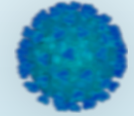
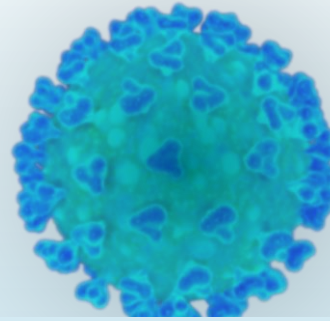


# COVID-19 Grief and Trauma: Applying Compassion-Focused Therapy Principles



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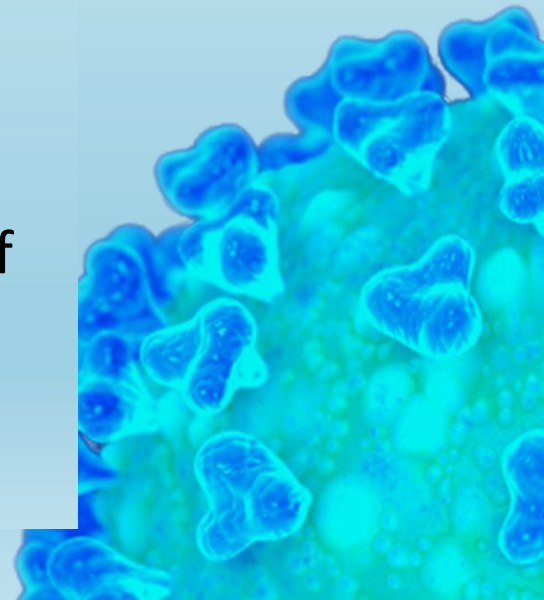
## Overlap of Grief and Trauma



It is naïve to think that the current situation invokes grief as we have experienced it before.

While grief and trauma are often intermingled, hearing descriptions with terms such as “global crisis,” “worldwide tragedy,” “epic proportions,” and “disastrous” tips us into feelings of threat, vigilance, paralysis, and overwhelm.

Thus, we would be wise to understand our reaction to trauma as a part of our grief during this time.



# Traumatic Overlay

There can be psychic overload that prevents reasonable coping and the ability to manage stress.

Managing threat and reverting to basic survival behaviors are ingrained in us as part of our survival instinct.

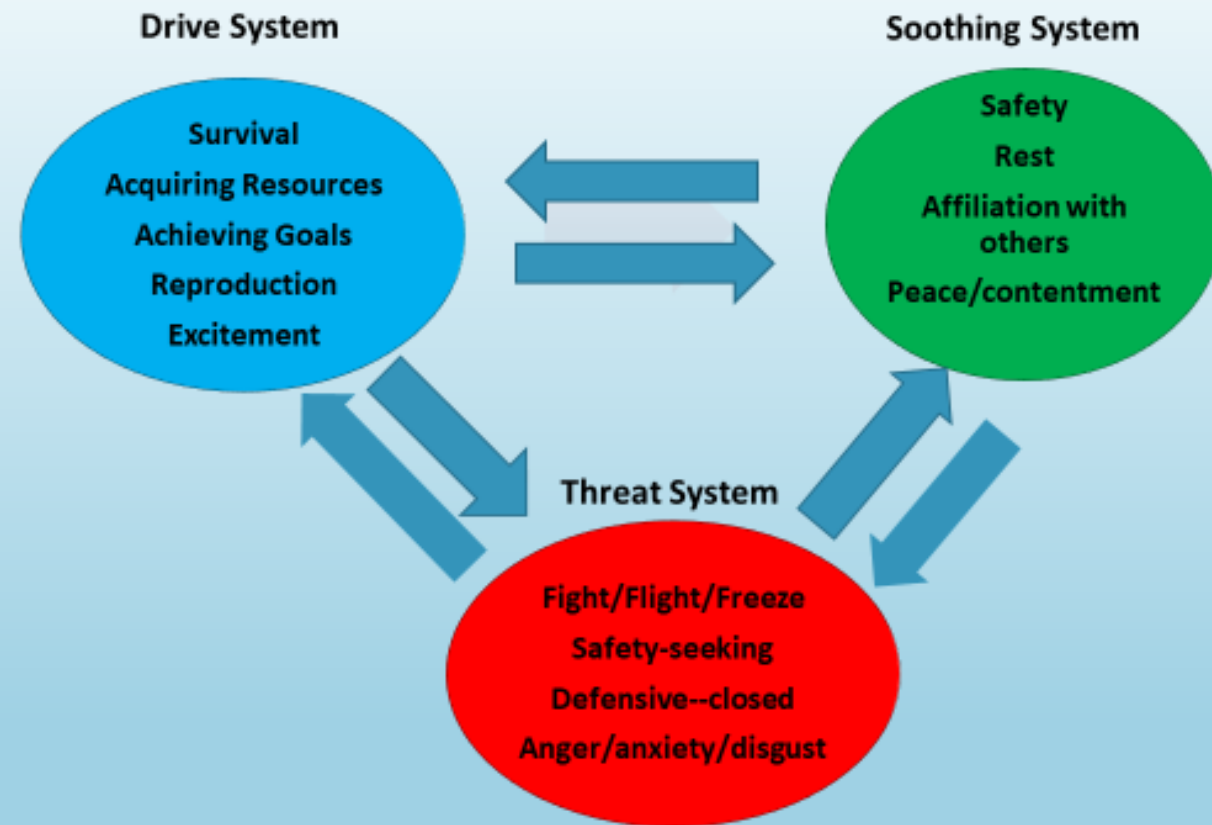
Feelings of underlying unease, anxiety, overwhelm, overload, and threat need to be acknowledged and appreciated for their helpful purpose in protecting us from harm.



# Understanding Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many behaviors we are seeing come from responses to the sense of threat by engaging our survival mechanisms.

We need to find ways to engage with our soothing system to offset the long-term effects of trauma.



Affect Regulation Systems as Proposed in Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT; Gilbert, 2009)

# Threat System

This system is probably activated for most people to some extent right now.

This system is designed to protect us from threat and keep us safe.

By itself, does not allow us to think clearly and openly; it is the “emergency” response to a perceived threat.

Makes us gravitate toward those who are like us, where we feel safe.



Consider threats to areas that may be activating this system right now:

Health  
Finances  
Safety  
Relationships

# Drive System

This system engages when we are concerned about lacking something essential for life or something that is considered a necessity.

Our “survival instinct” kicks in and we take stock of what we must have and what we need to get through a time when there is concern over lack.

Like the threat system, this system is often “in the background,” out of our conscious awareness.



Consider what may be activating this system right now:

Financial insecurity  
Social isolation  
Fear of inability to obtain needed goods and services



# Reframing some behaviors...

## Racism and the COVID-19 Outbreak



# Soothing System

When this system is activated, we feel comforted and open.

We are able to reflect on our actions and values.

We are able to think creatively, nurture ourselves and others, and replenish our need for love and belonging.

The soothing system allows us to access our true intentions, allowing us a chance to respond and reflect rather than react defensively or aggressively.



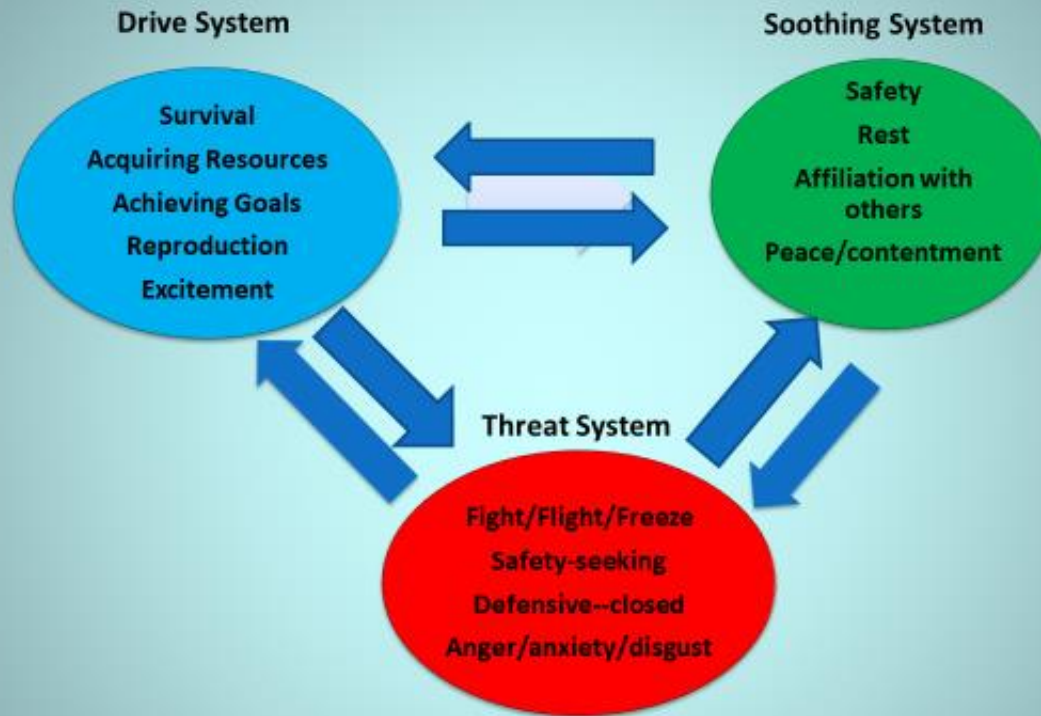
Consider what may be activating this system right now:

Connecting in the midst of isolation  
Selfless responses by those in caring professions:

Gratitude and grounding practices  
Offers of free services and volunteerism



# Balance is Important



We need each of these systems in order to survive. However, it is important to recognize the importance of balance between these systems.

At times when there is a large amount of uncertainty and an overarching sense of threat, we need to find ways to balance the threat and drive systems with the soothing system.