

Trauma is within everyone; it is a normal part of humanity. This connection increases our compassion toward each other. There are acute traumas “T”: sexual and physical assault, witnessing violence, natural disasters, world pandemics. There is also accumulated traumas “t”: emotional disconnect from self and others, significant plans that fail, significant relationship changes.

Coping with trauma requires co-regulation

The Vagus Nerve unconsciously connects the body with the brain. Under the old brain-only paradigm, we told people to self-regulate their emotions through conscious self-talk. But real emotional help comes through co-regulation. When a caregiver and a child physically hold each other, their bodily-states harmonize and they connect on a metabolic level. Together they move from separate distress to mutual calm. (Peter Lavenex, Neurochild).

Coregulation, when our trauma or anxiety is triggered, creates a safe space to unpackage and open to our-self; thus, allowing the emotions & thoughts to be identified. Once identified, we can move toward putting that “memory file” into the past. In turn, reducing future risks of flash backs and acute anxiety.

How can we as adults co-regulate? Of course, you can ask a friend or family member to hug you; but sometimes this is not an option. In these physically-distancing times, this can be even less available.

When trauma memory, anxiety or a flashback are triggered, try to hold your hands over your heart & breath; or hug a pillow and breathe slowly.

Observe where you feel the trigger in your body. What part of your body is reacting?

Rate the trigger, 1-10, (1 is totally relaxed and 10 is out of control)

Say: “For 1 minute I will slow down” – inhale and exhale slowly. Where am I? What sensations can I notice? What do I feel-name the emotion? What is my thought- say the thought?

This moves us from the lower brain of fight, flight or freeze, to the upper part of the brain of self-witnessing.

Ask: “What would be good to do for 2-3 minutes?” Breathing for 1 minute; Tapping for 1 minute or finger holding; listening to music; going outside; Identify your 5 senses in the moment; what can I: (see, touch, smell, hear, & taste); drink water; suck on ice; chew gum. These 2-3 minutes will lead to calm in our nervous system.

Try to make this “self-check-in” a ritual. Set times to self-check, 2-3 times per day, for 1-2 minutes each time. How can I build mini-self-checks into my day? Set you phone for a reminder; or do this before you eat; when you get up; before bed; before and after work. These regular mini-checks can reduce a full anxiety break down.

Please share this idea with others.