integrate while in “Survival Mode”
- Our experience with God will be dis-integrated, i.e., beliefs not matching behavior
- Spiritual truth cannot be heard until God’s safety is felt



Trauma and Impact to Spiritual Health

- Trauma distorts a person's image of God, self, and others
- Faith may become performance-based or fully avoided as a protective response
- The healing of trauma can be a method God uses to redeem a person



Healing Through Integration and Connection



Healing Through Integration and Connection

- Healing requires integration
 - Bringing together mind, body, emotions, relationships, and spirituality
- Transformation occurs through
 - Safe, attuned relationships
 - Being seen and known without judgment
 - Practices that engage both the brain and the soul



Healing Through Integration and Connection

- Practices like prayer, lament, confession and stillness:
 - Rewire the brain toward safety
 - Restore trust in God and self
- Healing practices must be trauma-informed, not forced or shaming



Creating a safe, healing environment

- Recognize:
 - Many people carry unseen wounds
 - Spiritual spaces can unintentionally activate trauma
 - Healing happens through safety, choice, connection, and trust



Creating a safe, healing environment

How to know someone is in a trauma response?

- Hypervigilance- scanning/searching the environment
- Appearing defensive or evasive
- Intense expression of emotions
 - Raising voice
 - Crying
- Inability to self-soothe



Creating a safe, healing environment

How to know someone is in a trauma response?

- Reactions to event do not match what happened
- Unable to rationalize
- Heavy breathing
- Body agitation
- Trouble remembering events or information
- Impulsive decision-making



Creating a safe, healing environment

- Safety as a foundation before spiritual growth
 - Orient people to the service, and what they can expect
 - Avoid putting people on the spot
- Invitation over compliance
 - “You need to...” → “You’re invited to...”
 - Provide multiple engagement pathways



Creating a safe, healing environment

- Compassion over correction
 - "That makes sense."
 - "I'm really glad you shared that."
 - Build testimonies that include struggle and process
- Presence over fixing
 - Resist offering Scripture as a quick answer, connection first.
 - "You do not have to go through this alone."



Creating a safe, healing environment

- Attunement over authority
 - Understanding Non-verbal cues
 - Ask permission: Would it be okay if I prayed with you? Have you considered?
- Trust over control
 - Predictable environment
 - Open invitations for responses and participation



Creating a safe, healing environment

- Embodiment over performance
 - Speaking from lived experience
 - Present with the person
 - No right answers
 - Checking in with a person's capacity
- Connection over self-sufficiency
 - Healing happens in relationship
 - God and Community



Creating a safe, healing environment

- Regulation over stimulation
 - Balance Lighting
 - Quiet Spaces
 - Marked Exits
 - Predictability in Service
 - Clear expectations and communication



Creating a safe, healing environment

- John 4- Woman at the Well
- You are safe
- You are loved
- Your story matters
- God is not disappointed in you
- Healing happens in time and relationship



Action Items:

Be authentic

Hold space

Learn to listen really well

Be curious

Set clear expectations and follow through



Resources

- Care to Change Podcast: Faith and Mental Health 101: <https://caretochange.org/?podcasts=mental-health-101-faith-and-mental-health>
- Care to Change Trauma Resources: <https://caretochange.org/resources/>
- *Anatomy of the Soul* book by Curt Thompson
- *Try Softer* book by Audi Kolber
- *The Other Half of Church* book by Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks



SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS!



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- Sponsor families in need
- Email us at help@caretochange.org



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Tell Us Your Thoughts on Today's Information



Answer 2 simple questions



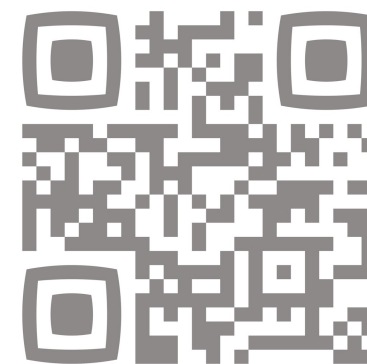
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Our Services



Our Team



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