

Working with Dissociative Disorders in Clinical Practice

online training



by Carolyn Spring

Session Summaries | Reflection Questions | References | Notes

Session summary – what will you learn?

- Exploring Stephen Porges' concept of 'neuroception' and trauma survivors' struggle to feel safe
- Exploring how to address the neurobiological aspects of feeling safe for a client in a therapy context
- Understanding the necessity of the therapist being able to self-regulate into the green zone (ventral vagal circuit) in order to co-regulate the client

Reflection Questions

1. Have you struggled to help clients 'feel safe' even though they are actually safe in the therapy room with you?
2. What strategies have you developed to bring clients back into the green zone?
3. What physical strategies do you have to soothe yourself when you are feeling anxious or unsafe?

Overall Learning Reflection from this session

Session summary – what will you learn?

- Exploring the way in which a trauma narrative can re-trigger rather than resolve traumatic responses
- Understanding the need for the front brain to be online during the integration stage
- Understanding the value and challenges of developing and exploring a trauma narrative
- Understanding the difference between front brain (higher cognitive) processing strategies and back brain (lower cognitive) processing strategies and how these arise and manifest as a result of trauma
- Exploring how to encourage clients towards higher processing strategies and away from lower processing strategies

Reflection Questions

Take a look at the table on the next page around higher and lower processing. How does this play out in your own life and in the lives of your clients?

Overall Learning Reflection from this session

Lower Processing (via back brain)	Higher Processing (via front brain)
Jumping to conclusions	Assessing all the data and making a decision
Fixed and rigid thinking (I know I'm right)	Adaptive and flexible thinking (curiosity and reflection)
Generalisations (all men hurt me)	Contextualisation (this man hurt me; others do not)
Catastrophising (assuming danger)	Assessing risk realistically
Despair and helplessness	Imagination for a different future and strategies for achieving it
Personalisation (everything is my fault)	Mentalising others' intentions
Magnification (making a mountain out of a molehill) or minimisation (denial)	Maintaining perspective
Mindreading (thinking we know what others are thinking)	Knowing the limitations of our predictions about other people
Persistent core beliefs of blame, shame, badness etc	Updating core beliefs to be realistic and helpful
Psychic equivalence (I feel bad so I am bad)	Mindsight (I am having a feeling of badness but that doesn't make me bad)
Pretend mode (If I believe it, it's true, e.g. fantasy and role play as reality)	Intact reality testing with self-aware escapism
Paranoia (everyone is out to hurt me) – overinterpretation of danger cues	Balance of safety and risk in relationships – accurate interpretation of danger cues

Session summary – what will you learn?

- Further exploring roadblocks and pitfalls
- Exploring how the therapist can manage feeling overwhelmed
- Exploring the ways in which traumatic material can be evoked, enacted and embodied
- Exploring the balance of responsibility within the therapeutic dyad
- Exploring how to work safely with self-harm and suicidal ideation
- Exploring how to work with stuckness
- Exploring the concept of shame as a best attempt at survival
- Exploring the concept of recovery and a post-trauma identity that is not based in structural dissociation

Overall Learning Reflection from this session and the course overall

SESSION 3

The theory of structural dissociation: *The Haunted Self: Structural Dissociation in the Treatment of Chronic Traumatization* by Onno van der Hart, Ellert R S Nijenhuis and Kathy Steele: <https://amzn.to/33rKRIq>

SESSION 5

The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk: <https://amzn.to/3f49bMk>

The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation by Stephen Porges: <https://amzn.to/3eZvjaj>

The Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe by Stephen Porges: <https://amzn.to/2PV4X12>

The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation by Deb Dana: <https://amzn.to/3vU3LdT>

Clinical Applications of the Polyvagal Theory: The Emergence of Polyvagal-Informed Therapies by Stephen Porges & Deb Dana (editors): <https://amzn.to/3utO7W3>

Notes

Info and links

‘Working with Dissociative Disorders in Clinical Practice’ online training by Carolyn Spring

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