

Stress-Proofing the Brain: Applying Neuroplasticity, Mindful Self-Compassion and Positive Psychology to Overcome Stress, Anxiety, and Trauma

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Learning Objectives

- Proven brain-based and mindfulness strategies to help clients cope with past and present traumas, chronic stressors, and attachment challenges
- Teach clients stress resilience and mental toughness skills from positive and health psychology
- Motivate clients and calm the brain's stress response using the power of neuroplasticity
- Help clients overcome fear-based living, self-limiting mindsets, and avoidant or addictive patterns
- Cultivate the skills of mindful self-compassion and cognitive flexibility

Course Program

Stress-Proofing the Brain - Overview

- *Calming the amygdala* - Grounding, mindfulness, self-compassion, perceiving control
- *Moving forward with the prefrontal cortex* – Cognitive flexibility, stress mindset change, taking in the good, mind-body health

Grounding Strategies for Stabilizing and Reducing Anxiety

- Yoga, relaxation, breathing, present-moment focus, soothing with the senses, creativity
- Orienting and sensorimotor strategies, bilateral stimulation
- Mental imagery - safe place, boundaries, energetic, moments of calm, strength, and competence
- Left-brain strategies - task focus and engagement
- Staying in the window of tolerance

Mindfulness Strategies

- Qualities of mindfulness states - open, nonjudgmental, fluid, deliberate
- Observing and accepting inner experience (thoughts, feelings, sensations)
- Slowing things down, emotion regulation strategies
- Reducing identification with negative self-images – RAIN practice
How mindfulness changes the brain

- Mindfulness practices - breathing, watching thoughts, urge surfing, open awareness
- Application to anxiety, depression, addictions, PTSD

Self-Compassion Strategies

- Self-kindness, common humanity, focus on unmet needs
- Application to depression, anxiety, stress- management, trauma, insecure attachment
- Practices - Metta meditation, soften, soothe and allow, dialogues with inner critic
- Overcoming guilt and perfectionism
- Link to Schema Therapy - Healthy Adult mode, Inner Child Mode
- Working with parts of the self – authentic vs Defensive

Cognitive and Behavioural Strategies

- How anxiety and depression narrow attention, create self-focus and cognitive rigidity
- Worry and rumination cycles - link to prefrontal cortex and default mode network. Why thought suppression doesn't work
- De-catastrophizing and probability estimation.
- Cognitive de-fusion
- Using metaphors (monsters on the boat, bouncy ball underwater, supermarket shelves etc.)
- Internalized negative schemas (helpless, unworthy, unsafe etc.) and schema change strategies

Creating Positive States of Mind to Counter Stress

- How our brains are wired to the negative
- Positive emotions can promote physiological recovery from anxiety and fear
- Reappraising anxiety as excitement, challenge emotions
- Flow and optimal experience, Gratitude diaries
- Commitment, control, and challenge; growth mindset

Living Healthy in the Face of Stress

- Healthy coping strategies - exercise, meditation, yoga, rest
Mindful eating and self-regulation strategies