

Survive or Thrive: Moving Past the Defensive Anger Stance and toward a Better Life.

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Central Premise and Key Concept

Central Premise:

Every one of our thoughts, emotions and actions reflect one of two goals: either to survive or to thrive.

Key Concept:

Survival Trumps Thriving

Main Goal: to help clients move away from their defensive stances and toward thriving in their daily lives.

Survive or Thrive Model

Three defensive brain/body networks:

- Freeze
- Flight
- Fight

One non-defensive brain/body network:

- Thrive

Rigid Survival Defensive Networks

- 1) Inflexible overlearned patterns.
- 2) Concurrent world view seems seem truthful and obvious.
- 3) Reactions seem inappropriate or overly strong to others.
- 4) May be formed through early parental misattunement/trauma.
- 5) Quick regression from new to old; older = more efficient (less energy compared with having to think about new actions or thoughts).

Basic Therapeutic Directions for Clients Stuck in Rigid Defensive Networks

- 1) Create cognitive awareness of core pattern.
- 2) Discover frequent triggers for defensive behaviors.
- 3) Determine current rewards and costs of defensive structure.
- 4) Reward new behaviors while anticipating frequent regressions: begin with “exceptions.”

Therapeutic Directions (continued).

5) Describe thriving behaviors, emotions, thoughts and beliefs to provide a model for change.

6) Therapy around family of origin may be appropriate.

7) Develop brain change plan centered on thriving.

The Freeze Defensive Network

Survival = Invisibility.

Roots in vagal nerve network.

Continuum: terrified paralysis to mild depressive states.

Freeze System Antidotes

- Movement
- Choice-Making
- Visibility

The Flight Defensive Network

Survival = running away from danger.

Brain/body network: autonomic nervous system (sympathetic nervous branch).

Learned fear expands danger cues.

Types: active and passive avoidance.

The Flight Defensive Network: Antidotes

- Unravel real safety concerns from false alarms.
- Practice “standing your ground” and assertiveness.
- Present concept of taking “safe risks.”

The Fight Defensive Network

PAG is a major component of the anger/aggression circuit.

Sympathetic nervous system activated.

Main difference from Flight: Move toward obstacles.

High costs/sometimes high rewards.

Variants: Hidden, Explosive, Chronic.

The Fight Defensive Network: Antidotes

For Hidden anger: Permission to feel, utilize and demonstrate anger.

For Explosive anger: Standard a.m. behavioral tools (time out, etc.)

For Chronic anger: Cognitive a.m. tools (disputation, etc.);
Learned optimism.

The Thrive Brain/Body Network

Common Aspects of Thriving:

- Life feels generally safe.
- Others are supportive and can be trusted.
- Cooperation is normal and expected.
- Communications are generally positive.
- People feel loved, lovable and loving.
- Positive emotions such as joy, serenity, and gratitude are felt frequently.

A Lyrical Definition of Thriving

- Growing toward the light.
- Growing toward your inner light.

What Makes Thriving Possible?

- Smart vagus nerve network.
- Default mode network (DMN)
- Neuroplasticity: myelination; long-term potentiation; arborization.

Brain Change is Part of Thriving

Use it or lose it.

Neurons that fire together wire together.

Brain change is simple but not easy.

Brain change requires commitment, time, effort and practice.

Useful Models of Thriving

Self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, relatedness.

Broaden and build: positive emotions.

Well-being theory: pleasure, engagement, accomplishment,
relationships, meaning.

Life in balance model: exploration of possibilities.

Resilience: bouncing back from adversity.

Earned security: creating safety.

Eight Step Plan: Life Journeys From Fight to Thrive

- 1) Review: Which defensive network is limiting you?
- 2) Create: develop a general goal.
- 3) Name the journey.
- 4) Build a starting plan: What comes first?
- 5) Commit: for at least three-six months.
- 6) Take action: begin making changes. Practice, practice, practice.
- 7) Improve: Add new steps to broaden change.
- 8) Expand: Link this Thrive program with others.

Helping Clients Thrive

Our job as anger management specialists: Helping clients grow toward their inner light.

- 1) Respect anger as part of the Fight defensive network.
- 2) Help clients discover overlearned aspects of their Fight network.
- 3) Explain the differences between Fight and Thrive.
- 4) Explore with clients ways they could move toward Thrive while retaining critical components of their Fight network.
- 5) Develop an eight step to implement specific movements toward Thrive.

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