

## Being with Difficult Feelings Topics and Learning Objectives:

### Day 1: Content Description – Stephen Porges (Polyvagal) and Iain McGilchrist (Right and Left Brain)

Participants will begin with mindfulness practices to support nonjudgmental awareness related to the difficult feelings our clients bring to sessions. We will discuss our embodied brains, with emphasis on the belly brain, heart brain, and autonomic nervous system. In service to ethical boundaries and practice, we will outline the work of Iain McGilchrist regarding the two hemispheres of the brain and their relationship to grounded decision making as well as Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory and its applications to a variety of feelings that challenge clinicians in the therapy room. Group discussion will support deeper learning.

Attendees will be able to:

1. List four features each of the right and left hemispheres of the brain, according to Iain McGilchrist.
2. Describe the importance of cultivating nonjudgmental presence as a foundation of ethical practice and decision-making.
3. List three or more embodied signals a client might report when experiencing a dorsal shut down.
4. Identify nervous system, gut and heart brain precursors to intense emotional responses in the therapy room in service of mitigating imposing personal values on client autonomy.

### Day 2: Content Description – Jaak Panksepp (Midbrain Emotional-Motivational Circuitry)

After opening with mindfulness practices, we will continue to discuss Porges' and McGilchrist's work in the context of difficult feelings, adding a focus on Jaak Panksepp's model of midbrain emotions. In service to a critical analysis of cultural misperceptions regarding certain emotions and their expression, our work today will focus on the adaptive purpose of such feelings as grief/panic, fear, and rage. Participants will be provided their first opportunity to experiment with the sand tray figures in the context of an experiential interpersonal sharing period. Group discussion will be interspersed.

Attendees will be able to:

1. Discuss the midbrain circuits, as identified by Jaak Panksepp, that come online when we experience disconnection from others.
2. Discuss the kinds of autonomic nervous system activation we might experience when our clients drop into pockets of rage, fear or panic/grief and appraise the kinds of ethical implications that may arise.
3. List three circumstances in which integrating psychoeducation about these brain circuits can help empower and alleviate shame in our clients.
4. Determine supports to help you assess your efficacy with clients for whom difficult emotions are an ongoing part of your work.

### Day 3: Content Description – Implicit Memory as Countertransference

After opening with mindfulness practice, we will discuss implicit memory versus explicit memory and the ways these unconscious relational dynamics express themselves in our therapy sessions. Participants will once again be provided an integrated opportunity to explore difficult feelings utilizing sand tray figures in the context of an experiential interpersonal sharing period. Consultation concerning clients who challenge our implicit inner world will be provided in service to determining choice points for seeking additional colleague or supervisor support. We will conclude the day with a question-and answer-period.

Attendees will be able to:

1. Explain in client accessible language, one IPNB framework you plan to add to your psychoeducation toolbelt.
2. Name three left-brain presenting strategies you may observe in a client that point to the avoidance of feeling or expressing an overwhelmingly difficult feeling.
3. Discuss relational interventions that support integrating implicit memory experiences with explicit awareness, behaviors and relational habits.
4. Outline risks and benefits for a client of containing versus processing nervous system activating feelings in service to choosing the course of action that supports client self-determination and welfare.