


Julie Kurtz

The Impact of Trauma on Brain Development:

Creating Strength-Based Environments to Support Children's Health and Healing



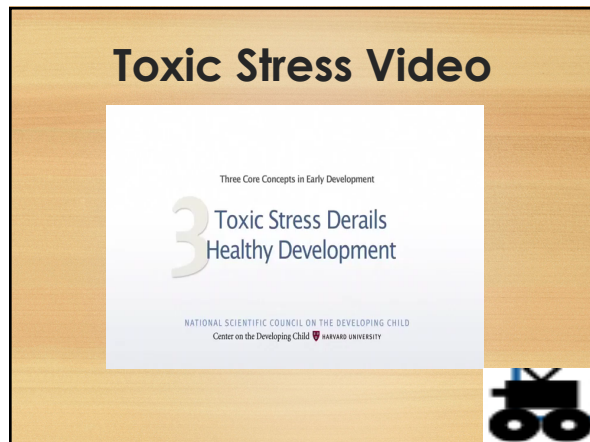
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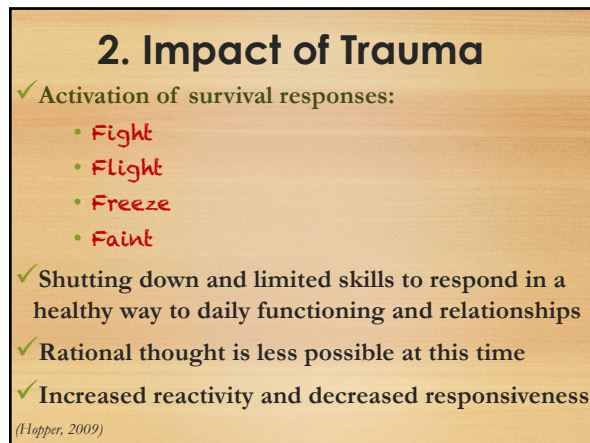
1. Defining Trauma

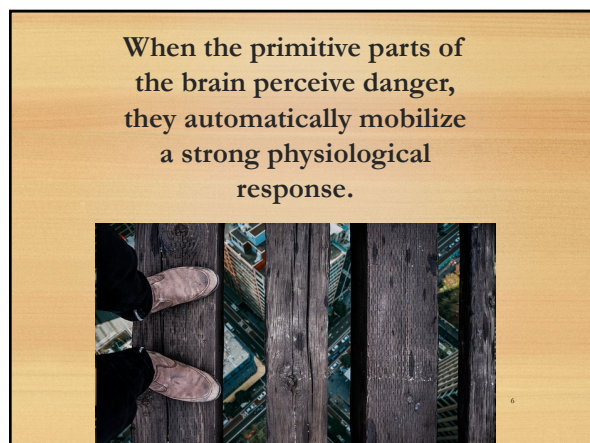
Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (Samsha 2014)

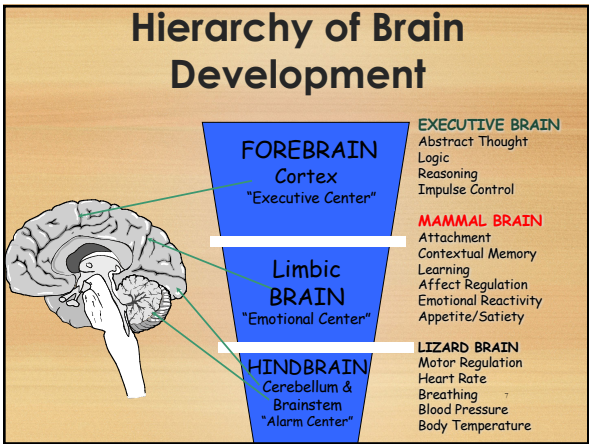
Trauma is defined by its effect on a particular individual's nervous system, not on the intensity of the circumstance itself. A complete loss of control and a sense of utter powerlessness.

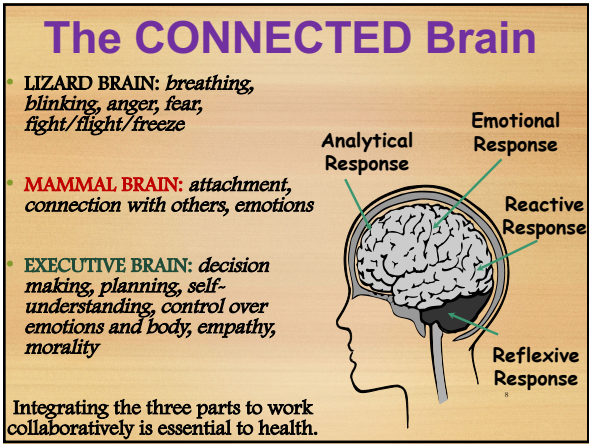
Regaining control is an important aspect of coping with traumatic stress and helping the child return to a **situation that is predictable and safe** is essential.

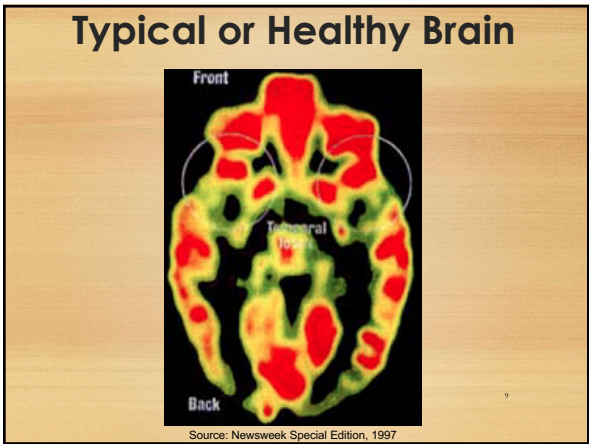


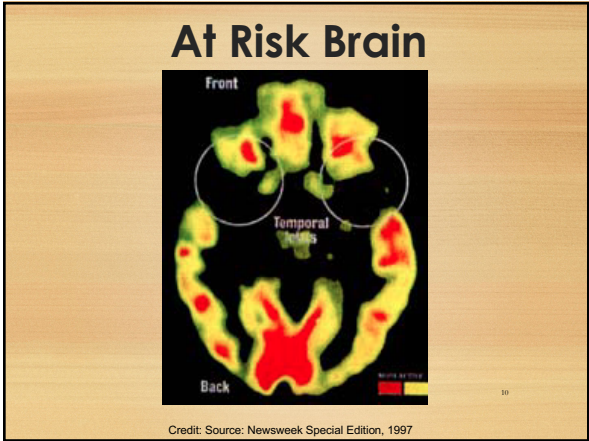








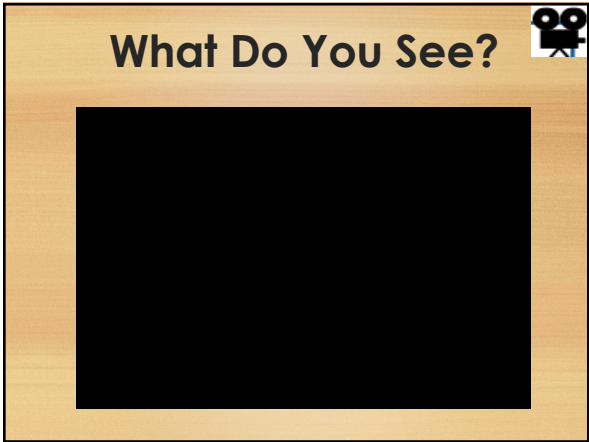


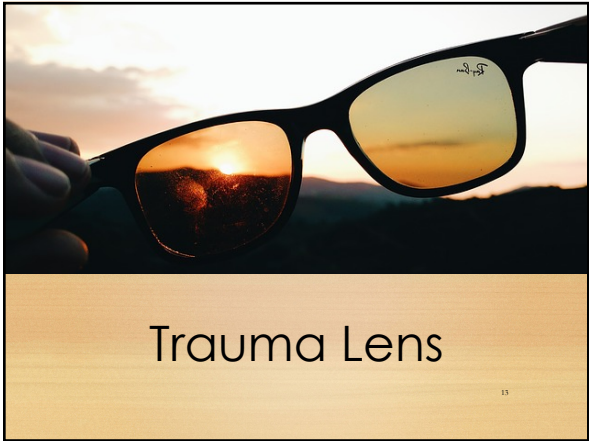


**700 New Neural Connections
are Being Built Every Second
in a Child**

**What does this
mean our job is
with children?**

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/five-numbers-to-remember-about-early-childhood-development/>






Trauma Triggers that Affect Arousal States <small>Sorrels (2015), p. 39</small>		
A new child or adult	Quick movements	Disorganized materials
A stranger entering the space	Unexpected touch	Unpredictable schedule
Noise level	Harsh touch	The absence of caregiver
A smell	Another child crying	A particular texture
An unexpected noise	Someone taking something away	Taking the child's shoes off while they are lying down
Change in lighting	New room arrangement	Someone approaching while the child is lying on a cot
Change in schedule	New piece of equipment	
Too many transitions	Nap time	Tickling a child
Harsh words or tone of voice	Someone approaching the child too quickly	
Angry or fearful facial expression	An adult towering over a child	

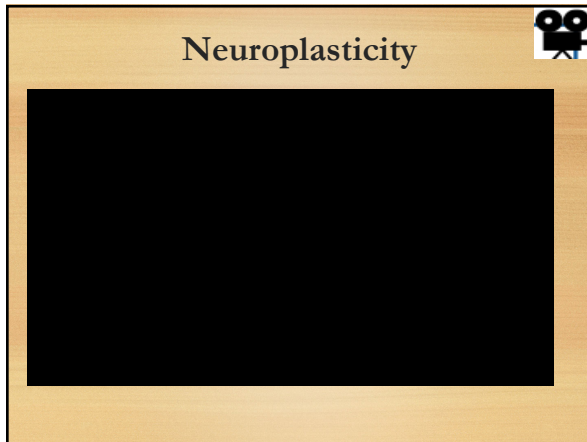
Common Behaviors of Children in FIGHT Mode <small>Sorrels (2015), p. 39</small>	
Child yells or screams	Child is argumentative
Child curses	Child throws self on the floor
Child kicks, spits, bites, or head-butts other children and adults	Child destroys property
Child makes violent threats	Child uses objects to jab or hit other objects in the room

Common Behaviors of Children in FLIGHT Mode	
Sorrels (2015), p. 39	
Child covers face with hands, buries face in arms, pulls jacket over head, pulls hat down over face, wears sunglasses	Child hides someplace in the room out of sight of caregiver or teacher
Child runs out of building or room	Child hides under blanket
Child sits in the corner of the room and just watches	Child sits under table
Child appears to be daydreaming	Child falls asleep when things are chaotic, noisy, or overstimulating
Child becomes absorbed with things and seems unaware to people	

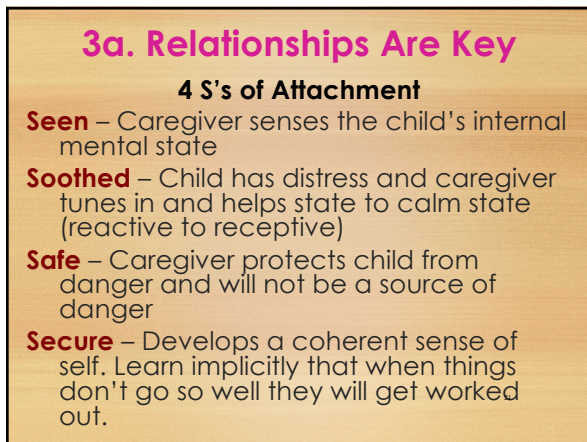
Common Behaviors of Children in FREEZE Mode	
Sorrels (2015), p. 39	
Child appears lethargic and spaced out, not paying attention	Child engages in repetitive movements or perseverating on something like picking at skin over and over
Child is unresponsive to name being called	Child is socially withdrawn
Child is unresponsive to commands, requests or questions	Child is not able to vocalize
Child appears to daydream a lot	

**It's Easier To
Build
The Brain
Of A Young Child,
Than Repair
The Brain
Of An Adult But...**











ATTUNEMENT AND CONNECTION

“For a child or an adult, it’s extremely powerful to hear someone say, ‘I get you. I understand. I see why you feel this way.’ This kind of empathy disarms us. It relaxes our rigidity. It soothes our chaos”

(Siegel & Bryson, 2012)


First: Connect to the Child – Second: Guide Toward Solution

Connect First:

- Validating emotions
 - Reassuring: tone of voice, listening
- Non verbal: touch, facial expressions (humming, rocking)
- Attunement: feeling felt

Redirect Second:

- Explain
- Plan
- Negotiate
- Reason



Adapted Dr. Daniel Siegel, "Whole Brain Child"

3b. Designing Supportive Environments

- Physical Environment
- Schedules & Predictable Routines
- Transitions



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Creating Trauma Sensitive Environments

- Create an environment that is safe, predictable and nurturing.
- Understand that daily routines are very important.
- Reduce the number of transitions.
- Reduce the number of unexpected guests and changes in schedules.
- Provide extra support in negotiating any change. Anticipate children's anxiety with separations.

For children who are panicking, having flashbacks, or in a preoccupied or disassociated state, it is useful if the adult can help children to differentiate her past experiences from the circumstances of the here and now.

Source: Lesley Koplow (Ed.), *Unsmiling Faces: How Preschools can Heal* (2nd Ed).



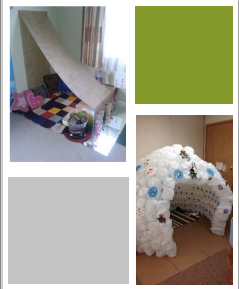
Where is it safe?

Some children look for spaces from which to observe or be by themselves

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Elmo has a Safe Place






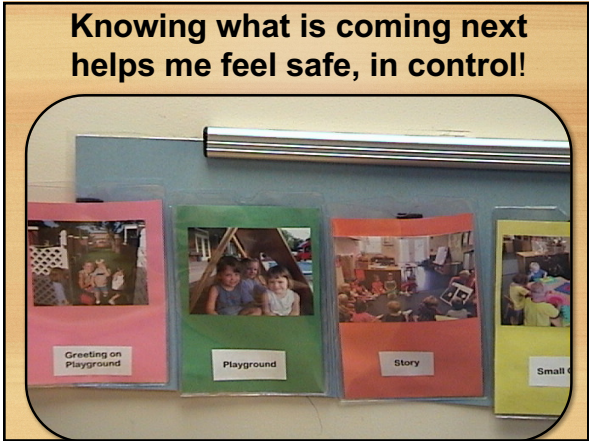
Calming Areas or "Safety Zone"

- Consider including sensory material for the child to touch
- A time to pause, CALMING and get away
- Space is enjoyable, comforting, soft
- Include objects that make child feel safe and secure
- Have sensory and/or feeling words

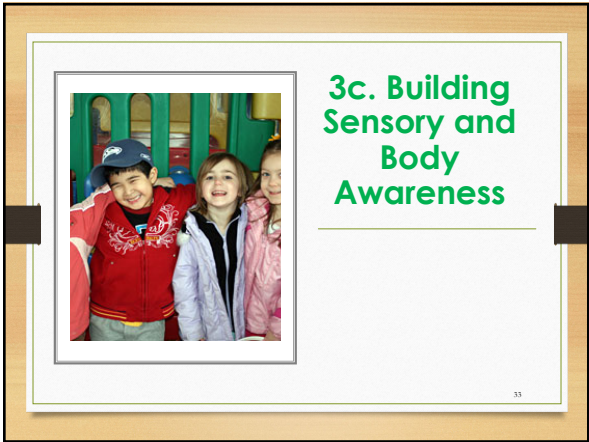
Predictable Schedules and Routines

- Decreases anxiety
- Help children feel safe
- Support a sense of control over their environment
- Supports knowing when reunion with caregiver will be





Strategies for Calming Young Children Stress Response Systems		
Visual Dimming the lights Reducing clutter on walls Providing small enclosures where toddlers can hide	Auditory Eliminate low frequency sounds Humming or singing Increase vocals/female voices to support relaxation Playing instrumental music Playing white noise Playing nature sounds	Tactile Patting or rubbing the back Providing textured blankets Swaddling Water or sensory table
Vestibular Rocking Swinging Bouncing Swaying Riding in a Stroller		Natural Outdoor Environments Healing effects Rich sensory input Loose parts Wonder and creativity



Sensory Literacy

The ability to identify, understand, and express sensations in the body and to express them in a healthy way



Communicating When Triggered

- Sometimes you have to start with teaching sensations in the body before naming feelings
- A trauma trigger means children may not be able to use words to express themselves
- Children need other nonverbal ways to communicate how they feel



Difference Between Sensations and Feelings

The body has to release a charge of energy after a trigger event

Sensations

- Physiological happenings in the body
- An energy charge in the body from a trigger
- The way your body "feels" (e.g. butterflies in stomach, head hurts, fire in throat, sweaty palms, pit in stomach)
- Body communicating intensity of experience

Feelings

- Words describe how you feel
- Small, medium or large feelings or scale of 1-10
- Triggered by an experience
- Mad, Sad, Angry, Frustrated, Scared

words cannot describe how I feel

When teachers ask a child to explain why she or he did something, we often hear only crickets. On our good days, we sense kids truly have no idea. On our bad days, we think they are intentionally not telling us. On our very worst days, we assume they got up in the morning with the intent to ruin our carefully constructed life.

Building a Language of Sensation

Source: Peter Levine and Maggie Kline *Trauma through a Child's Eyes*

Icy/Cool/Warm/Hot	Butterflies/Bumble Bees
Volcano (dormant, sizzle, exploding)	Relaxed/Calm/Peaceful
Itchy/Sharp/Dull	Kitten/Doggy/Dinosaur
Shaky/Tingly	Calm/Jumpy/Jiggly
Hurts (small/medium/big)	Strong/Tight/Tense
Ouchie/Owie	Empty/Full
Soft/Bumpy/Hard	Light/Medium/Heavy
Rocks (small, medium, large)	Cool/Cold/Warm/Hot

Proactively Teach Sensory Awareness

Here are some examples you could use with children as you help them describe where in their body they feel something and how small or large it might be:

- Hard, Soft, Stuck (rocks, cotton, nails, needles, pebbles, nails)
- Butterflies in my stomach
- Bees in my heart
- Rocks in my head – small, medium or large
- Volcano in my body – dormant, simmer, exploding

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Listen to your body

Pay attention to:

your breath

your heartbeat

the temperature of your skin


your muscles and belly

How do you experience the energy in your body?

What other sensations do you notice?

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- What are acceptable & safe ways to express emotions or your body sensations for children?
 - In your classroom?
 - In the home?
- Many children need to physically release the energy or adrenaline from the emotion first before talking. We can help guide this release
- What about a child that shuts down, disconnects from the world around them or dissociates?

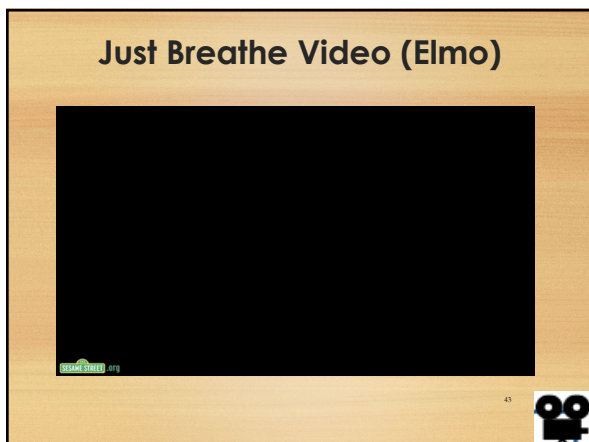


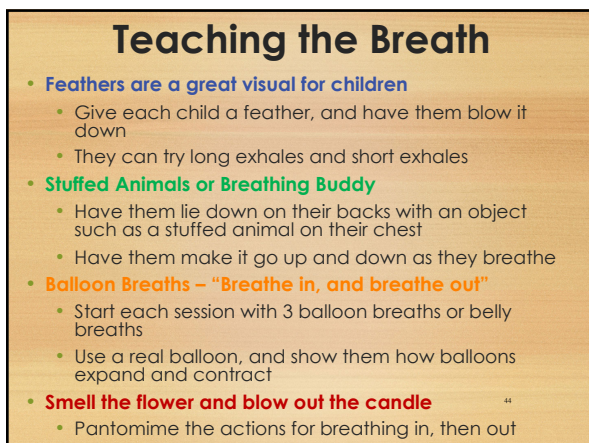
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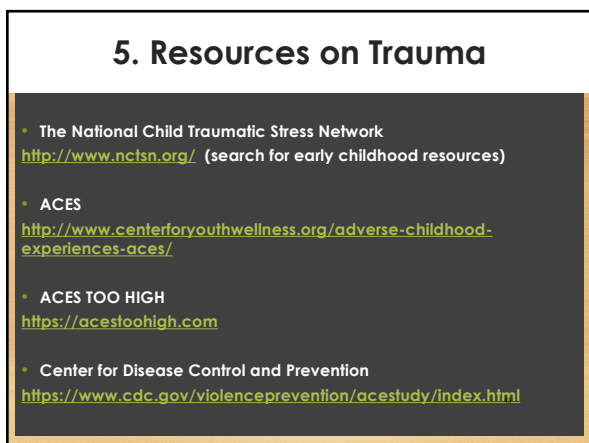
Just Breathe!

- Breathing is your bodies remote control
- Take three deep and slow breaths. Work from the belly, and move the breath all the way into your lungs. How do you feel?
- With this movement, the most important piece is incorporating the breath. It is all about the breath.
- After every pose or movement, we tell the children – “breathe in, and breathe out.”

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5. Resources Continued

Books

- Dr. Daniel Siegel: *Whole Brain Child and Parenting from the Inside Out*
- Leslie Koplow: *Unsmiling Faces: How Preschools can Heal*
- Dr. Peter Levine and Maggie Kline: *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes*
- Dr. Jane Nelsen: *Positive Discipline*
- Barbara Sorrels (2015). *Reaching and teaching children exposed to trauma*. Gryphon House, Inc.

Websites:

- <http://www.ahaparenting.com>
- www.ace-network.com/cfs/spotlight.htm
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/five-number-:-to-remember-about-early-childhood-development/>

With Appreciation and Thank you!



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