Episode #3: Why you feel like you are going crazy after a traumatic experience, and how to regain control fast without meds!

2k words = 20 mins :)

Welcome Survivors! To TUCK YOUR BOOBS IN: THE PODCAST that prepares survivors for the battle of overcoming trauma and helps you get your shit together after Childhood Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault.

I’m your host Rebecca Cia and On this week's episode we are going to talk about why we feel like we are going crazy and losing our minds after a traumatic experience, and I am going to share with you 3 simple things you can do to regain control of your mind and body quickly and easily.

So Tuck Your Boobs In and let’s get started!

There is a part of your subconscious mind that is responsible for organizing and storing memories and experiences, and it works kind of like a librarian. If you think of all of your memories and experiences as books, each experience is its own book, filled with information on the physical sensations, the emotions and feelings, the images, the thoughts, and the outcomes of every single experience. And it’s your subconscious librarian’s job to put the books away on the shelves. She organizes them and puts them on the shelf next to similar books, and cross- references them.

When you drive by a bakery and are reminded of a smell from your childhood for example- the librarian runs and gets the memory book off the shelf and reads you the story of your favorite birthday cake- we begin to feel the same joy and excitement and we can almost taste it!

Traumatic memories however, are filled with thoughts, pictures, emotions and sensations that don’t match anything else that she has in the library. The reason why trauma memories are so invasive and pop- up repeatedly and we find ourselves triggered sometimes by seemingly unrelated things is because when a libraina can’t find the right place to put the book, she often takes the book out and begins to read the story out loud. This is her way of looking for more information about the book so she knows where to put it. And when your subconscious reads outloud- we feel the sensations as if it was really happening.

Our brains do not like unfinished things; it’s just how we are built as humans. It’s why we get so upset when we get to the end of a season of our favorite show on Netflix and they leave you with an epic clif-hanger. We like completed stories so that we can put them away nicely and neatly into our memory library. However when a memory is not buttoned up physically, emotionally, and rationally, our *minds* don’t know where to put them away, and we continue to reexperience them- though symptoms like fashbacks, anxiety, intrusive thoughts, insomnia, and many more ways.

In order to complete the processing of these trauma reactions, you first need the Resources you didn’t have at the time the event occured. This means tapping into your 3 brains: 1) your Thinking Brain (In nerd speak this is the Neo Cortex or frontal brain) it’s the part that helps you rationalize and organize the memories of the experience, 2) your Emotional Brain, (It’s the Midbrain or Limbic System if your feeling nerdy) - basically the part between your ears - which helps you process the emotions and feelings of the implicit memories and 3) the Survival Brain (It’s technically called The Basal Ganglia- but is also known as Lizard brain because it’s the most primitive part of the brain, and it’s only job is to detect danger and keep you safe in a crisis by managing impulses and responses.

Many survivors are left with unresolved trauma memories, and many times their brains are operating on high alert almost constantly. This can feel like being easily triggered, feeling confused or frustrated, and it kinda feels like you are losing your mind, like you have lost control of your own thoughts, beliefs, and actions. This is called being Dysregualted.

To get a better understanding what is happening in your brain when you are dysregulated, we’re gonna use our imaginations here, with a little metaphor (BTW our brain love metaphors)

OK - I want you to think of your 3 brains like this:

First - Your “thinking brain” is well “you” the one that thinks and talks who answers when someone calls your name.

And I want you to imagine your emotional brain as a toddler, they don’t always know what they want- but if you meet their needs they seem pretty harmless.

Annnd last but not least- picture your survival brain or lizard brain as your trusty family dog.

Now imagine you are all driving along in a car- your toddler brain is strapped into her car seat, your trusty dog sitting next to her in the back seat- and you are in the driver's seat driving the car. You get to decide where you want to go, maybe stopping to get an ice cream to keep your toddler brain happy. And your lizard brain, I mean trusty dog, is sitting watching out the window. This is what a regulated brain looks like. You’re in charge, your emotional needs are met, and your survival brain is calmly on the lookout.

Now your dog spots some danger up ahead--- he starts barking to alert you, and before you can even see what it is you slam on the brakes - just in time, and another car blows through a red light in front of you. It was a near miss- but you are OK. You feel a little rattled, and your toddler brain gets upset because she dropped her ice cream when you stopped short. You give her a little attention to calm her down and you thank your dog and carry on your way. This is how we are built to handle life's normal stressors.

After we experience a significant trauma- things start to change in our brain.

Ok So now, I want you to imagine that you are driving along in your car- but this time your dog is sitting in the front seat- and he is on high alert, looking for anything dangerous. He starts barking at everything- leaves falling off of trees, and the sound of another car honking its horn- he knows it's his job to keep you safe- so he is warning you about everything he sees. Now this constant barking is making it hard for you to think, and it’s upsetting your toddler. In an attempt to calm everyone down- you stop the car and pull over. You and your toddler hop out of the car for some fresh air ( this by the way is when we dissociate) - And your lizard brain- I mean dog jumps into the driver's seat and drives away- leaving you and your toddler screaming and crying as you chase after him.

This is what it feels like when you are in a dysregulated state.

The first step in resolving your trauma is to put your Thinking Brain back into the driver’s seat- and strap your Emotional Brain into her car seat- and put your Lizard back into his little travel carrier.

If you find yourself in a dysregulated state, I have a 3 step process you can do to help you re-regulate the brain.

1 Evaluate -

2 Stimulate-

3 Activate-

**So Step One:**

Evaluate: You want to bring your awareness to the here and now, and you want your “thinking brain'' to get back into the driver's seat.

You can do that by asking yourself 3 questions- yes outloud- and yes I know this sounds super cheesy- so If you are afraid people are gonna look at you funny for talking to yourself… go sit in your car- go to the bathroom, or find a quiet space alone.

Question #1

1. **Am I in Fight, Flight, or Freeze?** Asking this will bring your attention to your active experience. You will notice your behaviors, the sensations in your body, and your emotions. For example if you are in Fight Mode: You might be clenching your fists and jaw, holding your breath, and feel angry.

Question #2

1. **What was the trigger?** Once you recognize your current state- and start to put the thinking brain back into the driver's seat, you can begin to look for the cause, and the reason you went into this state. Sometimes the trigger will be obvious, like the sounds of a door slamming, or horn honking...and other times it will be less obvious. Don’t worry if you don’t know the answers to this question. Just asking it will activate your subconscious to start to look for the answers for you.

Question #3

1. **Has this happened before?** Making yourself aware of another time when you have felt this way in the past will help your Subconscious Librarian cross reference the information- look for similarities and actions that created a safe outcome. All of this will help her make sense of where to file this memory and will help to neutralize the trigger response. - and it will all happen in a split second.

**Ok - Onto step 2**

2: Stimulate: In order to Re-regulate the brain - you are going to have to wake up the parts of your brain that have been bullied into submission by that pesky Lizard. And you are going to have to get both hemispheres of the brain talking to each other again. This is called bi-lateral stimulation. And it's really easy to do. I have 3 different exercises you can try!

1. One way you can do this is by passing an object from one hand to another and following it with your eyes. This activates your motor control and stimulates your visual cortex. You may have even seen salesmen or high level executives do this when they are on the phone or trying to close a deal. They may unconsciously do this, but it can actually help put us into that “flow state” where we become naturally productive and at ease.

Now in this case we are using it to help sync different regions of your brain, however The left to right motion of the eyes is actually used in a more advanced form of neurofeedback therapy called EMDR, and has been proven to help process trauma memories.

1. Another way you can practice bilateral stimulation is with something called EFT. Or Emotional Freedom Technique. It was discovered in the 1990’s by a man named Gary Craig- and has been put to the test by therapists and Neuro Linguistic Programming experts- and has had incredible results. It is now a very commonly used practice and part of a greater field known as Energy Psychology. It works by activating the pressure points and nerve centers, much like the ancient practice of acupuncture but without the needles! You can use it to quickly help re-regulate the brain, or with the addition of certain scripts or mantra, to help eliminate specific fears or anxiety. How you do it by using your fingertips to tap 5- 10 times on each of these areas:
   * 1. Start with the Karate chop part of your hand… on the side of the hand, the squishy part below your pinky. Tap one hand then the other….
     2. Then move to the eye brow- if you are wearing glasses, you might want to take them off. With both hands, Tap at the beginning of your eyebrows near the nose,
     3. Then move to your temple, outside of your eyes
     4. And now to your cheeks under your eyes..
     5. Then with one hand, tap your upper lip- well more like between your lip and your nose
     6. And move to the space between your chin and your lower lip
     7. And finally your collar bone- with your fingers about 2 inches off the center of your chest.

You can repeat this sequence a few times or until you feel a sense of calm. But don't forget to breathe while you are doing it.

3. Another way you can use Bilateral stimulation is with the Butterfly Hug. This is a really simple technique. Basically you want to stand up and cross your arms over your chest and alternate tapping each of your shoulders, while taking slow controlled breaths. This works to simply activate the sensory receptors in the brain. If you are sitting at work for example and don’t want your co-workers staring at you- you can do another version of this… by sitting up straight, with your shoulders back, place your hand on your knees and alternate tapping each side, again with slow controlled breaths. You can add a mantra here as well, such as “ I am safe, I am strong, and I am loved”

I know these all seem a little cheesy and woo-woo at first, but I suggest that you try each of these examples and see which one works best for you. Do each of the exercises for at least 30 seconds to a minute- even if you feel yourself calm down halfway through- just keep going to ensure you are locking in that feeling.

**Now, Step 3 of Re-regulating your nervous system: Activate**

Once you have put your thinking brain back in the driver's seat, and stimulated both hemispheres of your brain, you will want to move onto the third step which is activating your Vagus Nerve.

The vagus nerve is the longest cranial nerve in the body. It directly connects the brain to the face, ears, the vocal cords, the heart, the lungs, the liver, stomach, spleen, kidneys, and your digestive tract. Now I will spare you the anatomy lesson I gave myself when researching this Episode, however I will share with you a few reasons why this nerve is so important for trauma recovery.

The vagus nerve is responsible for several functions in the body. It literally tells your heart to beat and regulates your heart rate, it controls involuntary functions like breathing and digestion. And when the F/F/F Response is activated the vagus nerve sends signals to the parts of the body that will need extra energy to fight, or run away, and it deactivates the parts that are not necessary in a fight.

I have a friend who, when she gets nervous or overly excited she always says “ *Ugh I feel like I’m gonna shit myself!*” We all laugh about that- but what is happening here is the vagus nerve is kicking in sending a sensation to her bowels to let it all go- so she can be prepared for anything.

When the survival brain takes over the vagus nerve is the messenger, sending the commands to the different parts of the body, and creating the visceral sensations we feel when we are emotionally overwhelmed, anxious, or afraid.

The good news is that the Vagus nerve can send a 2 way message. Meaning we can use it to send messages back to the brain, and flush out the stress chemical adrenaline and Cortisol and release the warm fuzzies; serotonin and dopamine.

So How do we do that?

Well here are 3 simple ways to do it.

1. Rub your ears and relax your jaw! Yup- I know it sounds weird but remember one of the first stops the vagus nerve makes is to the ears. So go ahead and try it!
2. Box Breathing: This is a technique that is used by navy seals, marathon runners, and even monks to control their breathing and their heart rate. There are a few different techniques used to lower your heart rate. In all of these make sure you are sitting up straight or laying down flat.
   * 1. The true Box breathing is inhaling for a count of 4 - or 4 seconds, Hold for 4 , exhale for 4 , and hold for 4. This puts you in control of your breath and tells the vagus nerve that you’re in control.
     2. Another breathing exercise you can do is a short inhale, shoop,

and a long exhale, ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Where you exhale until your lungs are empty. I recommend trying this one laying down first. And only do a few repetitions. If your lungs have not been exercised deeply in a while you may find yourself getting light headed or dizzy. If this happens - just breathe normal slow breaths until you stop feeling light headed or until you yawn. This is a good technique to help you wind down and fall asleep.

1. This one is way more fun- Try Singing and Dancing. Singing is good for us because we not only need to activate our lungs, but it also stimulates the vocal cords, as well as releases endorphins. Dancing is good because it moves the body and actually expels the tension and energy. Have you ever watched the Discovery channel and when a lion chases a zebra, and the zebra gets away - one of the first things you see the zebra do is shake, or wiggle it’s whole body. It activates its vagus nerve and expels the extra energy that was sent to its muscles and organs to help it escape. But one the threat is neutralized and the danger is over- it doesnt need the extra energy, and if it's’ left in the body it leads to tension.

**Ok os a quick recap.**

When you feel like you are going crazy, or are overwhelmed with anxiety- chances are you are dysregulated. If you can take a few minutes and do a few of these quick exercises you can re-regulate the brain and body and put yourself back in control.

**Just Remember:**

**Evaluate**

**Stimulate**

**Activate!**

Share this with a friend who is struggling. For more information or great resources - follow me on IG @rebeccacia.co for some behind the scenes work and tips and tricks.

Alright survivors- That's it for this episode- the place that prepares survivors for the battle of overcoming trauma and helps you get your shit together after Childhood Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault. DOnt forget to subscribe- every Wednesday I drop a new episode . And If you have any questions or would like to add some of your own personal experiences to this - please feel free to DM me @rebeccacia.co and as always: Don't forget to Tuck Your Boobs In!

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