



Toxic Stress and Our Children



Positive Stress

- Normal and essential part of healthy development
- Brief increases in heart rate and blood pressure
- Mild elevations in hormonal levels
- *Example:* Final exam Playoff game.

Tolerable Stress

- Body's alert systems activated to a greater degree
- Activation is time-limited and buffered by caring adult relationships.
- Brain and organs recover
- *Example:* Death of a grandparent, car accident.

Toxic Stress

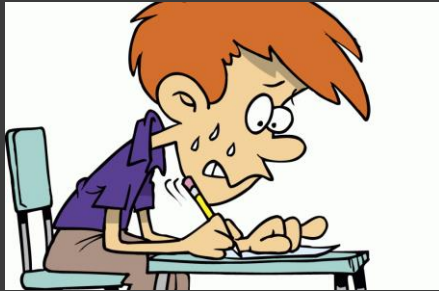
- Occurs with strong, frequent or prolonged adversity
- Disrupts brain architecture and other organ systems
- Increased risk of stress-related disease and cognitive impairment
- *Example:* abuse, neglect, caregiver substance dependence or mental illness

**Intense, prolonged, repeated, unaddressed;
Child or family vulnerabilities, limited supports, devel. delays**

**Social-Emotional buffering, Learned skills, Parent/Child
Resilience, Early Detection, Effective Intervention**

Positive Stress?

Necessary for healthy development
Moderate & short-lived



Tolerable Stress?

Stressful situations that could disrupt brain architecture, but generally occur within a time-limited period & are buffered by supportive relationships that facilitate coping.

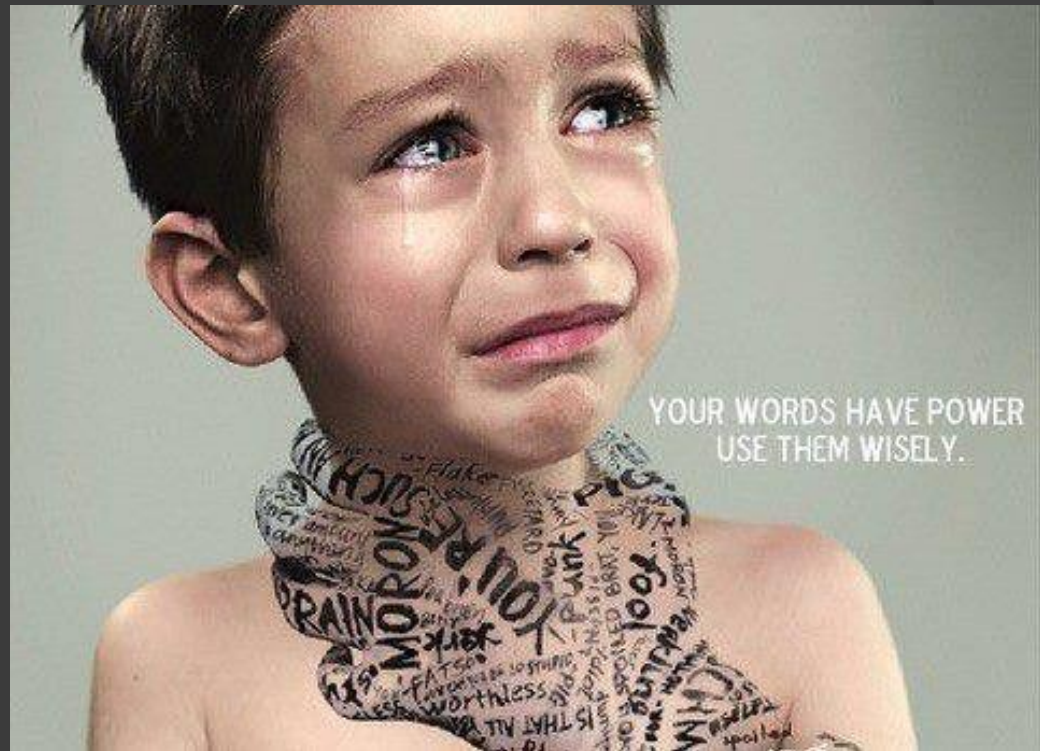


Toxic Stress?

Chronic trauma within the context of a relationship

Personal or Exposure to:

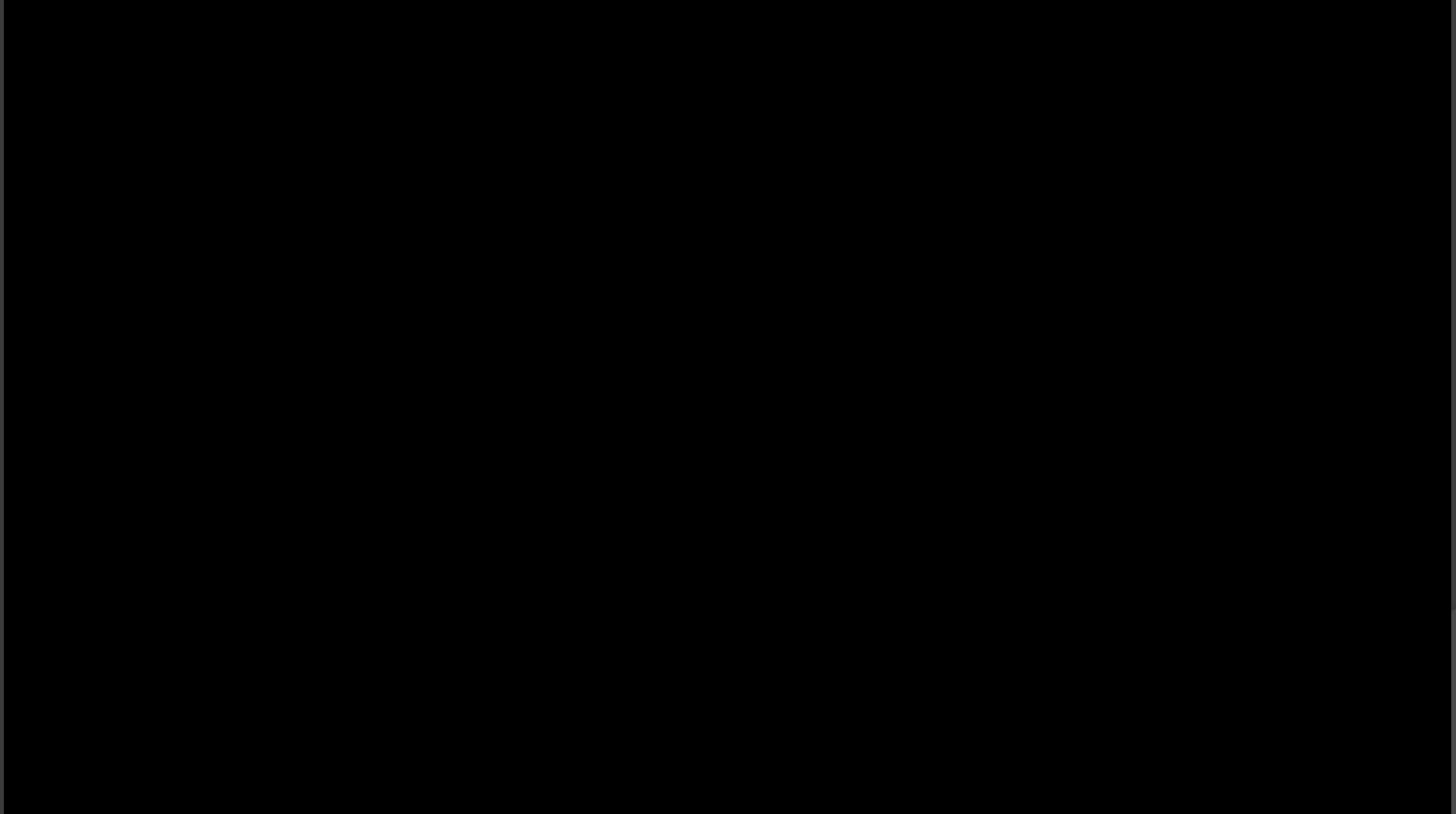
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
 - Direct or Indirect
- Neglect
- Abandonment
 - Loss of a loved one
- Domestic Violence
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Illness



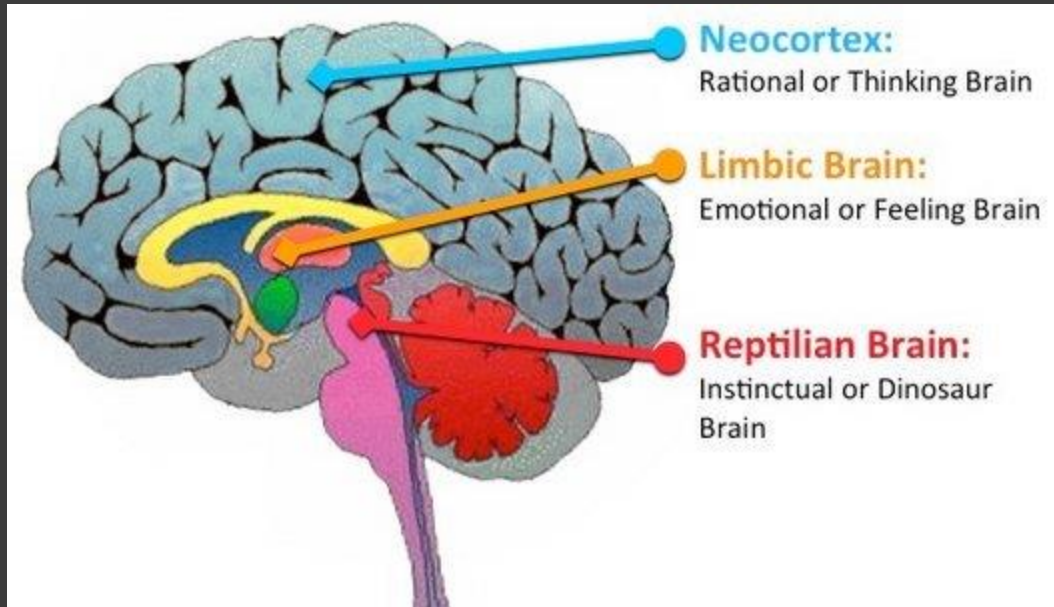
Adverse Childhood Experiences (The ACEs Study)

- Kaiser-Permanente and the CDC
- Over 17,000 participants
- Middle-class adults, insurance, college-educated
- So, what did they learn?

Resilience Movie Trailer



“We remember trauma less in words and more with our feelings and our bodies.” (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995)



Prefrontal Cortex- Responsible for problem solving. Shuts down during and while remembering a traumatic event. Overwhelmed by feelings.

Do I Feel Loved?

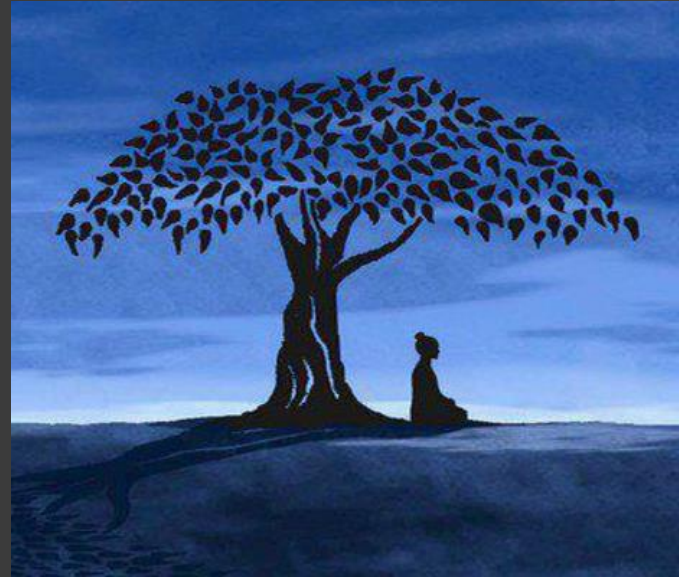
Reptilian Brain-
Instinctual. Active at birth.
Automatic. Responds with
fight-flight-freeze.

Am I Safe?

Lymbic System-
Responds to memories.
This is the emotional
memory center
(**amygdala**). “Sounds the
alarm” when in danger.

Brain States

- Calm
- Alert
- Alarm
- Fear
- Terror



Where learning can take place

Calm State

- ◉ Emotionally & physically safe
- ◉ Supported by an adult

Alert State

- ◉ Child encounters something new
- ◉ Brain makes sense of it
- ◉ Learns something new
- ◉ Supported by an adult

Alarm & Fear States

What's happening?

- ⦿ Emotional response takes over executive functioning
- ⦿ Reactive to people & environments
- ⦿ Unpredictable in responses
- ⦿ Anxiety
- ⦿ Difficulty focusing
- ⦿ Unable to rationalize

Escalation occurs when:

- ⦿ Raised voice
- ⦿ Shaking finger
- ⦿ Harsh words/tone
- ⦿ Verbal threats
- ⦿ Ultimatum
- ⦿ Abrupt movements
- ⦿ Walking fast

Terror State

What's happening?

- ⦿ Acting out of brain stem (reptilian brain)
- ⦿ Limited language
- ⦿ No thinking
- ⦿ Survival mode
- ⦿ May be aggressive, violent or may run or hide

BEWARE!!!

- ⦿ Do not leave alone
- ⦿ Remain nearby
- ⦿ Have an outlet in place

DO

- ⦿ Slow movement
- ⦿ Calm voice

Trauma Responses

FIGHT:

Verbal or physical aggression
(hit, kick, spit, pinch)

FLIGHT:

Get away from perceived threat
(run, hide)

FREEZE:

Initial response to a threat/ body prepares to get hurt
(in a daze, wandering, unresponsive, uncooperative)

Lizard Brain = *STRESS*

Fight, Flight or Freeze Response



Trauma & the Brain

- ⦿ Chronic stress = ongoing release of neurochemicals (such as cortisol)
- ⦿ Increase changes the architecture of the brain
- ⦿ Decreases brain function
- ⦿ Decreases immune system response
- ⦿ Impacts nervous system

What might we see?

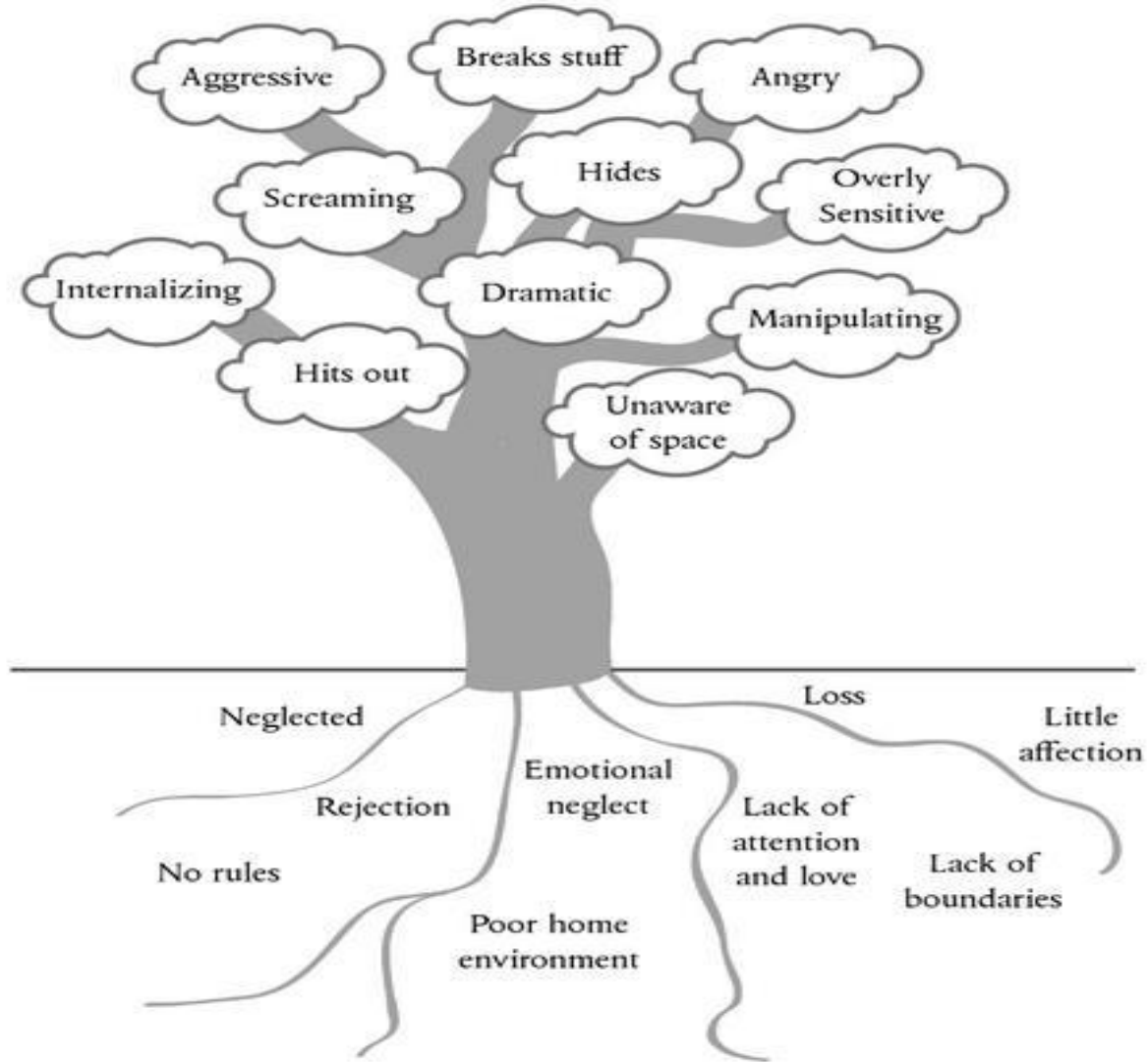



Figure 6.6 The completed 'Behaviour Tree'

A young green plant with several leaves is growing out of a cracked, dry, sandy surface. The plant is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame. The background is a vast, flat, light-colored expanse of cracked earth, suggesting a harsh, arid environment. The overall image conveys a sense of struggle and the need for intervention.

What can WE do?

Goals for support

1. Children feel physically & emotionally safe
 2. Children learn to identify, name & express their feelings
 3. Children learn strategies for self-regulation
- 
- A young green plant with three leaves is growing out of a hole in a concrete sidewalk. The plant is positioned on the right side of the frame, and its shadow is cast onto the concrete. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface, possibly a wall or another part of the sidewalk.

1. Physically & Emotionally Safe

⦿ Structured classroom environment

- Routines
- Posted Schedule (visual)
- Brief transitions
- Clear expectations



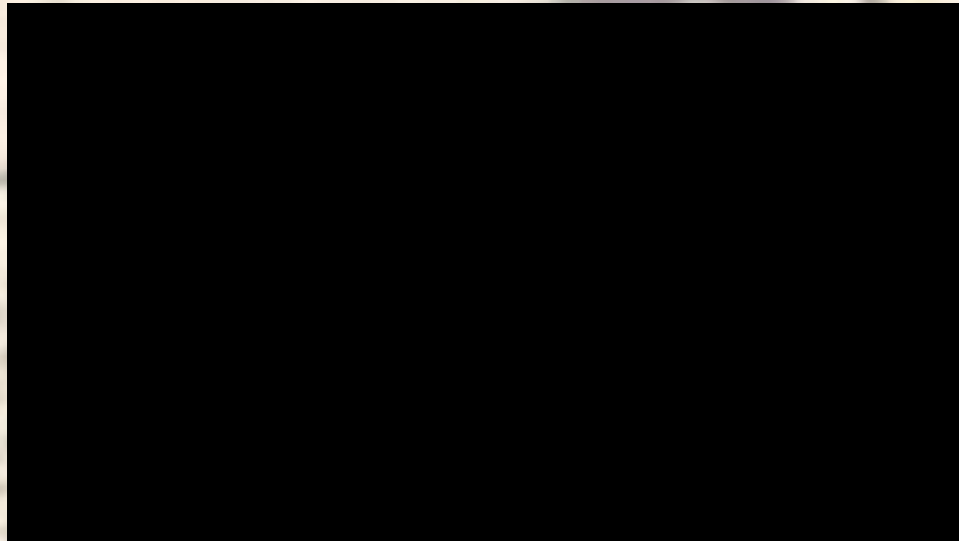
⦿ A positive classroom environment

- Calm and warm voice
- Positive language
- Encouraging
- Non-judgemental & non-critical



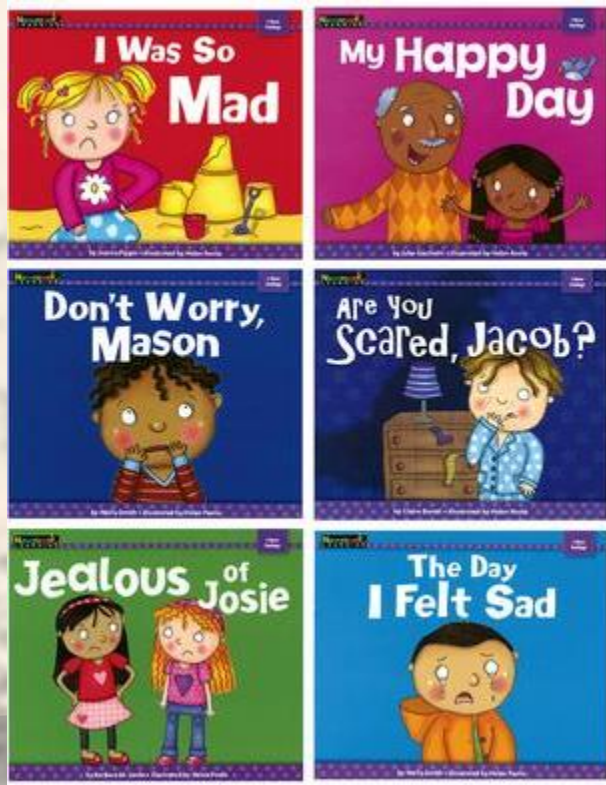
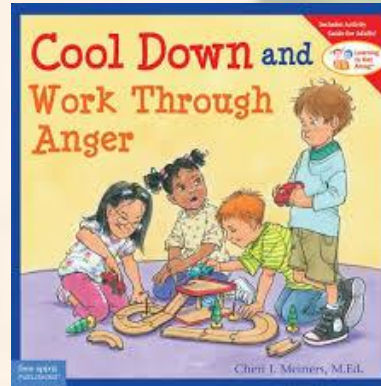
1. Physically & Emotionally Safe

- ◎ Building a **classroom community**
 - Everyone is special & important
 - Classroom jobs
 - “I Love You” Rituals (Conscious Discipline)



2. Identify, Name & Express Feelings

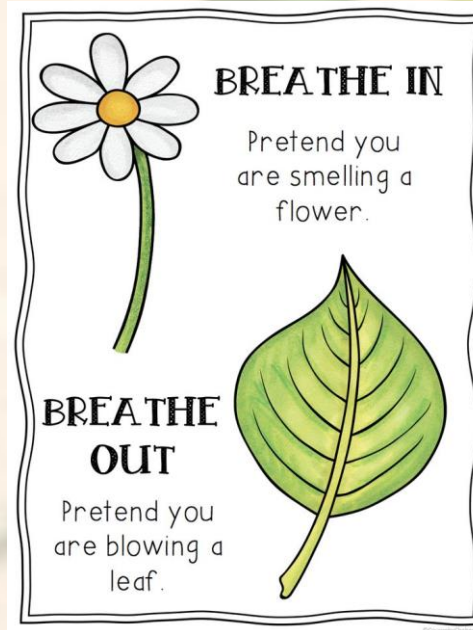
- Visual cues
- Books
- SEL curriculum



3. Self-Regulation Strategies

☉ Mindfulness

- Meditation
- Relaxation Music
- Yoga
- Deep Breathing



GARDEN YOGA FOR KIDS



Pretend to be a tree

Tree Pose: Stand on one leg. Bend the other knee and place the sole of your foot on your inner thigh. Sway like a tree in the breeze. Now the other side.



Pretend to be a frog

Squat Pose: Come down to a squat with your knees apart and arms resting between your knees. Touch your hands to the ground. Jump like a frog.



Pretend to be a seed

Child's Pose: Sit back on your heels and bring your forehead down to rest on the floor. Pretend to be a seed in the garden.



Pretend to be a butterfly

Cobbler's Pose: Sit on your buttocks with a tall spine. Bend your legs with the soles of your feet together. Flap your legs like the wings of a butterfly.

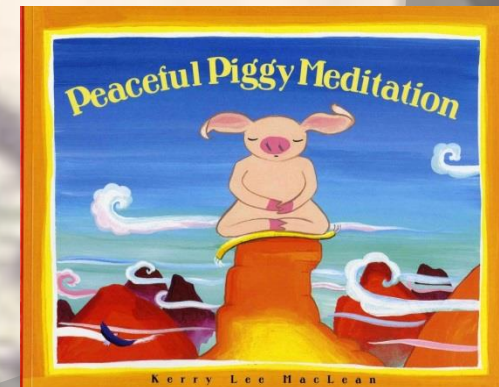
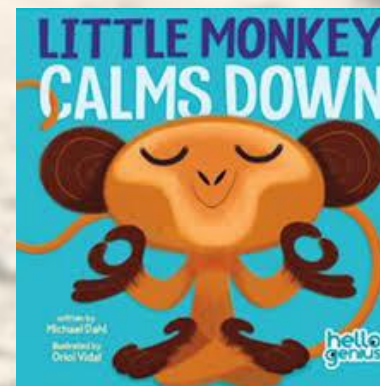
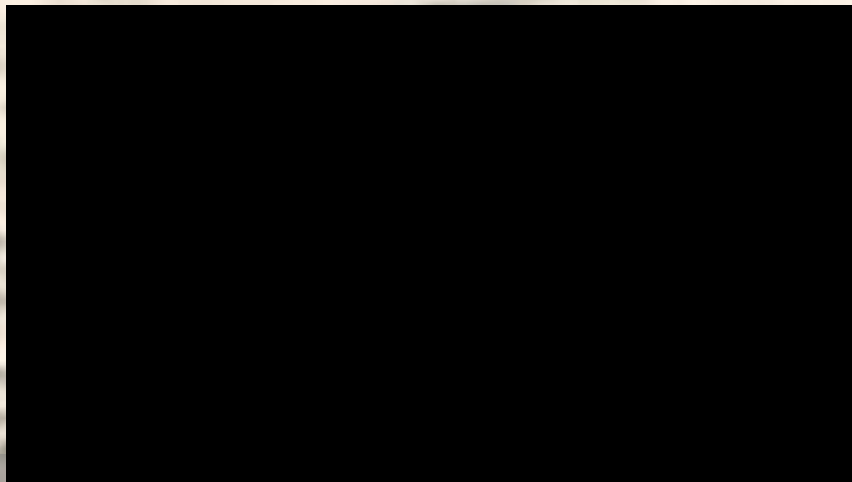


Pretend to be a flower

Flower Pose: Lift your bent legs, balancing on your sitting bones. Weave your arms under your legs, palms up. Pretend to be a flower in bloom.

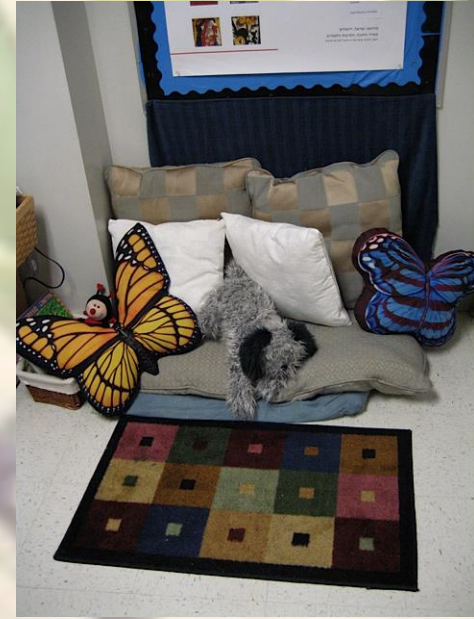


printable yoga poster



3. Self-Regulation Strategies

- Incorporating a cozy corner



3. Self-Regulation Strategies

- Fidget Toys
- Sensory Toys
- Weighted Items



How to Make a
Perfect
Sensory Bottle



Calm Down Kit
for sensory meltdowns, & quiet time



Referral Services

- In-school support (TDT services)
- In-home services
- Family Therapy
- Trauma Counseling
- Family Support Groups



Helping Families



- ◎ **Educate** families & caregivers
 - Developmentally appropriate behaviors
 - Behavior management strategies
 - Toxic Stress
- ◎ Recommend **family support services**
 - Counseling
 - In home services
 - Support Groups
 - Parenting classes
 - Stress management classes/workshops

Creating a Trauma-Informed Program

- ◎ **Recognize** the need
- ◎ Ongoing **Training**
- ◎ Purchase **Materials** to support goals
- ◎ **Connect** with community agencies
- ◎ **Non-judgement & Compassion**
- ◎ **Policy, Practice & Procedure**

Trauma
Aware

Trauma
Sensitive

Trauma
Informed

The Good News?

- According to numerous studies...

All it takes is ONE supportive, positive, caring adult to reverse the effect of trauma



Every kid needs a champion- Rita Pierson



Connect with me

Melissa Carter

Education, Disability & Mental Health Manager

Monticello Area Community Action Agency- Head Start

Charlottesville, Virginia

melissac@macaa.org

