

Breaking Cycles of Violence and Pain

By Carolyn Yoder MA

© November 2003 by Eastern Mennonite University, Conflict Transformation Center

Credits:

This presentation is an integration of ideas and models
from the following:

Peter Levine PhD Waking the Tiger

Olga Botcharova and The Center for Strategic
and International Studies, Washington DC

Basel Van der Kolk PhD, Traumatic Stress

Daniel Siegel, MD, The Developing Mind

John Gottman PhD, Why Marriages Succeed
or Fail

Walter Wink, The Powers that Be

Stress and Trauma Handbook, John Fawcett,
Ed.

Martha Cabrera, “Living and Surviving in a
Multiply Wounded Country.”

and many clients and personal experiences
over the years

Guidelines for Use of This Powerpoint

This copyrighted Powerpoint presentation is the work of Jayne Seminare Docherty, PhD and Carolyn Yoder, MA, of the Conflict Transformation Program of Eastern Mennonite University, VA, USA (www.emu.edu)

Permission is granted to use it freely for educational purposes, without permission, provided it is not used in a published work or sold, and that the source of the materials is clearly identified. If the materials are to be used in a published work, permission may be requested by contacting the Conflict Transformation at Eastern Mennonite University.

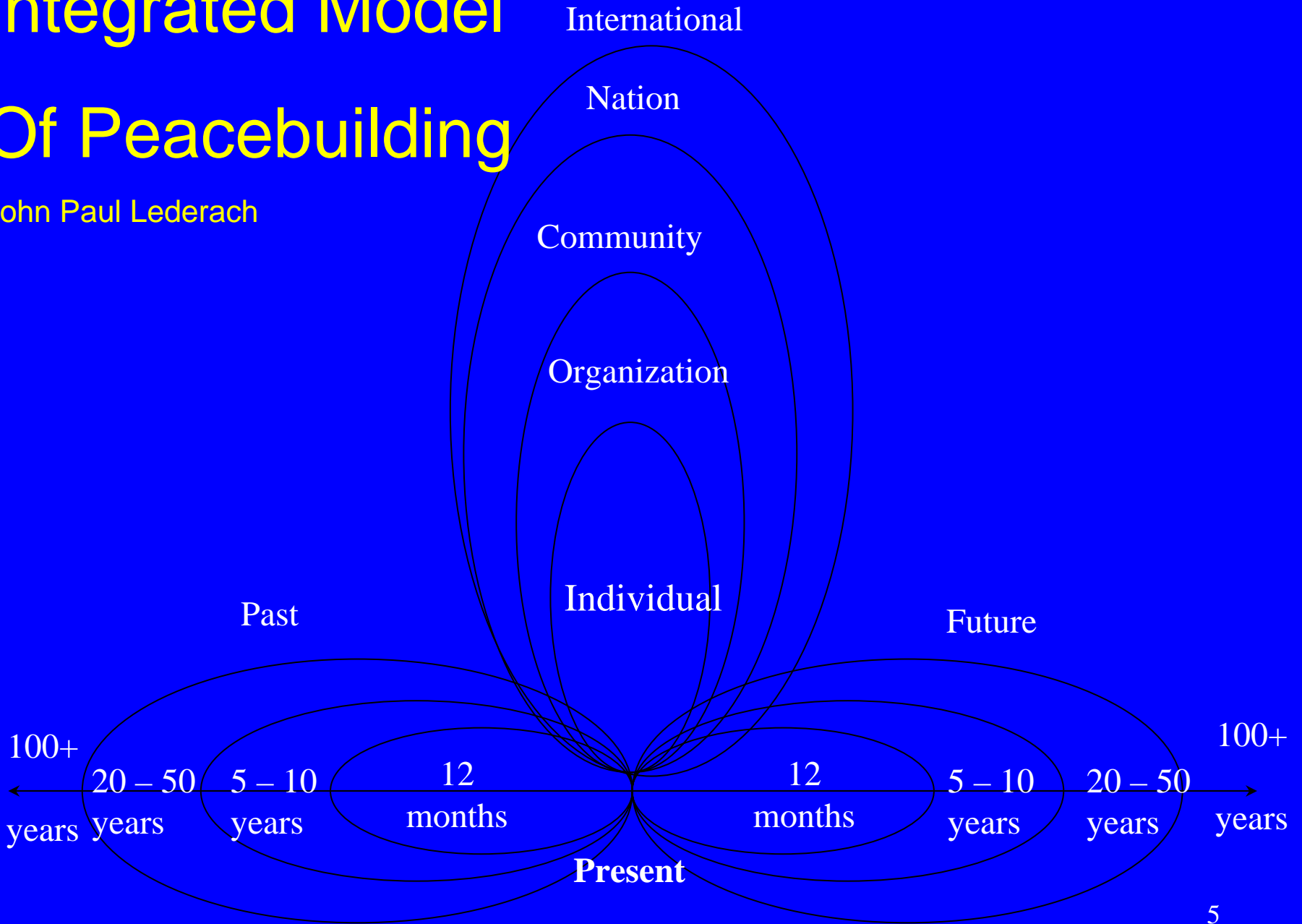
Thank you.

WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF “TRAUMA HEALING: BREAKING THE CYCLES OF VICTIMHOOD AND VIOLENCE”?

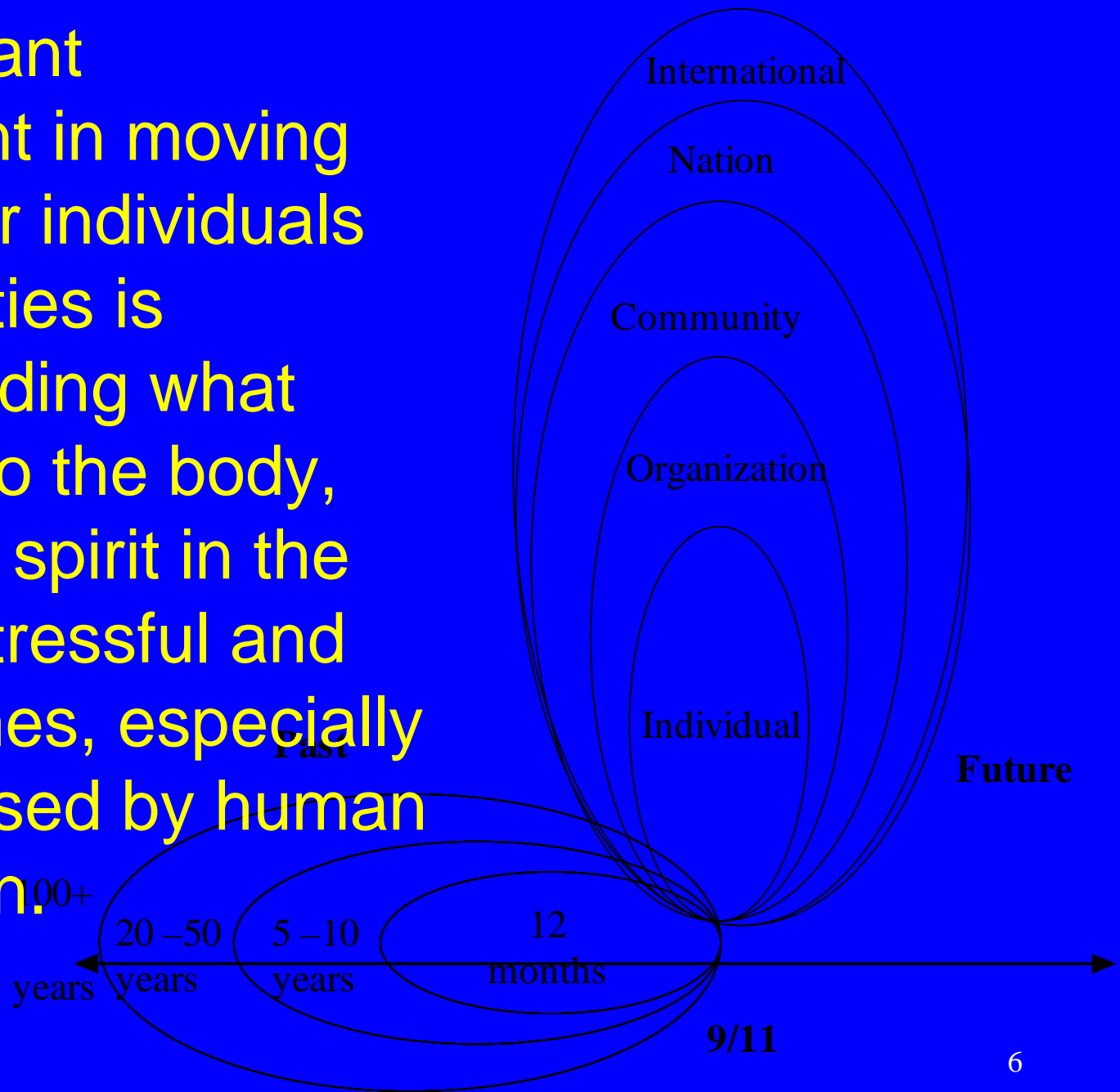
Like most things in life, prototypes and models are the synergistic results of the insight, wisdom, and practical work of many people, making it well nigh impossible to fully credit each person. But we present here the history we know. The groundwork for the model has its origins in the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington-based independent research institute focusing on international affairs. Later, Olga Botcharova and her colleagues in the former Yugoslavia (which included Eastern Mennonite University Conflict Transformation Program faculty Barry Hart) adapted the CSIS model, borrowed from other work (including that of CTP faculty Ron Kraybill), and came up with a model based on their experience in hundreds of trauma and conflict resolution workshops held throughout the region. (Botcharova describes these learnings and presents the model in “Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy” published in Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation, Helmick and Petersen, Editors, Templeton Foundation Press, 2001). **Trauma Healing: Breaking the Cycles**, as presented here, is a further adaptation by the faculty, staff and associates of the Conflict Transformation Program (CTP) and the Institute for Justice and Peacebuilding (IJP) of Eastern Mennonite University.

Integrated Model Of Peacebuilding

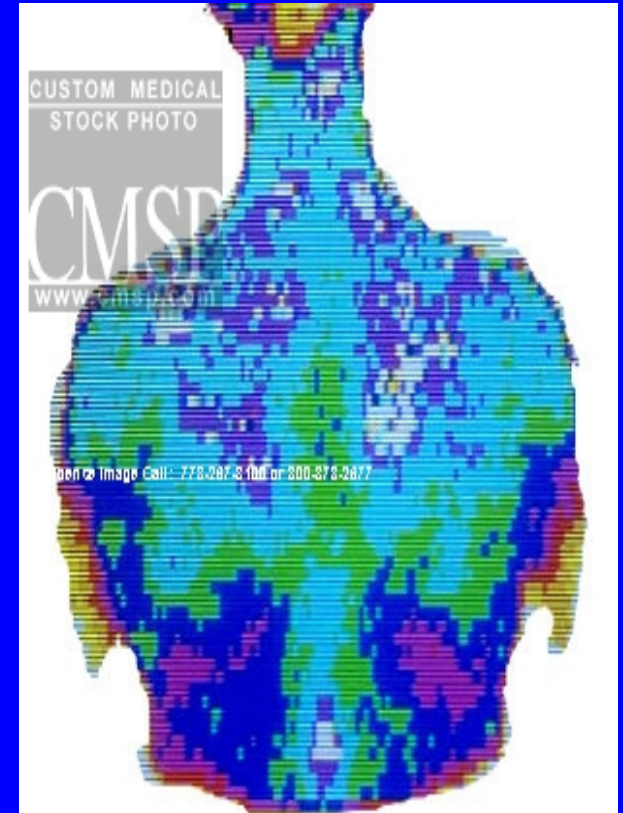
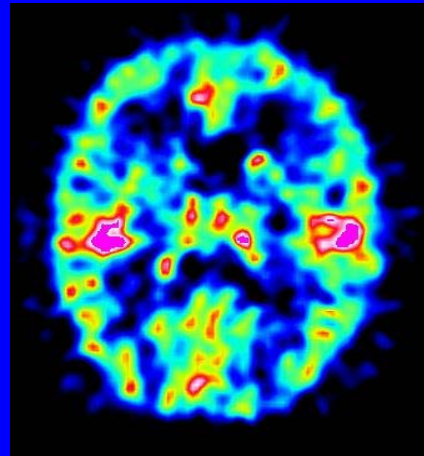
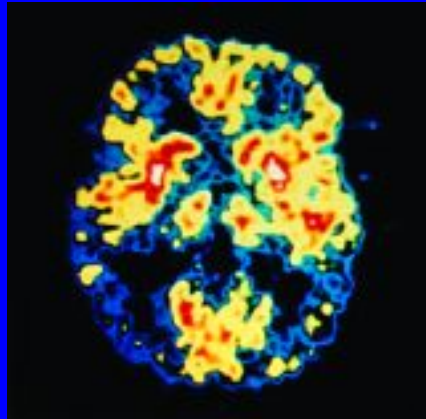
John Paul Lederach



An important component in moving forward for individuals and societies is understanding what happens to the body, mind, and spirit in the midst of stressful and painful times, especially those caused by human aggression.



Physical Reactions to Long Term Stress and Painful Events



Common traumatizing events

- Violence (assault, wars)
- Accidents/falls
- Serious illnesses
- Sudden loss of loved ones
- Surgical, medical and dental procedures
- Difficult births
- Sudden changing of “the rules” or expectations and norms

What is trauma?

When our ability to respond
to threat is overwhelmed.

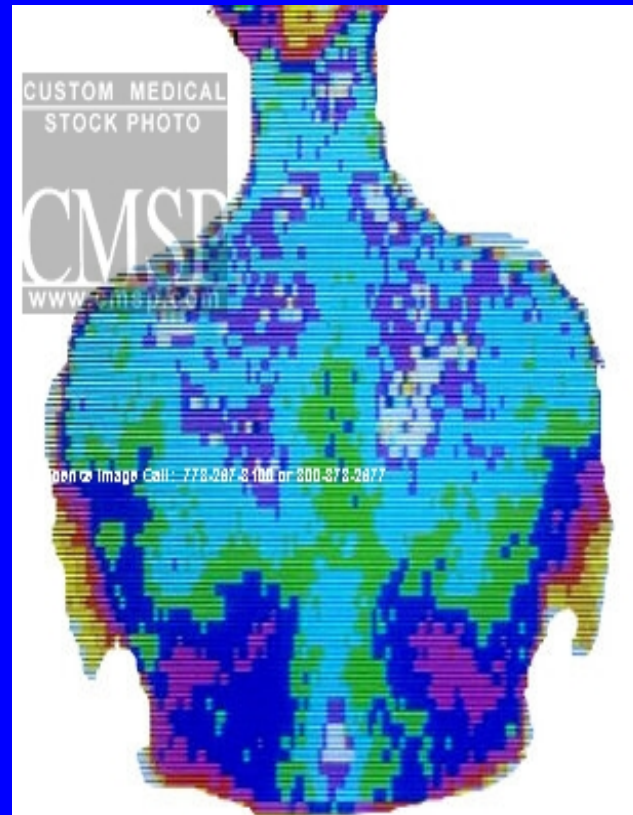
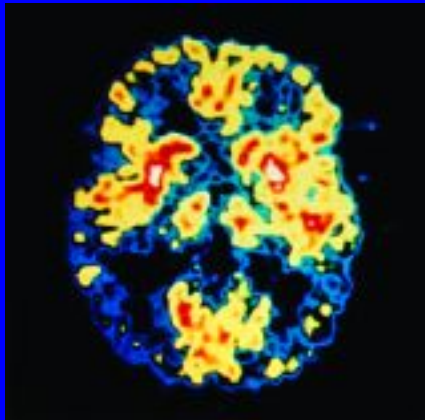
Peter Levine, Waking the Tiger

The body, mind, emotions, and/or
spirit can be overwhelmed.

What determines who is traumatized?

- The event itself
- The content of the individual or group's life at the time of the event
- An individual or group's physical and emotional characteristics
- The person or group's sense of capacity to meet danger/challenges, including the history of success or failure in dealing with past issues or events

Natural Physical Reactions to Long Term Stress and Trauma

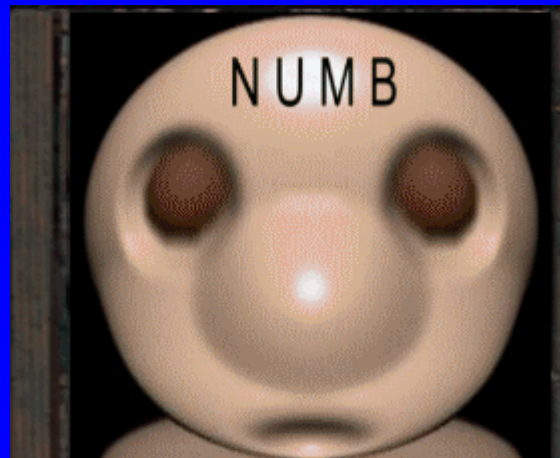




In situations of cumulative or on-going tension and stress, individuals and groups “habituate” to survive.

Orange alert

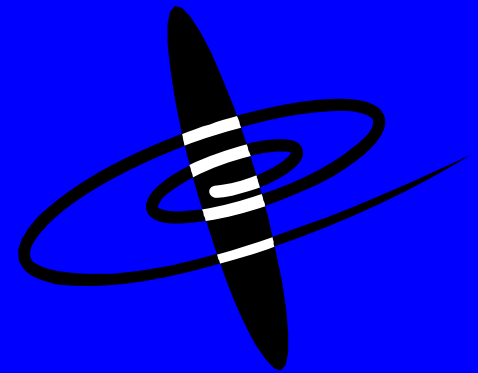
Low levels of stress hormones are present in the body. On a chronic basis, they are harmful especially to the heart, immune system, nervous system, and brain.



In major crises, fear triggers the “fight or flight response” with an avalanche of stress hormones. Or one can be frozen by fear.



Either way, an enormous energy is generated in the body to help us survive and cope. It has been likened to an internal tornado.





This tornado-like energy can be occurring inside even when individuals or groups look calm outwardly, or are frozen by fear or indecision.

Stressful and/or traumatic events impact groups as well as individuals.

Violence between groups of people affects individuals and it traumatizes the wider society in which those persons live.

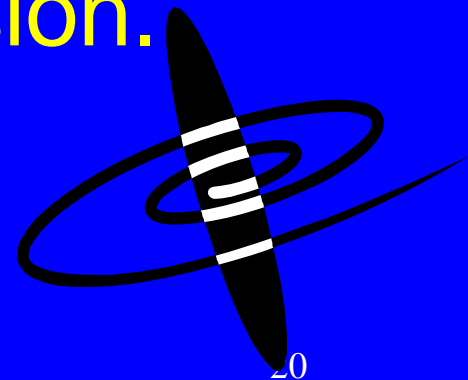


Inter-group violence causes both individual and cultural trauma...

In major crises, fear triggers the “fight or flight response” with an avalanche of stress hormones. Or one can be frozen by fear.



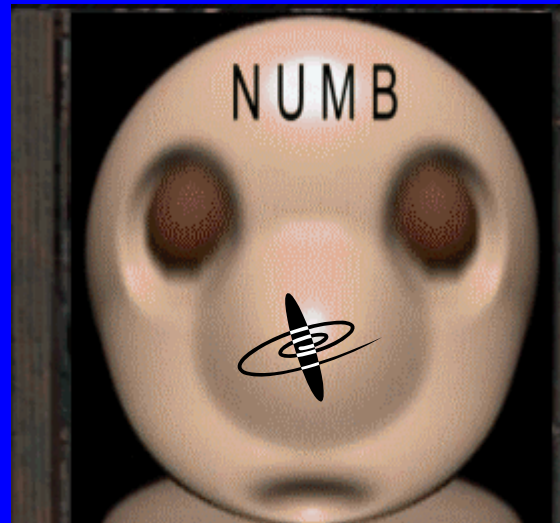
Either way, an enormous energy is generated in the body to help us survive and cope. It has been likened to an internal tornado. This is occurring even when individuals or groups look calm outwardly, or are frozen by fear or indecision.



In situations of cumulative or on-going tension and stress, low but physically impacting levels of stress hormones are present. On a chronic basis, they are harmful especially to the heart, immune system, nervous system, and brain.

Under such conditions, individuals and groups “habituate” to survive.

The “tornado” is numbed out emotionally often with the help of medications, over-work, and/or alcohol and illegal drugs.



Stressful and/or traumatic events impact groups as well as individuals.

Violence between groups of people affects individuals and it traumatizes the wider society in which those persons live.



Inter-group violence causes both individual and cultural trauma...

What happens to the brain in response to stress hormones?

Our fearfully and wonderfully made brain has three parts:

- Instinctual / brain stem
- Emotional / limbic
- Rational / cerebral-cortex

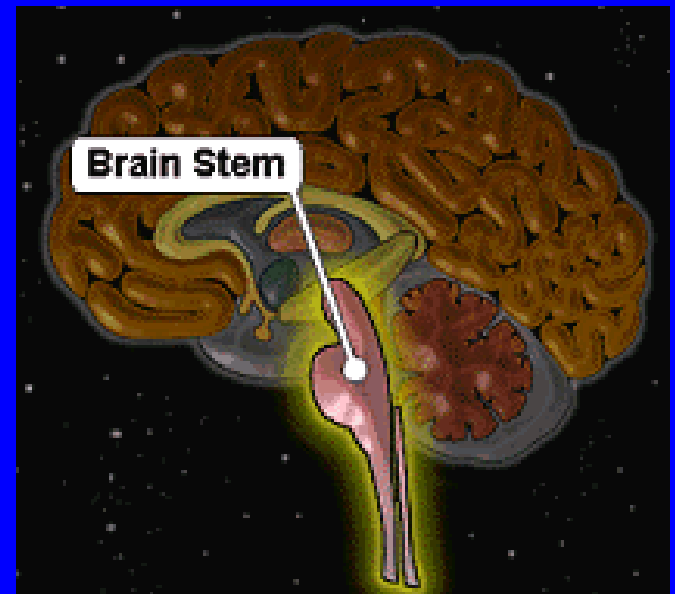


Instinctual brain, or brain stem

- Everything is now: yesterday?today?tomorrow?
- Concerned about self-preservation.

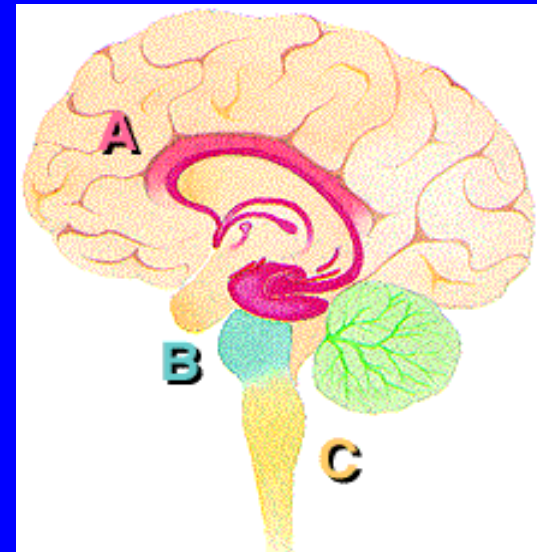
Asks “Is this situation safe? Is it something:

- To nurture or be nurtured by
 - Have sex with
 - Run away from (flight)
 - Attack (fight)
 - Submit to (freeze)
- Automatic reactions
 - Reproduction
 - Blood circulation
 - Muscle contraction
 - Temperature regulation
 - Breathing, sleeping



Emotional brain: limbic system

- Site of emotions
- Site of memory storage
- Automatic reactions:
“first alert” alarm system
in times of stress and
crisis



Rational brain

- Site of our cognitive (thinking) functions
- Has a sense of linear time (yesterday, today, tomorrow)
- Is conscious and alert
 - Observes, anticipates, plans, responds
 - Organizes information, makes decisions
 - Logical
 - Creates ideas

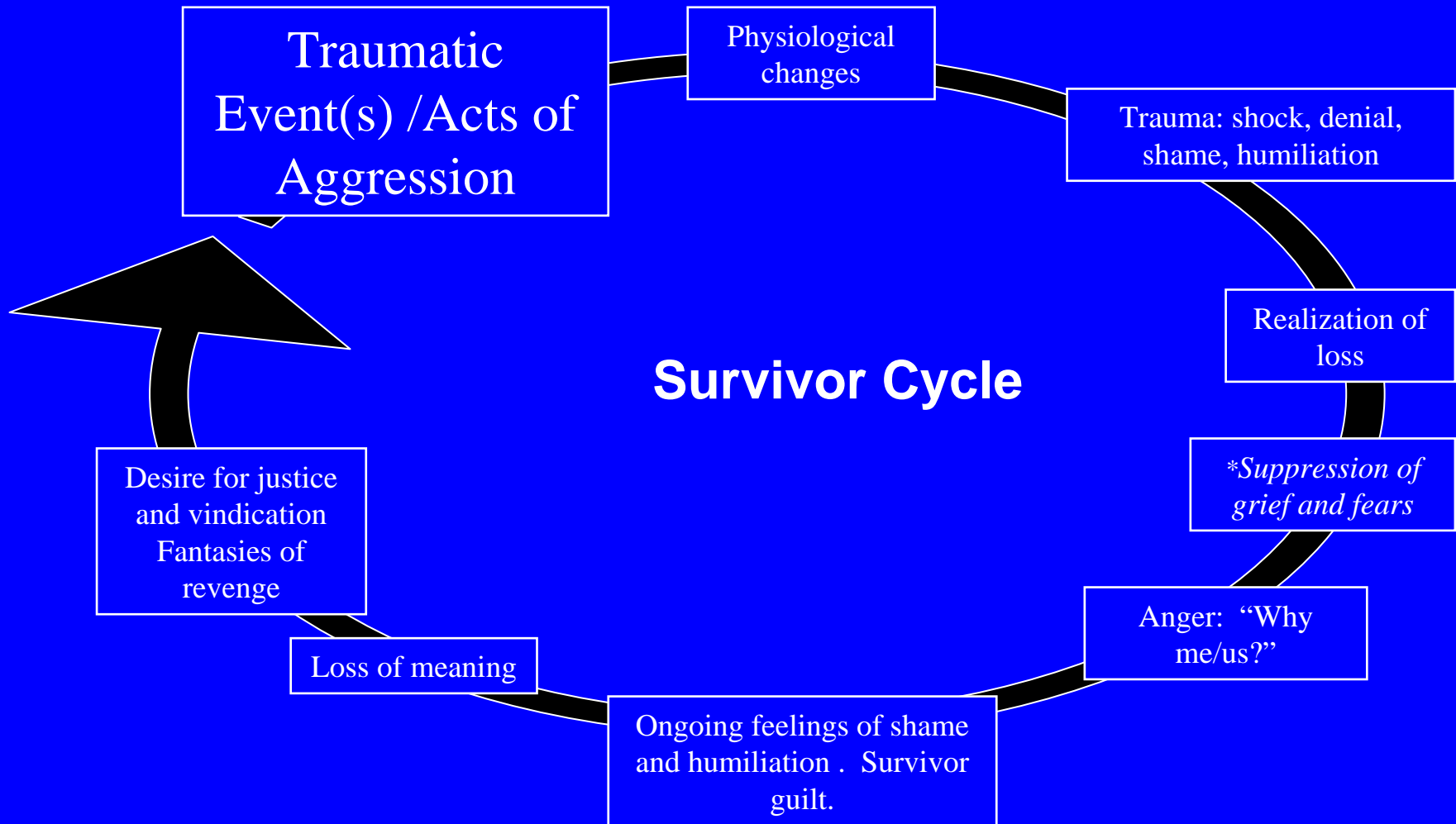


Under normal conditions,
the thinking brain immediately
can influence reactions of the
emotional and instinctual brains.

But in high anxiety situations,
the rational brain is
“the last to know.”

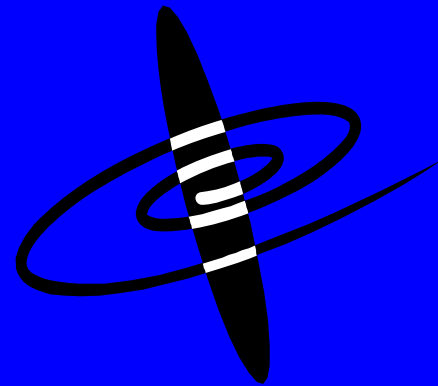
During times of high stress and crisis, memories and emotions cannot be processed and stored in the normal way. So they “fly around” in the brain.

Parts of the brain don't know the crisis is over.

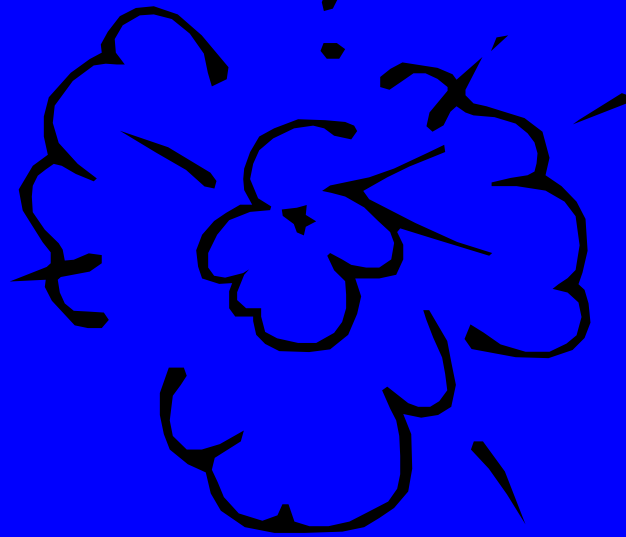


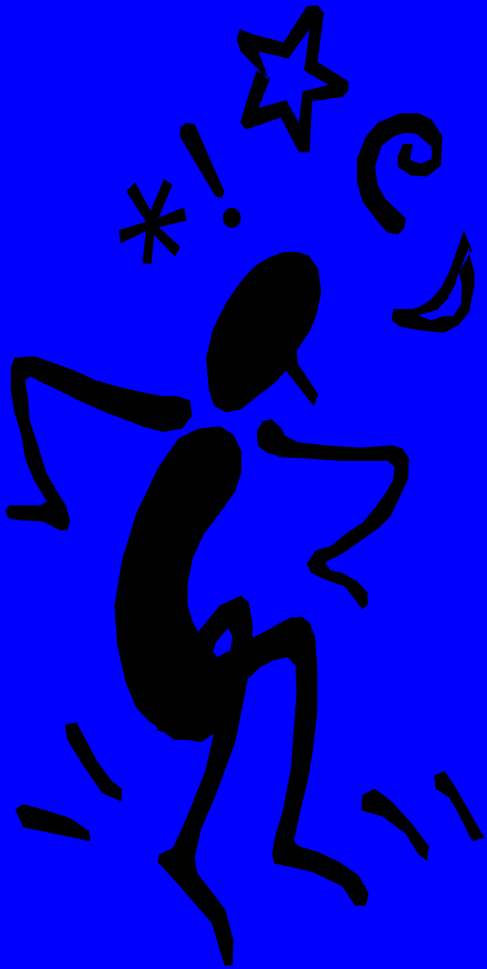
*A common reaction, but not inevitable

What happens
to all the extra energy
generated in the body in
response to stress or trauma?



If not released, the frozen or un-used energy is trapped in the body (brain, nervous system, muscles) where it wreaks havoc on our bodies in the form of stress reactions.

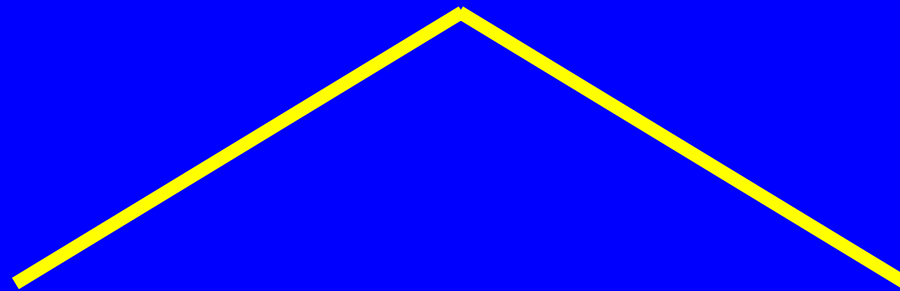




We go through life physically hyper-vigilant and quickly give a “threat” meaning to others and to events around us. This is part of what is called “acting out” re-enactment, and we do this to keep ourselves safe.

The energy also manifests as
"acting in" against the self.

Re-enactment of Unhealed Pain



Acting in

(turning unhealed pain
energy in on oneself)

Acting out

(turning unhealed pain
energy out onto others)

Re-enactment: acting-in

Turning the un-processed energy against oneself

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Overwork
- Eating too much or too little
- Depression, numbness, anxiety
- Self blame, shame, self mutilation
- Physical symptoms
 - High blood pressure, pain (chest, back, joints), headaches, digestive problems, etc.

Most cultures have little tolerance for such emotional vulnerability.

“Pull yourself together.”

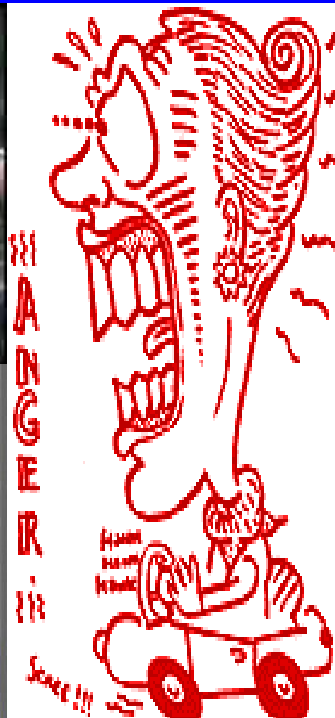
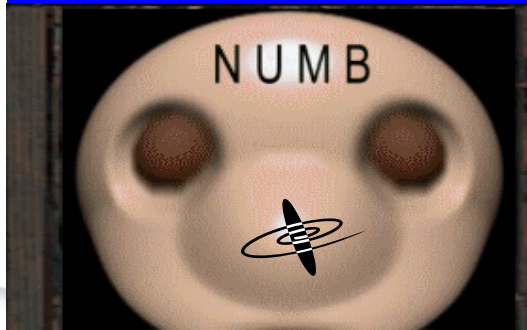
“Get over it.”

“Be strong.”

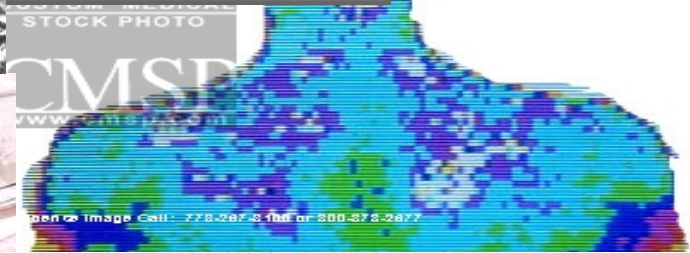
“Move on.”

Re-enactment: acting-out (with the world as the stage)

- Child abuse
- Inability to be flexible, tolerant, and show empathy to others
- Depression acted out (difficulty in intimate relations, domestic abuse, blaming, irritability)
- *Repetitive conflicts and wars*



emotional eating



Revenge fantasies



Common Responses to High Stress and/or Trauma

Adapted from the work of Jim Norman, M.ED, C.T.S Oklahoma City, OK. by Carolyn Yoder

After experiencing a traumatic event, or in response to cumulative stressors, it is common---and normal-- to experience a wide range of emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual reactions. These responses may appear immediately after the event(s) *or some time later*. ***These are normal reactions to abnormal situations.*** The following are some of the most common responses:

Emotional	Cognitive (thinking)	Behavioral (doing)	Physical	Spiritual	Societal Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Fear •Terror •Anxiety •Panic / Paranoia •Anger / Rage •Apprehension •Depression •Vengeful •Shame •Guilt •Sadness •Grief •Emotional shock •Emotional outbursts •Loss of emotional control •Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness •Feeling numb •Irritability •COURAGE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Confusion •Nightmares •Hypervigilance •Suspiciousness •Flashbacks •Overly sensitive •Difficulty concentrating/ making decisions, spaciness •Memory problems •Shortened attention span •Overly critical •Blaming others •Poor problem solving •Poor abstract thinking •Preoccupied with the event(s) •Inability to recall all or parts of the event •Disorientation of time, place or person •Heightened or lowered awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Withdrawal •Antisocial acts •Inability to rest, pacing •Hype-alertness Erratic movement •Suspiciousness •Emotional outbursts •Change in speech patterns •Increased alcohol/drug use •Avoiding thoughts, feelings related to the event •Difficulty writing or talking •Impaired sexual functioning •Loss or increase of appetite •Feeling uncoordinated •Domestic Violence •CARING FOR OTHERS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Thirst/dry mouth •Twitches •Vomiting •Weakness •Chest pain •Elevated blood pressure •Rapid heart rate •Muscle tremors •Visual difficulties •Nausea/diarrhea •Shallow breathing •Dizziness or faintness •Chills or sweating •Easily startled •Fatigue •Changes in appetite •Sleep disturbances or nightmares •Headaches •Grinding teeth •Inability to rest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Emptiness •Loss of meaning •Doubt •Feeling unforgiven •Martyrdom/punished •Looking for magic •Loss of direction •Cynicism •Apathy •Needing to “prove”self •Alienated •Mistrust •Crisis of faith •GROWTH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Apathy •Silence/impaired communication •Aggressive behavior •Isolation •Lack of empathy •Denial •Low energy/low productivity •Inflexibility •High rates of alcoholism, drug abuse •High rates of (untreated) mental health issues (depression, sexual dysfunction, etc) •High rates of stress related health issues (and medication use) •Intergenerational transmission of pain •SPIRITUAL GROWTH, WISDOM

Where is the brain in this?

The rational brain wants justice
and to be fair and reasonable.



*But the emotional brain
(limbic system) is feeling*

anger rage

fear panic /paranoia

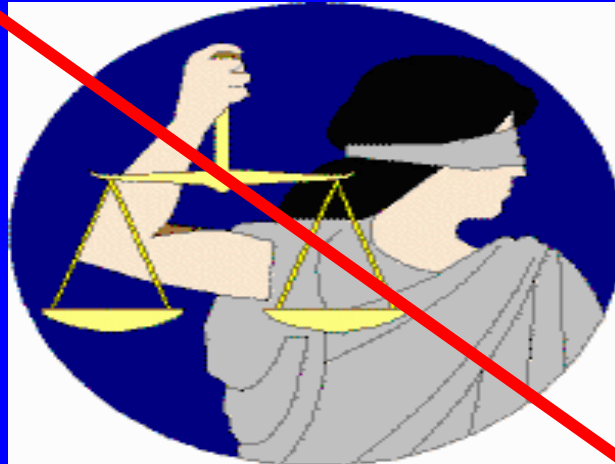
hurt/pain despair

*shame **Shame /humiliation***



And in the instinctual brain, the trauma energy is swirling....

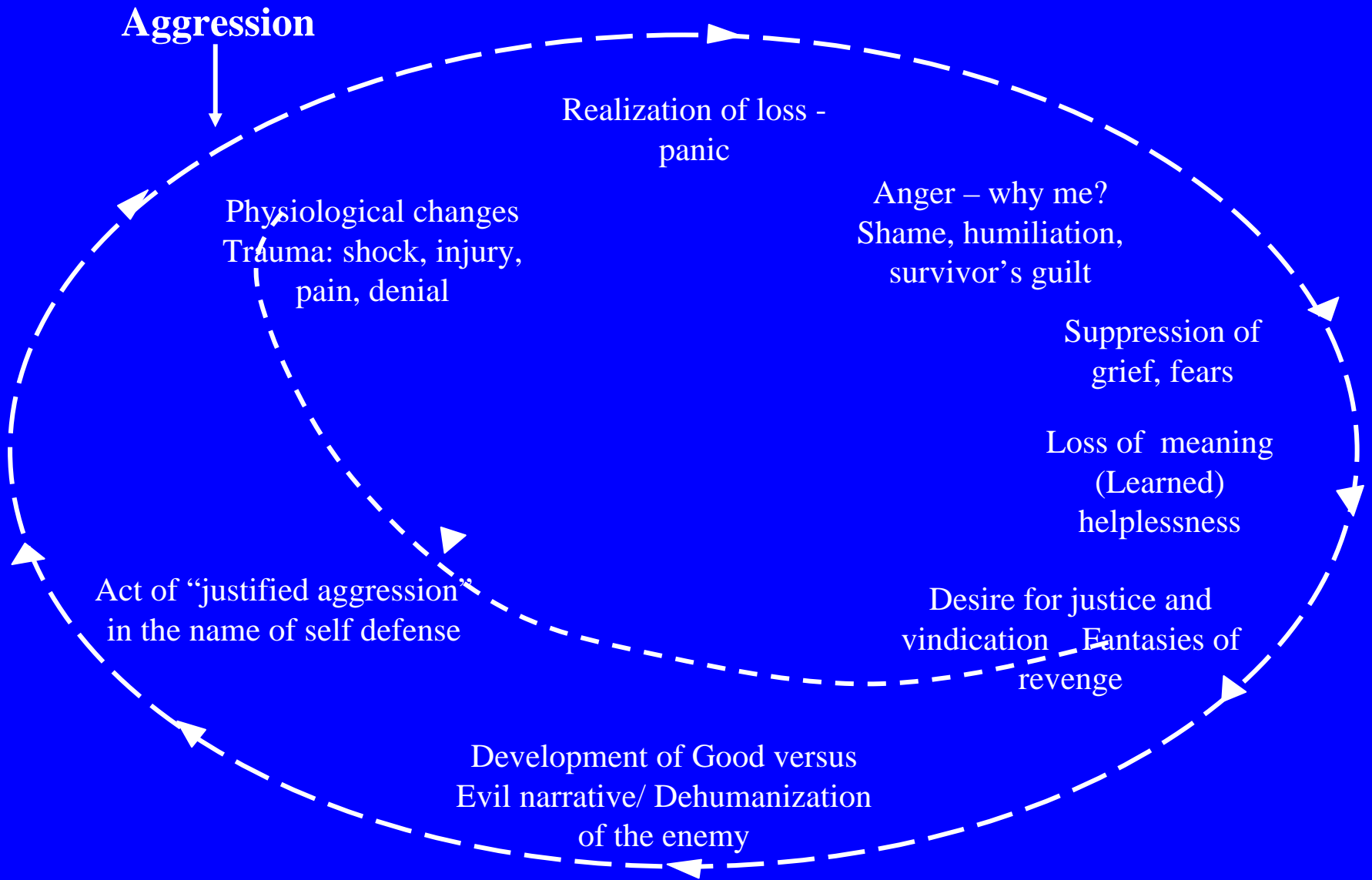
*...so the rational brain
is overruled and over-run.*



Justice is confused with REVENGE .

In fact, the rational brain is co-opted
or hijacked by the emotional brain
and the instinctual brain...
and equates REVENGE with justice.





The Cycle of Victimhood and Violence

"Pain that is not transformed is transferred."

Richard Rohr



But it doesn't have to be this way.
Individuals, communities, and societies can make *the choice* to work at root causes and view pain as an *invitation to* spiritual, emotional, and societal *transformation*.



Pause

In groups of three discuss:

- What was the most interesting thing I just heard about pain/trauma/aggression?
- Did it show me something new about my own story? If so, what?
- Did it show me something new about your community or Northern Ireland?

But it doesn't have to be this way.
Individuals, communities, and societies can make *the choice* to work at root causes and view pain as *an invitation to spiritual, emotional, and societal transformation.*



The drive to “unfreeze” and heal stays with us no matter how long ago events happened. So individuals and groups can heal even years later.

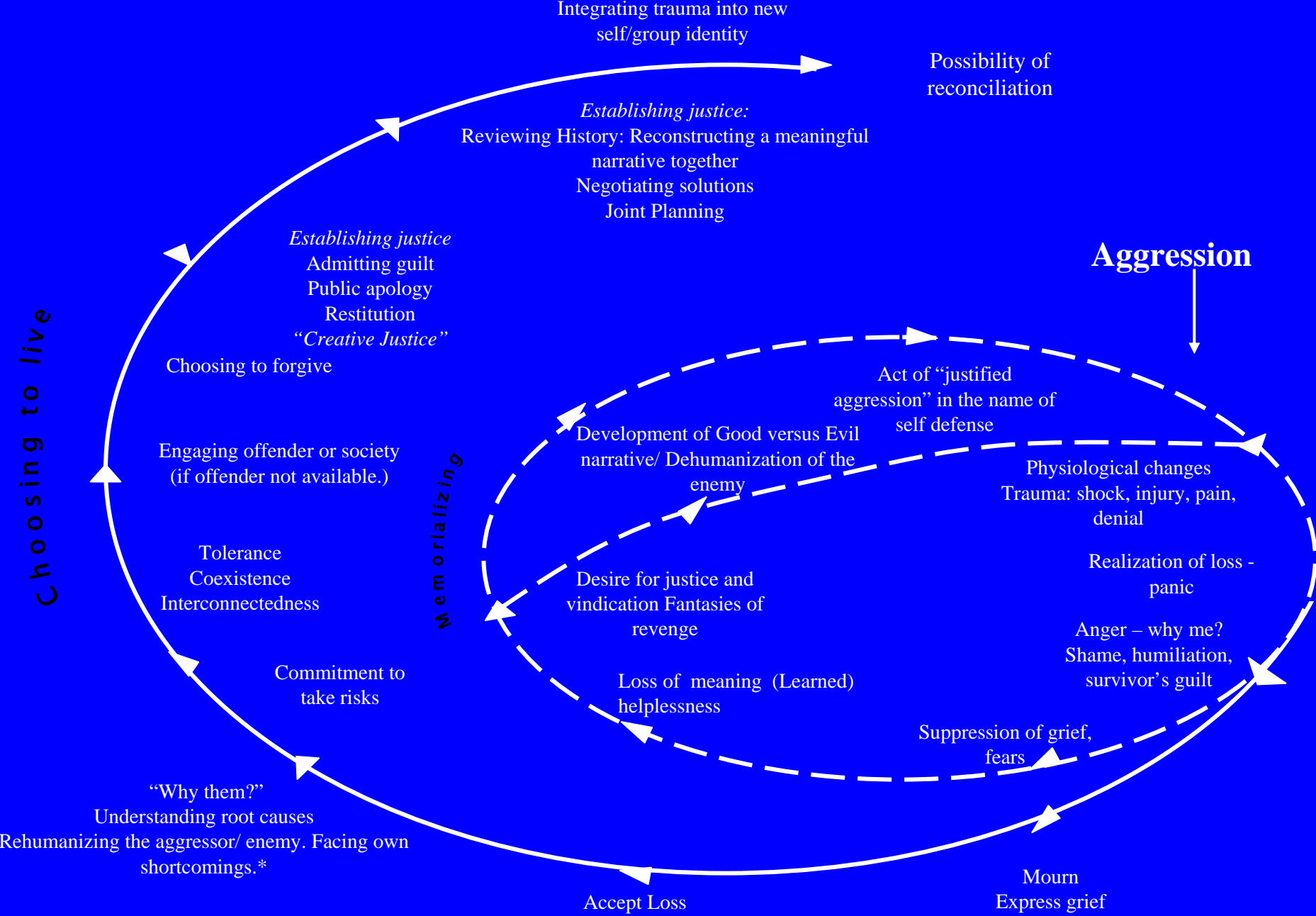


“Multiply wounded societies run the risk of becoming societies with inter-generational traumas. . . anywhere that large population groups are traumatized, the trauma is transferred to the next generation.”

Martha Cabrera, Nicaragua

How do individuals and societies transform pain and so get off the carousel of the survivor and aggressor cycles?





*This does not apply to all cases; for example, child abuse.

A Healing Journey: Breaking the Cycles Victimhood (survivors) and Violence

So many projects have the stated goal of “reconstructing the social fabric” but who reconstructs a society’s fabric? People do. . . There can be no social change without personal change.

Martha Cabrera, Nicaragua

We needed to deal with the subjective,
the psychological, the spiritual. We called
our effort “***affective and spiritual
reconstruction.***”

Martha Cabrera, Nicaragua

A way to begin is with our story/ our history:

- Acknowledge and name what happened
(multiple wound phenomenon and no time to reflect)
- Express the pain
- Reflect on the pain

Expressing pain through calming the brain and releasing blocked energy

– **The Relaxation Response:** From the work of Herbert Benson, MD at Harvard Medical Mind Body Center

- Deep breathing
- Repetitive prayer
- Repetitive exercise
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Guided imagery
- Body Scan
- Progressive muscle relaxation



Other ways to induce the relaxation response (suggested by STAR participants)

- Faith rituals/worship
- Dancing
- Singing
- Tai Chi
- Speaking in tongues
- Walking the labyrinth
- Poetry (writing or reading)
- Journaling
- Drumming
- Being with safe people/
having a community
- All kinds of exercise
- Massage



Fr. Michael Lapsley identifies three questions individuals and groups need to ask while reflecting:

- What was done to me (us)
- What I (we) did to others
- What I (we) failed to do



Fr. Michale Lapsley, a native of New Zealand, worked to end apartheid in South Africa. He lost both hands as the result of a letter bomb mailed to him..

People tend to know very well who
their oppressors are but in most
cases, they are blind to who they
are oppressing.

Fr. Michael Lapsley

In essence, healing has to do with
the process of assuming personal
responsibility.

Martha Cabrera, Nicaragua

Reflecting on these questions is
a spiritual and healing journey of
the deepest sort.



This journey leads into the depths of ourselves as individuals and groups. Here we come face to face with our own darkness.

In this unlikely place, grace abounds, and transformation and hope begins.



Walking in the Light.
Knowing the truth sets us free.
Confess your faults.

This process can be aided by outside resources/help. Others can ask questions and provide information and support that opens new options and ways of seeing the events.

The other person does not need to be a mental health “professional.” Trauma is not a mental illness.

“One doesn’t need a psychologist to heal. . . . Healing is a collective challenge: my pain, your pain, the other person’s pain are similar.”

Martha Cabrera

Reflection can done many ways

- Art--painting, drawing, sculpting
- Singing, writing songs
- Storytelling or drama
- Healing prayer, faith rituals
- Crying, shaking----
- and even laughter
- Writing, journaling



Part of naming and reflecting also involves looking at national history (histories)

“We worked for a year and a half on the personal histories. . . providing. . . a great number of tools. . . to deal with their own histories. We also gave tools to be able to reflect on Nicaragua’s history and culture.

It was complex, because we had not been able to acquire a critical distance from the history we have lived through: even the textbooks polarized us, so we are making an effort to prepare new texts to help us see history more critically. . . Unprocessed pain has prevented us from . . . being able to see history through other eyes and move beyond it.”

Martha Cabrera

When people begin to talk about their history, assume it and reflect on it, [they] find meaning and significance in what they have lived through.

Reconstructing the sense of our national and personal histories is a path to understand that there is *meaning* in what we are and what we have lived through despite everything, and this is what allows us to go forward in life.

Spiritual Reconstruction

Many people found meaning, their reason for being, in the revolution, but have not identified with any religion or spirituality since it ended and thus feel a profound emptiness.

It is important for people to explore their spiritual dimension to improve their own mental and physical health....

We work a lot with rituals, using them as tools that can pull groups together.

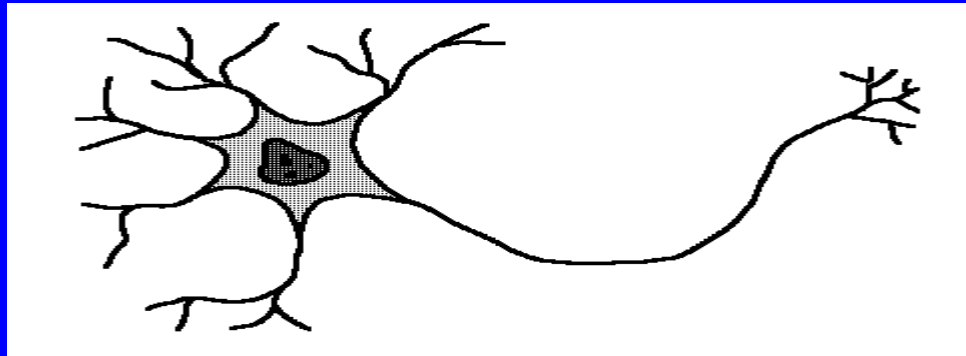
Martha Cabrera

Growth from Pain

“It is essential not to see wounds and traumas just in the negative sense. They are a source of experience and wisdom. In fact, work through personal trauma is nothing other than transforming it into wisdom for oneself and for others.”

Martha Cabrera

Acting in new ways literally allows new neural pathways to form in the brain.



Pause for Discussion

What evidences of pain and trauma do I see in the community/society? (You may want to use the “Common Responses to High Stress and Trauma” list.)

What evidences of growth and wisdom?

What work is already being done either with individuals and communities?

What is needed---and how might it be done?

What obstacles/blocks exist to doing healing work?

How might they be overcome?

Obstacles to Healing: Fear of being overwhelmed by the emotions



"Grief is a wound that needs attention in order to heal... We fear that once grief is acknowledged it will bowl us over. The truth is that grief experienced does dissolve. Grief unexpressed is grief that lasts indefinitely."

Judy Tatelbaum in "The Courage to Grieve: Creative Living, Recovery and Growth Through Grief"

Cultural obstacles to healing: dirty laundry

If we are to collectively heal ourselves, we need to undergo a cultural change.

Why is that people don't talk? Because they are subjected to the strong cultural mandate that "dirty laundry is washed at home."

Martha Cabrera

Cultural obstacles to healing: gender socialization

- Women permitted sadness, guilt, complaining and crying, but not rage
- Men only allowed to express anger, even violence, but never fear, guilt or sadness, and they can never cry
- They pay dearly for that repression of their emotions, as do the women close to them
 - Martha Cabrera

Self care is essential while doing this work. Give your emotions and pain over to God for grace and healing. Physically release the stress energy. Pray and trust that tomorrow will bring new energy and hope.



The ability to break out of the inner cycle depends on:

- Safety: emotional, spiritual and/or physical (e.g. event is over, faith beliefs, turning off news and being able to center, routine, parents protecting children, strength from community)
- Choice/decision of victim/survivor: willingness to move beyond blame
- An awareness of healing options (seeing hope)
- An understanding of trauma and what it does to us/our identity

The ability to break out of the inner cycle depends on (cont.):

- Leadership (whether it keeps communities in inner cycle or helps them to break out of the cycle, e.g. modeling and telling transforming narratives, providing ceremonies and religious rituals that promote long-term healing, working with own trauma)
- Available support: spiritual, physical, social, emotional, cultural
- Memorializing and telling the story in ways that promote long lasting healing
- Pain (facing it is better than re-cycling)
- Willingness break patterns of learned helplessness or hopelessness

Expanded aggressor/offender cycle

