

The background features several abstract geometric shapes. In the top left, a large teal circle is partially visible, with four thin vertical lines extending downwards from its edge. To its right is a circle divided into a dotted left half and a solid teal right half. Further right are four horizontal lines of varying lengths, stacked vertically. On the far right, a red vertical rectangle is partially shown, with a large purple circle overlapping its bottom right corner. In the bottom left, there is a red circle overlapping a dotted circle, which is itself overlapping a purple shape. At the bottom center, a teal circle is partially visible. In the bottom right, there are overlapping triangles in red, teal, and dark teal. The main title is centered in a large, bold, teal font.

Learned Helplessness Understanding Capacity and Finding Balance

Facilitated by Alison Krause, LCSW

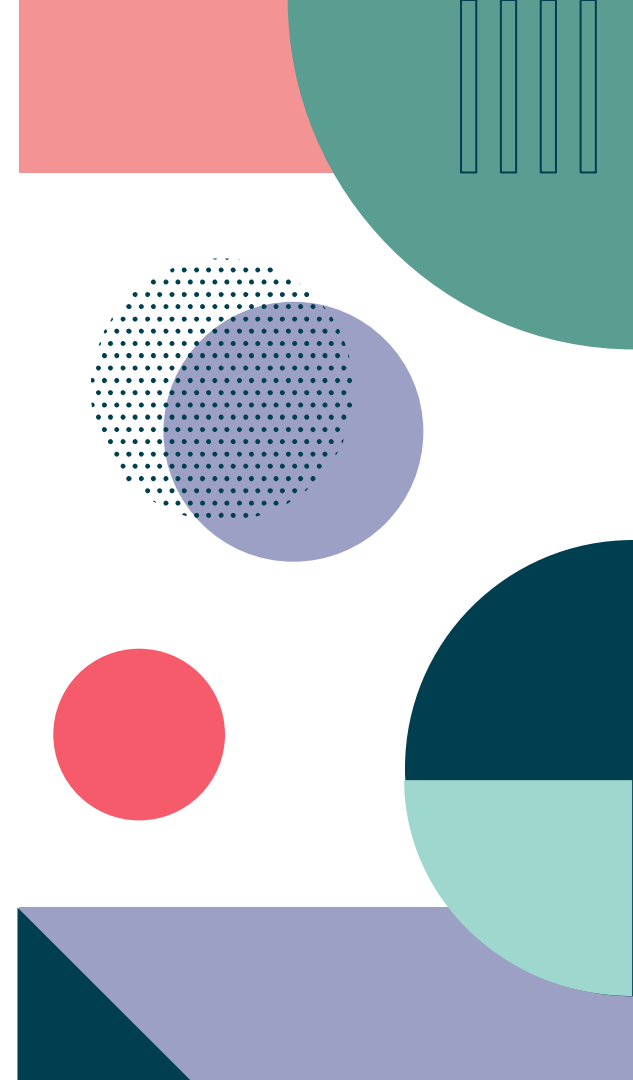
Helplessness

Martin Seligman

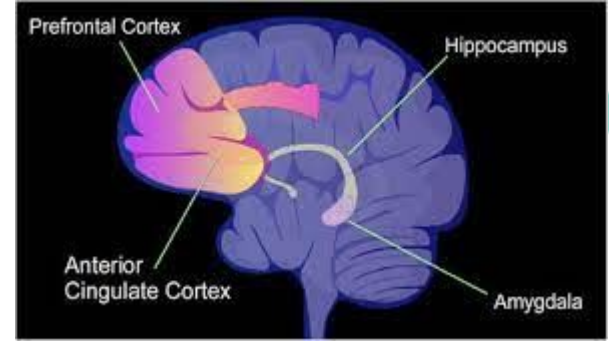
Is it learned or automatic?

Learned Helplessness: Term coined by American Psychologist Martin Seligman

- His research showed that if an individual is shown that your action does not have a desired outcome that you will stop trying: Learned Helplessness
- Later research showed that there is a part of the brain (dorsal raphe nucleus) in mammals that demonstrated that helplessness is actually the automatic response to adversity
- Hope: the concept that what we do matters. Thoughts that the future can be better than the past are learned.
- Learning that we can take action to change circumstances is how to avoid the automatic response of helplessness.
- We learn about hope by doing things and being successful but also through immersion in hopeful and optimistic cultures and environments.

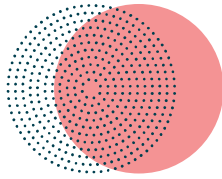


Why individuals with learning differences are more prone to helplessness



- A brief lesson on Neurochemistry: Prefrontal cortex the emotional brain
- Self Defeatist thinking in the emotional brain
- Optimism and Hopeful thought patterns more associated with the prefrontal cortex
- Societal lack of understanding of capacity: lower expectations
- Distress: it's bigger and harder to communicate
- Lack of insight and self awareness
- Individuals who feel helpless often have maladaptive ways of getting their needs met (tantruming, crisis)

The path to “learned helplessness”



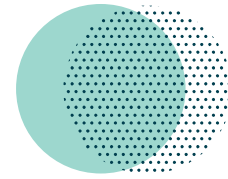
If the task is too challenging it can lead to a lack of motivation to try



Creates feelings of apathy or powerlessness



Can lead to all or nothing thinking:
“Doesn't matter what I do, I always mess up or fail”



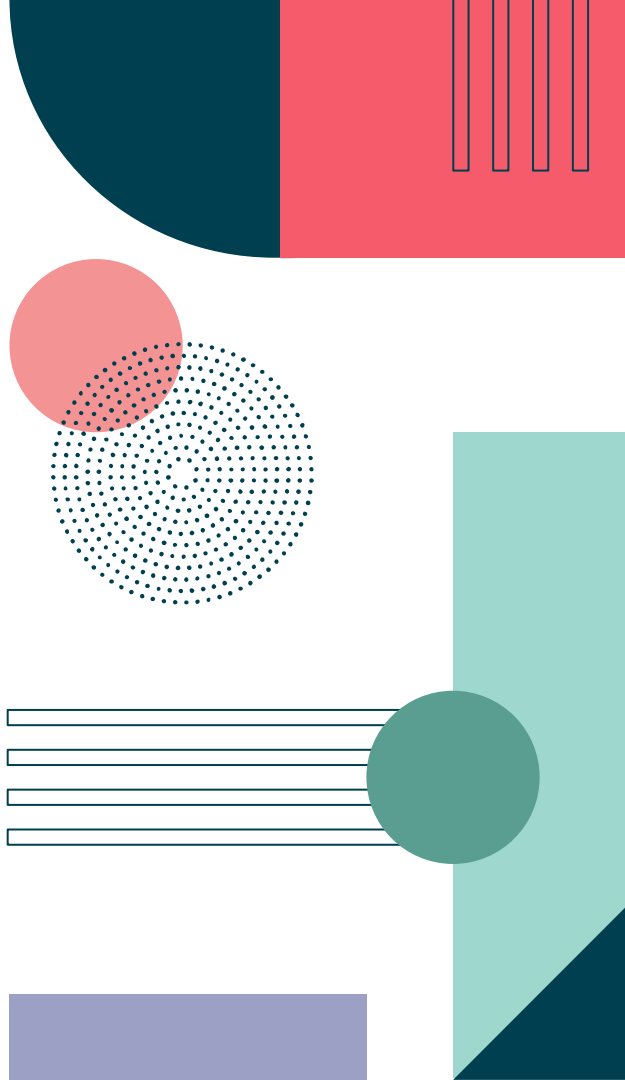
The Sweet Spot

Finding a task that is challenging but not too challenging is extremely important to developing a sense of accomplishment and avoiding learned helplessness

Example: “Clean the kitchen” May be too vague, hard to know where to start, feels overwhelming, leads to lack of motivation.

Example “You need to start controlling your anger.”: this is probably something that they also want but don’t know how to start. Can lead to a case of the “screw-its”

+ Wait time = SUCCESS



How to combat Learned Helplessness





Reframing thoughts of Learned Helplessness



It's too hard to get up every
morning on time

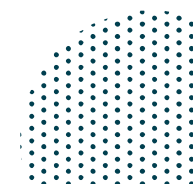
It might be hard now but if you develop
a habit it can get easier

I am scared of their reaction I
don't want to talk to them

I wonder if we make a plan and
practice what you can say how that
would go?

Every time I try I mess up

Messing up is ok! It helps us to learn,
maybe we can do this task together
first



MODEL (walk the walk)

Being unsure of
what to do

Talking through
moments
where you don't
know the
answer

Doing things you
don't always want

to “I don't really want to go for
a walk because I am
feeling tired but I know I
will feel better after”



Problem Solving

Talk through when you
are actively solving a
problem

Distress
Tolerance

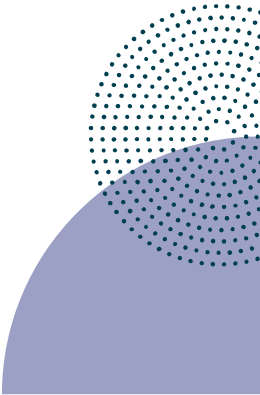
After you do
something
challenging
talk through
the feeling




How to Empower!



Schedule Time	During visits home schedule an hour for skill building. It can be anything that has been hard or a challenge for your young adult.
Hope and Optimism	Think about language “You can do really hard things” “That was really stressful but you did it anyway.” “With practice it will get better”
Break it down	Talk through the steps of a task



The background is a light teal color. It features several abstract geometric elements: a red square in the top-left corner; a large teal circle in the top-right corner, partially cut off by the edge; a smaller teal circle and a larger dotted teal circle overlapping in the upper-middle; four thin vertical teal lines on the right side; a dark teal triangle in the bottom-left corner; a purple square in the bottom-middle; a pink semi-circle in the bottom-right; and two overlapping circles (one dotted teal, one solid purple) in the lower-right. The text "It's an uphill climb but....." is positioned in the upper-left area.

It's an uphill climb but.....

Don't Give Up

Resources

1. The Hope Circuit: A Psychologists Journey from Helplessness to Optimism
2. <https://psychologycompass.com/blog/overcoming-learned-helplessness/>
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5572253/>
4. <https://positivepsychology.com/learned-helplessness-seligman-theory-depression-cure/>
5. The Psychology Podcast” Martin Seligman: From Learned Helplessness to Learned Hopefulness

And not But Meditation

Take the time to come into your space and find a comfortable upright position

You can lay your hands on your lap or on your belly or your heart

Start to become aware of your breath, no need to change it just observe

You may feel your chest rising and falling or the air on your nose or mouth

We discussed a lot of important concrete skills that can be really helpful but it so important to practice self compassion

Take this time to in your head to speak these words

there is opportunity for me to improve and I am doing the best I can (repeat)

Hear these thoughts in your mind and in your heart and know that you can always come back to a space where you have compassion for yourself