



SHE*T FOR BRAINS

**FROM TRAUMA
TO TRIUMPH:
THE SCOTT FAMILY'S
JOURNEY THROUGH
DYSREGULATION TO
HEALING**

Introduction:



“The best kept secret is that if you lead with empathy at the heart of everything you do, you can and will be successful.”

— JONATHAN STANLEY

In sharing the Scott family’s journey through trauma, resilience, and advocacy, we aim to shed light on the profound impact that mental health has on both personal and professional lives. Their story illustrates that we are all more than just our output—we are individuals with challenges, triumphs, and complex stories behind our everyday appearances.

This whitepaper explores their path from crisis to healing, the concept of dysregulation and its effects, and the tools they discovered to reclaim balance and well-being. Through their experience, we gain valuable insights that can help others facing similar struggles and create more compassionate communities both at home and at work.

The Scott Family's Journey

The Beginning of the Storm

The Scott family's ordeal began like many stories of the pandemic era—with disruption and uncertainty. Their daughter Becca, now a college sophomore, had struggled with anxiety since fourth grade. She had been in therapy consistently since that time and began medication in middle school. Despite these challenges, she was thriving as a high school freshman in 2019, excelling academically and competing successfully on the varsity cross-country team.

Then came March 13, 2020—the day the world changed. As the pandemic lockdowns began, the family was vigilant about Becca's mental health, knowing that uncertainty and unpredictability feed the "beast of anxiety." Despite their care, on June 1, 2020, Becca experienced her first seizure.

This seizure, as they would later learn, "woke up something in her brain." Over the next year, Becca would experience seizures consistently, sometimes multiple times daily, ranging from two to 45 minutes of convulsions. During these episodes, she would often fall and hit her head, leading to concussions that compounded her suffering.

In Becca's words: "I would often fall and hit my head. Today I've had 13 concussions in the last seven years from this. I now know that my having a seizure was my body's way of releasing stress."

The Domino Effect: How One Crisis Can Cascade

The Scott family's experience demonstrates how dysregulation can create a chain reaction of health issues:



Understanding this cascade effect helps explain why addressing the root cause—dysregulation—was essential to breaking the cycle, rather than treating each symptom in isolation.

Communication in Crisis

One of the most startling aspects of Becca's condition was her inability to communicate verbally during and after the seizures. The family developed an extraordinary system to bridge this gap:

"I could hear my parents talking calmly to me, but I couldn't respond verbally with words," Becca explains. "So I started using sign language with my dad. I would just sign letters to spell out words and put spaces in between letters. My dad would translate to my mom, and I would talk to my mom through answering yes or no questions, just by squeezing her hand once for yes, and twice for no."

Brian would sometimes receive FaceTime calls while working at Blooming Color, stepping away from running presses to translate Becca's sign language for Amy. This communication system became a lifeline, but it was only one aspect of the family's new reality.

The Search for Answers

The family embarked on an exhaustive search for medical answers. They consulted countless specialists and ran every test imaginable, yet results consistently returned normal. Becca appeared healthy on paper, but her suffering was undeniable.

As the fall of 2020 approached, the challenges intensified. Amy took an unprecedented three-month leave of absence from her teaching position to focus on Becca's care. When she eventually had to return to work, Brian restructured his schedule entirely, staying home during the day with Becca and then working from approximately 3:30 PM until 3:30 AM, running presses and managing his business in the middle of the night.

"I would be zooming with Becca so she could sign to me so I could tell Amy what she's saying," Brian recalls, describing the extraordinary measures they took to maintain both Becca's safety and their professional responsibilities.

The family eventually received a diagnosis of PNES—Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures. Unlike epileptic seizures, these couldn't be controlled with medication. They were manifestations of anxiety, physical expressions of psychological distress that required intensive therapy to address.

The Vacation from Hell

By summer 2021, Becca's seizures had decreased in frequency, and the family believed the worst was behind them. They planned a celebratory trip to Hawaii—which quickly became what they now refer to as “the vacation from hell.”

Upon arrival, Becca developed a sore throat, which they initially dismissed. By the next evening, she was experiencing excruciating pain in her legs. “It felt like somebody was taking my muscles and twisting them,” Becca remembers. “I couldn't move my legs. I was screaming in pain.”

This began a series of emergency room visits across Hawaii. During one hospital stay, doctors performed a spinal tap to rule out meningitis. Unfortunately, this procedure led to a cerebral spinal fluid leak, leaving Becca unable to sit or stand upright without intense pressure in her head. She spent much of the vacation lying flat in their condo while Brian stayed with her.

“We had to carry her from the condo to the car in a chair laying backwards because she couldn't walk,” Amy recalls. “It was messed up. And that was just to get to the airport that day.”

From Bad to Worse

Upon returning home, Becca went for a run, only to develop intense itching and rashes on her legs. Initially diagnosed as poison ivy, these symptoms persisted and worsened. A pediatric rheumatologist eventually diagnosed Henoch-Schönlein Purpura (HSP), an autoimmune vasculitis that typically affects young children, not teenagers.

“My blood vessels became so inflamed that my legs and feet were covered in these bruises that were in rashes,” Becca explains. “They were incredibly swollen. I gained about 20 pounds just in my feet and legs and I couldn't wear shoes, couldn't stand, couldn't walk.”

The condition, which typically resolves in two weeks in young children, persisted for three to four months in Becca's case. She ended up in a wheelchair, eventually requiring physical therapy to relearn how to walk.

During this same period, Becca began experiencing new symptoms, including frequent fainting. After an eight-month wait to see a specialist, she was diagnosed with POTS (Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome), a form of dysautonomia that affects heart rate and blood pressure regulation.

The mounting diagnoses seemed endless—seizures, HSP, POTS, occasional COVID infections, and even mononucleosis somewhere in the mix. The family had reached a breaking point, having endured over two years of medical crises with little improvement in Becca's condition.

The Mayo Clinic Breakthrough

The turning point came when they discovered the Pediatric Pain Rehabilitation Clinic at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. After an extensive application process, Becca was accepted as one of eight teenagers in the summer program.

Amy and Becca rented a small house in Rochester for a month while Becca attended the intensive program. For eight hours a day, she participated in occupational therapy, physical therapy, mindfulness training, medical consultations, and biofeedback sessions.

The approach was radically different from what they had expected. Rather than prescribing medications or additional medical interventions, the program focused on rewiring the brain's response to stress. As Brian explains, "We were on a search for a medical diagnosis for this

problem that was occurring and, you know, chased it for months and months with different doctors, different tests. When we went to the Mayo Clinic, they told us to forget all of that. This is not a medical problem, really. This is a mental problem that you need to learn how to retrain your brain."

One of the most challenging aspects was the prohibition on napping. Becca had been sleeping up to 16 hours a day, and the program required her to stay awake during the day and limit sleep to 8 hours nightly.

"I would sit there, and I would rock back and forth, and I was like shaking because I needed a nap," Becca recalls. "I literally think that I had withdrawals."



The Counterintuitive Path to Healing

The Mayo Clinic's approach contradicted many of the family's expectations:

- Instead of more medical tests, they were told to "forget all of that"
- Instead of more medications, medications were reduced
- Instead of rest and recovery, naps were prohibited
- Instead of focusing on symptoms, they were instructed not to discuss them
- Instead of treating the body, they focused on retraining the brain

"We thought they were going to give us some magic pill. And they did the opposite," Brian explains, highlighting the paradigm shift in their understanding of Becca's condition.

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Understanding the Science

While Becca was in the program, Amy attended parallel sessions for parents, learning about the neuroscience behind her daughter's symptoms. She discovered that all of Becca's physical symptoms—the seizures, the pain, the fainting—stemmed from dysregulation of her autonomic nervous system.

The autonomic nervous system controls involuntary bodily functions like breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure. When chronically stressed, this system can become dysregulated, causing a wide range of physical symptoms that appear medical in nature but originate from the brain's stress response.

Amy learned about the "Flip Your Lid" model, which explains how stress affects brain function:

- The front part of the brain (prefrontal cortex) handles reasoning and thinking
- The back part (amygdala) manages emotions like fear and anger
- When we're regulated, the prefrontal cortex can communicate with and modulate the amygdala
- When we're dysregulated ("flipping our lid"), the prefrontal cortex disconnects from the amygdala, leaving us at the mercy of our emotional responses

Becca had been living in a chronically dysregulated state for years, her brain constantly in "fight, flight, or freeze" mode. Each new stressor—from the pandemic to medical procedures—reinforced these neural pathways until her brain became "stuck" in patterns of dysregulation.

The Road to Recovery

Armed with this understanding, the family returned home with a toolkit of strategies to help Becca regulate her nervous system:

- 1. Diaphragmatic breathing**
Deep belly breathing practiced three times daily for 10 minutes, described as a “natural antibiotic for stress”
- 2. Consistent routine**
Regular sleep schedules, meal times, and activities to provide predictability
- 3. Physical activity**
Return to running and movement to help discharge stress hormones
- 4. Social connection**
Regular interaction with friends and family instead of isolation
- 5. Mindfulness**
Practices to stay present rather than scanning the body for symptoms

They also had to change how they interacted with Becca. They were instructed not to ask “How are you feeling?”—a question that prompts scanning for symptoms—and instead focus on activities and engagement rather than the medical aspects of her condition.

“We weren’t allowed to ask her how she was feeling,” Amy explains. “We weren’t supposed to talk about the seizures, talk about the anxiety. We just like totally cut it all off.”

This approach was challenging but effective. Gradually, Becca began to improve. She returned to high school full-time, rejoined the cross-country team, and began rebuilding her social life. The seizures decreased dramatically in frequency, though they didn’t disappear entirely.

Present Day: Living with Resilience

Today, Becca is a sophomore at Hope College, running on the cross-country and track teams and pursuing a degree in social work. She still experiences occasional seizures—roughly once every three months rather than multiple times daily—and has an unusual pattern of passing out immediately after crossing the finish line in races.

“Every time after I cross the finish line, I pass out immediately,” Becca explains. “So somebody always has to catch me.”

Despite these ongoing challenges, Becca has reclaimed her life and is thriving. Her experience has shaped her career goals—she plans to become a medical social worker to help others access the resources that helped her.

“I am not my illness,” Becca affirms. “I’m much more than that. And that’s just like a small part of me that has actually made me a lot stronger.”

The experience has transformed the entire family. Both parents describe ongoing “triggers”—a phone call at an unusual hour or the sound of a shampoo bottle falling in the shower can still provoke immediate anxiety, reminding them of the crisis years. Yet they’ve emerged with deeper empathy, greater resilience, and a powerful understanding of how the mind and body interconnect.

The Journey to Advocacy

Becca’s traumatic experience has transformed into a calling:

“I am studying social work here at Hope, and I want to be a medical social worker to help marginalized groups receive access to the resources that I was able to receive. The odds of me actually being able to go to Mayo Clinic... there were only eight kids.”

This transformation—from patient to advocate—represents one of the most powerful potential outcomes of trauma: using personal suffering to create meaning and help others. Becca’s commitment to ensuring others have access to the resources that helped her exemplifies post-traumatic growth.

Understanding Dysregulation

The Scott family’s journey provides a powerful case study in dysregulation—a state where the nervous system becomes stuck in heightened stress responses. Understanding this concept can help make sense of seemingly disconnected physical and emotional symptoms.

What is Dysregulation?

Dysregulation occurs when our autonomic nervous system—the system that controls unconscious bodily functions like breathing and heart rate—becomes imbalanced due to chronic stress, trauma, or persistent anxiety. In this state, the brain remains in “fight, flight, or freeze” mode even when no immediate danger is present.

Signs of dysregulation can include:

- Emotional volatility
- Sleep disturbances
- Digestive issues
- Pain without clear physical cause
- Immune system dysfunction
- Panic attacks or anxiety
- Dissociation or brain fog
- Fatigue or energy crashes

In Becca’s case, dysregulation manifested as seizures, paralysis, autoimmune responses, and POTS—all expressions of a nervous system unable to return to balance.

The Autonomic Nervous System Ladder

Amy describes the nervous system as a ladder:



Healthy nervous systems move up and down this ladder in response to stressors but return to higher rungs when the threat passes. During chronic stress, people can become “stuck” in the lower rungs, their bodies and brains locked in survival mode.

For Becca, years of anxiety combined with the pandemic’s uncertainties pushed her system into persistent dysregulation. Each seizure, medical crisis, and hospital visit reinforced these patterns, creating a cycle that was difficult to break without intervention.

The Path to Regulation: Evidence-Based Strategies

The Scott family's experience at Mayo Clinic revealed powerful strategies for returning to a regulated state—approaches that can benefit anyone experiencing chronic stress.

The Four Foundations of Regulation

The Mayo Clinic program emphasized four key approaches that effectively help regulate the nervous system:



Breath:

Diaphragmatic breathing directly signals the nervous system to calm down



Movement:

Physical activity helps discharge stress hormones



Sensation:

Engaging the senses grounds us in the present moment



Rhythmic Patterns:

Consistent routines help retrain the brain toward regulation

Diaphragmatic Breathing

One of the most accessible regulation tools is diaphragmatic breathing:

1. Place one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen
2. Inhale slowly through your nose for 4 counts, allowing your belly (not chest) to expand
3. Hold briefly
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 counts
5. Repeat 3–5 times

Mayo Clinic recommended 10 minutes of diaphragmatic breathing three times daily as an “antibiotic” for stress. Amy noted that this practice was fundamental to Becca's recovery.

The Power of Routine and Consistency

The Mayo Clinic approach emphasized the importance of consistent routines in retraining dysregulated nervous systems. For Becca, this included:

- Regular sleep/wake schedules (no more than 8 hours of sleep)
- Elimination of naps, despite intense resistance
- Scheduled physical activity
- Regular social engagement
- Consistent meal times

These routines provided predictability that helped calm her nervous system over time, creating new neural pathways that supported regulation rather than dysregulation.

Community and Connection

Perhaps surprisingly, social connection was emphasized as a crucial component of healing. While the natural tendency during crisis is often to withdraw, the Mayo Clinic program taught that community provides essential support for regulation.

The Scott family initially isolated themselves during the height of their crisis. Over time, however, they found that support from friends, extended family, and colleagues made an enormous difference. Friends who brought meals, classmates who learned to recognize seizure signs, and Becca's boyfriend who learned sign language all became part of their healing journey.

Practical Applications for the Workplace

While the Scott family's story is deeply personal, it offers valuable insights for professional settings as well. Brian and Amy both had to navigate their work responsibilities while supporting Becca through her health crisis, demonstrating how personal and professional realms inevitably overlap.

Supporting Team Members Through Crisis

When colleagues face personal challenges, simple accommodations can make a significant difference:

- Flexible scheduling to accommodate medical appointments or family needs
- Remote work options when appropriate
- Understanding of occasional communication limitations
- Focus on outcomes rather than process
- Preservation of dignity and privacy

Brian notes that without the support of his team at Blooming Color, particularly Rosemarie, "the business might have closed." Having colleagues who could step up during his absence was crucial to maintaining operations while he supported his daughter.

Recognizing Dysregulation in Professional Settings

In workplace environments, dysregulation may manifest as:

- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Unusual emotional reactivity
- Withdrawal from team interactions
- Decreased productivity or quality
- Memory issues or missed deadlines
- Physical complaints like headaches or stomachaches

Recognizing these signs as potential indicators of stress rather than performance issues allows for more compassionate and effective responses.



Creating Supportive Environments

Organizations can foster environments that support mental well-being:

- Normalize taking breaks for regulation (brief walks, breathing moments)
- Create quiet spaces for decompression
- Establish clear, consistent expectations and procedures
- Encourage open communication about workload and capacity
- Provide resources for mental health support
- Model healthy boundaries around work and rest

The Scott family's experience demonstrates that supporting team members through mental health challenges doesn't diminish professional excellence—it enables sustainable success.

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CULTIVATING RESILIENCE IN LEADERSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM GLENN PACKIAM

Conclusion: Lessons from the Scott Family's Journey

The Scott family's path from crisis to healing offers profound lessons that extend beyond their personal experience:

The Mind-Body Connection is Real

Becca's experience demonstrates the powerful connection between mental and physical health. What began as anxiety manifested in seizures, immune dysfunction, and autonomic nervous system disorders—all real, measurable physical symptoms with roots in the nervous system's response to stress.

Knowledge is Power

Understanding the neuroscience behind dysregulation transformed the family's approach. Rather than continuing to search for medical cures, they learned to address the root cause through regulation techniques, consistent routines, and brain retraining.

Healing Requires Both Individual Effort and Community Support

While Becca had to do the hard work of rewiring her brain through consistent practice, she couldn't have succeeded without her family's unwavering support and the broader community around them.

Resilience Can Emerge from Suffering

Today, Becca plans to use her experience to help others as a medical social worker. What began as a devastating health crisis has shaped her purpose and strengthened her character in ways none of them could have anticipated.

The Importance of Holistic Approaches

The Mayo Clinic's approach addressed the whole person—physical, mental, emotional, and social—rather than treating symptoms in isolation. This integrated perspective was key to Becca's recovery.

The Scott family's journey reminds us that behind every professional face is a human being with their own struggles and triumphs. By fostering environments that honor this full humanity—at home, in healthcare settings, and in workplaces—we create the conditions for both individual healing and collective thriving.

As Becca powerfully states: "I am not my illness. I'm much more than that. And that's just like a small part of me that has actually made me a lot stronger."

About Sheet for Brains

The mission of She*t for Brains is to create a space where people feel heard and are provided opportunities to listen to others who may think or see things differently. All while feeling like they can be authentic, vulnerable, and express themselves without judgment. The intention is to provide learning proven strategies for working toward wellness, resilience, leadership, work/life balance, stress, and anxiety in the workplace, among other topics. We've partnered with credentialed psychology and counselling experts and professional organisations to provide knowledge and resources displayed in quarterly meetings online, through social media, specifically this She*t for Brains LinkedIn Group. Grounded in genuine connection and understanding of the need for a community that embraces vulnerability and an openness to address otherwise stigmatised personal and professional challenges, She*t for Brains aims to cultivate an inclusive platform that digs deep into the corners of transformative collaboration.

Website: www.sheetforbrains.org

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