

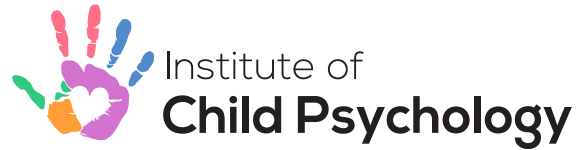


# UNDERSTANDING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

## *Webinar Handout*

*Presented by:*

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Co-Founder, Psychologist,  
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## *Our Vision*

Our foundation is one of respect for all with a commitment to listen fully and learn from the diverse viewpoints of our team and those we service in our community.

At the heart of our work is the importance we place on insight, compassion, trust and warmth. We want to foster lasting change in the lives of families and transform our community. We believe that everyone should have access to affordable mental health resources.

We believe strongly in dismantling the stigma around mental health and in empowering caregivers and professionals to help children to reach their full potential. We continually identify important questions, seek out the answers, and evaluate and document what we learn.

### FEATURED ON





TRAUMATIC EVENTS ARE EXTRAORDINARY, NOT BECAUSE THEY OCCUR RARELY, BUT RATHER BECAUSE THEY OVERWHELM THE ORDINARY HUMAN ADAPTIONS TO LIFE - DR. JUDITH HERMAN



## WHAT IS *Trauma* ?

### The Challenge

- Experience that may be perceived and traumatic for one individual may not be interpreted in the same way for another
- Not what happens to you but what happens inside you
- Conflicting messages from others:
  - i.e., Sexual assault: “I believe you” vs. “are you sure”
- Trauma overwhelms our capacity to control how we are responding to our environment
- Our brain keeps us alive at all costs
- Experience of trauma: moves us out of knowing what we are doing to **reacting** to what is happening
- Results in **“disconnection from self”**
- Supporting someone who has experienced trauma requires that we accept that a person may be both living in a secure and predictable present, while also experiencing an overwhelming, ever-present, past



## ACES - ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

The CDC-**Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study** is one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse, neglect, household challenges and later-life health and well-being.

The original ACE Study was conducted at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 with two waves of data collection. Over 17,000 Health Maintenance Organization members from Southern California receiving physical exams completed confidential surveys regarding their childhood experiences and current health status and behaviors.

(<https://www.cdc.gov/>)

## THE THREE TYPES OF ACES INCLUDE

### Abuse



Physical

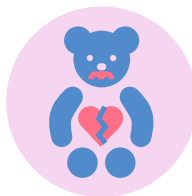


Emotional



Sexual

### Neglect



Physical

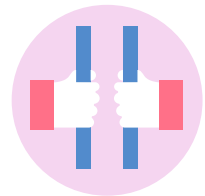


Emotional

### Household Dysfunction



Mental Illness



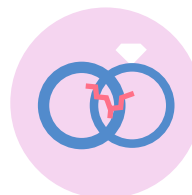
Incarcerated Relative



Mother Treated Violently



Substance Abuse



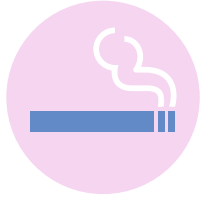
Divorce

## POSSIBLE RISK OUTCOMES

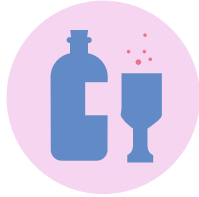
### *Behaviour*



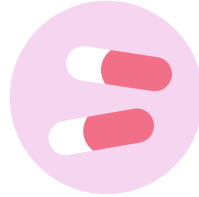
Lack of Physical Activity



Smoking



Alcoholism



Drug Use



Missed Work

### *Physical and Mental Health*



Severe Obesity



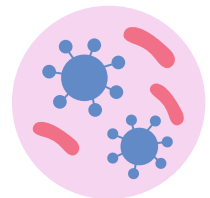
Diabetes



Depression



Suicide Attempts



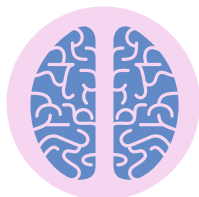
STD's



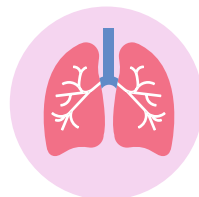
Heart Disease



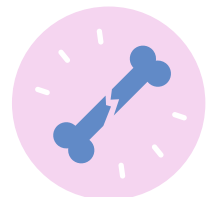
Cancer



Stroke



COPD



Broken Bones

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## PRIME DETERMINANT OF *Health*

### Literally changes your physiology

- High doses of toxic stress change your brain development, immune system, hormonal system, and how our DNA is read and transcribed

### 4 ACES:

- 1500% increased risk suicide
- 550% increased change of alcoholism, liver disease, COPD, and asthma
- 4.5x more likely develop depression

### 7 ACES:

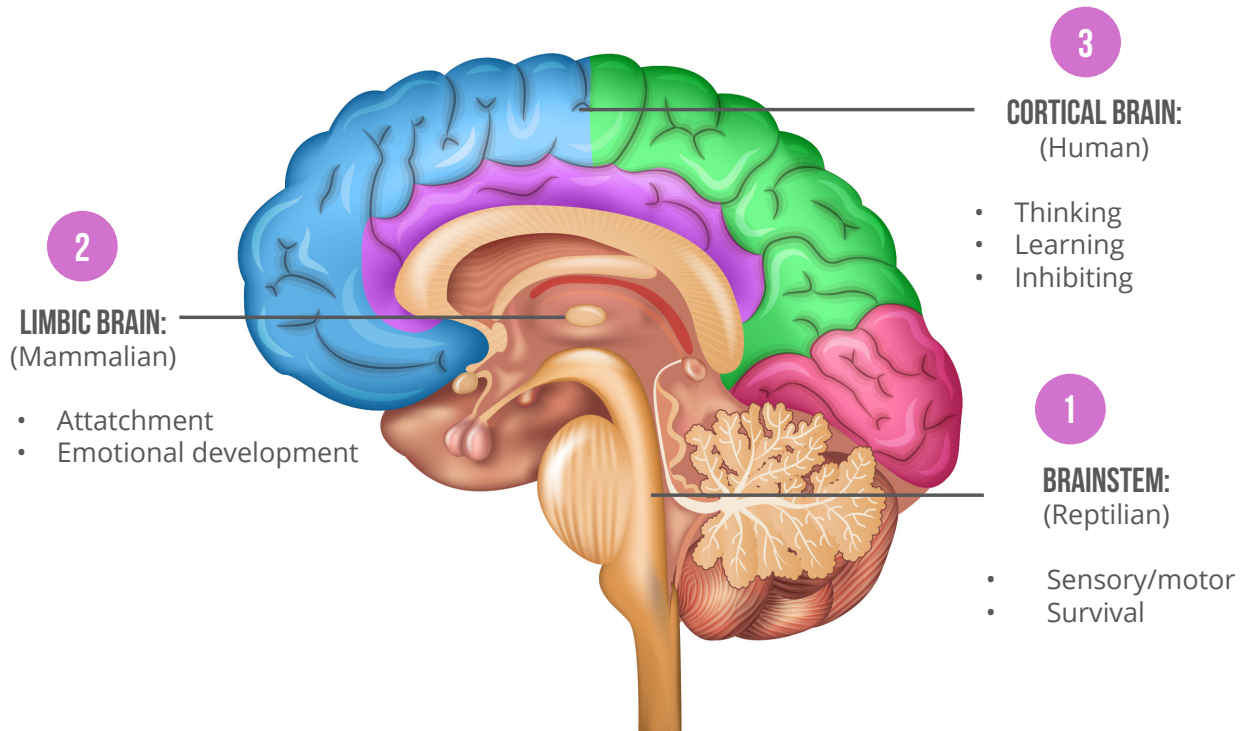
- Death 20 years earlier
- 3.5 x risk of heart disease
- 3x risk cancer

## EXPERIENCES OF *Trauma*

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Neglect
- Witnessing Violence
- Car Accidents
- Physical Injury
- Surgery/Major Medical Procedures
- Loss of Parent/Caregiver
- Loss or threat of Loss of Relationship
- Intergenerational Trauma
- High Conflict Divorce

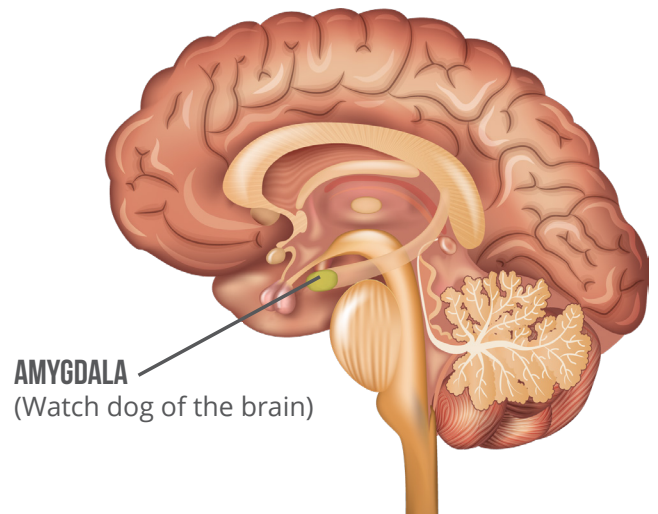


## CHILDREN'S BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



### TRIUNE *Brain*

- 1 Brain Stem (Reptilian):**
  - Develops first
  - Basic survival instincts – fight, flight, & freeze
  - Speaks in sensation
- 2 Limbic Brain (Mammalian):**
  - Develops second
  - Process memory & emotion
  - Speaks in feelings
- 3 Cortical Brain (Human):**
  - Develops third
  - Inhibition, perception, problem solving, planning, complex rational thought
  - Speaks in words





## THREAT *Response* SYSTEM

When we perceive a threat in our environment, our body prepares to respond to it. We have a biological predisposition to engage in either **flight, fight, freeze, or collapse**.

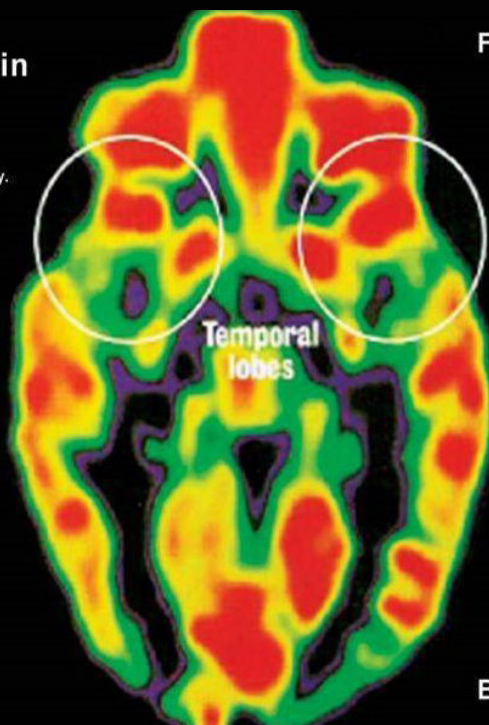


NEURONS THAT FIRE TOGETHER, WIRE TOGETHER - DONALD HEBB



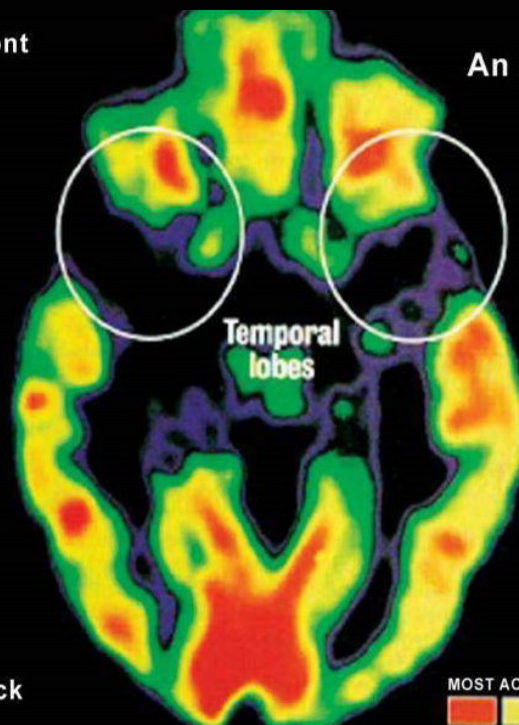
### Healthy Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.



### An Abused Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a Romanian Orphan, who was institutionalized shortly after birth, shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top), which regulate emotions and receive input from the senses, are nearly quiescent. Such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems.



MOST ACTIVE    LEAST ACTIVE



Source: Centre for Disease Control

## Window of Tolerance

Externalized Behaviours

Overwhelmed  
Chaotic Responses

*Hyper-Aroused  
Fight / Flight Response*

Outbursts  
Anger / Aggression / Rage

*Calm, Cool,  
Collected, Connected*

Shut Down  
Dissociation

*Hypo-Aroused  
Freeze Response*

Flat Affect /  
No Display of Emotion

Internalized Behaviours

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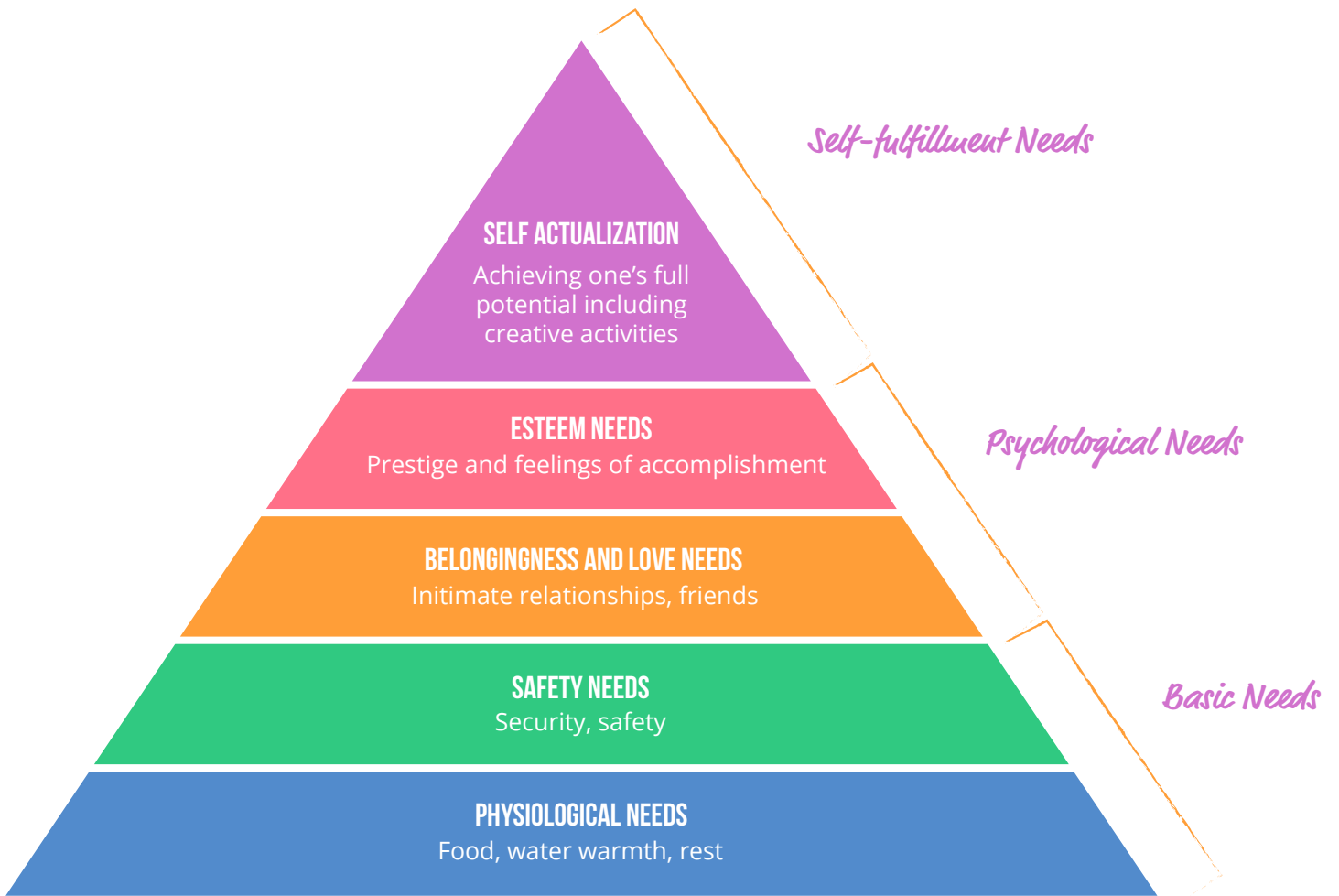
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## MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



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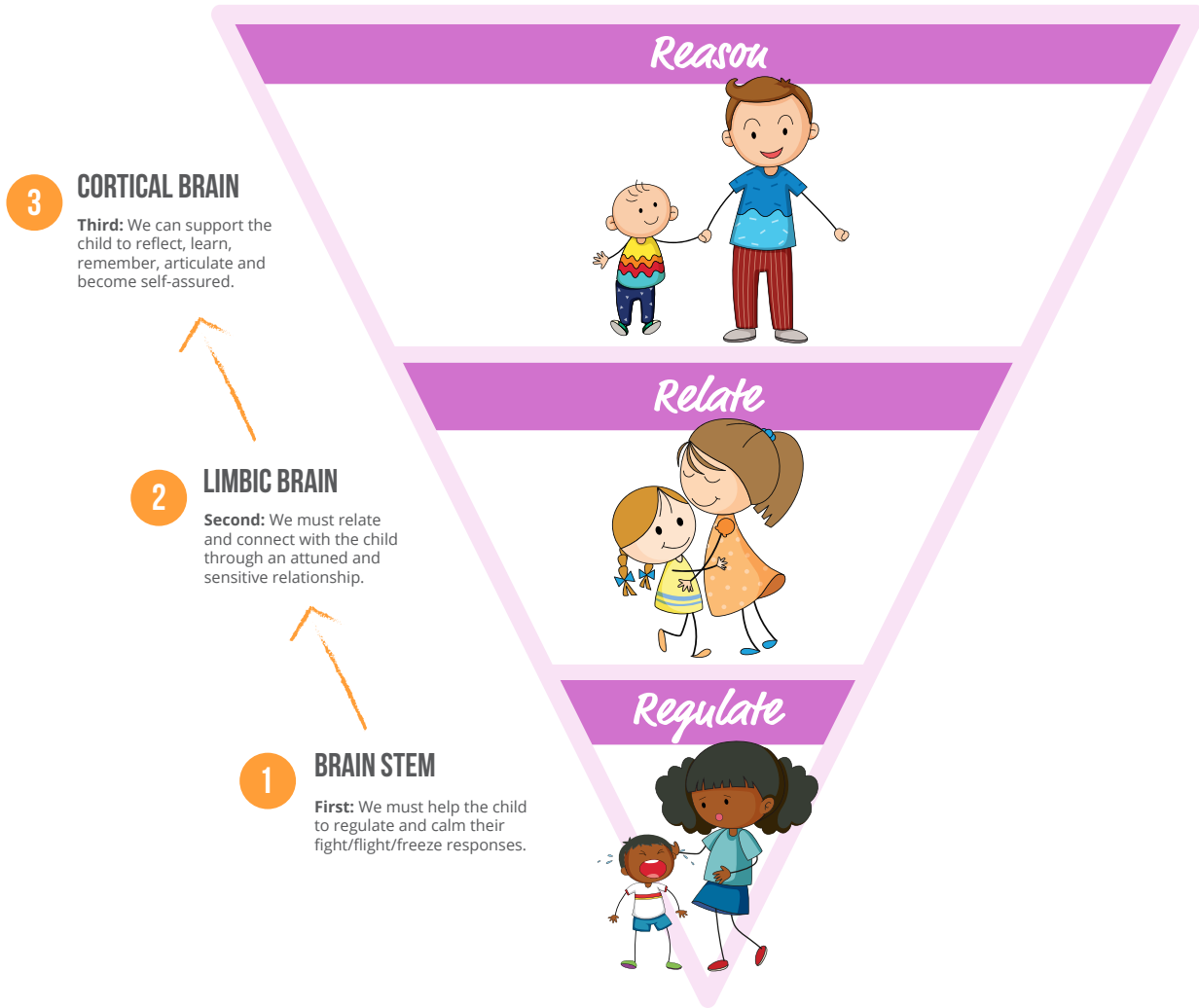
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# THE 3 R'S

Based on the work of Dr. Bruce Perry




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## AN *Evidence* BASED SOLUTION:

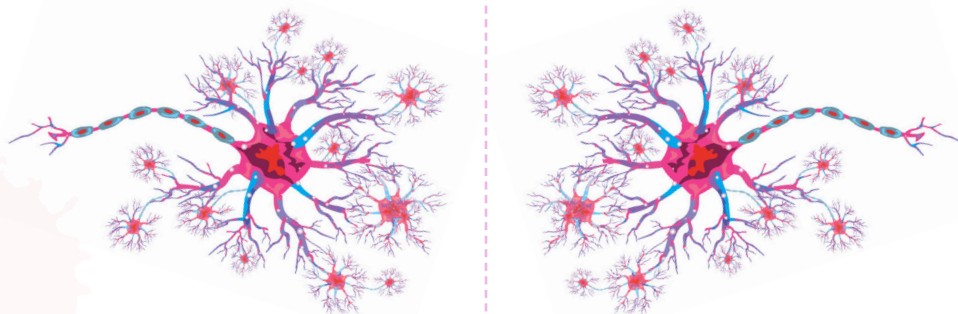
### Why is attachment important?

- Acts as a protective factor.
  - Impacts how we perceive the actions of others.
  - Foundation of human psychology
  - **SURVIVAL** mechanism
  - Through this relationship children develop their capacity to identify and manage emotional states.
  - Through the relationship with the attachment figure a child can develop feelings of safety, increasing their capacity to explore their world.
  - Through attachment we learn how to be in relationship with our parents, peers, partners, and own children.
  - Without attachment we do not experience safety, and then we do not learn
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### *Mirror* NEURONS

Mirror neurons allow us to learn through imitation; reflecting body language, facial expressions, emotions, and most importantly, the development of empathy.

- Research has shown that infants that are physically in sync with caregivers are also emotionally in sync
  - Contribute to the development of capacities such as empathy, imitation, synchrony, and language development
  - Plays significant role in the development of attachment
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**TRAUMA INVARIABLE INVOLVES NOT BEING SEEN, NOT BEING MIRRORED, AND NOT BEING TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT - VAN DER KOLK**

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**ATTUNEMENT:**

Attunement is being aware of, and responsive to, another. How does your child feel? Are they happy or sad, interested, engaged, capable of listening? Are they in distress, hungry or just needing to be held?

*Attachment* **FOCUSED INTERVENTION**

| Routines                                 | Caregiver Affect Management          | Attunement  | Praise and Reinforcement |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Routines for mealtimes, bedtimes, etc.   | Tune into and notice child successes | Respond to affect NOT behaviour: separate the child from the behaviour                  | Notice changes           |
| Reduce stressors in the home / classroom | Learn emotion regulation skills      | Be hypervigilant of child's cues; learn to read child's non-verbals and teach to others | Notice child coping well |
| Consistent, appropriate limit setting    | Psycho-education                     |   | Celebrate successes      |



## *Calu* THE BRAIN STEM

### **GROUNDING: 5-4-3-2-1**

- 5 - LOOK:** Look around for 5 things that you can see, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I see the computer, I see the cup, I see the picture frame.
- 4 - FEEL:** Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things that you can feel, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I feel my feet warm in my socks, I feel the hair on the back of my neck, or I feel the pillow I am sitting on.
- 3 - LISTEN:** Listen for 3 sounds. It could be the sound of traffic outside, the sound of typing or the sound of your tummy rumbling. Say the three things out loud.
- 2 - SMELL:** Say two things you can smell. If you're allowed to, it's okay to move to another spot and sniff something. If you can't smell anything at the moment or you can't move, then name your 2 favorite smells.
- 1 - TASTE:** Say one thing you can taste. It may be the toothpaste from brushing your teeth, or a mint from after lunch. If you can't taste anything, then say your favorite thing to taste.

**Take another deep belly breath to end.**



**CROSSING THE MIDLINE**



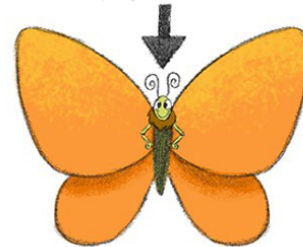
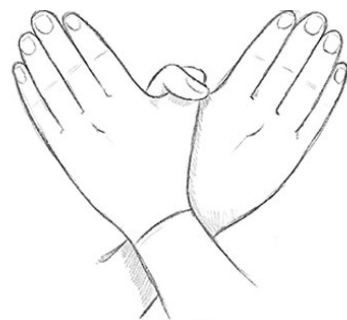
**MANAGING BIG FEELINGS**

**I spy with my little eye....**



*Distraction*

Bring Attention to Moment



*Bilateral Movement*

Butterfly Hug

## *Managing* **BIG FEELINGS**

### **Time-In's VS. Time-Out's**

Relationship should not be conditional

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### **Connect and Redirect**

Acknowledge the child's feeling using words, body language, and tone. Then engage with the challenge the child is experiencing.

**A-** Acknowledge Feelings - "You are feeling \_\_\_\_\_"

**C-** Communicate Limit - "People are not for hitting"

**T-** Target an Alternative

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### **Aggression**

- Child is in a threat response and they can't hear you
- Don't personalize their words
- Do not engage in power-struggles

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CONSIDER “WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU” INSTEAD OF “WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU”  
- JEN ALEXANDER

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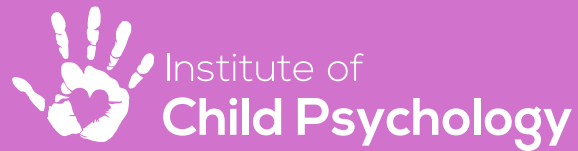
## *Move* FROM JUDGMENT TO COMPASSION

Recognize their humanness. We are all in this together. Try to see yourself in them, and move from separateness to love and compassion.

### We are hard wired for connection

- Connection is the **evidence-based treatment**
- No “letters” needed
- Our deepest fear is **disconnection** and not belonging





The **Institute of Child Psychology** was founded to educate parents and professionals on issues pertaining to children's mental health, and to promote the psychological and emotional well-being of children and adolescents.

Our mission is to empower parents, teachers, therapists, social workers and psychologists by giving them pertinent insights, skills, and tools necessary to help children thrive.



[www.instituteofchildpsychology.com](http://www.instituteofchildpsychology.com)