

# **The Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit**

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**Trauma 101 Training  
Participant Manual**

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## Trauma 101: Learning Objectives



### Trauma Definitions and Types

- Define acute, chronic, complex, racial, historical, and intergenerational trauma



### Trauma and Memory

- Recognize the relationship between a child's lifetime trauma history and their behaviors and responses
- Understand how cultural factors influence how a child may identify, interpret, and respond to traumatic events

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**Before  
We Get  
Started...**

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## Trauma-Exposed Workplaces

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

- Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen

Remen, N. R. (2006). *Kitchen table wisdom: Stories that heal (10<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed)*, pp. 52. Riverhead Books.

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## Trauma: Definitions & Types



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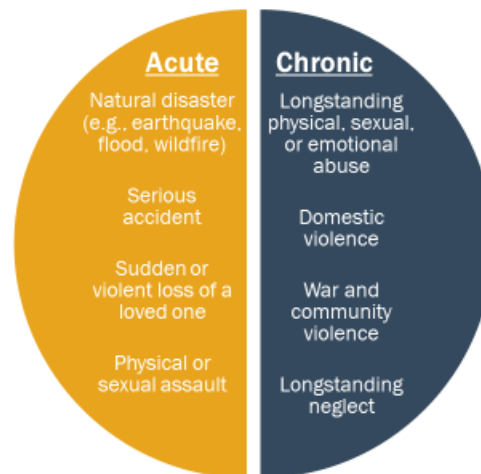
# What is Trauma?

Trauma occurs when an individual experiences an **intense, recurring, and/or prolonged** event or events that threatens or causes harm to their **emotional and/or physical well-being**.



# What is Trauma?

- **Acute trauma** is a single traumatic event that is limited in time.
- **Chronic trauma** refers to the experience of multiple traumatic events. They may be varied and/or longstanding events.



## Types of Trauma

- **Complex trauma** refers to children’s experiences of multiple traumatic events that occur within the caregiving system, or the social environment, that is supposed to be the source of safety and stability in a child’s life.
- Typically, complex trauma exposure includes simultaneous or sequential occurrences of **child maltreatment**—such as emotional abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing domestic violence—that are chronic and begin in early childhood.
  - 2017 data from the U.S. Children’s Bureau indicated that over 91% of substantiated cases of child maltreatment were at the hands of one or both parents.

U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2019). *Child maltreatment 2017*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>

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## Types of Trauma

- Historical trauma results from prolonged events or experiences that have an impact across generations within a group or community.



- Includes major losses and assaults on culture and well-being such as slavery, removal from homelands, relocation/displacement, massacres, genocides/ethnocides, and cultural and racial oppression

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## Types of Trauma

- **Racial trauma** refers to the stressful impact or emotional pain experienced as a result of witnessing or experiencing racism, discrimination, or structural prejudice.
- It can contribute to cumulative and systemic challenges faced by groups who have also experienced historical trauma.

## Types of Trauma

- **Intergenerational trauma** affects one family across two or more generations.
- The traumatic experiences and events can be transmitted from one generation through family norms, beliefs, habits, etc.





## Examples of Racial Microaggressions

Theme	Microaggression	Message
<p><i>Alien in own land</i> When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born</p>	<p>“Where are you from?” “Where were you born?” “You speak good English.” A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language.</p>	<p>You are not American You are a foreigner</p>
<p><i>Ascription of Intelligence</i> Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race.</p>	<p>“You are a credit to your race.” “You are so articulate.” Asking an Asian person to help with a Math or Science problem.</p>	<p>People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in Math / Sciences.</p>
<p><i>Color Blindness</i> Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race</p>	<p>“When I look at you, I don’t see color.” “America is a melting pot.” “There is only one race, the human race.”</p>	<p>Denying a person of color’s racial / ethnic experiences. Assimilate / acculturate to the dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial / cultural being.</p>
<p><i>Criminality – assumption of criminal status</i> A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant on the basis of their race.</p>	<p>A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes. A store owner following a customer of color around the store. A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it.</p>	<p>You are a criminal. You are going to steal / You are poor / You do not belong / You are dangerous.</p>
<p><i>Denial of individual racism</i> A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases</p>	<p>“I’m not a racist. I have several Black friends.” “As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.”</p>	<p>I am immune to races because I have friends of color. Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can’t be a racist. I’m like you.</p>
<p><i>Myth of meritocracy</i> Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes</p>	<p>“I believe the most qualified person should get the job.” “Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.”</p>	<p>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race. People of color are lazy and / or incompetent and need to work harder.</p>
<p><i>Pathologizing cultural values / communication styles</i> The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant / White culture are ideal</p>	<p>Asking a Black person: “Why do you have to be so loud / animated? Just calm down.” To an Asian or Latino person: Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal.” Speak up more.” Dismissing an individual who brings up race / culture in work / school setting.</p>	<p>Assimilate to dominant culture. Leave your cultural baggage outside.</p>

Theme	Microaggression	Message
<p><i>Second-class citizen</i> Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color</p>	<p>Person of color mistaken for a service worker Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you "You people ..."</p>	<p>People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high-status positions. You are likely to cause trouble and / or travel to a dangerous neighborhood. Whites are more valued customers than people of color You don't belong. You are a lesser being.</p>
<p><i>Environmental microaggressions</i> Macro-level microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels</p>	<p>A college or university with buildings that are all named after White heterosexual upper class males Television shows and movies that feature predominantly White people, without representation of people of color Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color</p>	<p>You don't belong / You won't succeed here. There is only so far you can go. You are an outsider / You don't exist. People of color don't / shouldn't value education. People of color are deviant.</p>
<p><i>How to offend without really trying</i></p>	<p>"Indian giver." "That's so gay." "She welsched on the bet." "I jewed him down." "That's so White of you." "You people ..." "We got gypped." Imitating accents or dialects Others?</p>	

Adapted from:

Wing, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, Esquilin (2007). Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice. *American Psychologist*, 62, 4, 271-286

## Intergenerational Trauma



## Types of Trauma

- **Childhood bereavement** refers to when someone important to a child dies.
- The death can be either sudden and unexpected (e.g., homicide, suicide, accident, accidental overdose) or anticipated (e.g., lengthy illness).
- It can result in severe psychological and/or behavioral distress, including maladaptive grief reactions.

## Types of Trauma

- **Traumatic separation** refers to the loss of a caregiver for varying lengths of time due to circumstances other than death.
- It can also apply to other close relationships, such as those with grandparents and siblings.
- It is often accompanied by subsequent stressful events or traumatic experiences (e.g., entry into foster care).

## System-Induced Trauma & Retraumatization

- Trauma and loss are endemic to foster care.
- The losses continue to accumulate with removal, placement changes, educational disruptions, cancelled visits, sibling separations, etc.
- Children and youth face further threat of harm due to impermanency, fears of rejection, and uncertainty.
- Some may experience subsequent maltreatment after entering the system.

## Trauma & Memory

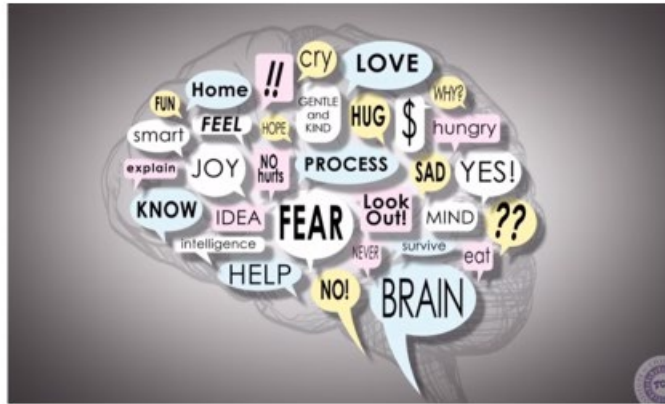


## Trauma & Memory



- **Implicit memory:** Babies can perceive their environment and retain unconscious memories (e.g., recognizing their mother's voice).
- **Explicit memory:** Conscious memories are created around age two and tied to language development.
- Children with early trauma may not retain or be able to access explicit memories. However, they may retain implicit memories of physical or emotional sensations.

# Children From Hard Places & the Brain



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# Trauma & The Brain



Foster Care Alumni of America. (2011). Postcards from the soul. Author. Graphic used with permission.

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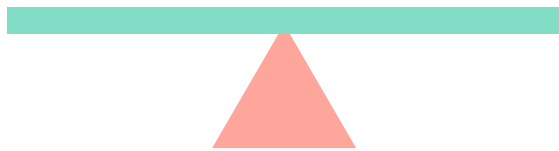
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# Effects of Trauma on the Brain

## Typical Brain Functioning

**Upstairs Brain (Prefrontal Cortex): Processing Center**

**Downstairs Brain (Limbic System): Primal Instincts**



## BRAIN FUNCTIONS



Left Hemisphere

Right Hemisphere

- Logical
- Literal
- Linear
- Linguistic

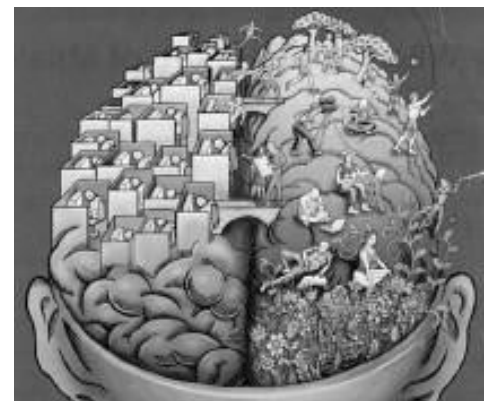
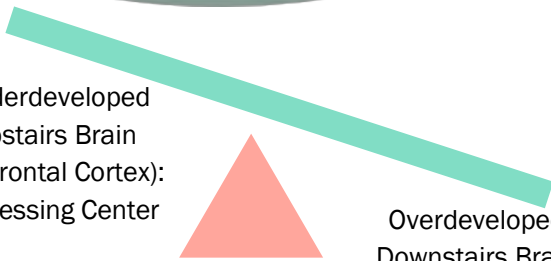
STRONG  
CONNECTION

- Emotions
- Sensations
- Big picture
- Random

## Impact of Repeated Trauma on the Brain

**Underdeveloped Upstairs Brain (Prefrontal Cortex): Processing Center**

**Overdeveloped Downstairs Brain (Limbic System): Primal Instincts**



Left Hemisphere

Right Hemisphere

- Cut off from emotions
- Numb
- Avoidant

WEAK  
CONNECTION

- Flooded emotions
- Aggression
- Depression
- Anxiety

### Repeated experiences activate growth

Depending on the type of experience, the scale for Upstairs Brain and Downstairs Brain can remain balanced or tip. When it tips so that the person's Downstairs Brain is more developed than the Upstairs Brain, the connections between the Left and Right Hemispheres are weaker.

## Activity: Grounding Exercise



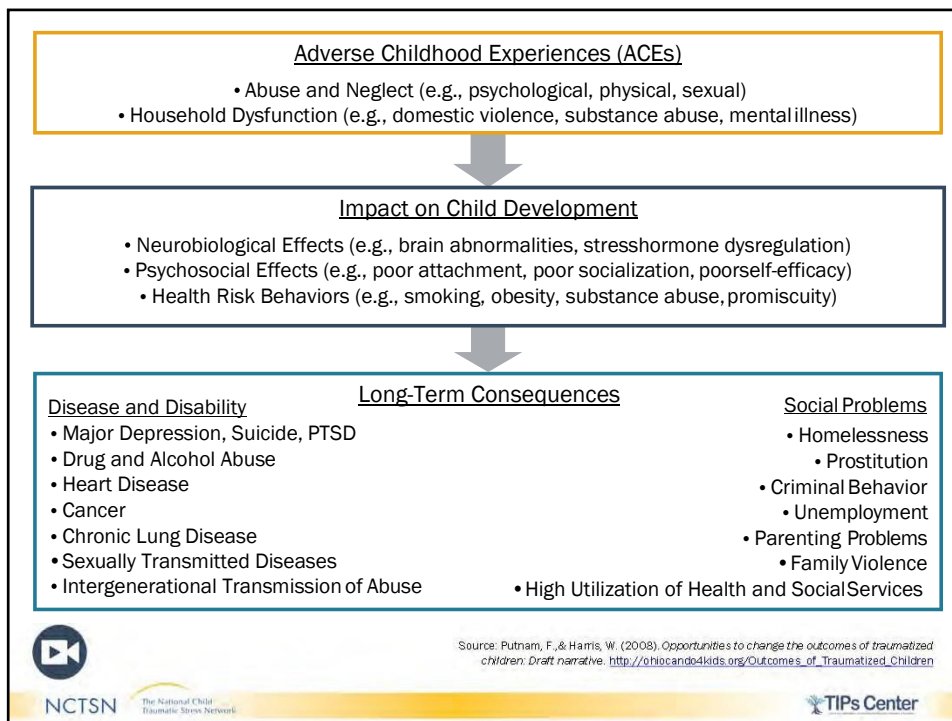
## Long-Term Effects of Childhood Trauma





## Epigenetics & Trauma

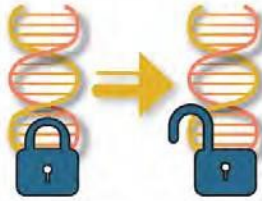
- The genes a person inherits from their biological parents provide information that guides their development.
- Experiences during development can rearrange the epigenetic marks that impact gene expression.
- Positive experience like supportive adults can impact these, as can negative experiences like abuse and neglect.



# WHAT IS EPIGENETICS?

## AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

“Epigenetics” is an emerging area of scientific research that shows how environmental influences—children’s experiences—actually affect the expression of their genes.



During development, the DNA that makes up our genes accumulates chemical marks that determine how much or little of the genes is expressed. This collection of chemical marks is known as the “epigenome.” The different experiences children have rearrange those chemical marks. This explains why genetically identical twins can exhibit different behaviors, skills, health, and achievement.



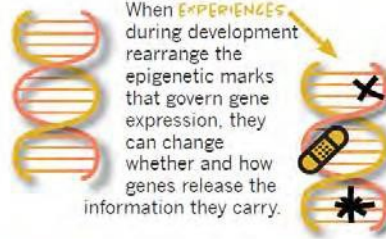
This means the old idea that genes are “set in stone” has been disproven. Nature vs. Nurture is no longer a debate. It’s nearly always both!



## EPIGENETICS EXPLAINS HOW EARLY EXPERIENCES CAN HAVE LIFELONG IMPACTS.



The genes children inherit from their biological parents provide information that guides their development. For example, how tall they could eventually become or the kind of temperament they could have.



When **EXPERIENCES** during development rearrange the epigenetic marks that govern gene expression, they can change whether and how genes release the information they carry.

Thus, the epigenome can be affected by positive experiences, such as supportive relationships and opportunities for learning...

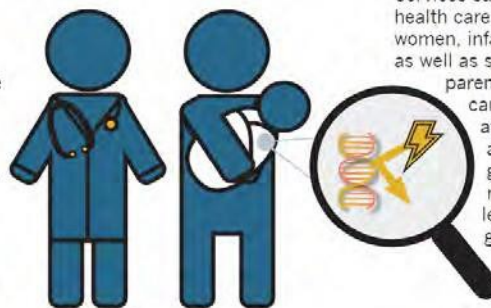


... or negative influences, such as environmental toxins or stressful life circumstances ...

... which leave a unique epigenetic “signature” on the genes. These signatures can be temporary or permanent and both types affect how easily the genes are switched on or off. Recent research demonstrates that there may be ways to reverse certain negative changes and restore healthy functioning. But the very best strategy is to support responsive relationships and reduce stress to build strong brains from the beginning.

## YOUNG BRAINS ARE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO EPIGENETIC CHANGES.

Experiences very early in life, when the brain is developing most rapidly, cause epigenetic adaptations that influence whether, when, and how genes release their instructions for building future capacity for health, skills, and resilience. That’s why it’s crucial to provide supportive and nurturing experiences for young children in the earliest years.



Services such as high-quality health care for all pregnant women, infants, and toddlers, as well as support for new parents and caregivers can—quite literally—affect the chemistry around children’s genes. Supportive relationships and rich learning experiences generate positive epigenetic signatures that *activate* genetic potential.

# Thank you!

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# Trauma 101

Virtual Classroom

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## Trauma 101: Learning Objectives



### Impact of Trauma/Development and Trauma

- Recognize the relationship between a child's lifetime trauma history and their behaviors and responses
- Understand how cultural factors influence how a child may identify, interpret, and respond to traumatic events
- Understand how traumatic experiences affect development throughout the lifespan



### Resilience

- Identify internal and external factors that promote healing and resilience among children who have been impacted by trauma

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## Activity: Commonalities

- Group will identify two things in common
- Can not be related to where we live or working in child welfare.



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We Get  
Started...**

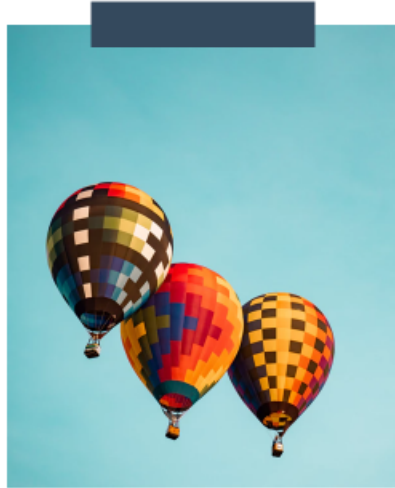
## You Make a Difference



## Culture, Race, & Trauma

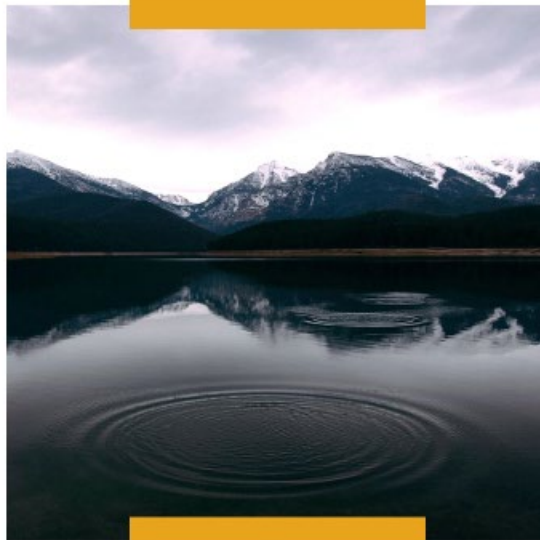


## Activity: Differences



For this activity, please:

- Think of 3 things about your identity that you think make you different from others in this group. List those in the chat box.
- What might be some of the similarities and differences, between yourself and the families you serve?



## Impact of Trauma

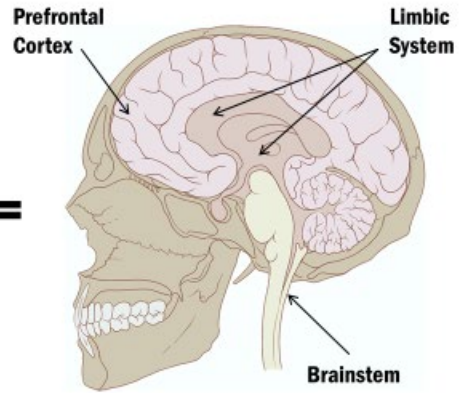
# The Brain



+



=



# Neural Connections



Newborn



1 Month



9 Months



2 Years

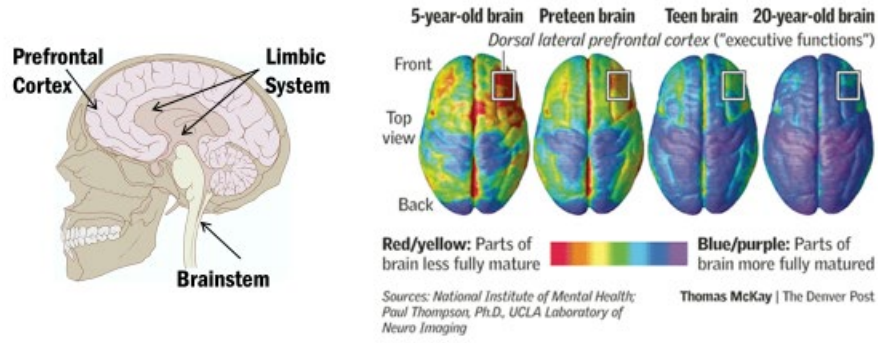


Adult

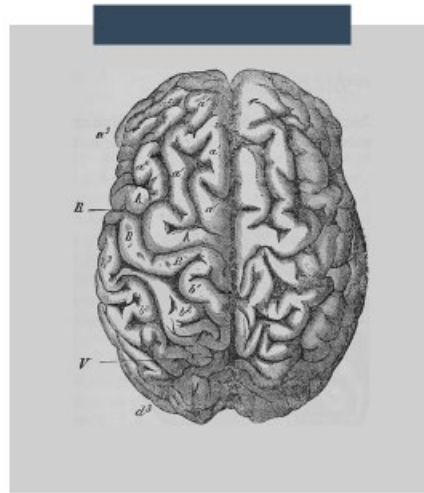
Source: Corel, J. L. (1975). The postnatal development of the human cerebral cortex. Harvard University Press.



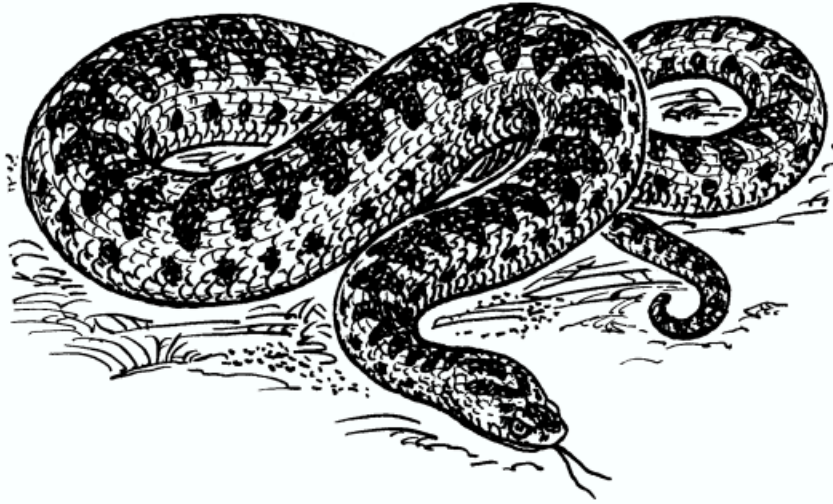
# Brains Develop from the Bottom Up



# Trauma & the Brain



## We Learn by Experience



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## We Learn by Experience

Fight

Flight

Freeze

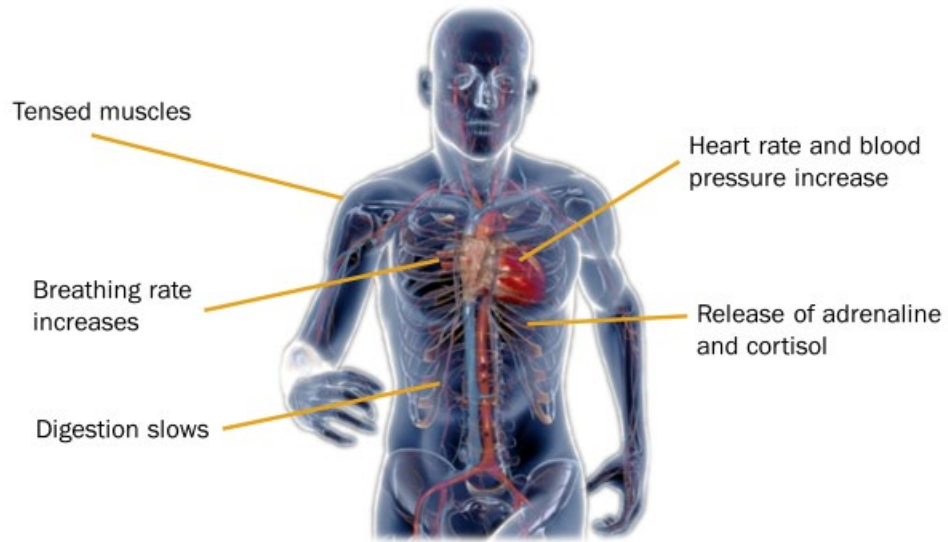


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## Preparing for Action



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## We Learn by Experience



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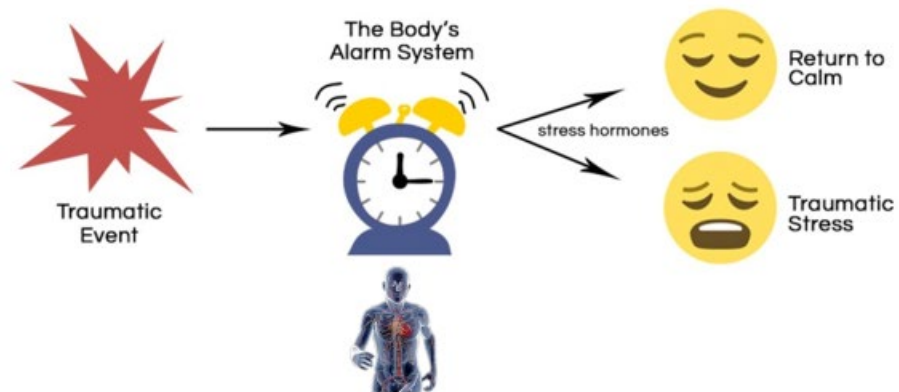
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## We Learn by Experience



## The Traumatic Stress Response Cycle



## The Traumatic Stress Response Cycle

*What are some of the impacts when children's and family's response systems are stuck in the "on" position?*



*How are safety, permanence, and well-being impacted when children's and family's response systems are stuck in the "on" position?*

## Variability in Responses to Stressors and Traumatic Events

- The impact of a potentially traumatic event is determined by both:
  - The objective nature of the event
  - The person's subjective response to it
- Something that is traumatic for one person may not be traumatic for another.

## Variability in Responses to Stressors and Traumatic Events

The impact of a potentially traumatic event depends on several factors, including:

- The person's age and developmental stage
- The person's perception of the danger faced
- Whether the person was the victim or a witness
- The person's relationship to the victim or perpetrator
- The person's experience with trauma
- The adversities the person faced prior to and following the trauma
- The presence or availability of adults who can offer help and protection

## Trauma Reminders

- There are often smells, tastes, sounds, sights, people, even time of day that may serve as reminders of a trauma and may cause a response or trauma reaction.
- This response is occurring as if there is current danger and is involuntary.



## **Intergenerational/Parent Trauma**

Parents may have been victims of childhood trauma.

May have a history of their own trauma as adults from community violence, domestic violence, and/or serving in the military, etc.

This often impacts their ability to parent and their perspective on their own children's abuse.

## **Caregivers as Mediators of Trauma Response**

A child's relationship with an attachment figure mediates the child's response to a trauma.

The caregivers' responses to the trauma may influence how the child perceives the trauma.

When there is interpersonal trauma, children and caregivers may serve as traumatic reminders for one another.

Thus the importance of attending to parent and caregiver trauma.



## Development & Trauma

## Developmental Stages & Trauma

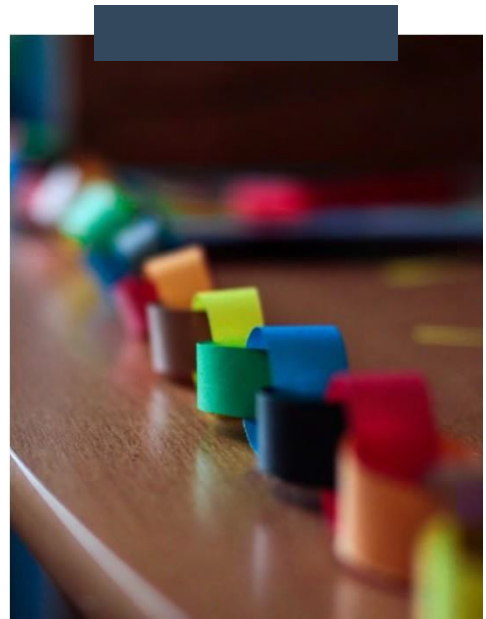
- Children who have been exposed to trauma expend a great deal of their energy responding to, coping with, and coming to terms with the event.
- This may reduce the children's capacity to explore their environment and to master age-appropriate developmental tasks.
- The longer their traumatic stress goes untreated, the farther children tend to stray from appropriate developmental pathways.



# Activity: The Impact of Trauma at Different Developmental Stages

For this activity, please:

- ▮ Review the examples of expected developmental milestones for your assigned stage.
  
- ▮ Developmental Stages
  - Early Childhood
  - School Aged
  - Adolescent
  - Transitional Age Youth



# Early Childhood Development Milestones

## Physical/Motor

- Sitting, walking, feeding self, etc.
- Body awareness (early foundations of sexuality)

## Cognitive

- Using objects correctly
- Imitating gestures
- Sorting
- Playing make-believe
- Matching
- Following simple commands
- Learning numbers, sounds, colors, etc.

## Communication/Language

- Expressive speech
- Receptive speech
- Body language

## Socio-emotional

- Identification of different genders and self-identification
- Attachment
- Developing self-regulation

# School-Age Developmental Milestones

## Physical/Motor

- Writing
- Using scissors
- Climbing

## Cognitive

- Learning, understanding, problem-solving, reasoning, and remembering
- Learn how to tell what time it is

## Communication/Language

- Increased vocabulary
- Learning to read

## Socio-emotional

- Questioning gender roles and developing sexual attitudes
- Making and keeping friends
- Mood regulation
- Understanding consequences for their actions

# Adolescent Development Milestones

This is a time of seeking independence and forming identity!

## Physical/Motor

- Puberty and growth spurts

## Cognitive

- Moral sense of what is right and wrong
- Learning, understanding, problem-solving, reasoning, and remembering
- Increased academic complexity
- Planning for the future (school or work)
- Greater awareness of current events and how they are impacted by them

## Communication/Language

- Complex communication skills

## Socio-emotional

- Dating
- Sexuality and Sexual Identity
- Increased importance of friends
- Mood regulation - impact of hormones
- Individuation
- Challenges with empathy and perspective taking

# Developmental Tasks for Transitional Age Youth (TAY)

## Age of identity exploration

Young people are deciding who they are and what they want out of work, school, and love.

## Age of instability

The years after high school are often marked by changes in residence, in work and in romantic partnership.

## Age of self-focus

Freed of the parent- and society-directed routine of school, young people try to decide what they want to do, where they want to go, and who they want to be with.

## Age of feeling in between

Many emerging adults say they are taking responsibility for themselves, but still do not completely feel like an adult.

## Age of possibilities

Hopes flourish and there is a lot of room for life transformation.

### Reference:

Arnett, J. J. (2015). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199795574.013.9>

# Impact on Development Activity

How might these milestones be impacted by a trauma event(s) if it occurs at that stage?

How might these milestones be impacted by a trauma event(s) that occurred at an earlier stage?  
(N/A if you are assigned to the early childhood age range)

What might be some variables that impact the effects of trauma at this stage?

What types of emotional or behavioral responses to trauma might you see at this stage?

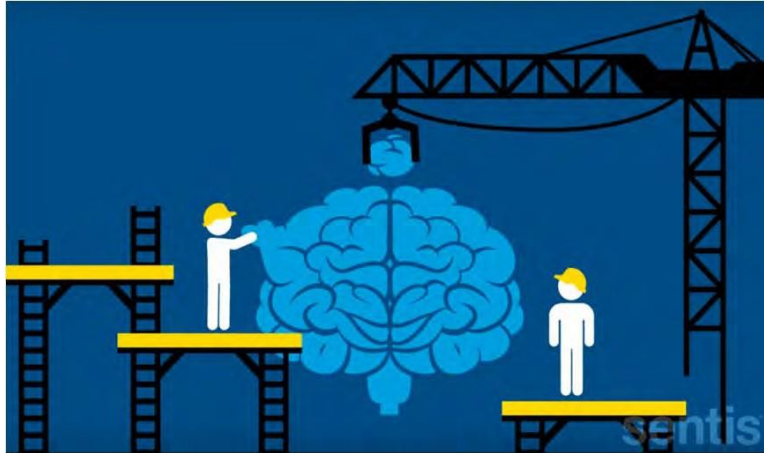
## Resilience

“None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody—a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony, or a few nuns—bent down and helped us pick up our boots.”

- Thurgood Marshall

Newsweek. (1991, October 28). Thurgood Marshall on the story of his successor, Clarence Thomas. Author.

## Neuroplasticity



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## Defining Resilience

Resilience is **not**:

- Dichotomous (have/don't have)
- A single strength, characteristic, or attribute
- An outcome
- Fixed or static across the lifespan
- “Bouncing back” after a traumatic experience or event



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## Defining Resilience

Resilience is a **dynamic developmental process** resulting in healthy adaptation despite adversity.

- The process involves interactions and exchanges between the child or youth's personal characteristics (internal factors) and resources in their environment (external factors).
- It is a culmination of both internal and external factors as well as traumatic experiences, genetic makeup, and individual capacities.

## Defining Resilience

Resilience is a dynamic developmental process resulting in **healthy adaptation** despite adversity.

Healthy adaptation is viewed as achieving appropriate developmental tasks and milestones.

- Many of these achievements are universal expectations across cultures and society (e.g., learning to walk, completing school, and gaining a sense of identity), however, they must take into consideration individual differences and variables from child to child.
- Newer concepts of resilience include the sustainment of well-being as a component of healthy adaptation.

## Defining Resilience

- Sam is an 8-year-old boy who lives with his mom and dad in an affluent community. He is an above average student who enjoys playing soccer and spending time with friends.
- Roger is also an 8-year-old boy, but unlike Sam, he has spent the past two and a half years in foster care where he moved placements 3 times. He just started at a new school and joined a soccer team, which he is enjoying, however, he is still having difficulty making friends, keeping up his grades, and connecting with his classmates.
- Now imagine that Sam and Roger both break their legs after falling from a tree.

How might their past experiences, current environments, and connections to others influence their resilience?

## Internal & External Protective Factors

Internal Factors	External Factors
Positive beliefs, hope, and optimism	Caregiver's coping advice
Problem solving skills	Social support from adults
Ability to regulate own emotions and behaviors	Socioeconomic status
Self-motivation	Nurturing school and community environments
Good intellectual functioning	Opportunities to develop competence
Positive self-views	Positive peer relationships
Relationship building skills	Cultural and spiritual connections

## Tipping the Scale



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## How Can the Child Welfare Workforce Influence Resilience?

- 1 Focus on improving behaviors and building strengths like having a positive outlook and a sense of hope for the future in children and caregivers.
- 2 Foster healthy, enduring relationships between children and caregivers.
- 3 Help children and youth make meaning of their experiences.
- 4 Promote positive coping skills and self-regulation in children and caregivers.
- 5 Help children and youth strengthen self-efficacy and perceived control.
- 6 Connect children and caregivers to formal trauma-focused services and supports.
- 7 Mobilize sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions in the children's and caregivers' lives.

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## Wrap-Up & Closure



# How Can the Child Welfare Workforce Influence Resilience?

By following these strategies:

1. Focus on improving behaviors and building strengths like having a positive outlook and a sense of hope for the future in children and caregivers.
2. Foster healthy, enduring relationships between children and caregivers.
3. Help children and youth make meaning of their experiences.
4. Promote positive coping skills and self-regulation in children and caregivers.
5. Help children and youth strengthen self-efficacy and perceived control.
6. Connect children and caregivers to formal trauma-focused services and supports.
7. Mobilize sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions in the children's and caregivers' lives