

YOGA MEDICINE®

EDUCATION. EXPERIENCE. RESULTS.

Introduction to Mindful, Trauma Informed Yoga

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Clinically significant trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) results from exposure to life endangering stressors and is accompanied by a number of other symptoms including cycles of emotional reactivity, fear, hypervigilance and numbing.

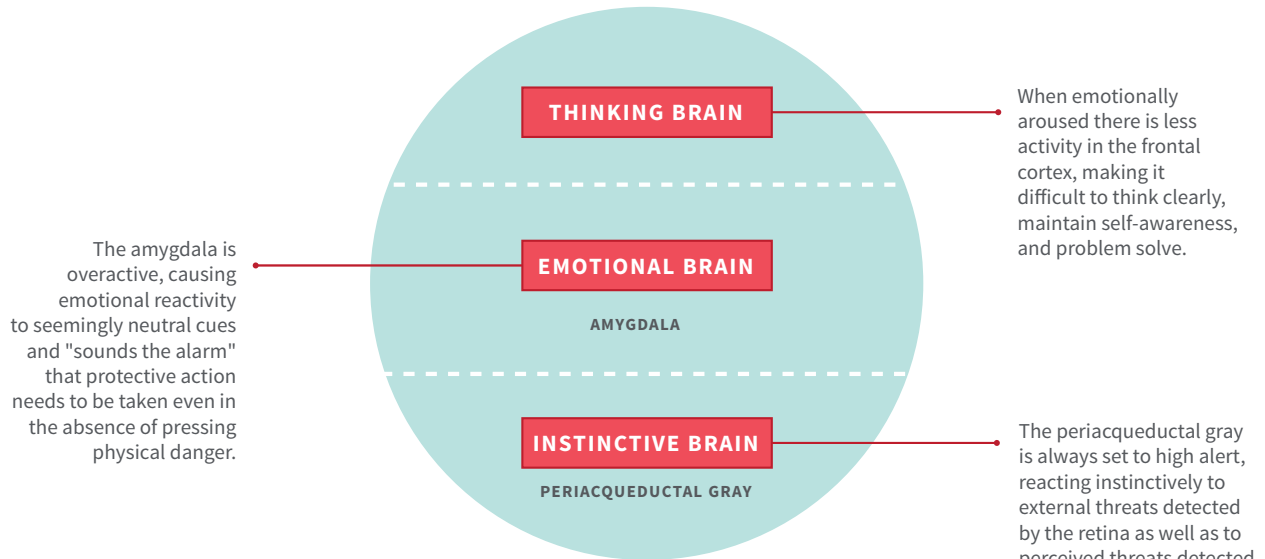
These troubling cycles of fear, hypervigilance, numbing and emotional reactivity are not just experienced in the mind. Rather, these symptoms are related to trauma induced changes in the brain and nervous system and they are experienced in the body as intense, unbearable sensation. These body-based symptoms will not change simply with talk therapy but can shift with somatic interventions. This is where mindful, trauma-informed yoga comes in!

Trauma impacts virtually every area of the brain. For our purposes we are using the simplified triune model of brain functioning. Trauma dysregulates all three areas of the triune brain: the instinctive brain and the autonomic nervous system, the emotional brain and the thinking brain.

Trauma leaves the instinctive brain and emotional brain overly activated and the thinking brain underactivated.

This means that traumatized individuals are often left experiencing unbearable sensations of fight, flight or freeze in the body and intense emotional reactivity with little conscious awareness about what is happening in the body or how to consciously shift these unbearable feelings and sensations.

THE TRIUNE BRAIN & TRAUMA



While trauma creates dysregulation in the body, brain and nervous systems, yoga can enhance regulation.

Breathing, meditation and relaxation have specifically been found to be the active ingredients in yoga that physiologically dampen the activity of the emotional and instinctive brains so that traumatized individuals are no longer at the mercy of near constant cycles of hyperarousal and hypoarousal.

Mindfulness--a practice of paying attention, on purpose, in the present, and without judgment—helps harness the thinking brain, and is an additional key intervention in healing from trauma. Mindfulness can enhance regulation by creating greater conscious awareness of sensation and feeling.

RECOGNIZING AND REGULATING LEVELS OF AROUSAL

HYPERAROUSAL ZONE

- “Fight or Flight Response”
- Sympathetic nervous system activation
- Hypervigilant, angry, threatening, impulsive
- Reduced ability to think clearly
- Rapid breath, rapid heartrate, tension in limbs

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE- CALM AROUSAL ZONE

- “Rest and Restore Response”
- Enhanced Parasympathetic Nervous System functioning
- Emotionally regulated
- Thinking clearly
- Calm breath, calm heart rate, relaxed body
- Use breathing, relaxation, meditation, movement and mindfulness to get here

HYPOAROUSAL ZONE

- “Freeze Response”
- Equal activation of sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems
- Emotionally numb, reduced ability to think clearly
- Reduced breathing and heart rate, reduced motion

YOGA

Mindful, Trauma Informed Yoga is NOT about intentionally triggering hyperarousal or encouraging the reliving or verbal processing of traumatic events in a yoga class. That kind of processing should only be done with a licensed mental health professional.

In designing a mindful, trauma informed yoga class there are 10 essential elements to consider:

1. **PHYSICAL DETAILS** (physical space, instructor clothing)
2. **CREATING SAFETY** (establishing therapeutic relationship, offering choice upfront)
3. **CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS** (check-ins, check outs, mindfulness meditation, observational languaging)
4. **BREATHWORK** (recommendations and cautions)
5. **MOVEMENT** (recommendations and cautions)
6. **CUING** (recommendations and cautions)
7. **AUDITORY ENVIRONMENT** (considering the use of music)
8. **FINAL RELAXATION** (recommendations and cautions)
9. **CLASS ENDINGS** (reminders for off the mat; healing words)
10. **ANTICIPATING RISK** (considering class size; managing crises)

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7. To find information on PTSD statistics go the PTSDUnited website: <http://www.ptsdunited.org/ptsd-statistics-2/>