

Think Trauma : A Training for Working with Justice-Involved Youth

Developed by The National Child Trauma Stress Network Juvenile Justice Consortium





The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



The mission of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and communities throughout the United States.



Series Overview

Module One: Trauma and Justice Involvement

Module Two: Trauma's Impact on Development

Module Three: Trauma in Context & Coping

Module Four: Trauma & Staff Wellness

NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

Why Think Trauma?

- How we explain behavior is directly linked to how we handle it.
- Trauma is not an excuse for behavior but an explanation for it.
- Understanding the impact of trauma gives us more tools to do our job, make everyone safer, and help youth build healthier lives and better futures.





Self-Care Alert

- Step out and take a break
- Talk to someone you trust
- Do something regulating

Learning Objectives

- **Define trauma** and describe how it differs from everyday stress
- View behaviors through a **trauma lens**
- Better understand the role of **resilience** and **recovery** in buffering the effects of traumatic events and promoting health and development



How would you . . .



- How would you define trauma?
- What is it that makes something traumatic as opposed to just stressful?





Does this behavior look familiar?

- In what ways are the characters in this story like the youth you work with?
- What beliefs do the staff in the clip have about these youth?
- What do you believe contributes to the way these young people think, feel, and behave?





Reaction to *Freedom Writers*

- What was your reaction as you watched the clip?
- What events did you see that you consider traumatic?
- What types of traumatic events have the clients you work with experienced?



What is a potentially traumatic event?

3 E's of trauma exposure:

Events

Experiences

Effects

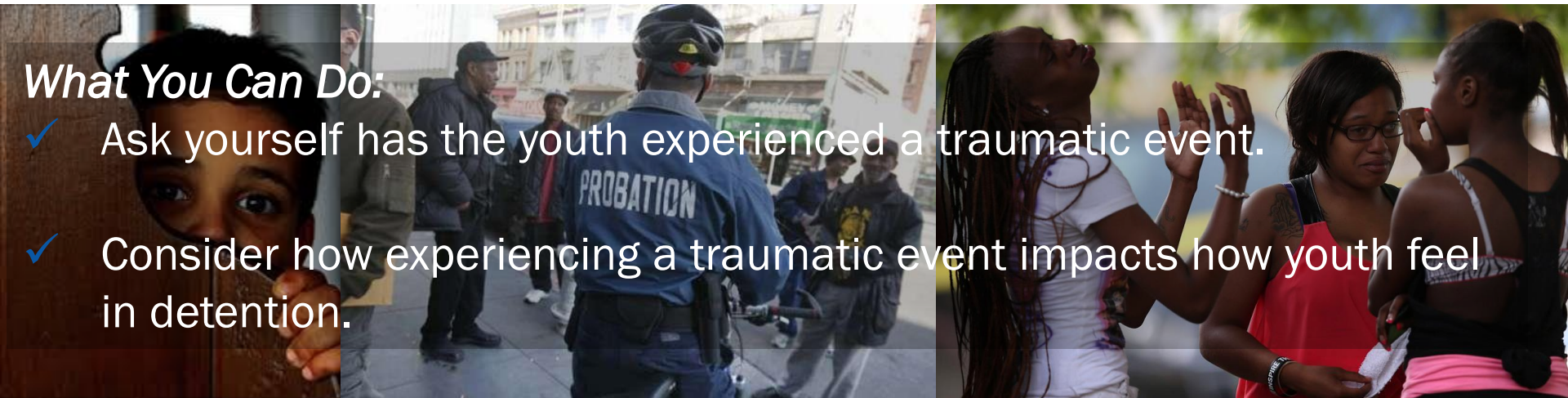
Events: Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violation.

Experiences: How a person experiences a potentially traumatic event can vary from person to person, but with trauma the event is experienced as harmful.

Effects: Traumatic events can have short and/or long-term adverse effects on a person's physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health that may show up immediately or later in a person's life.

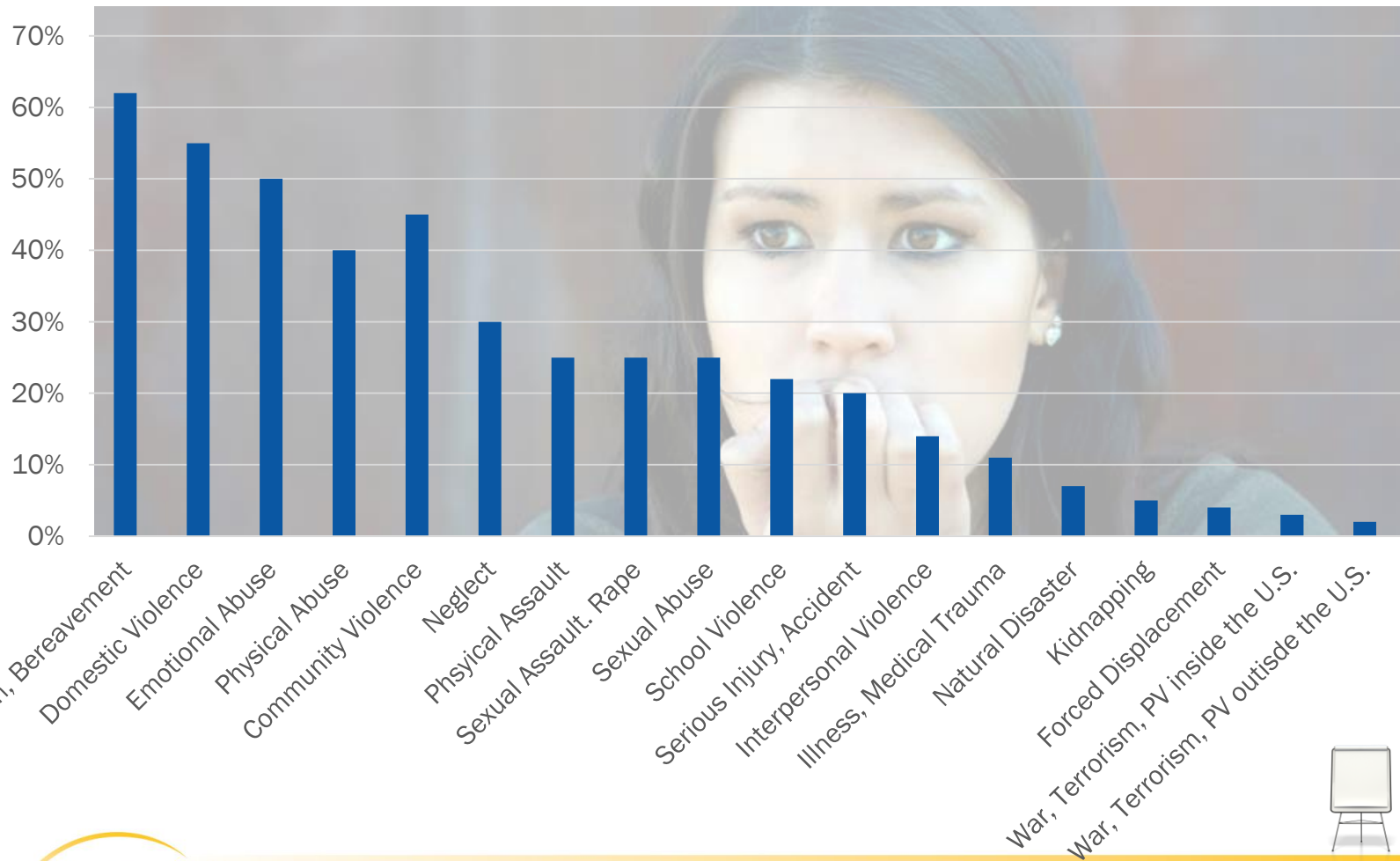
What You Can Do:

- ✓ Ask yourself has the youth experienced a traumatic event.
- ✓ Consider how experiencing a traumatic event impacts how youth feel in detention.



Juvenile-Justice Youth Exposure to Trauma

93% of juvenile offenders reported at least one or more traumatic experiences and on average reporting at least 6, with traumatic loss representing the most common exposure.



Principles for a Trauma-Informed System

Safety

Trust

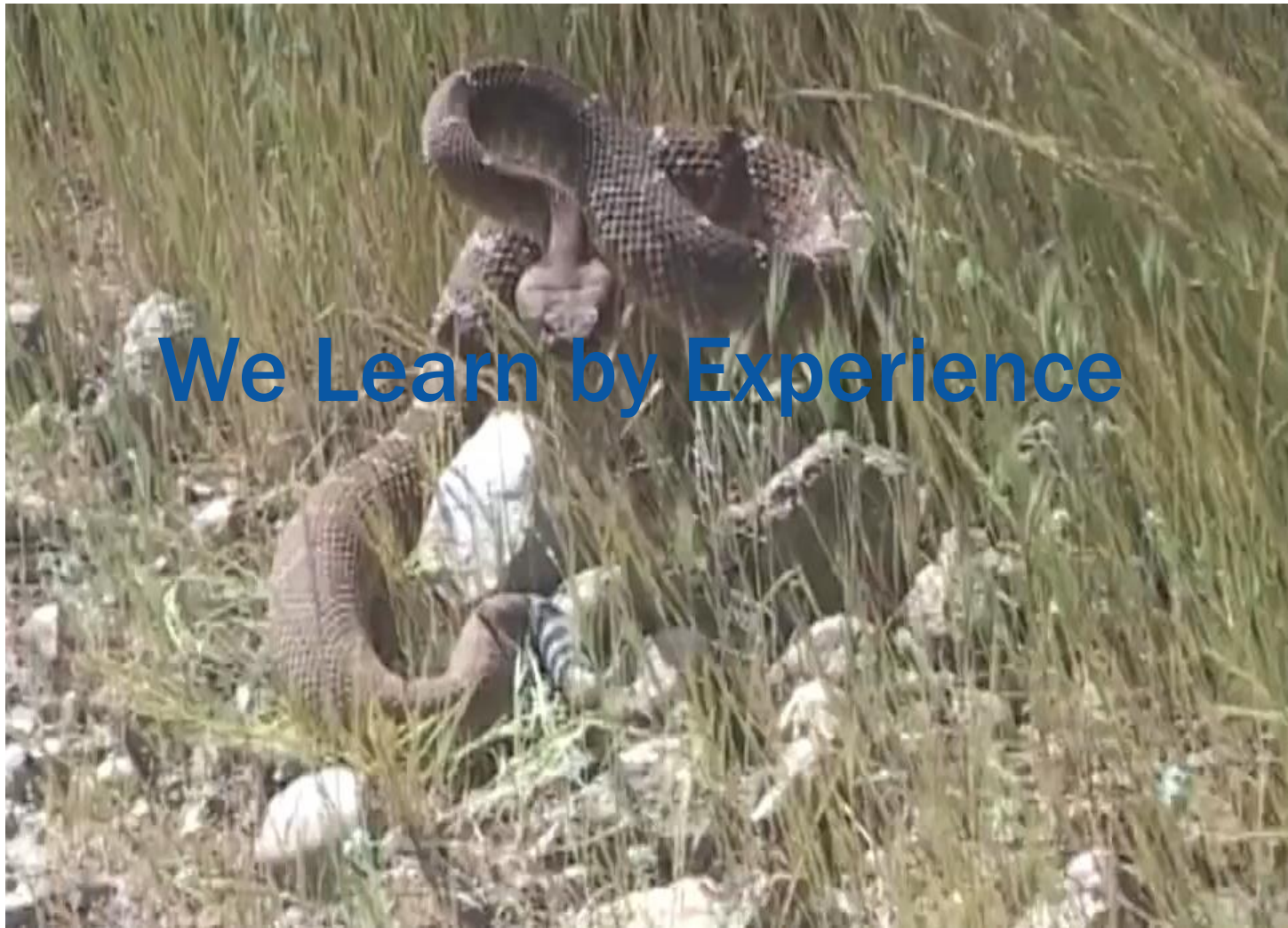
Empowerment

Collaboration

Peer Support and
Trauma Competence

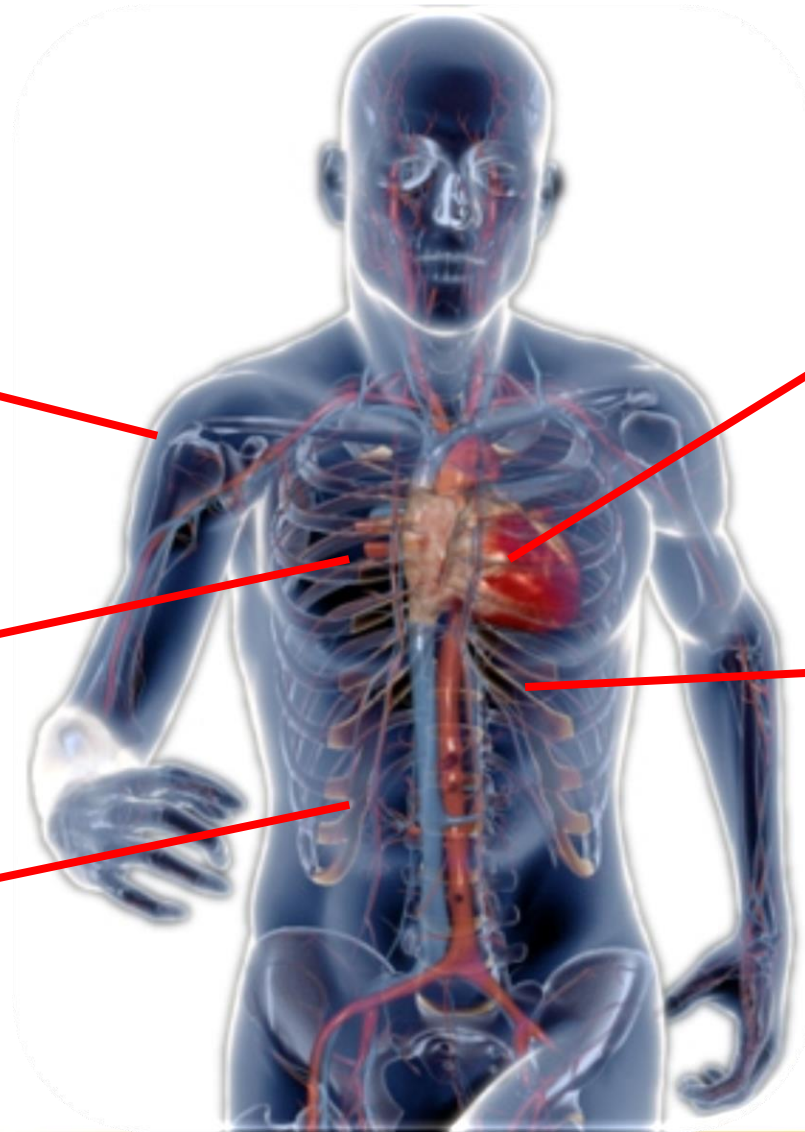
Cultural, Historical,
Linguistic, and
Gender
Responsiveness

We Learn by Experience



We Learn by Experience

Preparing for Action



Tensed muscles

Heart rate and blood pressure increase

Breathing rate increases

Release of adrenaline and cortisol

Digestion slows

We Learn by Experience



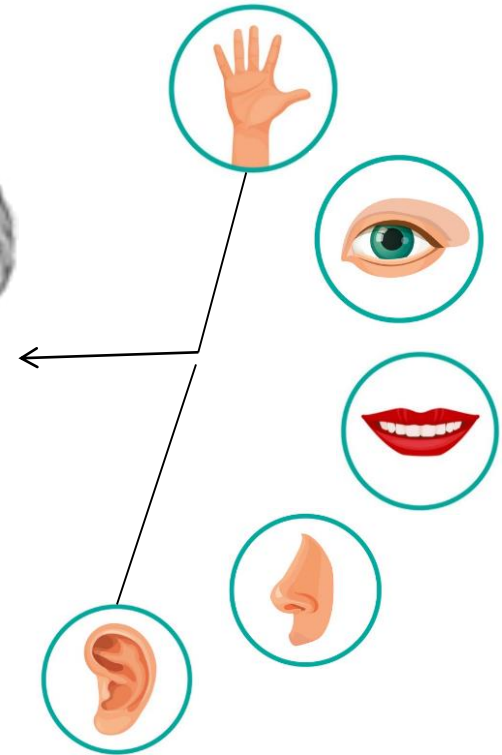
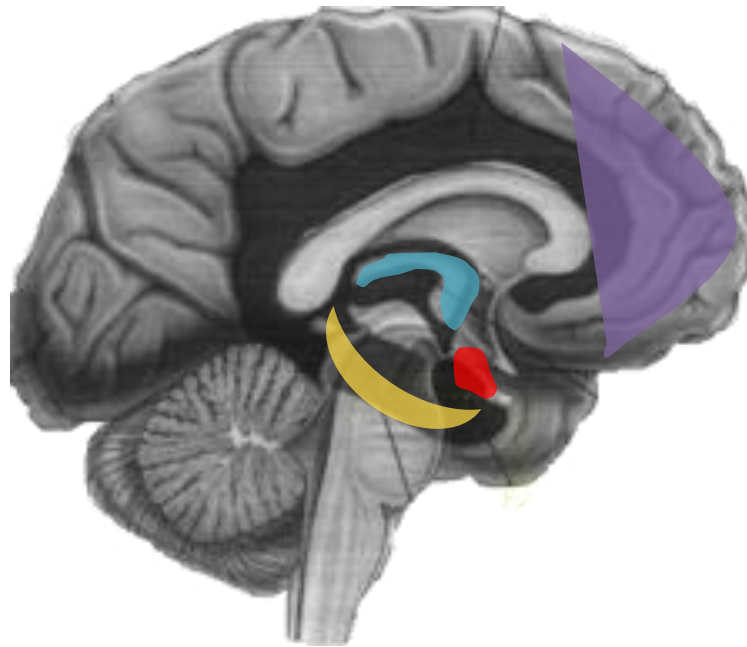
Understanding the Brain

Survival Brain

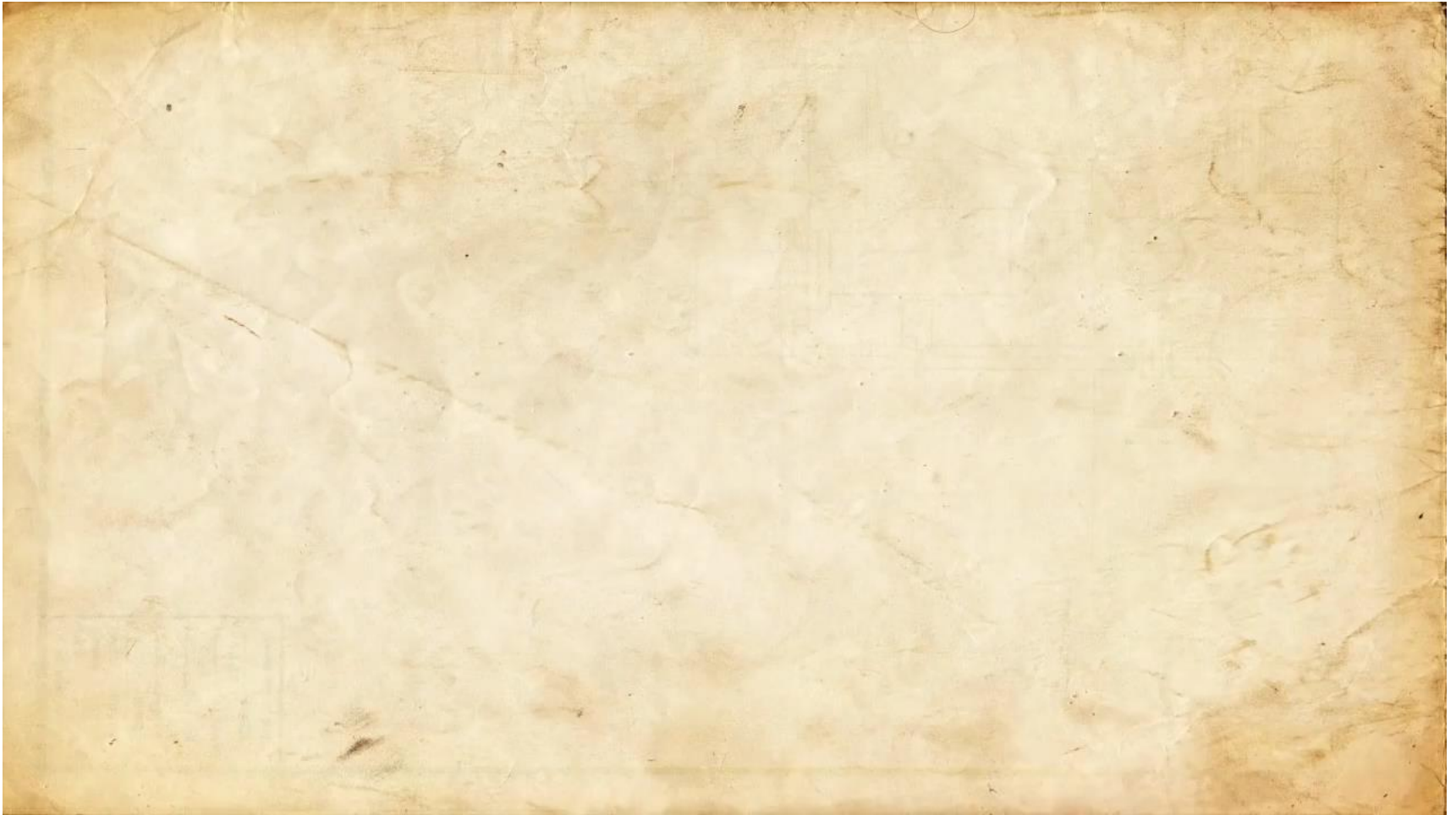
- Seeing threat
- Remembering danger
- Preparing to protect

Learning Brain

- Controlling impulses
- Thinking through decisions and effective protection strategies



Learning Brain vs. Survival Brain



Establishing Safety

The first step to connect with youth in a trauma-informed manner is to help them feel physically and psychologically safe.

What You Can Do:

- ✓ Help youth feel safer by being present and engaged
- ✓ Create predictability
- ✓ Balance firmness with caring



Creating a Trauma-Informed Safety Plan

A trauma-informed safety plan is one tool that all staff may use to collaborate with a youth who has experienced trauma.

This is usually a plan shared between staff and youth to help youth use healthier coping strategies.



Safety plans should include:

- Brief trauma history
- Trauma reminders
- Early warning signs of losing control
- Calming & regulating behaviors

Trauma Reminders or Triggers

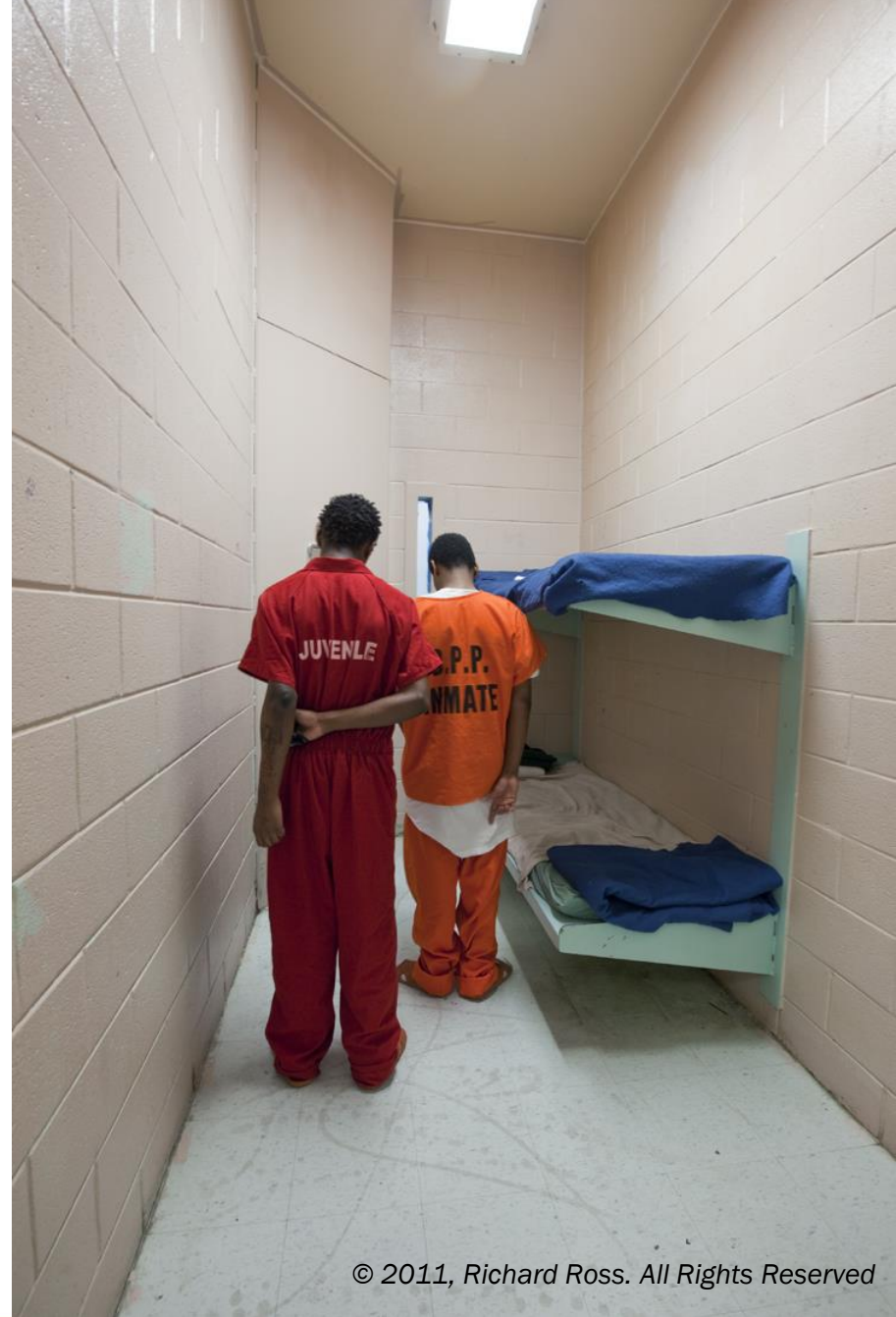
Things, events, situations, places, sensations, and even people that a youth consciously or unconsciously connects with a traumatic event.



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Loss Reminders

- Empty situations
- Shared activities
- Rituals
- Favorite activities
- Physical scars



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Hidden Reminders

- May be very difficult to identify
- Cause physical reactions without our being able to understand them
- Past betrayals can make trust, affection, and connection become hidden reminders of pain.



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Calming the Survival Brain

Youth affected by trauma may:

- Expect others to compromise their safety.
- Try to feel safe and protect themselves in ways that are risky, dangerous, or destructive.
- Can learn new ways to feel safe from firm and caring adults who are aware of trauma reminders.

What You Can Do

- ✓ List the actions an adult does to make youth feel unsafe and activate their survival brain.
- ✓ Consider some ways you and your co-workers can avoid behaviors that make youth feel unsafe.



How Youth Respond to Trauma: Traumatic Stress Reactions



- Re-Experiencing
- Avoidance
- Hyperarousal/Reactivity
- Negative alteration in cognition/mood
- Dissociation

How Youth Respond to Trauma: Re-Experiencing Symptoms

Intrusive images, sensations, or memories of the traumatic event recur uncontrollably.

This includes:

- Nightmares
- Disturbing thoughts
- Flashbacks
- Physiological reactions
- Intense/prolonged psychological distress





Kari's Intrusive Thoughts

Kari, a young man who was shot by a robber who stole his gold chain, speaks about his assailant.

“I can't get this dude out of my head. I see him every day . . . every day. Every night I see this dude. And he's locked up!”

“No one is gonna step to me like that ever again!”

How Youth Respond to Trauma: Avoidance Symptoms

Avoidance of **internal reminders**:

- Thoughts, feelings, or physical sensations

Avoidance of **external reminders**:

- People, places, objects
- Activities, situations, conversations
- Avoid discussing related issues



How Youth Respond to Trauma: Alterations in Arousal & Reactivity

- Irritable or aggressive behavior
- Self-destructive or reckless behavior
- Jumpiness or quick to startle
- Problems with concentration
- Sleep disturbance
- Hyperarousal/hypervigilance



How Youth Respond to Trauma: Negative Alterations in Cognition & Mood

- Inability to remember parts of traumatic event
- Persistent negative emotions
- Persistent difficulty experiencing positive emotions
- Decreased interest or participation in activities
- Feeling detached from others
- Persistent exaggerated negative expectations
- Persistent distorted blame of self or others





Numbing: Ian Loses His Fear

“So a lot of things that made me scared or made me nervous, they don’t scare me no more. They don’t affect me.

Like, if a whole bunch of dudes kept on lookin’ at me, I used to feel nervous. And, if someone kept on like giving me mean looks? I used to get nervous.

It don’t happen no more. It’s like some of the feelin’ is just gone. If they look at me mean now, I look at them right back like, ‘What?’”

How Youth Respond to Trauma: Dissociation

- Feeling unreal and disconnected from self
- Mentally separating the self from the experience
- May experience the self as detached from the body, on the ceiling, or somewhere else in the room
- May feel as if in a dream or unreal state



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Rates of Trauma & PTSD in JJ Youth

93% of juvenile offenders reported at least one or more traumatic experiences and on average reporting at least 6.

Youth in the JJ population have rates of PTSD comparable to those of service members returning from Iraq.

40% of youth with trauma history are diagnosed with at least one other mood, anxiety or disruptive behavior disorder.

Understanding Trauma & Preventing Re-Offending

Identifying trauma can improve risk assessment for further offending and lead to rehabilitative services that work.

Risk

Determining the likelihood for re-offending and type of services that will rehabilitate.

Need

Targeted provision of services that are matched to specific risks for re-offending using effective and proven tools.

Responsivity

Youth's ability to rehabilitate is maximized by tailoring services to youth needs and strengths.

Mental Health Disorders' Role in Responding to Trauma

Rates of Mental Health (MH) Disorders

Type of MH Disorder	% with MH Diagnosis
Disruptive Disorders (i.e. Conduct Disorder)	46.5%
Substance Use Disorders	46.2%
Anxiety Disorders	34.4%
Mood Disorders	18.3%



What are barriers to working with mental health professionals and communicating with them about youth?

What improves working with mental health professionals and helps communication with them about youth?



Activity: Talking to Each Other



- What are the traumatic experiences and/or losses?
- What are the traumatic reactions?
- What could be potential trauma reminders?



Identifying Resilience



Resiliency in the Face of Adversity: How Did He Survive and Better Yet Thrive



- What childhood adversities were portrayed in this clip?
- What contributed to his resilience?



Understanding Resilience & Managing Challenges

Assets

- Self-efficacy
- Self-esteem
- Competence
- Spiritual belief

Resources

- Family support
- Peer support
- Community connections
- School connectedness

What specific assets or resources do you think support youth who have experienced trauma?



Rebuilding Beyond Survival

Youth whose functioning declines due to trauma exposure can recover when given opportunities to rebuild their lives.

What You Can Do:

- ✓ Not take their behavior personally.
- ✓ Let them know it is okay to feel upsetting feelings.
- ✓ Help translate their behavior into feelings and words they can express in a healthy way.
- ✓ Work with them to reduce or avoid unnecessary reminders.
- ✓ Invite youth to share what is most frustrating about stressful situations and brainstorm healthy ways to deal with it that addresses it directly.



Better for Everyone



What are things you can do or say to help youth feel safe?





JUVENILE
JUSTICE

Take Home Messages

1. Trauma affects behavior.
2. Resilience and recovery are possible.
3. YOU can make a difference.

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