

Thrive 365

Dragonfly: Impact Education



Did you know?

In the 1990s Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda conducted what would go on to be a ground-breaking study on Adverse Childhood Experiences – or ACEs[1]. Their results were so powerful that ‘they stunned us’; according to Anda: the higher the ACE score the worse the outcome on almost every chronic disease and addictive behaviour. The damage to the mind and body caused by ACEs is not as a result of one-off periods of stress, but of the body’s reaction to chronic stress. The way our body manages stress is called ‘allostasis’ and we need to provide opportunities for our bodies to have some respite from the ‘allostatic load’.

2 Be conscious

‘Be aware of the impact of ACEs on both yourself and others. Education about how trauma can impact on life-long health means that more early intervention can be put in place to break the cycle.

Also, be aware that there are lots of things we feel that don’t even register on our conscious radar. We might be busy, or not want to deal with an unpleasant emotion so automatically look to distract ourselves (think phone games/scrolling!). At the end of the day, this leaves a lot of subconscious feelings but can’t quite put our finger on why we feel so low. So, first of all, notice when a feeling washes over you by pausing and taking a breath.

1 Be more zebra

Zebras will react with an appropriate amount of stress when attacked by a lion – but once the threat is over they will go back to grazing [2]. To model ourselves on this behaviour, we need to recognise feelings associated with stress. Learning to recognise how an emotion feels in the body can be an effective grounding technique. A grounding technique is a method of bringing yourself out of your mind and rooting yourself in the present by focusing on the physical senses. Doing something that releases oxytocin such as being with people who make us feel safe, cuddling a pet or giving yourself a hug can help to counterbalance the effects of stress hormones such as cortisol.

3 Be specific

With a lot of young people, if a feeling doesn’t fit into happy/sad, they tend to default to angry! Try and categorise the emotion into a broad category (happy/sad/angry/surprised) and then try and put a more specific label on it (surprised in a good way or bad way? Dismayed/ shocked/ amazed/confused?). Once the feeling has been identified, think about where it’s physically felt in the body: tense shoulders? Butterflies? If you notice your jaw is clenched, or you’re holding your breath, try to consciously relax those areas. Take a few seconds to acknowledge the feelings, breathing in for 3, out for 4. This will take you out of your mind and can be an effective way of stopping negative thought cycles.

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References:
[1] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379798000178>
[2] <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Why-Zebras-Dont-Ulcers-Revised/dp/0805073698>