The Disengagement Crisis: Supporting Youth Through Resiliency

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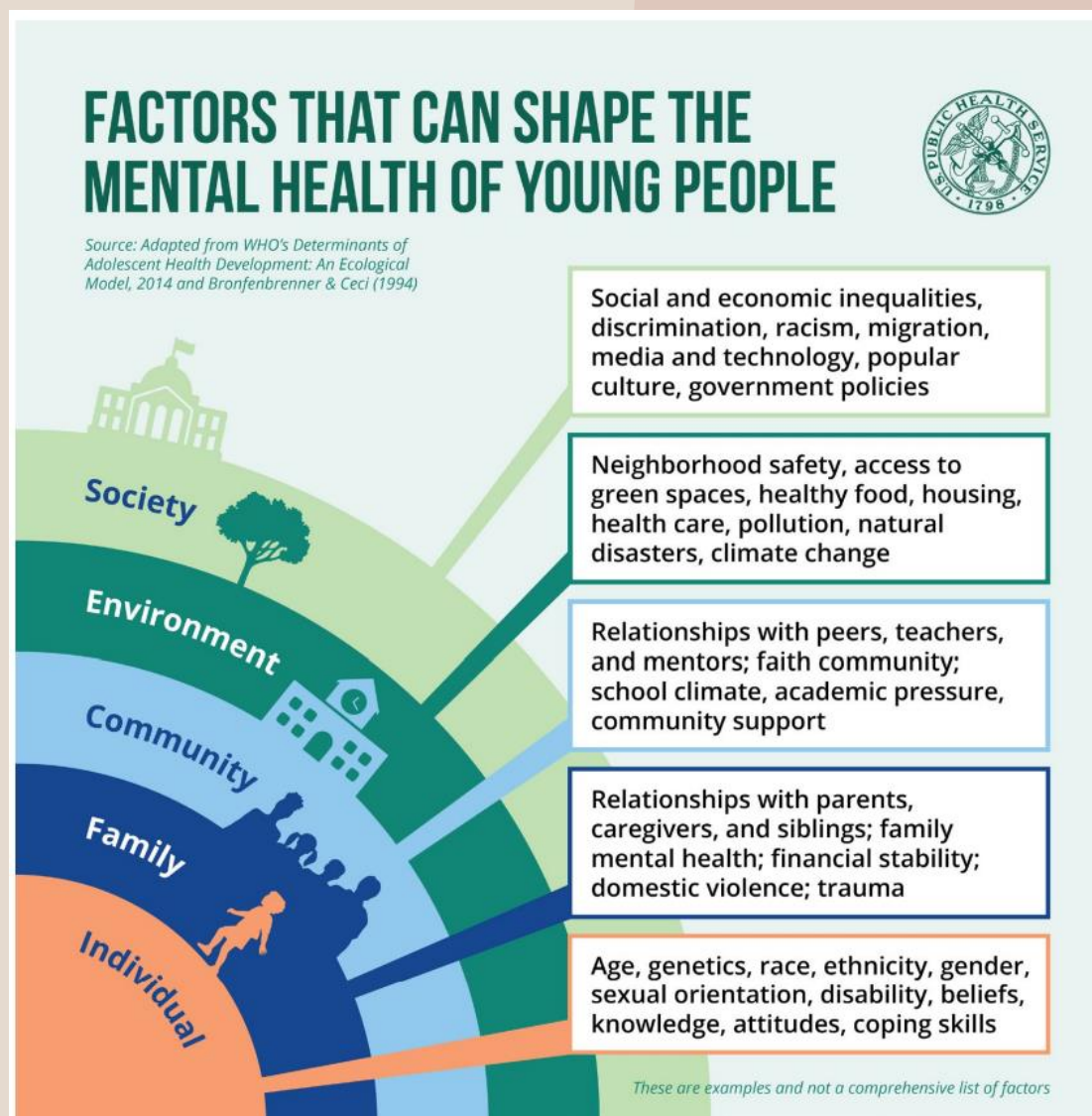
agenda

Mental Health and Youth

Brain Development and Trauma

Re-Engaging

Resiliency

Surgeon General-Youth Mental Health Advisory

FACTORS THAT CAN SHAPE THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Source: Adapted from WHO's Determinants of Adolescent Health Development: An Ecological Model, 2014 and Bronfenbrenner & Ceci (1994)

Society

Environment

Community

Family

Individual

Social and economic inequalities, discrimination, racism, migration, media and technology, popular culture, government policies

Neighborhood safety, access to green spaces, healthy food, housing, health care, pollution, natural disasters, climate change

Relationships with peers, teachers, and mentors; faith community; school climate, academic pressure, community support

Relationships with parents, caregivers, and siblings; family mental health; financial stability; domestic violence; trauma

Age, genetics, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, coping skills

These are examples and not a comprehensive list of factors

Youth Mental Health Advisory

Since the pandemic began, rates of psychological distress among young people, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders, have increased.

Recent research covering 80,000 youth globally found that depressive and anxiety symptoms doubled during the pandemic, with 25% of youth experiencing depressive symptoms and 20% experiencing anxiety symptoms.

In early 2021, emergency department visits in the United States for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher for adolescent girls and 4% higher for adolescent boys compared to the same time period in early 2019.
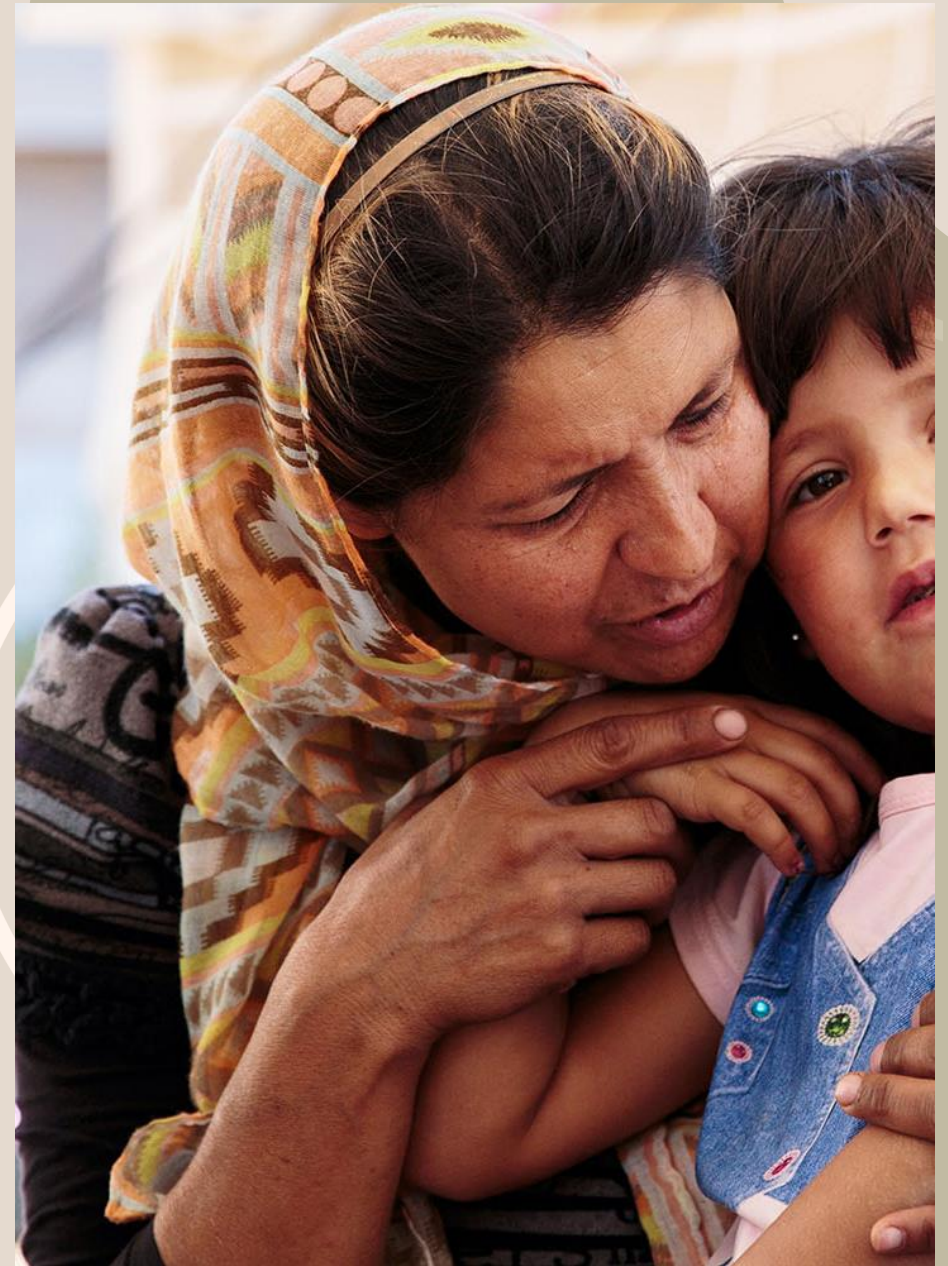
What is Trauma?

A response to a negative external event or series of events which surpasses the child's ordinary coping skills. It comes in many forms and includes experiences such as maltreatment, witnessing violence, or the loss of a loved one. Traumatic experiences can impact brain development and behavior inside and outside of the classroom.

Traumatic Experiences and Education

- 1 in 4 children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning and/or behavior.

- Trauma can impact school performance (lower GPA, lower attendance, decreased reading ability, increased behavioral issues)

- Trauma can impact memory attention, and cognition, interfere with problem solving which results in frustration and anxiety)

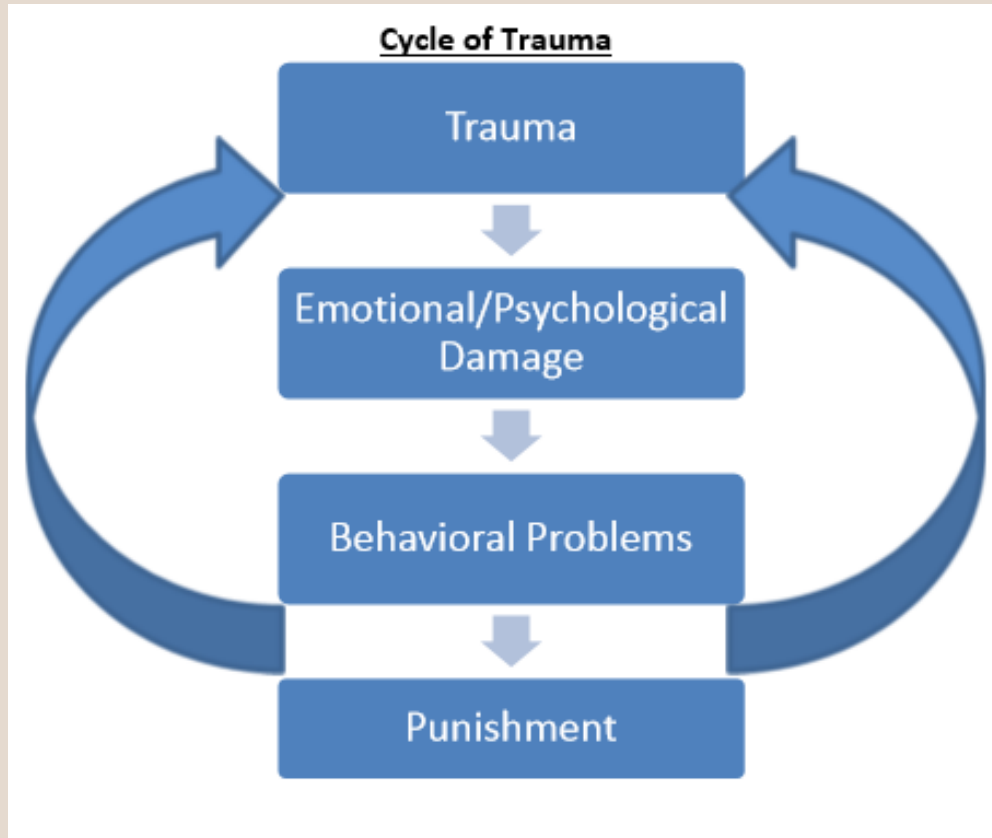- Traumatized children may experience physical and emotional distress.

When children experience multiple traumas, their brains and their bodies continue to function as though the threat remains.

They will spend a lot of time scanning their environment and looking for threats. Their bodies stay in constant state of alarm.

Paying attention to instruction, recalling information, and retaining learned ideas all become difficult.
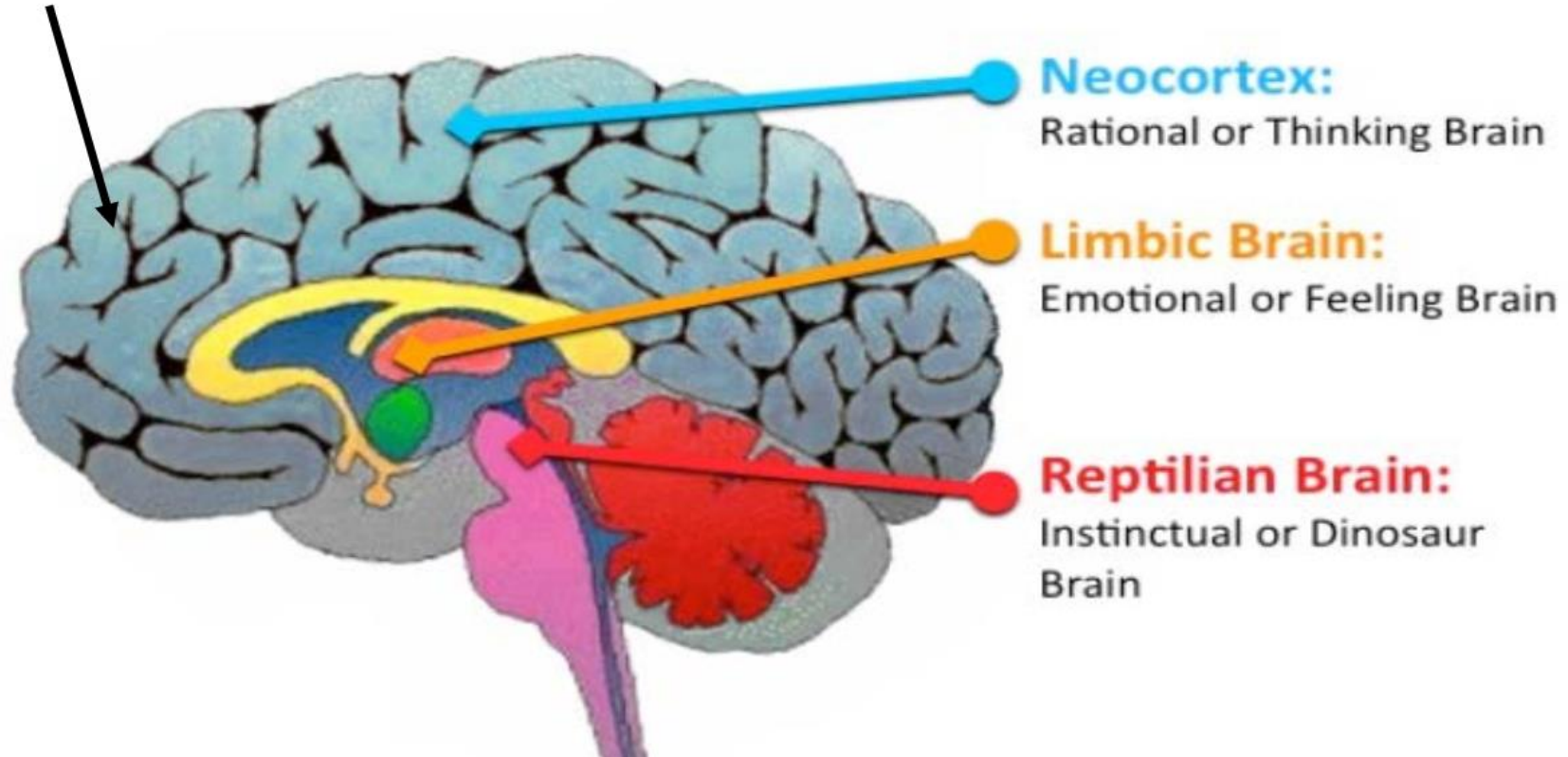
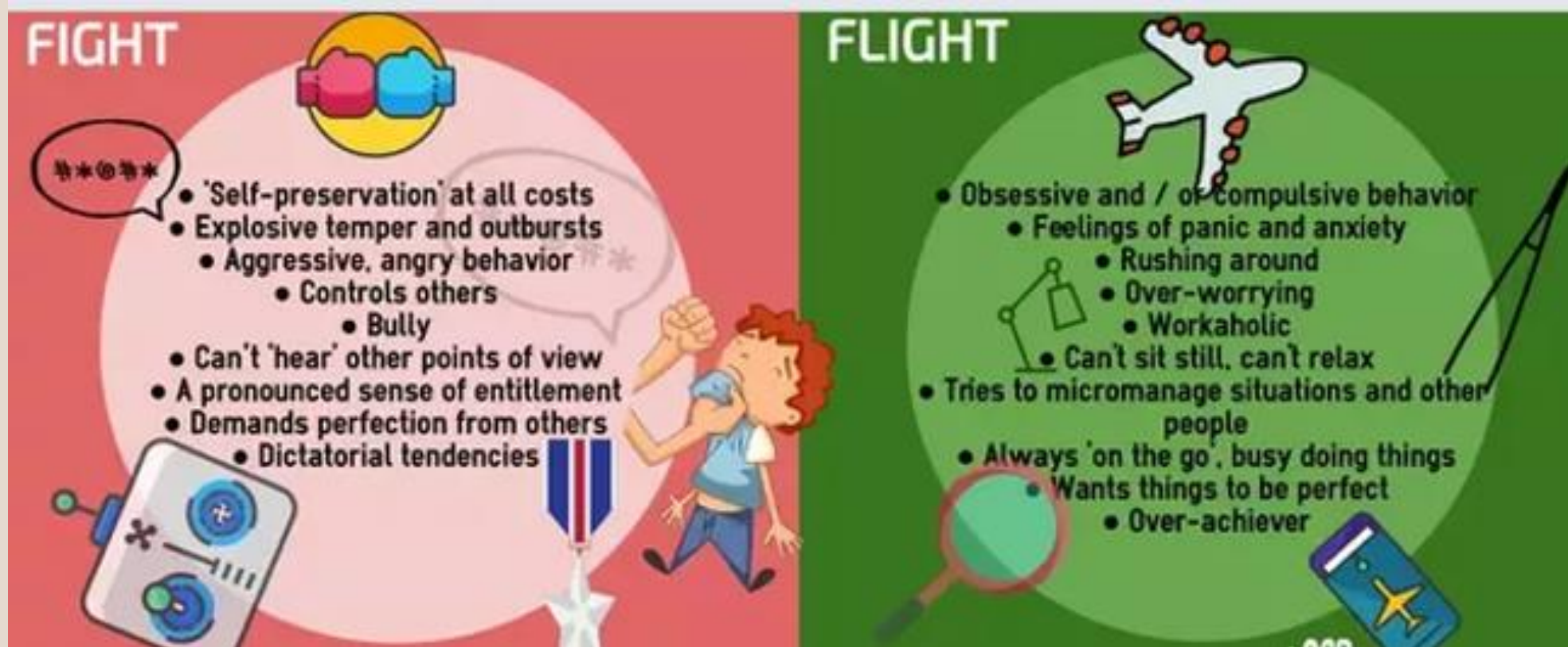There is difficulty in building positive relationships with adults and peers.

TRAUMATIC EVENT

PROLONGED ALARM REACTION

ALTERED NEURAL SYSTEMS

Figure 1.

Adapted from the Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010

Cycle of Trauma

Trauma

↓

Emotional/Psychological Damage

↓

Behavioral Problems

↓

Punishment

- We need to understand the "cycle of trauma" in the environment, where youth may display problem behaviors related to past trauma and then become re-traumatized through punishment for those behaviors – embedding the trauma further and continuing the cycle of behavioral problems rather than lessening them.
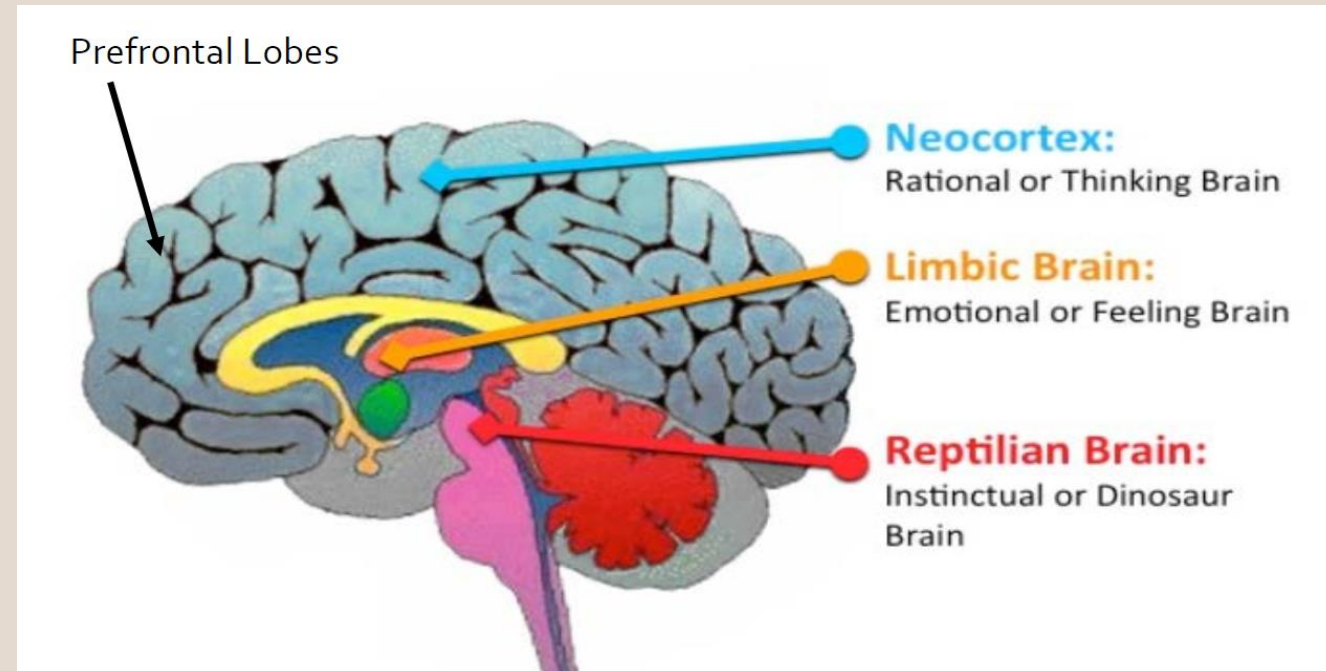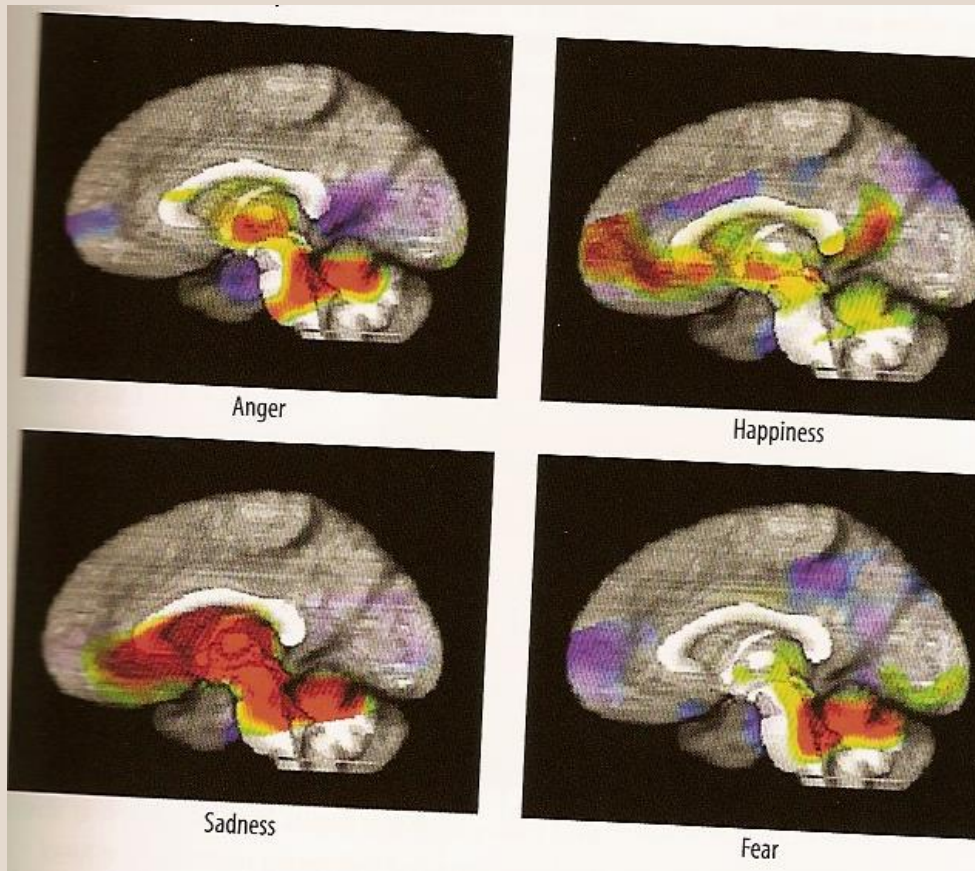
Stress Responses

Stress Responses
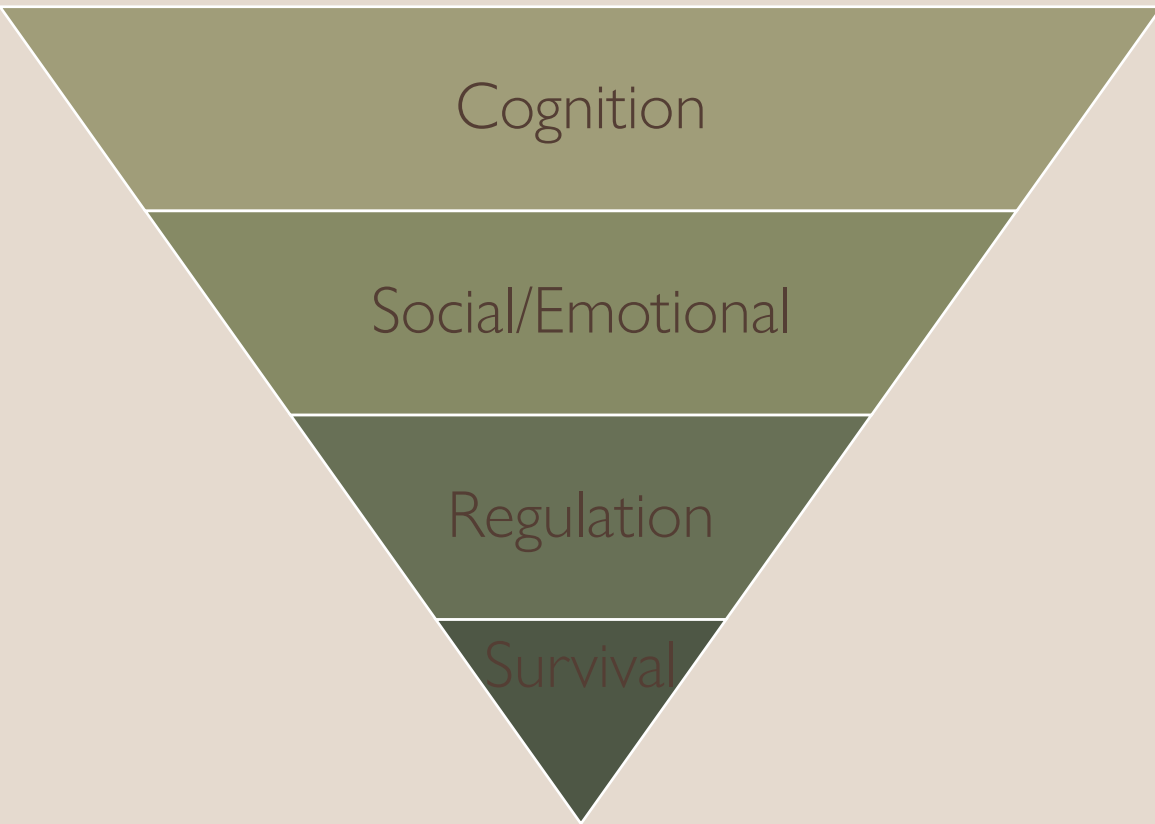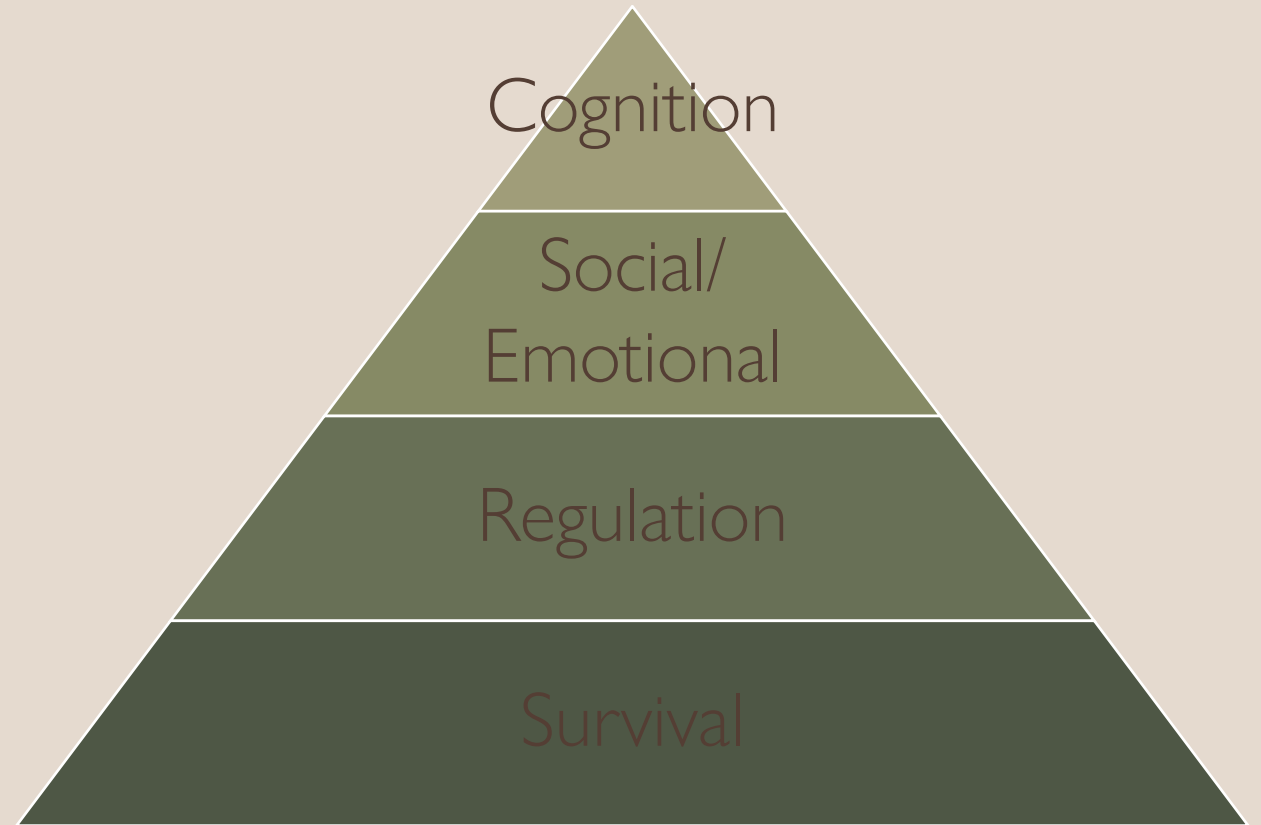
Anger

Happiness

Sadness

Fear

Prefrontal Lobes

Neocortex:
Rational or Thinking Brain

Limbic Brain:
Emotional or Feeling Brain

Reptilian Brain:
Instinctual or Dinosaur Brain

Trauma from Covid

Children with a history of trauma have an increased risk of negative outcomes throughout their lives. Researchers have recently called for improved school-based screening to identify childhood trauma, but those tools have limitations. Multiple issues must be considered in determining how best to evaluate responses to trauma; a single assessment solution applied broadly across school settings is not recommended. This is particularly important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools should evaluate options to strengthen their current surveillance efforts to appropriately identify and support needs, but should not undertake a complete overhaul of existing assessment systems.

When children are exposed to a traumatic event such as COVID-19, their individual interpretation and reaction is determined by the interactions among their history of trauma exposure, environmental factors, and personal factors. For some, the impact of the pandemic may be minimal whereas it will be substantial for others. In school, reactions to COVID-19 may manifest itself in many different ways across academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and physical domains, and will vary based on developmental stage. Although assessment plays an important role, preparations to ensure an emotionally and physically safe environment are equally -- if not more -- important in mitigating the number of students and staff who experience long-term traumatic stress reactions.

Impacts of Trauma on the Brain

Structural Changes: Reduced Volume In

- **Hippocampus**
  - Learning & memory
- **Cerebellum**
  - Balance, coordination, executive functioning & emotional control
- **Prefrontal Cortex**
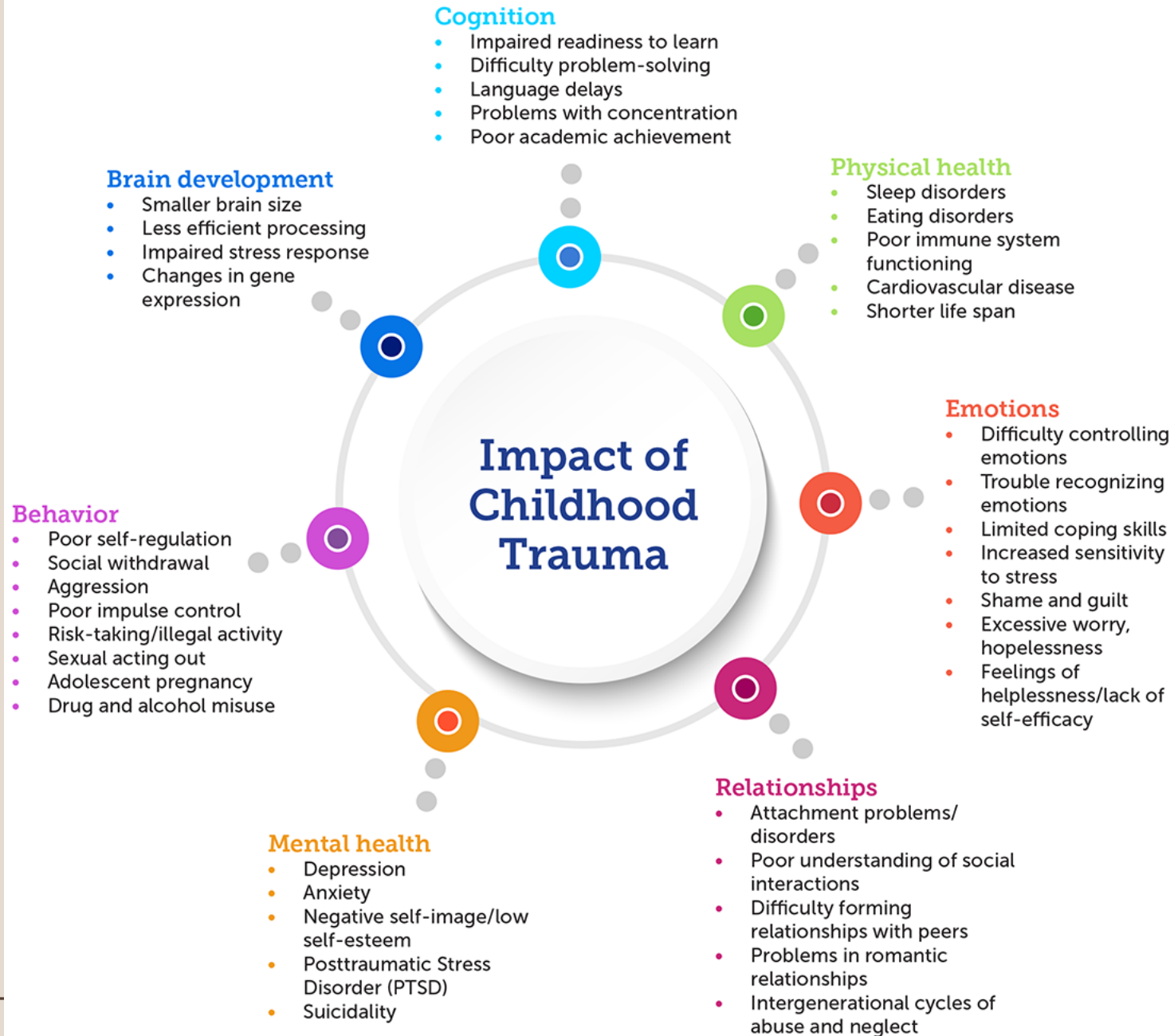 - Executive skills
- Other structures & metabolism

Activity Changes: Changes in neural activity

- **Amygdala**
  - Assessing threats
- **Abnormal Cortisol Levels**
  - Too low
  - Too high
- **Prefrontal Cortex**
  - Executive skills
- **Reduced Neural connectivity**

Functional Changes: Behavioral Changes

- Persistent fear response
- Hyperarousal
- Reduced Working Memory
- Impulsive
- Increased risk taking
- Difficulties navigating social situations
- Weakened response to positive feedback

Impact of Childhood Trauma

Cognition
- Impaired readiness to learn
- Difficulty problem-solving
- Language delays
- Problems with concentration
- Poor academic achievement

Brain development
- Smaller brain size
- Less efficient processing
- Impaired stress response
- Changes in gene expression

Physical health
- Sleep disorders
- Eating disorders
- Poor immune system functioning
- Cardiovascular disease
- Shorter life span

Behavior
- Poor self-regulation
- Social withdrawal
- Aggression
- Poor impulse control
- Risk-taking/illegal activity
- Sexual acting out
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Drug and alcohol misuse

Impact of Childhood Trauma

Emotions
- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Trouble recognizing emotions
- Limited coping skills
- Increased sensitivity to stress
- Shame and guilt
- Excessive worry, hopelessness
- Feelings of helplessness/lack of self-efficacy

Mental health
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Negative self-image/low self-esteem
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Suicidality

Relationships
- Attachment problems/ disorders
- Poor understanding of social interactions
- Difficulty forming relationships with peers
- Problems in romantic relationships
- Intergenerational cycles of abuse and neglect

Cues to When a Trauma-Sensitive Lens is Necessary

- Known history of potentially traumatizing events or traumatic stress

- Behavioral responses are rapid &/or disproportionately intense given the trigger

- Traditional behavioral approaches & responses not successful
  - Efforts to teach alternative behaviors not working
  - Rewards/consequences trigger behavior

- *Traditional FBA approach not successful*
  - Antecedent behaviors & patterns are hard to identify (i.e., no pattern to where & when behavior occurs & who is present)
  - Function of behavior may be neurological & not observable (i.e., not outcome driven)

- Adapted from Zivsak, Vidimos, & Mack

Trauma and Negative Belief Patterns

Trust

Power & Control

Esteem

Intimacy

Importance for adults in our youth's lives

• You have an important role to play in providing stability and a safe space for children and connecting them to caring adults.

• You can:

- Serve as a link to supportive services (what services are in your area? How can you connect the youth you serve with these services?)

- Be the stability that the youth needs

"There is no more effective neurobiological intervention than a safe relationship"
Bruce Perry, PhD, MD

- The relationship works to bring the brain back into regulation

- Safe, predictable, consistent relationships ARE AN intervention

Differentiation of Relationships

Relationships are like a bank account:

- One cannot withdrawal from a youth until deposits have been made

- Once one has made sufficient deposits into the relationship, one can skillfully withdrawal for a variety of purposes

How do we begin reengagement ?

Teach Self-Regulation

Consistent Structure and Routines

Develop and Teach Social Emotional Skills

Space to Regulate

Build Community

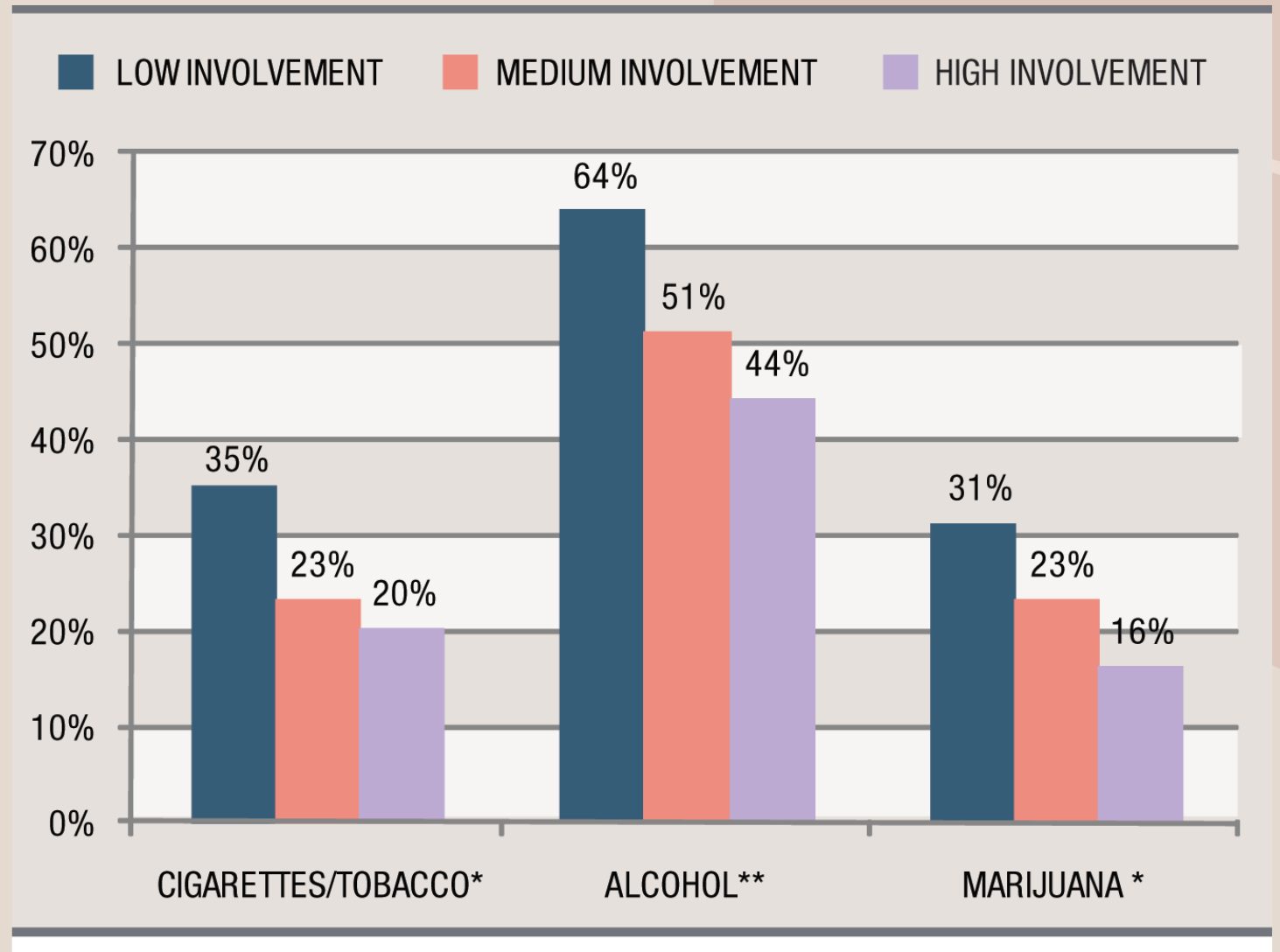Empower Student with Voice

Supportive Risk Taking

"What do I do?"
Trauma-Informed Support for Children

1 Create safety
If the child is overwhelmed, perhaps guide them to a quiet corner or allow them to decompress by visiting the restroom. If you are in a classroom, maybe you have a peace corner that you've outfitted with blankets or a screen so that it feels like a safe place.

2 Regulate the nervous system
Stress brings a predictable pattern of physiological responses and anyone who has suffered toxic stress or trauma is going to be quickly stressed into hyperarousal (explosive, jittery, irritable) or hypoarousal (depressed, withdrawn, zombie-like). No matter how ingenious our regulation strategies, how artsy-crafty we get with tools, the child has to find what works for them.

3 Build a connected relationship
This is the number one way to regulate the nervous system. When we are around people we care about, our bodies produce oxytocin, which is the hormone responsible for calming our nervous system after stress. If we stay connected, then eventually the calm discussion of each person's feelings and needs can take place.

4 Support development of coherent narrative
Creating predictability through structure, routines and the presence of reliable adults helps reduce the chaos a child may feel and allows them to start creating the kind of logical sequential connections that not only help them understand their own narrative, but are also the fundamental requirement of many types of learning.

5 Practice 'power-with' strategies
One of the hallmarks of trauma is a loss of power and control. When someone is wielding power over you with no regard to your thoughts or feelings, the toxic shame of the original trauma may come flooding back. As adults, we should use our power well. If we model a 'power-with' relationship with children it's our best chance of creating adults who will treat others with dignity and respect.

6 Build social emotional and resiliency skills
Trauma robs us of time spent developing social and emotional skills. The brain is too occupied with survival to devote much of its energy to learning how to build relationships and it's a good chance we didn't see those skills modeled for us. Learning to care for one another is the most important job we have growing up.

7 Foster post-traumatic growth
We know that there are qualities and skills that allow people to overcome the most devastating trauma and not just survive but find new purpose and meaning in their lives. Problem solving, planning, maintaining focus despite discomfort, self-control and seeking support are all known to lead to post-traumatic growth and are skills we can foster in children.

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Student Voice to Improve School Culture

- Increasing student voice in schools helps create a shift towards a more positive school climate (Mitra, 2003)

- Schools with a positive school culture are more effective and safe
  (Engles et al, 2008)

- Finding ways to seek student input and involve students provides opportunities for student leadership

- When the voice of students is heard it makes the message more FUN !!!!!

Youth voice increases engagement in healthier behaviors

LOW INVOLVEMENT   MEDIUM INVOLVEMENT   HIGH INVOLVEMENT

CIGARETTES/TOBACCO*: 35%, 23%, 20%
ALCOHOL**: 64%, 51%, 44%
MARIJUANA *: 31%, 23%, 16%

Staunton & Jaffee, 2014

Denaro, Innovative Behavioral Consulting,
Becca Conference, 2022

Trauma practices in your space

- Build relationships with youth that is not based on logistics! Find out what they like to do etc.

- Ask youth about themselves. Once they know that you care about them as people, they will be more likely to engage.

- Teach them about their brain and their stress response systems.

- Be aware of potential triggers. Provide choices during the day so they feel that their own voice is part of the space, and they feel they have more power and agency.

Consistency and Predictability

Research shows that the more consistent and predictable an environment is, the less anxiety for an individual

- Routines
- Expectations (If we think that they should know better- they don't!)

Predictable and Safe Environments=Trauma Informed!

Structure and predictability is the intervention!

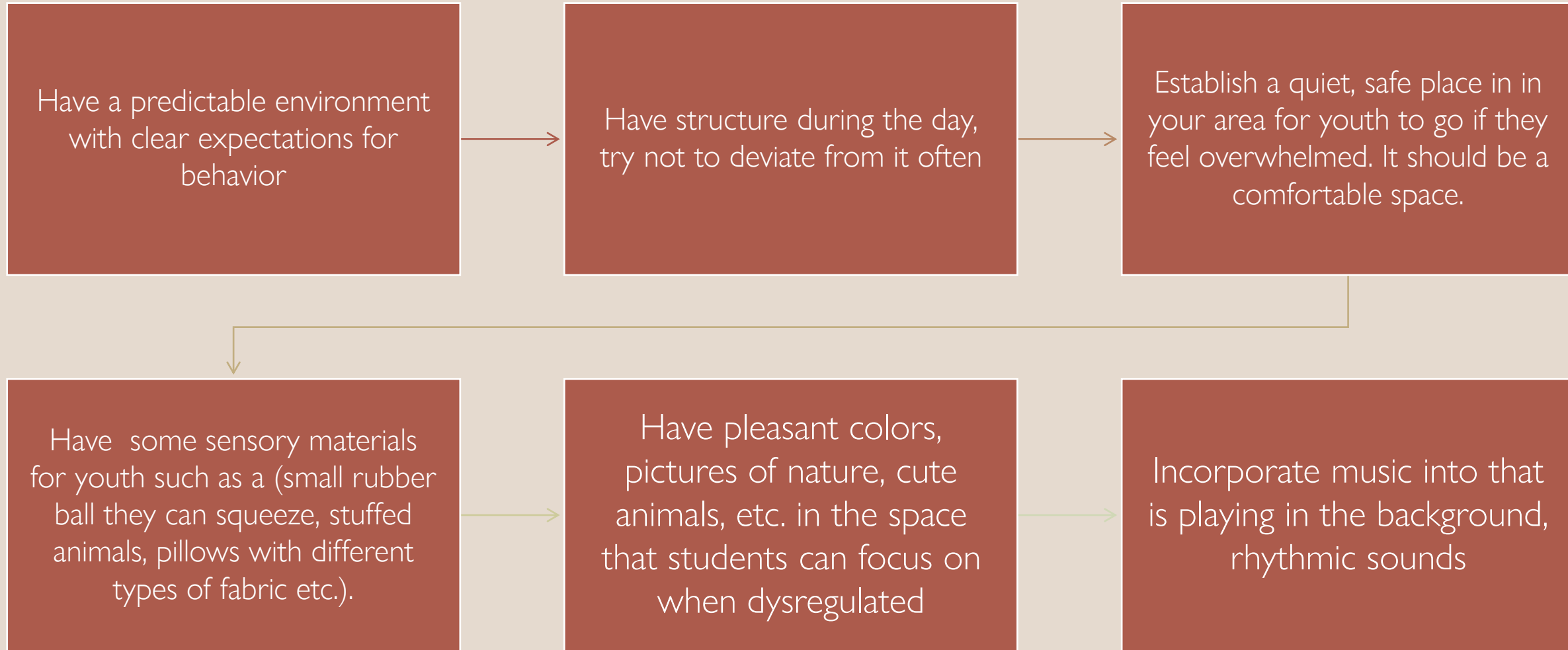Connect structures and expectations together— no surprises!

Provide opportunities for open-communication between youth and adults and youth with one another.

Scaffold activities so youth experience a high rate of success.

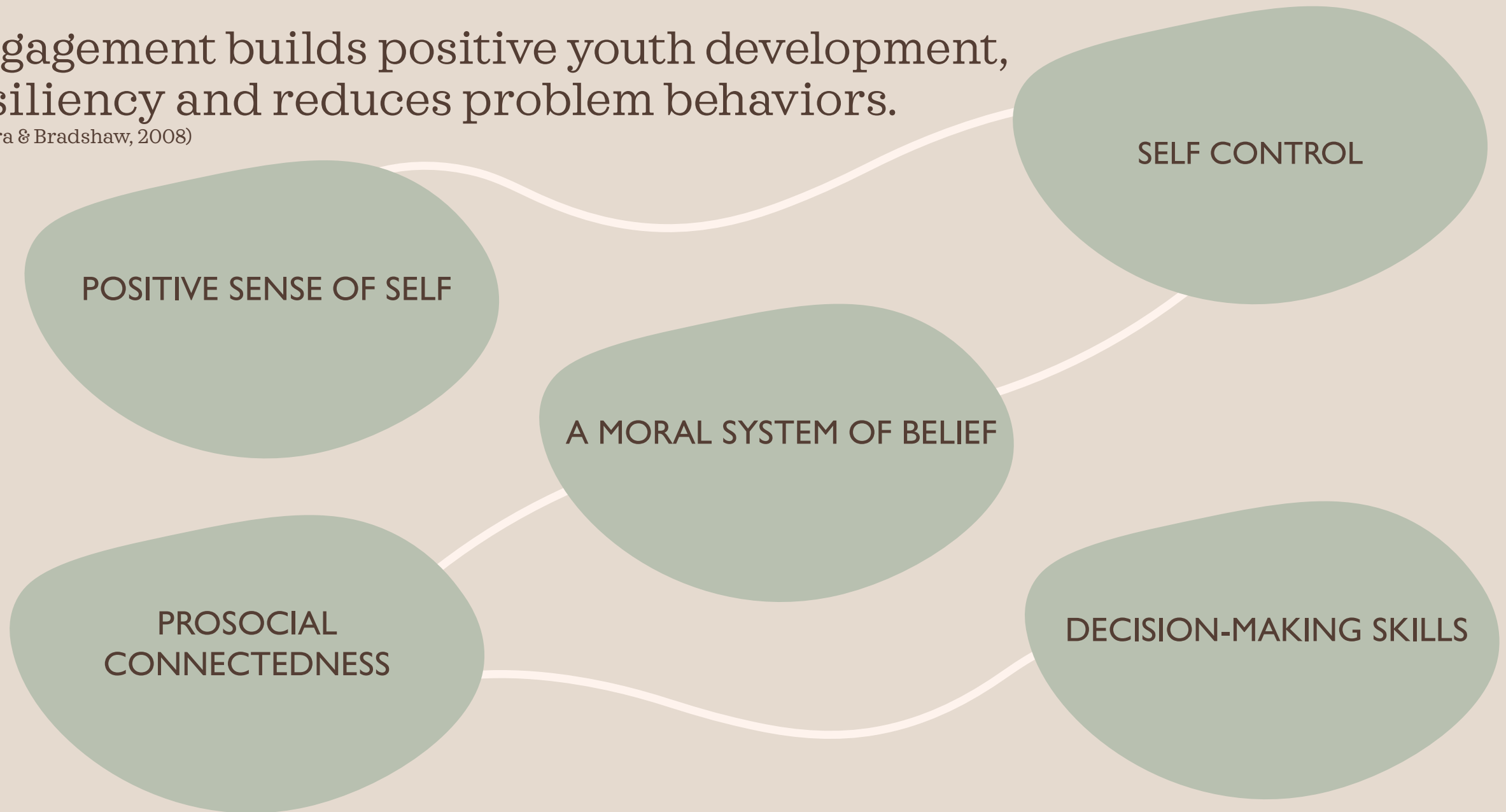Places for youth to take breaks, calm down and remove themselves from the stress to regroup.

Adults are all on the same page, so youth are not surprised by a change in decision making or expectations.

Create Safety Approaches

Have a predictable environment with clear expectations for behavior

Have structure during the day, try not to deviate from it often

Establish a quiet, safe place in in your area for youth to go if they feel overwhelmed. It should be a comfortable space.

Have some sensory materials for youth such as a (small rubber ball they can squeeze, stuffed animals, pillows with different types of fabric etc.).

Have pleasant colors, pictures of nature, cute animals, etc. in the space that students can focus on when dysregulated

Incorporate music into that is playing in the background, rhythmic sounds

Engagement builds positive youth development, resiliency and reduces problem behaviors.
(Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008)

SELF CONTROL

POSITIVE SENSE OF SELF

A MORAL SYSTEM OF BELIEF

PROSOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

Predictors of Resilience Among Youth

Predictors of Resilience

• Intelligence and cognitive ability

• Positive parenting and caregiving

• Self-efficacy and positive self-perceptions

• Hope, faith, and religious affiliations

• Positive relationships

• Self-regulation skills

• Self-efficacy skills
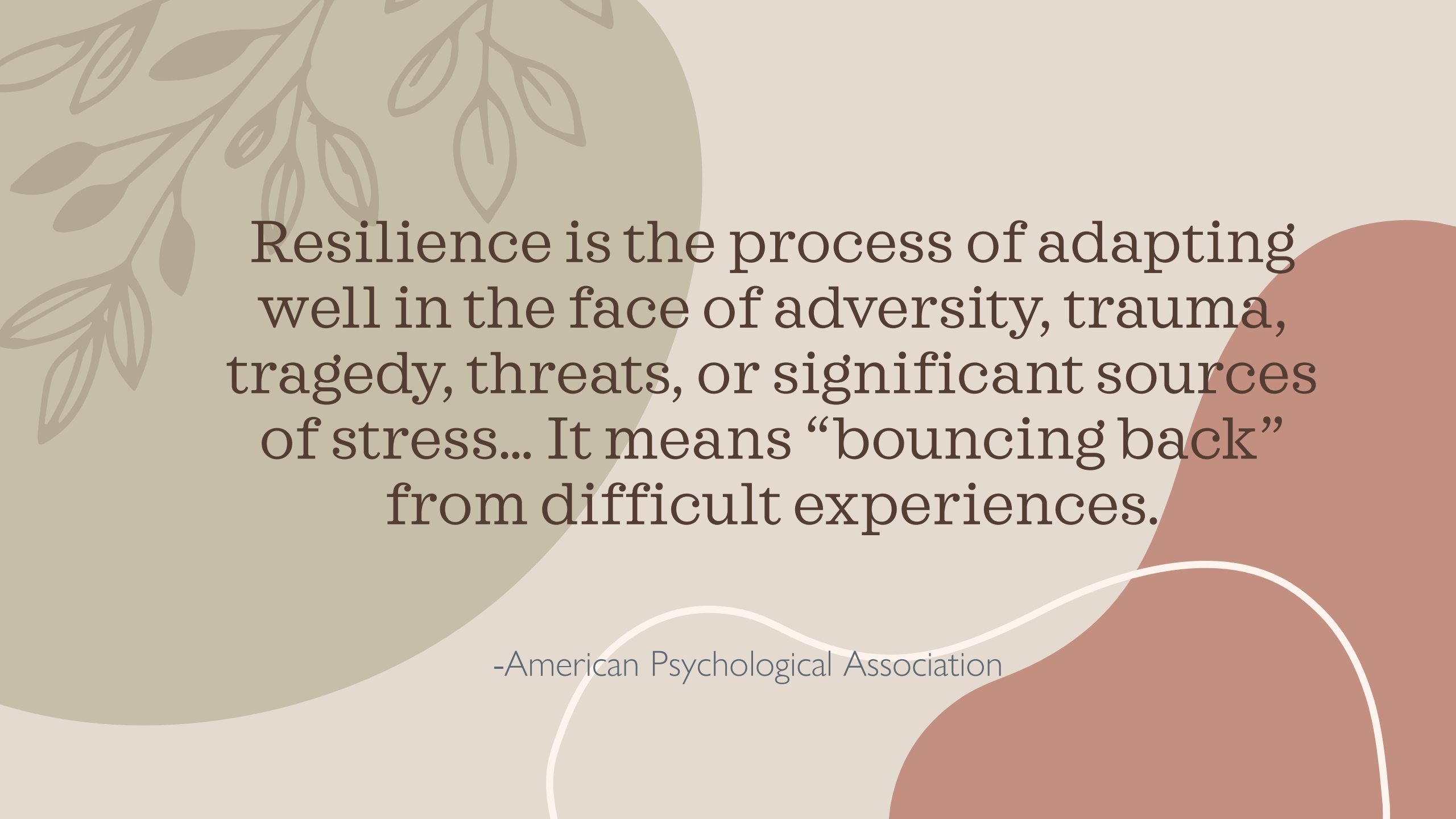
Engagement builds youth resiliency skills
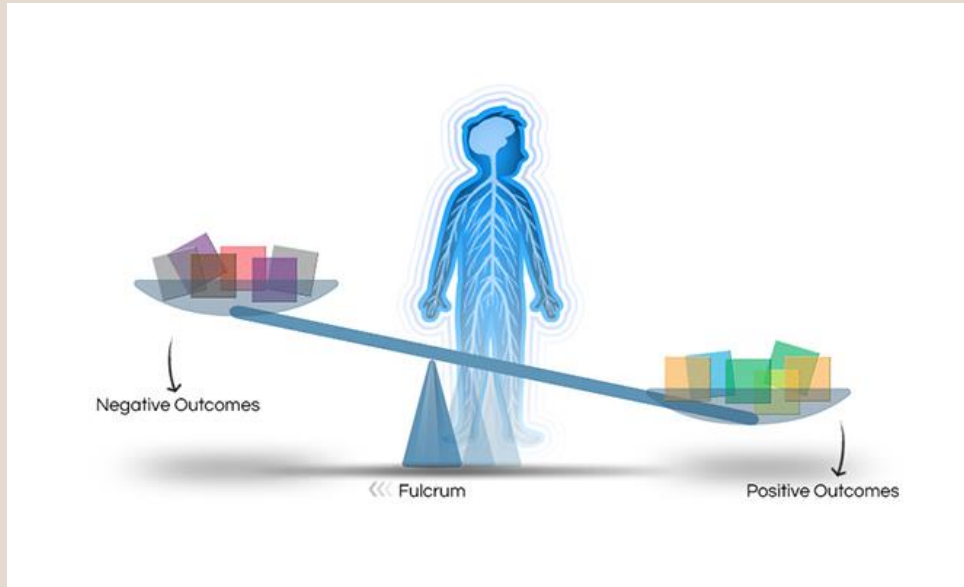
Center for the Developing Child,
Harvard University

Positive Influences can tip the scale:

1. facilitating supportive adult-child relationships;
2. building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control;
3. providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and,
4. mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions.

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress... It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.

-American Psychological Association

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to things as they are.

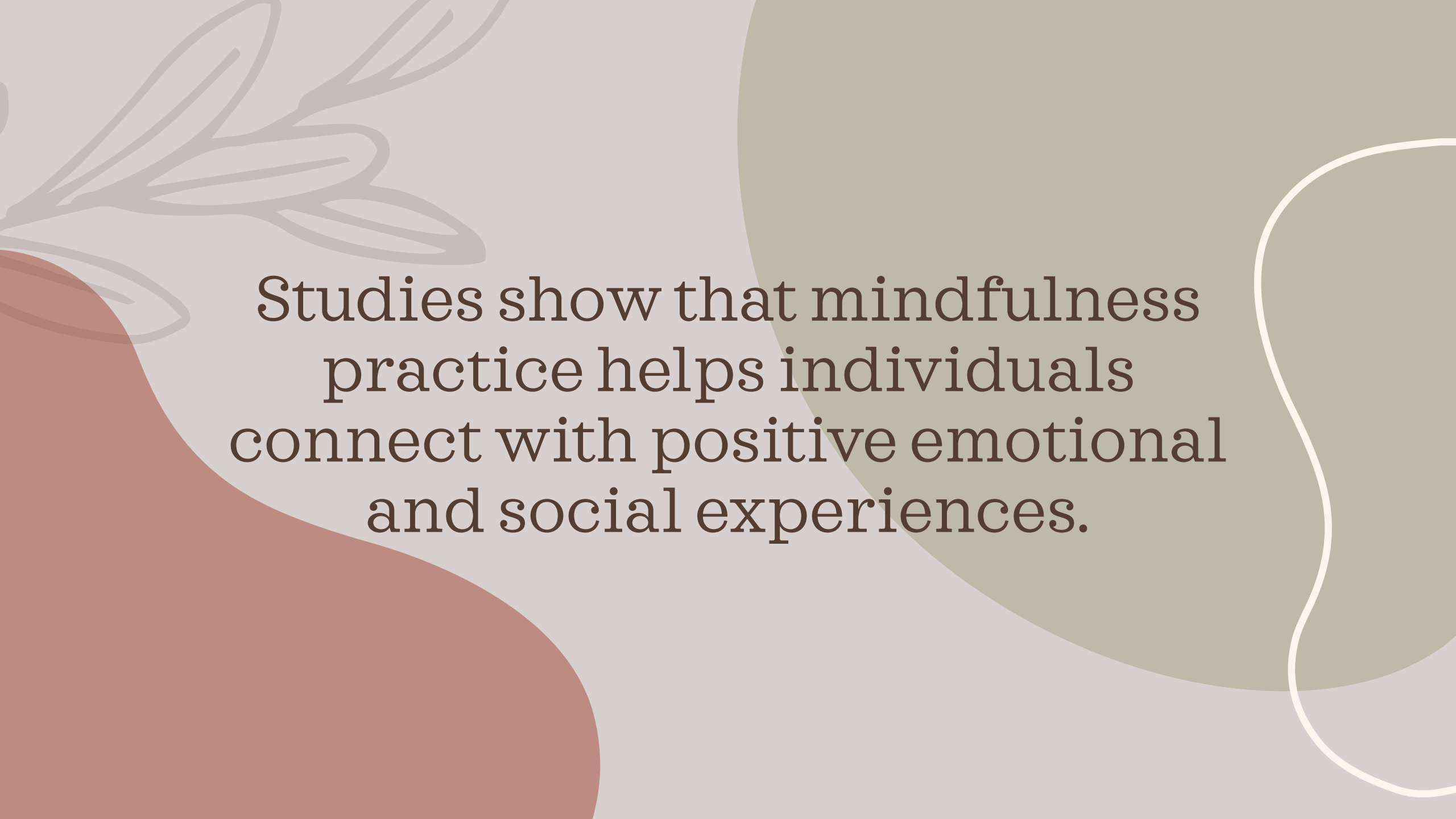-Williams, Teasdale, Segal, and Kabat-Zinn (2007)

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

Mindfulness is a quality that every human being already possesses, it's not something you have to conjure up, you just have to learn how to access it.

Studies show that mindfulness practice helps individuals connect with positive emotional and social experiences.

In the Moment Mindfulness

- **S**top what you are doing
- **T**ake a mindful breath
- **O**bserve what you are doing and thinking
- **P**roceed

STOP 3-4 times per day

Breathing is Mindfulness!

Let's Breathe! (YouTube)

Hardiness?

Hardiness is a personality trait that is associated with a person's ability to manage and respond to stressful life events with coping strategies that turn potentially unfortunate circumstances into learning opportunities.

Although this can be inherent, this can also be developed. When people speak of "building resilience" this is often what is being addressed.

Focus on What is Important


Out of my control

In my control

Positive Self-Talk

- Positive Self-talk is "the act of practice of positively talking to oneself, either aloud or silently"
  - Generally, negative self-talk makes us feel worse
  - Positive self-talk can make us feel better
  - Positive Self-talk increase the problem problem-solving mechanisms in the brain and helps remind ourselves that making mistakes is part of life

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU ARE TALKING TO YOURSELF BECAUSE YOU ARE LISTENING.

- LISA M. HAYES

QUOTESPEDIA.ORG

Benefits of Positive Thinking

- Increased life span

- Lower rates of depression

- Lower levels of distress

- Greater resistance to the common cold

- Better psychological and physical well-being

- Better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease

- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

healthy body + healthy mind = happy life
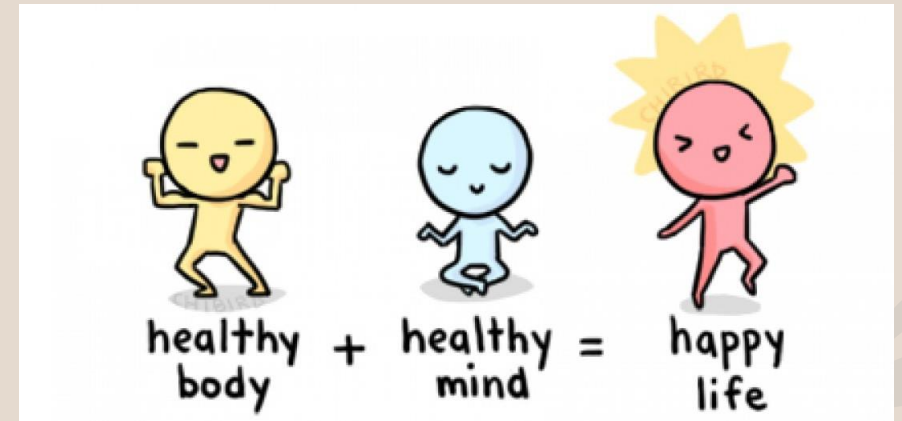
What You Resist, Persists

- Have honest and open discussions
  - Avoiding the conversation leads to more feelings of anxiety
  - Be honest! *Show your vulnerability, that is ok*
  - Talk about what they are excited for, what they are nervous for, what will AND won't change
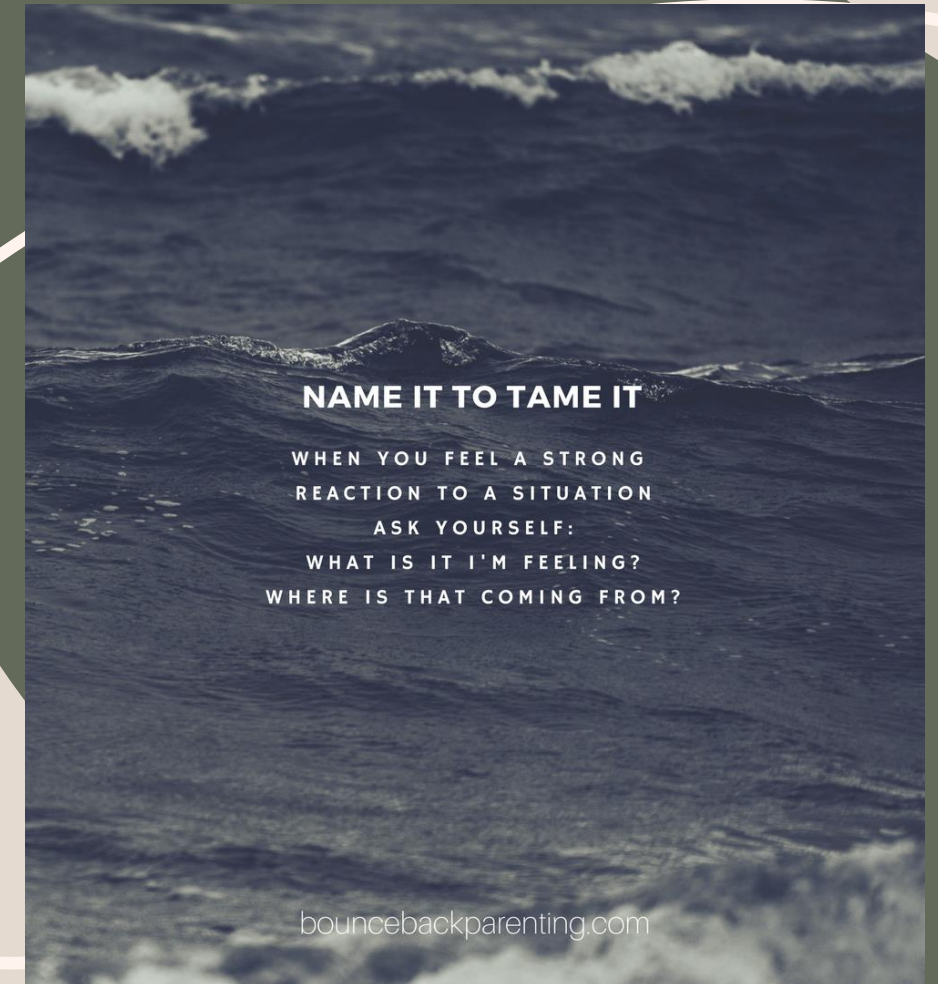
Name It To Tame It

We can help children identify their concerns by asking them what they're worried about. Then, we can name it.

 Younger children might name their fear the Worry Monster.

 Older youth, labelling the emotion as anxiety can be helpful.

Naming the worry often helps tame the fear by helping build understanding about what the feeling. It also gives common language that can be used in future discussions and provides an opportunity of emotional support and coping strategies.

NAME IT TO TAME IT

WHEN YOU FEEL A STRONG
REACTION TO A SITUATION
ASK YOURSELF:
WHAT IS IT I'M FEELING?
WHERE IS THAT COMING FROM?

bouncebackparenting.com

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

20 WAYS TO CALM YOURSELF DOWN

- ☐ "Ground" yourself techniques
  (connect with your body through deep breaths and awareness of your surroundings)
- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Find a "safe space" in your home and spend a few moments there
- ☐ Pay close attention to your breathing
- ☐ Make yourself some calming hot tea
- ☐ Talk with a friend
- ☐ Get outside! Take a walk & change scenery
- ☐ Make a gratitude list
- ☐ Put on your favorite song
- ☐ Dance
- ☐ Take a bath
- ☐ Snuggle with your pet
- ☐ Watch or read something that makes you laugh
- ☐ Do something creative (drawing, coloring, etc.)
- ☐ Unplug from social media
- ☐ Clean an area of your home
- ☐ Focus on the present
- ☐ Practice meditation
- ☐ Write down your emotions

A TO Z OF COPING SKILLS

A ASK for help	**B** BREATHE deeply and slowly	**C** COUNT forwards or backwards	**D** DRINK some cold water
E EXERCISE run, jump, skip, kick a ball or walk fast	**F** FIND a safe place	**G** GO to your happy place	**H** HUG a friend or family member
I IGNORE people who are annoying you	**J** JOKES to help you laugh	**K** KIND hands. Keep them to yourself	**L** LISTEN to calming music
M MEDITATE use yoga or mindfulness	**N** NAME the emotion you are feeling	**O** OBSERVE Use mindfulness techniques	**P** PAINT your feelings
Q QUESTION your thoughts	**R** RUN as fast as you can	**S** SEPARATE yourself from the situation	**T** THOUGHTS negative to positive
U USE your safe place	**V** VOICE your concerns	**W** WRITE down your feelings	**X** EXHALE breathe out your feelings
	Y YELL as loud as you can into a pillow	**Z** ZONE out and relax yourself	

ELSA support

PROMOTE PROBLEM SOLVING

Identify a few possible solutions and then help them identify which solution seems best.

Discuss different options or role-play solutions. Encourage your child to try out the solution in real life and discuss whether it worked.

thank you

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