

Institute of  
**Child Psychology**

## Childhood Trauma

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Co-Founder: *Institute of Child Psychology*

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- Registered Psychologist
- Registered Play Therapist
- Former Elementary Teacher (B.Ed)
- Owner/Executive Director: *Family Counselling Centres*
- Co-Founder: *Institute of Child Psychology*
- Founder: *Child-Centered Animal Assisted Therapy Association*
- Specialties: *AAT, Childhood Anxiety, and Trauma*



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### What can\* the traumatized student look like?

-  PERFECTIONISM
-  THE STUDENT WHO DOESN'T CARE
-  THE VOLATILE STUDENT
-  THE NO PROBLEM HERE STUDENT

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## ACES

### IMPACT OF TRAUMA OVER THE LIFE SPAN

EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD ADVERSE EXPERIENCES

- NEUROLOGICAL
- BIOLOGICAL
- PSYCHOLOGICAL
- SOCIAL

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## ACES IN YOUR CLASSROOM. . .

- In Canada, **32% of children will be exposed to physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or exposure to intimate partner violence during childhood** (statcan.ab.ca)
- 2.5X repeat a grade, disengaged from school work, and to suffer chronic health problems (i.e., asthma, obesity) (Khazan, 2014)
- ACES second most powerful predictor of academic failure (Blodgett, 2012)
- 1:4 Child has experienced trauma (Alexander, 2019)

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#### Health Impact

#### Mental Health

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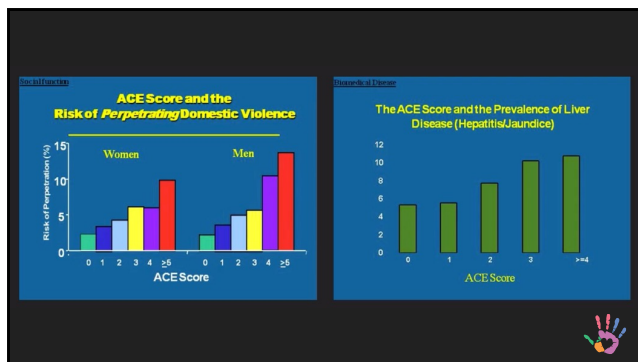
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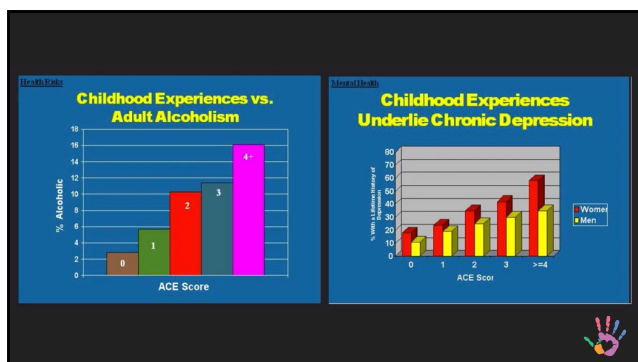
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## WHAT IS YOUR ACE SCORE?

<https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-know/the-brain-story>

- ✓ Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- ✓ Neglect (emotional or physical)
- ✓ Parental Mental Illness
- ✓ Family Domestic Violence
- ✓ Incarcerated Relative
- ✓ Familial Substance Use
- ✓ Divorce

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## The ADHD Controversy

The percent of children 4-17 years of age ever diagnosed with ADHD had previously increased, from 7.8% in 2003 to 9.5% in 2007 and to 11.0% in 2011-12 (CDC, 2012)

- Hyperactivity
- Distractibility
- Inability to read social cues
- Forgetfulness
- Decreased awareness of consequences
- Disorganization

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## What is Trauma?



"Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life."  
-Dr. Judith Herman



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Students are not  
 GIVING us a hard time. . .  
 they are HAVING a hard time"

-Jen Alexander



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### 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
- Children who grow up with trauma or neglect lack the fundamental developmental experiences . . . to self-regulate, relate, communicate, and think (Perry, 2006)



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- 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 experience an overwhelming, ever present, past



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## 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



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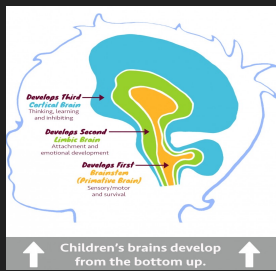
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## The Triune Brain



<http://beaconhouse.org.uk/useful-resources/>



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## Triune Brain

- **Cortical** (Human)
  - Inhibition, perception, problem solving, planning, complex rational thought
  - Speaks in words
- **Limbic** (Mammalian)
  - Process memory & emotion
  - Speaks in feelings
- **Brain Stem** (Lizard)
  - Basic survival instincts – fight, flight, & freeze
  - Speaks in sensation



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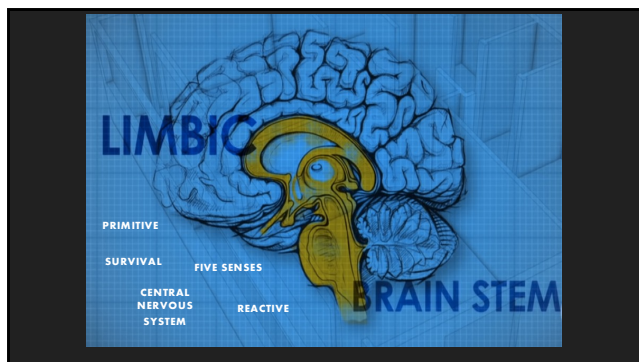
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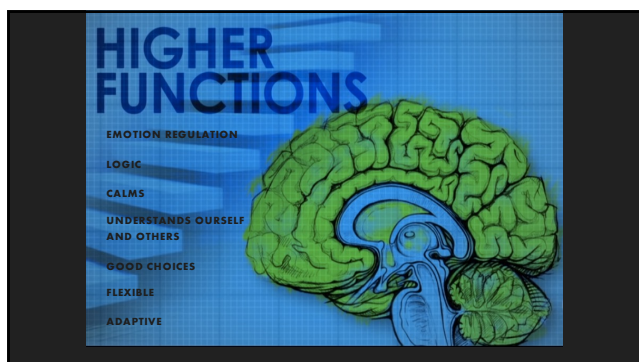
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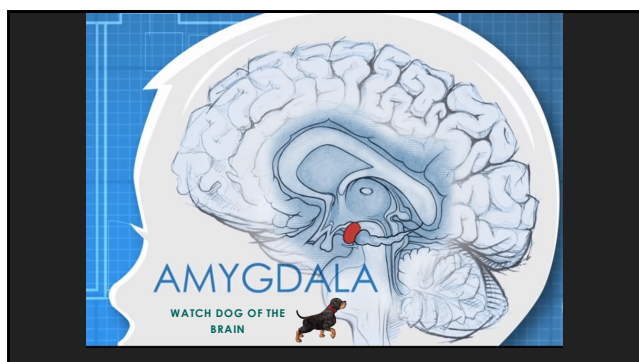
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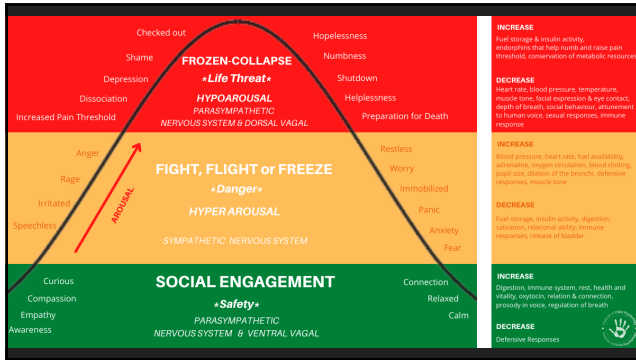
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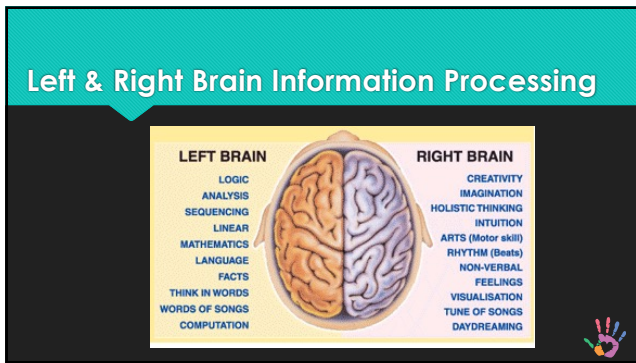
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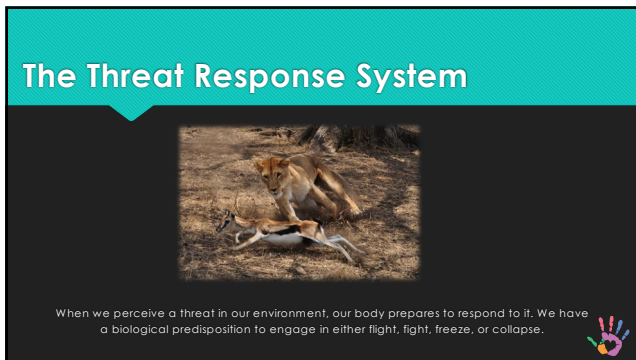
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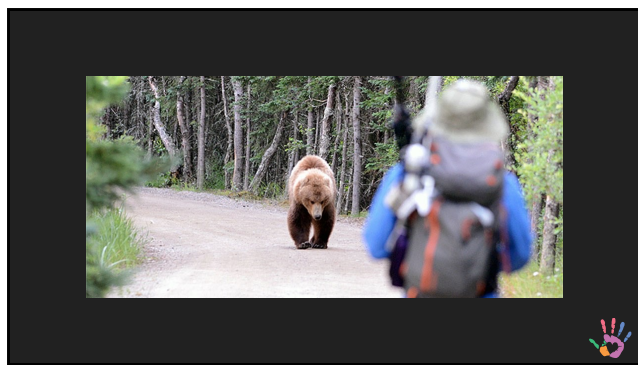
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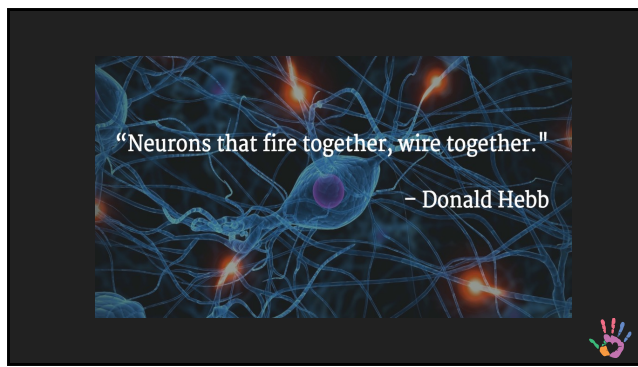
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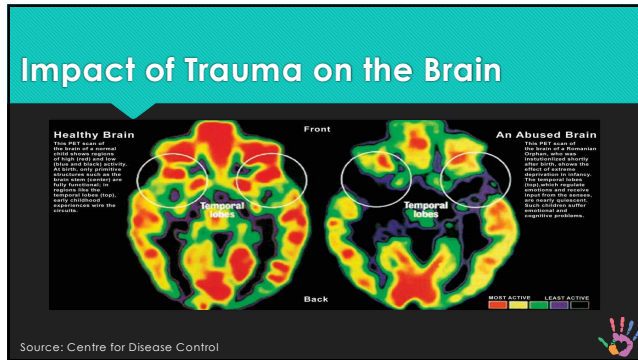
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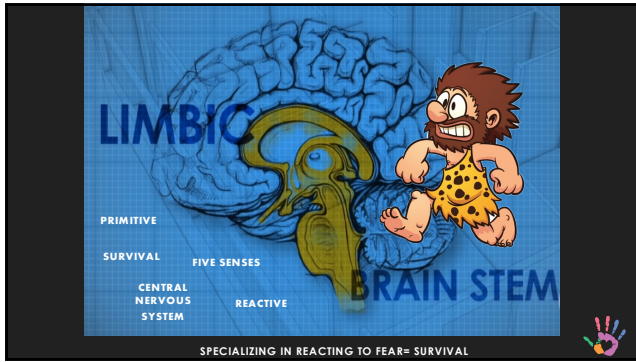
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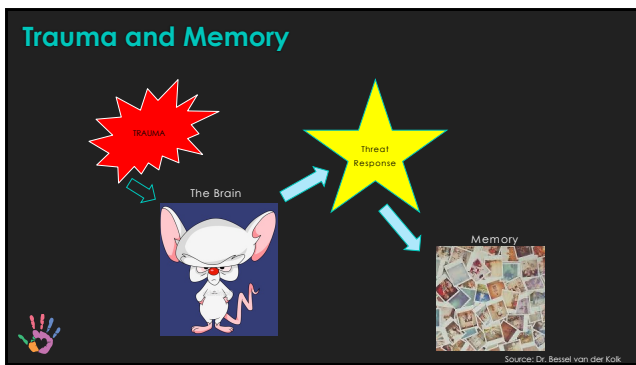
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### Perception of Emotion

- Pollak, Cicchetti, Hornung, & Reed (2000)
- Conducted a study examining the perception of emotion in faces between children who had experienced physical abuse, physical neglect, and those who experienced no abuse.
  - **Control**- children viewed discrete emotions as dissimilar
  - **Neglected** – saw fewer distinctions between emotion
  - **Physically Abused** – most\* variance across emotion

The slide features a row of ten grayscale faces, each displaying a different facial expression. A small hand icon is in the bottom right corner.

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**An Evidence-Based Solution . . .**

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**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

Source: Handbook of Attachment

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## Mirror Neurons

- 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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"Attunement"



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"Our brains are wired for connection, but trauma rewires them for protection. That's why healthy relationships are difficult for wounded people."

- RYAN NORTH -

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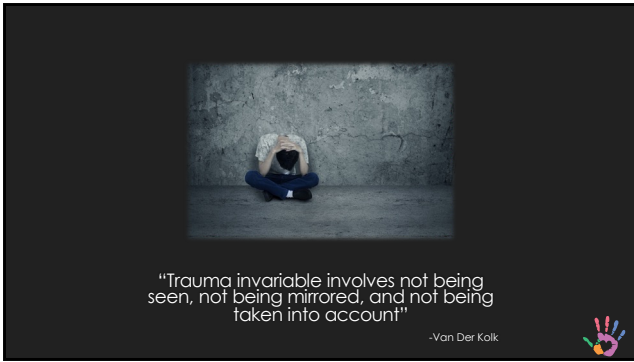
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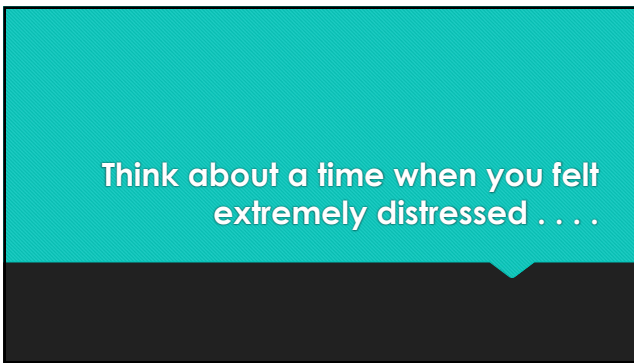
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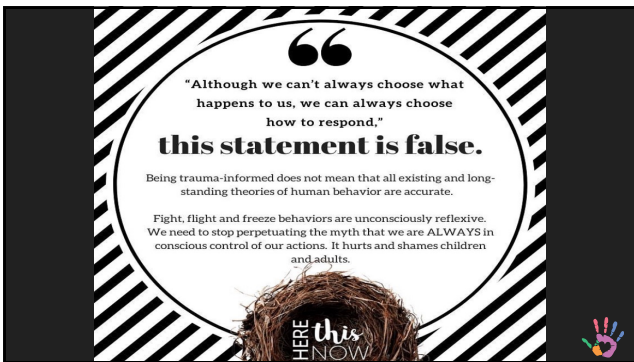
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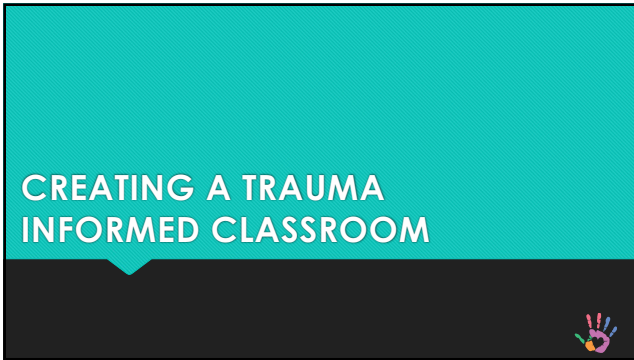
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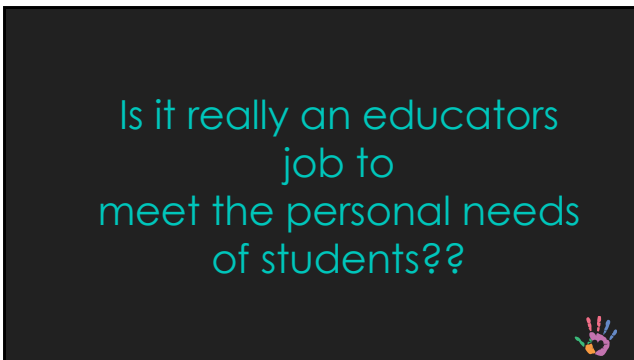
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### Attachment Focused Intervention

Routines	Caregiver Affect Management	Attunement	Praise & Reinforcement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routines for mealtimes, bedtimes, etc</li> <li>Reduce stressors in the home/classroom</li> <li>Consistent, appropriate limit-setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tune into and notice child successes</li> <li>Learn emotion regulation skills</li> <li>Psycho-education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to affect NOT behaviour; separate the child from the behaviour</li> <li>Be hypervigilant of child's cues; learn to read child's non-verbals and teach to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notice changes</li> <li>Notice child coping well</li> <li>Celebrate successes</li> </ul>

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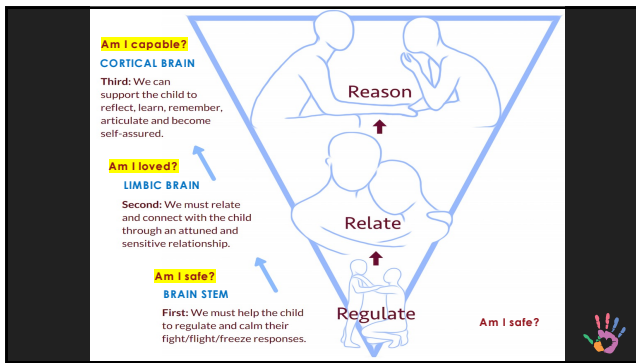
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## Toolkit



Source: Creating Cultures of Thinking

- o Greetings
  - o Location, handshakes, principal, school culture, open doors early
- o 5:1
  - o greeting, praise, conversation, smile, thumbs-up sign
- o Check-ins
- o Targeted Praise
  - o specific and soon after
- o Rituals
- o The 'two-by-ten' intervention.
  - o A positive 2-minute conversation with the student at least once per day across 10 consecutive school days

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- Teach skills that help students build and maintain healthy relationships
- Eat with students
- Cooperative games
- Attend student events
- Inclusive Language (i.e., "In our class/school")
- Talk to youth about their accomplishments
- Learn about their interests
- Work towards a common good
- Includes support staff (i.e., kids coming in late—refrain from negative comments)
- **BRAIN STEM:** chewing, swinging, hanging, moving, sipping, pressure,

Source: Building Trauma Sensitive School



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- Write a letter before school starts
- Attend school events
- 5 New Students
- Whole Body connections
- Classroom culture (sharing circles, sitting with students, expressions of gratitude, comment and notice changes, leave notes for students, notice when they are absent)
- Survey:
  - *What do you wish your teachers knew about you as a learner?*
  - *What are the things that teachers do that let you know they respect and value you?*
  - *What advice would you give teachers to bring out the best in students?"*
- Family survey



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### 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.



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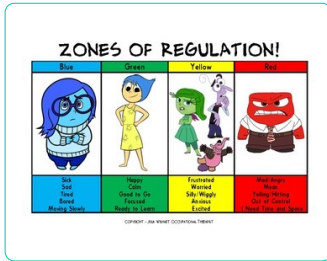
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### Kids Need to Understand Their Feelings

- My face/your face
- What does that feel like in your body?




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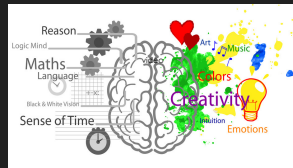
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### Left and Right Brain Integration

- Often misread the cues of others and perceive them as danger cues or negative emotion
- Kids who have experienced trauma often have a hard time connecting internal state to verbal emotion
  - Name It to Tame It (Daniel Siegel)
- **Storytelling:** When a child is shifting into a big feeling helping them to tell a story about what has happened connects the feel state (right brain) to the words (left brain)



Source: Dr. Daniel Siegel & Dr. Tina P. Bryson

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### Managing Big Feelings

- **Time In vs. Time Out**
  - Relationship should not be conditional
- **Limit Setting**
- **Connect and Re-direct**
  - Acknowledge the child's feeling using words, body language, and tone. Then engage with the challenge the child is experiencing.
    - C- communicate limit - "People not for hitting"
    - A- acknowledge - "You are feeling \_\_\_\_\_"
    - T- target an alternative
- **Aggression**
  - Child is in a threat response and they can't bear you
  - Don't personalize their words
  - Do not engage in power-struggles



Source: Dr. Siegel, Dr. Bryson, & Dr. Macnamara

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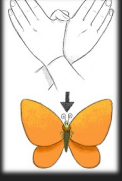
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### Managing Big Feelings



**Bilateral Movement**  
Butterfly Hug

I spy with my little eye....



**Distraction**  
Bring Attention to Moment

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### Crossing the Midline



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## Discipline

*"When we discipline we must always consider a child's developmental capacity, particular temperament, and emotional style, as well as the situational context."*  
- Dr. Daniel Siegel

- Discipline actually means to teach, not punish
- Shame vs guilt
  - You're bad vs. You made a bad choice
- Can't vs. won't
  - Children do not yet have the capacity to meet the expectations of adults all the time
- Consequences
  - Is the consequence being used against the child or in service of being a responsible caretaker

Source: Dr. Siegel, Dr. Bryson, Dr. Macnamara, Brene Brown

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**MOVE FROM JUDGEMENT 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.*

*Consider*  
 "WHAT HAPPANED TO YOU"  
*instead of*  
 "WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU"

-Jen Alexander



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**We are Hard Wired for Connection**



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

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“  
 The most powerful tool we possess for changing behaviour is the **RELATIONSHIP** we have with a child

- Institute of Child Psychology



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**Moving Forward**

- STUDIES ON RESILIENCY
- It just takes ONE relationship: someone who knows them, can be present, patient, calm, sensitive, and understands what feels what's going on inside of them
- "I'm with you. . . I believe in you. . . I see you"
- Connection, consistency, predictability 



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**Questions?**

Contact  
[www.instituteofchildpsychology.com](http://www.instituteofchildpsychology.com)  
[jammy@instituteofchildpsychology.com](mailto:jammy@instituteofchildpsychology.com)  
 The child psych podcast



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