

# From Cynicism to Radical Acceptance – How to cope during challenging times



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# Common Stress Reactions



# Three Ways Trauma Changes Our Brain



**Threat Perception Enhanced:** we see danger everywhere, even in the neutral or positive



**Sensory Filtering Disrupted:** we have trouble filtering information that is and is not relevant which leads us to have difficulty with staying present and numbing or dissociation as compensation is common

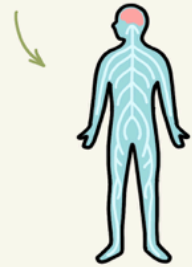


**Self-sensing Dampened:** our bodies stay primed for stress, which helps us to manage fear responses however also makes it hard to engage in joy, connection, empathy and passiveness becomes common

# OVERCOMING OVERWHELM & TRANSFORMING TRAUMA

*with The Trauma Stewardship Institute*

*here's me, feeling good*



Ideally our nervous system & brain = spacious and regulated, so we're present & responsive, not ruminating & reactive.



But, stress can saturate us, including, but certainly not limited to:



daily triaging & just... life



And once saturated, we rupture.



One cost of being saturated & rupturing is living in fight/flight/freeze/fawn. When not necessary, it becomes maladaptive & can result in:



(Trauma Stewardship Institute, 2024)

# Common Overwhelm & Trauma Exposure Reactions

- Feeling helpless & hopeless – like you can never do enough
- **Dread**
- hypervigilant and always serious
- Anger & **cynicism**
- Guilt, fear, complicated grieving
- Lack of awe
- Sense of persecution
- Fight/flight/immobility
- Dissociative moments
- **Inability to see options** & diminished creativity
- Physical, emotional, mental health impacts
- Chronic exhaustion
- Confirmation bias
- **Lack of presence**, avoidance, cognitive overload
- Rigid & controlling in other areas
- **Disheartened & dispirited**
- Grandiosity
- **Negativity bias** & not assuming well of others
- **Difficulty empathizing**, minimizing, numbing
- Toxic conduct, **incivility**, low impulse control
- Addictions
- **Loneliness, isolation, strained relationships at work and home**



# What is dread?

- A deep-seated fear or apprehension about something unpleasant or menacing that is yet to come
- Characterized by its anticipatory nature, and often arises from anticipating negative outcomes
- Unlike other fearful emotions, dread is NOT triggered by an immediate event, but by a belief that something will likely occur

# What does dread feel like?

— David Clark, PhD; ADAA

- Highly unpleasant, feels uncontrollable
- Intense form of ***anticipatory anxiety*** – feeling of apprehension or worry about a future experience you expect will be distressing
- Can come from getting stuck in your head
- Becoming preoccupied with an experience you are about to face or something that worries you
- Consumed with thinking about how bad something will be
- May experience high anxiety or panic
- Heightened if we anticipate something being threatening

# The Cynicism Trap

-Dr. Jamil Zaki “Hope for Cynics: The Surprising Science of Human Goodness”, Director of Stanford Social Neuroscience Lab



**Cynicism** – The belief that people are generally selfish, greedy and dishonest; lack in faith of people (different from skepticism, which is a lack of faith in our assumptions)

## Why?

- Can make us feel safer and smarter
- Can be self protective, but it prevents you from taking emotional chances that could potentially be more rewarding

**Impact?** Can have a negative effect on our health, such as being more likely to suffer from depression, heart disease and burnout AND research shows that ***beliefs stemming from cynical thought are often untrue***

**Slido check in – which of these reactions are you noticing in yourself or in those around you?**





**Which of these reactions are you noticing in yourself or in those around you?**


# How do we respond to stress?

- Distress Tolerance: the ability to endure emotional discomfort without turning to harmful coping methods
- Radical Acceptance: Accepting what is and letting go of what you want
  - Ongoing acceptance of the present moment, reality, truth
  - Accept what cannot be changed in present or past
  - Marsha Linehan – Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (UW Connections!)

# Radical Acceptance

Core practice of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) developed at UW


“Radical” - at the root



Getting at the root of your thoughts, feelings and behaviors about a situation



Regarding trauma, **this does NOT mean justifying what happened** or what someone did to you – it just means accepting that, however awful, it did happen.



We must first acknowledge that the situation and impact exists so we can make choices that help you to get to your goals.

# Radical Acceptance

"A moment of radical acceptance is a moment of genuine freedom." -Tara Brach

- Practicing Radical Acceptance: step back from emotions to see reality and truth
  - Acknowledging what is (not approval, acceptance)
  - Let go of fighting or struggling with reality
  - Move away from the fantasy or stories we create
- Accepting the present moment allows us to make changes for the future

# What should we accept?

- The past does not change
- We can only control some things
- We are imperfect
- Things only go our way some of the time
- Our thoughts and feelings
- Impermanence – nothing lasts forever

**Goal: Let go of “I wish things were different” or “I want to go back to the way things were”**

# Simple Equations

**Pain + Non-Acceptance = Suffering**

**Pain + Acceptance = Pain**

Although pain is an inevitable part of life, radical acceptance involves moving away from emotional reactions and helplessness toward calm and logical thought. While you may not be able to change the facts of a situation, you can choose how you view it.



**What is something that has been challenging or even painful during the last several years that you are working on accepting?**

# Example of Radical Acceptance

- Let's think of a stressor that is a 3/10...
- Practice in the every day so we can handle the 8's, 9's, 10's...
- You have an important appointment, and you hit traffic on your way... what do you start feeling and thinking?
- What would you say to yourself to radically accept the moment?



**Thinking back to what you are trying to radically accept, or - thinking to a daily 3/10 if you are already dealing with a 7, 8, 9... How could you phrase your radical acceptance of that thing to yourself?**

# Agency in Uncertainty

- Accepting what we can and cannot control
- Anxiety drops when we let go of worrying about things outside of our control
- Turning our focus onto what we can control and look forward to



# Compassion with Equanimity

*-Caring for others without losing ourselves-*

**Everyone is on their own life journey.**

**I am not the sole cause of this person's suffering,  
nor is it entirely within my power to make it go away,  
even if I wish I could.**

**Moments like this are difficult to bear,  
yet I will still try to help if I can.**

# Anticipatory Joy

- Chronic stress can have negative health effects on us
- Balance positivity with the hard – NOT to be confused with toxic positivity...
- Limit to how many things our brain can focus on at once
- What do you have agency over that you can look forward to doing?



**What's one thing you are looking forward to doing or experiencing in the next couple of weeks?**

## UW Medicine System Well-being Resources

### UW Medicine Well-being & Support Program

<https://faculty.uwmedicine.org>

### The Whole U

<https://thewholeu.edu>

### WA EAP Employee Assistance Program

<https://eap.wa.gov>

877-313-4455

Access Code: UW

### UW Medicine Peer to Peer

<https://faculty.uwmedicine.org/p2p>

### UW Medicine Employee Support Program

Intake Form:

<https://redcap.iths.org/surveys/?s=CYCXL3HXRE>

### Community of Support Drop-in Sessions

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesdays 1:3—2:30 pm & 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays 7:30-8:30 am

Zoom Meeting ID: 206 519 7721

## Local UW Well-being Resources

### HMC Well-being & Resilience

<https://one.uwmedicine.org/sites/hmc/resilience>

(Requires AMC log in)

### UWMC Montlake & Northwest: CARE4U

<https://uwmedicine.org/uwcare4u>

(Requires AMC log in)

### Fred Hutch Cancer Center (FHCC)

- Support our Staff (SOS): visit site on TogetherNet
- [Fred Hutch EAP Link](#)
- Premise Health Clinic: <https://ourcampusclinic.org>

### Need Urgent Help?

- Talk with a crisis counselor or crisis navigator 24/7
- Call or Text : 988



# Looking Forward

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What do you take away?

- What stands out to you?
- How does this shift how you move through your work?
- What do you hope to share with others?



**What do you want to take away from today's session?**

**THANK YOU!**

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