

Post-Traumatic Growth:

Supporting the emotional well-being of children, families, and providers

Children's Mental Health Summit
May 4, 2022



CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR
CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
integrating research, policy, and practice



 **Georgia
Health Policy
Center**

Presenter



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Excellence for Children's Behavioral Health**

Georgia Health Policy Center
Georgia State University

Thank you for all you do for
Georgia's children and families!





Photo by Paulo Philippidis on Flickr

**1 in 11
children**

Experienced
anxiety or
ADHD

**1 in 5
adolescents**

Ever experienced
major depressive
episode

**1 in 3 high school
students and 50%
of female
students**

Reported
persistent feelings
of sadness or
hopelessness in
2019

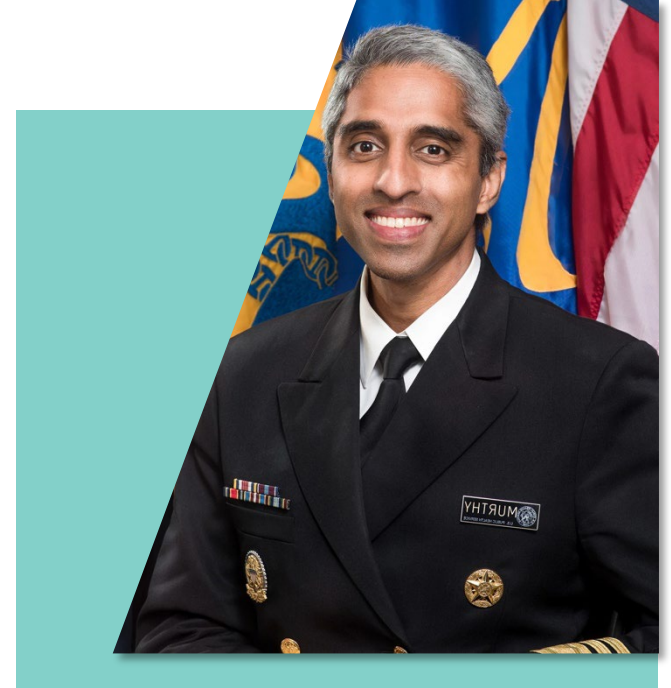
Increase in Mental Health Challenges During the Pandemic Due to:

- Increased isolation
- School disruption
- Worry about family health; loss
- Economic stress in family
- Increased social media and internet use



Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy

“...the challenges today’s generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating.”



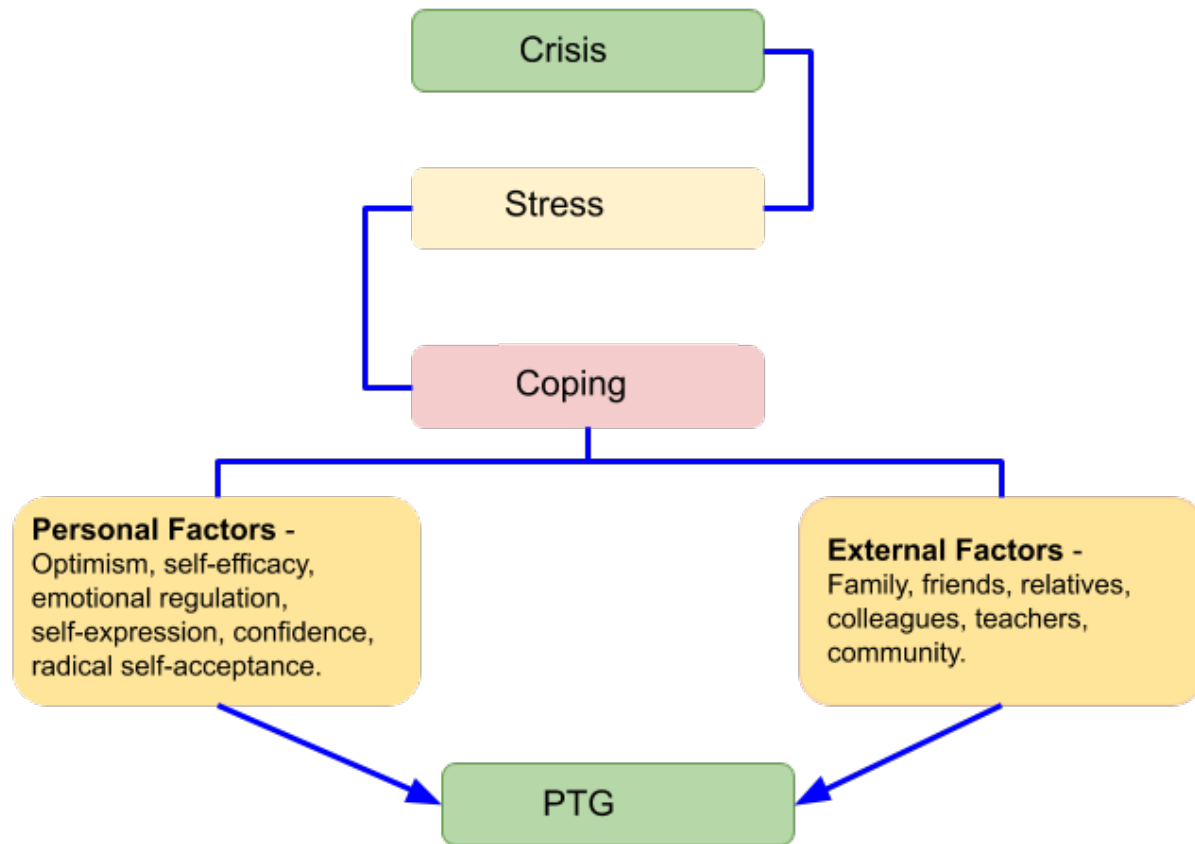


What is Post-Traumatic Growth?

- Positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event
- Healing by transforming pain and unwanted thoughts into favorable actions
- Struggle → Strength



Model of Post-Traumatic Growth



The Model Of Life Crisis

Source: Schaefer & Moos, 1992. *Life crises and personal growth*. In B. N. Carpenter (Ed.), *Personal coping: Theory, research, and application* (p. 149–170). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers/Greenwood Publishing Group.

Five Areas of Post-Traumatic Growth

- Embracing new opportunities
- Improved personal relationships
- Greater spiritual connection
- Increased emotional strength and resilience
- Heightened sense of gratitude toward life



Source: Meyerson et al., 2011. Posttraumatic growth among children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Clin Psychol Rev* (6): 949-64.

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Questions Used to Assess Post-Traumatic Growth with Children

- I learned how nice/helpful people can be.
- I can handle big problems better.
- I know what is important to me.
- I understand how God works better.
- I feel closer to people.
- I appreciate/enjoy each day more.
- I have a chance to do things I couldn't.
- My faith/belief in God is stronger.
- I can deal with more.
- I have new ideas how I want things to be.

Post-Traumatic Growth is Slightly Different than Resilience

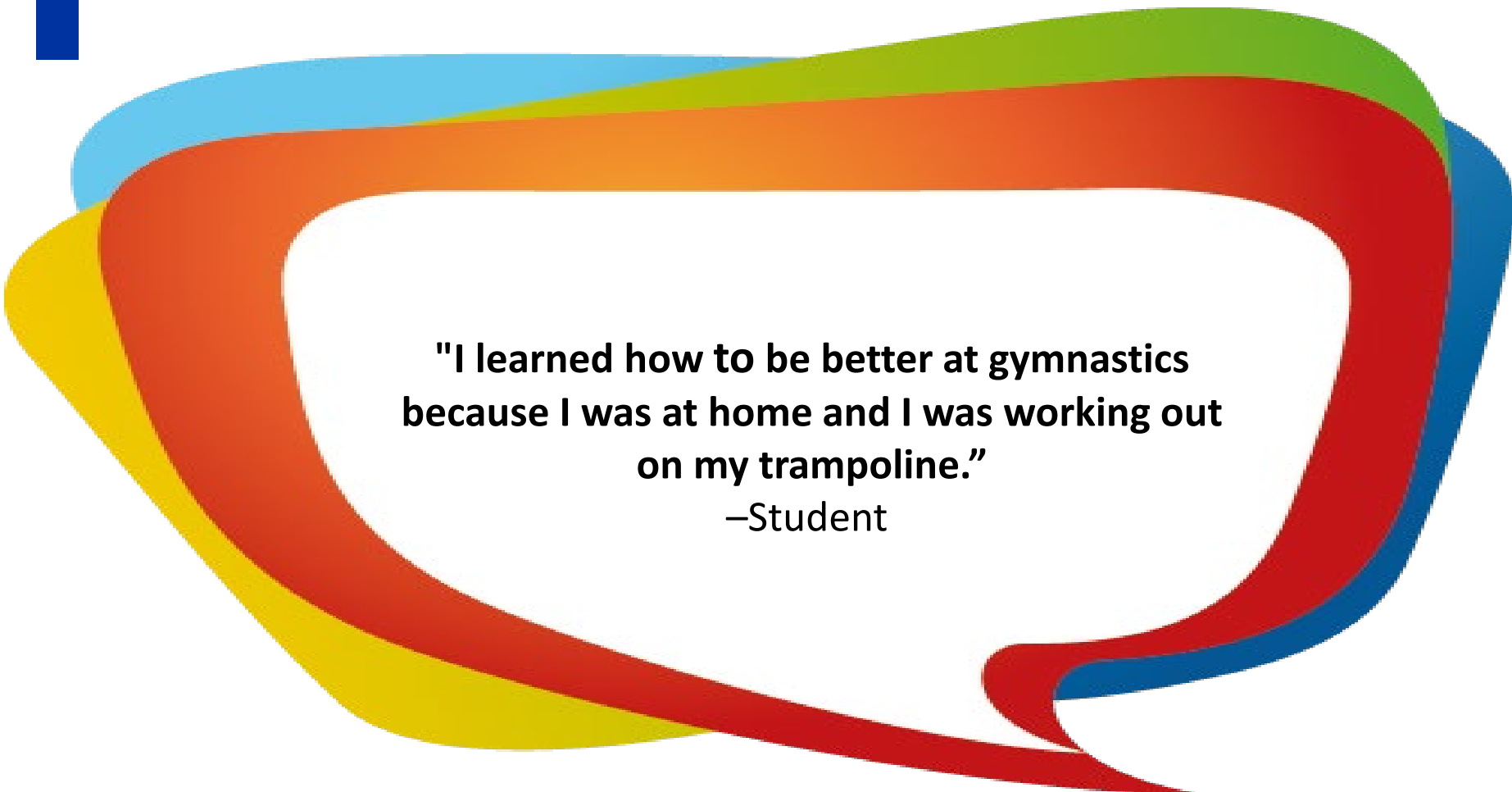
- Resilience = developmental process reflecting evidence of positive adaptation despite significant life adversity... being able to move on with life
- Post-traumatic growth goes further... it is the *transformative* process by which one experiences positive changes as a result of the struggle after trauma

Kids Find the Bright Side of COVID-19





Coming out of the pandemic, what is something you learned that you are proud of?



**"I learned how to be better at gymnastics
because I was at home and I was working out
on my trampoline."
–Student**

Coming out of the pandemic, what is something you learned that you are proud of?

"Cooking, trying new recipes."
–Student

Coming out of the pandemic, what is something you learned that you are proud of?



"How to keep myself and others healthy."
—Student



Coming out of the pandemic, what is something you learned that you are proud of?

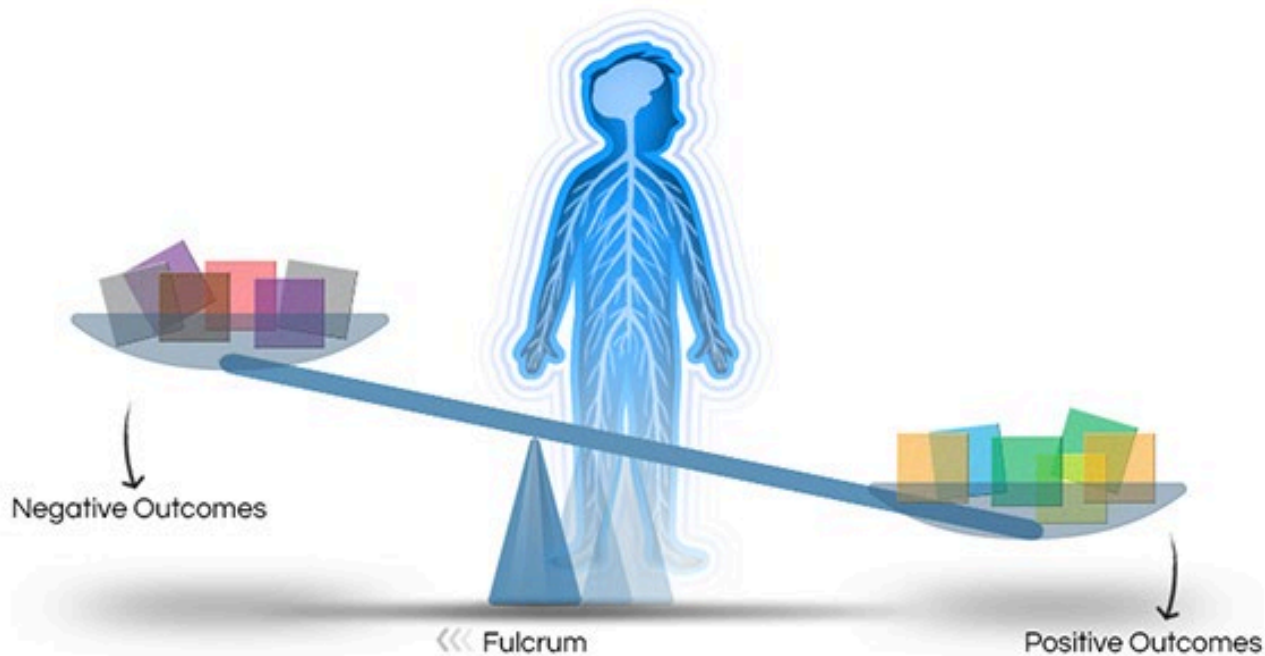


**"I have learned to play an instrument and
that sunshine and fresh air are very
important to stay healthy."**

—Student



So how can we tip the scales and promote post-traumatic growth among children and families?



Factors Associated with Post-Traumatic Growth and Resilience

The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.



Factors Associated with Post-Traumatic Growth and Resilience

- Social support and strong relationships
- Engaging in experiences that promote:
 - productive decision making and engagement in family, community, school
 - youth voice, choice and personal responsibility
 - development of self-regulation, adaptive skills, self-reflection, self-confidence, self-compassion
- Mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions
- Health-promoting activities

Strategies and Clinical Implications

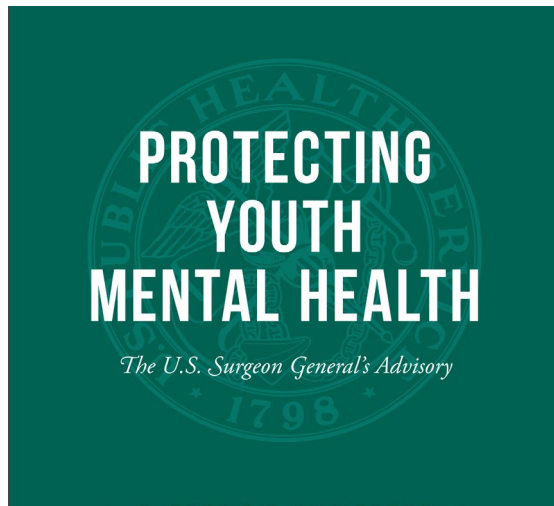
- Trauma-informed approach
 - Reframe the question:
 - X What's wrong with you?
 - ✓ **What has happened to you? How can I help?**
 - Empathy and deep listening
 - Widen window of tolerance for pain
- Meet youth and families in their current mindset

Strategies and Clinical Implications

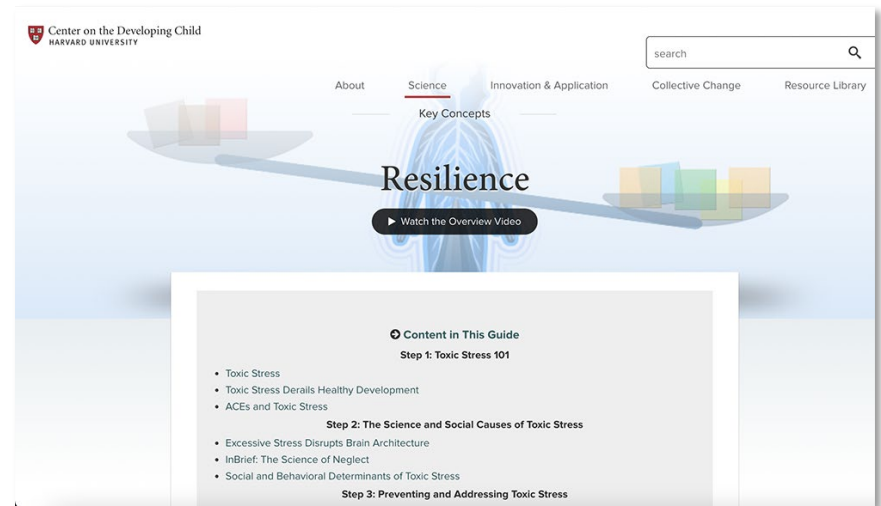
- Help children & families pay attention to opportunities for growth that accompany stress; identify those situations that have personal value
- Create safe environment
- Activate sensory-based interventions

Sources: Brown, 2022. [Sitting With Our Pain: The Key to Posttraumatic Growth | Psychology Today](#); Miller, 2018. [Post-Traumatic Growth & Resiliency Factors for Children and Adolescents - Starr Commonwealth](#); Kilmer et al., 2014. Posttraumatic Growth in Children and Youth: Clinical Implications of an Emerging Research Literature. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 84(5): 506-518

Resources for Working with Children and Families



[Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory 2021](#)



[Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University: Resilience](#)

Resources for Working with Children and Families



Resilience and Child Traumatic Stress



What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability of a child to recover and show early and effective adaptation following a potentially traumatic event.

What is a traumatic event?

Traumatic events, like sexual or physical abuse, witnessing domestic or community violence, or being in a natural disaster, often cause children to have strong, upsetting feelings and can potentially disturb daily life, development,

and ability to function. The effect of a traumatic event depends in part on the severity of a child's experience. All children have some strengths to help them adjust and recover following a traumatic event.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Resilience and Child Traumatic Stress



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Clinical Psychology Review

Volume 31, Issue 6, August 2011, Pages 949-964



Posttraumatic growth among children and adolescents: A systematic review

David A. Meyerson ^a, Kathryn E. Grant ^a, Jocelyn Smith Carter ^a, Ryan P. Kilmer ^b

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.06.003>

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Posttraumatic Growth in Children and Youth: Clinical Implications of an Emerging Research Literature

Resources for Children and Families



[Free Your Feels | Mental Health Campaign](#)

Voices for Georgia's Children; DBHDD

Resources for Children and Families



RESILIENT TEENS

Resilient Teens – Supported by Resilient Georgia + Pittulloch Foundation

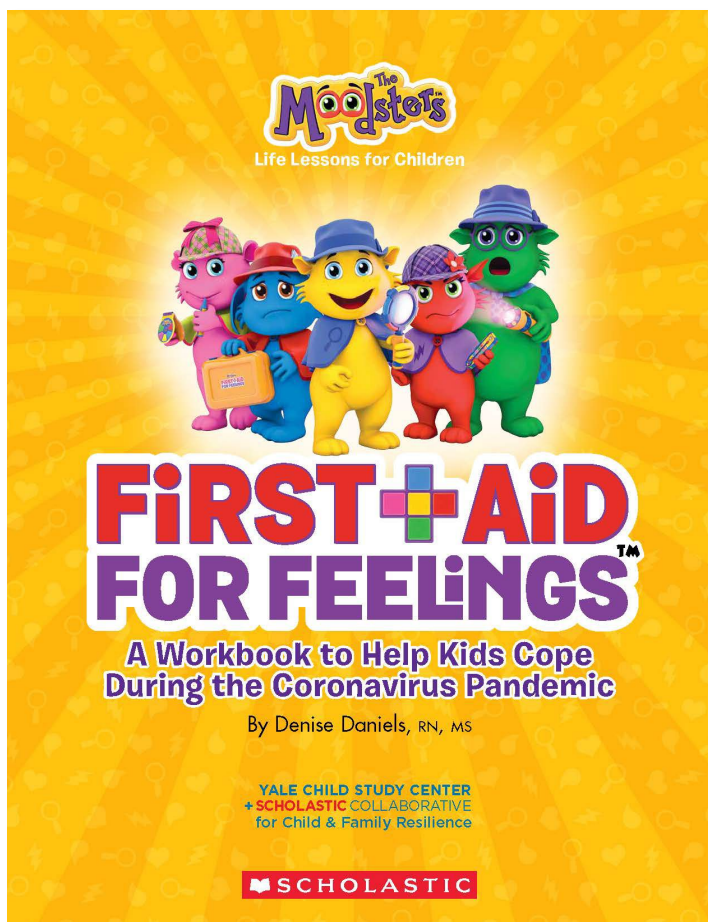
Augusta, Georgia and Surrounding Communities

Raising Resilience

STRONG4LIFE/Children's Hospital of Atlanta



Resources for Children and Families



Providers are also experiencing high levels of stress and distress.



@kl.the.artist

Burnout is Real

- Burnout
- Compassion fatigue
- Secondary traumatic stress



**> 50% of
therapists**

Reported
moderate to
high levels of
stress and
burnout

**47%
Social workers**

Have experienced
job stress and
emotional
exhaustion

**35%
psychologists**

Have experienced
emotional
exhaustion

Sources: Simionato & Simpson, 2018. Personal risk factors associated with burnout among psychotherapists: A systematic review of the literature. *J Clin Psychol* 74(9): 1431-1456.; Evans et al., 2006. Mental health, burnout and job satisfaction among mental health social workers in England and Wales. *Br J Psychiatry* 188: 75-80.; McCormack et al., 2018. The prevalence and cause(s) of burnout among applied psychologists: A systematic review. *Front. Psychol* 16; <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01897>.

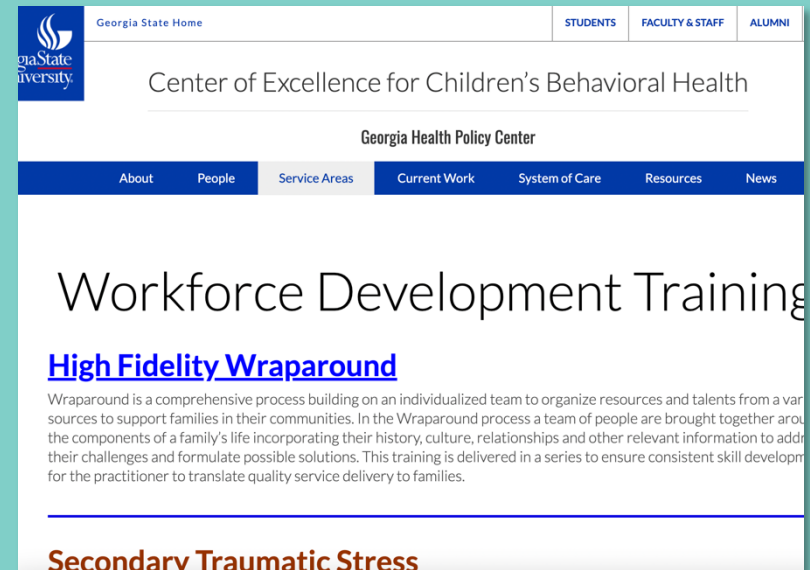
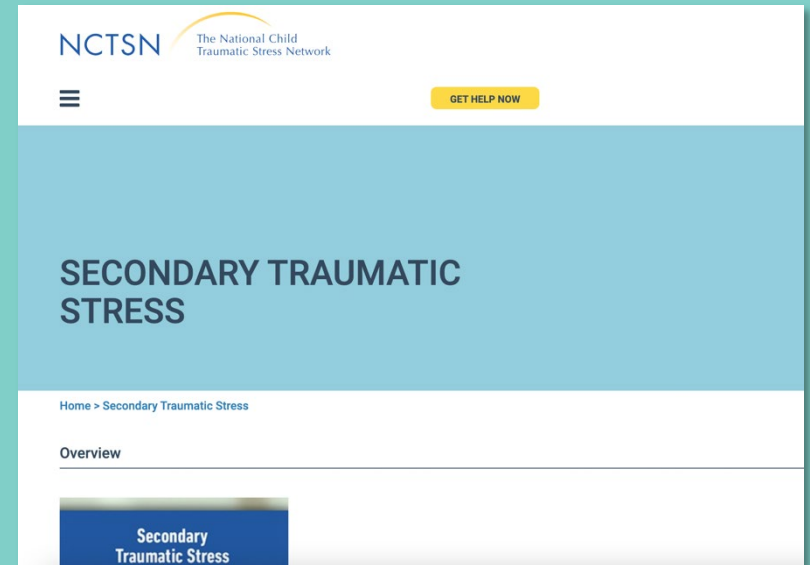
Put Your Oxygen Mask on First Before Helping Others

HOW varies by each person



Secondary Traumatic Stress Resources for Providers

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- Center of Excellence for Children's Behavioral Health, Georgia State University

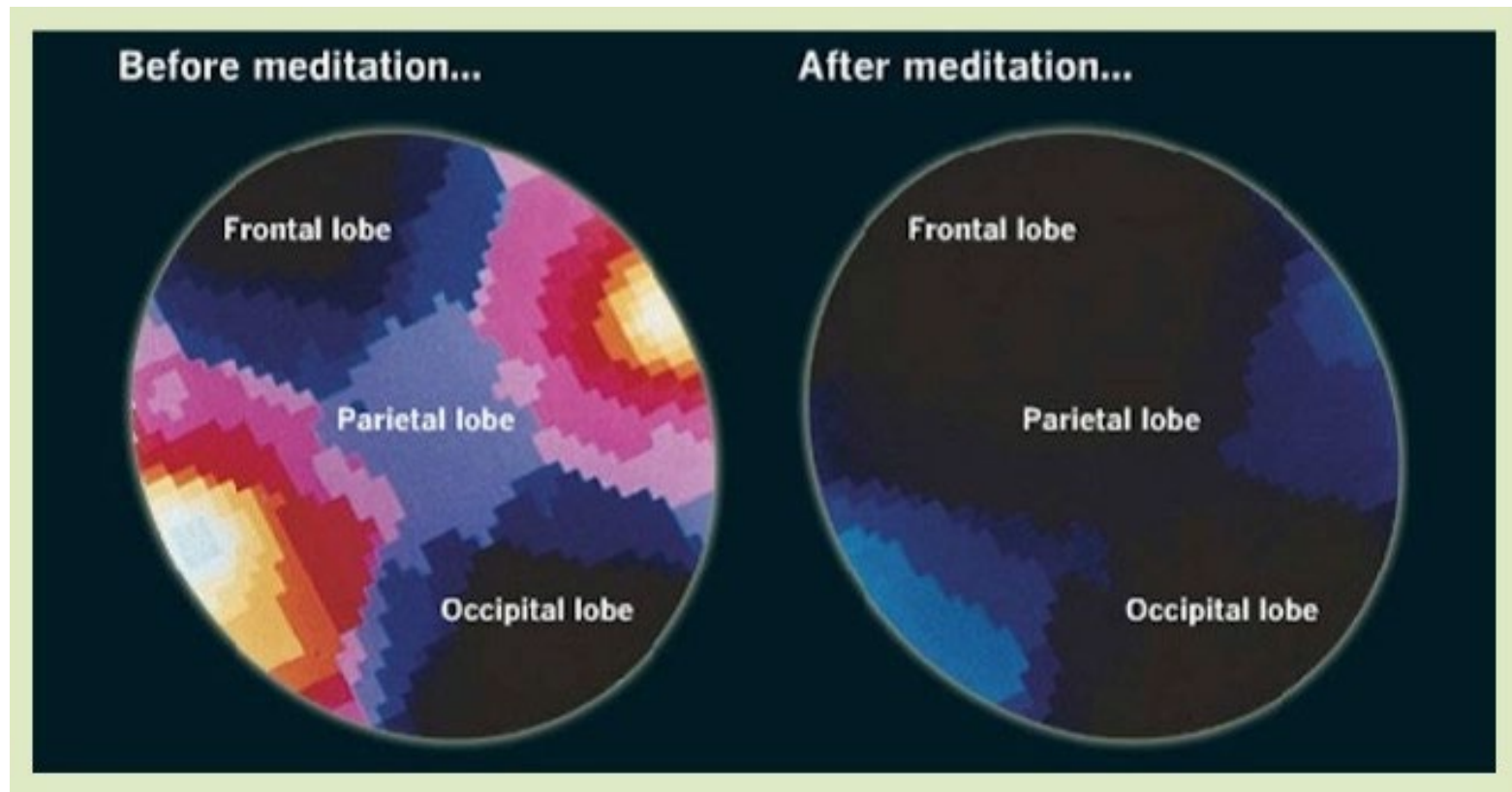


Mindfulness and Self Compassion

- Mindfulness is the “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.”
—Jon Kabat-Zinn, professor of medicine
- Self Compassion is “celebrating and enjoying yourself when life is going well and being kind and forgiving toward yourself when life is hard.”
—Tim Desmond, author and psychotherapist



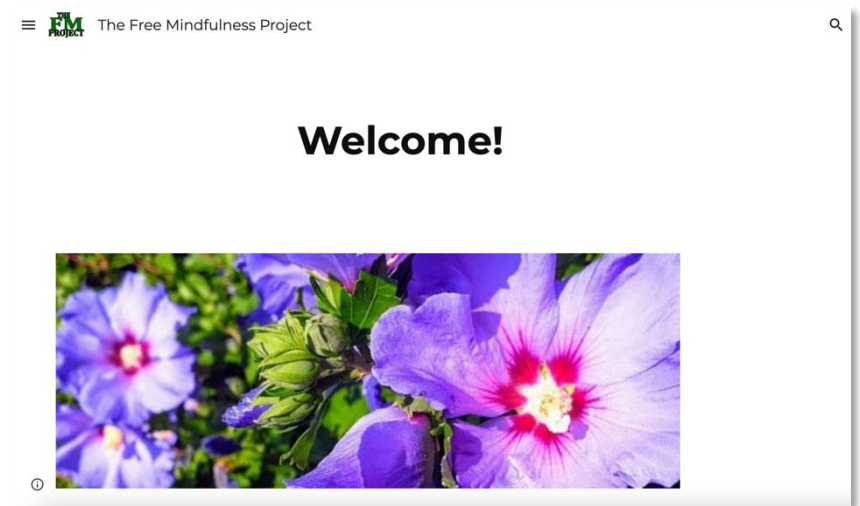
Meditation and self compassion practices can lead to positive changes in the brain.



Resources for Mindfulness and Self Compassion Practices

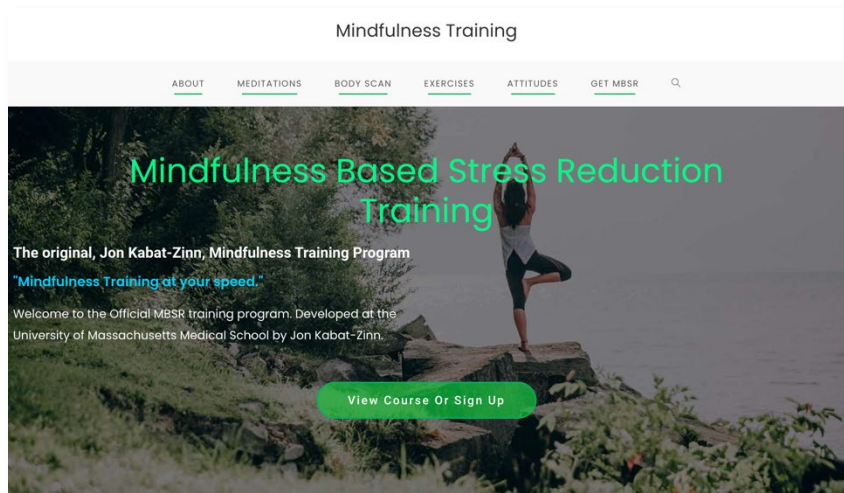


Atlanta Mindfulness Institute
[Home - AMI](https://atlantamindfulness.com)
(atlantamindfulness.com)

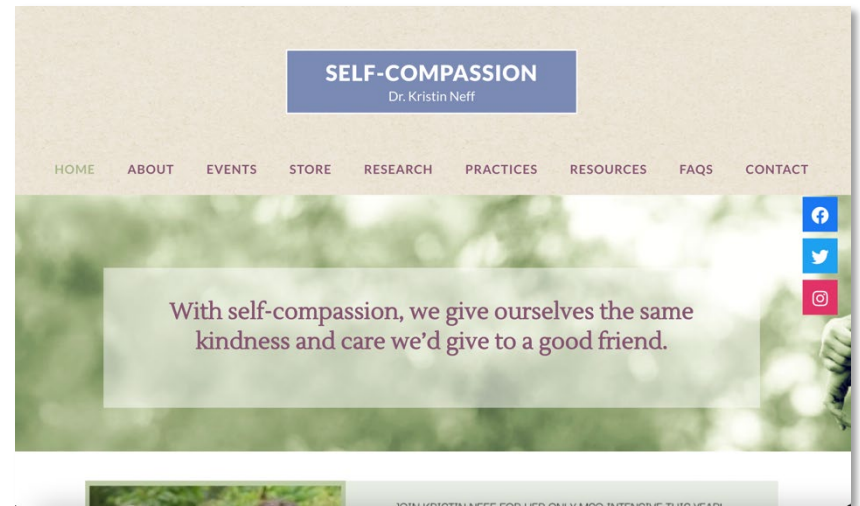


The Free Mindfulness Project
(freemindfulness.org)

Resources for Mindfulness and Self Compassion Practices



Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Training (mbsrtraining.com)



Self-compassion.org (Dr. Kristen Neff)

“Our job is not to deny the story, but to defy the ending—to rise strong, recognize our story, and rumble with the truth until we get to a place where we think, Yes. This is what happened. And I will choose how the story ends.”

—Brené Brown, professor and author



Thank you

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the Center of Excellence for
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