

Keep Calm and Coregulate: A Trauma Informed Response to Behaviors

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Learning Objectives



- Understand how trauma responses arise in relation to common behavior problems
- Explore strategies to respond to your own nervous system to promote a coregulation space
- Utilize a step-wise problem solving approach to support a child's nervous system

Disclosures



- None of the planners or speakers for this activity have relevant financial relationships to disclose.
- Resilience University is a “University” in name only
- Online resources with free courses and downloadable content

Why a Trauma Informed Response to Behaviors?



Universal Trauma Informed Response



More than **TWO THIRDS OF CHILDREN** reported at least 1 traumatic event by age 16.¹ Potentially traumatic events include:

PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL, OR SEXUAL ABUSE

COMMUNITY OR SCHOOL VIOLENCE

WITNESSING OR EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

NATURAL DISASTERS OR TERRORISM

COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

SUDDEN OR VIOLENT LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

REFUGEE OR WAR EXPERIENCES

MILITARY FAMILY-RELATED STRESSORS
(E.G., DEPLOYMENT, PARENTAL LOSS OR INJURY)

PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL ASSAULT

NEGLECT

SERIOUS ACCIDENTS OR LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS

SAMHSA.gov, Understanding Child Trauma

REPORT FEELING CONSUMED BY WORRIES REGARDING MONEY

66%

39%

AGREE THEY FEEL EMBARRASSED TALKING ABOUT MONEY/THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION WITH OTHERS

57%

39%

NO ONE UNDERSTANDS HOW STRESSED OUT THEY ARE

62%

42%

MOST DAYS THEIR STRESS IS COMPLETELY OVERWHELMING

48%

26%

WHEN THEY ARE STRESSED, THEY CAN'T BRING THEMSELVES TO DO ANYTHING

50%

28%

MOST DAYS THEY ARE SO STRESSED THEY CAN'T FUNCTION

41%

20%

STRESS MAKES IT HARD FOR THEM TO FOCUS

60%

37%

THEY ARE SO STRESSED THEY FEEL NUMB

42%

22%

■ PARENTS* ■ OTHER ADULTS**

American Psychological Association. Stress in America 2023: a nation recovering from collective trauma. Nov 2023. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2023/collective-trauma-recovery>

Symptoms of Trauma in children (& their parents!)



- React Intensely
- Lack of impulse control
- Unpredictable
- Oppositional
- Defensive or aggressive
- Worry, feeling tense
- Irritability
- Sleep problems

From the National Child Traumatic Stress Network
<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma>

Multi-generational Neurohormonal Stress Response



Hypothalamus

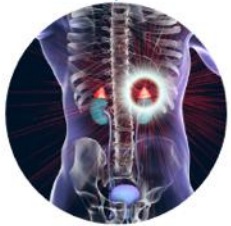


Peri-Aqueductal Grey

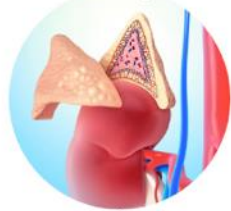
Sympathetic Innervation

Anterior Pituitary (↑ CRH, ACTH)

Posterior Pituitary



↑ Epinephrine & Norepinephrine



Adrenal Cortex
-> ↑ CORTISOL



↑ Oxytocin



Freeze

←---Fight or flight---→



Affiliate

Adapted from Garner AS, Saul RA. *Thinking Developmentally: Nurturing Wellness in Childhood to Promote Lifelong health*. Ithaca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018.

S T R E S S R E S P O N S E

POSITIVE

Physiological response to mild or moderate stressor

Brief activation of stress response elevates heart rate, blood pressure, and hormonal levels

Homeostasis recovers quickly through body's natural coping mechanisms

Tough test at school, playoff game

TOLERABLE

Adaptive response to time-limited stressor

Time-limited activation of stress response results in short-term systemic changes

Homeostasis recovers through buffering effect of caring adult or other interventions

Immigration, natural disaster

TOXIC

Maladaptive response to intense and sustained stressor

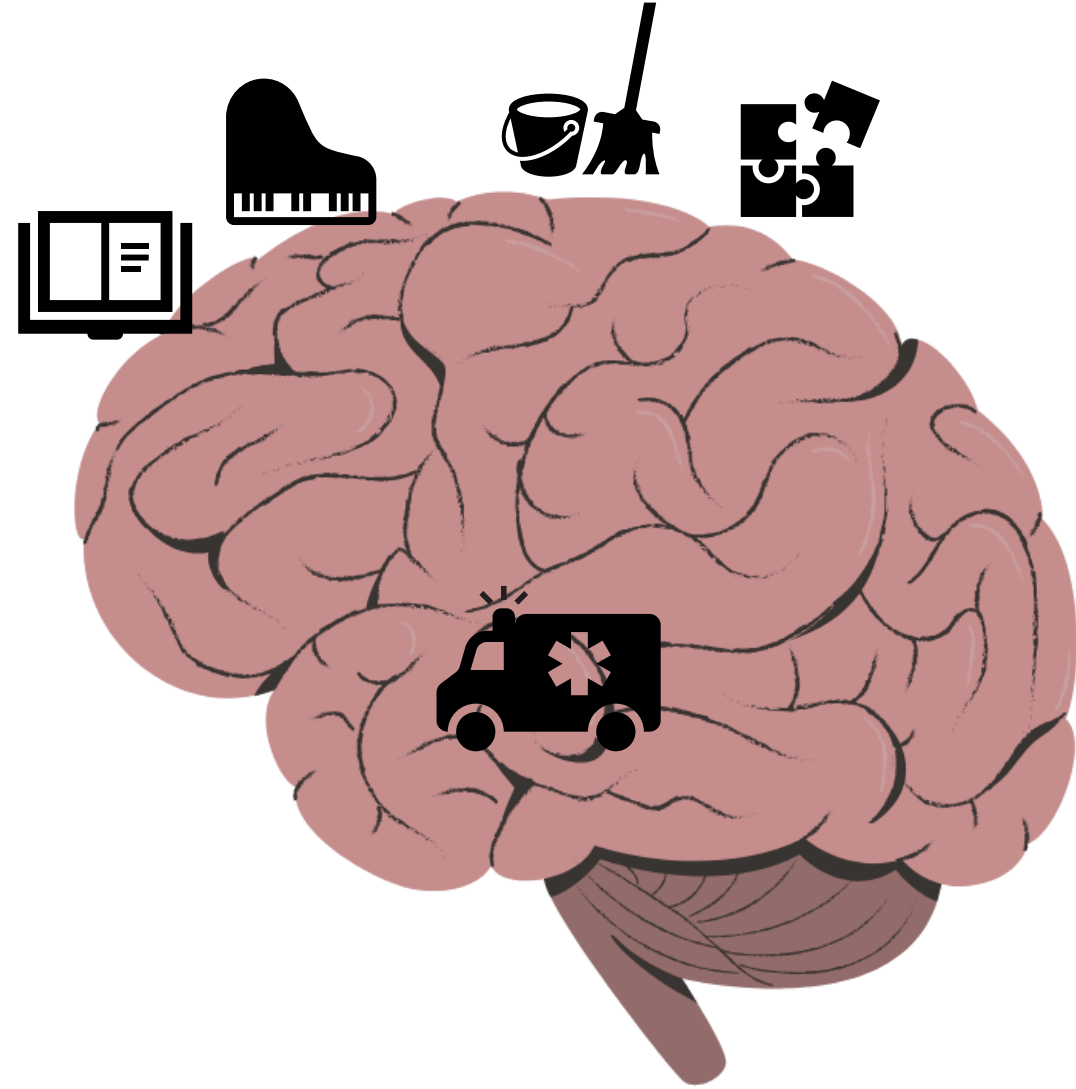
Prolonged activation of stress response in children disrupts brain architecture and increases risk of health disorders

Prolonged allostatic load establishes a chronic stress response

Abuse, neglect, household dysfunction

Originally published in Bucci M, Marques SS, Oh D, Harris NB. Toxic stress in children and adolescents. *Advances in Pediatrics* 2016; 63(1): 403-28; accessed from California Surgeon General's Roadmap for Resilience https://osg.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/266/2022/05/Roadmap-For-Resilience_CA-Surgeon-Generals-Report-on-ACEs-Toxic-Stress-and-Health_12092020.pdf

“Firetruck Brain”

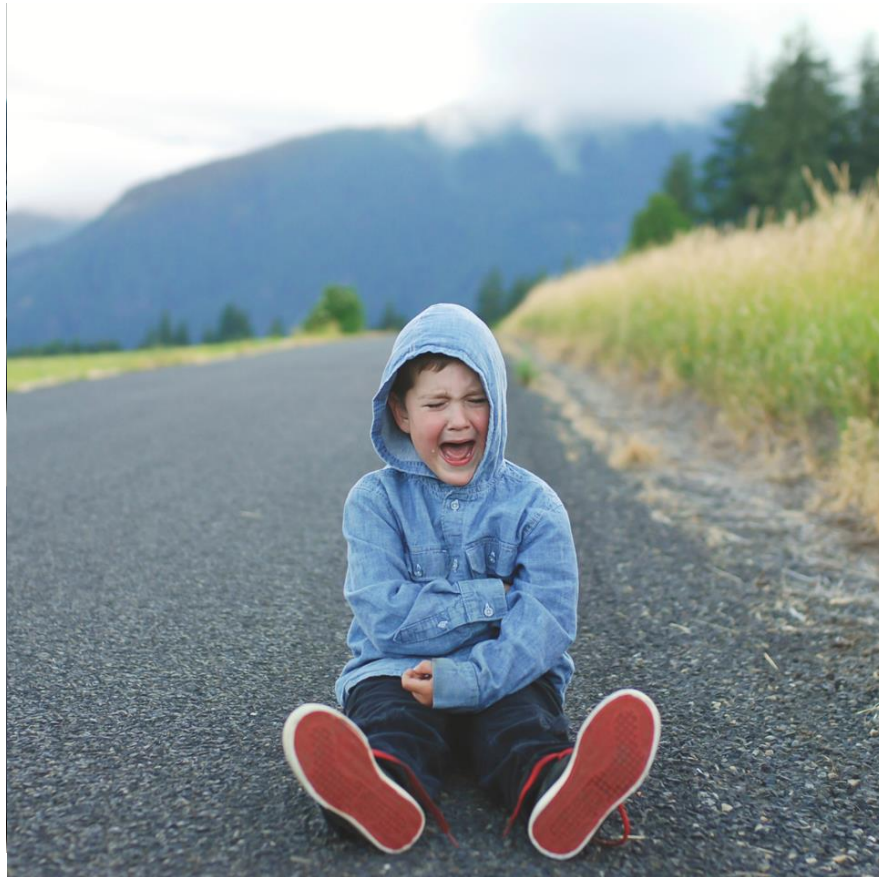


*Inspired by Dan Siegel's "Flipping your lid," Mindsight, Bantam
2010*

Toxic Stress
can be
mundane
events



Reframing Trauma Symptoms



Universal Trauma Informed Precautions

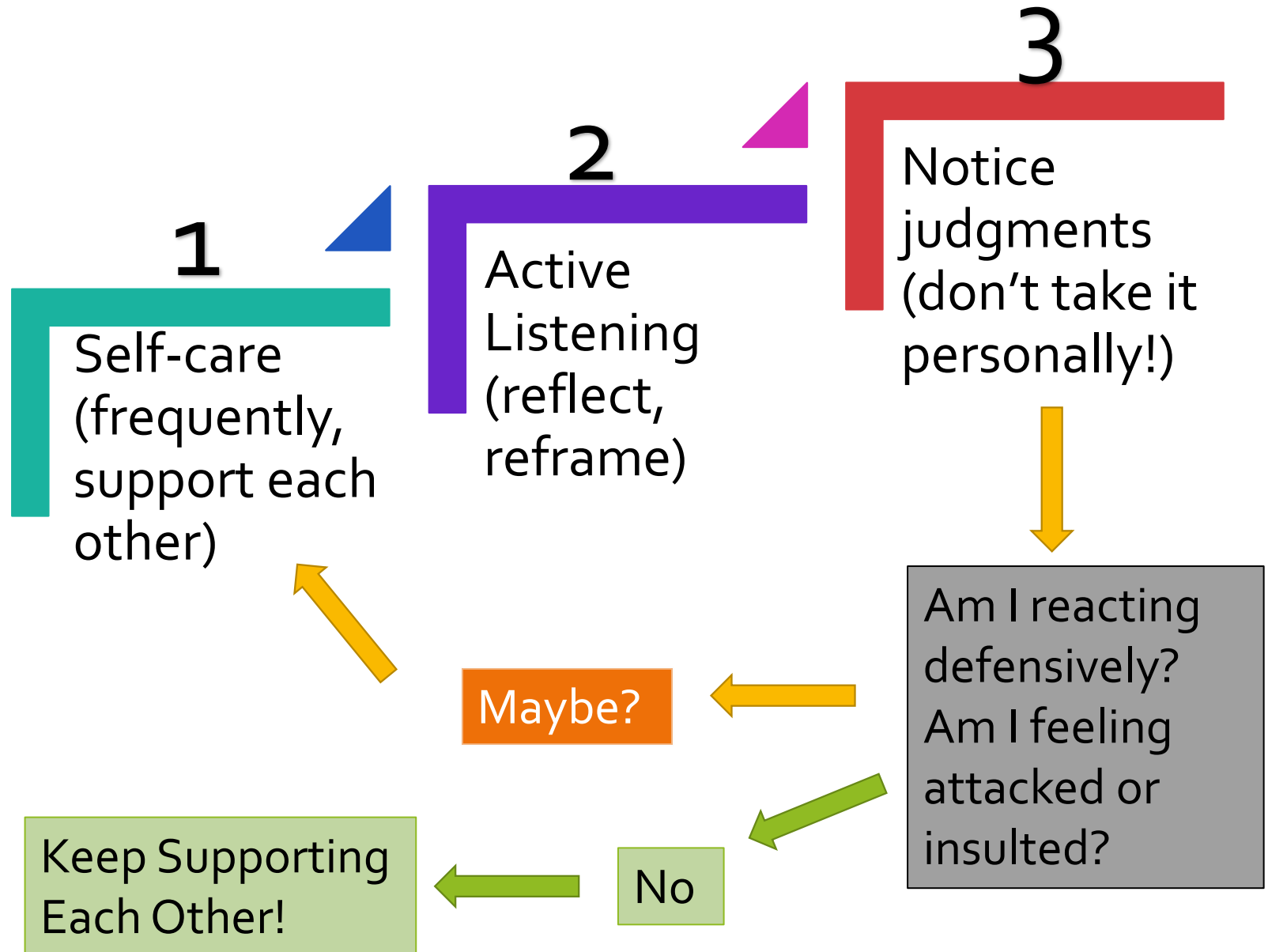


1. *Take into consideration the impact of pervasive crises (i.e. COVID)*
2. *Use therapeutic communication*
3. *No room for judgements*
4. *Create a healing environment*
5. *Practice self-care*

<https://sites.rutgers.edu/shp-shpri/trauma-informed-care-universal-precautions/> (Rutgers University)



Step-wise approach for TIC



Coregulation



Regulation Strategies



- *Breathing*
- *Meditation*
- *Mindfulness*

“

"BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE, THERE IS A SPACE. IN THAT SPACE LIES OUR FREEDOM AND POWER TO CHOOSE OUR RESPONSE."

Viktor Frankl

6 STEPS TO CONSISTENTLY PROVIDING TRAUMA INFORMED CARE



1

SEE:

WHAT IS HAPPENING FEELS FRUSTRATING, OVERWHELMING, STRESSFUL OR YOU'RE SHUTTING DOWN.



2

UNHOOK:

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY!

IF YOU HAVE A HABITUAL WAY OF RESPONDING WHEN THIS SCENARIO HAPPENS, TRY NOT TO DO IT!



3

NURTURE:

PAUSE TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. YOU'VE GOT THIS. REGULATE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM FIRST BEFORE YOU RESPOND TO PATIENT.



4

NOTICE:

YOUR PATIENT IS HAVING A STRESS RESPONSE AND WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO ACCESS THE CARE THEY NEED WITH A TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE.



5

IDENTIFY:

TRY TO IDENTIFY WHAT YOUR PATIENT IS EXPERIENCING. ARE THEY SCARED? SAD? FRUSTRATED?

OFFER 3 VALIDATING STATEMENTS.



6

CONNECT:

CO-REGULATE & CO-CREATE A PLAN. START WITH STRENGTHS & OFFER A COPING SKILLS OR SUPPORT WITH ACCESSING RESOURCES.

3 VALIDATING STATEMENTS:

1. "OF COURSE YOU FEEL ____"
2. "YOU'RE HAVING A NORMAL RESPONSE TO A STRESSFUL SITUATION."
3. "ANYONE WOULD FEEL ____ WHEN ____."

Five Big Deep Breaths



5x Breathe in deeply, through your nose all the way into your belly. 5x



Blow out through your mouth like you're blowing out a candle. Try to exhale for longer than you inhale.

Repeat at least 5 times!

Breathing



REPEAT AT LEAST 4 TIMES

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RELAXATION BREATHING



4 (in): I am okay.

7 (hold): This feeling will come and go.

8 (out): I am loved and I can do this.

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breathe in 2, 3, 4
breathe out 2, 3, 4

repeat until you arrive at the chaos!



Meditation

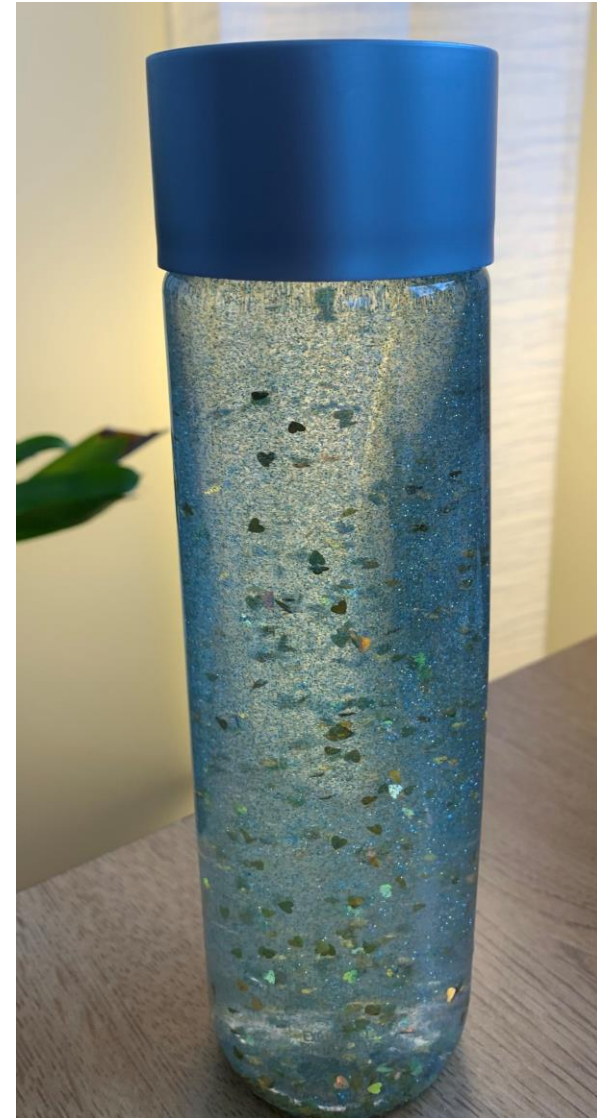
LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

“

“MAY I BE SAFE.
MAY I BE HEALTHY.
MAY I BE HAPPY.
MAY I LIVE WITH EASE.

MAY MY CHILDREN BE SAFE.
MAY MY CHILDREN BE HEALTHY.
MAY MY CHILDREN BE HAPPY.
MAY MY CHILDREN LIVE WITH EASE.”

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Mindfulness

calm

your
nervous
system

*use your
senses*



*Find all the things
that are blue you
can see.*



*What are three
things you can
hear?*



*What are three
things you can
touch?*



*Name one of your
favorite smells
and imagine it.*

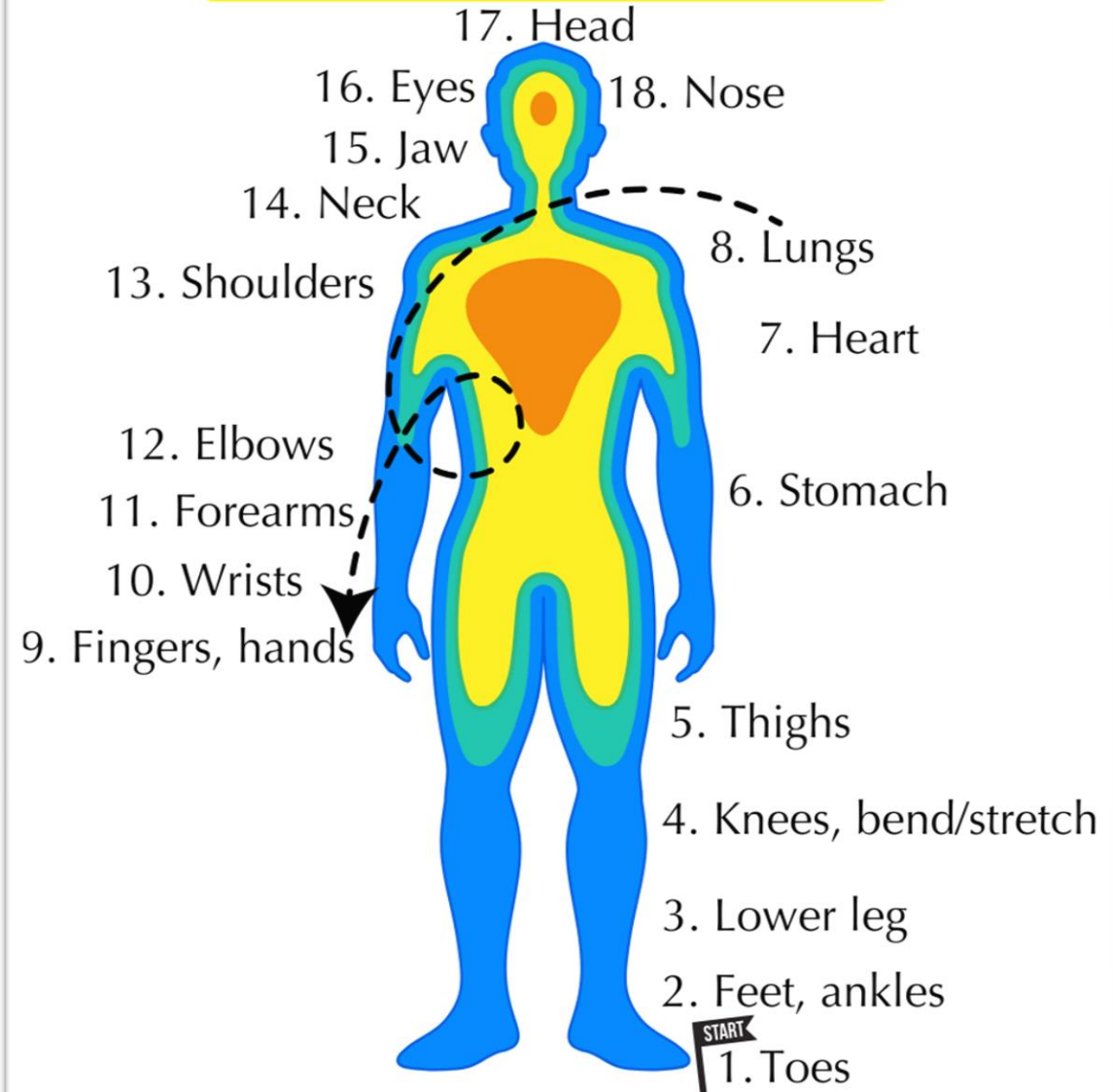


*Imagine how your
favorite thing to
eat tastes.*



*Give yourself a big
squeazy hug for 6
seconds.*

TOES-TO-NOSE: A BODY SCAN



#1 Check in with your toes. Wiggle them. How are your toes? Your feet? Your ankles? Roll your feet in circles.



#2 Check in with your legs. Bend your knees, how are your legs? How are your hips? Your stomach? Are you hungry?

#3 Check in with your heart. Put your hand on your chest, see if you can feel it beating.



#4 Check in with your lungs. Take a few big deep breaths.

#5 How are your hands? Clench and release your fists. How are your elbows? Arms?



#6 Roll your shoulders & neck. Are they tight?

TOES-TO-NOSE

#6 How is your mouth? Jaw? Eyes? Nose? Head?



Stress Mitigating Factors



Affiliate Response:

- Being able to talk about feelings, experiences
- Supportive relationships (caregivers & non-parent adults)
- Access to resources, supports, healthy coping skills
- For parents, an awareness of child development
- Sense of self efficacy and perceived control
- Sense of hope & mattering

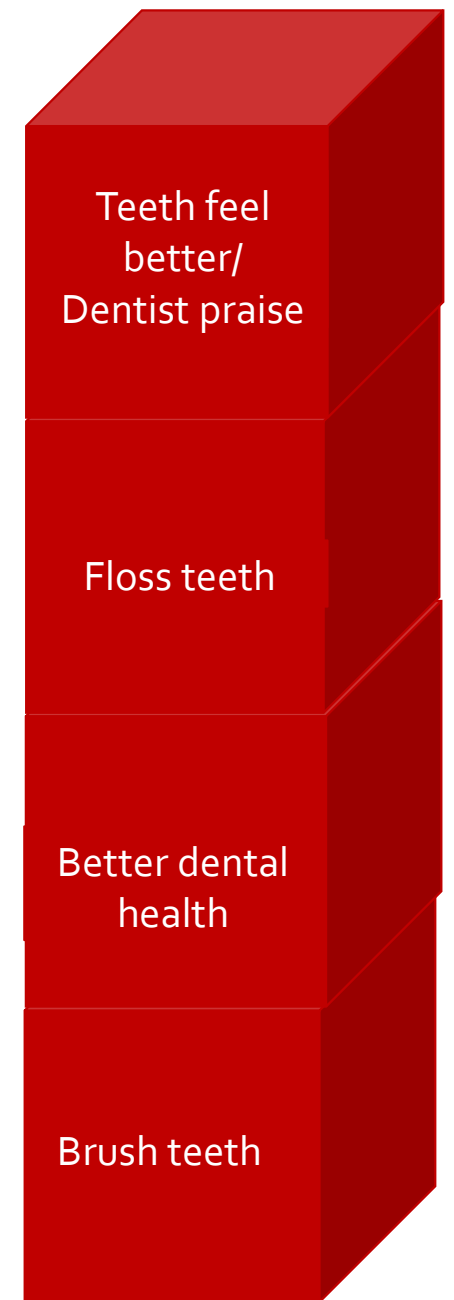
A step-wise
“Quality
Improvement”
approach to
change



Habit Stacking



Steps



Example

Fighting kids on the playground



- At recess, Sam punched another kid and the kid hit him back. You are called out to help.
- You bring Sam back to your office to bandage his cuts.
- You're aware his family has recently become homeless.
- Feeling tired, frustrated, stressed
- Current response?



Recognize your own stress response

- Fight Response: “I don’t have time for this!”
- Flight Response: walk the other way, not my problem
- Freeze Response: “robot-mode”

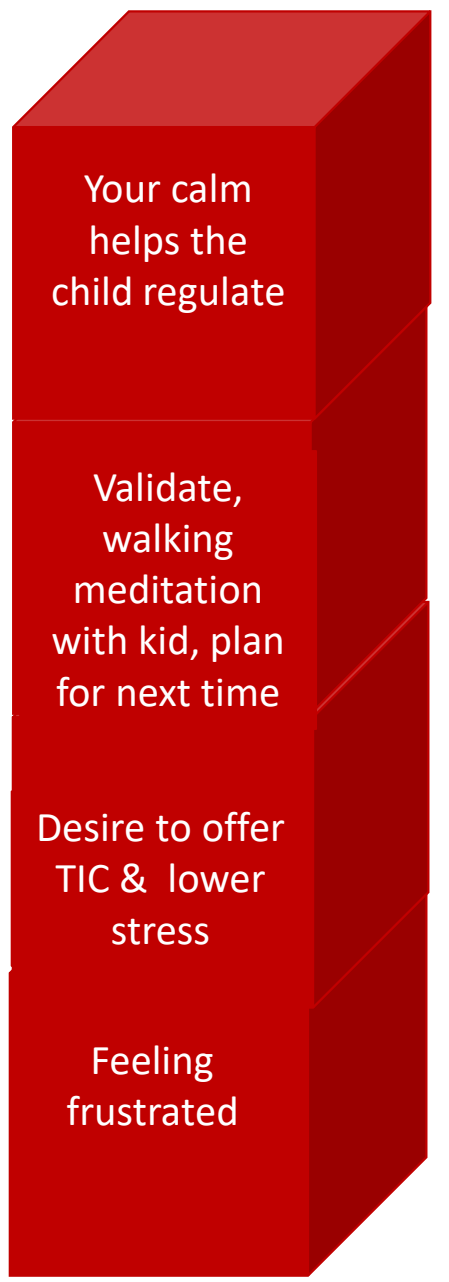
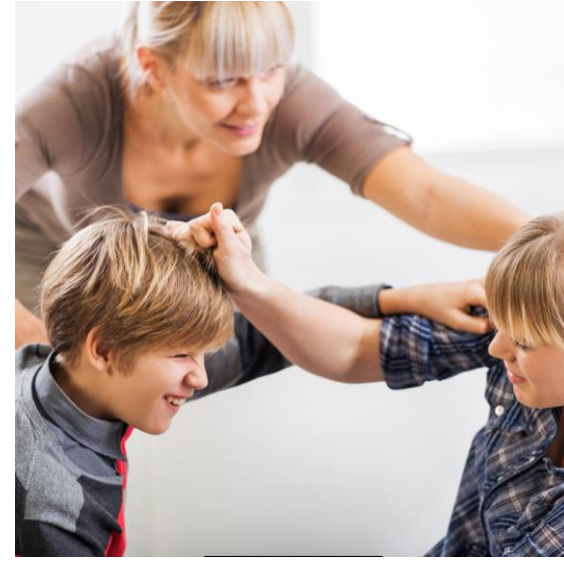
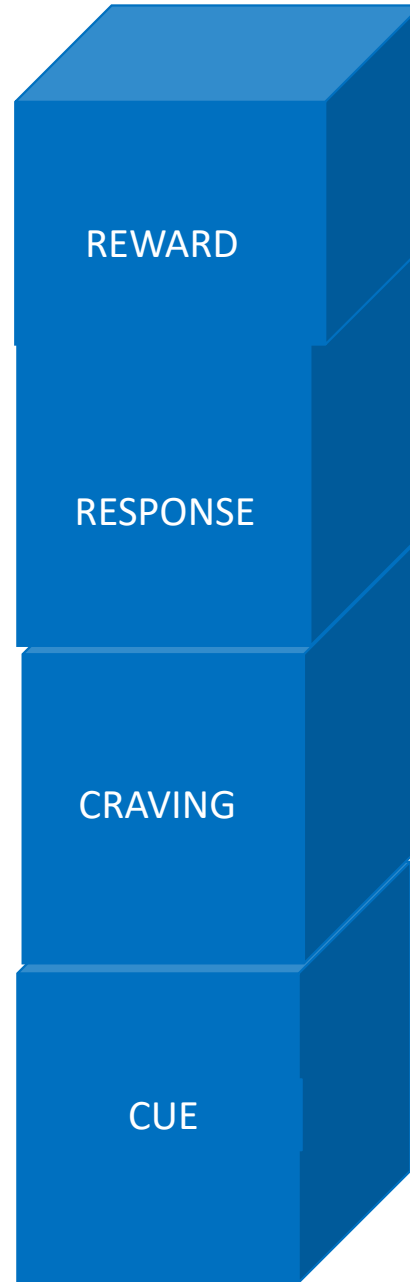
OR

- Affiliate Response:
 - “We’re in this together”
 - Stay curious, active listening
 - Notice judgments, self-care
 - Coregulate & cocreate a plan



Habit Stack

A Trauma Informed Response



Physical Aggression



- You're helping with a fun activity, Aaron wants to be first, disruptive, has to wait and go to the back of the line
- By the time it is his turn, he is so angry, he punches your leg
- Feeling hurt, overwhelmed, frustrated, angry
- Current response?



Recognize your own stress response

- Fight Response: yell “Stop it! What is wrong with you!”
- Flight Response: send him to the principal’s office
- Freeze Response: pretend it didn’t happen

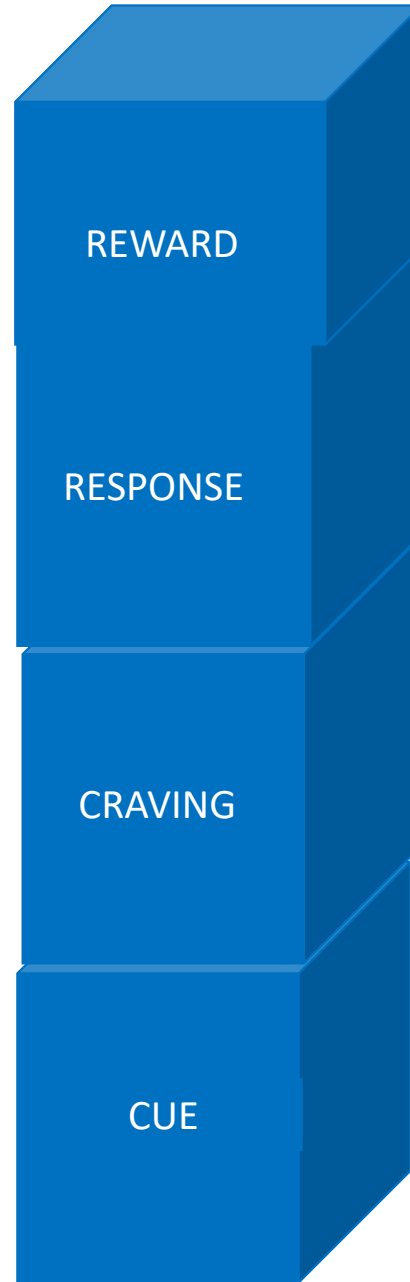
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Habit Stack

A Trauma Informed Response



Anxious Teen



- Student who is anxious with frequent panic attacks, now coming to you saying she feels dissociated
- Coming to see you daily, feeling like there is not much you can do
- You're aware the family experienced trauma on their way to the US
- Feeling overwhelmed, stressed, helpless
- Current response?



Recognize your own stress response

- Fight Response: “calm down” or “there’s nothing to be worried about”
- Flight Response: not my problem, send her home
- Freeze Response: “robot mode”

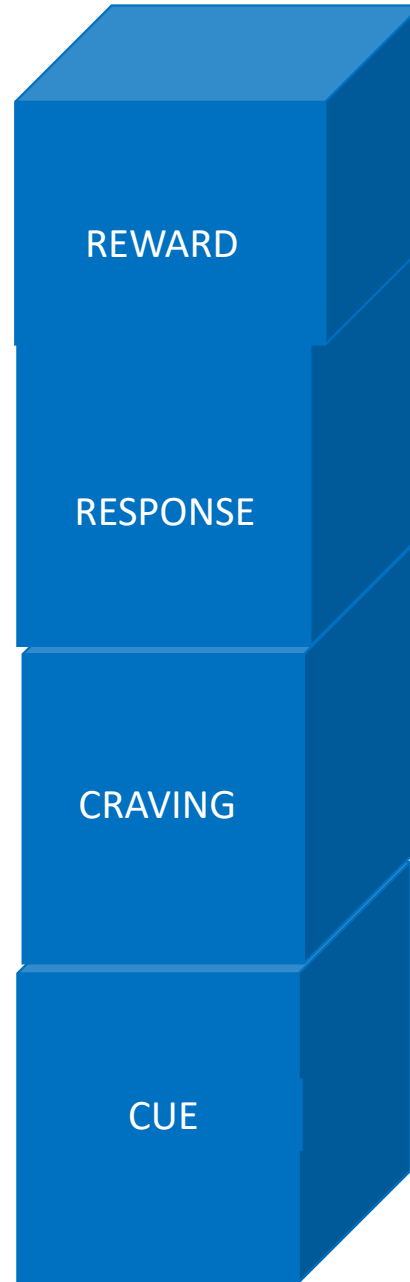
OR

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Habit Stack

A Trauma Informed Response



Your calm creates the coregulation space

Validate, do toes-to nose with her



Desire to offer TIC & lower stress

Feeling helpless, overwhelmed

Consistently Trauma Informed



TINY Change Cycles



1. Plan: notice when you feel overwhelmed or stressed and take care of your nervous system
2. Do: try sensory grounding each time you notice stress for 1 day
3. Study: did it help?
4. Act: yes -> keep; no-> try 5 big deep breaths instead (new PDSA cycle)

Common Barriers to Change

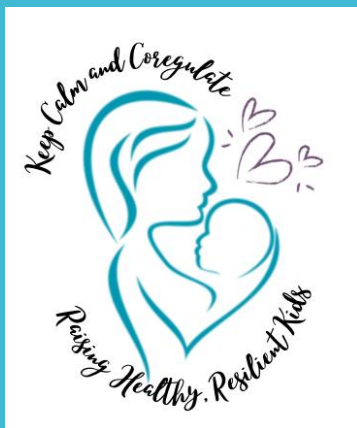


- Overwhelming stress
- Mutual dysregulation
- Taking “it” personally
- Feeling stuck or disempowered
- Lack of agency “This is how it will always be”
- Not comfortable with change
- Not confident change would help

Next Steps?



1. SEE one: reviewed the strategies for mitigating stress and change cycles
2. DO one: try this for yourself at home with your partner and kids, at work with colleagues and staff, in the airport, rush hour traffic, etc.
3. TEACH one: Share these strategies with your family, kids, friends, colleagues, patients/clients and administrators



THANK YOU!!

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