

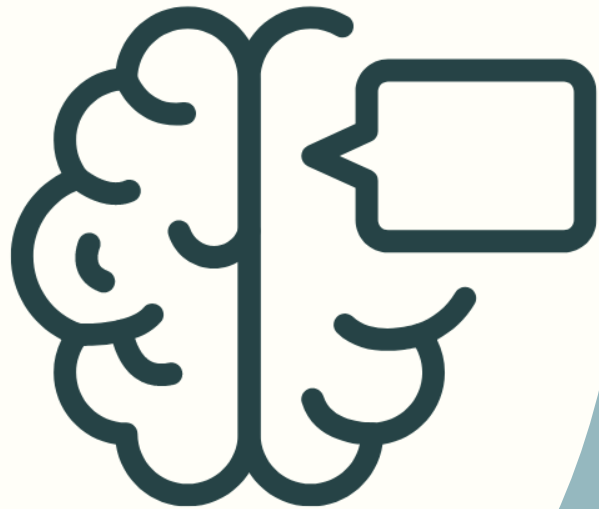
# DISSOCIATION

ATYPICAL  
PRESENTATION  
AND MANAGEMENT  
OF THIS SNEAKY  
SYMPTOM

## Whit Davison, LCSW

Therapy for adults and teens 14+  
Intense anxiety, complex trauma, and dissociation  
Coordinated Couples Counseling with Klick Counseling  
Family Therapy Intensives (coming 5-2024)  
Peer consults and speaking



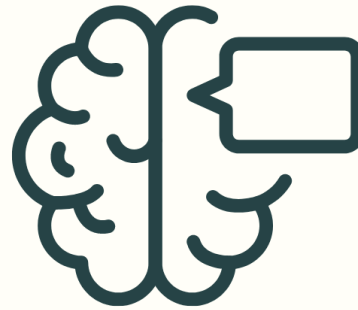


# AGENDA

1. Refine our focus
2. Identify sneaky symptoms
3. Address challenges effectively



# **BEFORE WE BEGIN**



## **My theoretical orientation:**

Cognitive

Object Relations

Psychodynamic



## **Disclaimer:**

**Thoughts  
contained in this  
presentation are  
my own**

# We're not talking about...

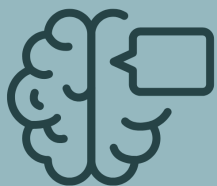
## DSM-V

Dissociative Identity Disorder  
Dissociative Amnesia  
Depersonalization/  
Derealization Disorder (DPDR)  
Other Specified Dissociative  
Disorder (OSDD)  
Unspecified Dissociative  
Disorder  
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder,  
Dissociative Subtype



## ICD-11

Dissociative neurological  
symptom disorder  
Dissociative amnesia  
Trance disorder  
Possession trance disorder  
Dissociative identity disorder  
Partial dissociative identity  
disorder  
Depersonalization-derealization  
disorder  
Other specified dissociative  
disorders  
Dissociative disorders,  
unspecified



# **We ARE talking about...**

**Non-pathological dissociative symptoms or experiences**

**Disruptions in psychological continuity**

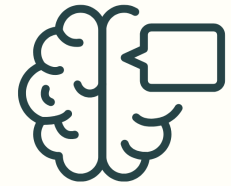
**Numbing intolerable affect**

**Symptoms of other disorders with dissociative aspects**

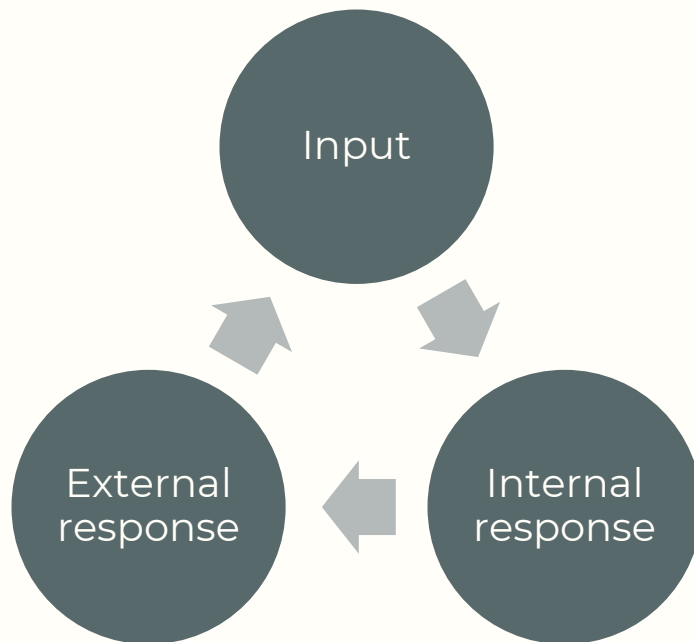
**Dissociation mimicking other disorders**

**When unrecognized, may cause challenges in treatment**

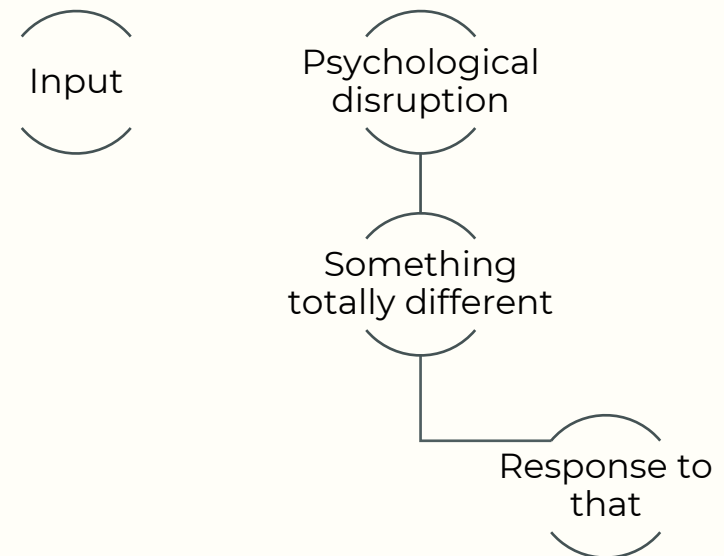
# Why is this important?

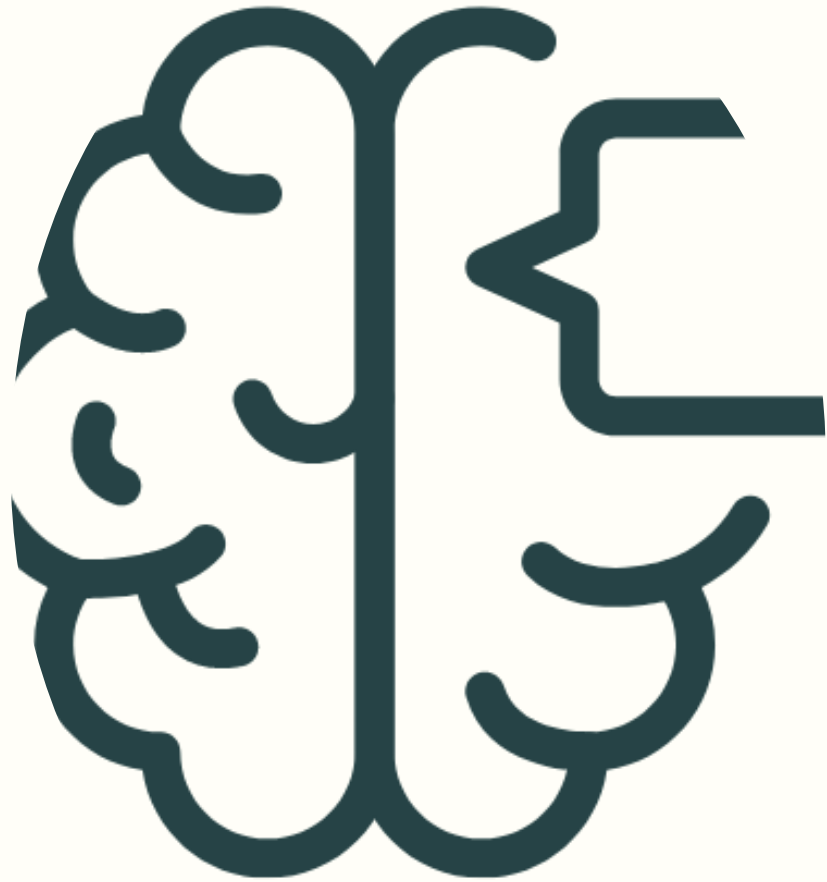


## Without dissociation



## With dissociation





# **Disruption in Psychological Continuity**

**Surroundings**

**Feelings**

**Thoughts**

**Time**

**Memories**

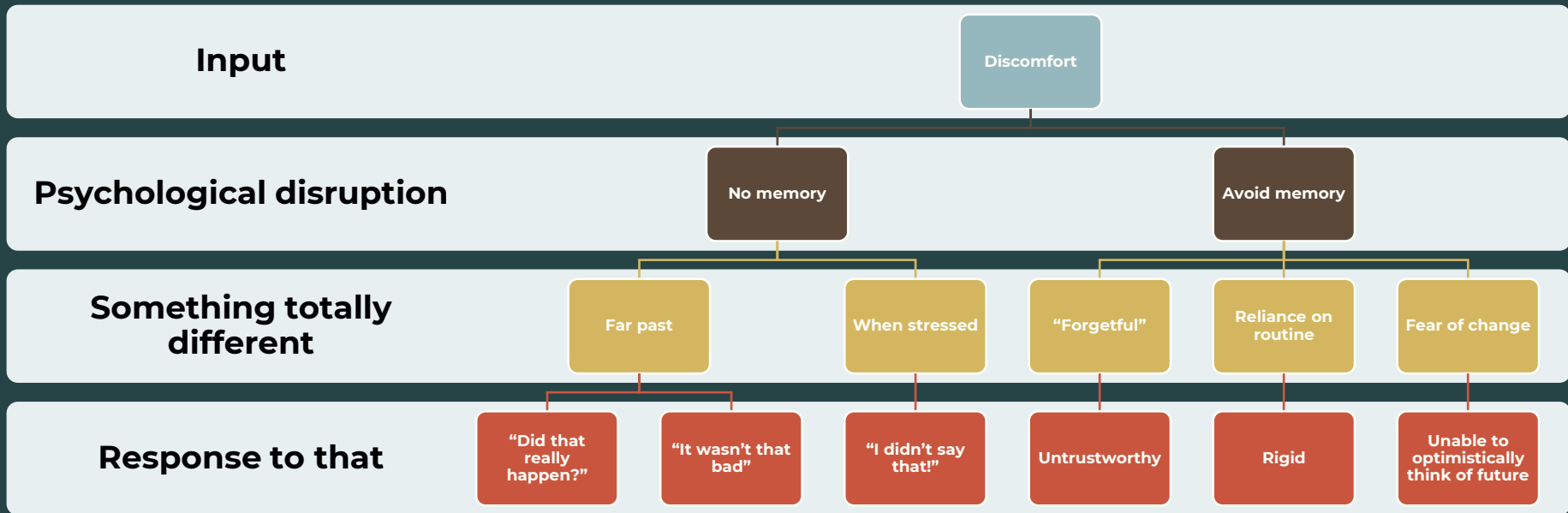
**Sense of self**



# Sneaky Symptoms

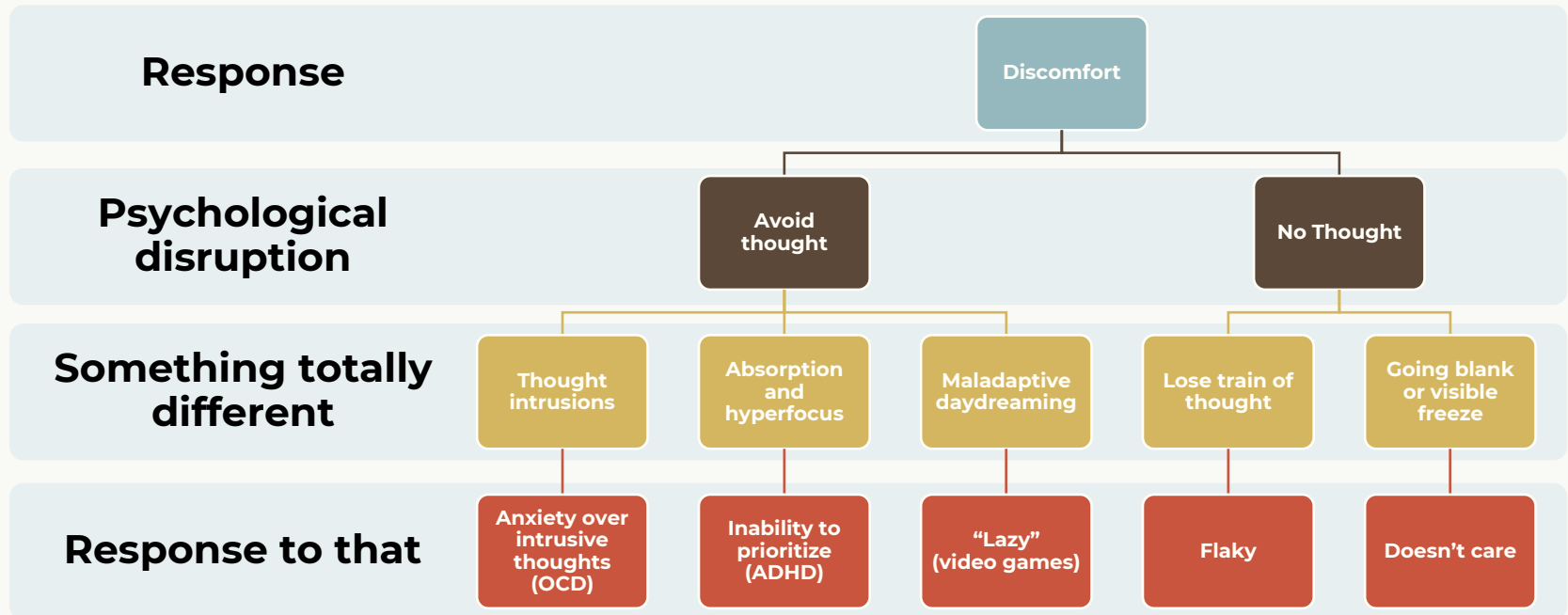


# Memory Disruptions

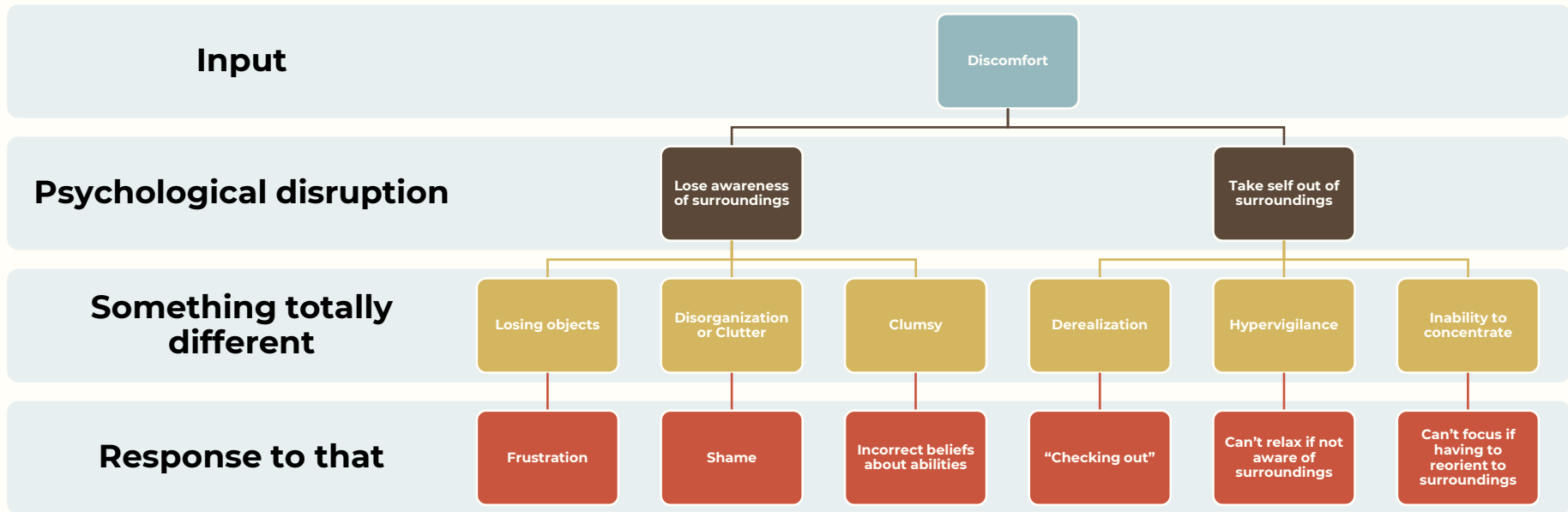




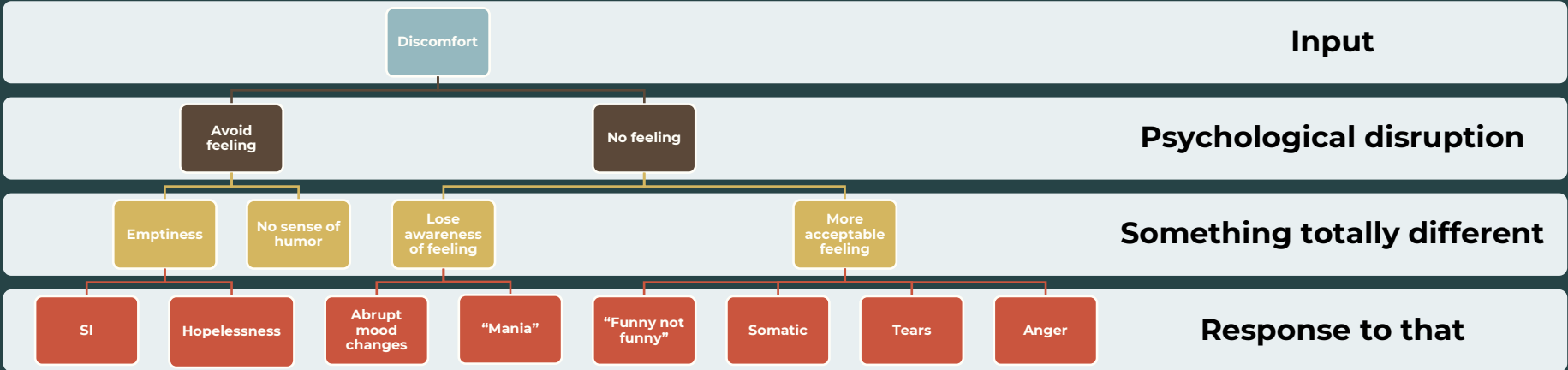
# Thought Disruptions



# Surroundings Disruptions

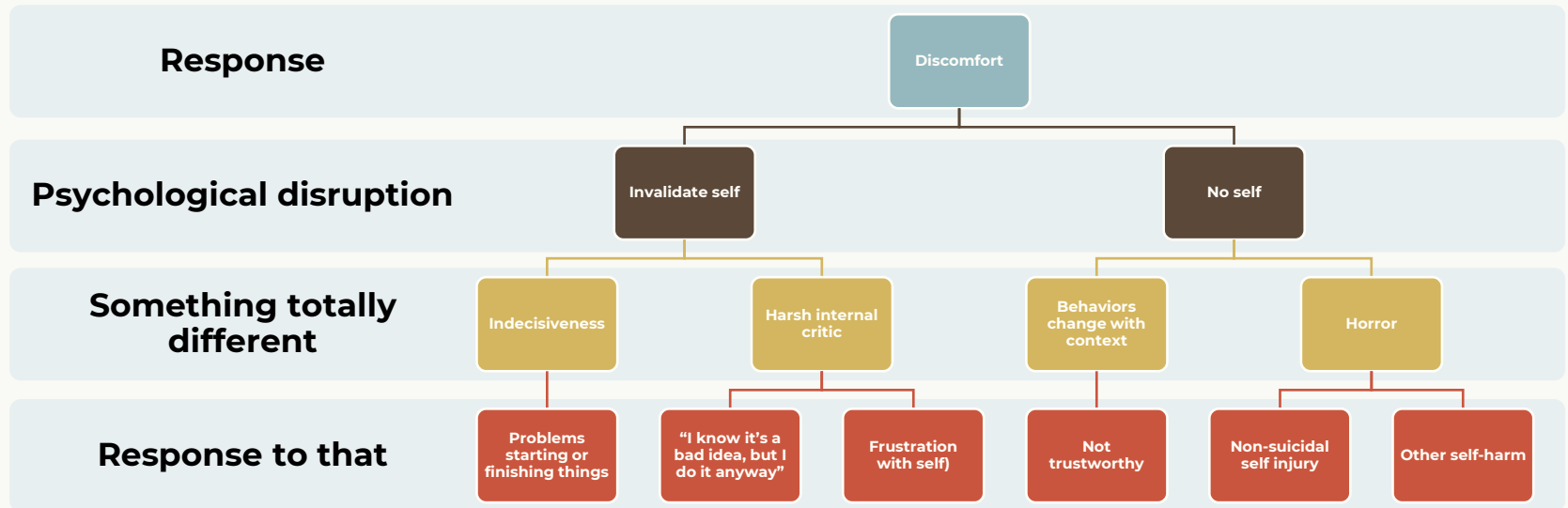


# Feeling Disruptions





# Sense of self disruptions



# Time Disruptions



Input

Discomfort

Psychological disruption

Time compresses

Time expands

Time disappears

Something totally different

Actual impulsivity, especially under stress

Difficulty handling uncertainty

"Time blindness"

Procrastination

Perceived impulsivity

Hopelessness

Response to that

Consequences

Panic

Others' frustration

Own frustration

Distrust in own decisions

No end to emotional torment



# Managing Effectively

# Signs in Session



**“Onion Effect”**

**Very little connection to the body or awareness of emotion (alexithymia)**

**Gaps in personal narrative**

**Adherence to what they have been told about themselves despite evidence**

**Sleep concerns: restless, broken sleep; repetitive symbolic dreams**

**Family history includes challenges with caregivers**

**ADHD, autism, gifted, dyslexic, any mismatch between caregiver and child**

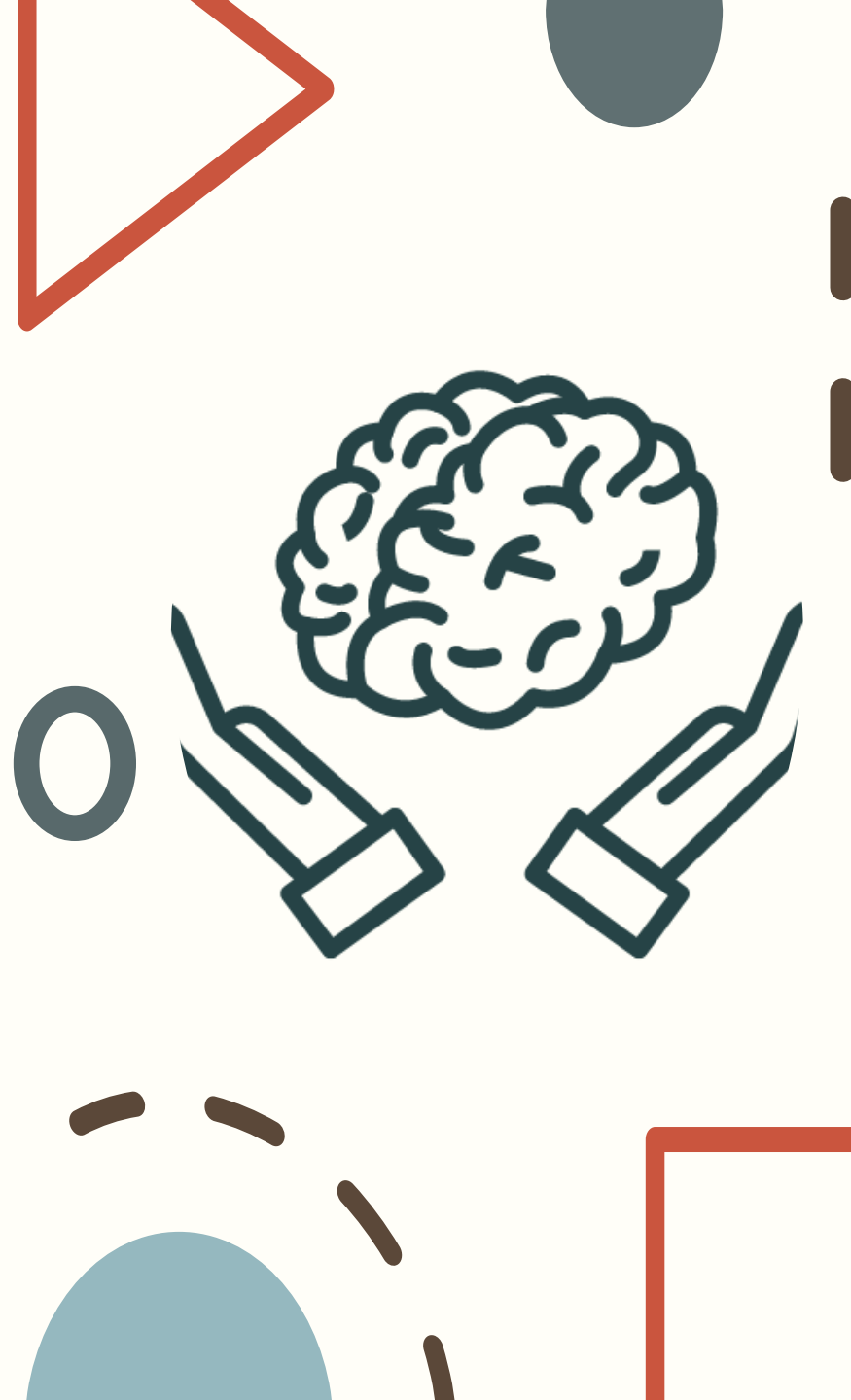
**Member of a marginalized community**

**YOUR mind goes blank**



# Key Phrases to Listen For

- “It’s like a switch flips”
- “I feel like I’m possessed”
- “I’m suddenly out of control”
- “I feel like I’m falling apart”
- “I don’t know”
- “I leave here and totally forget what we talked about”



# Strategies to Use

## Working with Symptoms

1. Recognize dissociation
2. Identify what cannot be felt or what cannot be known (“I can’t be angry”)
3. Take an indirect and inquisitive approach
4. Reframe cognitive challenges into values statements
5. Address sleep hygiene
6. Address substance use which may increase symptoms



## ISST-D Guidelines:

1. ISST-D guidelines:
  - a) Establish safety, stabilize, and reduce symptoms
  - b) Identify, work through, and integrate traumatic memories
  - c) Facilitate identity integration and rehabilitation (client has a more complete sense of self)

# When to Worry



Significant memory issues



Marked difference in appearance



Non-substance related blackouts lasting for hours or but less than days (not fugue)



“Trapped” in one feeling state / persistent return to one feeling state

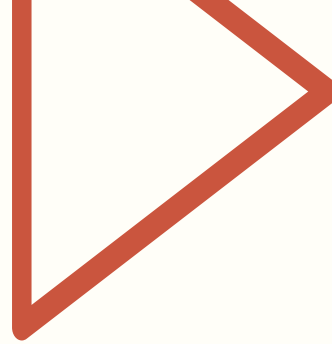


Significant shifts in personal narrative



That funny feeling in your gut

**That funny  
feeling in your gut**





**Questions?**

# Whit Davison, LCSW

Davison Counseling, LLC

[whitdavison.com](http://whitdavison.com)

913-214-2490

[whit@whitdavison.com](mailto:whit@whitdavison.com)

Therapy for adults and teens 14+  
Intense anxiety, complex trauma, and dissociation  
Coordinated Couples Counseling with Klick  
Counseling

