The Unshakable Core: Growing Embodied Resilience In a Turbulent World

FACES Mindfulness, Compassion, and Wisdom
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What We’ll Explore

1. Positive Neuroplasticity
2. The Green Zone Brain
3. Calm Strength
4. Grateful Contentment
5. Loved and Loving
Positive Neuroplasticity
Some Mental Resources

Character Strengths
Secure Attachment
Executive Functions
Positive Mood
Social and Emotional Intelligence
Resilience
Mental Resources Are Acquired Through Changes in the Brain
Neurons that fire together, wire together.
Mental resources are acquired in two stages:

Encoding → Consolidation
Activation → Installation
State   →   Trait
Experiencing doesn’t equal learning.

Activation **without installation** may be pleasant, but no trait resources are acquired.

What fraction of our beneficial mental states leave traces in neural structure?
Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias
Mindful Cultivation: HEAL Process

**Activation**
1. **H**ave a beneficial experience

**Installation**
2. **E**nrich the experience
3. **A**bsorb the experience
4. **L**ink positive and negative material (Optional)
Have a Beneficial Experience
Enrich It
Absorb It
Like a Nice Fire
Link Positive & Negative Material
Have It, Enjoy It
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tzu
Think not lightly of good, saying, “It will not come to me.”

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

Likewise, the wise one, Gathering it little by little, Fills oneself with good.

Dhammapada 9.122
Green Zone Brain
Our Three Fundamental Needs

- safety
- satisfaction
- connection
Needs Met by Three Systems

Safety
Avoiding harms

Satisfaction
Approaching rewards

Connection
Attaching to others
The Evolving Brain

- Cortex ("primate/human")
- Subcortex ("mammalian")
- Brainstem ("reptilian")
- Cerebellum
# Growing Inner Resources for Needs

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With resilience, we meet challenges to needs in the **Green Zone**: with fullness and balance, and peace, contentment, and love.

Without resilience, challenges push us into the **Red Zone**: with deficit and disturbance, and fear, frustration, and heartache.
Can You Stay in the Green Zone With:

A sense of unpleasant?

A sense of pleasant?

A sense of relatedness?
Repeatedly taking in experiences of safety, satisfaction, and connection develops an increasingly unconditional core sense of fullness and balance, rather than deficit and disturbance.
Pet the Lizard
Feed the Mouse
Hug the Monkey
Coming Home

Peace

Contentment

Love
3

Calm Strength
# Growing Inner Resources for Needs

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Calming the Visceral Core

• A brief explanation of heartrate variability

• Relax.

• Gently lengthen exhalations . . . As long as or longer than inhalations . . . Then letting breathing be soft and natural.

• Bring attention into the chest and area of the heart.

• Be aware of heartfelt feelings . . . Perhaps love flowing in and flowing out in rhythm with the breath.
Feeling Alright Right Now

• Aware of the body going on being . . . Enough air to breathe . . . The heart beating fine . . . Basically alright . . . Now

• You may not have been basically alright in the past and you may not be basically alright in the future . . . But now you are OK . . . Still basically OK . . . Now

• Letting go of unnecessary anxiety, guarding, bracing

• Reassurance, relief, calming is sinking into you . . . Still basically alright . . . Now
Feeling Strong

• Bring to mind times that you felt strong, determined, enduring . . . Focus on feeling strong . . . Take in this experience.

• Imagine experiencing strength while dealing with a challenge . . . Let the sense of this sink into you.
Grateful Contentment
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

What are some of the **good facts** in your life these days?

As the listener, keep finding a genuine gladness about the good facts in the life of your partner.

or journal.
Gratitude and Gladness

• Bring to mind some of the things you have received and are thankful for . . . Good fortune, the kindness of others, the gift of life . . . The universe itself . . . Letting gratitude sink into you and spread inside you.

• Bring to mind some of the things you are glad about . . . Happy times with friends, challenges put behind you, recent successes, good things happening for others . . . Letting gladness sink into you and spread inside you.
• Focus on the sense of having received so much already . . .

• Get a sense of the fullness in the present moment . . . So much texture, so many sensations, sights, thoughts, feelings . . . Almost overwhelming, why seek anything more . . .

• Find a contentment in the moment as it is, moment after moment . . . Not wishing it to be different than it is . . . Drivenness and grasping and discontent falling away . . . Already satisfied.
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Loved and Loving
Self-Compassion

• Bring to mind beings who care about you . . . Focus on feeling cared about . . . Use HEAL to take in this experience.

• Bring to mind beings for whom you have compassion . . . Receive the sense of compassion into yourself . . . Know what compassion feels like.

• Be aware of your own burdens, stresses, and suffering – and bring compassion to yourself . . . Get a sense of caring, warmth, support, compassion sinking deeply into you.
“Anthem”

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in
That’s how the light gets in

Leonard Cohen
Forgiving Others and Yourself

• Two levels of forgiveness: disentangling yourself . . . and a full pardon. In both there can be a recognition of wrongdoing and a valuing of justice.

• Disentangling involves standing up for yourself while not feeding resentments and grievances, and deliberately releasing the charge on what happened.

• A full pardon involves compassion, a recognition of the many causes of what happened, a release of punishment, and a full letting go.
Feeling of Worth

- It is natural and important to feel that you have worth as a person – which does not mean arrogance or ego.

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<th>You develop this sense of worth through:</th>
<th>Take in experiences of being:</th>
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<td>- Others including, appreciating, liking, and loving you</td>
<td>- Capable, skillful, talented, helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- You respecting yourself</td>
<td>- Included, wanted, sought out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Appreciated, acknowledged, respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Liked, befriended, supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Loved, cherished, special</td>
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A Confident Heart

• Feeling caring . . . And cared about.

• Stepping back and seeing yourself objectively . . . Recognizing your capabilities . . . Your good intentions . . . What you have been through and dealt with and overcome.

• Finding the respect for yourself that you would have for a person just like you . . . Letting go of needing to prove yourself or impress anyone . . . Recognizing your decency and efforts . . . Your good heart . . .
New Book from Rick Hanson, Ph.D.

Grow an Unshakable Core of Resilient Well-Being

Learn how to develop key inner strengths to stay calm, confident, and happy no matter what life throws at you.

ORDER YOUR COPY NOW AT RESILIENTHAPPINESS.NET
References
Suggested Books

See **RickHanson.net** for other good books.

See www.RickHanson.net/key-papers/ for other suggested readings.


Selected References - 3


Selected References - 5


Supplemental Materials
Four Learning Curves

Mental Resources

Time

1. Decline
Four Learning Curves

- No growth
- Decline
Four Learning Curves

- **1.** Decline
- **2.** No growth
- **3.** Linear growth
- **4.** Exponential growth; learning how to learn

![Diagram showing different learning curves](image-url)
The Negativity Bias

During the 600 million year evolution of the nervous system, avoiding “sticks” was usually more consequential than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it
4. Install it efficiently in memory (incl. implicit),
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.
The Negativity Bias
The brain is good at learning from bad experiences but relatively bad at learning from good ones.

Even though learning from good experiences of mental resources and related factors grows inner strengths.
Major Neural Mechanisms of Learning

(De)Sensitizing existing synapses
Building new synapses
Altered gene expression
Building and integrating new neurons
Altered ongoing activity in a region
Altered connectivity of regions
Altered neurochemical activity
Information from hippocampus to cortex
Modulation by stress hormones, cytokines
Slow wave and REM sleep
Effects of Meditation on the Brain

- Increased gray matter in the:
  - **Insula** - interoception; self-awareness; empathy for emotions
  - **Hippocampus** - visual-spatial memory; establishing context; inhibiting amygdala and cortisol
  - **Prefrontal cortex (PFC)** - executive functions; attention control

- Reduced cortical thinning with aging in insula and PFC

- Increased activation of left frontal regions, lifting mood

- Increased gamma-range brainwaves – heightened learning and integration

- Preserved telomere length in chromosomes, aiding longevity
It’s Good to Take in the Good

Develops psychological resources:
• General – resilience, positive mood, feeling loved
• Specific – matched to challenges, wounds, deficits

Has built-in, implicit benefits:
• Training attention and executive functions
• Being active rather than passive
• Treating oneself kindly, that one matters

May sensitize brain to the positive

Fuels positive cycles with others
What – if it were more present in the mind of a person – would really help with challenges, temperament, or inner wounds or deficits?

How could a person have and install more experiences of these mental resources?
Four Ways to Use HEAL with Others

Doing it implicitly

Teaching it and leaving it up to people

Doing it explicitly with people

Asking people to do it on their own
HEAL in Classes and Trainings

Take a few minutes to explain it and teach it.

In the flow, encourage Enriching and Absorbing, using natural language.

Encourage people to use HEAL on their own.

Do HEAL on regular occasions (e.g., at end of a therapy session, at end of mindfulness practice)
Implicit HEAL in Therapy

- Creating space for beneficial experiences
- Drawing attention to beneficial facts
- Encouraging positive experience of beneficial fact
- Drawing attention to key aspects of an experience
- Slowing the client down; not moving on
- Modeling taking in the good oneself
Teach the method

- Background helps about brain, negativity bias
- Emphasize facts and mild beneficial experiences.
- Surface blocks and work through them.
- Explain the idea of “risking the dreaded experience,” noticing the (usually) good results, and taking them in.
Explicit HEAL in Therapy

- Do HEAL with client(s) during a session
  - Reinforcing key resource states and traits
  - Linking rewards to desired thoughts or actions
  - When learning from therapy has worked well
  - When realistic views of self and world come true
  - Good qualities in client
  - New insights

- Encourage HEAL between sessions
  - Naming occasions
  - Identifying key beneficial facts and experiences
Promoting Motivation

- Identify what you want to encourage (thought, word, deed); be clear; what would it look like?

- Use HEAL to associate rewards to what you want to encourage:
  - Before doing it
  - While doing it
  - After doing it

- Give over to this new habit, let it carry you along.
In Couples, Benefits of HEAL

- “Installs” key resources that support interactions (e.g., self-soothing, recognition of good intentions)
- Dampens vicious cycles
- Helps partner feel seen, credited for efforts
- Increases the sense of the good that is present
- Reduces clinginess, pursuing, or reproach that the other person withdraws from
Using HEAL with a Couple

- Basic steps (often informal):
  - Attention to a good fact
  - Evoking and sustaining a good experience
  - Managing blocks
  - Awareness of the impact on one’s partner
  - Debriefing, often from both partners

- Pitfalls to avoid:
  - Seeming to side with one person
  - Unwittingly helping a person overlook real issues
  - Letting the other partner pile on
Uses for Children

- Registering curricular skills and other resources
- Motivation for learning; associating rewards
- Seeing the good in the world, others, and oneself – and in the past, present, and future
- Seeing life as opportunity
- Feeling like an active learner
- Developing child-specific inner strengths
Adaptations for Children

- Kids gain from HEAL – particularly mistreated, anxious, spirited/ ADHD, or LD children.

- Style:
  - Be matter of fact: this is mental/neural literacy.
  - A little brain talk goes a long way.
  - Be motivating: name benefits; “be the boss of your own mind.”
  - Down to earth, naturalistic
  - Scaffold based on executive functions, motivation, and need for autonomy.
  - Brief, concrete
Occasions for HEAL with Kids

- Explicit training in positive neuroplasticity
- Natural rhythms in the day (e.g., start of class, after a lesson or recess, end of day)
- When working with an individual child
- When dealing with classroom issues
Needs Feel Met: Responsive Mode

When we feel basically **safe** – not disturbed by **threat** – the Avoiding system goes Responsive, with a sense of **peace**.

When we feel basically **satisfied** – not disturbed by **loss** – the Approaching system goes Responsive, with a sense of **contentment**.

When we feel basically **connected** – not disturbed by **rejection** – the Attaching system goes Responsive, with a sense of **love**.
The Responsive Mode is Home Base

In the **Responsive “green zone,”** the **body** defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of refueling, repairing and recovering.

The **mind** defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:

- **Avoiding** Peace
- **Approaching** Contentment
- **Attaching** Love

This is the brain in its homeostatic **Responsive, minimal craving** mode.
Needs Don’t Feel Met: Reactive Mode

When we feel **unsafe** – disturbed by **threat** – the Avoiding system goes Reactive, with a sense of **fear**.

When we feel **dissatisfied** – disturbed by **loss** – the Approaching system goes Reactive, with a sense of **frustration**.

When we feel **disconnected** – disturbed by **rejection** – the Attaching system goes Reactive, with a sense of **heartache**.
In the **Reactive “red zone,”** the body fires up into the stress response: fight, flight, or freeze; outputs usually exceed inputs; long-term building projects are deferred.

The mind fires up into:

- **Avoiding**
  - **Fear**

- **Approaching**
  - **Frustration**

- **Attaching**
  - **Heartache**

This is the brain in its allostatic **Reactive, craving** mode.
Resting in Love

• Bring to mind beings you care about . . . Friends, family, pets, people who have helped you . . . Compassion for suffering . . . Kindness and friendliness . . .

• Focus on feelings of caring and love . . .

• Bring to mind beings who care about you . . . Focus on feeling cared about. . .