

* Trauma: What Counselling Students Need to Know

Rory Lees-Oakes



* Learning Outcomes

Aim: To identify potential areas that could be traumatic for counselling students

Objectives:

- ✓ To identify potential areas of trauma that could arise during studies
- ✓ To suggest resources that support further learning and self-support in the area of trauma
- ✓ To analyse how to gain effective support to minimise the risk of trauma

* What Is Trauma?

‘Trauma is when we experience very stressful, frightening or distressing events that are difficult to cope with or are out of our control. It could be one incident, or an ongoing event that happens over a long period of time.’

‘Most of us will experience an event in our lives that could be considered traumatic.’

Mind, 2023, ‘What is trauma’ section, paras. 1 and 2



* Why Does Trauma Appear in Counselling Training?

- ✓ Many students training to become counsellors have experienced trauma in their own lives.
- ✓ Students in practice may become triggered by a client's story or disclosure.
- ✓ Students may feel a lack of support in their studies, skills development, sessions or practice; as a result, they may develop trauma.





What Kinds of Situations or Activities Can Activate a Trauma Response?

1# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

These may come into your awareness through:

- ✓ A realisation through group work that your childhood was traumatic/abusive
- ✓ Uncovering difficult childhood experiences in skills practice
- ✓ Awareness gained in process groups or personal therapy.

* 1990s



Dr. Vincent Felitti



Dr. Rob Anda

Stevens, 2012

* Childhood Experiences

Abuse:

Physical abuse

Emotional abuse

Sexual abuse

Neglect:

Emotional neglect

Physical neglect

Household dysfunction:

Parent* treated violently

Substance misuse

Parent's mental illness

Parent in prison

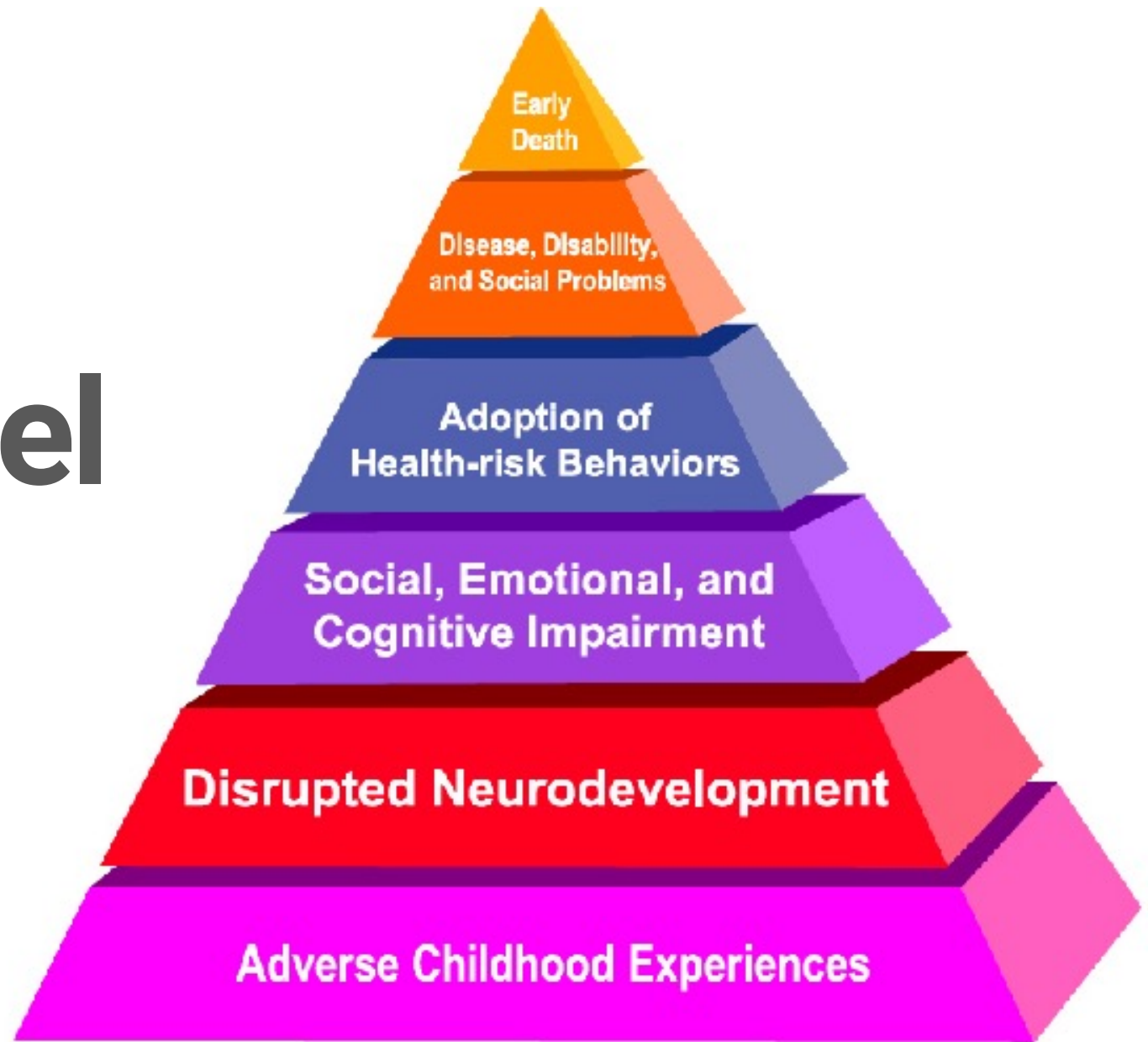
Parental separation/divorce



* Consequences for Adult Health

- ✓ Liver disease
- ✓ Heart disease
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Suicide attempts
- ✓ Smoking
- ✓ Drug use
- ✓ Alcoholism
- ✓ Early sexual activity
- ✓ Adolescent pregnancy
- ✓ Sexually transmitted diseases
- ✓ Foetal death
- ✓ Partner violence
- ✓ Health-related poor quality of life

* ACEs Model

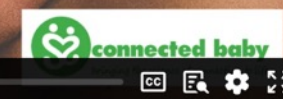
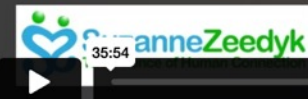


* ACEs

* Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Dr. Suzanne Zeedyk

Research Scientist
Developmental Psychologist
Founder of *connected baby*



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What Kinds of Situations or Activities Can Activate a Trauma Response?

2# Vicarious Trauma

This may result from:

- ✓ Hearing a peer's story in skills practice
- ✓ Listening to issues brought up in client work, such as suicide, abuse and self-harm
- ✓ Realising trauma through learning theory
- ✓ Experiencing ethical dilemmas and moral fracture.

* Vicarious Trauma: Relational

- a) Behaviour to reduce the chance of re-experiencing traumatic material
 - ✓ Avoidance of thoughts, memories, activities, situations, people and sensory experiences (sound, smell, taste, touch and sight) that are characteristic of trauma
 - ✓ This can be deliberate/automatic – how much is in your control?



* Vicarious Trauma: Relational

b) A sense of self that is forcibly reconfigured

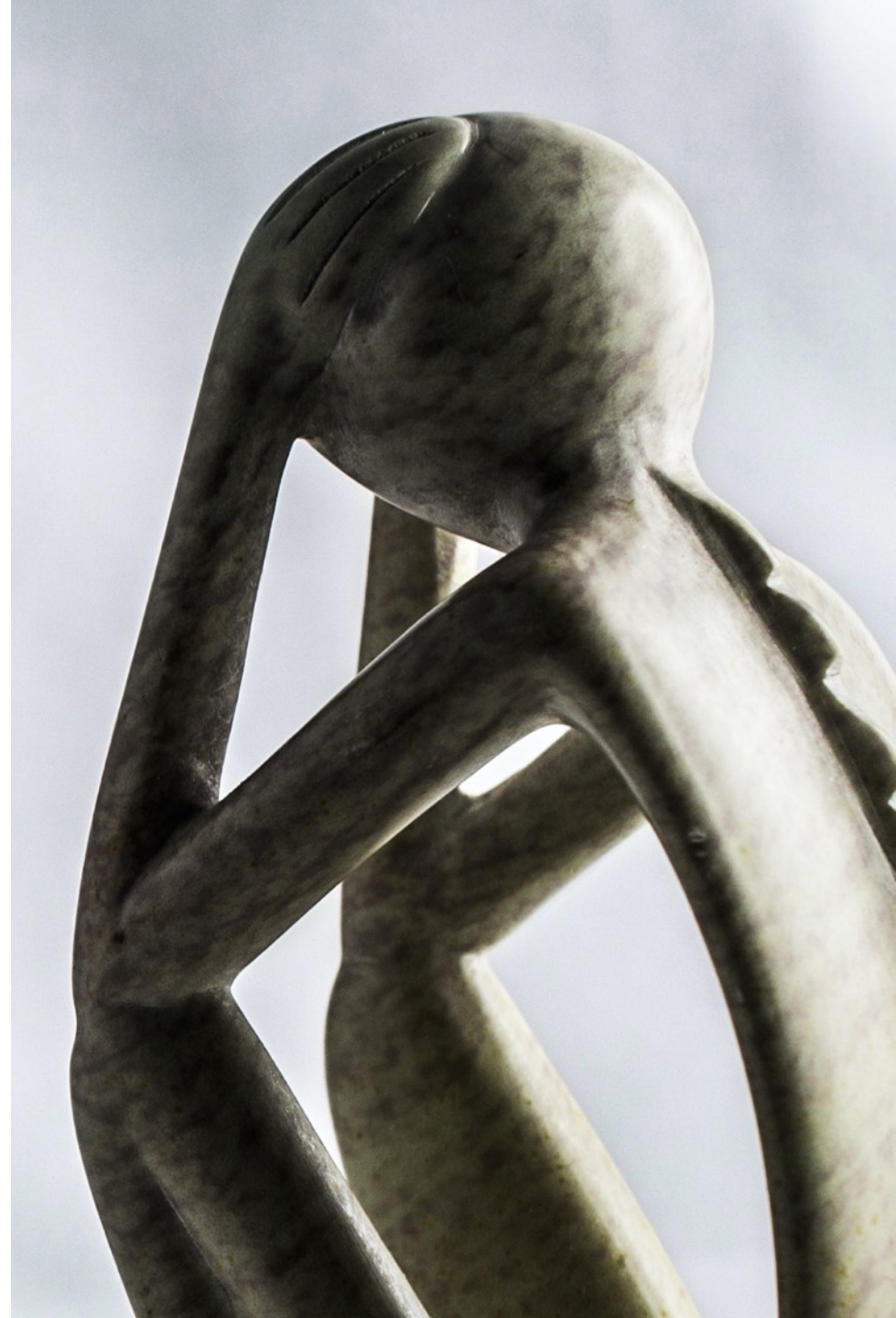
- ✓ Difficulty in understanding and managing emotions, thoughts and behaviours
- ✓ Experiencing emotions to a more intense or a greatly reduced degree
- ✓ A change in how you experience the multifaceted self (disconnection/relatedness)
- ✓ Changes in how you experience your personal identity
- ✓ An impaired ability to attend to everyday life, including attention to the present moment.



* Vicarious Trauma: Relational

c) An impaired sense of safety


- ✓ Difficulties in relating to yourself, other people and the wider world
- ✓ Feeling unsafe, wary or unsure in multiple spaces in the wider world
- ✓ Personal worlds becoming smaller, sometimes to the boundary of the body and/or mind.




* Understanding Vicarious Trauma



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* What Happens in the Brain When We Are Triggered?

The Five Fs Survival System

Friends (Looking for support in a stressful situation)

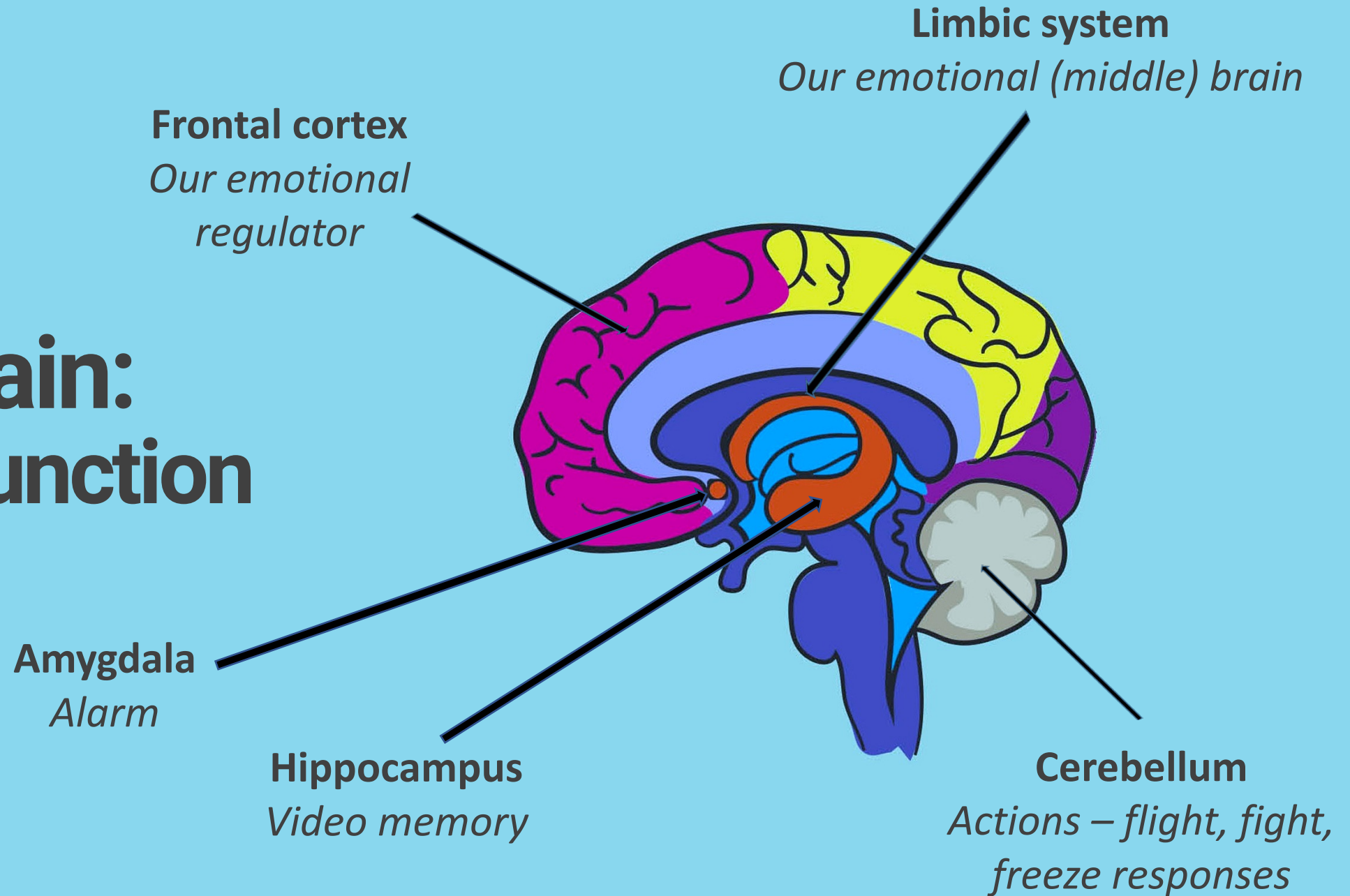
Fight (Fighting the assailant)

Flight (Running away)

Freeze (Staying where you are)

Flop (Amygdala and hippocampus becoming overloaded with cortisol, at which point you 'play dead' or dissociate)

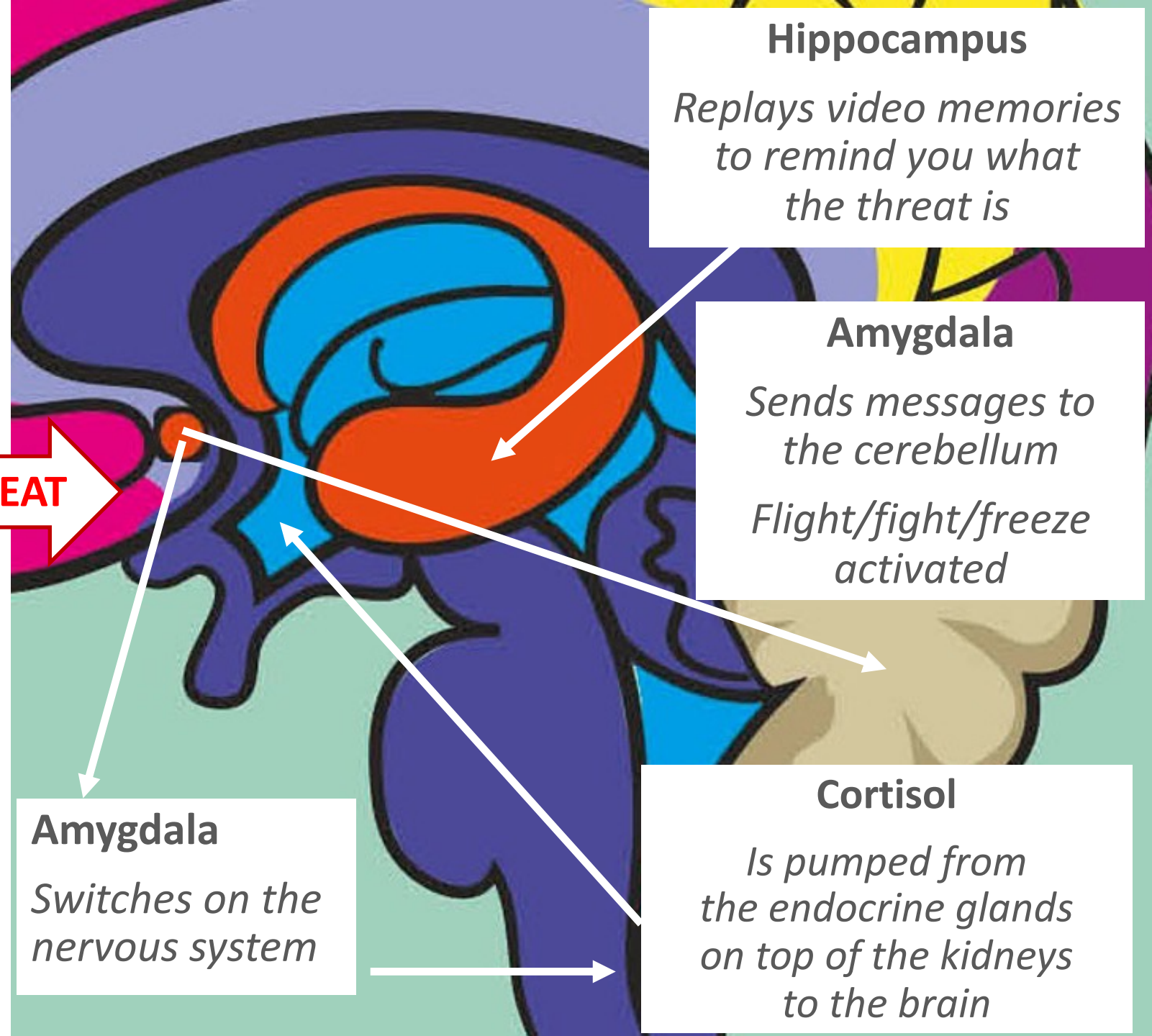
* The Brain: Basic Function



* The Flight/Fight Response

But what happens if the threat is real?

How does the brain react in times of danger?



Hippocampus

Replays video memories to remind you what the threat is

Amygdala

*Sends messages to the cerebellum
Flight/fight/freeze activated*

Cortisol

Is pumped from the endocrine glands on top of the kidneys to the brain

Amygdala


Switches on the nervous system

* How Does the Brain Process Trauma?


The video player interface features a blue header with the text "Counselling STUDY Resource" in yellow and white, and "The Most Comprehensive Resource for Students of Counselling and Psychotherapy" in white. The main content area has a grey background with a wireframe brain illustration. The title "Trauma & Brain Plasticity" is displayed in blue and grey. The Counselling Study Resource logo is in the bottom left. The video progress bar shows a play button, a time indicator of 47:45, and settings and full-screen icons.

Counselling STUDY Resource
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Trauma &
**Brain
Plasticity**

 **COUNSELLING
STUDY RESOURCE**

47:45

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* How Would I Know That Someone Was Experiencing Trauma in a Skills Session?

That's a great question!

In most cases, the 'client' would ask to stop or take a break. However, dissociation can sometimes occur very suddenly.

Let's explore why this happens and what it looks like.

* Trauma Is a Time Machine

When someone is in dissociation, they are in an emotional time machine replaying past events.

More importantly, the hippocampus is replaying those past events like a YouTube video.

Keeping the client in the here-and-now is imperative.



* What Are the Signs of Dissociation?

When someone disassociates, there are a few telltale signs:

- ✓ 1,000-yard stare
- ✓ Becoming childlike (regression)
- ✓ Heightened sense of surroundings
- ✓ (In extreme cases) wetting or soiling themselves.




Corporal Antonio Metruccio

* Trauma and the Brain

Counsellor Resources
The Most Comprehensive Resources for Counsellors and Student Counsellors


Trauma and the Brain

 COUNSELLOR RESOURCES

42:33

▶ [Progress Bar] ⚙️ [Full Screen]

The video player shows a woman with her hands covering her face, suggesting distress or trauma. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grass. The video title 'Trauma and the Brain' is prominently displayed in the center. The 'Counsellor Resources' logo and name are in the bottom left corner. A progress bar at the bottom indicates the video is at 42:33. Control icons for play, settings, and full screen are visible.

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* Getting Support

Coping Strategies for Counselling Students

- ✓ **Supervision and mentorship:** Regular supervision can provide support and guidance. Speak to your tutor.
- ✓ **Self-care practices:** Engage in activities that promote wellbeing, such as exercise, hobbies and relaxation techniques.
- ✓ **Peer support groups:** Sharing experiences and coping strategies with fellow students can reduce feelings of isolation.
- ✓ **Therapy:** Personal therapy can help you process your emotions and trauma.
- ✓ **Psychological education:** Learning about trauma and its impact can help develop resilience and effective coping mechanisms.

* **Breathwork**

– **Slowing down the heart rate to calm the body**

Guide the person in square (or 'box') breathing.

- ✓ Slowly exhale through your mouth until you feel you have emptied all your breath.
- ✓ Slowly inhale to the count of four; be aware of your lungs expanding, and the air moving into your abdomen.
- ✓ Hold your breath to the count of four.
- ✓ Exhale through your mouth to the count of four.
- ✓ Then hold your breath for the same count of four.
- ✓ Repeat this process as many times as necessary.

* Movement

– Rocking, swaying, tuning into what the body needs

Invite the person to move around the room.

- ✓ If somebody is fidgeting or struggling to sit still, there's a good chance that they are feeling cortisol or adrenalin in the body.
- ✓ Invite them to tune into the fidgeting, and to move in any way that feels right to them to allow them to expel or express that fight/flight energy – sitting still may be very difficult.
- ✓ You might want to experiment with them – swaying, rocking or simply walking around the room.

* Connection

– Co-regulating the nervous system with a safe being

Be a safe and calm nervous system.

Nervous systems communicate with each other through mirror neurons. If you are calm, their nervous system will know this and this will allow them to feel more safe.

Use imagination and memories.

Imagining or remembering a place or person that you felt safe with can also calm the nervous system. Some clients might use their imagination; others might like a picture or video of a child, partner, friend, place or pet to help them to remember a feeling of safety.

* Using Trauma Grounding Techniques

* Using Trauma-Informed Grounding Techniques in Therapy

Emma Chapman

COUNSELLOR RESOURCES

Accessing the cranial nerves


- Engaging the social engagement system in order to feel safe (grounding)
- Checking in how they are doing
- Offer a simple breathers
- Ask how they are doing and if they are ready to try
- Use a simple grounding exercise with a partner person.
- Use a simple grounding exercise with a partner person.
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- Use a simple grounding exercise with a partner person.

42:35

32:39

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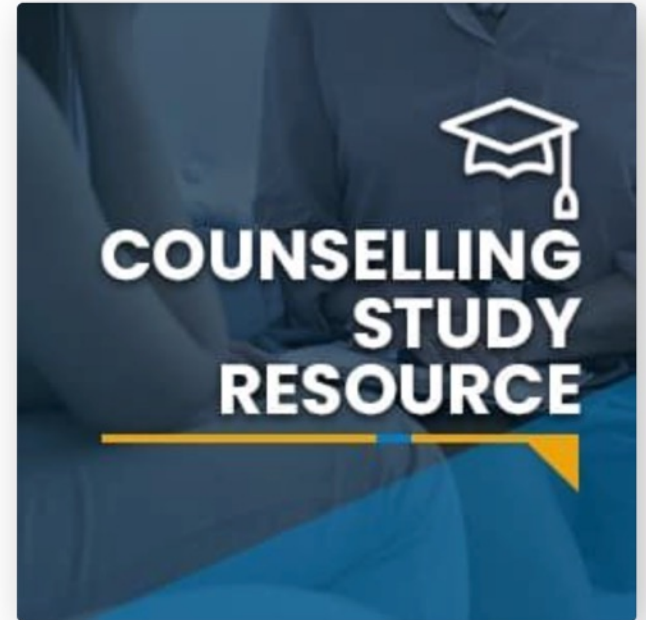
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* Sources of information

The material for this lecture has been curated from a wealth of comprehensive lectures provided by experts, all of which are available in the CSR student library.



[MORE INFO](#)

Student Study Resource

Online lectures, assignment guidance and study support for students of counselling and psychotherapy; resources are mapped to the UK awarding bodies' criteria.

* References

- ✓ Chapman, E. (2021). Using Trauma-Informed Grounding Techniques [online lecture, members only]. *Counselling Study Resource*. [Viewed 28/8/24].
- ✓ Hadjiioannou, E. (2022). Understanding and Managing the Impact of Vicarious Trauma [online lecture, members only]. *Counselling Study Resource*. [Viewed 28/8/24].
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- ✓ Mind. (2023). Trauma [online]. *Mind*. [Viewed 28/8/24]. Available from: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/trauma/about-trauma/>
- ✓ Stevens, J. E. (2012). The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study – the largest, most important public health study you never heard of – began in an obesity clinic [online]. *Aces Too High*. [Viewed 28/8/24]. Available from: <https://acestoohigh.com/2012/10/03/the-adverse-childhood-experiences-study-the-largest-most-important-public-health-study-you-never-heard-of-began-in-an-obesity-clinic/>
- ✓ Zeedyk, S. (n.d.). Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) [online lecture, members only]. *Counselling Study Resource*. [Viewed 28/8/24].

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