

Healthy Futures

News Views

An Educational Newsletter Covering Eating Disorder Treatment and Other Mental Health Issues

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Beginning with reptilian basics

Getting a handle on the triune brain theory

In her former career as a schoolteacher, Healthy Futures team member Kim DiRé taught her students about the human brain by dissecting an animal brain (brought in by a rancher or farmer parent of one of the kids).

As a psychotherapist, she still teaches about the brain, but quickly learned adults can be squeamish about the real noodle. So DiRé came up with a different approach - her brain puppet.

It's actually three puppets in one, and that's by design.

"It helps me teach about the triune brain - or the brain that has three parts," DiRé said.

The triune brain theory first was developed by the late Dr. Paul MacLean, a physician and neuroscientist, and former director of the Laboratory of the Brain and Behavior at the United States National Institute of Mental Health.

The triune brain is a model of the brain based on its evolutionary development and contains three parts that work to-



Healthy Futures team member Kim DiRé displays the puppet version of her "reptilian brain."

gether and (at times) not so well together.

According to Dr. MacLean's work, each of the layers or "brains" was established successively in response to evolutionary need.

The three layers are the reptilian system, or R-complex, the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex.

Each layer is geared toward separate functions

of the brain, but all three layers interact substantially.

"The first part of the triune brain is the reptilian brain - the brain stem - the one that keeps us alive, the one that was built in survival and procreation," DiRé said. It's within this R-complex that we have our flight, flight or freeze reactions when presented with danger.

The second part is limbic system.

It contains our primary centers for emotion. It's in this area that our brain attaches an emotion to a specific event. "It holds the memory for emotion, so when the feeling comes of threat, anxiety might come up, justifiably," DiRé said.

Last is the prefrontal

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Two tips for dealing with annoying colleagues, relatives

Summertime is here and that inevitably means it's time for those annual get-togethers so many of us dread.

Whether it's a company picnic at a park, or a family reunion at grandma's house, it seems fate forces us to be around certain "special" individuals you just can't stand to be around. Like Stan from accounting, or Uncle Benny, who always smells faintly of bologna and talks way too close for comfort.

Healthy Futures team member Sheri Robenstine offers clients tips and strategies when those uncomfortable moments crop up.

When total avoidance is impossible, Robenstine advises to try the next best thing.

"One of the strategies you can use is to gently avoid that person. When I say 'gently avoid,' I mean that you would have conversation with that per-

son you would have if you had just met them," she said.

"You might talk about the weather. You might talk about the event you're at. You might comment on something that's happening in news today – a current event. But you wouldn't discuss anything more than that. So it would be a very basic conversation," Robenstine advised.

Another strategy she offers is not allowing the offensive person to affect you on a personal level.

"One thing you can do that works well is not taking anything they do personally," she said. "Don't assume they're doing things to frustrate you, to annoy you, to upset you. Just assume they're doing things because this is their natural behavior. It's



some habit they have that might be annoying but it's not necessarily directed at you."

If this strategy is used effectively, she said, that person becomes nothing more than another person you might encounter

(rather than "the enemy.")

"They don't have to be someone who's frustrating to you, or someone's who's angering to you. They just happen to be another person that you have to encounter," said Robenstine.

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cortex – our "thinking" brain. It's the part that makes writing and language possible, as well as logic and processing sensory information.

As the most developed part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex sometimes interferes with our instinctual, reptilian brain, especially when threats or trauma happen.

"No one gets out of our life without feeling some kind of trauma," DiRé

said. "Sometimes there are big traumas and these self-protective responses that are happening for and by the reptilian brain don't get to be completed in the physiological piece, or the body piece, and so this continues over and over for the past event to come present."

Essentially, our intellectual self can halt the natural processes of our instinctual self. The response remains incom-

plete, and that can manifest in various undesirable ways.

Healthy Futures is a national leader in Somatic Experiencing (SE), a form of mental health therapy, which specifically helps clients naturally work through these incomplete traumas.

The puppet, it turns out, is a handy way to illustrate how SE can greatly help clients.

"We want to work

with our body system to complete self-protective responses that didn't get completed, so that trauma can be released – or the blocked energies of trauma can be released – and someone can stay present on purpose," DiRé said.

To see DiRé explain the triune brain with her puppet, head to Youtube.com/HealthyFuturesAZ