

Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

PTSD And Memory



Description

PTSD And Memory is a simple one-page guide to brain regions implicated in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD has been associated with alteration in functioning of a number of brain regions including the amygdala, hippocampus, and pre-frontal cortex. The amygdala is a central part of our automatic threat-detection system and many studies have demonstrated amygdala hyperactivity in PTSD. The hippocampus is known to be essential for memory formation, but the hippocampal function is known to be impaired by extreme stress.

Clients with PTSD find it extremely helpful to understand more about the function of these brain regions since it forms a key part of a rationale for memory processing therapy for PTSD.

Instructions

This is a Psychology Tools information handout.

Suggested uses include:

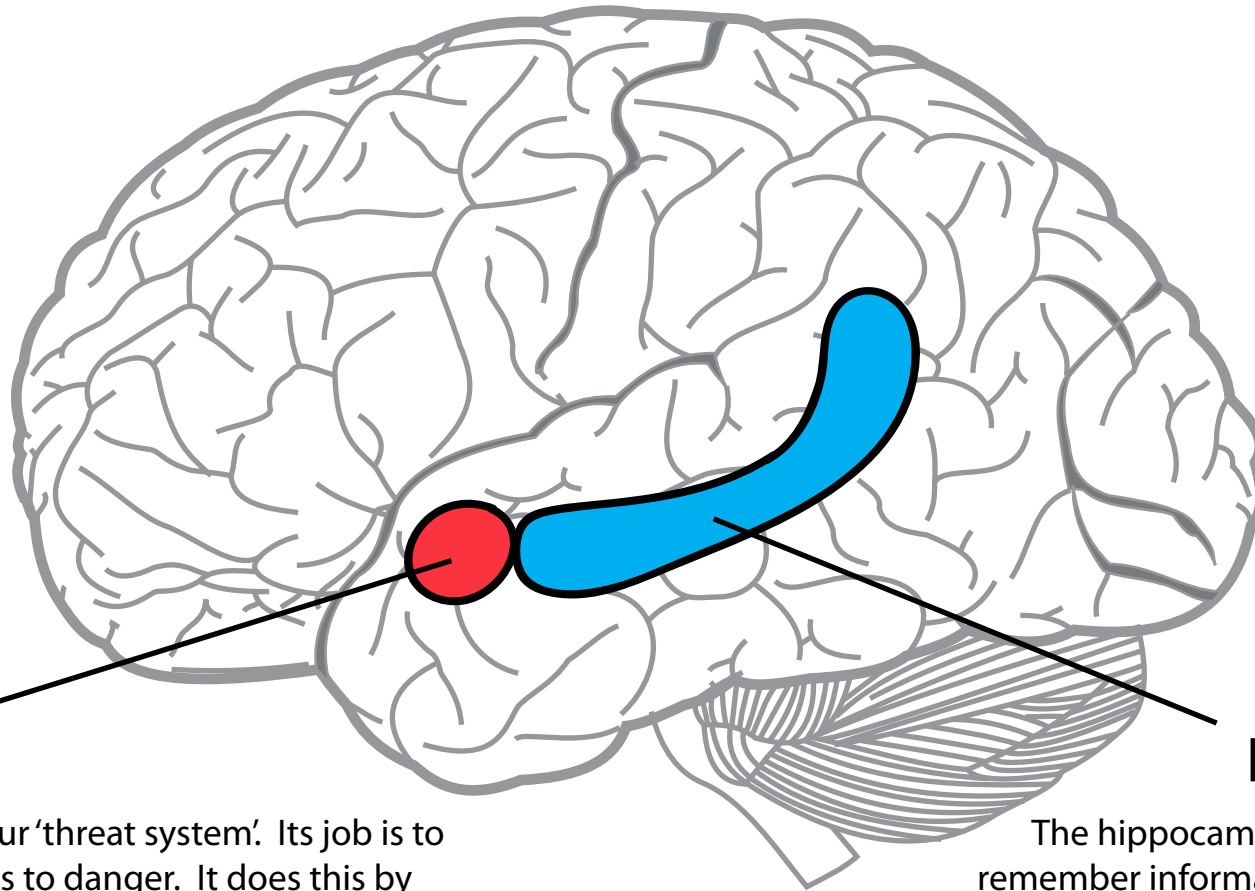
- Client handout – use as a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – use to provoke a discussion and explore client beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Teaching resource – use as a learning tool during training.

References

Brewin, C. R., Dalgleish, T., Joseph, S. (1996). A dual representation theory of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Psychological Review*, 103, 670-686.

Brewin, C. R., Gregory, J. D., Lipton, M., Burgess, N. (2010). Intrusive images in psychological disorders: Characteristics, neural mechanisms, and treatment. *Psychological Review*, 117(1), 210-232.

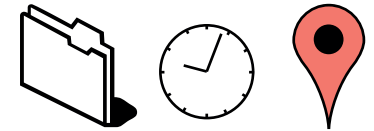
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Amygdala

The amygdala is part of our 'threat system'. Its job is to keep us safe by alerting us to danger. It does this by setting off an alarm in our body: by triggering the 'fight or flight' response, it gets us ready to act.

Unfortunately it isn't very good at discriminating between real dangers 'out there', or dangers that we are just thinking about: it responds in the same way. This means that it can set the alarm off when we are thinking about an unpleasant memory from the past, even though the danger has passed.



Hippocampus

The hippocampus helps us to store and remember information. It is like a librarian, and it 'tags' our memories with information about where and when they occurred.

When our 'threat system' is active the hippocampus doesn't work so well. It can forget to tag the memories with time and place information, which means they sometimes get stored in the wrong place. When we remember them it can feel like they are happening again.

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