

# BluesNews

Volume 11, Issue 1

February 2017



BE SOMEONE THAT  
MAKES YOU HAPPY

You cannot hang out with  
negative people and expect  
to live a positive life...

when nothing  
goes right...  
go left.

PTSD Stress Cup Theory	2
10 Insights of Remarkable Parents	3
Three Keys to Finding Peace As A Special Needs Parent	5
A Very Punny Christmas	7
Professional Development / InService 2016—2017 – DATES	8

# Healing From Complex Trauma & PTSD/CPTSD

## PTSD Stress Cup Theory

(Imagine these are three cups)



Cups 1 & 2 show the daily good & bad stress everyone deals with.

Cup 3 shows the added PTSD the brain is 'full' processing continually, and how the PTSD brain has far less capacity to process any further good and particularly bad stress.

This explains why people with PTSD, cannot cope with the same amount of (brain) stress, as people without PTSD.

'Brain Stress' is anything the brain has to do for us to function. This will include all we do unconsciously, like our internal organs working, breathing, moving, food digestion etc. It also includes good and bad stress we deal with daily. Good stress, being anything the brain processes not causing negative emotions – eg taking a shower. Bad stress being anything that does cause negative emotions, like naughty children, noise (big PTSD stressors).

### Cup/Diagram 1.

This shows the daily good stress, everyone's brains deal with daily.

### Cup/Diagram 2.

This shows the added bad stress, everyone deals with daily. As you can see, there is still room left for added good or bad stress, before the cup 'overflows'.

The cup 'overflowing' – will be when the person can't cope emotionally and becomes irritable, angry, tearful etc.

### Cup/Diagram 3.

This shows the added PTSD brain 'stress' – a PTSD brain is dealing with – added to all the normal good and bad stress everyone has. There is very little room left for any added good or bad stress, to occur.

Which is why people with PTSD don't cope well, with added stress and can get very irritable, fast and quickly over minor things.

This is described as being when the 'cup overflows'. In order to reduce this overflowing, no stress can be occurring, so the 'cup emp-

ties' a little, back to having room for daily stress again.

I know when my cup is overflowing, as I start to become irritable, and I know my coping capacity, reduces, quickly and stressors like noise, irritate me more than normal.

I have learned to reduce my daily activities, have relaxing time, and not plan too many things in one day.

I have learned to have relaxation time before anything anxiety/stress raising, and have relax time afterwards.

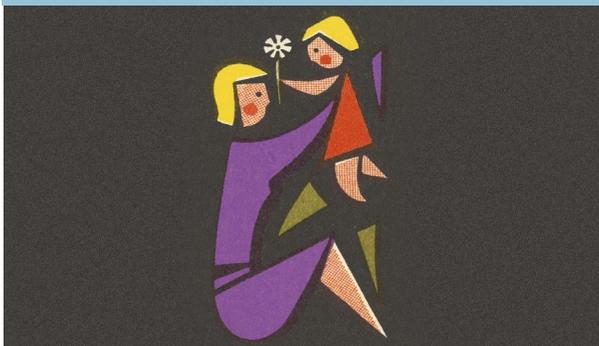
Along with all the breathing, mindfulness strategies, this is how I have learned to manage my 'cup overflowing'.

I have to do this, because if my 'cup overflows' continually, my mood lowers, my emotions increase and all my complex PTSD symptoms then increase as a result, which results in complete incapacity, to cope and can become life threatening. PTSD – is a life threatening disorder, when severe.

It is why I always say, you will not learn to manage your PTSD well, if you have a busy, stressful daily life. Which cannot always be avoided, I understand, but it is essential for PTSD management, to have the least stressful life possible. Especially if the PTSD symptoms are severe, and while first learning to manage them.

## 10 Insights of Remarkable Parents from a Family Therapist

Angela Pruess



At any given time you'll find four or more parenting books on my Amazon wish list, a few by my nightstand, and an email box chock full of insightful parenting theories and approaches.

Granted, child development is my career, but I speak with plenty of parents in my practice who find themselves in similar circumstances. With information around every corner and our culture projecting constant messages (many times contradictory) regarding how we should raise our kids, feeling like a confident and intentional parent can seem out of reach many days.

In my 12 years as a family therapist, I've seen many well-intentioned parents mistakenly employing strategies that aren't meeting the emotional or developmental needs of their children or families. I've also observed an increasing number of parents who are successfully mapping out new and healthier ways of raising children.

These insights, collected over time and gleaned from experience, parallel what we know from current brain and behavioral research about what kind of parenting is most likely to contribute to the healthy development of children.

### 1 | Know that kids will act like kids.

Often parents forget that the way a child's learning begins is by screwing up. Making mistakes. Behaving immaturely. The 'magic' happens when a supportive caregiver then steps in to steer them in the right direction. We get frustrated and impatient, becoming annoyed with whininess and 'back talk' when really, this is how kids are wired.

The part of the brain responsible for reason, logic and impulse control is not fully developed until a person reaches their early 20's. Immature behavior is normal for immature human beings with immature brains. This is a scientific reality that helps us to be patient and supportive in order to guide our children when they struggle.

### 2 | Set limits with respect, not criticism.

Due to the fact that our kids need to learn literally everything about the world from us, they will require many limits throughout their day. Without proper limits in their environment, kids will feel anxious and out of control.

Limits can be delivered in the form of criticism and shaming, or they can be communicated in a firm but respectful way. Think

about how you appreciate being spoken to at work and go from there.

### 3 | **Be aware of developmental stages.**

Have you ever questioned where your easy-going toddler disappeared to as he was suddenly screaming bloody murder while getting dropped off at daycare? Hello separation anxiety!

There are literally hundreds of very normal, very healthy transitions kids go through to become adults. Being aware of these puts their puzzling behaviors into context, and increases the odds of reacting to them accurately and supportively.

### 4 | **Know your child's temperament and personality.**

It seems pretty obvious, but if we are in tune with the characteristics that make our child unique, we will have a better understanding of when they may need additional support, and when and where they will thrive.

Once you know the basics of what makes your child tick, many important areas become much easier to navigate, such as pinpointing the best environment for homework, or understanding why your daughter needs to come home from overnight summer camp.

### 5 | **Give your child plenty of unstructured play time.**

Unless you studied play therapy in school, most adults will never fully understand and appreciate the power of play.

Play is how kids learn all the things and develop all the stuff.<sup>17</sup> This means leaving time each day for straight-up unstructured, kid-controlled, exploration of the world kind of play.

### 6 | **Know when to talk and when to listen.**

Kids learn to be pretty good problem solvers if we let them. Because we love the life out of them and want them to succeed, it's hard not to jump in and solve problems for them by virtue of lecture or criticism.

If parents more often held their tongues and waited it out, they'd be shocked at how often their children can successfully reach their own conclusions. Being heard is powerfully therapeutic, and it allows us to think things through and reach a solution.<sup>9</sup>

Kids want and need to be heard, and feel understood. Just like the rest of us.

### 7 | **Have an identity outside of your child.**

Many of us often claim that our children are our world, and this is certainly true in our hearts. In terms of daily life however, parents need to have more. We need to nurture the friendships, passions and hobbies that make us who we are as individuals.

Doing this can feel like a battle, as our protective anxieties try to convince us our children can't be without us, and also that we can't be without them. But we can be, and need to be, in order to stay sane, and avoid saddling our kids with the task of meeting all of our emotional needs.

### 8 | **Understand that actions speak louder than words.**

The way you interact with your child and live your life will be your child's greatest teacher. Kids are incredibly observant and way more intuitive than we give them credit for. They are always watching.

This can be slightly inconvenient for parents, but if we're able to keep it in mind, knowing our children are watching our actions will not only teach them how to behave, but it will make us better people.

### 9 | **Recognize that connection, fun, and creativity are the best ways to promote positive behaviors and a cooperative attitude.**

Fear and control aren't effective long-term teachers for our kids. While those dynamics may appear effective in the short-term, they won't equip our kids with a strong moral compass, or effective problem-solving skills.

If our child feels valued as a person based on our interactions with them, they will naturally learn to value others and have the confidence to make good choices.

### 10 | **Set the overall goal to shape a child's heart and not just their behavior.**

We often get the impression from the world around us that the goal of parenting is to produce a compliant, well-behaved child. While these are certainly desirable qualities for most parents, they are not core qualities that contribute to a happy and healthy human.

Helping our children understand the importance of their thoughts and emotions gives them coping and relationship skills. Skills that will protect and guide them throughout their lives.

# The Three Keys to Finding Peace As A Special Needs Parent

Angela Pruess

Out of nowhere, standing in the kitchen and observing my kids running rampant in play, it dawned on me. We had made an amazing, ridiculous, chaotic, exhausting and spectacular family. Granted, it had been a decent day, mostly free of meltdowns, sibling brawls and endless therapy appointments to get to, but nonetheless, it was one of those moments when things come into perspective.

As I've been on my special needs parenting journey for over seven years now, I can happily report that these moments of perspective come more frequently now. There is not as much daily mental and emotional muck to wade through as there was early on, and there are a few crucial cornerstones I've learned

along the way, both personally and professionally, that help with finding peace in the midst of struggle and hurt.



## **ACCEPTANCE**

As you have likely already noticed, we humans don't cope well when things don't go our way. Especially when the unexpected events occur around our children and family, such significant parts of our lives. A piece of our heart breaks when we realize our child will likely face ongoing challenges throughout their life. Reconciling our perception of what we thought things would be, with what actually is, is imperative in finding an emotionally healthy existence and being present for your child. In a nutshell, this process is known as grief.

Grief is a tricky business and can be described with many words, however, both 'consistency' and 'predictability' are not one of them. Many are familiar with the Kubler-Ross stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance), which assert that we experience grief in distinct linear phases, and progression to the next stage depends on resolution of the stage prior. If only grief were that reliable.

The reality is, grief is highly personal and can't be defined, nor can it be contained by time or space. It just is. The emotions that lie within grief are universally human and present within us, whether we acknowledge them or not, but denial and avoidance of our pain will only serve to cause anxiety and depression. In short, we need to let ourselves feel our feelings.

Being in-tune with what emotions we are experiencing, and being intentional about working through them, is paramount to taking care of yourself as a special needs parent. Put down the bucket of ice cream, your smartphone, or whatever your own personal numbing device is, and sit with your feelings. Talk through them with a supportive loved one. Buy a pretty journal and pen and scribble down a few thoughts during your day.

After seven years, I am still reconciling my reality from my past expectations, just much less frequently now.

## **SELF-COMPASSION**

Most are familiar with the phrase 'dig deep'. Special needs parents may as well wear a sign on their forehead most days that reads "digging deep" as they tend to place super-human expectations on themselves.

"Could my child benefit from another therapy?" "Should we try another supplement?" "If I just read one more book..." Dr. Kristin Neff is known for coining the term 'self-compassion', meaning 'to extend compassion to oneself in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure or general suffering.' I don't know about you, but I am pretty good at expecting myself to get it ALL done and do it PERFECTLY, which usually leads to me running around like a crazy chicken with a pit of anxiety in my stomach.

As special needs parents we know we should 'love our child where they're at', but what if we applied this same mantra to ourselves in our daily lives? What if we didn't beat ourselves up over a forgotten school snack or a missed doctor's appointment? What if, instead, we spoke lovingly to ourselves in our thoughts and musings, inviting room for mistakes and actually allowing ourselves to be human?

If we worked harder to extend the same love and patience we do for others, for ourselves, self-compassion would reap tremendous benefits in all areas of our lives. Not only would we experience better moods and more fulfilling days, but through our modeling, we would give our children a head start in the practice of grace in imperfection.

## **GRATITUDE**

For the first few years after we had our daughter with special needs, I spent a lot of time feeling angry and helpless. "Why does my child have to suffer?" "It's not fair that bad things happen to good people..." Do you tend to think more about the burdens parenthood has brought you, or the gifts? Gratitude can be defined as affirming there is goodness in our lives and acknowledging where that goodness comes from. Dr. Robert Emmons has been studying gratitude for a decade, and has found that gratitude has the power to heal, energize and essentially change our lives. Doesn't that almost sound like magic pill meant for special needs parents?

Consciously focusing on the good around us can help to heal our hearts and minds. It can help to heal past pain encountered by ourselves or our children, enabling us to move forward and not be bogged down by the past. Intentionally shifting into a grateful mindset throughout our day can move us into a place of hope, instead of helplessness, and energize us to be the best person and parent that we can be.

Turning our minds towards the positives we experience with our children will literally (neuroscience shows us it literally changes our brain wiring) lead us to feel happier and more satisfied in our role as a special needs parent. Now how flipping amazing is that? I for one am grateful for gratitude.

Find peace wherever you can.

As I sat in my kitchen that day reflecting, I was rudely interrupted by my toddler hurling a train car at my shin. In special needs parenthood (or parenthood in general), moments of peace may seem fleeting. However, luckily for us and our kids, the outlook of zen moments is bright if we are able to accept ourselves and our children as we are, be kind to ourselves day to day and find gratitude in both the small things and the large.

You are crushing it special needs parent...and in the spirit of the article, and being an old person with outdated slang... peace out!

## A VERY PUNNY CHRISTMAS...

Why did the frog go to the hospital?

For a hop-eration

Did Rudolf (The Red-Nosed Reindeer) go to school?

No. He was elf-taught

What did the stamp say to the Christmas card?

Stick with me; we'll go places.

What did Adam say to his wife the night before Christmas?

It's Christmas, Eve.

What kind of shoes do bananas make?

Slippers

What did one snowman say to the other?

Do you smell carrots?

What did the cheese say to itself in the mirror?

Halloumi

Professional Development / InService

Leamington  
1st and 3rd Wednesday

Parkhill  
2nd and 4th Wednesday

Sept 21	Sept 14
Oct 5	Sept 28
Oct 19	Oct 12
Nov 2	Oct 26
Nov 16	Nov 9
Dec 7	Nov 23
Dec 21 (Christmas Party?)	Dec 14 (Christmas Party ?)

2017

Jan 18	Jan 11
Feb 1	Jan 25
Feb 15	Feb 8
March 1	Feb 22
March 15	March 8
April 5	March 22
April 19	April 12
May 3	April 26
May 17	May 10
June 7	May 14
June 21	June 14

