

The Body Keeps the Score

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Hello, Colleagues:

I hope that your March Break allowed some time for rest and to focus on what fills you up outside of work. Whether you were vacationing or “staycationing”, this month’s giveaway, *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Dr. Bessel van Der Kolk reminds us that our experiences are reflected in many ways that we may not always realize.

I was so fortunate to attend a workshop facilitated by the author of *The Body Keeps the Score* during a conference. His insights into how we experience the world around us has greatly informed my practice and the way I approach challenges I am facing. In sharing, I hope that you are able to take something from this article that will support you in any way that is needed. It’s important to keep in mind that there are always aspects of any situation that are within our control as well as those that are not. Cultivating the practice of trying to focus on what we can control can be an important tool in both our work and our personal lives.

Let’s reflect on some of my takeaways from this resource.

“The more you stay focused on your breathing, the more you will benefit, particularly if you pay attention until the very end of the out breath and then wait a moment before you inhale again. As you continue to breathe and notice the air moving in and out of your lungs you may think about the role that oxygen plays in nourishing your body and bathing your tissues with the energy you need to feel alive and engaged.” (p.207)

The five senses exercise and deep breathing can help us in moments of stress, so when responding to a situation we don’t react out of emotion. The Action for Happiness Calendar prompt for March 9th in Mindful March suggested that we take a deep breath in and out before we reply to others. If we are able to create this space for ourselves, we may feel more steady on our feet.

“Mindfulness not only makes it possible to survey our internal landscape with compassion and curiosity but can also actively steer us in the right direction for self-care.” (p.285) Belly breathing or deep breathing is an essential component of many self-care practices including mindfulness and yoga, because of the knowledge mentioned in the previous quote. The power of our breath is always with us. When we can take a moment to focus and release the expectation of ourselves to have the answer immediately, we create an opportunity to be as present as possible for the situation before us.



“Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.” (p.81)

As educators and support persons, we encounter so many people during and after our work day. Some of these meetings leave us feeling uneasy while others allow us to

put down our guard and be ourselves. While we cannot always control this aspect, there are things we can do to support ourselves as we connect with others. Being mindful of our breath, gathering our resolve, focusing on what we can control and connecting with someone and/or something that fulfills us after a particularly heavy day can all help to replenish this sense of safety. It also allows us to take note of how we might approach a similar situation differently the next time to feel as safe as possible.

“As long as we feel safely held in the hearts and minds of the people who love us, we will climb mountains and cross deserts and stay up all night to finish projects.” (p.352) In my second year as a school counsellor, my administrative team was incredibly supportive. I recognized then and now how integral that was to me developing my practice. I truly felt a difference in how my role was viewed. This is not always the experience of everyone. When this feeling is absent, we can either make time to surround ourselves with those people in our lives as often as possible, or we can try to cultivate this space for others. It’s important to be mindful of how much energy we expend holding space for others, however, the reciprocity in supporting one another can help prevent depletion. I am not suggesting expending too much time. While you may have the inspiration to work fervently it’s important to also set boundaries necessary for your well-being.

As we head into spring, wish that you experience a renewal of your energy and sense of being. As our worlds awaken from their winter slumber, I am hopeful these takeaways can help to re-energize your creativity, imagination and energy for yourself, your students and your safe people. I share these words of Dr. van Der Kolk in hopes we can all try together to be more human beings instead of human doings.

Take care, colleagues.