

Coping with Uncertainty

“Strategies for managing overwhelming stress
in the COVID-19 Era”

Hanover Public Schools

May 12-13, 2020

Jim McCauley LICSW

Riverside Trauma Center

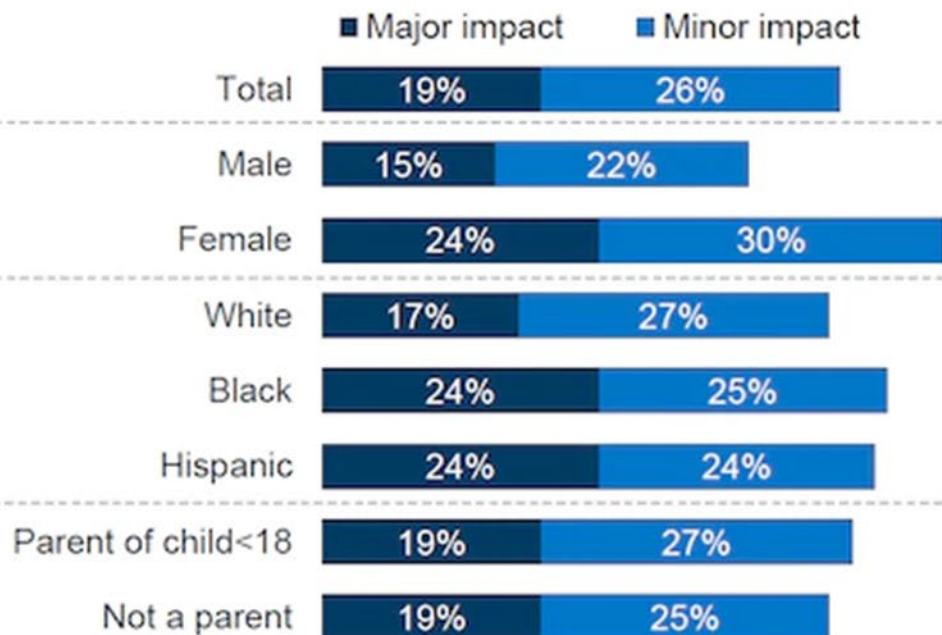
Riverside Trauma Center

A program of Riverside Community Care
Funded by the Department of Public Health and
the Department of Mental Health
Provide “critical incident response”
For example:
Sudden, unexpected deaths, hurricanes, Boston
Marathon Bombings..... And now
Covid-19

Figure 8

Significant Shares Say The Coronavirus Has Had A Negative Impact On Their Mental Health

Percent who say they feel that worry or stress related to coronavirus has had a negative impact on their mental health:



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted March 25-30, 2020). See topline for full question wording.



Domains Affected by Trauma/Acute Grief

Domain	Symptoms
Cognitive	Confusion, intrusive thoughts, concentration
Emotional	Shock, sorrow, anger, guilt, irritability
Social/Behavioral	Withdrawal, fighting
Physiological	Fatigue, stomachache, startle response, sleep
Spiritual/ Meaning-Making	"Nothing matters." "Why would God do this?" "Why do I bother to do this kind of work?"

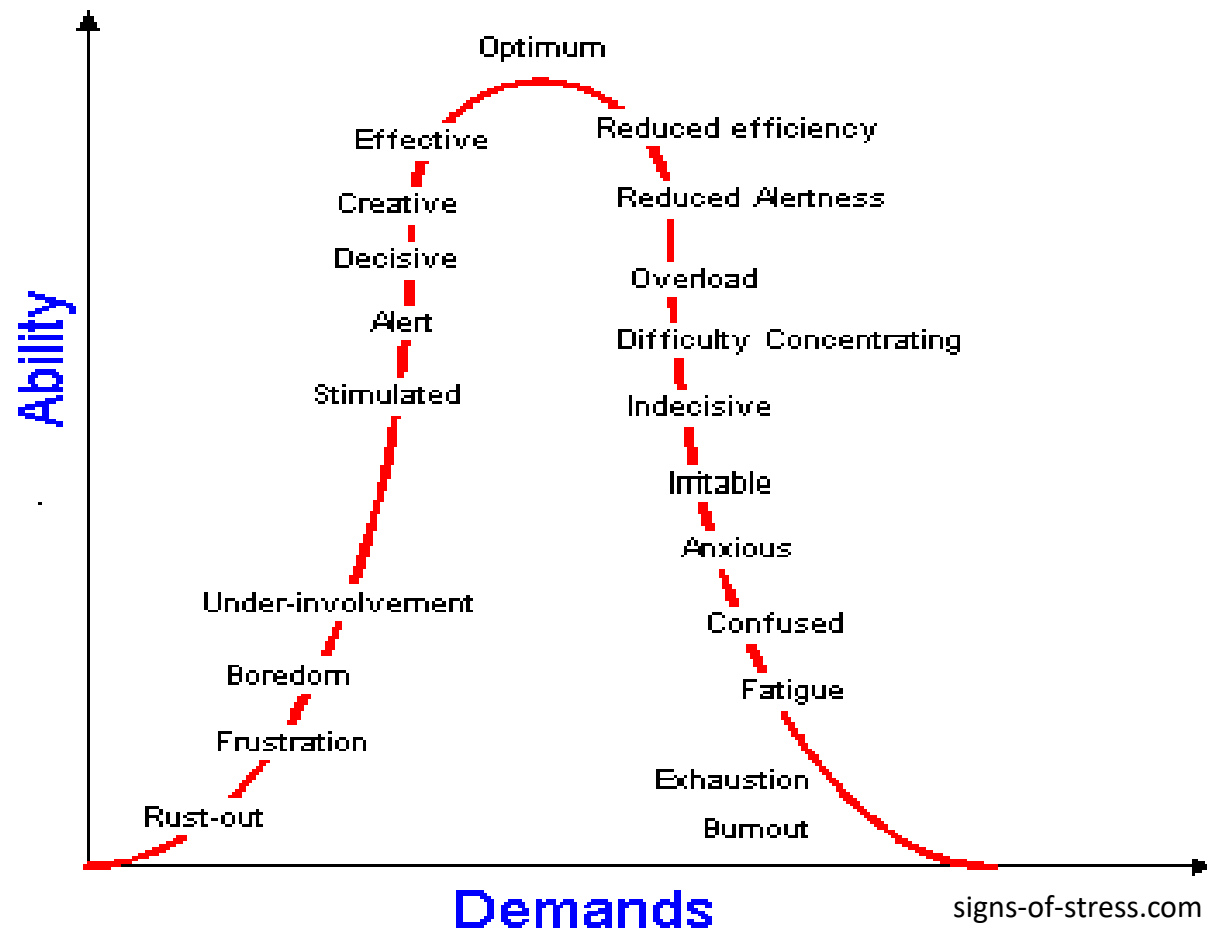
Ambiguous Grief

- We associate grief with the death of a loved one but other kinds of losses can result in a strong grief reaction:
 - - loss of a job
 - -loss of safety
 - -loss of social connections
 - -loss of “anniversaries” – graduations, proms...
 - loss of privacy
 - loss of future dreams

What is Stress?

- Stress is a normal physical response to perceived threats.
- The stress response is the body's way of protecting us.

The Stress Response



Fatigue

- Physical Fatigue
- Mental Fatigue
- Compassion Fatigue
- Gratitude Fatigue

Three Kinds of Responses to Stress

Positive

Brief increases in heart rate,
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable

Serious, temporary stress responses,
buffered by supportive relationships.

Toxic

Prolonged activation of stress response systems
in the absence of protective relationships.

The Brain and Stress

Cortisol causes the brain to be cloudy

But....

You don't know your thinking is cloudy
because your thinking is cloudy

Parts of your brain shut-down

Okay, I know you already tried these ways to support your child

Keep your kids moving

Manage screen time

Offer choices

Provide structure and routine

Maintain social connections

Remind your children they are contributing to the solution

And yes, you already tried these ways to support yourselves

- Be kind to yourself
- Remember your coping strategies
- Set small, achievable goals
- Remind yourself you have good parenting skills
- Find time for yourself, even in small chunks
- Maintain your social connections

You can't think yourself out of this dilemma

Good self-regulatory skills – especially for learning, start from the bottom of the brain and work their way up:

- 1) Regulate – music, walking, stretching, breathing.... Move 5 minutes for every 30 minutes of sitting. Patterns, repetition.. “dosing” throughout the day
- 2) Relate – good, two way communication
- 3) Reason – now you can learn

If you only do 3 things

- Sleep
- Move
- Stop watching the news

Different Framework for Resilience

“Resilient people don’t bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives..... “

“They move through... find ways to grow wiser and stronger”

“ If we limit our understanding of resilience to this idea of bouncing back , we miss much of what hardship, pain, and suffering offer us. We also misunderstand our basic human capacity to change and improve.”

Greitens, Eric. Resilience. Boston: Houghton Mifflin (2015)

The Resilience Prescription

- 1. Positive Attitude**
- 2. Cognitive Flexibility Through Cognitive Reappraisal**
- 3. Embrace a Personal Moral Compass**
- 4. Find a Resilient Role Model**
- 5. Face Your Fears**
- 6. Develop Active Coping Skills**
- 7. Establish and Nurture a Supportive Social Network**
- 8. Attend to Physical Well-Being**
- 9. Train Regularly and Rigorously in Multiple Areas**
- 10. Recognize, Utilize and Foster Signature Strengths**

“Growth Mindset”

- “Mindset: The New Psychology of Success,” Carol Dweck, Stanford.
- Abilities aren’t fixed. You can always improve.

'If I was mentally tougher I would..'

Run a marathon..... be more assertive.....
exercise every morning..... lose
weight.... Prepare for surgery..... Overcome my
traumatic experience
Be more patient with my children

watch less TV and read more..... Go back
to school for my degree..... manage my anxiety
better..... Public speaking Study for the SAT's

“What is my strategy for coping with overwhelming stress”?

- Navy Seals BUDS Class #264:

Class started with 256. Only 16 graduated

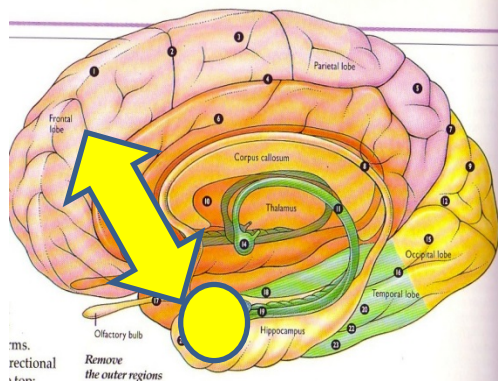
Navy Seals: 4 Techniques of Mental Toughness

- Goal Setting
- Visualization
- Positive Self-Talk
- Arousal Control/Breathing

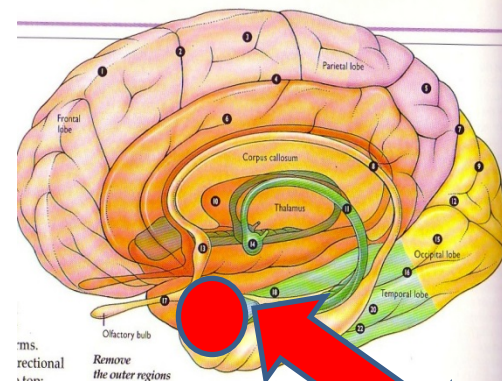


Re-programming your brain

Goal-setting assists the frontal lobes in planning and keeps the amygdala from firing



safe



unsafe

Goal Setting

Your goal: Purpose and Meaning

“The Central Governor Theory:” Our brains give out before our body

Small, achievable objectives:

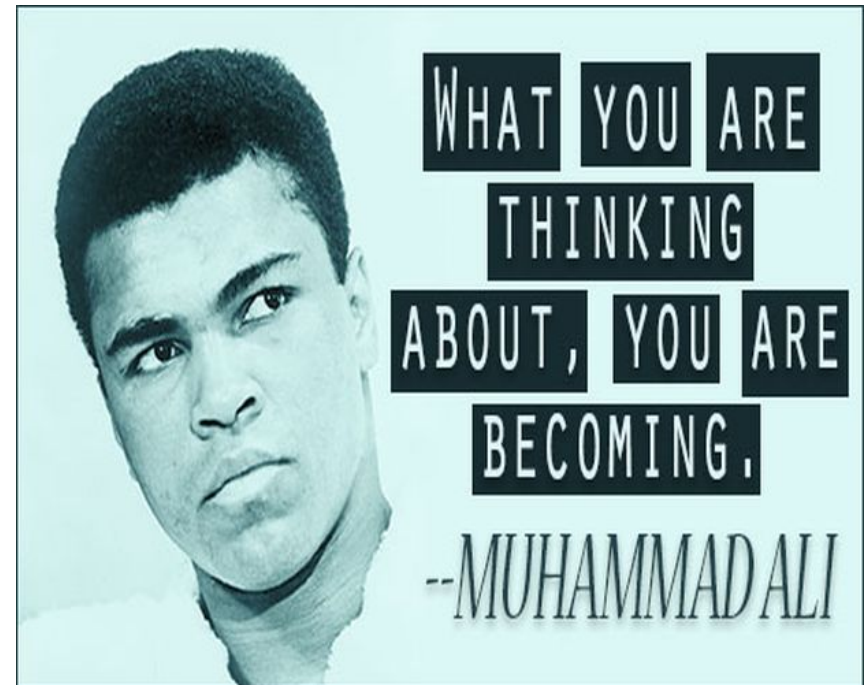
Not months. Hours

Not miles. Yards

Celebrate small wins.....

Goal Setting

- Make it a game!
- Not “threats” or “barriers” but “challenges!”
- Mentally strong people don’t compare themselves to others!
- What would one of my objectives look like in one day? In one hour?



Mental Rehearsal

- When you continue to run through an activity in your mind, when you do it for real it will come naturally.
- Practice, imagine, rehearse..... Next time it will be less of a stressful reaction
- “Pre-mortem”

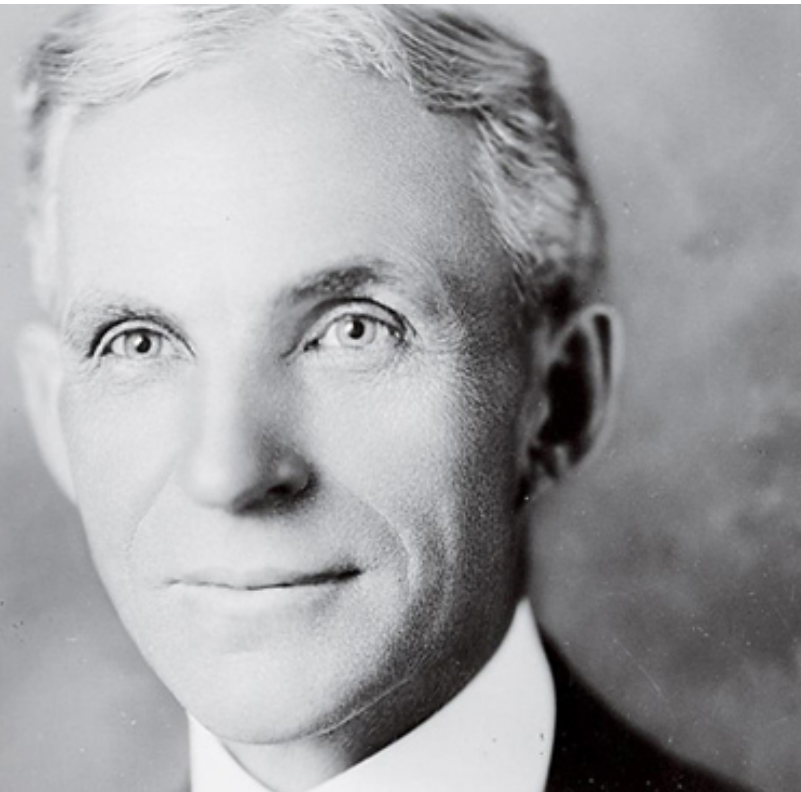
Visualization

- Behavioral Rehearsal
- “Muscle Memory” (“10,000 hours myth)
- Imagine every scenario (where are the fire exits?).....
- Plan “B” Plan “C” Plan “Z”
- Practice! Practice!

Positive Self Talk

*"Whether
you think you can,
or you think you can't,
you're right."*

— Henry Ford



Positive Self Talk

Studies show that most people talk to themselves at the rate of 300-1000 words a minute!

Imagine the power of changing from negative self talk to positive self talk

Talk in the 3rd person

What is your positive “speech” in support of your goals?!

Practice for one minute.....

Breathing/ Arousal Control



Take a deep breath, relax
and imagine yourself
exactly as you wish to be.

Brian Tracy

quotefancy

Breathing makes you smarter

- Deliberate, slow-breathing with long exhales mimics the body's relaxation response.
- More oxygen goes to the brain
- Performance increases
- Slow breathing is a great focusing strategy
- Postural re-set

Breathing/ Arousal Control

- Lots of ways to do this. Just pay attention to your breathing
- Feet on the ground. Heels pushed in. Chair with arms
- Breathe in 4 seconds. Exhale 4
- Breathe in 4 seconds. Exhale for 7 while saying “Reeelaaxxxx”
- Breathe in 7 seconds. Exhale for 8
- Breathe in 3 seconds. Hold for 3. Exhale for 3 (good for anxiety)
- Children: “ Smell the flower..... Blow out the candle”
- “Make a belly balloon”

Combat Tactical Breathing

This breathing strategy has been used by first responders, the military and athletes to focus, gain control and manage stress.

- Relax yourself by taking 3 to 5 breaths as described below. Visualize each number as you count.
- Breathe in counting 1, 2, 3, 4
- Stop and hold your breath counting 1, 2, 3, 4
- Exhale counting 1, 2, 3, 4
- Repeat the breathing
- Breathe in counting 1, 2, 3, 4
- Pause and hold your breathe counting 1, 2, 3, 4
- Exhale counting 1, 2, 3, 4

Enhancing the Skills of Mental Toughness and Resilience

- Framework for Self-Care (Primal Blueprint)
- Finding a mentor
- Playing
- Self-care plan
- Activation Energy
- Social Connections
- Practice Gratitude



Primal Blueprint

1	Eat lots of plants and animals.		6	Play.	
2	Avoid poisonous things.		7	Lift heavy things.	
3	Move frequently at a comfortable pace.		8	Get adequate sunlight.	
4	Sprint once in a while.		9	Avoid stupid mistakes.	
5	Get adequate sleep.		10	Use your brain.	

Social Connections

- Pro-sociality
- “Social Connection is the greatest predictor of happiness”
- Success doesn’t equal happiness. Happiness equals success. (Shawn Achor, “The Happiness Advantage”)
- Find 5 “Happy” Friends



“Activation Energy”

The twenty second rule:

Make a positive habit 3-20 seconds easier to start and dramatically increase your likelihood to follow through.

What is Play and Why is It Important?

“Play, more than any other activity, fuels healthy development of children and continued healthy development of adults.... All learning – emotional, social, motor, and cognitive – is accelerated and facilitated by repetition fueled by the pleasure of play”

- If it isn't fun, it isn't play
- A wonderful cycle of learning is driven by the pleasure of play
 - Curiosity leads people to explore and discover
 - Discovery brings pleasure
 - Pleasure leads to repetition and practice
 - Practice brings mastery
 - Mastery bring the pleasure and confidence to, once again, act on curiosity
- These options/activities are often taken away as structure increases (more classes) or as behavioral adaptations cause traumatized kids to bomb out of structured programs

Riverside Trauma Center

www.riversidetraumacenter.org

Jim McCauley LICSW

Associate Director

jmccauley@riversideecc.org