

Think Trauma Module 2: Understanding Trauma's Impact on Development



Learning Objectives

- Describe how trauma impacts ***attachment*** and ***relationships***
- Identify key ***adolescent developmental tasks*** and ***competencies***
- Describe how trauma can ***derail developmental progression***

Trauma and Factors that Influence Its Impact



Age of the youth

Trauma at the hand of caregivers

Trauma history:
Direct victim or
Witness

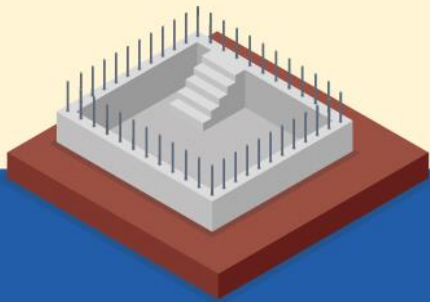
Secondary
adversities

Trauma refers to events that a person experiences as extremely harmful or life threatening and potentially has short or long-term harmful effects on the person.

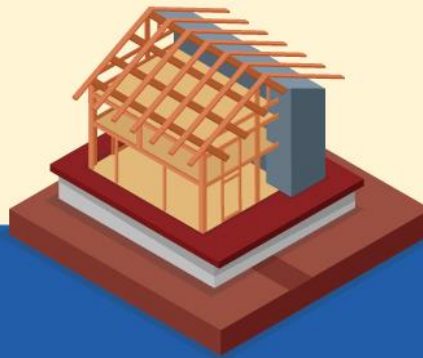
3 E's of trauma exposure:

- Events
- Experiences
- Effects

Building the Foundation & Understanding Development



Early Childhood



Middle Childhood



Adolescence

How has your relationship with a young person helped them deal with a problem they've faced for a long time?



Protection and Injury

- Stage of development and life experiences shape the way youth perceive protection and safety.
- Each traumatic experience can cause invisible wounds that can change how a child develops.
- Youth recover from these wounds through relationships they build with healthy adults.



Principles for a Trauma-Informed System

Safety

Trust

Empowerment

Collaboration

Peer Support and
Trauma Competence

Cultural, Historical,
Linguistic, and
Gender
Responsiveness

Complex Trauma: Trauma Exposure & Development Impact

- Chronic and/or multiple traumas
- Interpersonal trauma often caused by a caregiver or other trusted adult.
- Trauma typically begins at a very young age.



Complex Trauma: Trauma Exposure & Development Impact

Domains of Impact

- Attachment & Relationships
- Biological & Physical
- Cognition
- Emotion Regulation
- Behavioral Regulation
- Self-Concept & Future Orientation/Worldview



Impact of Multiple Traumas: Complex Trauma & Victimization

- Complex trauma involves being victimized and often exposed to multiple types of violence.
- Exposure to violence and victimization can include experiences outside the home in settings such as the community or school.



Impact of Multiple Traumas: Complex Trauma & Victimization

Bullied at School

**Living in a home with a
parent who uses
substances**

**Exposure to community
violence**

**Sexual victimization by a
stranger or acquaintance
outside of home**

**Exposure to
domestic violence**

Nowhere is safe or feels safe!



Attachment & Relationships



Complex trauma can have a significant impact on the development and maintenance of healthy relationships.

Why Attachment Matters



The Still Face Experiment



Disruption in Early Development & Rebuilding

Key Early Developmental Tasks:

- Reference caregivers to understand what is safe and unsafe.
- Learn the importance of rules and how to effectively communicate disagreement with rules.
- Distinguish between different intense personal feelings.
- Respond to others behavior with modeled responses.



Development & Safety Planning: Early Warning Signs

Understanding trauma's impact on developmental domains provides insight into early warning signs that may be connected to specific traumatic stress reactions.

Please describe your warning signs, for example, what your body feels when you are losing control and what other people can see changing? (Please check all that apply)

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating | <input type="checkbox"/> Breathing hard | <input type="checkbox"/> Racing heart | <input type="checkbox"/> Clenching teeth | <input type="checkbox"/> Clenching fists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red faced | <input type="checkbox"/> Wringing hands | <input type="checkbox"/> Loud voice | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping a lot | <input type="checkbox"/> Bouncing legs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rocking | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacing | <input type="checkbox"/> Squatting | <input type="checkbox"/> Can't sit still | <input type="checkbox"/> Swearing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crying | <input type="checkbox"/> Isolating | <input type="checkbox"/> Hyper | <input type="checkbox"/> Nauseous | <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping Less | <input type="checkbox"/> Eating less | <input type="checkbox"/> Eating more | <input type="checkbox"/> Being rude or agitated | <input type="checkbox"/> Singing inappropriate songs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | | | | |



Key Adolescent Developmental Tasks: Relationship Development

During adolescence, individuals:

- Develop stable and constructive peer relationships, sometimes including romantic relationships.
- Transition to referencing peers for problem-solving.
- Learn to develop intimacy and manage intense emotions in close relationships.





Trauma's Impact on Attachment & Relationships

- Continued expectation of maltreatment or abandonment
- Persistent distrust and suspiciousness of others
- Isolation and withdrawal
- Difficulty in perspective-taking and enlisting others as allies
- Difficulty with establishing appropriate social boundaries
- Frequently marked by violence

Key Adolescent Developmental Tasks: Biological & Physical Development

During adolescence, individuals:

- Adjust to outward changes in the body
- Adjust to increased hormone levels
- Manage feelings of sexual attraction related to physical appearance



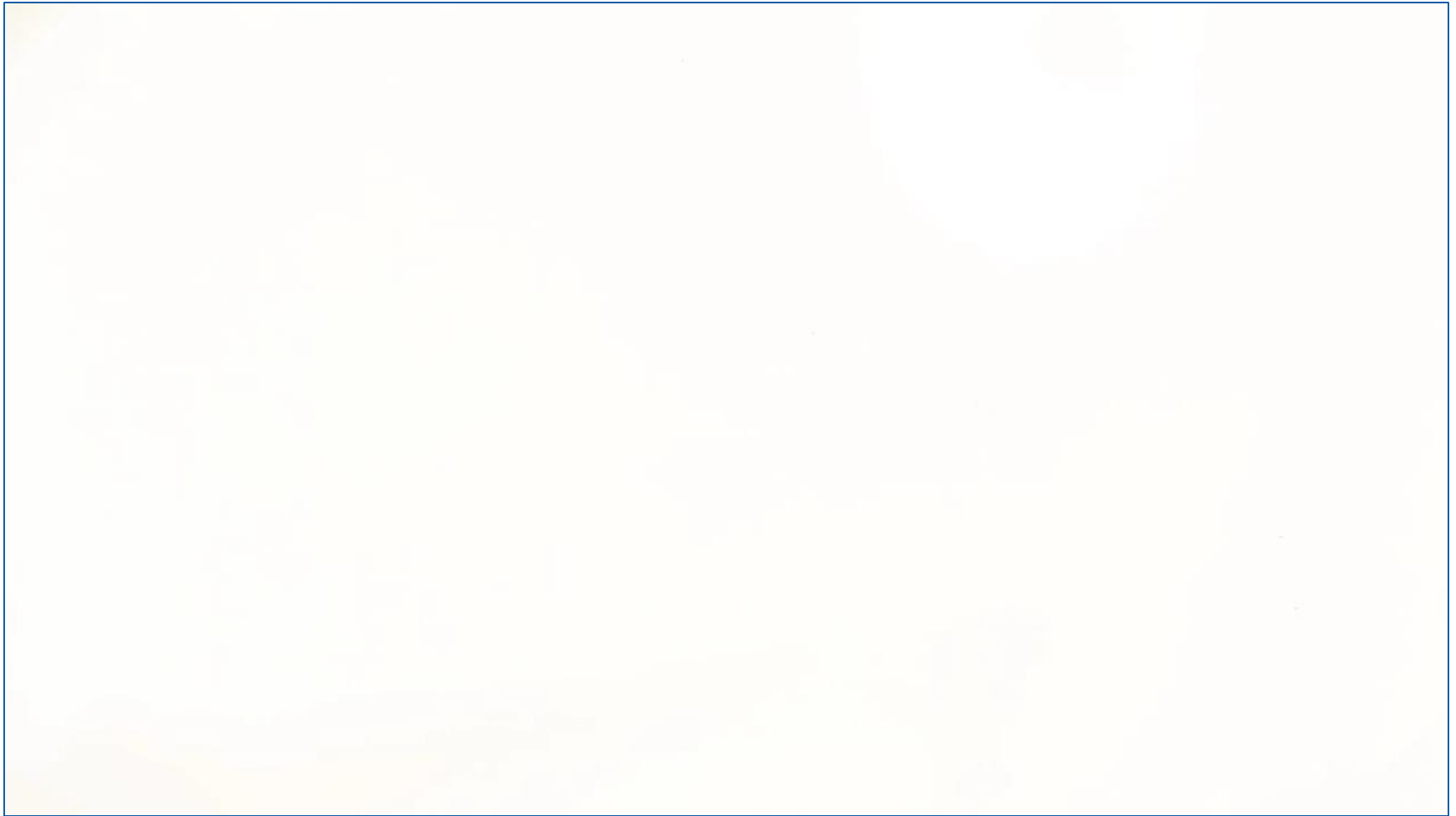


Trauma's Impact on Healthy Physical Development

- Body development can be more distressing.
- Hormones may modify mood-behavior.
- Body may serve as a trauma reminder.
- Alcohol and substance abuse can also be ways of trying to control changing emotions and physical sensations.
- Changes in the stress response can occur.



Effect on Overall Health



Elevated Health Needs

- Traumatic Brain injury
- Broken bones
- Lead Exposure
- Asthma
- Poor Dental Health
- Tuberculosis
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)
- Pregnancy
- High Blood Pressure
- Obesity
- Type 2 Diabetes

Key Adolescent Developmental Tasks: Cognitive Development

During adolescence, individuals:

- Develop a greater capacity for abstract thought
- Take in a great deal of new information, retain it, and apply it to effectively problem-solve and achieve academically as well as in other developmental areas



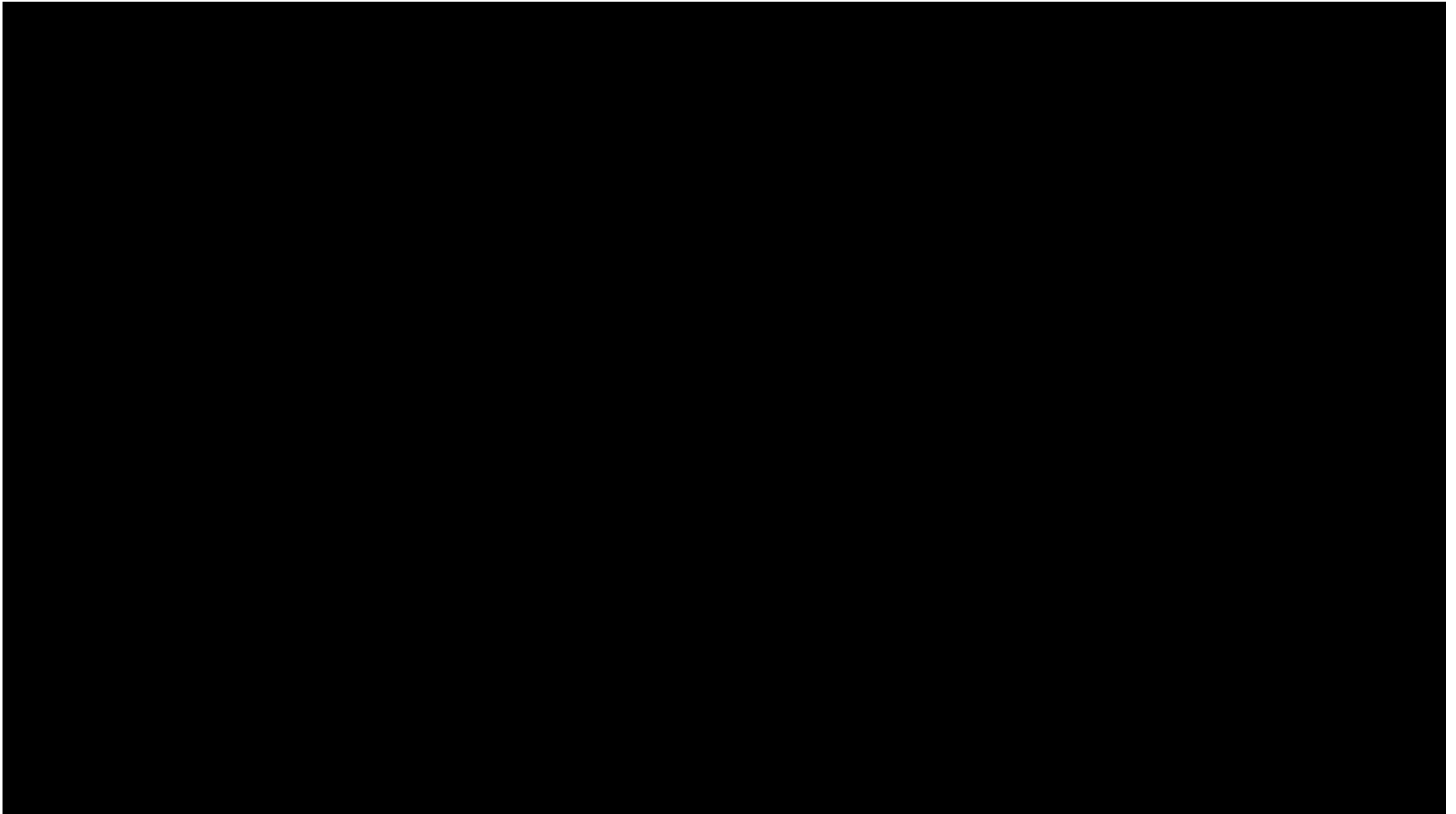
Cognition



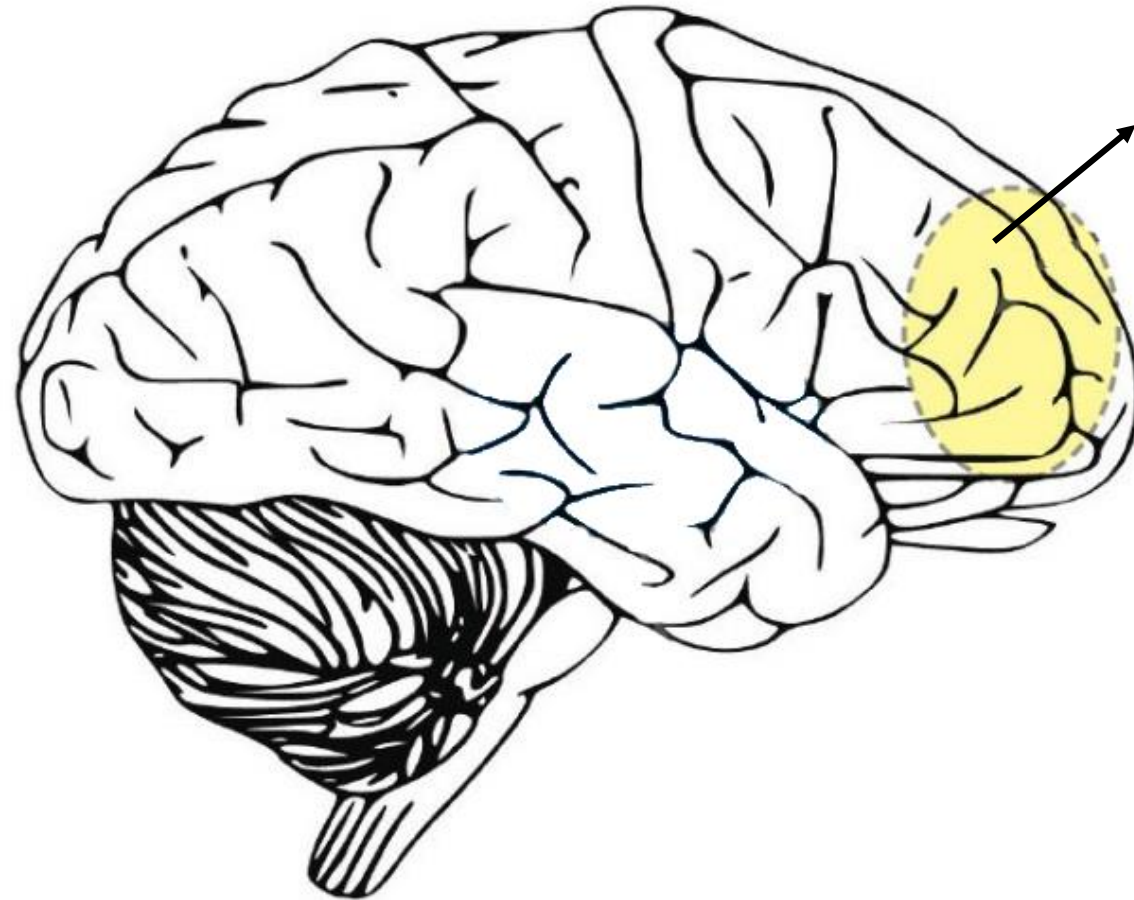
Cognition refers to a range of mental processes including:

- Acquiring information
- Storing information for a short or long period of time
- Manipulating the information – meaning that you can use the information to complete another task and hold on to it at the same time
- Retrieving the information when you need to use it

Typical Adolescent Brain Development



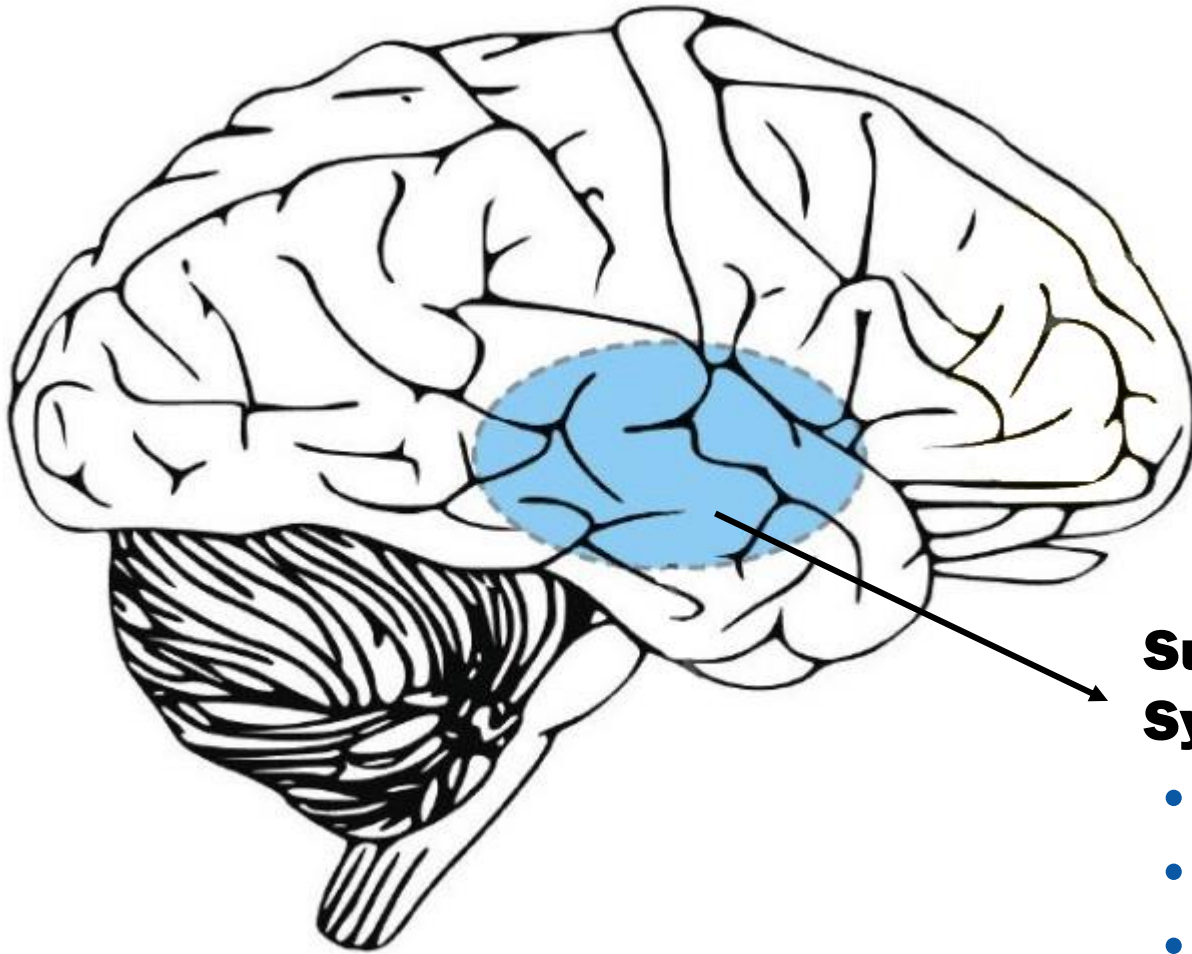
Diving Deeper into the Brain



Learning Brain (Frontal Lobe & Prefrontal Cortex)

- Sustain attention
- Inhibit impulses and select behaviors
- Hold information in memory
- Demonstrate cognitive flexibility

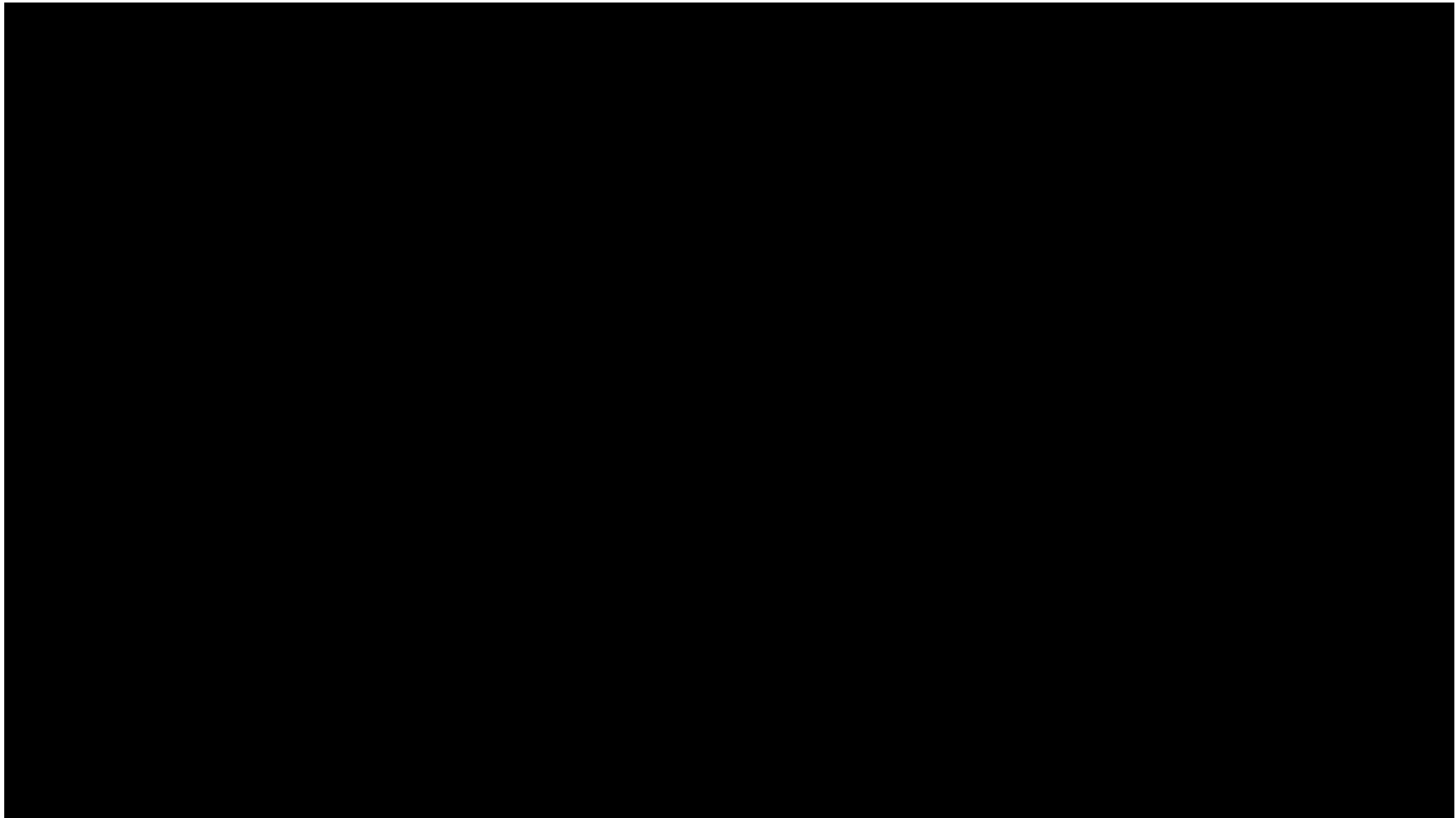
Diving Deeper into the Brain



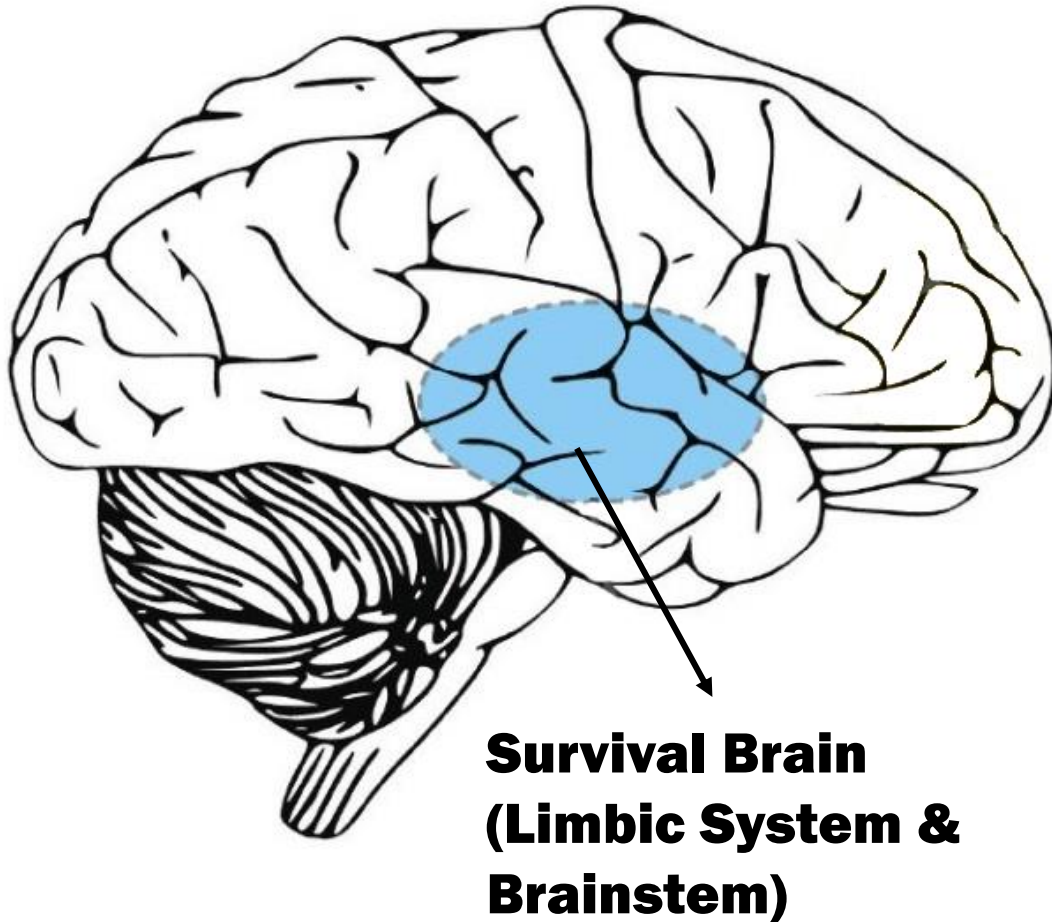
Survival Brain (Limbic System & Brainstem)

- Emotional Functioning
- Reward Center
- Fight/Flight/Freeze

Adolescent Development & Juvenile Justice

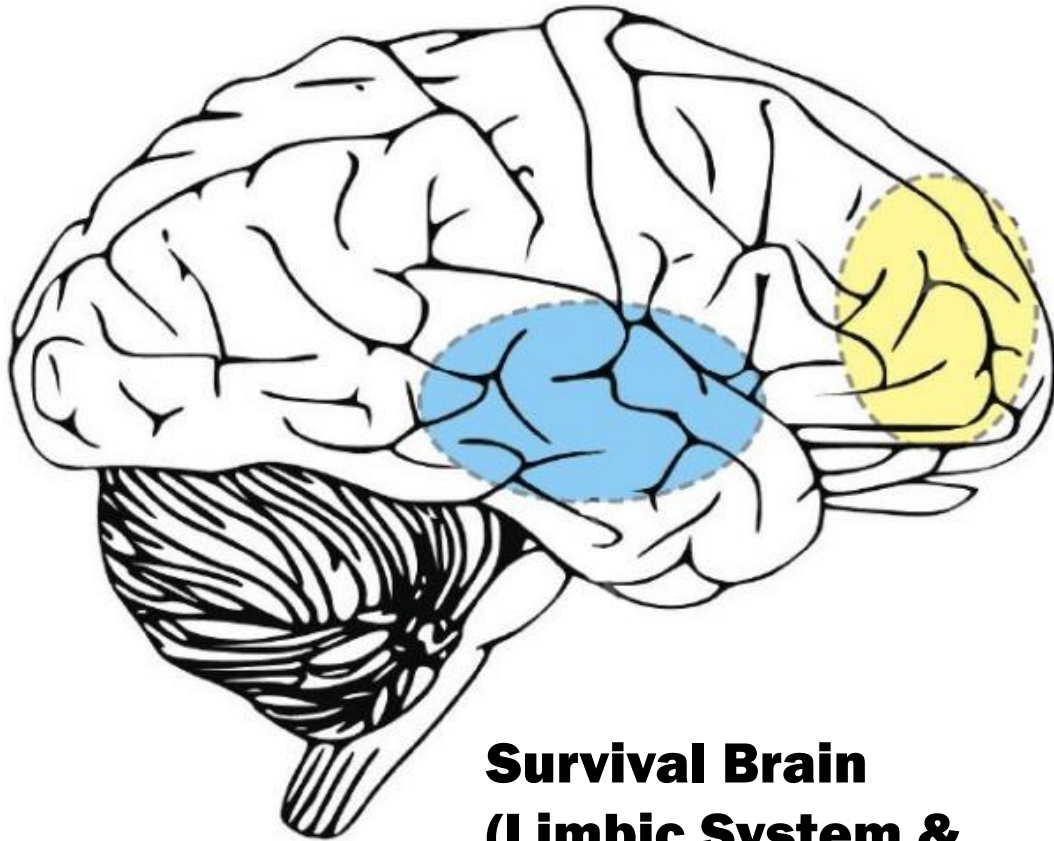


Trauma Interference with Functioning & Managing Danger



- Has difficulty sustaining attention
- Has memory impairments that make it hard to hold onto information and use it to solve problems
- Has trauma reactions that interfere with test taking and the ability to remember learned information
- Looking for danger which impedes their ability to focus.

Trauma Interference with Functioning & Managing Danger



**Survival Brain
(Limbic System &
Brainstem)**

When discussing trauma, one of the most important functions of both the survival and learning brain is dealing with danger from the outside world.

Trauma's Impact of Decision-Making

Reasons for poor decision-making for trauma-exposed youth may include:

- Misinterprets people and situations as threatening
- Has less self-control and difficulty thinking through consequences of decisions
- Is drawn to peers may be inexperienced at dealing with problems in healthy ways
- Has increased sensitivity to rewards during adolescence may make the above worse

Complex trauma can negatively impact short- and long-term decision making.



Getting Development Back on Track: Building Trust



New experiences with trusted adults and peers can help youth to develop alternative views of themselves, the world, and others.

Activity: Building Trust



- What is the impact of trauma on their relationships?
- What is the impact of trauma on their physical and cognitive development?
- How would you build trust with your youth?



Key Adolescent Developmental Tasks: Emotional & Behavioral Development

During adolescence, individuals:

- Have increased awareness and sensitivity to the emotional experiences of others and themselves
- Develop increased impulse control and wider range of behaviors to problem solve



Emotional Regulation

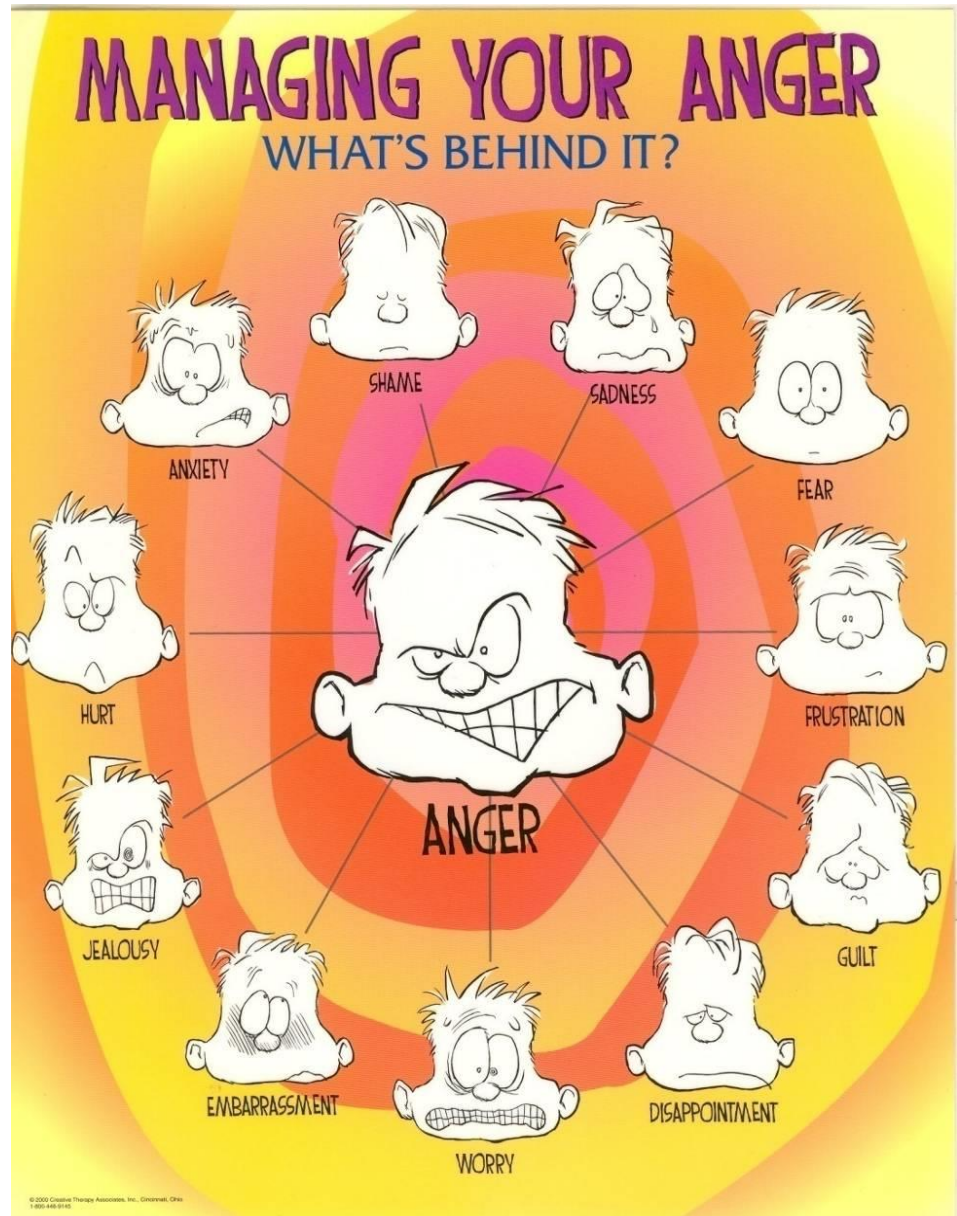


Trauma's Impact on Emotional Development

- Difficulty with self-regulation
- Difficulty describing feelings/internal states
- Difficulty communicating wishes and desires



Is it really
anger?



Behavioral Regulation



Trauma's Impact on Behavioral Development



Youth who have experienced significant trauma may have difficulty:

- Making realistic appraisals of danger and safety
- Governing behavior to meet longer-term goals

As a result, these adolescents may engage in:

- Reckless and risk-taking behavior
- Become avoidant of any risk



Getting Development Back on Track: Promoting Empowerment



Opportunities to develop a healthy sense of control over their lives builds resilience and counters the impact of trauma on their view of themselves, others, and the world.

Empowerment & Accountability Through Restorative Practices

- Traumatic experiences may explain behaviors that led to justice-involvement, but do not lessen the impact these behaviors had on victims of youth crime.
- Restorative justice provides tools to help youth repair the damage caused by their actions.
- Providing opportunities to repair damage allows youth to remain accountable while developing skills that will help them recover from the impact of their trauma.



Activity: Promoting Empowerment



- What's the impact of trauma on emotional and behavioral development?
- How might you empower your youth to better handle challenges in the future?



Developing a Sense of Self

- Primary goal of adolescence is to develop a secure sense of self.
- Youth commonly explore different versions of themselves during adolescence.
- Self exploration leads to trying different behaviors and forming a variety of relationships with peers.



Self-Concept



Dissociation



©Olly/Shutterstock, Inc

NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network



Key Adolescent Developmental Tasks: Future Orientation & Worldview

During adolescence, individuals:

- Establish adult vocational goals
- Develop independent identities
- Begin to plan for and imagine their futures
- Forge new relationships with mentors and role models



Trauma's Impact on Planning for the Future

Unprepared for Future

- Sense of a foreshortened future or cannot see any kind of future for themselves.
- Feel ill-equipped to handle the future because of the life skills they've missed along the way.

Difficulty Being Present

- Have many life pressures that make it hard to focus on the present or plan for the future.
- Have intense thoughts about revenge may make it difficult to focus on a more productive future.



The Invisible Suitcase



Trauma helps shape adolescents' beliefs and expectations:

- About themselves
- About the adults who care for them
- About the world in general

The Invisible Suitcase



“you’re paid to care”
**“get them before they
get you”**

“I’m no sucker”

“no one loves me”

“I’m stupid”

“grownups lie”

“you’re going to hurt me”

“I am bad”

“it’s all my fault”

Activity: What's in your Youth's Suitcase?



- What beliefs has the youth developed about themselves?
- What beliefs has the youth developed about others?
- What beliefs has the youth developed about the world and how it operates?
- How can you use trust and empowerment strategies to rebuild youth self-concept, future orientation and worldview?





JUVENILE JUSTICE

Take Home Messages

1. Many youth with trauma have developmental deficits from earlier in childhood.
2. Trauma can impact many adolescent developmental tasks.
3. You can help youth get back on track by building trust and empowerment through relationships.

© 2011, Richard Ross. All Rights Reserved