Self Capacities: The Building Blocks of the Self

An RC Refresher on Self-Capacities

Risking Connection® Framework

Childhood Traumatic Events/ACEs

Disrupted Development

Attachments
Body and brain

Self capacities:

Inner Connection
Worthy of Life
Feelings Management

Current Stressor

Intolerable Feelings

Acts to Relieve Feelings

Retreats, hurts self, or hurts others

Adaptive: Helps in the moment, hurts in the long run

Feelings Skills: Self Capacities

Definition: The ability to stay connected to and grounded in one’s sense of self even when one is experiencing strong feelings.

The fundamental building blocks of the self.
The Three Feelings Skills: Self Capacities

1. Inner connection to others
2. Feeling worthy of life
3. Managing feelings

Biology of Self-Capacities
Window of Tolerance: Healthy Nervous System

Hyperarousal (INTOLERABLE)
Fear Anxiety Rage Panic

Window of Tolerance

Activation  \[ \} 
Settle

Current Stressor

Hyparrousal (INTOLERABLE)
Numb Depressed Cut-Off Withdrawn

P. Levine

Biology of Self-Capacities
Window of Tolerance: Less Healthy Nervous System

Hyperarousal (INTOLERABLE)

Window of Tolerance

Stuck on “ON” \[ \} 

Current Stressor

Hyparrousal (INTOLERABLE)

Stuck on “OFF”

P. Levine
**Biology of Self-Capacities**  
**Window of Tolerance: Strengthening Self-Capacities**

- Use inner connections
- Feel worthy/manage shame
- Use feelings management skills

Current Stressor

Hyperarousal (INTOLERABLE)

Hyperarousal (INTOLERABLE)

P. Levine

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**Biology of Self-Capacities**  
**Window of Tolerance: Healthy Nervous System**

Hyperarousal (INTOLERABLE)

Activation

Calm

Current Stressor

P. Levine

Hyperarousal (INTOLERABLE)

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**Risking Connection® Framework**

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- Disrupted Development
- Body and brain
- Self capacities:
  - Inner Connection
  - Worthy of Life
  - Feelings Management
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Inner Connection to Others

The ability to form connections with positive others

AND

To hold onto that connection when the other is not physically present and use it to soothe oneself

“Never Alone” by Jim Brickman and Sara Evans
https://www.google.com/search?q=sarah+evans+never+alone&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8

May the angels protect you
Trouble neglect you
And heaven accept you when its time to go home
May you always have plenty
The glass never empty
You're never alone

May your tears come from laughing
You find friends worth having
As every year passes
May you win and stay humble
Smile more than grumble
And know when you stumble
You're never alone

Chorus: Never alone
Never alone
I'll be in every beat of your heart
When you face the unknown
This isn't goodbye
My love will follow you stay with you
Baby you're never alone
I have to be honest
As much as I wanted
I'm not gonna promise that cold winds won't blow
So when hard times have found you
And your tears surround you
Wrap my love around you
You're never alone

How Impaired Inner Connection Looks in Clients

– Extreme reactions to small separations
– Extreme behaviors to keep others engaged and avoid separation
– Putting self at risk to maintain connections and not be alone

Brainstorm: What are specific examples do you see in each of these areas with clients?
Exercise

• Handout: How Do Caregivers Foster Development of Inner Connection

Video

• Peek-a-boo
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ERDeCNFmH8

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Worthy of Life

The ability to hold onto a sense of oneself as deserving and worthwhile in order to soothe oneself.

GUILT VS. SHAME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUILT</th>
<th>SHAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I made a mistake</td>
<td>I am a mistake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on error in my behavior</td>
<td>Focus on rottenness of myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned about my behavior’s effect on others</td>
<td>Concerned with other’s evaluation of me and who I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel remorse and regret</td>
<td>I feel small, worthless, and powerless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less painful</td>
<td>More painful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek to address the behavior.</td>
<td>I seek distance from the behavior by hiding, denying responsibility, or attacking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look to repair the relationship</td>
<td>I see repair of the relationship as impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires forgiveness of others</td>
<td>Requires forgiveness of self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Daniel Hughes

GUILT vs. SHAME

Brene Brown video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqGFrld-IQg
Shame-Based Aggression

Use aggression to prevent or deflect exposure of shame

Attack weakness wherever they see it

Don’t take responsibility for their actions

Responsibility Taking and Shame

RESPONSE

ABILITY

Exercise: He Just Won’t Take Responsibility!!!!

JOHN

SCOTT
**Strengthening Worthy of Life**

- Focus on strengths before addressing weaknesses
- Anticipate likelihood of shame and tread lightly around it
- Look for any positives in a difficult event
- Lead with empathy
- Work toward repairing the relationship whenever possible
- Allow for the opportunity to make amends.
- See the shame below anger. Don’t take the bait by reacting to the anger
- Avoid shame triggering situations
- Model forgiveness of yourself (ie. owning mistakes)

**Risking Connection® Framework**

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3. **Attachments**
4. **Body and brain**
5. **Self capacities:**
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   - **Worthy of Life**
   - **Feelings Management**
6. **Intolerable Feelings**
7. **Acts to Relieve Feelings**
   - **Retreats, hurts self, or hurts others**
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**Feelings Management**

The ability to soothe oneself when having strong feelings.
Feelings Management

Specific feelings management skills are taught -- usually within relationships.

Co-regulation

• Clients become regulated in the presence of regulated treaters.
• Keep yourself calm using your own coping strategies
• You are modeling feelings management for clients

Managing Feelings

• Feeling Awareness…
  of the bodily signs of calm vs. dysregulation
• Feeling Identification…
  of words associated with dysregulation
• Feeling Modulation…
  using strategies to calm dysregulation
• Feeling Expression…
  using skills to express feelings constructively
Feelings Awareness

Knowing and identifying the bodily sensations connected to being calm/settled vs. being dysregulated/activated.

Exercise: Language of Sensation
Exercise: Language of Sensation

Solid, relaxed, warm, calm, grounded, alive, energized, open, free, unstruck, smooth, settled

Tight, dizzy, burning, fuzzy, hot, numb, dull, shaky, nothing, cold, sharp, clammy, sweaty, foggy, nauseous, goose bumpy, blocked, tense, butterflies, wobbly, tired, stuck, thick, itchy, fidgety, suffocated, frozen, breathless, blank, floaty, empty, hollow, deadened, absent, heart pumping

Others?

Exercise: Catching It Early

Worksheet: Catch It Early!

What are 3 situations that set you off (triggers)?

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________

What do you feel in your body when you are calm? At a 1/2?

What do you feel in your body when you are first getting upset? At a 4/5?

What strategies help you when you are first getting upset? At a 4/5?

What would staff see looking at you when you are more upset? At a 6/7?

What would staff see looking at you when you are first getting upset? At a 4/5?

What strategies help you when you are more upset? At a 6/7?

What strategies help you stay calm when you are calm? At a 1/2?
Worksheet: Catch It Early

What do you feel in your body?
Solid, relaxed, warm, calm, grounded, alive, energized, open, free, unstruck, smooth, settled
Tight, dizzy, burning, fuzzy, hot, numb, dull, shaky, nothing, cold, sharp, claustrophobic, sweaty, fuzzy, nauseous, jumpy, jiggly, butterflies, wildly, tired, stuck, itchy, rigid, suffocated, frozen, breathless, blank, floaty, absent/not there, heart pounding

What would staff see looking at you?
Smile, talking with others, focused, on task, singing, relaxed, engaged, eye contact, verbal, attentive
Staring into space, foot tapping, fidgety, fatigued, ignoring limits, annoying others, withdrawal, no eye contact, non-verbal, hand wringing, distracted, numb, tired, confused, not listening, not responding, ignoring others

What strategies help you calm down?
Distract myself, take a walk, have alone time, be with others, talk to music, read, play a video game, do deep breathing, do progressive muscle relaxation, take a shower, call a crisis hotline, do something fun, talk to a person I trust, call a family member, use a sensory object (hard candy, bounce on ball, aromatherapy, calm music), go for a run, do pushups, play with your pet, go running, rip pages out of book, pound clay

Others?

Feelings Modulation

Brainstorm strategies that you use for feelings modulation

- Belly Breathe with Elmo*
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mZbzD0pytA
- “Stickman Struggles with Anger”
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kv455O7sWfE

Summary
- Self-capacities are the fundamental building blocks of the self.
- Self-capacities are learned starting in infancy and continuing throughout life
- Strengthening self-capacities changes the brain and nervous system
- Strengthening self-capacities makes what was previously intolerable feel more tolerable
- Learning self-capacity skills reduces crisis and makes life feel worth living