

# Early Identification of Triggers in Childhood Trauma

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# OBJECTIVES

- Define trauma, trauma reminders, and traumatic stress reactions.
- Identify minimum of 3 impacts of trauma on individual.
- Recommend minimum of 2 strategies to minimize impact of psychological trauma.

# Exercise

Pick a partner

Partner A/Partner B

Face each other



# What is Trauma

A traumatic event is one in which a person experiences, witnesses or is confronted with:

- ➔ Actual or threatened death
- ➔ Serious injury
- ➔ Threat to the physical integrity of self or another

Responses to a traumatic event may include

 Intense fear

 Helplessness

 Horror

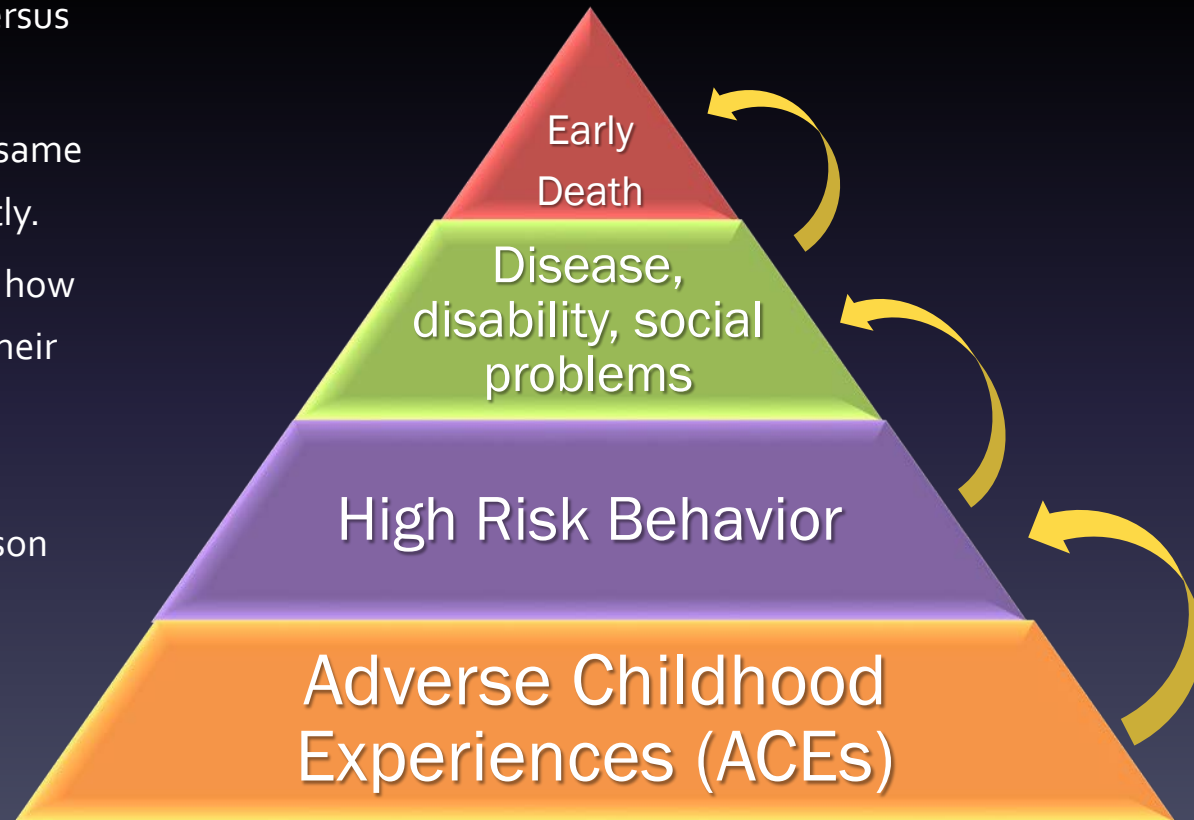
 Attachment

# Students with emotional and behavioral health concerns have poor school-related and long-term outcomes

- Low overall academic achievement
- Higher rates of suspension and expulsion
- High rates of absenteeism
- Highest incidence of contact with juvenile justice system
- Low graduation rates
- Poor psychosocial outcomes

# DISSECTING TRAUMA

- Acute traumatic experience versus chronic traumatic experiences
- Different people can view the same traumatic experience differently.
- Traumatic experiences impact how a person assesses threat and their automatic strategies for self-protection.
- Sometimes it limits how a person copes with stress.



# Exercise





# Building Trust

- Trauma can interrupt the process of building trust.
- Basic needs may not be met early in life and undermine the development of secure attachment.
- The brain becomes hardwired to assess for threat and more automatically uses the “survival brain” instead of the “learning brain”.

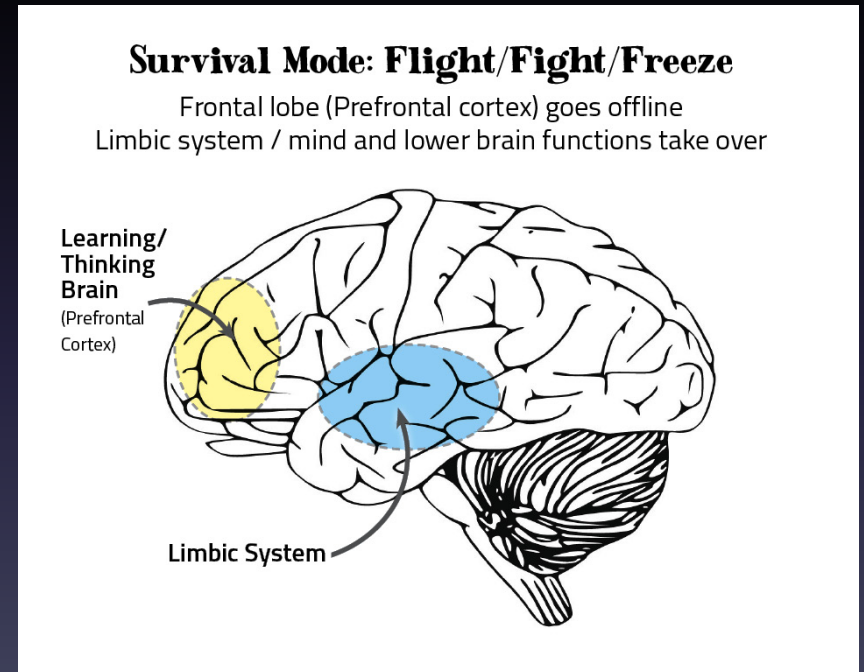


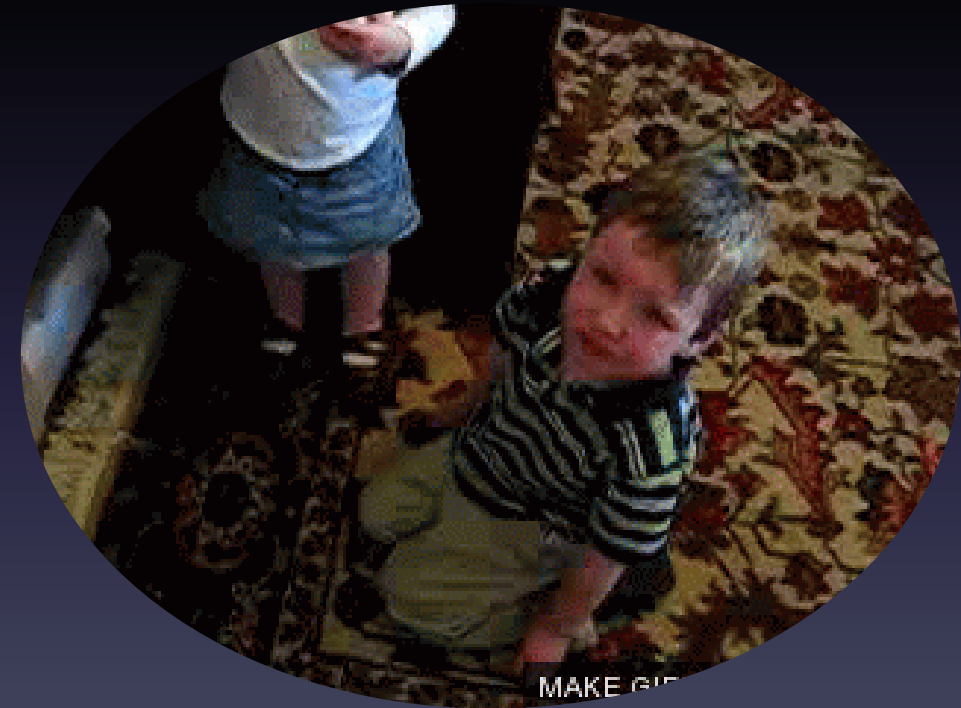
Photo Credit: <http://communityresiliencecookbook.org/your-body-brain/>

# UNDERSTANDING SELF & OTHERS

- Trauma can undermine the development of a healthy level of autonomy.
- Infants often control the environment with tantrums and melt downs.
- Infants don't know how to express their feelings with words.

# STUCK IN THE PAST

- Trauma can lead to regressed behavior or underdeveloped skills
- Emotion regulation and executive functioning deficits may make daily functioning difficult and decision making processes problematic.
- Attempts to communicate may become frustrating and lead to aggressive behavior.



# IDENTIFYING TRAUMA

- Understanding the 3 E's (events, experiences, and effects) provide a foundation for identifying the impact of trauma in the classroom.
  - Events are the traumatic incidents that have happened to the child
  - Experiences refer to the child's responses to traumatic events
  - Effects refer to functional impairment that may occur related to the trauma but be compounded by other stressors
    - Changes in behavior
    - Disproportionate response to stress

# REMINDERS OF TRAUMA & EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- Trauma reminders (also referred to as triggers) can be anything that reminds the person of the trauma both consciously and unconsciously. This includes:
  - A person/gender/race
  - Tone of voice and/or touch
  - Emotional connection
  - Similar situation
- Triggers are often present prior to a person entering crisis mode.
- Early warning signs are behaviors a person shows BEFORE entering crisis mode. May include talking loudly, profanity, and numerous other non-life threatening actions that are escalated but do not require immediate physical intervention to de-escalate.

- Resilience is the ability to experience a difficult life situation and recover.
- Individual and environmental factors impact the development of resilience.
- Healthy coping skills for traumatic experiences can be learned and help to foster resilience. Strategies include:
  - Practicing mindfulness exercises that involve regulating breathing and increasing general awareness.
  - Learning verbal and nonverbal communication skills for expressing anger.
  - Practicing strategies for reading situations accurately and staying safe when emotionally overwhelmed.
  - Education that increases understanding of the impact of trauma.
  - Opportunities to connect with others who can model healthy ways of coping.
  - Addressing underlying emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety.

# PREPARING FOR DE-ESCALATION

- Recognize how trauma triggers and traumatic stress reactions are contributing to escalation.
- Threatening behavior toward an individual having a traumatic stress reaction will further activate their “survival brain” and potentially lead to a less safe environment.
- Explore where options can be given in an escalating situation to avoid powerlessness that leads to aggressive behavior.
- Consider expanding perception of resistance and disobedient behavior.



# PRACTICING COMMUNICATION

- Use Verbal and nonverbal communication that re-assure a person the safest possible outcome is being sought.
- Modeling calm and controlled communication
- Communication skills that are firm while indicating the other person was heard can potentially prevent perceived injustices.
  - Calm tone
  - Clearly explaining how to de-escalate the situation
  - Use a neutral expression
  - Shame attenuation
  - Announcing steps of interaction

# RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network Educator's Toolkit
  - <http://learn.nctsn.org/enrol/index.php?id=33>
- Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)
  - <http://cbitsprogram.org/>
- Trauma Grief Component Therapy for Adolescents (TGCT-A)
  - [http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/promising\\_practices/TGCT\\_fact\\_sheet\\_%203-22-07.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/promising_practices/TGCT_fact_sheet_%203-22-07.pdf)
- Crandal, B. & Conradi, L. (2013). Review of Child and Adolescent Trauma Screening Tools. San Diego, CA: Rady Children's Hospital, Chadwick Center for Children and Families.
- National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice
  - [Strengthening Our Future: Key Elements to Developing a Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice Diversion Program for Youth with Behavioral Health Conditions](#)