

EVER WONDERED WHY NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, WHICH NEW THERAPY YOU TRY, HOW 'MINDFUL', 'FORGIVING' AND 'ACCEPTING' YOU HAVE WORKED TO BECOME THAT THE 'FEELING BETTER' STAGE NEVER LASTS?

YOUR TRAUMA IS TRAPPED!

There is a very good reason why the trauma you experienced during your childhood, be that emotional, physical or sexual, seems to be as much a part of your present as it does your past.

Because you were a child when the trauma occurred, without the adult support necessary, you were unable to release the stress experienced at the time. This stress remains trapped in your Nervous System and because your Nervous System is the control centre of your body, over time, all of the body systems are affected.

If you experienced this kind of trauma during your childhood, have invested years of your life, your energy and money in your recovery yet still find yourself stuck and unable to separate the past from your present, there is a very good reason.

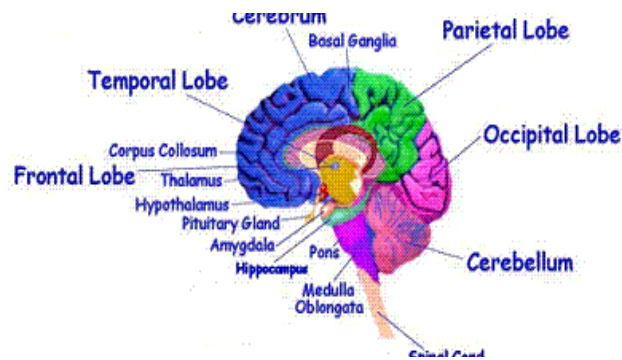
THE TIMEKEEPER, THE WATCHTOWER, THE LIBRARIAN AND THE COOK

The reason lies in the changes which occur in the brain during trauma. All experience, good and bad, creates change in the brain and fear and trauma, in the developing brain of a child have a dramatic effect.

The Timekeeper - The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex keeps our sense of ourselves in time and can explain why:

- ❖ Time seems to slow down or 'life flashes before your eyes' during a traumatic event
- ❖ During a flashback it can feel as though it will go on forever

❖ Past and present can feel intertwined



The Watch tower – The medial prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain responsible for decision making and planning. With this part of the brain closed down you may experience problems with concentration, focus, making plans and decisions, with the feeling of not being connected or 'outside the body'

The Librarian – The Hippocampus is the part of your brain responsible for memory. When you try and remember the traumatic events of your childhood you may find it difficult to remember certain parts, to put the parts you do remember into context making your memories feel disjointed and incomplete.

The Cook – The Thalamus is responsible for making sure that incoming messages from our environment and our senses are combined before they are sent on to the relevant parts of the brain. The Thalamus closes down during trauma and this is the precursor to 'Dissociation', with information entering the brain and remaining detached from emotional response.

Two other parts of the brain which it is important to mention are **Broca's Area** sometimes referred to as The Dictionary and **The Amygdala**. Broca's Area is concerned with speech and language and when this part shuts down we are often unable to articulate our experiences which makes talking therapies such as counselling almost impossible.

The Amygdala is our fear centre and when a child has experienced repeated and prolonged fear, function in the Amygdala becomes impaired, resulting in a diminished perception of danger. You may be far more likely to experience sexual trauma later in life when you have experienced it as a child, to take serious risks with your health and to be drawn to relationships where you will be hurt again. Outwardly it manifests in behavior which signals a

lack of self-value, which of course it is but again there is an underlying, physiological reason as well.

Let me just explain what happens in the body when stress is experienced.

FIGHT/FLIGHT/FREEZE

In times of threat and when a child experiences uncertainty, fear and helplessness the physiological stress response, 'fight/flight', is triggered. The 'fight/flight' response is a process designed with a beginning and an end in order to ensure our survival. When the stressful event or trauma occurs, the stress response will put us on high alert. Similar to an animal in the wild when it senses danger, it becomes very still, listening and watching, ready to leap into action. All mammals experience the fight/flight response and at the same time as our hearing and eyesight becomes more focused the internal organs prepare us to either fight or make that dash to safety. To fuel the body, the liver pumps out large amounts of glucose and the Adrenal glands produce stress hormones, in particular, Cortisol and Adrenaline. In fighting our way out of the danger or fleeing to safety, the chemicals released by the body would be diffused and once the threat was gone the body would re-regulate. This

means the breathing and heart rate would stabilise, the Adrenal Glands would stop producing the large amounts of Cortisol and Adrenaline and the Liver would stop pumping out vast amounts of Glucose.

Now imagine a child. Unable to fight off the abuser, stop their parents from shouting or hurting each other, unable to flee their environment and escape what they are either witnessing or what is happening to them directly.

The fight/flight stress response is disrupted and unable to complete its process and even though the traumatic event has finished, the child's internal system remains in this state of crisis, of 'needing to survive'.

The child goes into the third stage of the fight/flight stress response which is to freeze as their system effectively goes in to shock. Mentally the child will shut down and disconnect from the physical self. This is a coping mechanism and the body does this in order for the child to survive and to limit the psychological distress at the time of the trauma. A child who received adequate adult support would in all likelihood, recover better and much faster. But

as this is often not the case, children become adults who still carry this unreleased stress and the emotions they have repressed, created by the trauma.

For a child to express how they felt about their physical and emotional boundaries being violated, would possibly place them in more danger and so instinctually a child will repress the emotion of the trauma. Over time the repressed emotion, particularly anger and the unreleased stress remains stored in the Nervous System, similar to a recording.

In adulthood when situations occur that trigger the same emotions, such as helplessness, sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, shame and fear, they react through the memory of the original trauma. This can make reactions appear 'over the top' either underreacting at situations which should evoke emotion and overreacting at the 'drop of a hat'.

When the brain shuts down during trauma, our timekeeper, librarian, cook and dictionary are unable to function creating the experience of 'Depersonalisation'. This is the outer manifestation of these brain centres shutting down and when as adults we attempt to recover we may struggle as we try to process events through these 'shut down' areas.

THE COST TO EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Numerous emotional and physical symptoms develop and this toxic stress is the cause of serious and often life threatening illness. As a consequence of the fight/flight response remaining switched on, the process is never able to complete and bring the body back to a resting state.

Even when we are no longer under threat the body continues to act as though we are and we continue to experience the feeling of being under threat, helpless and on high alert which may result in an inability to relax and sleep or to feel good in general, without a reliance on alcohol and drugs.

The constant presence of these stress hormone, over time, creates a toxic internal environment leaving the body susceptible to a multitude of emotional, physical and often life threatening illnesses such as:

- Anxiety, chronic aches and pains and depression
- Weight Issues, Thyroid problems, Adrenal Fatigue, Digestion and Intestinal Disorders
- Rheumatoid Arthritis, Heart Disease, Diabetes, MS, and Cancer.

Consistently high levels of Cortisol:

- Suppress the immune system, inhibit cell regeneration, break down muscle encouraging the storage of fat and initiates food cravings.
- Raised levels of Glucose, produced by the Liver, constantly present in the blood coupled with a high sugar intake can lead to Type 1 Diabetes
- The Adrenal Glands, having worked hard since early childhood become fatigued leading to under active and over active Thyroid diagnoses.

THE SOLUTION

The good news is that a system overloaded and exhausted can recover, so long as focus and energy flows in the right direction and both mind and body are treated as a whole

- ❖ Switching the fight/flight response off will enable you to begin to feel less anxious and 'on edge' and allow the body systems to have a much needed rest from the constant influx of stress hormones.
- ❖ Releasing repressed emotions, in particular the anger and sadness you were unable to express when you were a child will offer you the opportunity to 'do now, what you could not do then'.
- ❖ Learning to feel safe in a body which became a dangerous place, will remove that 'out of the body' sensation enabling you to connect emotionally and physically with the messages from your emotional body which show up in the form of illness.
- ❖ Becoming aware of physical sensations first, shifts the focus from finding the words when articulating the traumatic events is too demanding.
- ❖ Building healthy personal boundaries and reigniting your intuition at the same time as releasing repressed emotions will increase your emotional capacity. This kick-starts your inner strength giving you something other than harmful coping mechanisms to fall back on.

Having invested years, energy and money on your recovery you may have found yourself stuck in the same cycles of feeling better for a while and then drifting back into old habits. If this has lead you to the belief that you are irreversibly broken or that there must be something wrong with you, please know that neither of these are true:

Every behavior and coping mechanism you have employed over the years has been a completely natural reaction to the abuse you have experienced.

WHAT TO DO NOW

The true cost of childhood sexual trauma is to your physical and emotional health, your relationships, the quality of the rest of your life and those of the next generation. When no human comes here to suffer endlessly, it is your birthright to step out of this chapter and into the next.

RESOURCES

You may find the following useful:

The ACE Study is a research study into adverse experiences on the health of children.

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/activities/adverse_childhood_experiences/en/

When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress

Book by Gabor Maté

Healing Trauma: A Pioneering Program for Restoring the Wisdom of Your Body

Book by Peter A. Levine

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma

Book by Bessel van der Kolk

If you have settled with the beliefs that you are irreversibly broken, that there is something wrong with you and that you have no choice other than to carry your past forever, I would love to help you. You can email me at enquiries.annamichellerichards@gmail.com

& Visit me at www.annamichellerichards.com

You can recover, completely and permanently.

Anna