



# Transforming Adversity into Leadership Growth Opportunities

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# Adversity, Stress, & Traumatic Stress

- According to researchers, Jeansok Kim and David Diamond, if all three of these things are happening simultaneously, a person is experiencing **stress**:
  - Measurable physiological response
  - A desire to avoid the situation
  - A loss of control

**Sound familiar????**

# Adversity, Stress, & Traumatic Stress

- Stress response

- Survival instinct that helps to keep us safe from danger
- Distributes all energy resources to systems in the body and brain that are needed to survive in the face of the threat- Stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol)
- Allows us to act now, think later
- Is necessary and healthy when experienced in a flexible, adaptable, regulated way, for a very short period of time
- When high levels of stress (overproduction of stress hormones in our bodies) are experienced over a prolonged period of time, we become deregulated (stay “stuck,” false alarms), and our systems are compromised (cardiovascular, immune, memory and problem-solving)

# Adversity, Stress, & Traumatic Stress

- We all have a different threshold (“tipping point”) for managing stress, based on a number of biological, genetic, and environmental factors.
- When our systems become overwhelmed by stress, we perceive a threat to our sense of safety/well-being/connection, feel helpless to control the threat to safety/well-being/connection, we lack certainty of the outcome, we enter into traumatic stress.
- Physiological, emotional, psychological impact- Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are impacted in a way that impairs our ability to function at our optimal or baseline level. We question our core beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world.



# Traumatic Stress Timeline

- I am helpless to protect my kids from danger.
- I can't trust my judgment in keeping my kids safe.
- I'm a bad mom.

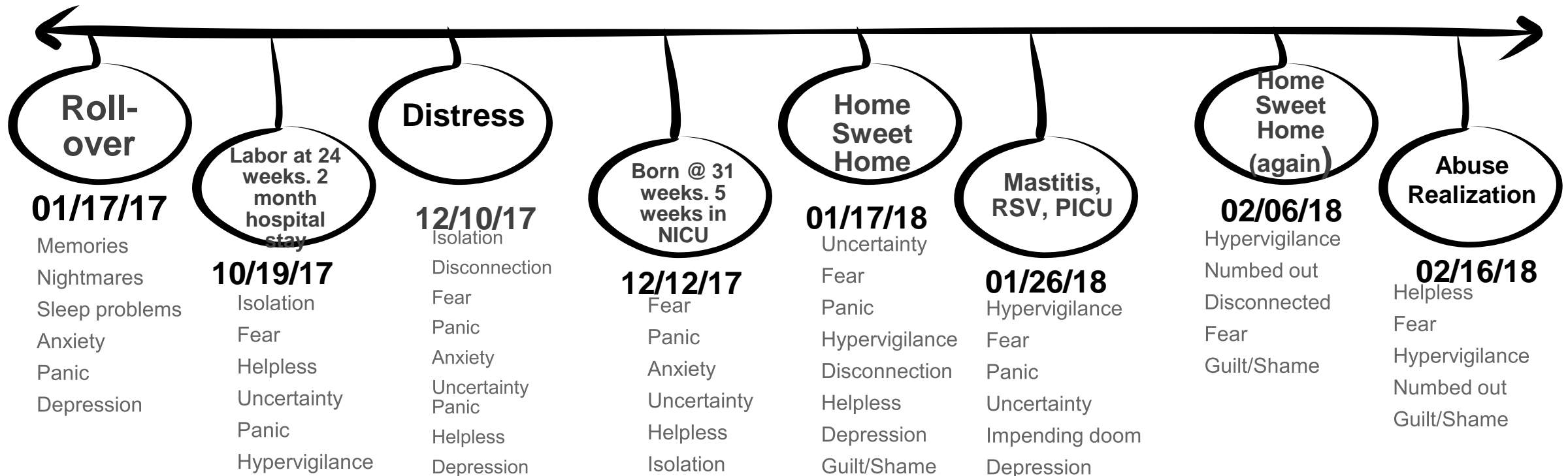
- I have no control over my body or my situation.
- I am helpless to protect my baby from danger.
- I can't trust my body or myself.

- My kids aren't going to be OK.
- I'm not going to be OK.
- We're not going to be OK.
- None of us are safe and this is my fault.

- This is never going to end.
- I must have done something to deserve all of this.
- I am a bad person.

- I don't think I can do this.
- I'm not a good mom.
- This is too overwhelming. I can't handle it.

- I can't keep my kids safe.
- The world isn't safe.
- I can't trust my own judgment.
- I can't trust myself.
- I can't do this.
- I'm a failure.
- I give up.



# Trauma and PTSD

“I take the elevator down and I walk through the long hallway that’s lined up with glass display cases and I cry, some nights hysterically, as I feel the guilt of leaving my baby and the guilt of not being there for my other children, tearing me in two. I remember reciting the NICU nurse’s reassuring words to ground myself and keep myself moving toward the parking ramp: “This is the safest place to leave your baby.”



# What is Traumatic Growth?

- The concept was developed by two psychologists in the mid 1990's who posited that people who endure psychological struggle following adversity can often see positive growth afterward.
- "People develop new understandings of themselves, the world they live in, how to relate to other people, the kind of future they might have and a better understanding of how to live life," -  
Richard Tedeschi, PhD

# Traumatic Growth vs. Resilience

- **Resiliency:**

- A personal attribute or ability to bounce back from a difficult or traumatic situation

- **Traumatic Growth:**

- Difficulty bouncing back after a traumatic experience

- Psychological struggle

- Challenges our core beliefs

- Often resulting in mental illness such as PTSD, Anxiety, Depression, Panic Disorder

- Ultimately finds a sense of personal growth through a process that takes a lot of time, energy, and struggle.

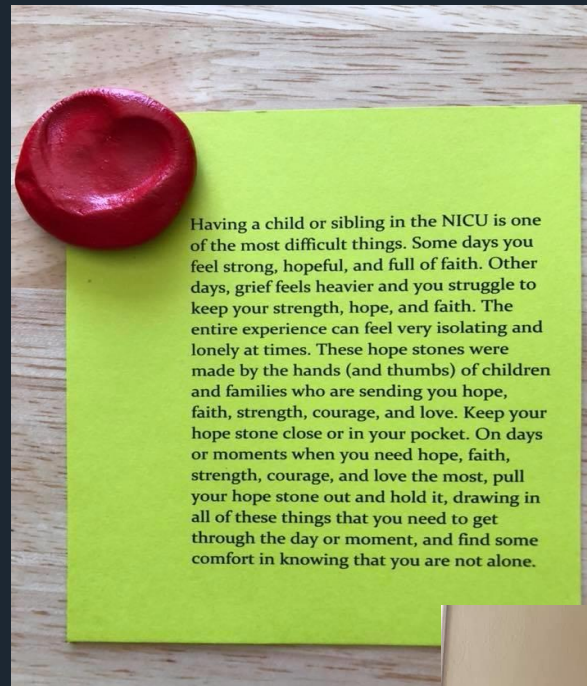
–Kanakano Taku, PhD



# Finding a Sense of Personal Growth

- Instead of asking how we will recover from these painful times, we should ask how we will be changed by them.
  - Appreciation of life
  - Relationships with others
  - New possibilities in life
  - Personal strength
  - Spiritual change

# Traumatic Growth...



Being a good mom doesn't require perfection. It requires love and presence. I am capable of those things.



My body responded to an unpredictable anomaly in the most protective way possible, allowing a miracle to occur that kept my baby safe in a highly threatening environment.



We are all safe NOW, and we have all of the [internal and external] resources we need to handle the adversities that we will inevitably continue to face throughout our lives.

# Breakout Session #1

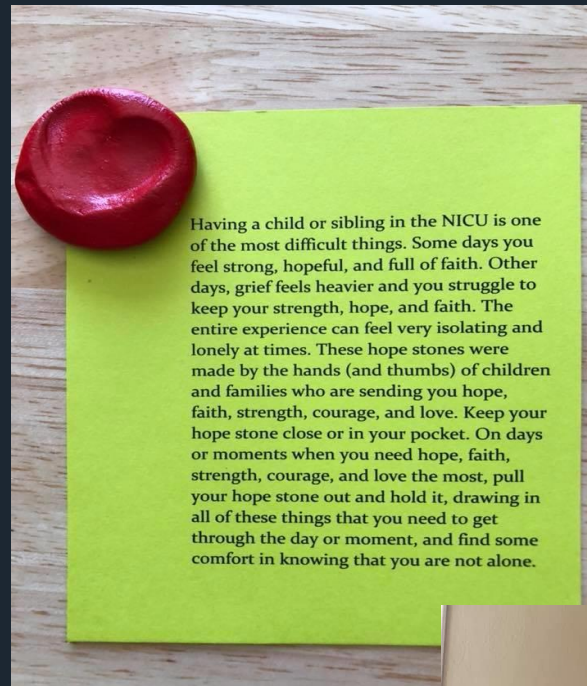
- In reflecting on the concepts of adversity, stress, traumatic stress, and especially traumatic growth, in relation to your own personal experience of the past 9(ish) months, discuss the following with your group...
  1. **How have I experienced the negative affects of stress (physiologically, emotionally, psychologically)?**
  2. **Which of my own core beliefs have been challenged and how (considering myself, others, and the world- themes may include: safety, control/power, responsibility, judgment/trust)?**
  3. **Where do I identify my own personal growth opportunities as a result of the adversity I have experienced over the past 9(ish) months?**
    - Appreciation of life
    - Relationships with others
    - New possibilities in life
    - Personal strength
    - Spiritual change

# How do we Apply Traumatic Growth to Leadership?

- Instead of asking how we will recover from these painful times, we should ask how we will be changed by them.
  - Appreciation of life
  - Relationships with others
  - New possibilities in life
  - Personal strength
  - Spiritual change
- Then ask, how will we use our experiences to influence, inspire, and facilitate positive growth and change in others, and in our larger systems (businesses, organizations, communities, etc)?
  - Empathy and Compassion
  - Common Humanity
  - Courage (Vulnerability)
    - ❖ Relationships are key to creating change!!



# Traumatic Growth...

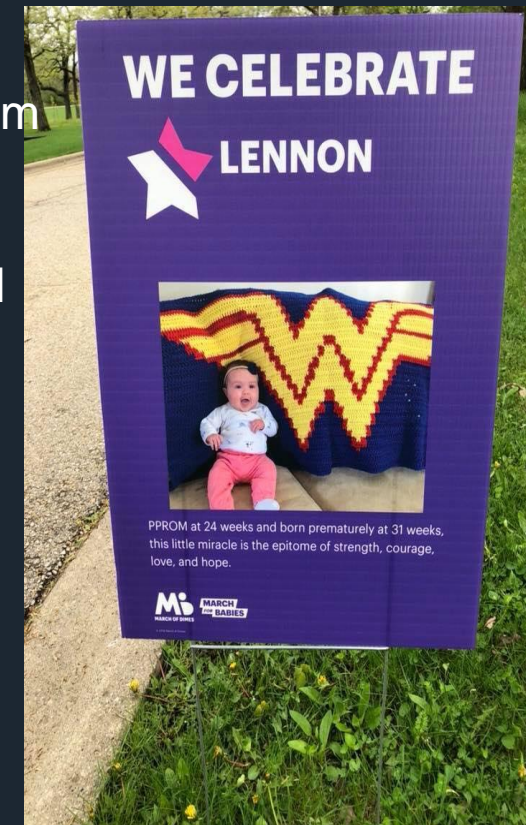


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...is a process...



# Creating Connection & Community Through Courage, Compassion, & Common Humanity

- “Healthy relationships are as essential as vaccines and ventilators for our global recovery. This pandemic isn’t the first time and won’t be the last time our social connections are tested. But it is rare for the whole world to face such a grave challenge simultaneously. For all of our differences, our shared experience is itself a bond. We will have this memory in common for the rest of our lives. And if we learn from this moment how to be better together, we won’t just endure this crisis, we will thrive.”

–Vivek Murthy, MD

19<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General of the US

# What the world needs now....

- The hidden impact of **loneliness (disconnection)** on our **health** is a root cause of and contributor to so many of the epidemics we see in the world today: alcohol & drug addictions, depression, anxiety, violence.
- Loneliness (disconnection) impacts our **work performance**, how our kids experience **school and learning**, and the sense of division and polarization in our society.
- “Humans are social creatures: In this simple and obvious fact lies both the problem and the solution to the current crisis of loneliness. At the center of our loneliness is our innate desire to connect. We have evolved to participate in community, to forge lasting bonds with others, to help one another, and to share life experiences. We are, simply, better together.”

-Vivek Murthy, MD



# Be the Change you Wish to See in the World. -Ghandi

1. **Spend time each day with those you love.** Devote at least 15 minutes each day to connecting with those you care about.
2. **Focus on each other.** Forget about multi-tasking and give the other person the gift of your full attention, making eye contact, if possible, and genuinely listening.
3. **Embrace solitude.** The first step toward building stronger connections with others is to build a stronger connection with oneself. Meditation, prayer, art, music, and time spent outdoors can all be sources of solitary comfort and joy.
4. **Help and be helped.** Service is a form of human connection that reminds us of our value and purpose in life. Checking on a neighbor, seeking advice, even just offering a smile to a stranger six feet away, all can make us stronger.

# “Be the Change” in Your Leadership Role

- **Ask yourself** and your organization, “How will we grow through this together?” versus focusing on recovering/returning to “normal.” Be mindful of your mindset. How will you bring ideas, concepts, and experiences of connection, common humanity, compassion, and empathy in to your organization? How can you model courageous vulnerability in sharing your own human experience to create a sense of connection and common humanity in your organization?
- **Affirm values** of team members and the organization as a whole- What values/guiding principles define us and why? How do we live those values daily? Linking words and actions. Creating a shared sense of purpose. –Jamil Zaki
- **Emphasize community** by building time into meetings for check-ins, and be open to the messy intimacy that comes with seeing coworkers’ homes and meeting their families and pets. Leaders can create peer-to-peer support networks in which working parents, those caring for sick relatives, and other groups can discuss struggles and compare notes. When leaders exhibit empathy, their employees feel safer, work more creatively, and perform better. -Jamil Zaki

# Break Out Session #2

- Using the ideas and concepts of how to apply traumatic growth to your personal life as well as in professional and leadership roles, discuss with your group...
  - How you will “Be the change” in your social circle, organization, and community (lead by example).
  - How will you practice courageous vulnerability to create a sense of connection, common humanity, compassion, and empathy in your personal, professional, and leadership roles?

# “Say Something” by Peter H. Reynolds

- “You can say something in so many ways...with words, with action, with creativity.”
- “If you see someone lonely...say something by just being there for them.”
- “If you see an empty lot...say something by planting a seed and watching it bloom.”
- “If you are angry...say something to help people understand.”
- “If you see an injustice, say something peacefully. Inspire others to do the same.”
- “Some people find it easier to say something than others...but everyone has something to say.”
- **“Your voice can inspire, heal, and transform. Your voice can change the world. Are you ready to say something?”**



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