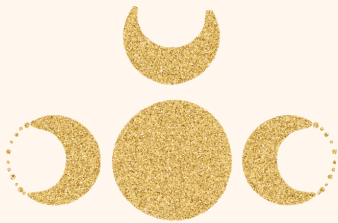


WHAT IS THE TRIUNE BRAIN?

THE TRIUNE BRAIN MODEL HELPS EXPLAIN HOW DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BRAIN RESPOND TO STRESS, DANGER, AND TRAUMA.

ALTHOUGH MODERN NEUROSCIENCE RECOGNIZES THAT THE BRAIN IS MORE COMPLEX THAN THIS MODEL, IT REMAINS A USEFUL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA RESPONSES.



Primitive Brain (Survival Brain)

The primitive brain is responsible for basic life functions that happen automatically, including:

- Breathing
- Heart rate
- Body temperature
- Survival instincts

Primary Role: Keeping the body alive.

Limbic System (Emotional Brain)

The limbic system processes emotions and helps determine whether a situation is safe or dangerous.

Key structures include:

- Amygdala
- Hippocampus
- Hypothalamus

Primary Role: Detecting threats and activating the body's survival response.

Neocortex (Thinking Brain)

The neocortex is responsible for higher-level thinking skills, including:

- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Language
- Planning
- Executive functioning
- Self-control

Primary Role: Helping us think before we react.



BY MAX CROUCH

UNDERSTANDING THE TRIUNE BRAIN AND THE FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE RESPONSE

Why Understanding the Brain Matters in Trauma Counseling



UNDERSTANDING THE FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE RESPONSE

When the brain senses danger, the amygdala quickly activates the body's survival system.

What Happens During Trauma?

During a traumatic event, the emotional brain becomes highly active while the thinking brain becomes less active.

This can make it difficult to:

- Think logically
- Solve problems
- Regulate emotions
- Learn new information
- Make decisions

This automatic reaction is often referred to as an amygdala hijack.



Fight

The person attempts to confront the threat.

Examples:

- Anger
- Aggression
- Defensiveness
- Arguing

Flight

The person attempts to escape the threat.

Examples:

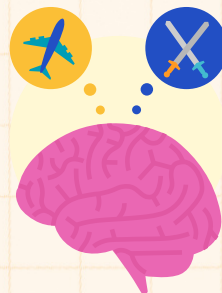
- Avoidance
- Running away
- Leaving situations
- Anxiety

Freeze

The person becomes unable to respond or move effectively.

Examples:

- Shutting down
- Going silent
- Feeling numb
- Difficulty thinking clearly



Why Is This Important for Counselors?

Understanding how trauma affects the brain helps counselors recognize that many behaviors are survival responses rather than intentional choices.

Instead of asking:

"What's wrong with this client?"

Trauma-informed counselors ask:

"What happened to this client?"

This shift helps counselors respond with empathy, patience, and understanding.

Key Takeaways

- The Primitive Brain focuses on survival.
- The Limbic System processes emotions and detects danger.
- The Neocortex is responsible for reasoning and problem-solving.
- Trauma can temporarily reduce access to the thinking brain.
- Understanding the brain helps counselors respond with empathy rather than judgment.
- Trauma-informed care begins by creating safety and building trust.

References

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