

Episode 177 (Psychologists Off the Clock): Mind-Body Practices for Stress and Overwhelm with Rebekkah LaDyne

[00:00:00]

Rebekkah LaDyne: All of these things happen to all of us from time to time and they're normal.

And they're even healthy. There are circumstances in which we would want to have each of these responses. However, when they happen, in situations where they're not warranted. And when they happen repeatedly, when they seem to be our go-to, that's something that our body is telling us.

There's dysregulation in this system, I'm responding to normal life events like the house is on fire, and I need to do something to change that.

Debbie Sorensen: That was Rebekkah LaDyne on psychologists off the clock

Diana Hill: We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado.

Diana Hill: I'm Dr. Diana Hill practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

[00:01:00] **Yael Schonbrun:** From coast to coast. I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book Of Act Metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

Jill Stoddard: You guys, we have a super exciting announcement here at psychologist's off the clock. We are hosting our first annual psychologists off the clock wise, mind summit, how to adapt and thrive in today's challenging times.

And we are bringing incredible experts on all different topics to help you flourish and your work, parenting relationships, and health. So Diana, tell us about this incredible lineup.

Diana Hill: We have two full days lined up for you and cover everything from growing the good in your brain and your life to how to build more movement into your life.

How to build more self care, navigating the demands of work, parenting, and partnership, how to empower our kids during challenging [00:02:00] times, and , how to help you with

healthy habits, especially during a pandemic. And it's going to be fantastic. All four of our co-hosts are going to be presenting in addition to Michael Harold.

and some people that we really admire and want to hear from again, including, Alex paying Robyn Gobin, Julie lift Scott home. We're Canson, Katie Bowman and more.

Jill Stoddard: Our summit takes place on Friday, January 29th and Saturday, January 30th. The first 300 registrants will be able to register for free and we'll continue to release free tickets as we get donations and additional sponsors.

And after that, tickets will only be \$8 just to cover administrative fees. So we hope you will join us. We're really excited. You can check it out on our website at offtheclockpsych.com.

Diana Hill: We're thrilled to be partnered with Praxis Continuing Education here at Psychologist's Off The Clock because we really value our own continuing education. And I know Jill you've participated in a number of Praxis events.

Jill Stoddard: I have. Praxis is my favorite. I think probably the most memorable was when I participated in an ACT Boot Camp after I'd already [00:03:00] been learning and doing ACT for about 15 years. And I still got so much out of the training.

Diana Hill: I have a memory of Steve Hayes jumping off of a phone book to demonstrate how small your committed action can be. And sometimes I'll bring up that memory and use it with my clients. And that's probably from 10 years ago. Praxis also continues to evolve and change over time. It integrates new therapies as they come out.

it has trainings in Compassion Focused Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Radically Open DBT.

Jill Stoddard: If you go to our website at www.offtheclockpsych.com and visit our sponsorship page, you can get a coupon for \$25 off. So check it out.

Debbie Sorensen: It's Debbie.

I'm bringing you this episode today on stress and overwhelm with a body-based therapist and author named Rebekkah LaDyne. And she's going to talk to us about the stress response and offer us some mind-body practices for responding to stress. And stress is all around us right now, Diana, I know you had some thoughts.

Diana Hill: yeah. What a [00:04:00] perfect episode Debbie to release right now during the holidays, pandemic numbers are going up. We're not only super stressed, but we're collectively stressed and it's been chronic. And I like to turn to the APA stress in America report, which I've been doing over these past episodes because it actually normalizes things for us a bit that if you're feeling stressed right now is understandable.

Uh, according to that report, eight and 10 adults, 78% say the coronavirus pandemic is a significant source of stress in their life. And it's impacting our behaviors. Half of adults say their behavior has been negatively affected and some of the most common experiences that people are noticing are tension in their body, snapping or getting angry really quickly, unexpected mood swings and screaming or yelling at a loved one.

I think. All of those could describe my past week and some of the most common experiences I'm hearing from clients. How about for you, Debbie?

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. I mean, I'm hearing it so much, the word overwhelm from so many clients right now. I think people are already busy with so many different [00:05:00] pressures and then you add the pandemic and all this, the other stressors in the world, it just feels like a pressure cooker. And yeah, I mean, I was just thinking about your recent episode on sleep, which I loved highly recommend and how in general my sleep has been okay.

But I had a night the other day where I just woke up and all the weight of everything just, you know, hit me in the middle of the night and I could feel the stress flowing and a million things hanging over my head. I just, I think overwhelmed is the word that I would use. And it was the middle of the night as usual.

How about you?

Diana Hill: Yeah, I feel overlapped a lot of days. And for me, it's really impacting some of my interactions with my family. I'll homeschool in the morning and then see clients and then have all my emails and all it make dinner, all the things that we used to not have to do as much as we have to do right now, everything is a little bit harder.

And. Just yesterday. I came up from work and my littlest said to me, he wanted to tell me the story of Hanukkah. And I looked at him like he was asking the [00:06:00] most demanding task of me, like, like to do his taxes or something. And I felt so bad because I could see the disappointment on his face, right that we're not only are we feeling overwhelmed and stressed, but we're, there's these spillover effects that when we get stressed, we spill it over to our family or maybe other people at the grocery store.

And we're, co-regulating each other in this stressful way. But I, what I liked about the episode and, and Rebekkah's approach is that she takes more of a body-based response to stress, which I think can be really helpful right now. And I think there's different aspects that I'm using both with myself, as well as with my clients to do more body-based work, to help with the immensity of the stress that we're feeling.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. I mean, I think I would not describe myself as a somatic therapist, like she is in that sense, but I, I bring those body practices in as well, more and more over the years, just tuning in to the body as a source of information. And also there is something about doing that, that really shifts the perspective to some [00:07:00] other information, because when we're stressed, we tend to be just so much racing through our minds.

And there's something about tuning into the body that can just really help. Sort of ground you in the midst of the chaos of life.

Diana Hill: Yeah. I feel like one of those bobbleheads toys where your head is so, so big, and you're just walking around all on your head and then forgetting to, to go into our body. And I think that doing some embodiment check-ins throughout our day, and sometimes I'll do this with clients just throughout our session of noticing what's happening in your body, the stress, the tension being aware of it, to get you out of your head and more into your body can be really helpful.

I also think it can be really helpful. To have those embodiment check-ins because it can help us with being more aware of our needs and Rick Hanson, who's been on the show and who's going to be in our upcoming summit. Talks about this in terms of the three basic human needs, which are, we need to feel safe, we need to feel connected, and we need to feel like we have enough resources. And [00:08:00] when those feel threatened, we get into often into stress. So using a sort of awareness of how can we cultivate more safety in the present moment can be helpful. How can we turn towards connection and thinking about maybe using imagery of somebody that you love or actually taking more action to make sure we're keeping connected because the ways in which we are communicating with each other have really been altered by the pandemic, we're not, we don't hear the soothing voice or see the smiles in the same way that we used to. And then finally, Being able to linger on, do I have enough resources in the here and now, because I think people feel really threatened about the future and things.

How long is this going to go on, how is this going to impact my business and in the here and now, where can I feel enoughness in my body and really linger on that, embody that feeling of enoughness for 10 to 12 seconds so that it actually gets shifted into your brain and in your memory.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. You know, I think to me, stress is. Part of life, right. We're never going [00:09:00] to totally be stress-free. We wouldn't want to be stress-free. But I do think that sometimes when stress feels too high, we can actually look to that as a source of information about our needs. Right? So sometimes actually stress can teach us that we're in a situation that's not good for us.

Toxic levels of stress, you know, it might be systemic. It might be that we've just been taking on too much. And I think sometimes actually, Stress can be an indicator that we need to make a change. We need to say, no, we need to just recognize that this isn't because we're failing to handle it all. It's because it's actually too much.

And I think the pandemic is a great example of that, right? Like just to go easy on ourselves at times when it feels like, Oh, I should, I should be doing all these things. And it's like, actually, maybe it's okay that I'm not given the situation and how highly stressful it is.

Like it's okay to say no, it's okay to. let go of a few tasks.

Diana Hill: Yeah, I think part of that is if you're expecting yourself to be performing in the same [00:10:00] way that you performed before a pandemic, you're going to constantly feel like you're not measuring up. And if you're expecting others to do that too, it can be, it can

be toxic for them. So we need to, we need to look towards changing our expectations, both for ourselves and for each other.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Diana, what are some of the ways you incorporate these practices into your work?

Diana Hill: It's interesting. I've been doing more yoga and breathing in my sessions than I've ever done before. And sometimes it's just doing a five count breath in and a five count breath out at the beginning of a session to orient ourselves and actually activate that vagus nerve. That will be something I do quite frequently.

I also am working a lot on, uh, compassion and seeing compassion both for ourselves and for others as a way of regulating the threat and drive systems. So that Paul Gilbert model of when we feel connected and interconnected, it actually makes us feel safer. So doing compassion based exercises, which is another [00:11:00] one, and then just a lot of present moment grounding stuff. How about you, Debbie?

Debbie Sorensen: similar. I mean, I think the main thing I do is just these kind of check-ins having people turn their attention toward what's happening in their body as a way, again, of kind of grounding themselves in there. It's, uh, it's really a body-based mindfulness exercise, but I think when your mind is getting carried away with the stress of it all, that can be a really helpful practice to do, just those simple embodiment exercises in the moment in therapy. well. If you're stressed during this holiday season, we are thinking of you and we hope that you find something helpful in this conversation.

Diana Hill: And as Debbie would say, go easy on yourself.

Debbie Sorensen: Rebekkah LaDyne has spent 25 years in the field of embodied wellbeing. After working in therapeutic mindfulness 15 years, she studied mind body medicine at Saybrook University and conducted clinical research in somatic self regulation based on her research in [00:12:00] mind-body medicine, her comprehensive training with the somatic experiencing Institute and her decades of professional experience.

She authored the mind body stress reset with a foreword by Kathy cane and endorsed by Peter Levine. In addition to her book, she has recorded several wellness. CDs appears on the radio and YouTube as a somatic wellness specialist, she meets with clients online from all over the globe. Rebekkah lives with her husband, two daughters and their puppy dog in the San Francisco Bay area.

And her website is Rebekkah Iodine.com, which is R E B E K K H L a D Y N e.com. Welcome to the podcast, Rebekkah. It's great to have you here.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Thanks Debbie. It's great to be here.

Debbie Sorensen: So we're going to start with a conversation today about stress and overwhelm and using mind body practices to help folks with that.

And I just, before we dive in, I want to just let folks know that we will be doing an [00:13:00] exercise brief exercise at the end of the interview. So stay tuned if you want to try putting some of this into practice.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Absolutely.

Debbie Sorensen: Great. So stress and overwhelm. This is something that a lot of folks are going to be familiar with.

It seems like it's a, maybe a very common, almost an epidemic of its own, right?

Rebekkah LaDyne: Absolutely.

I do. Yeah. I referenced it in the book as its own pandemic. It's something that is so widespread. Cross-cultural happening to most of us. At some point in our lives, it will touch us. And now with what we're living through.

Absolutely. It's touching more and more people all the time. It's really important that we gained some skills for how to help ourselves through difficult experiences. Absolutely.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I'm glad you're doing this work. And actually I'm wondering if you would mind sharing a little bit about your own personal story of how you became interested in this, because I think people will be able to relate to [00:14:00] it.

I know you share a little bit

about it in your book.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Absolutely. Sure. So. What happened for me is, um, I think it's pretty typical. If you a person listening, replace your own life experiences, the specifics of them with mine, it was a perfect storm of stress. It was, um, stress compiling from many different parts of my life.

And for me, what it was, um, was leaving a successful and satisfying career. Having children moving to a new state and then finally ending up in a toxic work environment. So putting all of those things together created such an intense stress load that my system couldn't handle. It couldn't regulate through it.

Couldn't find how to come back. And so again, listeners you'll have your own set of several. Events that create [00:15:00] so much reactivity in your system that you find yourself overwhelmed with stress response, overwhelmed with how can I come back from this reactivity? How can I return to. Uh, disposition of okayness or a baseline that has me functioning.

Um, but what I know about that now is that those experiences were really just waking what we could call the sleeping dragon. Those experiences are really just waking up. Years, past reactivity that had been stored in my body and those somatic memories were, I like to think of them as they were just waiting for the right time.

They were waiting for a moment in my life when I had capacity. To work through them as I didn't have when they originally imprinted in my system as a young person [00:16:00] and they were waiting for a time when the stress actually was just similar enough, just similar enough and also heavy enough or intense enough to remind my system, Hey, this is still here.

This is still here and it hasn't been resolved in the book. I liken it to us, a child waiting quietly in the back of the class, not bothering anybody, wondering when will it be my turn to get my, to get help, to get my questions answered. And in this case, the questions are, how can I learn how to recover from extreme stress reactivity?

Um, At the time that any of us are going through this, I, myself, the clients I've worked with the colleagues I've talked to wonder, you know, why is this happening? What's wrong with me. I wish this wasn't happening. Of course it's a painful experience where we're all gonna feel that way. But I think if we can.

[00:17:00] Create a little space in that to say, okay, this has been here. This has been here for a while and it's been waiting patiently for a chance to be processed for a chance to, um, gain efficacy over this experience. Let me. Use this to my advantage. Let me, I don't know if embrace is too strong a word, but, but let me welcome the fact that this is happening and this is giving me a chance to become effective at stress resilience in a way that I wasn't, when these imprints originally occurred for me.

And so for most of us, that's early in our life. Um, and then these, these difficulties come up when we're adults, many people say, you know, I don't really even understand why this is happening. The things that kind of tipped it off, weren't quote that bad. Um, and, and so stress reactivity can function that way.

Years later, decades later, we can have [00:18:00] a handful of experiences that are, let's say that the number of them is sufficient to create overwhelm, or we can have an experience. One experience that is big enough, that in and of itself, it can create overwhelm. Or it can just be repeated. There can be kind of medium high stress.

That's repeated for a long enough period of time that it creates overwhelm. And in any of those circumstances, we're going to wake up the sleeping dragon of, of those things that we weren't able to process through. Earlier in our lives that we didn't have self-efficacy that we didn't have capacity. We didn't have autonomy.

We didn't have agency in the ways we have now. And, and this is now the chance to change those imprints. This is now the chance to make it function differently in our body and our mind.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay. I see. So it's like, there's something, the sleeping dragon is, [00:19:00] um, it's like, this is

something that we can

learn, but

we sometimes just.

Don't really bother because we're kind of holding it together. But then when either whether it's a big. Traumatic stress or just that chronic stress, eventually it kind of starts to just take a toll. It sounds like.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Yeah. Yeah. It's the three things I like to say, or it can be something that is just too big that happens.

It can be things, a combination of things that are just too much or it can be too often. So. Too big, too much too often are things that create or awakened stress imprints that are already there, that our body system, our mind system lose the ability to effectively recover from.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay. We all have stress. Of course, it's part of life.

It's part of living and engaging in things that matter to us. And it's not always a problem, but there [00:20:00] is. I mean, I hear this word overwhelm a lot because I think there is something that can happen where the stress just becomes so much. Can you just describe a little bit about what, what does overwhelm really mean to you and how is it different from just the regular day to day stress?

Of living a life.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Yes. Overwhelmed to me has to do with the experience of not having the ability to manage your own stress reaction. So, you know, I'm. Late for a meeting. I forgot my masks pandemic time. I'm trying to figure out how I can navigate this difficult situation and still get to the person that I need to meet outdoor.

And at distance, I'm going to have a stress reaction. I'm going to my heart. Rate's going to increase my body. Temperature might rise. I might feel some muscle tension. My mind start to, [00:21:00] might start to work a little more quickly. No problem. This is a healthy, normal stress reaction. If I become overwhelmed by that experience, my.

Body-mind system is going to react in a way that isn't warranted by that situation. So I might begin to have a panic attack. I would I'm hyperventilating to the point of not being able to function my, I break into a cold sweat. I go into a freeze. I can't think I can't remember where I'm going. I can't find solutions to my dilemma.

Overwhelm is when the system is responding. Well, overwhelm is when the system can't take the stress reaction that the stress that's occurring. Maybe there are too many external stresses that are occurring all at once. And the system becomes overwhelmed by that. Or maybe there are too many internal stress responses happening all at once and the system becomes overwhelmed by that.

So [00:22:00] if you think of it as like a pot that's boiling over, maybe the pot is too full of contents. That's. Internal stress response, or maybe the heat outside the pot's too high. And I need to turn it down. So either I need to take some things out of the pot. I need to lessen those internal stressors sponsors, or I need to turn the heat down outside.

I need to figure out how to lessen what's happening around me and those two things. The combination of them create an experience where I can't respond in a way that is. A helpful response when I'm overwhelmed. When any of us is overwhelmed, our body mind system is reacting in a way that isn't helpful.

It's overreacting or under-reacting right. That's hyperactivation or hypo activation. And then we're not, we're not effective. We're not meeting the situation with what it needs and what we need in order to be where we are with what's happening.

Diana Hill: We've had a number of guests on the show that we've been inspired by, [00:23:00] and that are offering you our listeners discounts on their programs. If you go to our website offtheclockpsych.com, you'll be able to find coupon codes for the programs of Dr. Judson Brewer, Dr. Rick Hanson and Jen Lumenlun. So go check it out at, offtheclockpsych.com and start learning today.

Debbie Sorensen: Can

you tell us, so

what do you mean by, hyper activation? What might that look like? And then the hypo activation.

Rebekkah LaDyne: So if I'm overwhelmed and I move into hyperactivation, my mind is going to race. My heart is going to pound, my stomach might move into knots and I'm going to move into fight or flight.

Okay. So I'm going to try and battle my way through this experience. So if I'm like I was saying, driving down the highway and I realized they don't have masks and I'm late to the person I need to meet, I might start to drive like a maniac and shouted every other car on the road. We've all seen [00:24:00] drivers like that.

That's a person in hyperactivation. They are struggling to manage their reactivity. I might then, you know, Cut off someone and park my car and the spot they were waiting patiently for. Hyperactivation I might get out of the car and start grumbling or kind of dismissing the people around me. I was in downtown in the town.

I live in yesterday and someone shouted at me and my daughters. As we were staff standing on the sidewalk, they were parking their car. We weren't doing it. Anything in their direction, but they were in a state of hyperactivation. Okay. So it's just to recognize, okay, stress levels are high right now everywhere.

And let's just go inside the bookstore that we're standing in front of. Right. But hyperactivation is going to move someone into fight. So the other option for hyperactivation is they might move into flight. And if you're moving into flight reactivity, your whole body is urging you to get out of the situation that you're in.

So you might. Drop the [00:25:00] appointment that you're going to altogether, that's, that's a no-show right. Or you, we can, that's an external flight where I just disappear and don't complete the task, but there's also an internal flight where I kind of just disappear. I kind of just disconnect from what's happening.

I'm meeting someone, but I'm not really there. We've all had that happen either to us or within us. So those are the hyperactivation ends of reactivity.

Debbie Sorensen: And I, one of the words that you used to describe it that I love, cause I think it really is accurate you at one point in your book, you call it kind of spinning out.

And I have heard that from a lot of people where it just feels like

when

you're in that, that kind of fight or flight mode, it's like you're spinning,

you know, the whole world just feel

like you can't even kind of focus and make sense of it.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Yeah, exactly. And so it's. Another way to think about it is it's all gas.

Okay. So spinning, you're spinning in circles with your foot, just pedal to the metal gas. Okay. [00:26:00] On the other end of the spectrum, hypo activation bats are freeze and shut down. So I'm going down the road. I'm realizing I'm late. I don't have masks. I freeze, I panic. I, I can't solve the problem. I don't know what I'm going to do in order to get through this dilemma or situation in a freeze.

I like to distinguish between these two, there's a subtle difference in a freeze. My external. Presentation is that, um, Um, statue still hoping no one will notice me evolutionarily. I'm just like, if they can't see me because they can't locate me because of my stillness, maybe this whole thing will end and I'll be fine.

Right. Um, there are many predators that can't recognize their prey. If they're not moving so evolutionarily, we just hold still hold our breath and [00:27:00] hope it all passes quickly. But under that freeze, there's actually tremendous activation. So it looks like the brake is being slammed on, but there's so much fear coursing through that system.

There's so much reactivity coursing through that system. That's the stuff that tends to wake you up. At two in the morning later, is that unresolved, hyper response buried under all of that frozen freezy stillness. Okay. The further end of that spectrum is shut down. That's where you are so stressed. You, you hardly know where you are, who you are or what you're trying to do.

That's when you just can't think clearly you hardly know what's going on. You can't solve the problem. There's disconnection to you, to the people around you, to the circumstance. It's a very difficult state to be in, and it's, there's almost no functioning available to you. And people feel very stuck in that state.

Like they want to be effective and they want to have [00:28:00] agency, but there's this disconnecting shutdown that overtakes them. That's what happens when the system is so overwhelmed by stress, that the only thing the system can think to do is just turn off its awareness of the stress. Just completely disconnect from everything that's happening and, you know, kind of go into a hibernation state, ready to come out when it's all over.

Yeah.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. I mean, I think I just can think of some examples where you maybe a little bit. Less extreme, but where people just are sorta checked out, you know, you can tell they're not quite processing what's happening.

I mean, it probably happens to all

of us from time to time.

Rebekkah LaDyne: All of these things happen to all of us from time to time and they're normal.

And they're even healthy. There are circumstances in which we would want to have each of these responses. However, when they happen, in situations where they're not warranted. And when they happen repeatedly, when they seem to be our go-to [00:29:00], that's something that our body is telling us.

There's dysregulation in this system, I'm responding to normal life events. Like the house is on fire, and I need to do something to change that. Right. So, you know, I talk about in the book, if you're answering emails or paying bills, or just trying to make an appointment with a friend and you're moving into extreme stress reactivity, your body's telling you something it's telling you that when it wants to engage slightly.

Just enough to answer an email just enough to make an appointment. Your body goes into all systems, go reactivity. Like you're saying into complete spinning. That's where we lose our capacity to modulate. We lose that subtle responsiveness that. We need to be effective and, and to feel good in our life circumstances, being in extreme stress reactivity, it feels painful on whichever end of the spectrum.

You're on. It's a, it's a painful, uncomfortable experience because [00:30:00] our body thinks our life is in danger. And that's not something that you just kind of sit down and relax from after it's all over. That's really, it's taxing in a way that. Those of us that have lived through it can understand any of you out there.

You, if you know the experience of deep depletion, deep exhaustion after what seemed like just normal life events, that's your body moving into extreme stress reactivity, and it's taking a toll. We want to learn how to modulate our experience had to just have the response that's needed. Show up in a way that our body can handle that our mind can be.

Alert and engaged, but not in fear or in, like we're saying disconnection.

Debbie Sorensen: Is that what

you call in your book? Functional activation that state that you're talking. Tell us a little bit more about that. What does that mean?

Rebekkah LaDyne: So we've just talked about kind of above and below, right? Hyperactivation [00:31:00] is that's a really high level of reactivity hypo activation.

Is this very low level in the middle there. Functional activation because activation isn't negative. That's what I really want to underscore. Peter Levine talks about this in his work. Stephen Porges talks about this activation is a likeness activation is when we're having fun activation is when we're engaging in talking with friends activation is when we're going to an event that we're excited about activation is even just alertness, the alertness that draws you into a good book.

Okay. And so. Functional activation is when you are engaged, when you are present, when you feel your body is awake and alive. When you're, when you're in that kind of pleasant present moment experience. That's functional activation. And we want access to that. We're not trying to go through the world on some kind of dull subdued, you know, [00:32:00] monotone experience, but for people, for whom this stress reactivity is really deeply imprinted.

It's a very deep physiological habit. When they move into some kind of engagement, what we would call functional activation. It can. Tip them very easily into that hyper or hypo place. So one person I worked with gave me this example, it's happened to many people. I've learned since then, several clients have talked to me about this is going to a concert.

I mean, now no one's going to concerts, but we all remember when we would go to a concert. It's an exciting event. You get your tickets in advance, you plan the evening. It's something to look forward to. And the excitement of going to do something that you've been looking forward to, and that, you know, kind of brings this whole Hadid awakes tips.

A person into one of my clients had a panic attack at a concert. He was just [00:33:00] there, ready to hear his favorite song and the increase in his heart rate and the, even the way that we become in a negative light, we call it hypervigilant. But in a positive light, we call it attentive. Even in the way we become attentive to seeing and hearing can feel to our stresses.

Awesome. Like, Hmm. Am I beginning to scan? Am I beginning to vigilantly? Watch my environment and it tipped him into a hyper activated state. There is, uh, an interesting study of combat veterans who were sent into a safe environment to exercise. And so they were jogging in the woods and once their heart rate got to a certain level body temperature to a certain degree, breathing rate increased to a certain degree, they moved into hyperactivation.

They were jogging in the woods in a [00:34:00] safe, beautiful environment. This was a purely physical cue that sent them into. A response, similar to what they experienced in combat. So our body sends messages to our brain. Hey, my heart rate is increasing to a certain degree. Is there danger? Lurking? Hey, I'm starting to hyperventilate even if the ventilation is because I'm running.

Healthfully through the forest. Is there something happening here that I need to be aware of? Our body is sending messages up to our brain all day long, all the time. And so if we're a person for whom these stress reactive States are really available. As I talk about in the book, our body might send messages that cue.

Extreme reactivity when all we're doing is exercising or all we're doing is going to a concert or for some people, you know, all we're doing is giving a presentation at work, right? So we need to pay attention to do I have access to [00:35:00] functional activation. Can I stay embodied? And present and feeling safe and calm enough and okay.

Enough, but still be engaged, but still feel like I'm really with what is happening. I don't have to disconnect in order to stay safe, nor do I have to battle my way through it in order to stay safe. Right. That's the freeze shut down side or the fight-flight side for that. I can actually just be. They're really present really with my life.

That's I think what we want that's I think what this extreme stress reactivity is keeping us from. Yeah. Keeping us from being able to really be where we are.

Debbie Sorensen: And your approach really harnesses again, the body, you know, the mind body, you call it, the mind, body stress reset. And before we talk about that, I just, I think [00:36:00] often the, when we're feeling stressed when we're feeling overwhelmed.

We try to think our way out of it. And for example, for those of us who occasionally find ourselves late at night, just the mind is. You know, trying really hard to figure this out, right? So we get really into overthinking about it and we're trying to solve our stress problem, you know, intellectually. Why do you think that those types of approaches can sometimes just miss the Mark in terms of.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Absolutely. Yes, this is such a great question. So there we are. Some of us in the middle of the night and the mind is spinning as we were talking about before spinning indicates to our stress system. Hmm. I wonder if something's wrong. As we were talking about before the body sending messages. Right. So the body and the mind are constantly communicating with one another about the level of okayness, the level of safety that we feel is available to us.

If my mind is spinning my body's going to cue into that and wonder. [00:37:00] Is something happening around me that shouldn't be happening around me, just from the rumination, just from the way I'm mentally hypervigilant at that time. So that's the first thing is that mental rumination and hypervigilance is going to send cues to my body that something might be wrong.

The other thing that happens is that our stress reactivity is designed to go through experience that have a beginning. A middle and an end. And if I'm lying in my bed spinning in circles, there's no end to that reactivity. Okay. So I don't see something difficult, respond to it with intensity and then finish.

In the book I talk about how evolutionarily Robert Sapolsky explains we're meant to flee from a predator and then recognize we've gotten away or safe. Find a good place to settle down, take a breath, congratulate ourselves for [00:38:00] our earned safety and rest. When we're laying in bed in the middle of the night, ruminating.

We don't get to that place. We don't get to the end. The third difficulty is that we have these incredible imaginations and these incredible imaginations can take us to wonderful places and invent all kinds of things that we, human beings have invented over the spirit of time, but they can also take us to terrible destinations.

Okay. And what's. Unfortunate is that when we are in a state of stress, we are tuned into negative bias and our mind is going to jump to worst case scenarios, negative conclusion, over and over again. And each of those worst case scenarios that plays out in our mind is going to alert our stress system.

Again, things really are going South then a more difficult. What if is going to pop into the mind? That circles back into the body and [00:39:00] around and around, it goes amplifying our stress. So because of these dispositions, this is evolution playing out in our body and our modern night in our bed at two in the morning.

But because of these evolutionary dispositions, trying to think our way through it and solve it right there while lying still. Is intensely stressful for our system. So what can we do? Let's think about doing the opposite. Okay. So let's start with our imagination. We can recognize. Wow. I really am in a negative bias mind state right now.

Let me, I like to talk about evening the scales, right? If you think about the old fashioned scales, we have a basket on each side. The basket of negative, what ifs? This is really heavy. We've definitely covered that one in spades. Can I bring in some positive what ifs and this isn't [00:40:00] Pollyanna ish. I'm not pretending everything's rosy and perfect, but I'm just evening out.

What's running through my mind and therefore running through my body. So, so I'm just wanting to even out what's happening in my body and my mind can I. Can I consider how it might go. Okay. Whatever it is that I'm ruminating about. And if my mind is willing to maybe I'll just let myself imagine a positive outcome.

What I talk about in the book is that negative images have a tremendous impact on our body mind system, but positive images do also. So if we let ourselves picture something going really well and then let ourselves feel. Ha, how did that impact me then I'm referring back to the first one I talked about, which is what's going on in our mind has a deep impact on what's going on in our body.

And I let myself feel, yeah, that one feels really good. That version of things calms me at [00:41:00] two in the morning. Then I'm changing that body mind conversation for the better I'm changing it. Not to pretend like I said that everything's perfect and rosy, but that I can sooth my system. That I can let myself come back to a state that it probably is a more balanced response.

I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow with such and such, whatever I'm worried about. Can I let my system feel the potential for okayness as equally as it's already focused on the potential for not okayness, right? And with that self-regulation then I can get back to sleep, wake up in the morning and respond.

Instead of react from some kind of doomsday experience or body-mind state.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, it's almost like you're broadening your perspective to look. I think we get into this tunnel

vision around the, like you said, the worst case scenario. We love to do this at 2:00 AM and then you're kind of taking a look, you know, kind of expanding [00:42:00] into other possibilities as well.

Rebekkah LaDyne: That's exactly it. Debbie, in the book I talk exactly about that tunnel vision that you're referencing. And our mind is designed to move into tunnel vision. When we're in States of high stress. If I was being chased by a predator, I'm not going to look around and notice the beautiful foliage I need to focus solely on that predator.

So I tune everything else out for my survival. And when I am actually in a life-threatening circumstance, I say, great. Let me move into tunnel vision and be really effective and safe myself. However, when I'm not in life-threatening circumstances, this tunnel vision is a detriment. As you're saying, we need to, I call it the end.

Also, we need to widen out and ask ourselves, and also what else is happening. And also, what else am I aware of? So simple, but very effective. If I'm lying in bed at two in the morning, and [00:43:00] also what else is happening. Oh, I feel the comfort of the mattress beneath me. And also what else is happening. My blankets are warm and also what else is happening?

It's quiet outside my window. And also what else is happening. I'm orienting to my environment in this case, which is one of the skills I talk about in the book. And then I'm going to orient to my by bodily experience. And also I feel there's just a little bit of ease in my. Belly as, Hey, focus on the quiet outside my window.

And also there's just a little bit less tension in my jaw or my neck as I feel the mattress underneath me. So want to change the mind conversation from first, I was focused on, Oh my gosh, this is going to fail. Or this is going to be a catastrophe. And my body was contracting and I was just in that negative loop of things, feeling worse.

And then my mind mentally [00:44:00] sounding worse. Let's do the opposite. I call this a positive feedback loop. I feel the mattress. Then I noticed my shoulders stuff in and I begin

to be aware. There's like, you're saying I can widen out and see what else might be possible with this circumstance that I'm worried about.

Debbie Sorensen: You know, even as you're talking, my dog keeps barking and I was getting this stress response, but you're talking about just kind of checking in with what you're noticing. And I was just feeling that kind of happening. Cause I'm sitting here thinking. Why she bark it, you know what I mean? I can feel that happening. It's kind of nice to hear you just kind of tune in and say, okay, what else is here besides the dog barking?

Rebekkah LaDyne: Yeah. And so those that's such a good example because you know, we're having this conversation. We want the sound recording to be good. The dog is barking and you have a momentary reaction and then all of your great self-regulation comes on board and you ask yourself, what else.

Is happening. And [00:45:00] as you were describing our listeners, can't see it. But I see you settled down into your seat, right? There was ease in your body. You have access to all that. Great. Self-regulation, you're embodying that return to okayness right here before our very eyes. This is really valuable for us to talk about because.

It can be a period in our life where enough things happen in a row that are about as stressful as the dog barking during a podcast interview, but they keep happening and they keep happening and we don't access our somatic regulation. We don't access our return to okayness and suddenly not very much feels okay anymore.

So that's what I'm really talking about with the mind body stress reset is if you listeners have lived through or are currently living through a period of your life where your body keeps feeling like things, aren't okay. Things aren't safe, enough things aren't in things [00:46:00] aren't. Allowing you to feel welcome in your experience, that is a level of stress reactivity that you shouldn't have to live through, that you shouldn't have to push through.

Let's get you some tools so that you can access your somatic regulation. You can return to wellbeing and recover from these normal everyday things that happen in human existence. That facilitate there, create reactivity. Yeah,

Debbie Sorensen: your, your approach is really, that's kind of what it's about, right? Just tuning more into your body, your direct felt experience.

And I think one thing I've noticed for myself and, and, you know, sometimes in my work with clients, I, I, we work on this too, but is that there is something about just settling in just kind of paying attention to what's happening. In the body that really does, you know, there's a shift that happens. Um, so I was just wondering if you could kind of briefly tell us kind of an [00:47:00] overview of this approach and, and some of the kinds of things you do, and also, you know, just a bit more about why that helps with the stress and overwhelm.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Yeah. Let me start with the brain. Cause you were kind of talking about something that really relates to this fascinating. Neural pathway that we can access. And then I'll talk more broadly about a somatic approach. So what you're saying is, um, it's really true settling into the body can have a profound effect on us.

And I want to put a caveat to that after we've developed those resilience pathways. So for people who are listening, who are thinking, well, I try to settle into my body and it doesn't help at all. Yes. That is absolutely true. If you are living in extreme stress, just turning to the body, isn't going to feel like enough.

You need to develop those resilience pathways. And there are numerous tools, 10 or 12 tools in the book that I talk about that you can work with on your own. That really do help. Repair your resilience pathways that really do help you return to an [00:48:00] experience of feeling that coming into a embodied experience is one that suits the system.

So I want to say it's not inherent, but it is something that we can. Burn or develop in our system. Okay. So the mind this incredible medial prefrontal cortex, right this middle front brain has these two channels that kind of can go off in one of two directions. And this is something that I learned by studying the work of Bessel van der Kolk.

We can move into. On one branch. What we were just talking about, which is rumination and the research shows, it's often self-directed criticism that this particular kind of rumination that intensifies reactivity in the system. So I can kind of worry about myself and criticize myself and my own experience and move into States of stress reactivity, or the medial prefrontal cortex can do this other incredible thing.

[00:49:00] Which is somatic self sensing. If I'm tuned into sensing my body, but not just anything in my body, because I could sense tension and my stomach heart-pounding 10 straw. And that would send me into more reactivity. But if I can move into somatic self sensing, that is soothing. If I can learn how to notice, like we were saying the end also.

My feet feel okay right now, my eyebrows are relaxed. And I mean that it's sometimes I work with clients and I say, is there any part of your body that's a little less reactive, a little less tense than another. And they say my nose. And that's where we start. We start with the tip of my nose is a little less tense than my stomach, my chest, my back, my, what have you.

If we can tune in somatically to what's okay. Even just, okay. Ish. As I talk about in the book, that's where [00:50:00] we start. If that's where we start, we can send these important messages to the brain that we don't need to invest in that branch of rumination. We don't need to continue to reflect on what we might have done wrong or what so-and-so might have done wrong.

What might be just. Going wrong that we all know what rumination sounds like. So this is this, this powerful tool because the medial prefrontal it doesn't do both at the same time. So we're kind of saying, Hey, instead of moving into rumination, how about we move into somatic awareness instead, specifically somatic awareness of what's.

Okay. What's safe enough. What's pleasant enough. So that's this one part of why this. This particular approach is so effective, there really are neural. Connections and explanations for it. Um, the other thing is that our body responds to our environment and to [00:51:00] even images of our environment, what we think might be happening before our mind does our bodies actually our first responder team and then our mind.

Comes in and starts to tell us stories about it or make sense of it. Our, our mind is a meaning-making machine. So if our body has a response, that is, um, Quick fire, uh, gut sense. Something's not okay here. Our minds going to do some things valuable, which is assess the situation and figure out how to get out of it, what to do to remain safe.

But if my, uh, so Stephen Portus calls this neuroception. This is our embodied perception of our environment. If that's nervous system perception. If my body is inaccurate, if my body is in a state of hyperactivation and I'm vigilant and tunnel visioned, as we were saying for things [00:52:00] that are not okay. And there's just one part of the environment, that's a little questionable, but I key in on it.

My body's going to tell me things aren't okay. In situations in which they actually are. Okay. And because it's the first responder, I'm going to find myself in more and more circumstances where I feel. And I do mean we really feel it's all very real. We feel like things aren't okay, but we need to repair that neuro septic system.

We need to heal it so that it can more accurately perceive through the body what's happening around us. So when we're in. Extreme stress reactivity. When, when we live in that state, many, many things feel like they're not safe enough. And again, I've lived this, I know what this is like. And even though my, my mind was saying, Hey, you know what things really are.

Okay. I promise you. They are, my body was unconvinced. that's how I came to this place where I needed to find, how can [00:53:00] I access something that's going to convince my body, not my mind. My brain knows things are okay, but my body does not.

That's what's so different about a somatic approach is most of the clients, all the clients that I've worked with, they of course recognized to some degree or to a large degree that. Their stress reaction system isn't accurate, but they can't seem to find a way to talk themselves out of that stress reaction.

So what a sematic approach does is it really helps you slowly heal that neuro septic system by repairing the way that your body. Feels about the situations at sin. It's too much for me to deduce to a few sentences, but what I can say is we can't talk our way out of, and we can't think our way out of a [00:54:00] physical stress reaction, a physical fear reaction, or a physical shutdown reaction.

We have to go into the body and help our body recover. The felt experience the lived experience of accessing safety of really. Embodying wellbeing. What I, the reason I wrote the book is because I wanted folks to know I was in graduate school. I researched with the group of people.

Can these skills be taught? Can people self administer sematic skills? So I developed the protocol called the mind body reset and tested it out with a group of people. And the answer was unequivocally. Yes. The group had very good responses and we discovered, yes, you can learn these tools and teach your body how to recover from stress response, how to so mathematically engage [00:55:00] in the world in a way that feels good.

Feels safe. Feels. Present and aware and awake, but not overwhelmed, not overstimulated and, and not kind of distanced and behind as if you're living behind glass.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, wonderful. I mean, people should definitely check out your book with, you know, you have some breathing practice, some movement practices, some different

ways of checking in with the body and to wrap up, you had offered to give just a small flavor of that.

Just one brief exercise. And of course there's much more to

it so people can,

can reach out, can check out your book to learn more, find the of therapist, you know, but just give us a little flavor for what this. This is approach is like.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Like I'd love to, I'm so glad we're going to do this because we can talk about it all day, but less someone has a felt experience of it.

It won't mean that much.

Debbie Sorensen: All right. You got experience it. We've been taught, [00:56:00] right.

Rebekkah LaDyne: So

Debbie Sorensen: wonderful.

Rebekkah LaDyne: I'm so glad you saved time for this. So let's go through a brief exercise that I do with many of the people I work with. And that I myself do in shorter and longer versions throughout the day. This is just something simple that you can take with you.

And it touches on several of the pathways that can help us return to a felt sense of ease, a felt sense of wellbeing. So together, we're going to go through a few practices they're just short and brief touching in on. Somatic regulation. And I want you listeners to play with this and see which of them is actually most soothing for you because each body mind system will find its own approaches that are most satisfying at one particular time or over the long haul.

They remain more. Effective for you. So [00:57:00] feel your way into this and see what's right for you right now, or in general. So let's begin by focusing on our breath and taking a few long breaths with complete exhales. Okay.

Really allowing the breath out to be full and complete and then relaxing and letting the next breath in happen on its own.

and begin to notice what happens in your body with those long exhales begin to notice how that feels in your body.

Shift your awareness now to your seat. Paying attention to the surface underneath you and the surface behind you [00:58:00] noticing if there are places where you're able to release into those surfaces feeling as if you can let gravity move through you.

See if there's any part of your body where you feel rooted or pleasantly weighted, like you're really sitting into the seat, the surface, or standing onto the surface that you're on right now. Just notice how that feels.

and now let's shift awareness to the soundscape, letting yourself hear any sounds in the environment that are neutral, or maybe even pleasing,

[00:59:00] just noticing if there's anything that ears can take in that they enjoy.

and sense how that feels. What's it like to pay attention to the soundscape? Is there anywhere in the body where it's a comfortable experience or maybe just a neutral experience

and now let's pay attention to the visual landscape. Letting her eyes take a look around your environment to see something they enjoy.

notice what it's like to let your eyes rest on something that's pleasing. Maybe it's something in the room that you're in or outside. If you're in a room or just outside, wherever you are.

[01:00:00] See what it's like to have the eyes take in something they enjoy.

and then again, just returned to how this feels in the body. What's it like right now?

Can you sense anywhere that's pleasant or if pleasant isn't available? Anything? That's mostly. Okay. We'll take that. We'll start with whatever's here. That's not distressing. We'll just mostly. Okay, great. Let's start there.

so I, myself feel a shift each time I go through those things. Debbie, I'm wondering how that impacted you. What was that like?

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, it really did change my focus. I

started to

notice the world around me. [01:01:00] I noticing

beautiful scenery out

my

window and it did.

Yeah. I just felt much more kind

of calm and centered.

I really appreciated hearing that

Rebekkah LaDyne: exercise. Yeah. That's so glad. Yeah. And so listeners pay attention to how that impacted you because going through our somatic self-regulation skills, that's kind of step one. But then taking in the positive impact of them is very important step to letting yourself feel the experience of increased regulation of increased okayness.

That's what imprinted into the body. That's what lets our body remember. This is a place I can find. This is a place I can return to. Yes.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate it, listeners. I hope you found that enjoyable and can take a moment to appreciate that and let it imprint a little.

Rebekkah LaDyne: Absolutely. Yeah. Thanks so [01:02:00] much for this conversation, Debbie. It was great to talk with you today.

Debbie Sorensen: Oh, it was wonderful.

Thank you, Rebekkah. Really appreciate you

Diana Hill: coming on. Thank you for listening to psychologist off the clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

Yael Schonbrun: You can find us wherever you get your podcasts and you can connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Jill Stoddard: We'd like to thank our strategic consultant, Michael Herold and our interns, Katy Rothfelder and Melissa Miller.

Debbie Sorensen: This podcast is for informational and entertainment purposes only and is not meant to be a substitute for mental health treatment. If you're having a mental health emergency dial 911 if you're looking for mental health treatment, please visit the resources page of our web page offtheclockpsych.com