

Stress Reduction Webinar Q&A

Question: “Hello, wondering why 'sad and upset' feelings might be associated with the Parasympathetic dominant zone if one is feeling safe etc.”

Answer: In the optimal zone of arousal, we feel safe and thus are able to feel and experience the full range of emotions, including sadness, hurt, or upset as well as contentment, joy, or peace. Being in the zone of optimal arousal does not mean we don't experience emotions commonly labelled as “unpleasant” or “bad” and only experience emotions commonly labelled as “pleasant” or “good.” Being in the zone of optimal arousal means that we're able to feel all our feelings and that they are at an intensity which is tolerable for us to be present with. If the emotions are felt as too overwhelming, that's when we may leave that optimal zone of arousal and feel emotionally dysregulated. The idea here is that we can feel safe, present and connected, while also feeling emotions that may feel painful or unpleasant. This is actually the ideal zone of arousal to be in when we are processing emotions (such as in therapy or when sharing painful feelings with supportive people in our lives).

Question: “If you're missing your hypothalamus on one side, could that impact your ability to “sound the alarm?”

Answer: This is a very interesting question, and one I'm limited in responding to as I do not have any neuro-specialization. I would encourage discussion with your primary care provider about this and consider consultation with a neurologist.

The amygdala is more so the part of the brain that ‘sounds the alarm,’ and damage to the amygdala is associated with changes in one's ability to feel fear and learn from it (thus, impacting the ability to ‘sound the alarm’ at the appropriate times).

The hypothalamus is more the control centre for maintaining balance and homeostasis in the body, through influencing the autonomic nervous system and several different hormones. While it is responsible for regulating and maintaining many aspects of the stress response, I don't have the specialization to speak to if there is half the hypothalamus missing, what the impact would be on one's stress response.

Question: “I heard that an often unremarked stress response is, rather than to fight, flight or freeze, to affiliate, i.e., to seek to work together with others to manage and mitigate the stress together. And that this is mediated by oxytocin, often among women. Has that come to your attention too?”

Answer: Thank you for this awesome and interesting point. Yes, this is something that I'm aware of and have heard it often referred to as “tend and befriend.” There is quite a lot of research on this theory, indeed, and it's a very protective (especially collective/social protection) response to a threat. My understanding is that ‘tend and befriend’ or the affiliative responses to stress are similar to “face” in terms of arousal/physiological state and level of arousal. Perhaps the appraisal/assessment of the stressor and the circumstances (access and

availability of social connection, or awareness of others needing protection) promotes a physiologically response where one is able to seek social connection, share resources, etc.

Question: “I am very interested in knowing more about help with sleep.”

Answer: I’d recommend that you check out our webinar on sleep available on our website here:

<https://taddlecreekfht.ca/mental-health-webinars/>

Click “Mental Health Webinars November 2021” and see “2. Improving Your Sleep Nov 10, 2021.”

Another helpful resource for sleep is My Sleep Well: <https://mysleepwell.ca/>

Finally, I recommend speaking with your primary care provider who may be able to provide some further information about resources available to you based on the challenges you’re having (may entail referral to sleep study, CBT-Insomnia treatment, etc.).