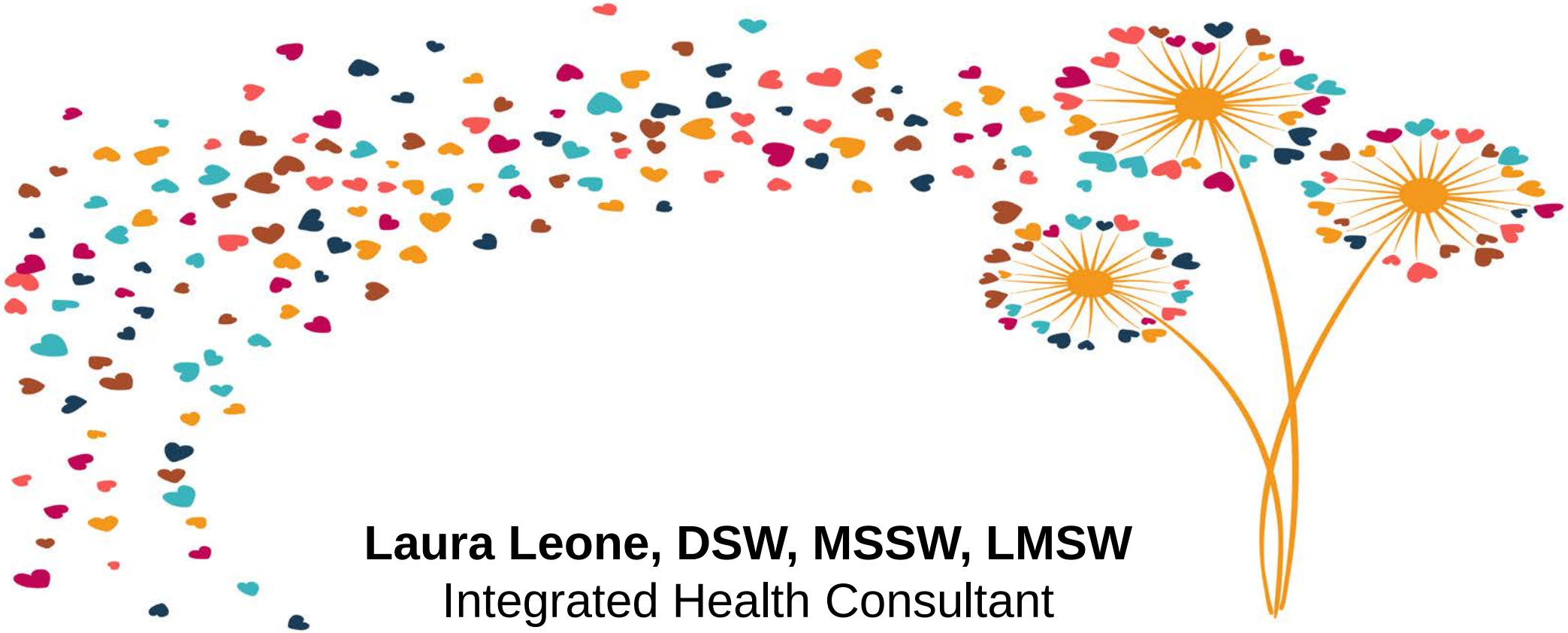
Understanding Anxiety



Laura Leone, DSW, MSSW, LMSW
Integrated Health Consultant
National Council for Behavioral Health

Today's Presenter

Dr Laura Leone, DSW, MSSW, LMSW
Integrated Health Consultant
The National Council for Behavioral Health

Stress Versus Anxiety

Stress kills…and it starts in childhood

- ***Stress response*** is the cascade of changes triggered by the release of corticosteroids and other stress hormones when the body perceives a threat and goes 'on alert.' The resulting physiological changes include increased heart and respiration rates, higher blood pressure, and more glucose released from the liver into the blood stream.

- ***Chronic Stress.*** Whereas acute stress arises from special events or situations which involve threat, novelty and uncertainty, chronic stress results from repeated or persistent exposures to situations which cause the release of stress hormones. Over time, this constant activation of the stress response— even at low levels—can injure the brain and body, increasing the risk for high blood pressure, diabetes and other chronic diseases and for emotional, cognitive and behavioral problems.

California Newsreel. The raising of America. 2017

Stress Response

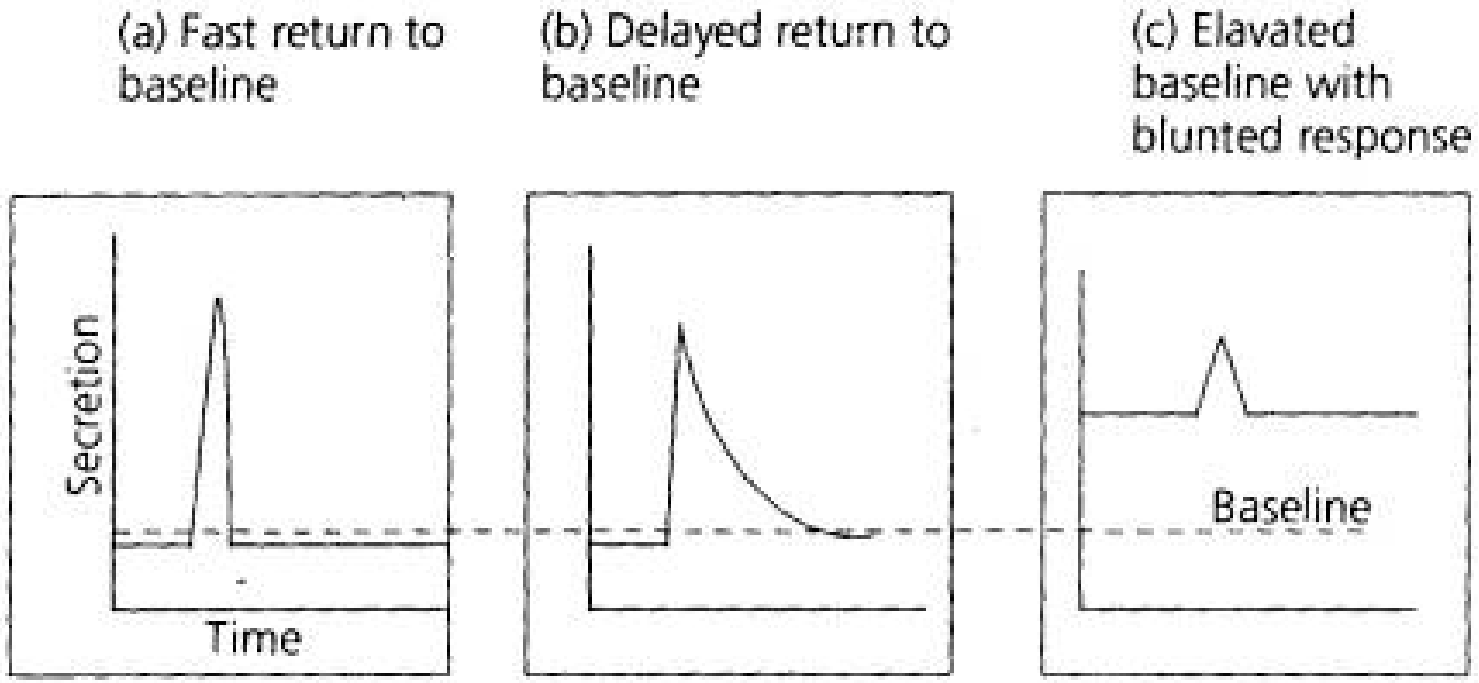


Fig. 2.5 Stress reactivity patterns. Idealized representations of neuroendocrine and metabolic reactivity. (a) Fast return to baseline: reactivity is responsive and flexible. (b) Delayed return to baseline: reactivity is responsive with slow recovery. (c) Elevated baseline with blunted response: weak reactivity and abnormal resting level.

Impact of Stress

- Impacts of the biological response to psychological stress include impairments to:
  - Cardiovascular, endocrine, circulatory, neurological, and metabolic systems.
- Resulting in:
  - Hypertension, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, heart attack, stroke, cancer, infectious disease, and lowered immunity, among others.

- Responding to stress is natural and necessary for survival
  - Flight or fight
- But there are limits to our stress response /reactivity
- Acute versus chronic stress

Reduce Stress

Causes:

Individual and Collective

Effects:

Chronic adrenaline and cortisol
Higher blood pressure
Seems to impact insulin effectiveness
Psychological

Neuroscience of Anxiety

- The cycle of anxiety
  - The limbic system senses danger (Amygdala)
  - The danger signal is sent to the hypothalamus, which initiates the fight/flight response
  - The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) then increases heart rate, blood pressure, perspiration
  - Digestion stops and blood flows to major organs leaving cold, clammy extremities
  - The brain, via the thalamus, receives sensory feedback of a pounding heart, sweat, and choked breathing
  - The limbic system (Amygdala) senses danger, and the cycle continues

Neuroscience of Anxiety

- Anxiety reduction
  - Medication, deep breathing, yoga, stress-relieving exercise etc. triggers the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS) - rest and digest
  - The PSNS/“brake" slows a racing heart and breathing begins to take on a relaxed rhythm
  - The brain, via the thalamus, receives sensory feedback from the body about increased relaxation and calm
  - The amygdala no longer senses danger, and the cycle ends

The Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)-7 scale.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
Having trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3

Total Score= Add Columns _____ + _____ + _____ + _____

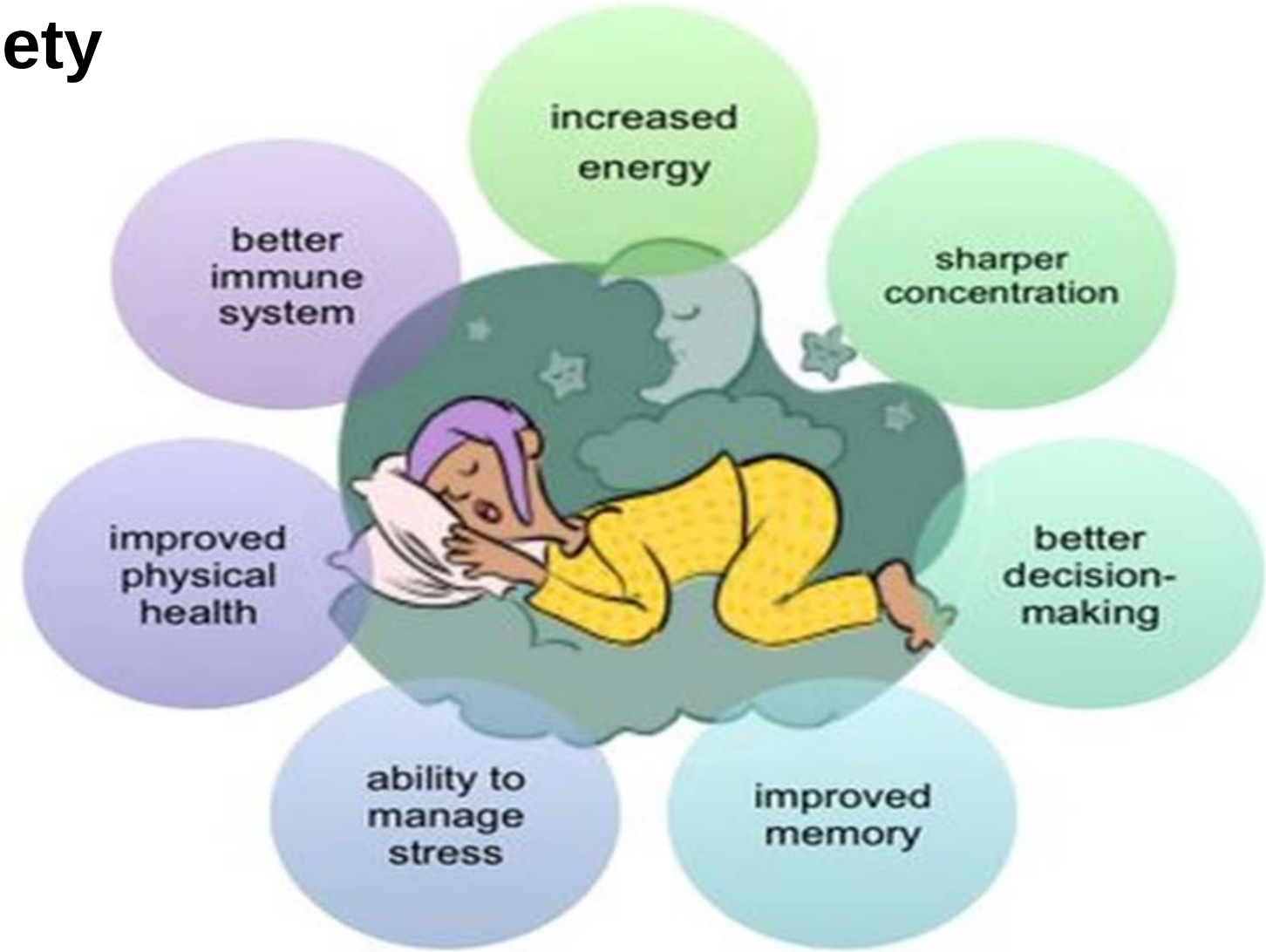
Anxiety Signs and Symptoms

- Feeling nervous or "on edge."
- Unfounded or unrealistic fears.
- Trouble separating from parents or guardians.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors.
- Trembling, sweating, shortness of breath, stomachaches, headaches, and/or muscle tension or other physical symptoms.

Types of Anxiety

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Specific Phobias

Managing Anxiety



Encourage Appropriate Professional Help

Types of Professionals
• Employee Assistance Program • Doctors (primary care physicians) • Nurse Practitioners • Psychiatrists • Psychologists, social workers, counselors, and other mental health professionals • Certified peer specialists • Certified drug and alcohol counselors

Types of Professional Help
• Cognitive behavioral therapy and other “talk” therapy for your child • Medication • Family therapy • Parent/guardian education and support. • Other professional supports (complimentary medicine)

Anxiety Treatment Best Practices

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Exposure Therapy (Systematic desensitization**)**
- Emotional Freedom Technique aka “Tapping”
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Hypnotherapy
- Medications

Research indicates that a combination of medication, counseling and lifestyle improvements provides long-term optimal outcomes

www.emdr.com/

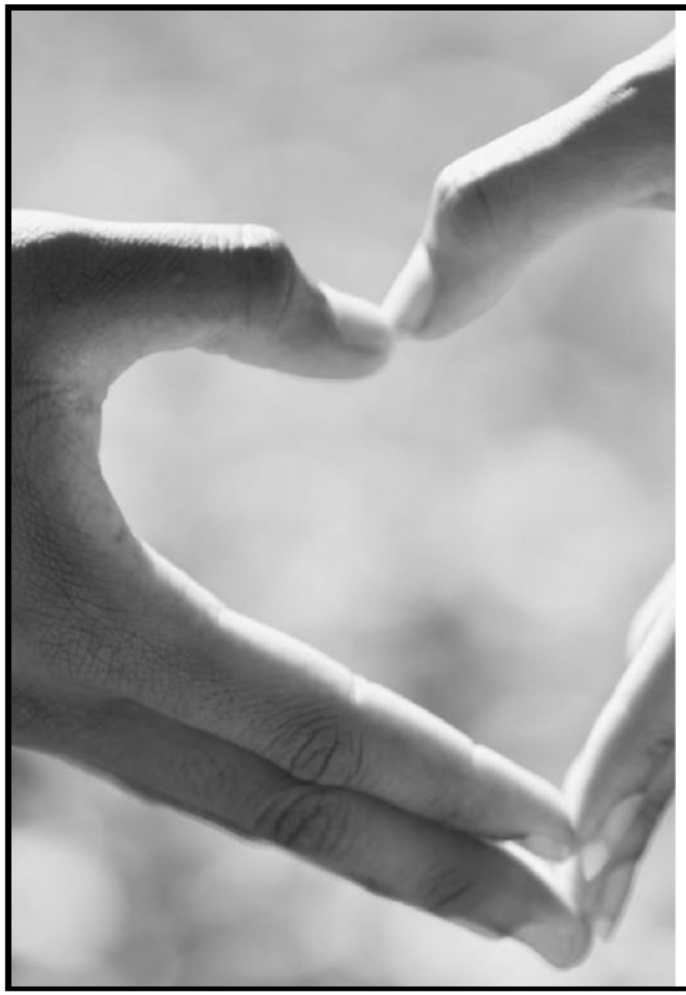
Self Help and Other Support Strategies

- Nutrition – anti-inflammatory diet
- Movement (exercise, yoga, aikido, Qi Gong, Tai Chi, etc.)
- Complementary Medicine (acupuncture, massage, etc.)
- Meditation
- Connection with others (loneliness can be lethal)
- Journaling
- Relaxation techniques

Neuroplasticity & Amygdala

- Some interventions have immediate effects on the activation of the amygdala
  - Diaphragmatic Breathing
  - Yoga
  - Aerobic Exercise
- Some interventions work in a short term way, changing the general level of activation for a period
  - Regular Aerobic Exercise
  - Yoga
- Some interventions rewire the circuitry in the amygdala, producing lasting change
  - Exposure

Schreiber-Pan H. Rewire the anxious brain: Using neuroscience to treat anxiety, panic and worry. 2018



Hand on the Heart – Linda Graham

- Self-directed Neuroplasticity
- Harness the capacities of the brain to rewire itself for greater resilience
- Oxytocin is the neurochemical basis in our body for the felt sense of safety and trust, of connection and belonging, which reassures us "everything is OK;
- The very fast-track way to release oxytocin and calm down stress, even extreme stress, is through safe touch and warmth in a safe, soothing relationship.
- Neuroscientists have demonstrated many times that even remembering or imagining someone we love, with whom we feel loved, is enough to release small but regular doses of oxytocin.

Schreiber-Pan H. Rewire the anxious brain: Using neuroscience to treat anxiety, panic and worry. 2018**.** **https://lindagraham-mft.net/hand-on-the-heart/.**

Self-Compassion & Neuroscience

triggering the release of oxytocin.

decreases our cortisol levels

physical touch releases oxytocin, and calms cardiovascular stress

Physical touch reduces cortisol

Oxytocin increase = trust, calm, warmth

www.selfcompassion.org Kristin Neff

Everyday Ways to Relax

Stress Reduction Interventions: Guided Imagery

- Sometimes called guided meditation, visualization, mental rehearsal and guided self-hypnosis.

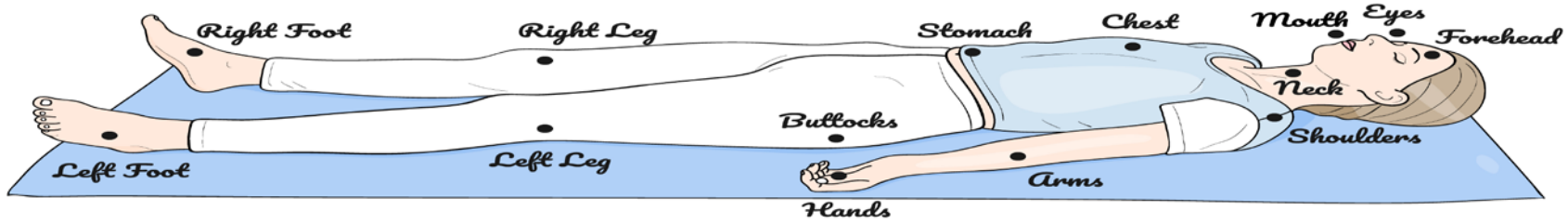
- A gentle but powerful technique that focuses the imagination in proactive, positive ways, involving as many of the 5 senses as possible.

- Examples: https://youtu.be/ar_W4jSzOlM or https://youtu.be/WBYYFbStfHM

Stress Reduction Interventions: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- The practice of tensing, or tightening, one muscle group at a time followed by a relaxation phase with release of the tension.

- Doctors have used progressive muscle relaxation in combination with standard treatments for symptom relief in a number of conditions, including headaches, cancer pain, high blood pressure, and digestive disturbances.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Dr Laura Leone, DSW, MSSW, LMSW
Integrated Health Consultant
National Council for Behavioral Health
LauraL@TheNationalCouncil.org