



Child Development and Trauma: Considerations for Educators

Alicia Rozum, MSW, PPSC

Project Director, Mental Health

arozum@schoolhealthcenters.org





Objectives

1. Conduct a self-care assessment and devise one strategy to employ next week.
2. Review our knowledge about child and adolescent development, particularly thinking, emotions and behavior.
3. Define "trauma" and understand its impact on the developing brain.
4. Discuss strategies educators can use to support students affected by trauma.



Self Care Assessment

- Working in schools is hard.
- We are affected by systemic trauma.
- We are affected by the trauma our students experience.
- Educators & Healthcare Providers can have their own trauma.
- Self-awareness and self-care are critical to supporting traumatized students.





Self-Care Is Critical

“It is not uncommon for school professionals who have a classroom with one or more students struggling from the effects of trauma , to experience symptoms very much like those their students are exhibiting.”

-The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resilience, and Academic Success



Child Development Review

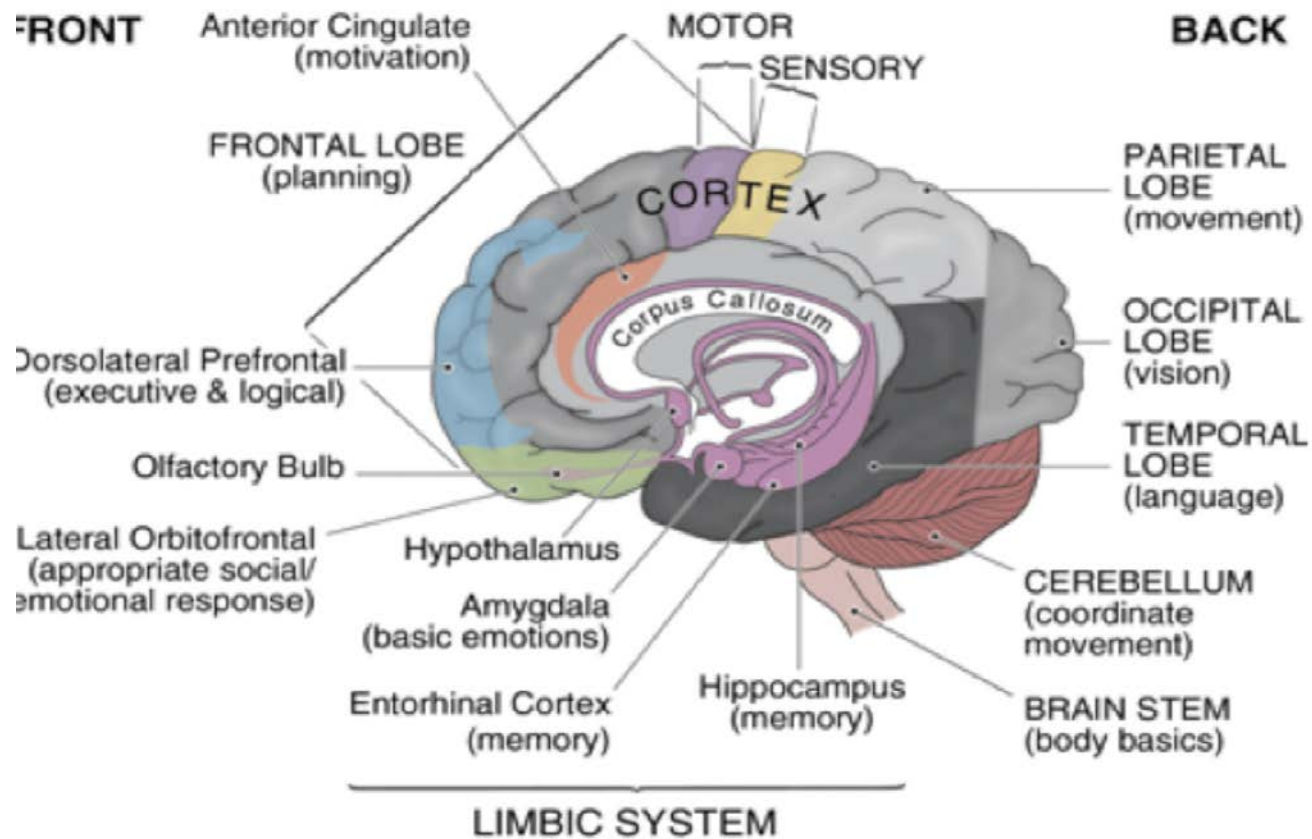




1. What do infants and young children need from caregivers?
2. What do infants and young children need from their environment?
3. What do preschool and school-aged kids need from their school?



Parts of the brain

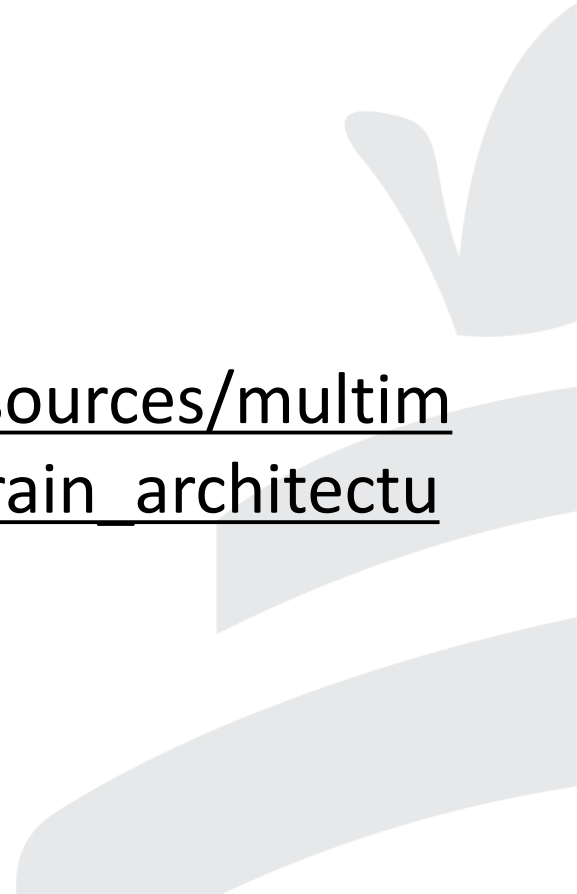




What influences child development?

- Intrauterine environment
- Endowments at birth
- Attachment
- Physical and cultural environment
- Quality and nature of parenting

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/three_core_concepts/brain_architecture/





Optimal Child Development

Provision of a safe environment

+

Attuned, reliable and consistent care

+

Patterned, repetitive responses

=

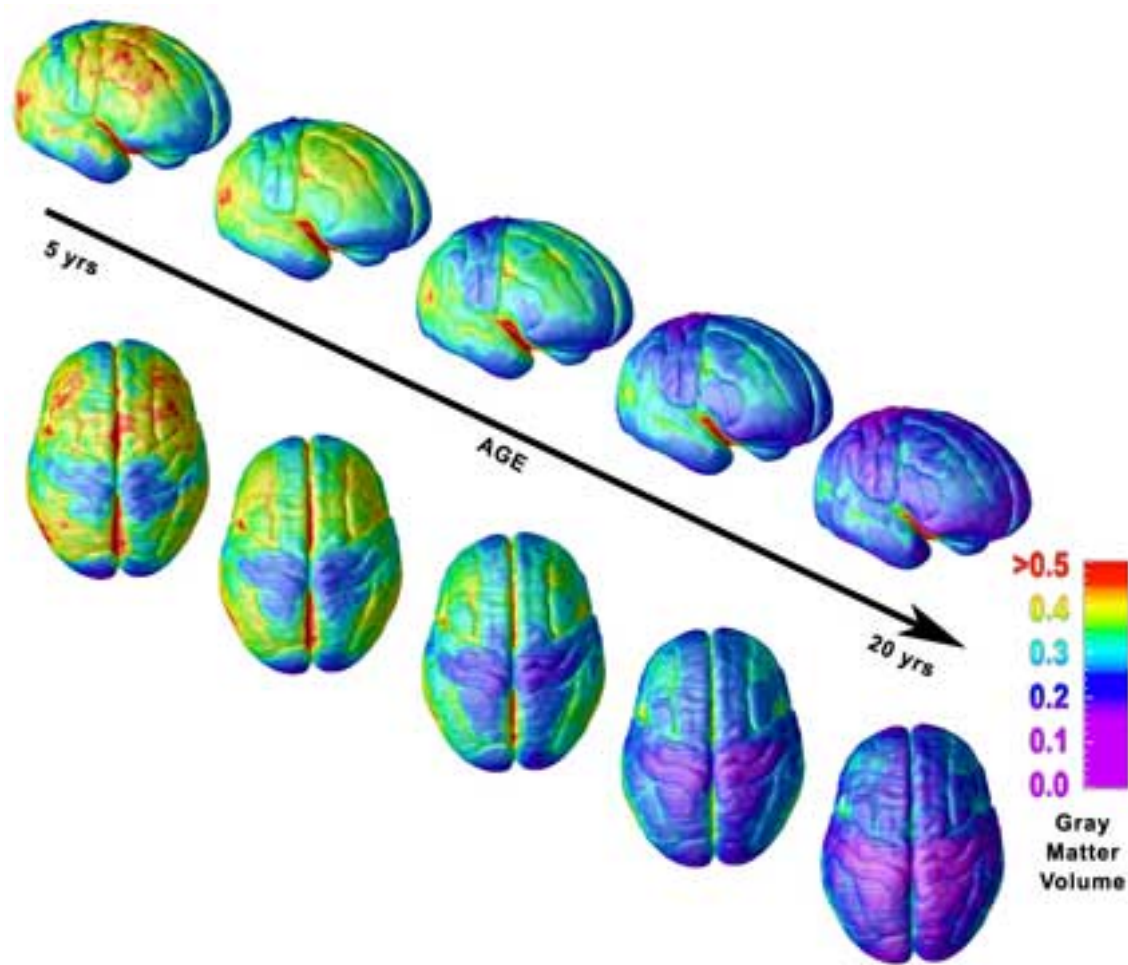
The best approach to optimizing children's
development.



Adolescent Development



Brain Imaging

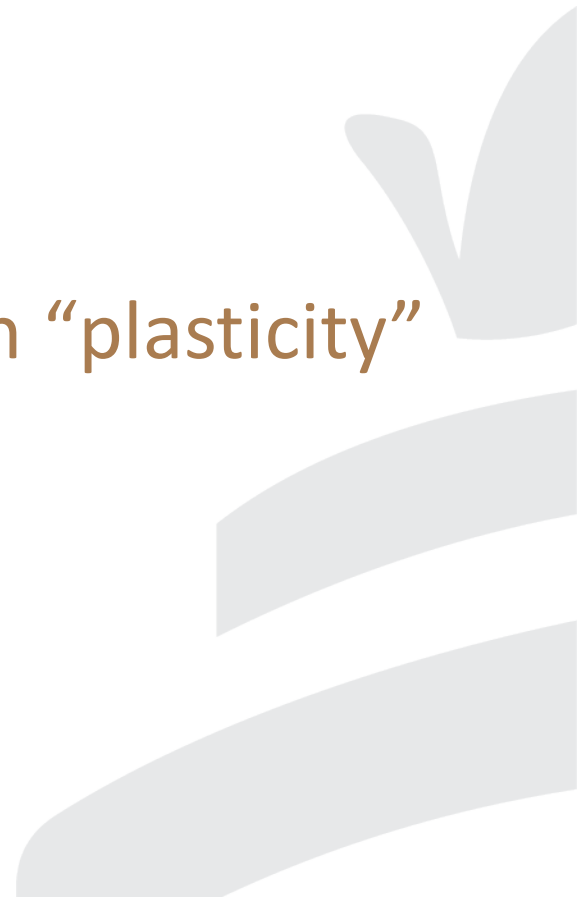


Brain development from age 5 to 20 / Source: Paul Thompson, professor of neurology, UCLA School of Medicine



What Do We Know About the Teen Brain?

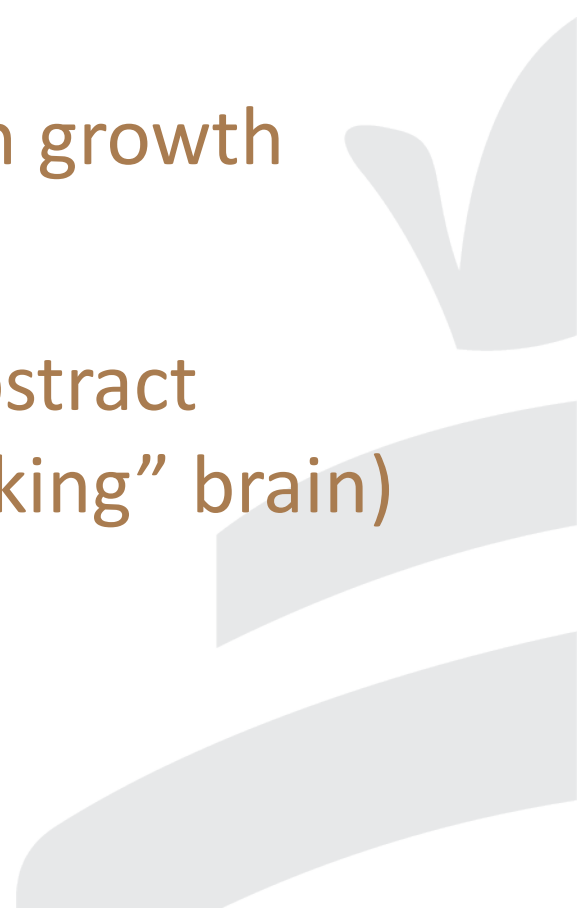
- Major brain growth spurt during teen years
- Brain develops until mid-20's
- “Use it or lose it” principal & brain “plasticity”





What Do We Know About the Brain?

- Brain matures in an environmental context
- High risk behavior related to brain growth
- Shift from concrete thinking to abstract thinking (“Feeling” brain to “Thinking” brain)





Shift Into Pre-Frontal Cortex

What Is Developing...

- Present-focus to future- vision
- Increased impulse control
- Increased emotional regulation
- Self-centered toward perspective taking
- “Seeing is believing” to imagining the possibilities

Adult Thinking & Behavior

- Planning and goal-setting
- Delay gratification
- Anticipate the future consequences
- Regulate emotions
- Behavior adjusts to situation
- Envision alternatives

Psychological & Emotional Development



Empathy
Positive self-regard
Sense of autonomy
Self-regulation skills
Positive coping skills
Conflict resolution skills
Optimism coupled with realism
Ability to comfort self and others
Recognition of right and wrong

DEVELOPMENTAL COMPETENCIES



Physical Development



Healthy Habits

Personal hygiene
Nutrition and exercise
Regular medical and dental care

Risk Management

Seat belts
Condoms
Bike helmets

Sense of belonging to society
Connectedness with parents/cargivers, peers, and other adults
Attachment to pro-social institutions such as school and church
Ability to navigate in multiple cultural contexts
Commitment to civic engagement



Social Development

Essential Life Skills:

Literacy Budgeting and banking
Shopping and cooking
Transportation and Safety planning

Essential Vocational Skills:

Job applications and interviews
Time management
Knowledge of more than one culture
Critical thinking and reasoning
Decision-making and planning

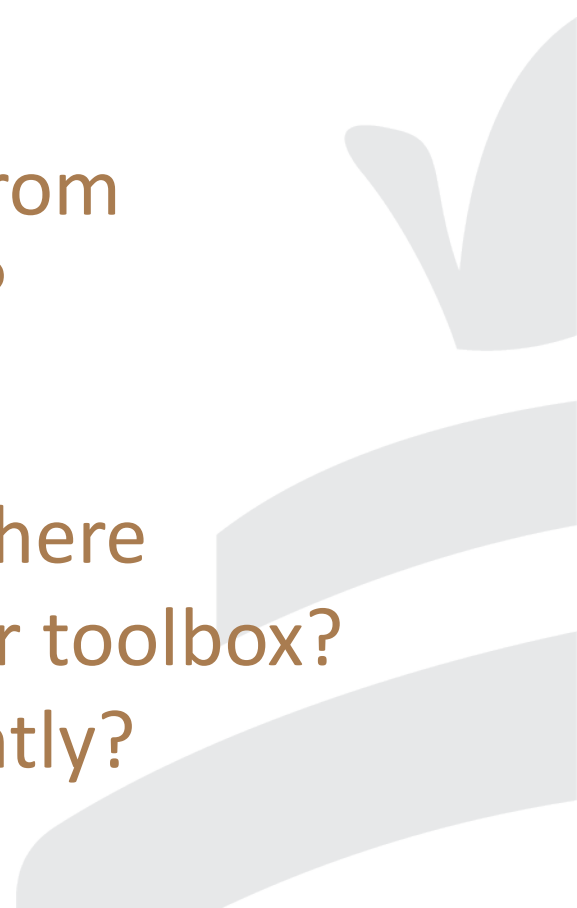


Intellectual Development



Strategies

- What is a strategy you have employed in your school/health center that considers child and adolescent development?
- What is something you learned from experience that DOES NOT work?
- After reviewing this research, is there something you would add to your toolbox? Something you would do differently?





How Can Schools Support Positive Development?

Classroom Environment

- Create a safe and stimulating environment in your classroom
- Provide opportunities for students to meaningfully participate, and decide things like classroom rules/ group agreements
- Introduce new information by connecting it to known information
- Allow for opportunities to practice new skills
- Reinforce new information through multiple stimuli—visual, arts, guest presenters, group work, student presentations
- Offer students brain “breaks”

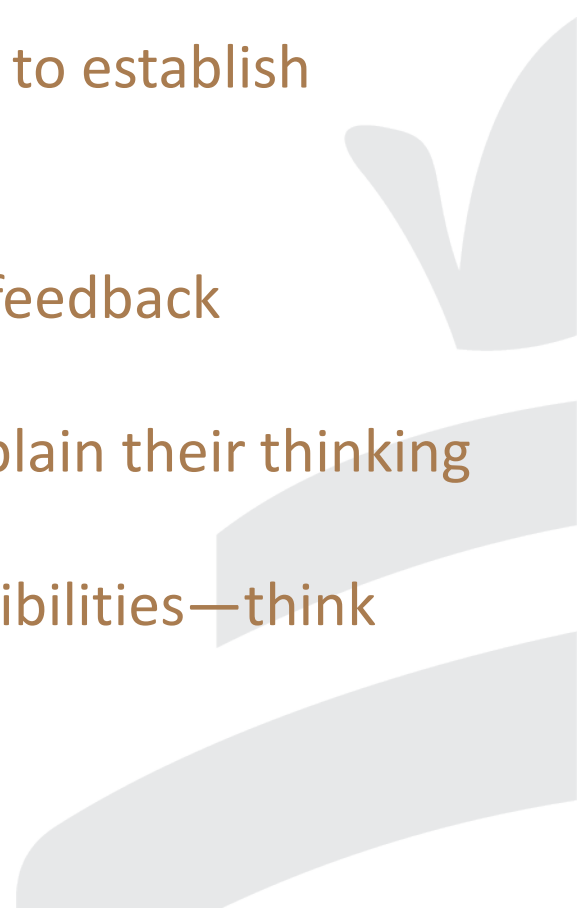




How Can Schools Support Positive Development?

Relational Skills

- Create opportunities for students to share and connect with one another (i.e. circles)
- Provide opportunities for healthy adults to establish mentor-like relationships with students
- 3:1 ratio of positive feedback to critical feedback
- Help students identify emotions and explain their thinking
- Help students explore options and possibilities—think into the future





Considerations About Trauma

- 60 % of California youth have at least one ACE.
- 60 % of youth have been exposed to violence.
- Trauma affects learning and school performance, and causes physical and emotional distress.
- Children/teens experience the same emotions as adults, but may not have the words to express them
- Some behaviors are protective in one environment, but problematic in another
- Schools have an important role to play in meeting the social/emotional needs of students




What Makes an Experience Traumatic?

- Overwhelming, very painful, very scary
- Fight or Flight incapacitated
- Threat to physical or psychological safety
- Loss of control
- Unable to regulate emotions





Types of Trauma

- Acute → earthquake
 - Chronic → sexual abuse
 - Toxic stress → community violence
 - Historical/Insidious → racism
 - Complex → caregiver neglect
- 



Trauma Impacts on Child Development

Trauma causes brain to adapt in ways that contributed to their survival (i.e. constant fight/flight/freeze).



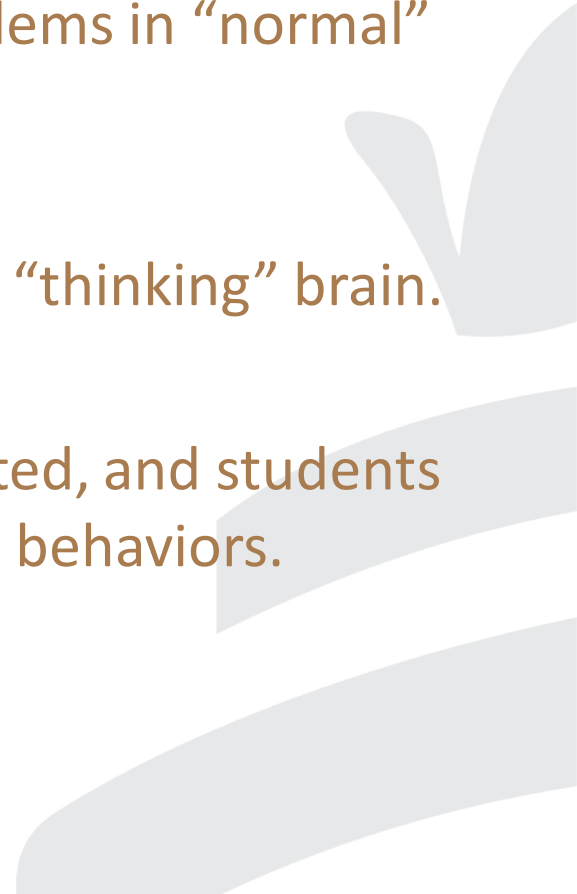
These adaptations can look like behavior problems in “normal” contexts, such as school.



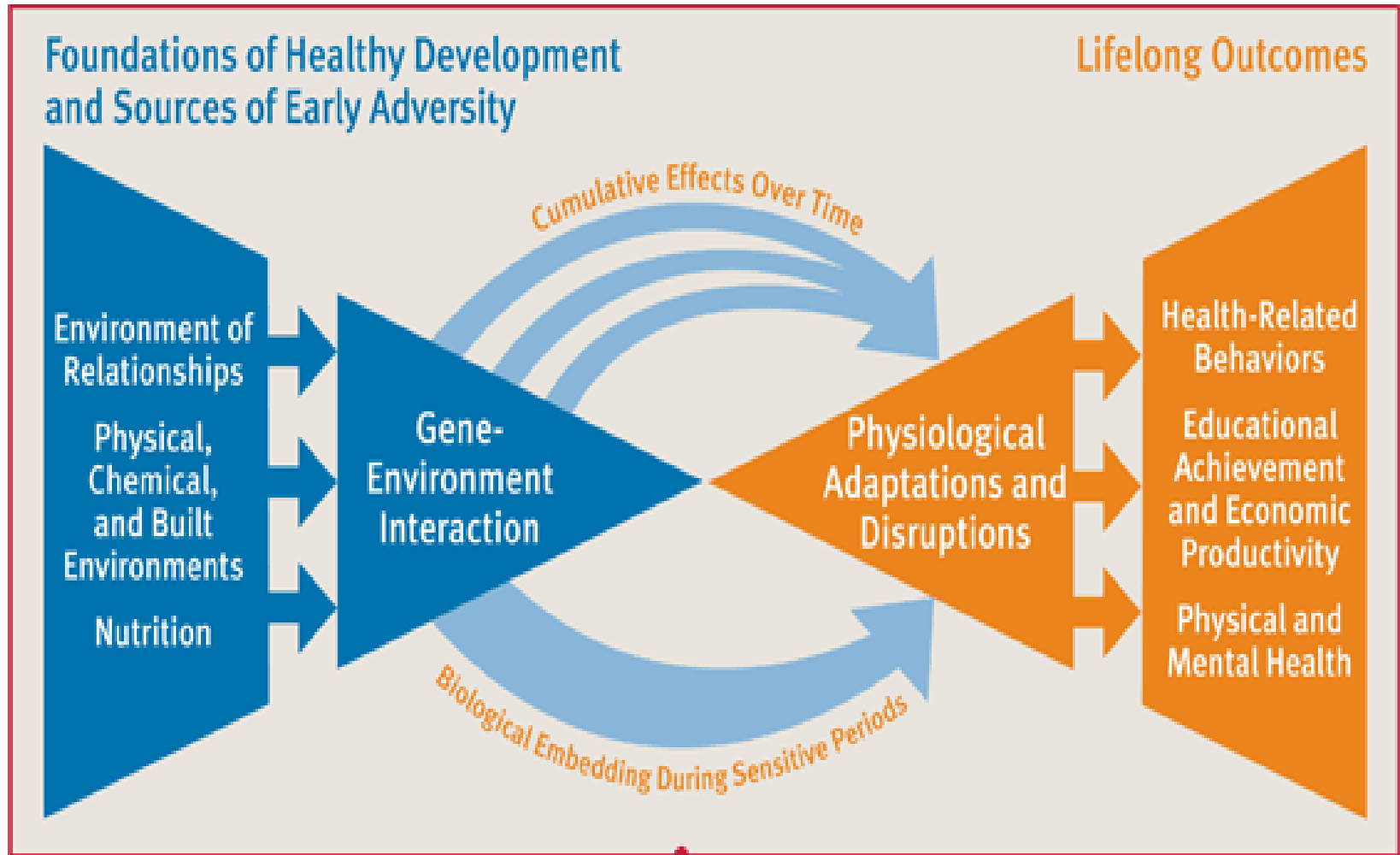
When triggered, “feeling” brain dominates the “thinking” brain.



The normal developmental process is interrupted, and students may exhibit internalizing or externalizing behaviors.



Gene/Environment Impact



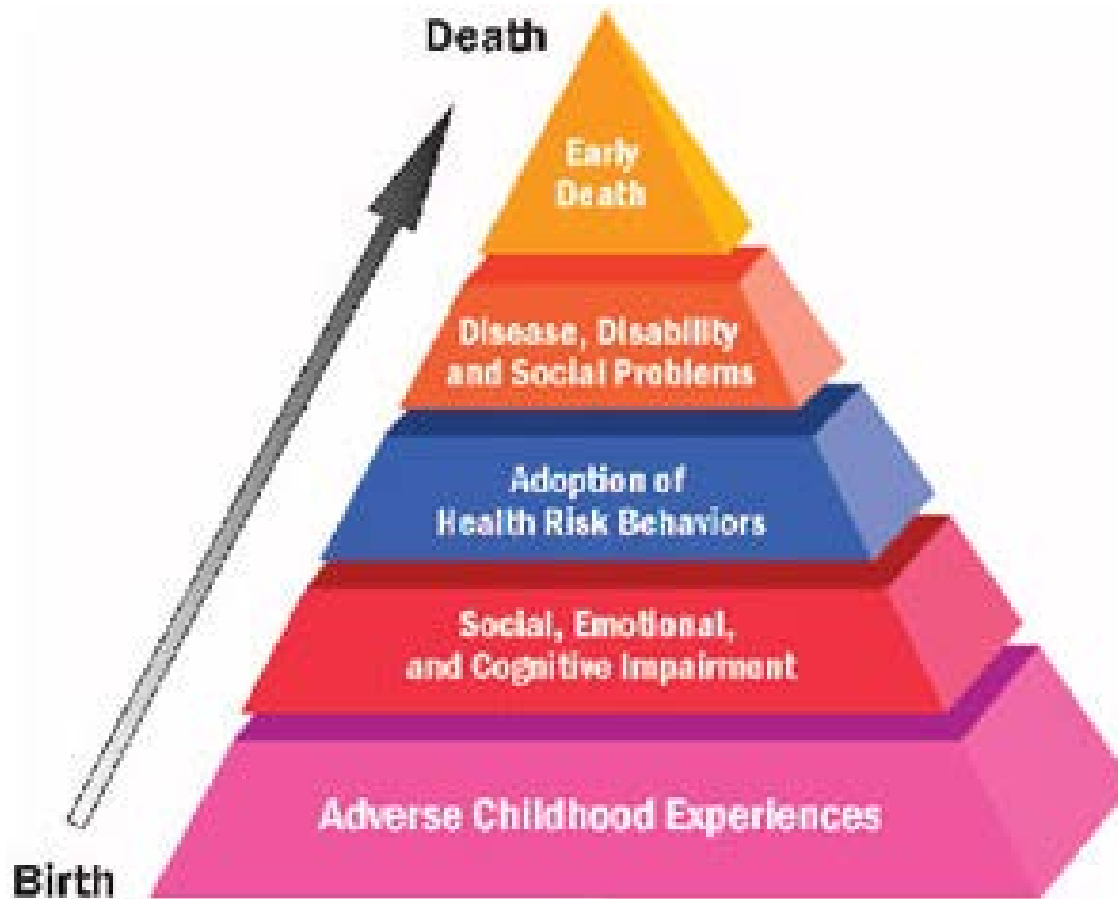


How does trauma impact child brain development?

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/three_core_concepts/toxic_stress/



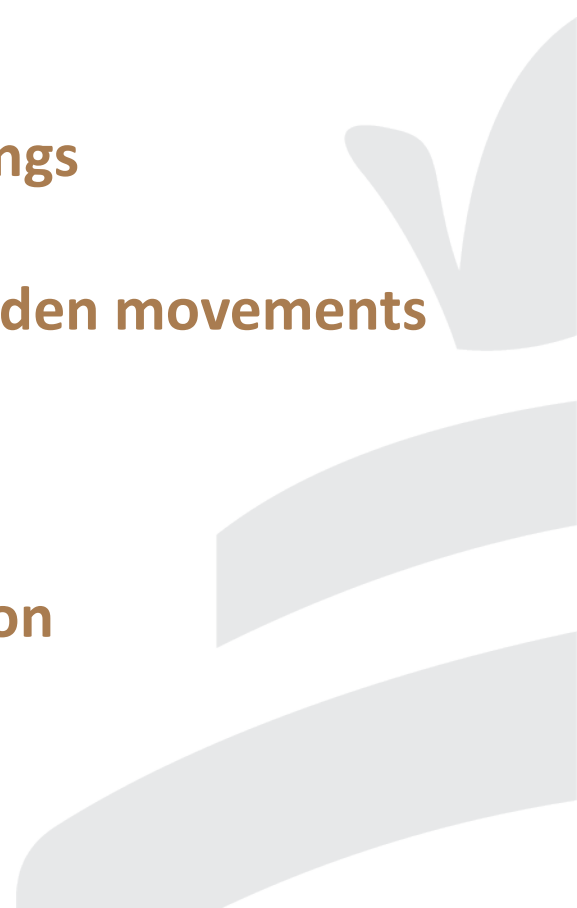
ACE Study





What Might You Notice?

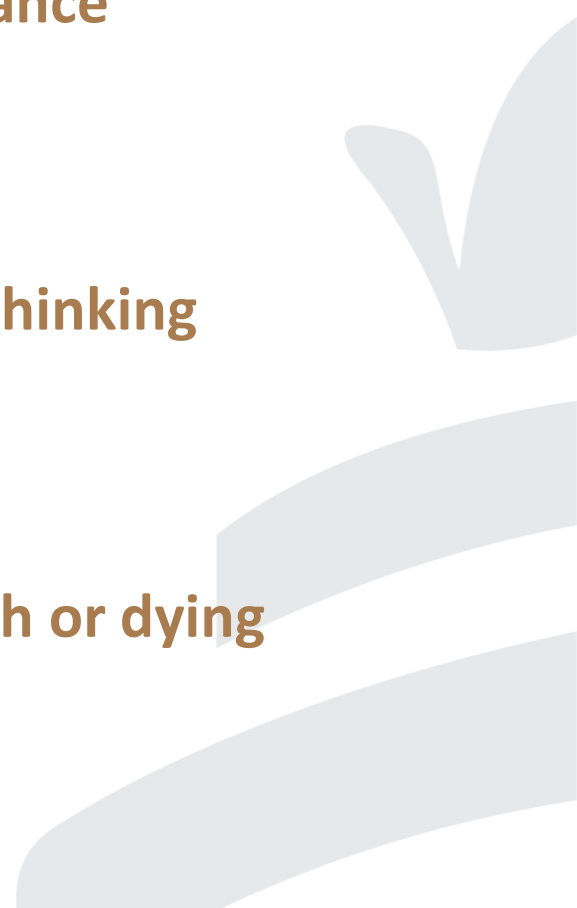
- Physical symptoms
- Poor emotional control/lashing out
- Confrontational/ control battles
- Overly protective of personal space/belongings
- Over- or underreacting to loud noises or sudden movements
- Difficulty with transitions
- Emotional response doesn't "match" situation





What Might You Notice?

- Depression/ withdrawal
- Anxiety/worry about safety of self and others
- Poor or changed school performance/attendance
- Avoidance behaviors
- Difficulty focusing, with attention, memory, thinking
- Increase in impulsive, risk-taking behaviors
- Repetitive thoughts or comments about death or dying
- Non-age appropriate behavior





Common Triggers

- Unpredictable situations or sudden changes
- Transitions
- Conflicts, disagreements or confrontation
- Particular sights, sounds, smells
- Feelings of vulnerability , powerlessness, or loss of control
- Experiences of rejection
- Praise, positive attention and intimacy





When a Student Is Triggered...

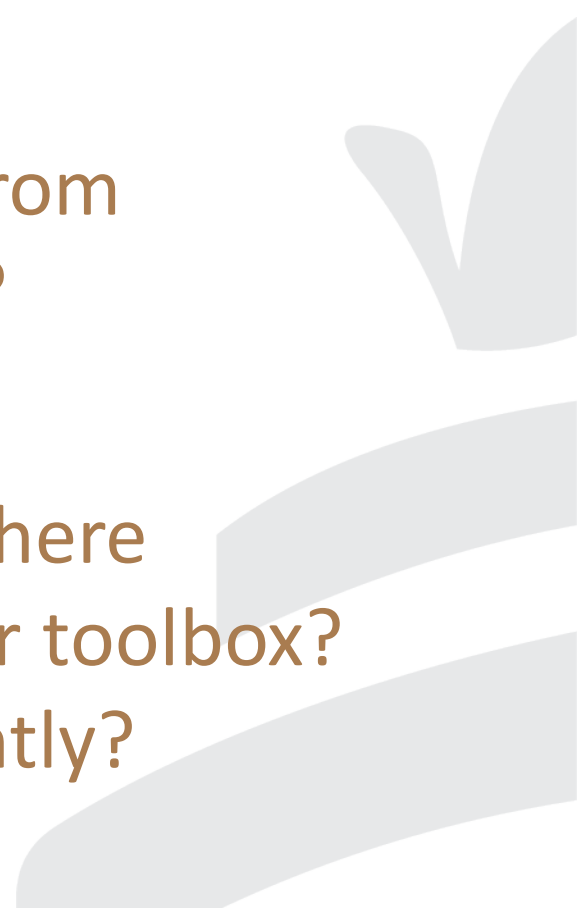
- Breathe! Be calm and you will help the student be calm.
- Do not use this as a time to try to change behavior or demand respect.
- Call for help, or ask another person to call.
- Notice your tone of voice and personal space.
- Remember that the student is probably not engaged in the pre-frontal cortex right now!





Strategies

- What is a strategy you have employed in your work that supports and youth who've experienced trauma?
- What is something you learned from experience that DOES NOT work?
- After reviewing this research, is there something you would add to your toolbox? Something you would do differently?





How can school and health center staff help?

Classroom Environment

Establish classroom agreements for behavior

Provide routines and consistency

Provide explicit preparation for changes and transitions

Seat students near the front or near you

Allow students to step outside of the classroom or put their head down

Give opportunities for creative expression

Teach about the power of mindsets

School Environment

Build 1:1 relationships with struggling students

Use restorative discipline practices

Create time in schedule for community building, circles, mindfulness

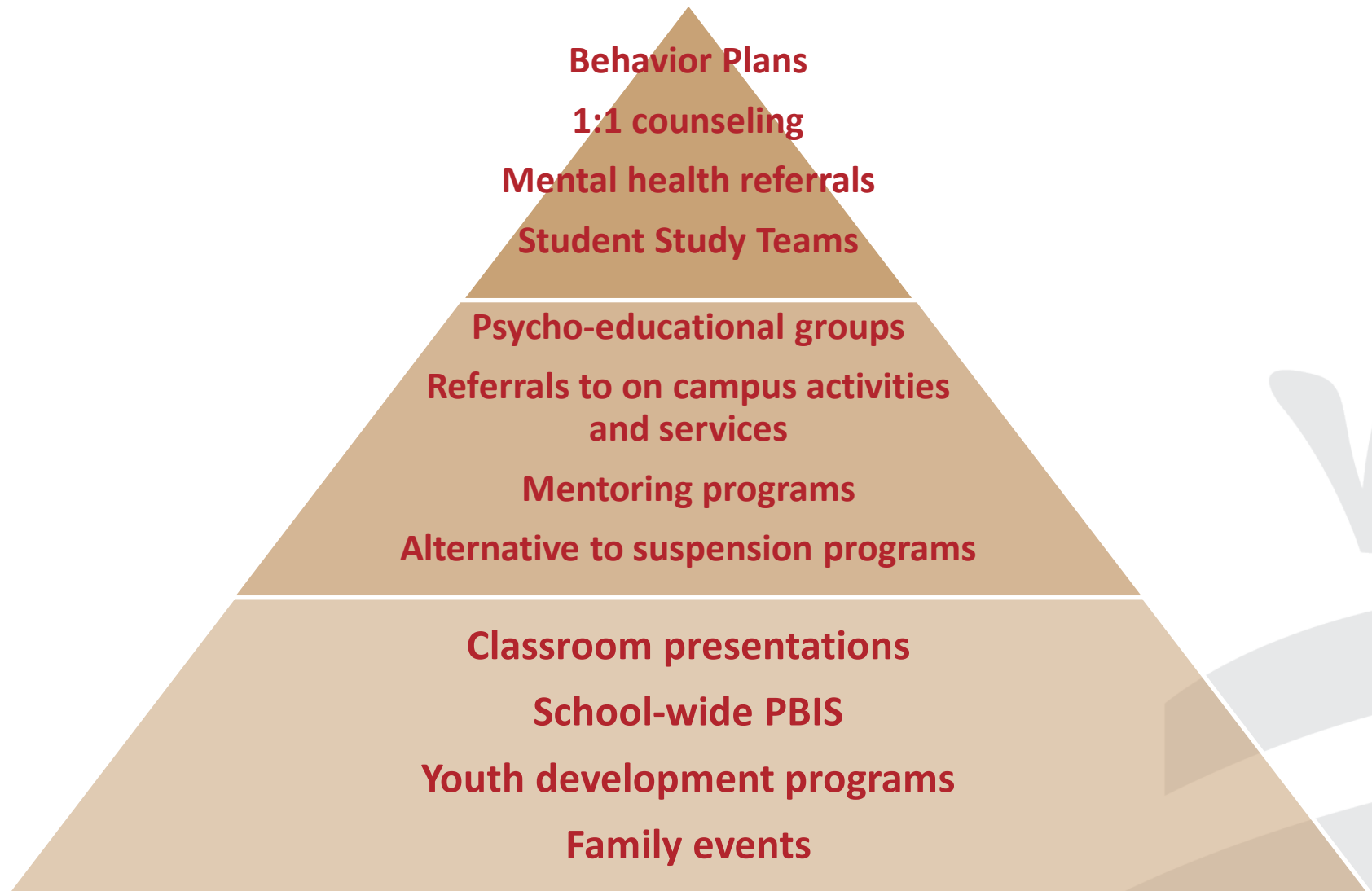
Ensure students have adequate break time

Establish mentoring programs

Dedicate staff PD time to trauma-informed practices



How can the school environment help?





Resilience

- Responsive caregiving provided to youth from trusted adults can moderate the effects of early stress and neglect associated with trauma
- Building resilience can counter the effects of trauma/ACE's and help lead youth to more effective, productive and healthy adulthoods

St. Andrews, Alicia (2013). *Trauma and Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit*.
San Francisco, CA: Adolescent Health Working Group, San Francisco, CA



Resources for Educators and Health Professionals working in Schools

- Adolescent Health Working Group:
www.ahwg.net
- Harvard Center on the Developing Brain:
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist:
http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/sspw_mhtrauma
- School mental health program consultation:
California School-Based Health Alliance,
www.schoolhealthcenters.org



References

1. UCSF HEARTS (Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools Project) Child and Adolescent Services, Department of Psychiatry, UCSF/San Francisco General Hospital Joyce Dorado, PhD and Lynn Dolce, MFT.
2. Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, David J. Schonfeld, MD
3. Castro-Rodriguez, G. (2014, May). Overview of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care. Lecture conducted from Kaiser Permanente, Oakland, CA.
4. Wright, T. (2014, May 6). Reframing Risk and Resilience in Young Children with Messy Lives. Devereux Center for Resilient Children Webinar. Webinar retrieved from www.centerforresilientchildren.org.
5. St. Andrews, Alicia (2013). *Trauma and Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit*. San Francisco, CA: Adolescent Health Working Group, San Francisco, CA
6. Oehlberg, Barbara (2008). Why Schools Need to be Trauma Informed. *Trauma and Loss: Research and Interventions*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall/Winter, 2008. Retrieved from www.traumainformedcareproject.org

References

7. National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee. (2008, October). Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.
8. Hertel, R. & Wilson, M. (2014, March 25). Creating Compassionate, Trauma-Informed Schools to Promote Student Well-being and Resilience. Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration Webinar. Webinar retrieved from www.samhsa.gov
9. Wolpov, R, Johnson, M.M., Hertel, R., and Kincaid, S.O. (2011, January). The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resilience, and Academic Success. Olympia, WA: State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Retrieved from www.k12.wa.us/compassionateschools/resources
10. Steinberg, L. (2009, February). Commentary: A Behavioral Scientist Looks at the Science of Adolescent Brain Development. National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD. Retrieved from www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles
11. Marijuana May Hurt the Developing Brain. Morning Edition. National Public Radio. 2014, March 3. Transcript.
12. Teen Drinking May Cause Irreversible Brain Damage. Morning Edition. National Public Radio. 2010, January 25. Transcript.