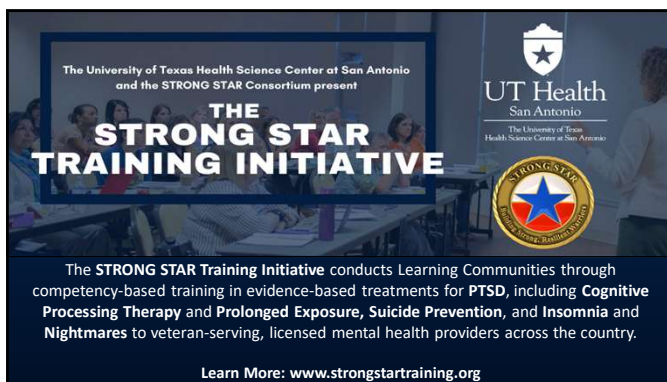


The Role of Emotions: Reducing Posttraumatic Emotional Numbing Using CPT and PE

VANESSA JACOBY, PHD, ABPP
The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas

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The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and the STRONG STAR Consortium present

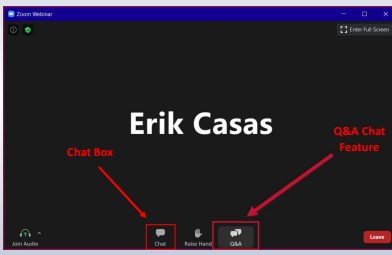
THE STRONG STAR TRAINING INITIATIVE

The STRONG STAR Training Initiative conducts Learning Communities through competency-based training in evidence-based treatments for PTSD, including **Cognitive Processing Therapy** and **Prolonged Exposure**, **Suicide Prevention**, and **Insomnia** and **Nightmares** to veteran-serving, licensed mental health providers across the country.

Learn More: www.strongstartraining.org

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Housekeeping Rules



- Place questions in the "Q&A" chat feature – questions will be answered at the end of the presentation.
- Place technical issues in the chat box.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure



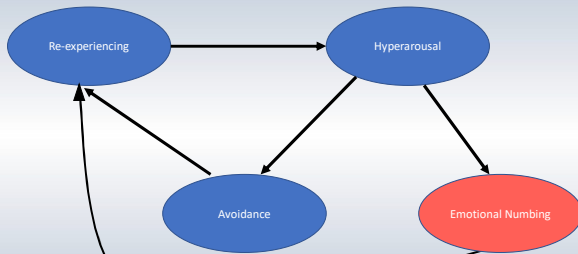
The presenter has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Numbing Symptoms in PTSD

7

Cycle of PTSD Symptoms



Monson & Fredman, 2012

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Emotional Numbing Symptoms in PTSD

Symptom	Example
Anhedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being uninterested in riding motorcycles or playing with one's children when this is something he/she used to enjoy.
Detachment or estrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling like no one in his/her family or unit understands them and their experiences.
Inability to experience positive emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not feeling joy when his/her child makes an achievement or he/she receives a promotion.

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Impact of Military Culture

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Cultural Impact: Stoicism




Intention =

- Self-control
- Inner strength
- Professionalism

Excerpts from NCO Creed: "No one is more professional than I...and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the military service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself...Competence is my watchword. My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind—accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my Soldiers. . ."

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Cultural Impact: Stoicism



Leadership

Use of language

Emotional Expression

Professionalism


Dress Code Requirements

Posture

Military Bearing


Emotional avoidance can be adaptive in a deployed setting

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Emotional Numbing & EBT for PTSD

13



PASSWORD #1:
strong

14



Emotional Numbing is Expected.

Considerations for therapist:

1. Is it interfering with treatment in session?
2. Is it interfering with practice assignments?

Emotional Engagement

+

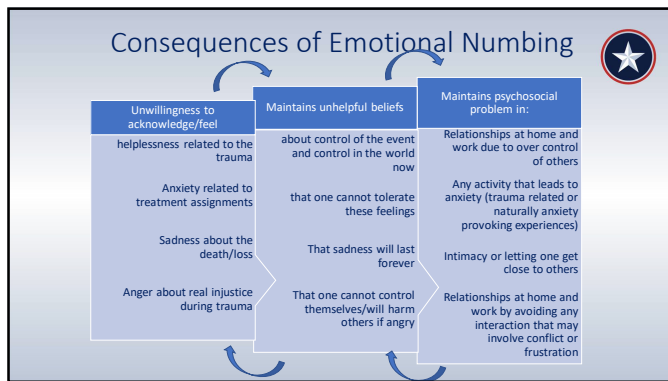
Disconfirmation of unhelpful trauma-related beliefs

=

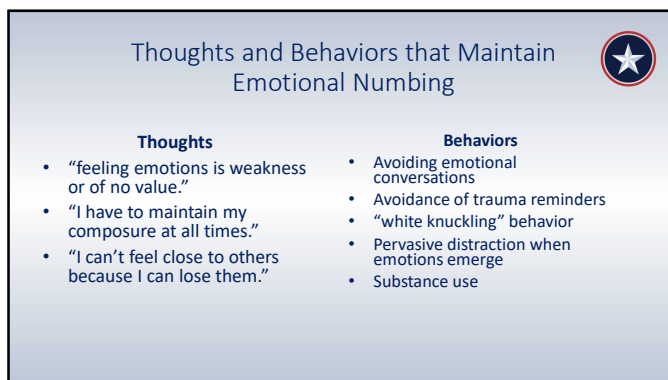
Emotional and Cognitive Processing

Remember emotional engagement can look a range of ways

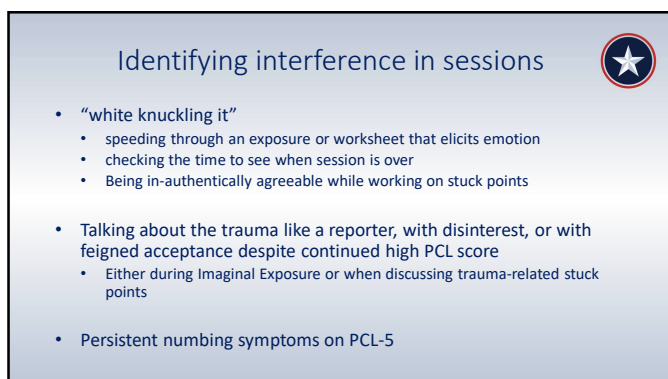
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Interventions to Address Emotional Numbing



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Psychoeducation About Emotions



- Acknowledging military, cultural, and gender norms around stoicism
- Highlight the protective function of emotions.
 - Value of both positive and negative emotions in helping people to learn and make sense of themselves, the world, and other people
 - Emotional expression is the "glue" of close relationships (Monson & Fredman, 2012)
- Highlight the function of posttraumatic numbing and emotional avoidance
 - Challenges to identify emotions at the time of the trauma because they were focused on the mission at hand and acted accordingly
 - Ongoing challenges - Brain trying to keep you safe. But it is confusing *feeling negative emotions* with being in danger.
 - Can make one *feel* more powerful, strong, untouchable. But it is a trick that may keep you from living the life you want to live.

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CPT Interventions for Emotional Numbing



Challenging Beliefs Work

Identify Stuck Points related to the emotional avoidance and challenge them using Challenging Beliefs Worksheets

- If allow myself to feel _____, then _____ will happen.
- If I feel _____, then it means I am _____.

Possible Socratic Questions

- Where does this thought come from? (e.g., childhood? Military training?)
- Is there a certain context for when this emotion is helpful vs. unhelpful?
- Is there a difference between emotion regulation and emotional over-control/numbing?

When an alternative thought is identified: "What would someone who believed that thought be doing differently than you are doing now?" Encourage "behavioral experiment" while practicing the new thought.

- Calling or texting a friend, Trying out a new restaurant that family wants to try, Visiting loved one's grave site or looking at pictures of them, Having a conversation with a spouse about something that has been bothering them, Telling someone "I love you"

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PE Interventions for Emotional Numbing



In-Vivo Exposure

Use the in-vivo hierarchy as a way to experiment with approaching feared emotions, noticing positive emotions, and practicing emotional expression. Add to hierarchy at any point in treatment.

Encourage patients to notice their emotions at different levels of intensity.

- Discuss how to notice emotions (mindfulness) – being present, noticing what happens in the body

In reviewing practice, ask about the feared outcomes related to emotional vulnerability

- “Did you fall apart? Did you lose control? Did it last forever?”

Task is for patients to repeat this exposure with the goal of rebuilding emotional engagement

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In-Vivo Exposure and Behavioral Experiments



Joy/Pleasure (Behavioral Activation)	Trauma-Related Emotions	Generalized Uncomfortable Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with your children • Appropriate physical touch • Family game night • Sexual intimacy • Self-Care activities • Meaningful hobby • Tell loved one that you love them • Call/text/facetime a friend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss trauma with supportive others • Share an intense story with a battle buddy or close friend • Write a letter or look at pictures of a friend who died • Share something meaningful about a friend who died 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address avoided conflict in relationship • Practice appropriate discipline with children • Watch a sad movie/listen to a sad song

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CPT Interventions for Emotional Numbing



Optional Trauma Narrative

Option to include a trauma narrative (CPT-A)

- Write out the facts of the trauma (vs. the “why”)

Goal is to access and experience natural emotions associated with the trauma

- Provides practice in emotional openness

Can use this to build evidence against emotion-related stuck points.

- “Did you fall apart? Did you lose control? Control of what? Are you less of a soldier because you felt feelings?”

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PE Interventions for Emotional Numbing Imaginal Exposure



- Focus on sensory details
- Encourage use of emotion words. This may be emotional expression experienced during or after the event
 - May do exposure of roll call, memorial service, talking to family
- Discuss vulnerability in processing.
 - How does not allowing yourself to express more "vulnerable" emotions impact the meaning your are making the trauma? (often themes of power/control)
 - How is this pattern negatively impacting your life now?
- Ask about the feared outcomes related to emotional vulnerability.

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PASSWORD #2:
star


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Questions?

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Next Month's Webinar



- *Addressing Racial Trauma through Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy*
- Presented by **Brittany N. Hall-Clark, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor within the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio
- **When:** Thursday, February 10 at 1pm CST/ 2pm EST



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