

The Impact of Trauma on Foster and Adopted Children



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Let's Start with a Video...



Let's start from the beginning...

- *Throughout life, the brain is making memories that correspond to various sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and movements.*
- *Everything the brain has experienced matched against future experiences*
 - *The brain does not like to be surprised*
 - *All unknown or unfamiliar environmental cues are judged to be threatening until proven otherwise*



What are templates?

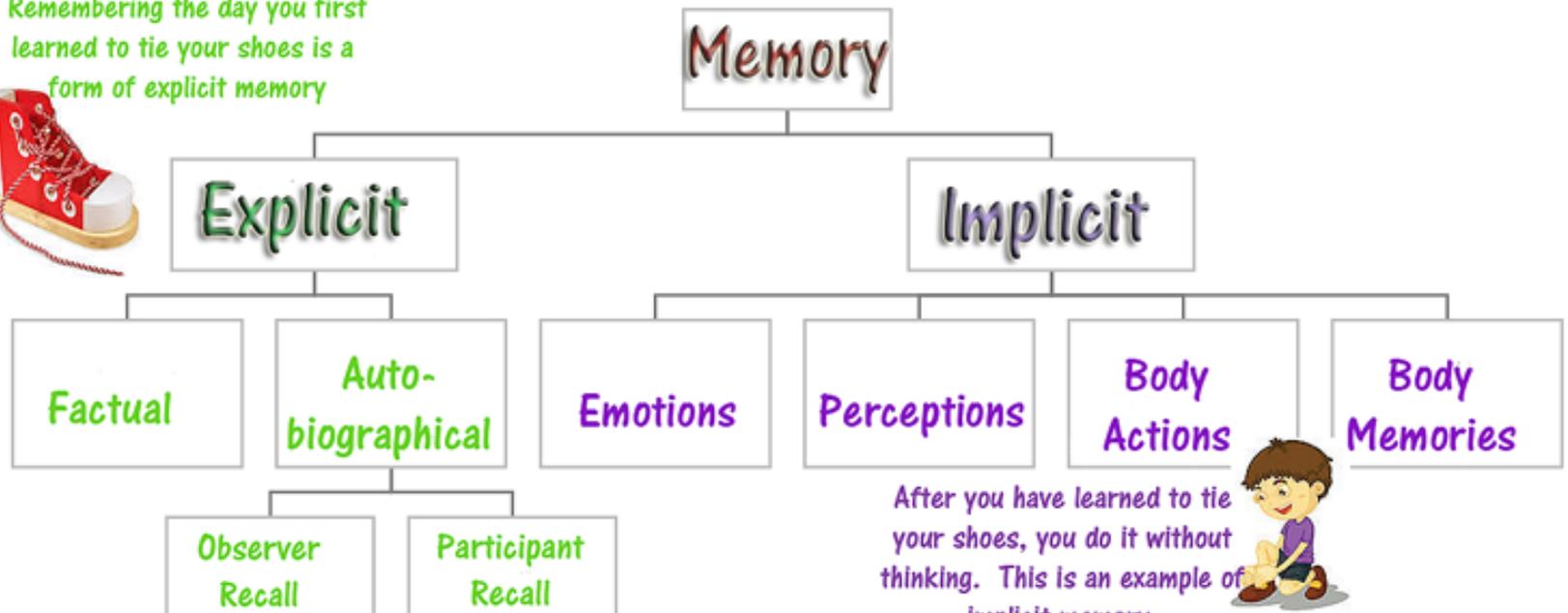
- *Templates are built on:*
 - *Repetitive behaviors*
 - *Environmental factors (emotional, psychological, social interactions)*
 - *Un-met needs*
 - *Desire to escape or avoid unpleasantness*
 - *Reinforced social behaviors*

Templates and Brain Function

- *Help you recognize what you see as safe and comfortable*
- *Organization of information. The brain cannot possibly create a unique neural imprint or pattern of change to store every element of every experience so it stores patterns based upon the **first** set of organizing experiences.*
 - *All future incoming input is matched against these stored templates, and if sufficiently different from the original pattern the brain will create a memory reflecting that difference*

Two Memory Systems

Remembering the day you first learned to tie your shoes is a form of explicit memory

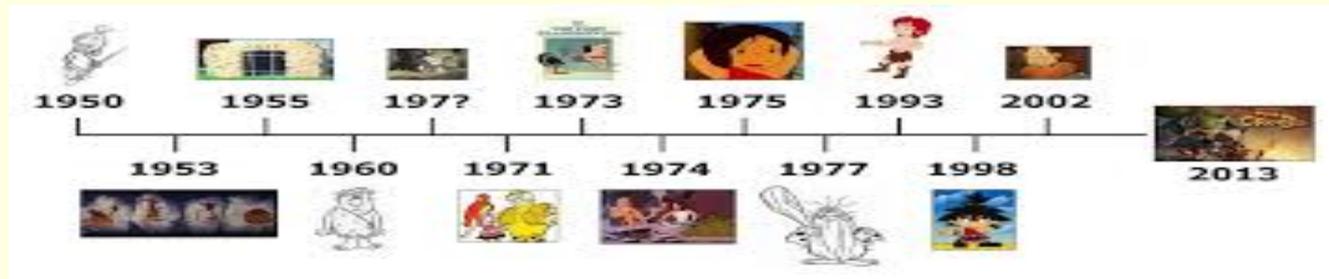
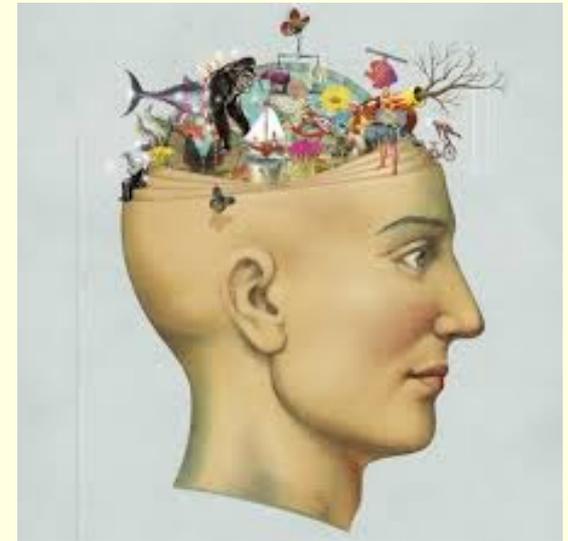


After you have learned to tie your shoes, you do it without thinking. This is an example of implicit memory.



Explicit Memory

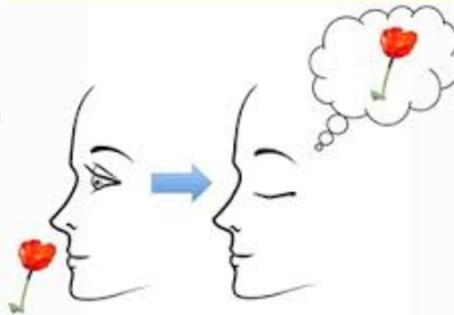
- *A sense of recall*
 - *Events or Facts*
- *Requires conscious attention*
- *Hippocampus*
 - *Develops around 18 months*
- *Organizes past experiences*
- *Has a timeline*



Implicit Memory

- *Perceptions, emotions, actions/behaviors, sensations*
- *Mediated by amygdala - which is reactionary based - safety*
 - *No experience of recall*
 - *Does not require conscious attention*
- *Anything we repeat over or over again - good or bad*
 - *Becomes second nature*
 - *Most impressionable from 0-5*
- *Unconscious lens of how the world operates*

Examples of Implicit Memory



Implicit Memory for Adopted Children

- *Emotion is the language between mother and child*
- *When an infant is separated from its mother, it will make a long term memory of this loss*
- *Precognitive -coded as an emotion*
- *REJECTION in any and all other relationships is triggering*



What about Grief ?

- *The memory is grief - the loss of the parent is a death to the child*
- *Through self-exploration children realize that they have feelings and they recognize the loss of the mother*
- *Cognitive Emotional disconnect - very powerful feelings but they can't be described in words - seen in behaviors - ODD, Conduct Disorder, etc..*

How do we heal implicit memories of grief and loss?

- *When a child feels disconnected, the opportunity to heal is when the memory is unlocked.*
- *The Limbic system doesn't understand words so body language and non-verbal cues will rebuild the memory.*
- *When a child is at his worst, the parent needs to be at his/her best.*

Adoptive and Foster Children Experience Developmental Trauma

*The Premature Maternal Separation is a significant
event for a child*

*This Significant Event = DEVELOPMENTAL
TRAUMA*



So what about Trauma?

“ANYTHING

that interrupts or interferes with normal social, emotional, psychological, cognitive, spiritual, language or physical developmental processes

OR

interferes/interrupts secure attachment can be a threat to the individual and considered traumatic”

A traumatic experience

- *Threatens the life or physical integrity of a child or of someone important to that child (parent, grandparent, sibling)*
- *Causes an overwhelming sense of terror, helplessness, and horror*
- *Produces intense physical effects such as pounding heart, rapid breathing, trembling, dizziness, or loss of bladder or bowel control*

What is the Impact of Domestic Violence?



Trauma derails development

- Exposure to trauma causes the brain to develop in a way that will help the child survive in a dangerous world



- On constant alert for danger
- Quick to react to threats (fight, flight, freeze)
- The stress hormones produced during trauma also interfere with the development of higher brain functions.

Young Children (0-5)

Key Developmental Tasks

- Development of visual and auditory perception
- Recognition of and response to emotional cues
 - Attachment to primary caregiver

Trauma's Impact

- Sensitivity to noise
- Avoidance of contact
- Heightened startle response
 - Confusion about what's dangerous and who to go to for protection
 - Fear of being separated from familiar people/places

School-Aged children (6-12)

Key Developmental Tasks

- *Manage fears, anxieties, and aggression*
- *Sustain attention for learning and problem solving*
- *Control impulses and manage physical responses to danger*

Trauma's impact

- *Emotional swings*
- *Learning problems*
- *Specific anxieties and fears*
- *Attention seeking*
- *Reversion to younger behaviors*

Adolescents (13-21)

Key Developmental Tasks

- Think abstractly
- Anticipate and consider the consequences of behavior
- Accurately judge danger and safety
- Modify and control behavior to meet long-term goals

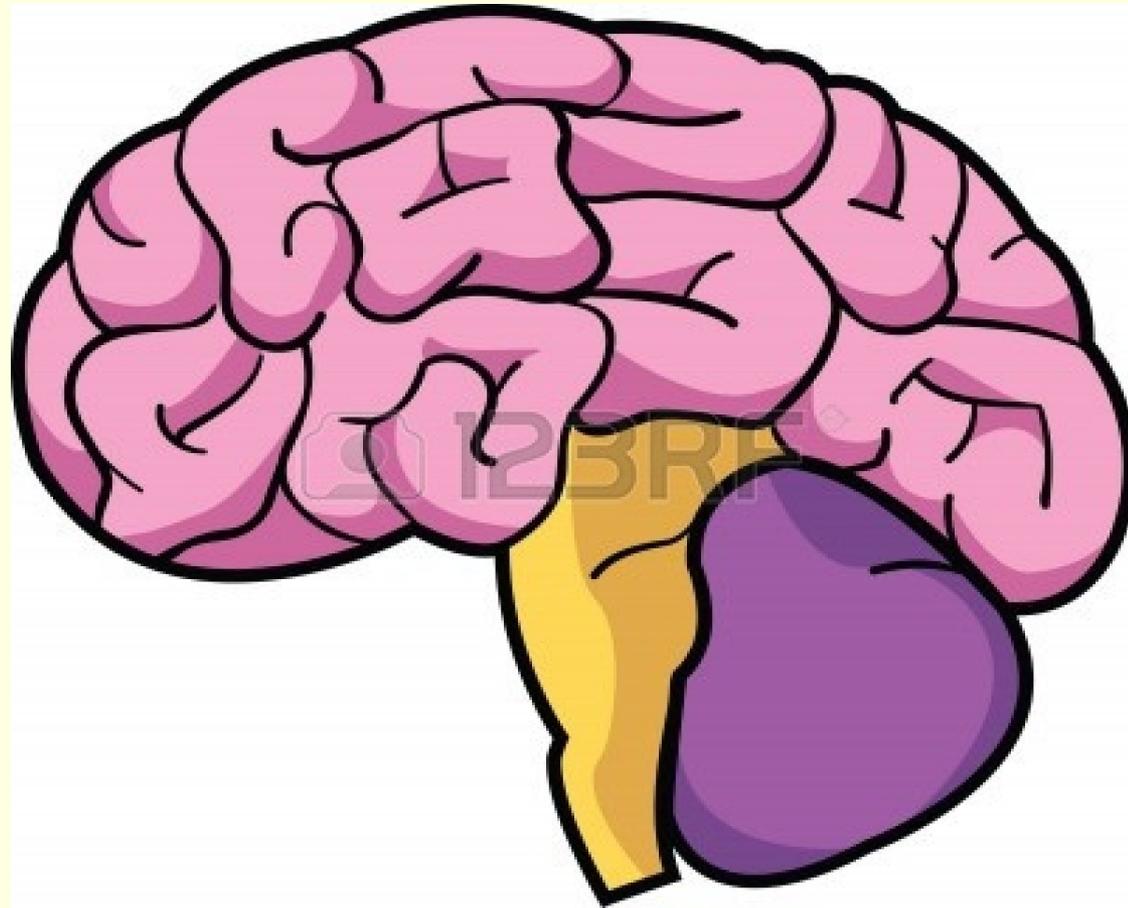
Trauma's Impact

- Difficulty imagining or planning for the future
 - Over- or underestimating danger
 - Inappropriate aggression
- Reckless and /or self destructive behaviors

Getting Development Back on Track

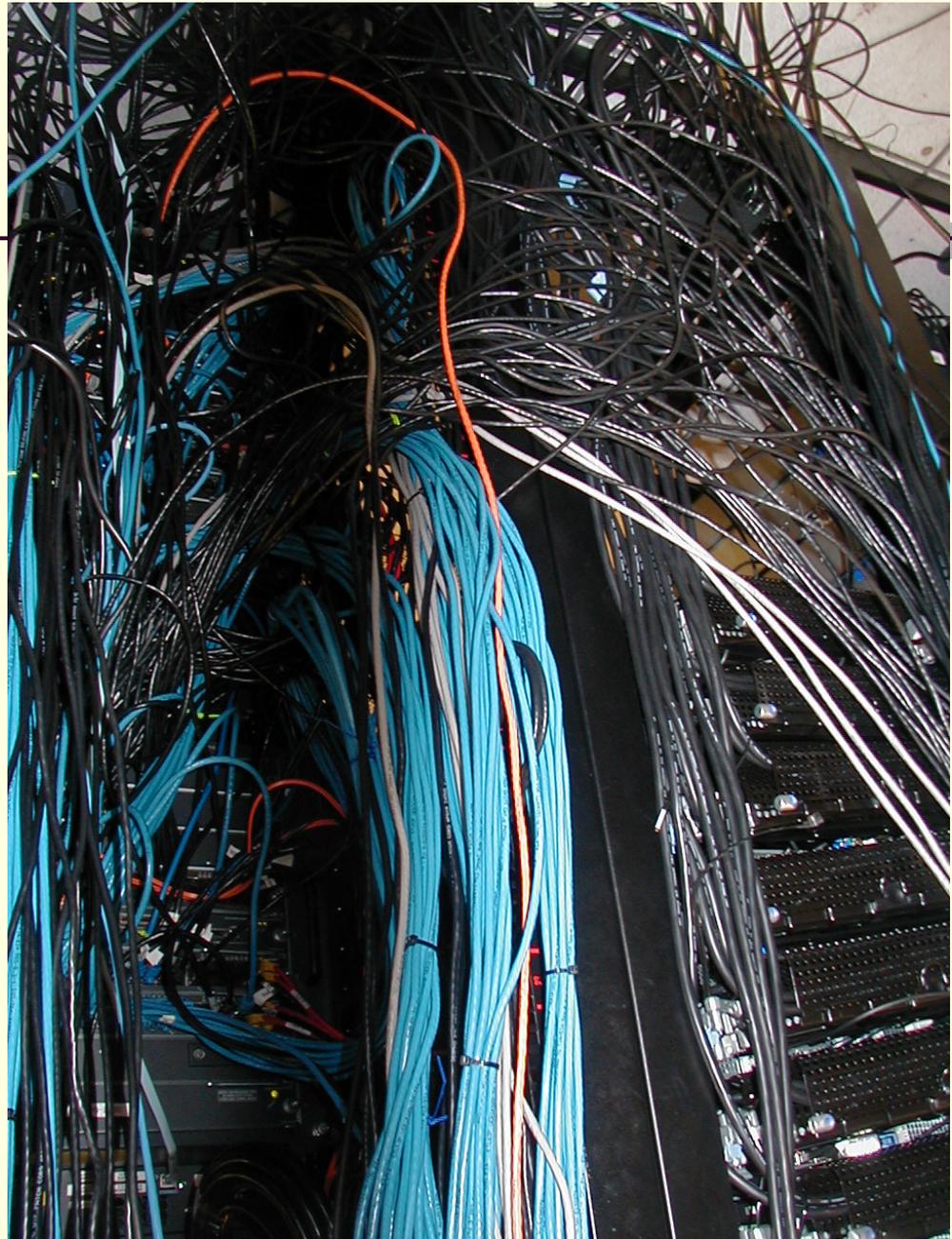
- *Traumatized children and adolescents can learn new ways of thinking, relating and responding*
- *Rational thought and self-awareness can help children override primitive brain responses.*
- *Unlearning and rebuilding takes time*

So What About The Brain??

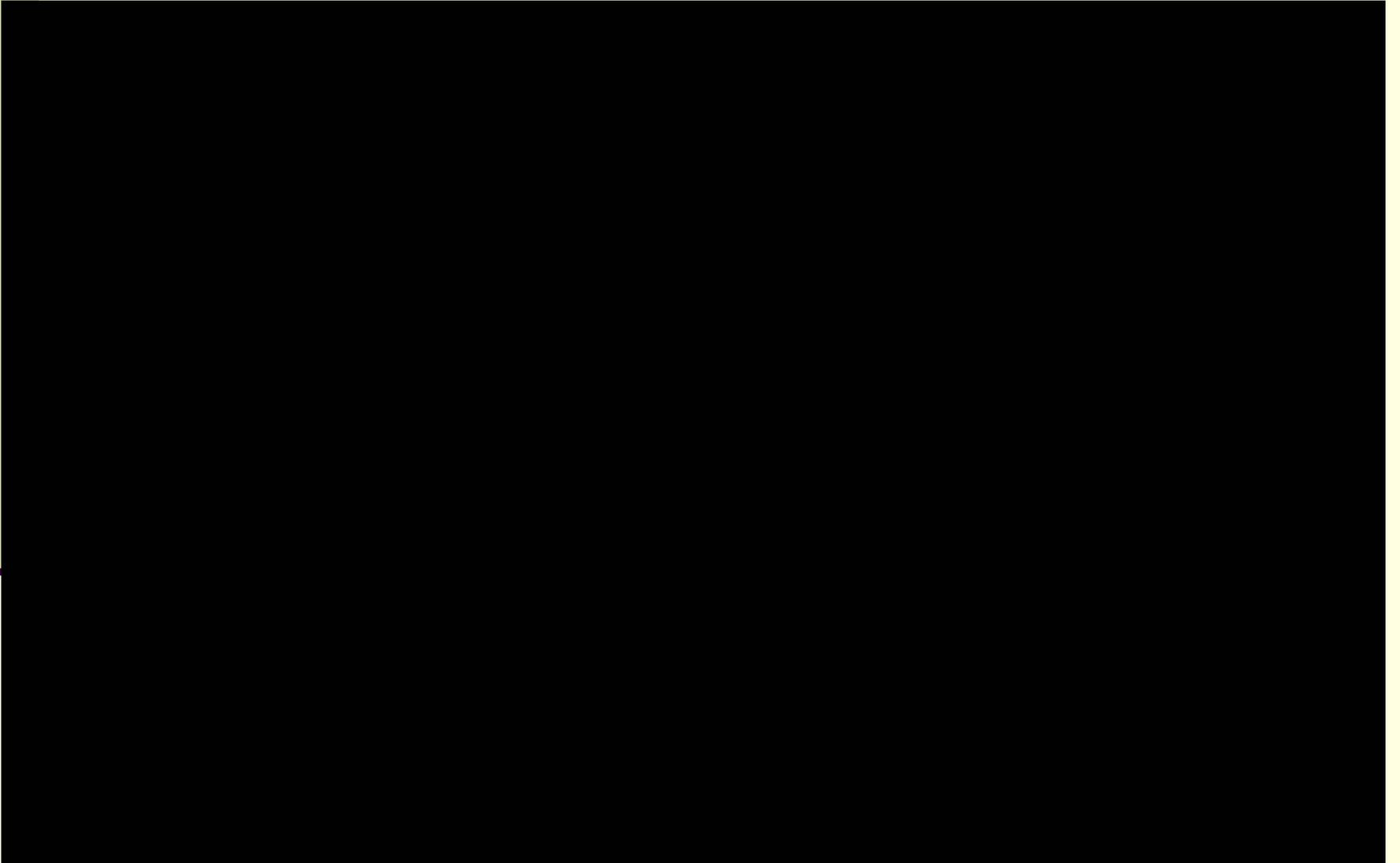


*Our brains
get wired
primarily by
experiences
in the
environment*

*Not by
what is
taught, but
by what is
experienced*



The brain is ever changing...



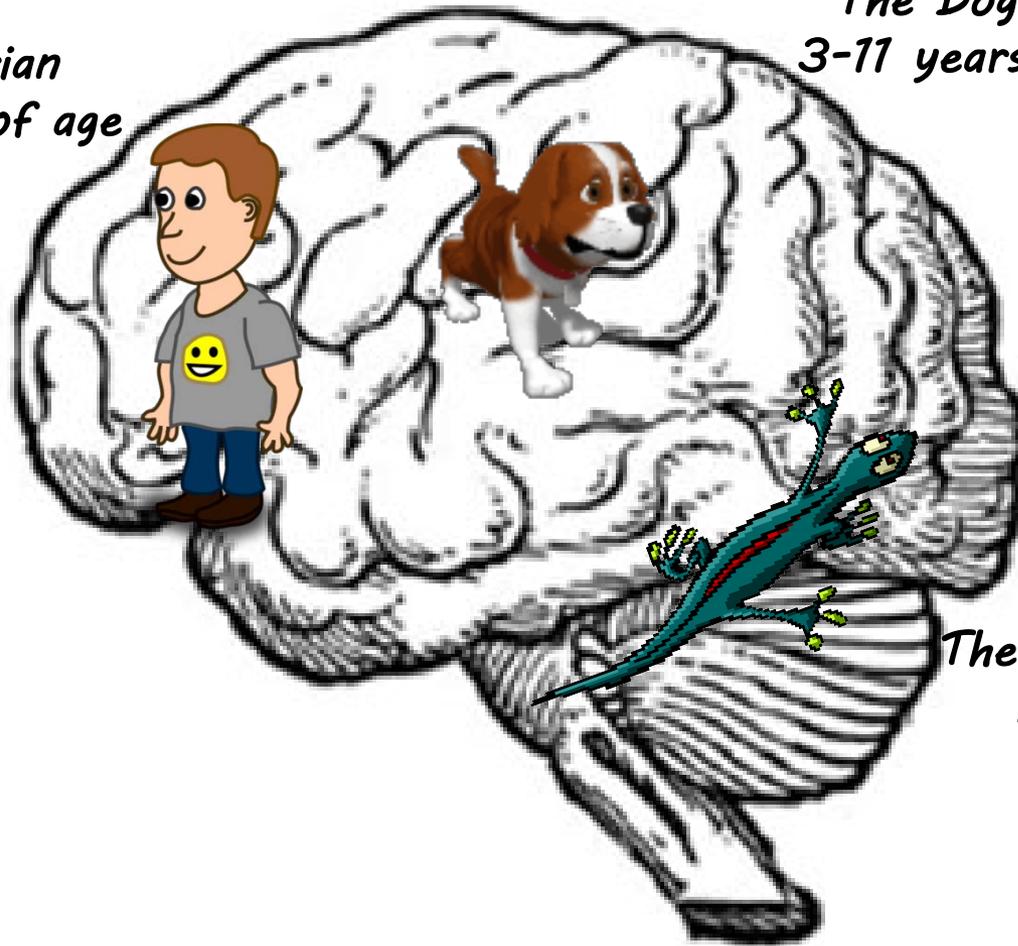
Brain development happens from the bottom up

- *From primitive (basic survival)*
- *To more complex (rational thought, planning, abstract thinking)*
- *The brain develops by forming connections*
- *Interactions with caregivers are critical to brain development*
- *The more an experience is repeated, the stronger the connections become*

The Developing Brain

*The Boy Brian
11-25 years of age*

*The Dog Brain
3-11 years of age*



*The Lizard Brain
Birth - 3*

Why Does Trauma impact the developing brain?



- Trauma activates stress -response systems in the brain
- Severe or chronic stress prevents the brain from returning to a relaxed state
- Traumatized children are often in constant fight, flight, or freeze



The Threat Response System

Ultimately Trauma is an over activation of the threat or stress response system in the body and most behavior considered pathological is an adaptive reaction to this over utilized system

FIGHT



FLIGHT Oohlala!

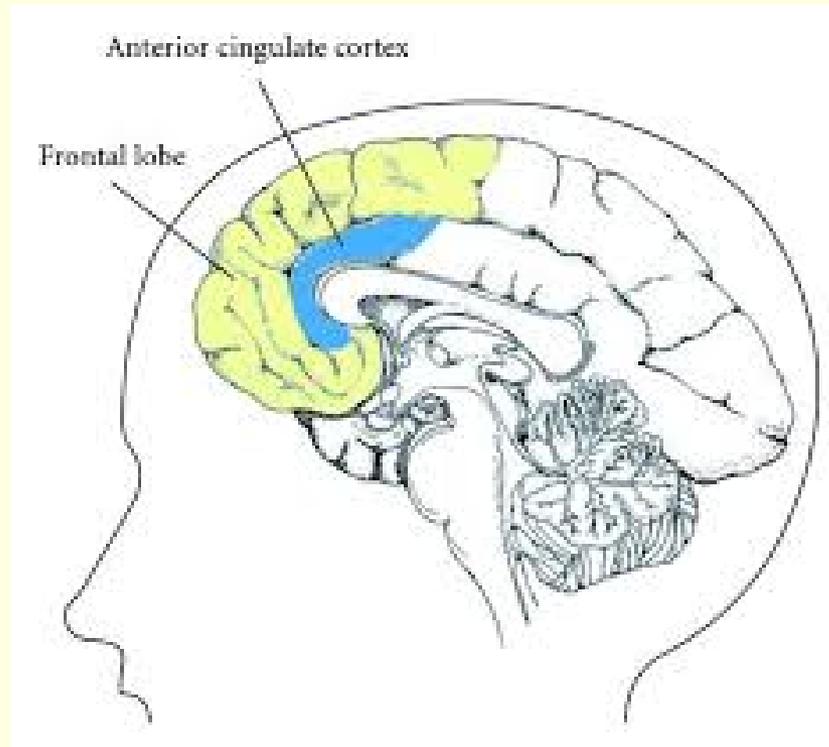


FREEZE



What is the Threat Response System?

Polyvagal System and the Anterior Cingulate of the Cortex (ACC)



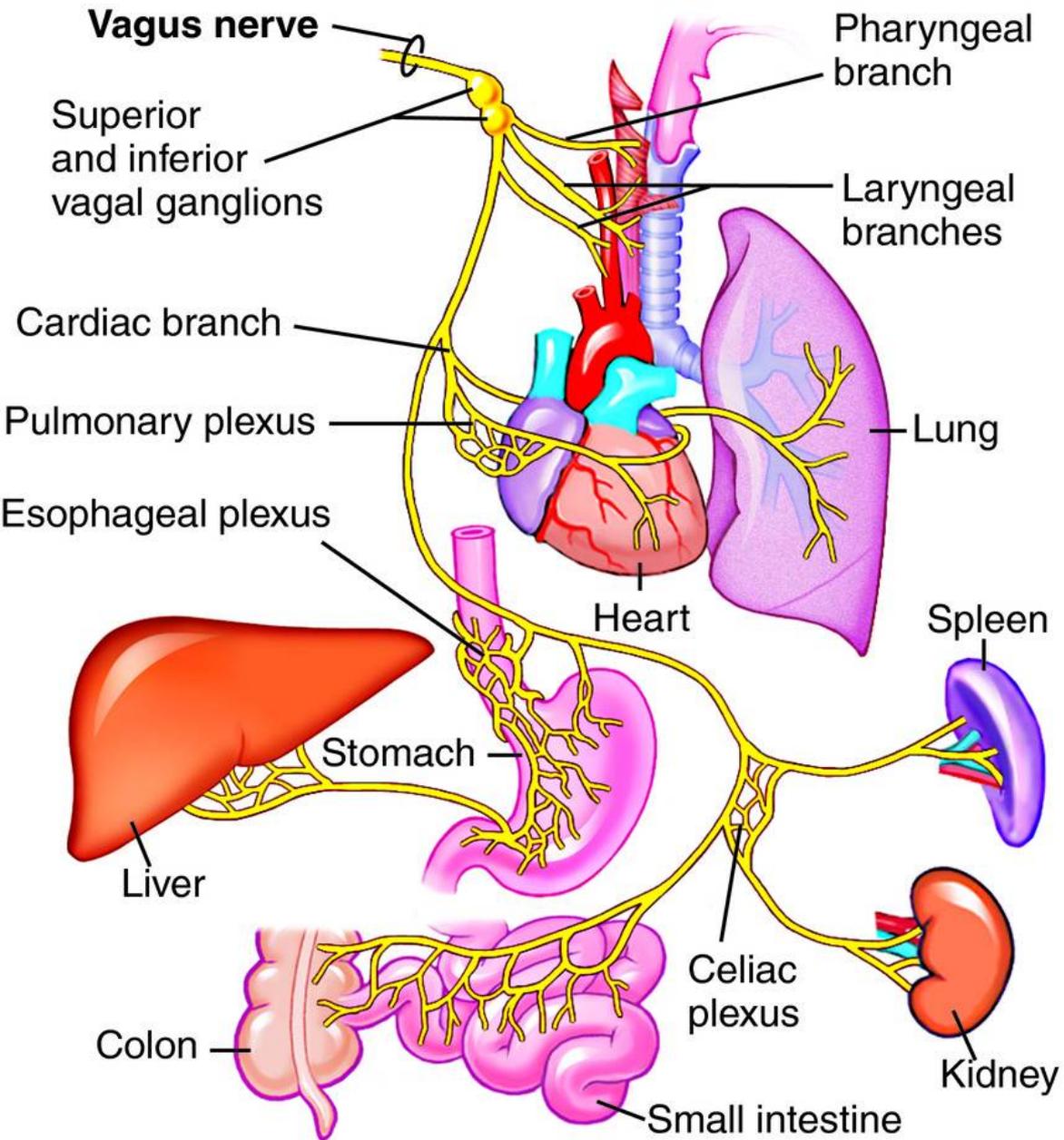
The ACC...Anterior Cingulate of the Cortex

- *One of the important information systems of the body*



- *Acts as an environmental filtering system, assessing threat in the immediate environment based on sensory input from the body*
- *Studying the environment in real time when the body is calm and relaxed*
- *Extremely sensitive to dysregulation.*





Every major system in the body is activated through the Poly-vagal system

ACC ACTIVATION EXERCISE



The Threat Response System (Activation of the ACC)

**COOL
Respond**

(Parasympathetic Nervous System)

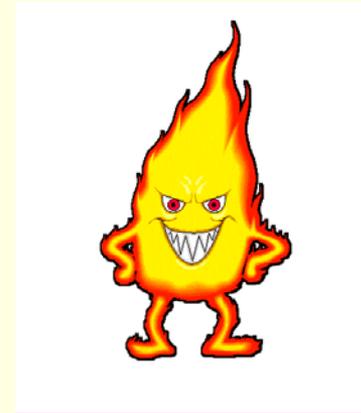
A system that supports:

1. Making conscious choices
2. Feeling connected in Communication
3. Emotional balance and regulation
4. Flexibility in response (pause before reacting)
5. Fear modulation
6. Empathy
7. Insight/judgment
8. Moral awareness
9. Intuition/spiritual feelings
10. Identity



**HOT
React**

(Sympathetic Nervous System)



A system that has the primary functions:

1. Fight- Physical or Verbal
2. Flight- Avoid or Run
3. Freeze

When the Hot System is Activated...

- o Shift away from real time environmental appraisal into the past
- o Perceptions shift to worrisome fantasies, memories, or repetitive negative thinking
- o Internal conditioned dialogues are activated
- o Blood flow shifts away from the ACC
- o Language ability reduces
- o Logic and reason shift
- o Moral reasoning lessens or disappears
- o Reacting to perceptions
- o Ruled by history or impulse rather than being intentional. The past is running the show
- o Volatile
- o Sense of identity lessens

Unmet Human Need that activate the threat system

- *Not feeling capable*
- *Not being successful or achieving at something*
- *Not feel cared for*
- *Not belonging to a group*
- *Not having power to influence one's environment/world*
- *Not having control in one's life*
- *Not being stimulated in mind and body*
- *Not understanding reality*
- *Not appearing competent to others*
- *Not be seen as being worthwhile or held in esteem by/to others*
- *Not feeling safe*
- *Not feeling secure in our attachments to others*
- *Not having a sense of meaning or purpose in life*
- *Not having fun and pleasure*

Fears & worry that activate the threat system

- Being judged
- Not measuring up
- Not being liked
- Not being loveable
- What if I fail?
- What if I can never get better?
- Not being competent
- What are they thinking about me?
- What if I can't do this?
- Thought to be stupid
- Being criticized
- Not meeting other important folks' expectations and demands
- Will they still like/love me?
- Being asked questions
- If this doesn't work what am I going to do?

About the ACC?



Hot System reduces Fuzzy activation and blocks access to executive functioning

- 1. Avoid (real or perceived) threat through flight*
- 2. Shut down and freezes the body, paralyzing any action*
- 3. Reduce (real or perceived) threat through aggression*
- 4. Alter body tension and muscle readiness to act*
- 5. tension and muscle readiness to act*

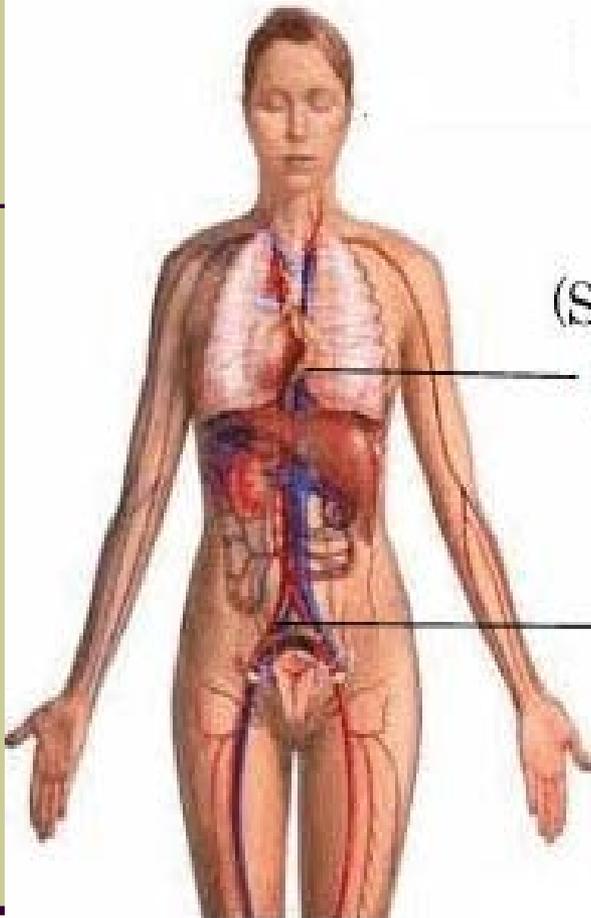


At the activation point

- **No future focus**...consequences are meaningless and not related to action.
- Everything is about this moment in time!
- **All nonessential systems are turned down** (suppressed)
- Regardless of the logic of an observer everything is about



When activation occurs



(SNS) Sympathetic Nervous System: Mobilization
■ System for Flight or Fight Behaviors.
(Our Aggressive Defense System)

(DVC) Dorsal Vagal Complex: Immobilization
■ System for Conservation Withdrawal.
(Our Passive Defense System)

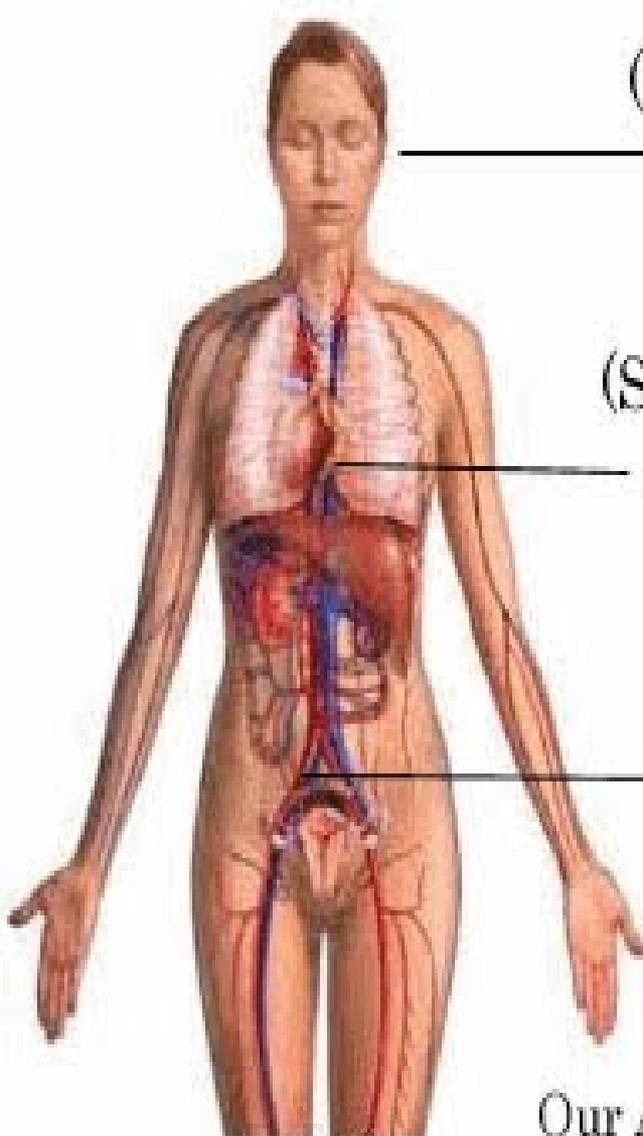
Behaviors associated

Sympathetic

- *Angry*
- *Aggressive*
- *Defensive*
- *Reactive*
- *Impulsive*
- *Hostile*
- *Irrational*

Dorsal Vagal

- *Freezing, stuck, paralysis of action*
- *Dissociation*
- *Emotional numbing*
- *Distraction*
- *Self-soothing*
- *Reactive*
- *Impulsive*
- *Emotional and psychological distancing*



(VVC) Ventral Vagal Complex: Signaling System
■ for motion, emotion & communication.
(Our Social Engagement System)

(SNS) Sympathetic Nervous System: Mobilization
■ System for Flight or Fight Behaviors.
(Our Aggressive Defense System)

(DVC) Dorsal Vagal Complex: Immobilization
■ System for Conservation Withdrawal.
(Our Passive Defense System)

Our Autonomic Nervous System fires muscular tensions triggered by feedback signals from the external & internal world at millisecond speeds below conscious awareness. These muscles tensions fire our Thoughts?

What is problematic about a reduction in activity in the Ventral Vagal (fuzzy system)?

- *General reduction in feeling pleasure, particularly in relational terms.*
- *The feelings of pleasure and pain can become confused with each other*
- *Traumatized people tend to feel numb or not fully alive, and they can make themselves feel alive by exposing themselves high risk situation or activities.*
- *Fear of allowing pleasure, because pleasure has the capacity to distract hyper vigilance or guardedness*



Ever had a sunburn?



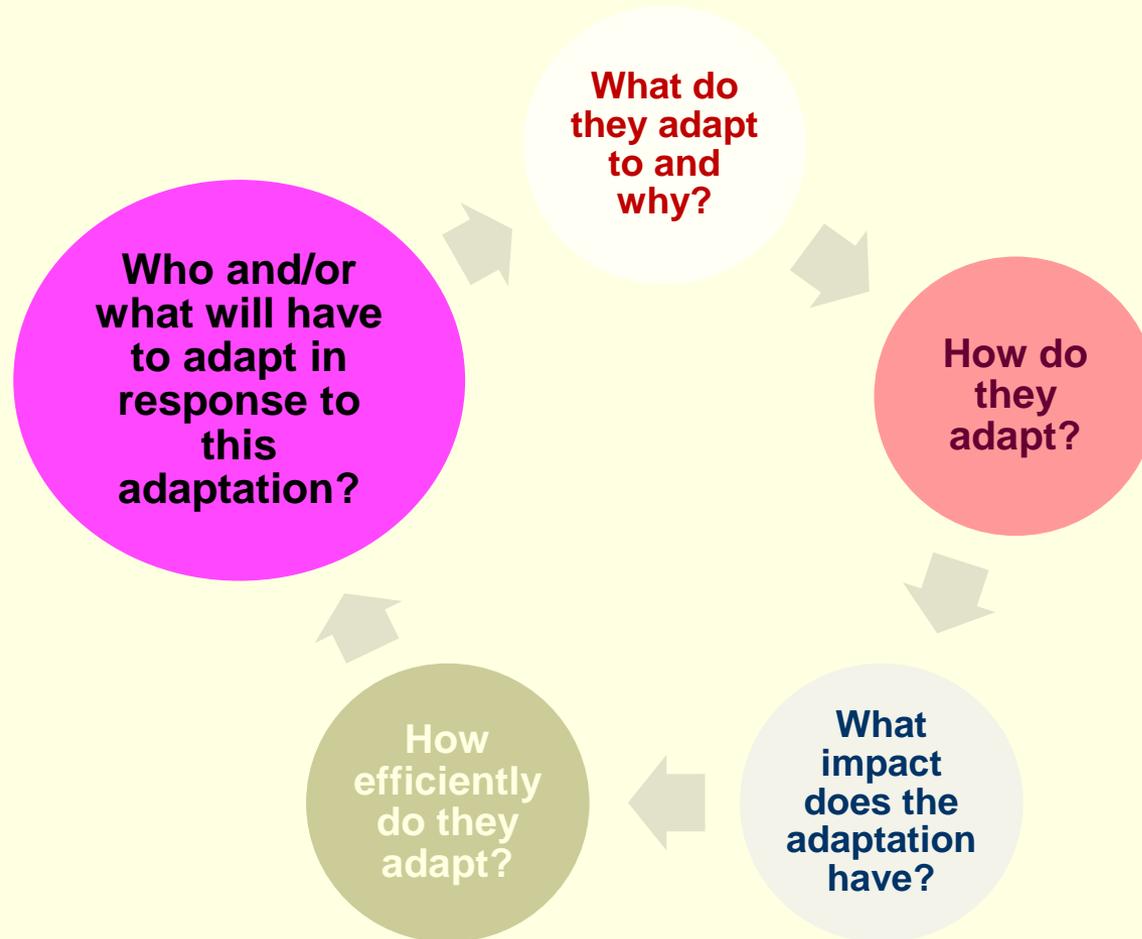
OR a Blister?



What do you do when you have sunburn?

- Do something to make it hurt less
- Don't let things come into contact with the sunburn (clothes or people) which we could call *avoidance*
- When touched we react by being cross or acting pained, to back the person touching us off and create distance.
- If someone intentionally pokes us it makes us mad and we are likely to say a bad word or two
- We adapt to avoid real or perceived (*possibility of*) pain

Behavior is evidence that adaptations are occurring and have occurred



So what does this all mean?

- *People are acting exactly as their history has wired them to act, perceive, emote.*
- *Most poor or problematic behavior is the consequence of reactive adaptation.*
- *Growth and change require intentional, and sustained ability to stay in the cool system.*
- *Behavior should never be the starting point of treatment (except for immediate danger of death or injury)*

So what is happening?

- *The physical and neurobiological systems are reacting to the environment.*
- *Patterns are developing around (perception, relationships, emotional regulation, physical and mental health)*
- *Patterns are emerging and becoming dominate templates/schemas.*
- *Family culture is being created or being reinforced*
- *ACC and the Vagus systems are in over-demand and usage begins to rewire physiology and behavior potentials*

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE)

*Collaboration between Kaiser Permanente's Department of Preventive
Medicine in San Diego and the Center for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)*

The 10 common Elements related to long term physical and mental problems

- *Psychological abuse by parents or caregivers*
- *Physical abuse by parent or caregiver*
- *Sexual abuse or exploitation*
- *Physical neglect or abandonment*
- *Emotional neglect* (deprivation of empathy, nurturance, protection, and direction)
- *Were Substances abused in the home (with or without addiction)*

The 10 common Elements related to long term physical and mental problems

- Was there mental illness (even mild)
- Separation and divorce
- Domestic violence (includes family screaming, yelling, the use of intimidation, threats of harm which may NOT include physical contact.
- Parent or caregiver absent, or incarcerated

ACE Score = Trauma "Dose"

Number of individual types of adverse childhood experiences were summed...

ACE score

0

1

2

3

4 or more

Prevalence

32%

26%

16%

10%

16% = 90%

Core Concepts of ACE Development

- The development of children unfolds along individual pathways whose trajectories are characterized by a series of significant transitions. *Each Child's history is unique based on their experiences!*
- The growth of self-regulation (*Intentional or chosen emotional reaction*) is the cornerstone of early development that cuts across all behavioral domains.
- Human development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interplay between biology and experience.

Core Concepts of ACE Development

- Human relationships, and the effects of relationships, are the building blocks of healthy development. *Compromised relationships weaken the ability to self-regulate, be intentional, and look toward consequences.*
- The course of development can be altered by traumagenic environments as well as ACE scores

*Why is the Aversive Experiences in
Childhood destructive to health
and happiness of individuals and
families?*

what is the epigenome?

How do we help parents with children who have experienced trauma and/or traumagenesis?

- I. The person of the parent or caregiver must self-regulate their own threat/stress response system.*
- II. Create an environment of felt and real safety for the child (no reptile brain activating).*
- III. Regulate the child relationally - love and relationship before rules.*
- IV. Help child regulate self when not with the parent or caregiver*

To improve family life and quality of relationships, we must be cool system driven

- *Ability to attach and attune.*
- *Show a positive attitude and affection not attached to rule performance*
- *Believe growth is always possible*
- *Focus on patterns rather than pathology or emotions.*
- *Adapt to child preferences, expectations and language as much as possible*
- *Less directive, less punitive and more skill and relationship building*

WRAP UP

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

