

SAD17 webinar w/Alison Roy: Understanding Fear, Anxiety and Upset—The Neurobiology of Stress

24 participants

- “Go slow to go fast”: prioritize relationships with students to enable students to learn better in the long run
- SAD17 resilience strategies
 - Second Step SEL curriculum from PreK-8
 - Exploring curriculum for HS as well
- Future sessions will get to reparative strategies that can be used at home, today is about context
- Brain based caregiving
 - 2017: APA survey shows that majority of Americans feel we are at the lowest point in history
 - Ubiquitous violence
 - Declining empathy
 - Harder to be empathetic when we are stressed
 - Disconnectedness is the norm
 - Social and economic disparities are growing
 - Reactive responding vs. reflection
- For many of us, this is the first time of experiencing feeling unsafe when leaving the house
 - Fear brain kicks in, activates stress response
 - Repeated exposure to aversive details (part of the criteria for experiencing trauma) is happening as we consume news and media, navigate the world and conversations
 - Grief & loss are traumatic events, and we are experiencing ambiguous loss during this time (loss of opportunities, normal life events, etc) which we are grieving
 - Doesn't seem to be an end, there isn't good closure
 - Validating the loss that kiddos (and others) are experiencing can be helpful
- Brain development
 - Develops in a sequence and hierarchy, with survival-brain at the beginning and more uniquely human characteristics at the end
 - Neurons that fire together wire together
 - Use dependent development
 - If you don't use it, it won't develop—but that doesn't mean it can't develop
 - Rapid early development: lots happens early on
- When calm goes away, our brain function declines and we lose access to our more advanced brain
 - IQ goes down as we lose access to more advanced layers of brain, to a low of about 50% of our normal IQ when we're operating from our brainstem
 - We may have experienced this when responding to an emergency and feeling clumsy, not able to remember basic facts, etc.
- Stress vulnerability
 - Some are born more vulnerable or more resilient
 - Dandelions & orchids analogy
 - The Kindling Effect: if you have kindling of trauma and chronic stress, it makes it easier to “start a fire” (since you're hyper-sensitive and hyper-aroused)
 - Can learn to build a more normal, adaptive response
 - Surge capacity: humans have an ability to get through rare, extreme circumstances

- Chemicals are released to help us through an emergency (like a car accident)
 - Body goes back to normal afterwards
 - Our surge capacity kicked in back in March and by now is completely depleted
 - Going back to baseline hasn't happened yet
- Fear and the brain
 - "Fear makes us stupid"
 - Amygdala detects fear, primes brainstem for action (fight, flight or freeze) by releasing chemicals
 - Prefrontal cortex goes offline
 - Memory shifts
 - Instinctual memory kicks in
 - Social engagement and communication are halted
 - Asking kids "what were you thinking?" is not going to get a response
 - Language centers of brain get turned off during a fear/stress response
- Dan Segal's "Whole Brain Child" is a great book for professionals and parents
 - T-I committee at HS read the book, so did Ed. Techs and admin
- Window of Tolerance
 - "Rest and digest" is default mode
 - Can go up into hyperarousal to help survive fight or flight scenario
 - Hypoarousal is freeze or "possum mode" and helps you survive if you're hurt or wounded
 - Activated by helplessness and shame/humiliations
 - Might see kids shut down, tune out, pull their hoodie over their face, etc.
- Impact of prolonged stress activation
 - Fatigue (including decision fatigue)
 - Exhaustion
 - Decreased focus
 - Irritability
- Vulnerability & sensitization
 - Unpredictable
 - Extreme
 - Prolonged
 - These characteristics describe our global pandemic
- Resilience & Tolerance
 - Predictable
 - Moderate
 - Give kids more moderate doses of stress so they can sustain
 - Controllable
 - Give kids choices, even small ones, because this helps to cause the stress response system