

Pathways to **EMPOWER**

Quick Guides



For Positive Mental Health

Pathways to **EMPOWER**

Quick Guide on SEL & MHL

What's the Difference?

Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health Literacy are not the same. Like math and science, they are complementary. This is why we've created this quick guide to help people define and assess their needs as they move toward building a wellness-informed community.

Social-Emotional Learning

Acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- Develop healthy identities
- Manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals
- Feel and show empathy for others
- Establish and maintain supportive relationships
- Make responsible and caring decisions

Mental Health Literacy

Acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- Understand how to obtain and maintain positive mental health
- Understand mental health issues, disorders, and their treatments
- Decrease stigma related to matters of mental health
- Enhance help-seeking efficacy

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A Quick Guide for Fostering Positive Mental Health

The Tools for a Healthy Brain

The Merit Badge represents our brain's need to experience compassion, pride, and gratitude. Depression and anxiety can come from the inability to act and feelings of helplessness.

Social interaction, especially with people we enjoy, is an important aspect of our overall wellness. Even when we can't be with people physically, it's important to communicate and interact.

Our brains need sleep, and they also need rest. We cannot concentrate for long periods without a break.

Our brains use a lot of the energy from the food that we eat, and it works best when we maintain a consistent input of healthy foods.

The binoculars represent focus and mindfulness. Very powerful tools for calming our minds.

The map represents the fact that our brains like to have predictable routines. When things are predictable, our brains feel more in control, which is particularly important right now.

The hiking boots represent exercise and movement. When we move our bodies, it helps our brains to be able to develop new neural pathways (i.e. learn).



**The
ANT**

Merit badge
(compassion,
pride, gratitude)

Binoculars
(focus)

Maps
(frameworks)

Walkie-talkie
(social)

Sleeping bag
(rest)

Snacks
(nutrition)

Hiking boots
(exercise)

Did you notice that the ant looks like it's about to go for a walk outside?

That's because getting outside and into nature is proven to be healthy for our brains!

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Supporting Adolescent Health

If you try to help a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, it will die. It is only through the struggle of breaking out that the butterfly can develop the strength that it needs to be able to fly. Similarly, adolescents need to handle challenges to build the skills to be independent adults.

Roots & Wings

Roots represent systems of support, the knowledge that kids have structures, predictable limits, and love and guidance from their family. **Wings** represent the confidence to move away and try things independently.

Relationships

Relationships are particularly important to adolescents as they begin to formulate their own ideas of self in relationship to others.



Resilience

Our resilience is our ability to respond to challenges. Those responses are guided by the way that we think about four S's: Self, Situation, Supports, and Strategies. [You can see them on the dragonfly's wings.]

Reward

The adolescent brain is driven toward rewards. The brain receives those rewards through brain chemicals: dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, etc.

Regulation

As adults, our tendency is to protect and do things for youth... especially during stressful and traumatic times. This is not helpful. Give them opportunities to practice independence and self-regulate.

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*Self Esteem is not a gift we can give; it is a neurochemical response
we rob someone of if we don't let them struggle toward success.*



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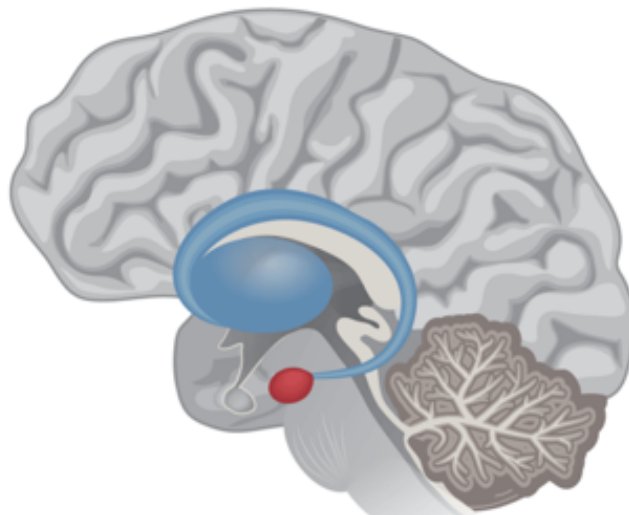
A Quick Guide To Understanding Trauma

Alert System

Our natural alert system works to alert us to danger, drive our response, (often "fight-flight-or-freeze"), and return to our resting state.

Memory

Our brains want to remember experiences that were threatening.. This makes them stronger triggers for "fight-flight-freeze".



Psychological Safety

In times of trauma, we naturally want to overprotect. What we really need to do is to give the message that we still have high expectations and that, overall, the world is a safe place.

Control

The brain responds to social threats and rewards in the same ways as physical threats, so the social threats associated with trauma also become stronger triggers.

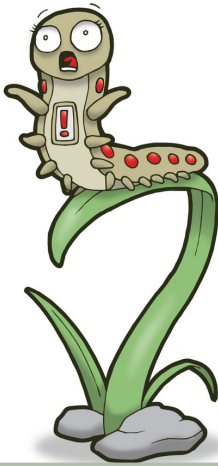
After experiencing a trauma, the alert system gets stronger, and our override system gets weaker... making us more likely to react.

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The Resilience Formula

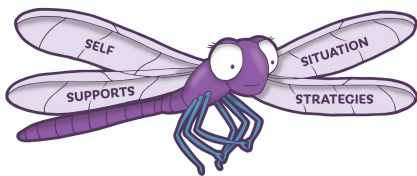
A Guide to Being Proactive, Not Reactive



Why Have a Plan?

In certain situations or in response to certain actions, our brains may be on high alert for threats. This puts us at risk of conflict, particularly with those we love.

When we feel threatened, our brain switches control to our limbic system, which only cares about the here and now. Having a plan helps us avoid saying and doing things that we later regret.



After the Conflict

Eventually, everyone will calm down and be ready to talk. This is the opportunity to reflect and learn. The Four S's (self, situation, supports, and strategies) are a great way to frame your reflection and help use the challenge as an opportunity to build resilience.

Before the Conflict

Proactive means just that, being ready with a plan in place. To be prepared, we need to have three things in place:

- A trigger script
- Rules for disengagement
- A reentry script



During the Conflict

Our natural response will be to react. We need to engage the plan and stick with it, even in the face of anger (not easy!).

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A Guide to Anxiety, Depression, and Violence

Fight, Flight, or Freeze

Our natural response to a threat is "fight, flight, or freeze". It is what helps us to survive when we are in danger. Violence, anxiety, and depression can roughly translate to the idea of "fight, flight, and freeze".



Action

Action can be an antidote to that "fight, flight, freeze" response, therefore helping to prevent violence, anxiety, and depression. As we build up the four S's, we learn that we can handle challenges, allowing us to over-ride that "fight, flight, freeze" response.



Brain Chemicals

Our brains need brain chemicals to stay healthy. Those brain chemicals are messages that help guide our responses. We need to make sure that we are finding healthy ways to get them, which also helps to prevent violence, anxiety, and depression.



Resilience & Mindful Practice

Our ability to respond to challenges can counteract that "fight, flight, freeze" response. As we build up the Four Ss and practice mindfulness, we can learn to override. It strengthens our ability to be proactive instead of reactive.

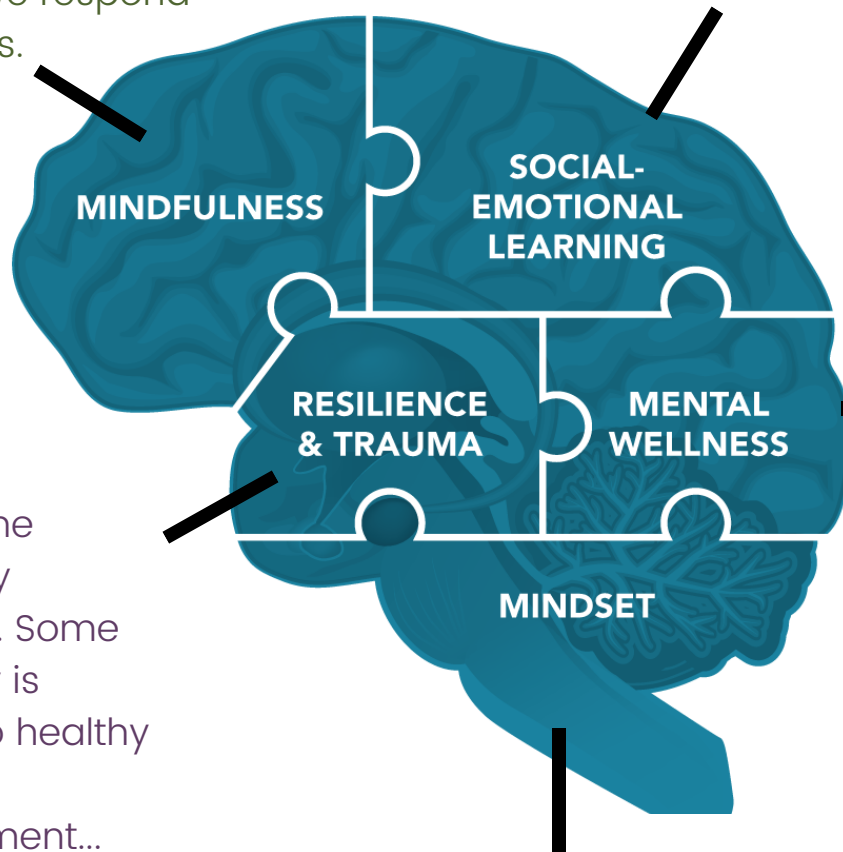


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A Quick Guide to Understanding Brain Health

By understanding the way our brains work, we can begin to make more mindful choices about how we respond to challenges.

Knowing how to regulate our social interactions and emotional responses can help us feel better about ourselves and others.



Finding the “adversity balance”. Some adversity is helpful to healthy brain development... too much is toxic.

Keeping our brains healthy with balanced choices and the tools of a healthy brain help us to maintain brain health.

Mindset matters. How we think about something helps determine both our behavior and our physiological response to it.

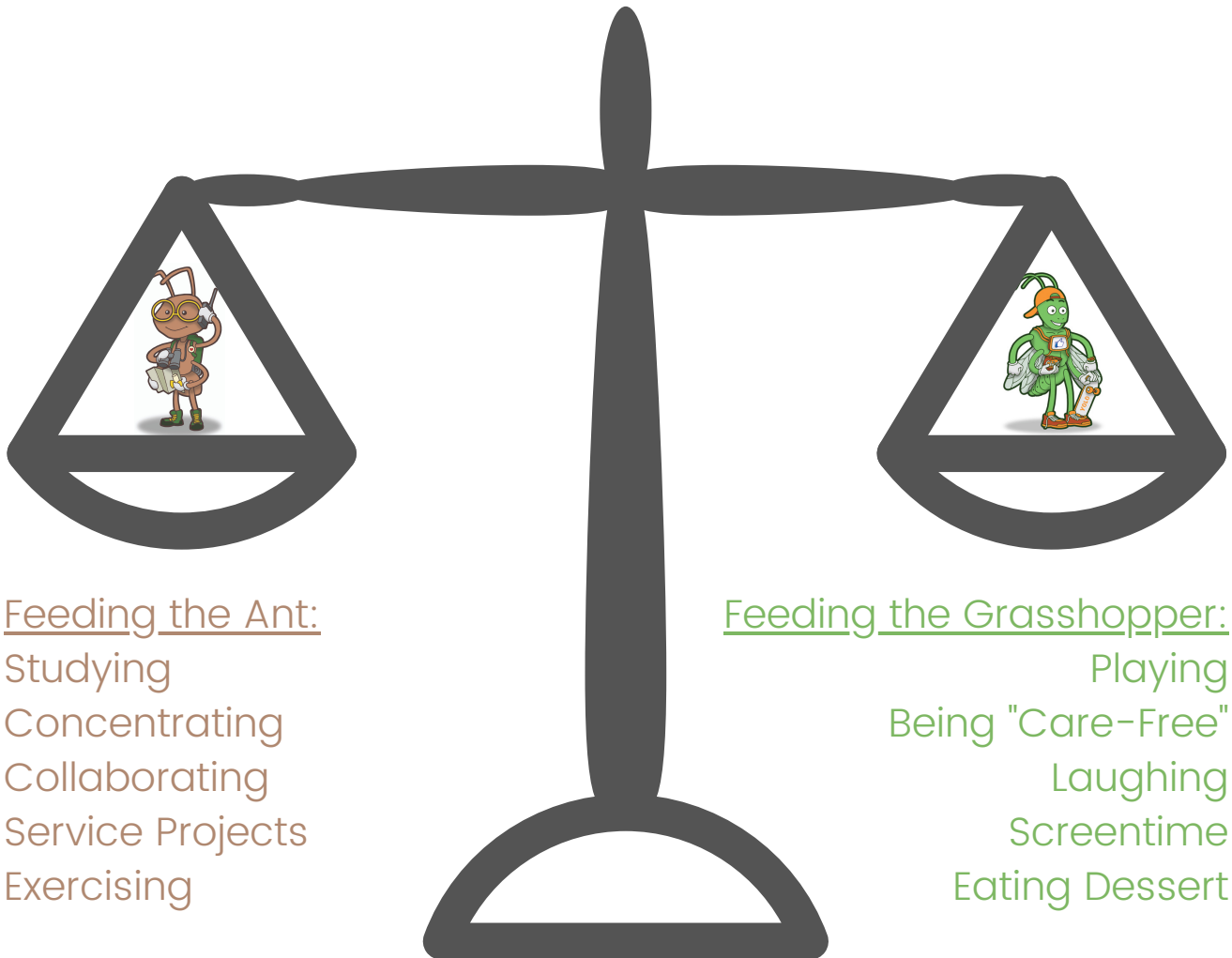
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A Quick Guide to Brain Balance

Mental health is brain health, and brain health is about balance.

"For Aristotle...virtue was to be found in the balance between selfish short-term desires and selfless long-term ones. Vice was to be found at either extreme."



Feeding the Ant:

Studying
Concentrating
Collaborating
Service Projects
Exercising

Feeding the Grasshopper:

Playing
Being "Care-Free"
Laughing
Screen time
Eating Dessert

Just like our bodies need a balance of different nutrients, our brains need a balance between those activities that benefit us in the long run and those that benefit us in the short run.

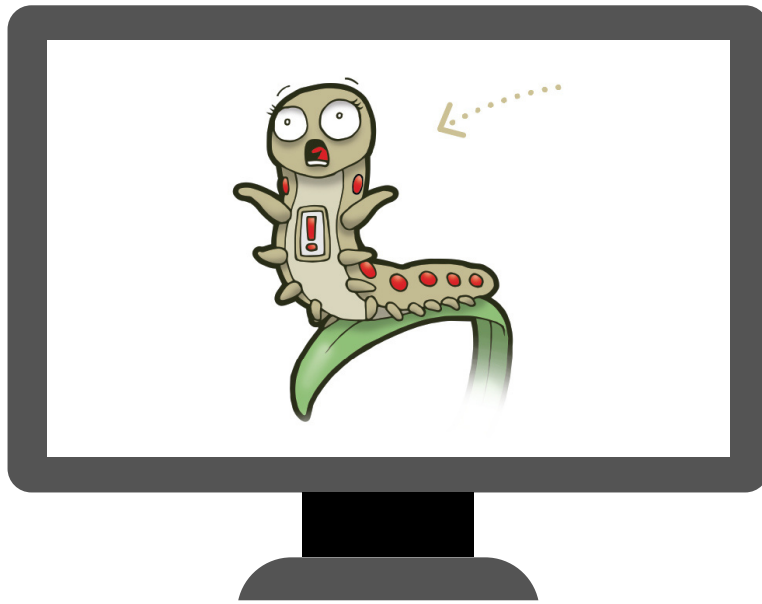
We need to make mindful choices about when we are feeding the ant (cortex) and when we are feeding the grasshopper (limbic system).

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A Quick Guide to Screen Time

Many people struggle with technology use. Here are some strategies for mindfully navigating screen use.



Prioritize: Energy is a limited resource. Spending time on the computer is a drain on that resource. With all of the digital opportunities out there, we need to be able to set priorities about our screen time.

Understand: Not all screen time is created equally. Try to have an understanding of how you are using screen time and how that use is affecting the way you feel.

Set Limits: It is easy to be attached to technology throughout the day, but that attachment may have detrimental effects on your well-being.

Recharge: Find times to engage in activities that intentionally disconnect from any devices. Make sure to take frequent breaks from the screen. If possible, get outside!

Protect: If you are staring at a screen for long periods, make sure that you lift the screen so that you do not have to bend your neck down. To help protect your eyesight, use the 20-20-20 guideline: every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.

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A Quick Guide For Why Our Brain 'REACTS'

Our brains respond the same way to social threats as they do to physical threats. REACTS is an acronym for the social threats to the brain.

RESPECT - Are people treating you well?

EQUITY - Do you feel like you are getting what you deserve?

ALLIANCES - Do you have people working with you?

CONTROL - Are you somewhat in charge of what happens?

TERRITORY - Is this something you feel like is yours?

SIMILARITY - Are you in some ways the same as others?

Violence, anxiety and depression roughly translate to fight-flight-freeze. They are our brain's response to feeling threatened, and when we are in this mode, we are using the limbic system, the emotional part of our brain. The limbic system is in charge of our short-term survival and does not make decisions that consider long-term consequences.

As a nation, we are dealing with both physical & social threats, seemingly more each day. These situations put us into a perfect storm for violence, anxiety, and depression. The key to prevention and mindful response is understanding our brain's responses.

We have tools that can help - Learn More at www.PathwaysToEmpower.com

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A Quick Guide for Having Difficult Conversations In a Thoughtful Way

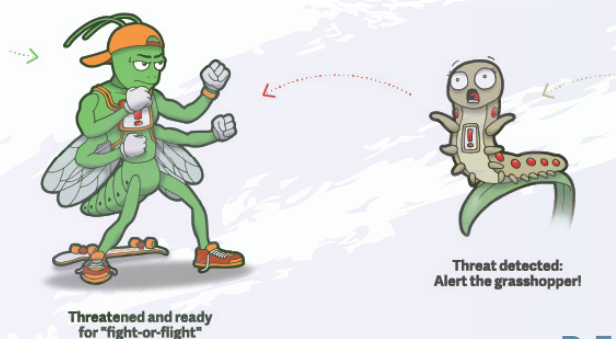
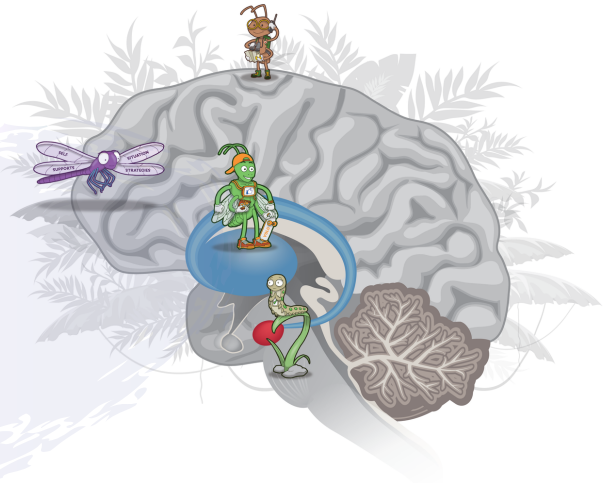
The Resilient Mindset Model can provide a framework for difficult conversations, especially with young children.

Ant: In charge of decisions that will benefit us in the future.

Grasshopper: In charge of emotions and decisions that will benefit us now.

Glowworm: In charge of looking out for threats.

Dragonfly: In charge of over-ride control.



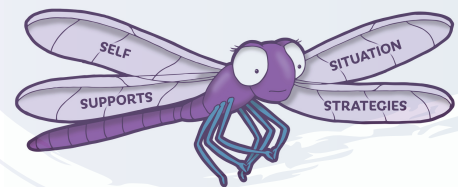
Our brain's primary job is to survive. When our glowworm senses a threat, it switches control of the brain from the ant to the grasshopper for fight, flight, or freeze.

R.E.A.C.T.S.

Respect, Equity, Alliances, Control, Territory, Similarity

Our brains respond the same way to social threats as they do to physical threats.

The **Dragonfly** is in charge of knowing when to over-ride the glowworm and keep us from going into fight-flight-or-freeze mode.



When engaged in emotionally charged conversations, our brains tend to move into 'Grasshopper Mode.' Exchanges are more productive when our brains are operating in 'Ant Mode.'

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Brain-Based Leadership Tools

The most critical needs of the brain are a sense of security and a sense of autonomy. In other words, we want to feel safe, and we want to feel independent. These two ideas are sometimes in conflict, so...

Here are some tools that can help provide

Roots & Wings

Staging:

Our brains like predictable situations that provide reassurance that we will not be threatened, physically or socially. Staging is giving information that prepares people for what is to come. Providing structure, like routines and agendas, can help prevent a reactive response, especially during conflict/crisis.

Scaffolding:

Our brains want to feel purposeful and independent. Scaffolding is providing as much support as necessary to assist someone as they learn a new skill, then gradually removing those supports as they become more independent.

Scripting:

Having the appropriate language is often one of the most challenging aspects of negotiating new situations. Scripting is providing the language necessary for those situations.

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