

Being a Trauma Informed Teacher: A Vital Knowledge Set for Today's Teachers

A Special Presentation for Kentucky CEC

**Presented by Steve Hutton, Director
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Participant Expectations

Be Responsible

- ☐ **Return promptly from breaks (Call Back Song)**
- ☐ **Be an active participant**
- ☐ **Use the law of two feet**

Be Respectful

- ☐ **Maintain cell phone etiquette (silent/vibrate mode)**
- ☐ **Listen attentively to others (Attention Signal)**
- ☐ **Limit sidebars & stay on topic**
- ☐ **Texting permitted in hallway**

Be Kind

- ☐ **Enter discussions with an open mind**
- ☐ **Respond appropriately to others' ideas**

Objectives

1. Define Trauma
2. Discuss the meaning of a trauma exposed student.
3. Learn how the brain reacts to trauma.
4. Discover strategies for successfully working with trauma exposed students.

Self-Care Alert

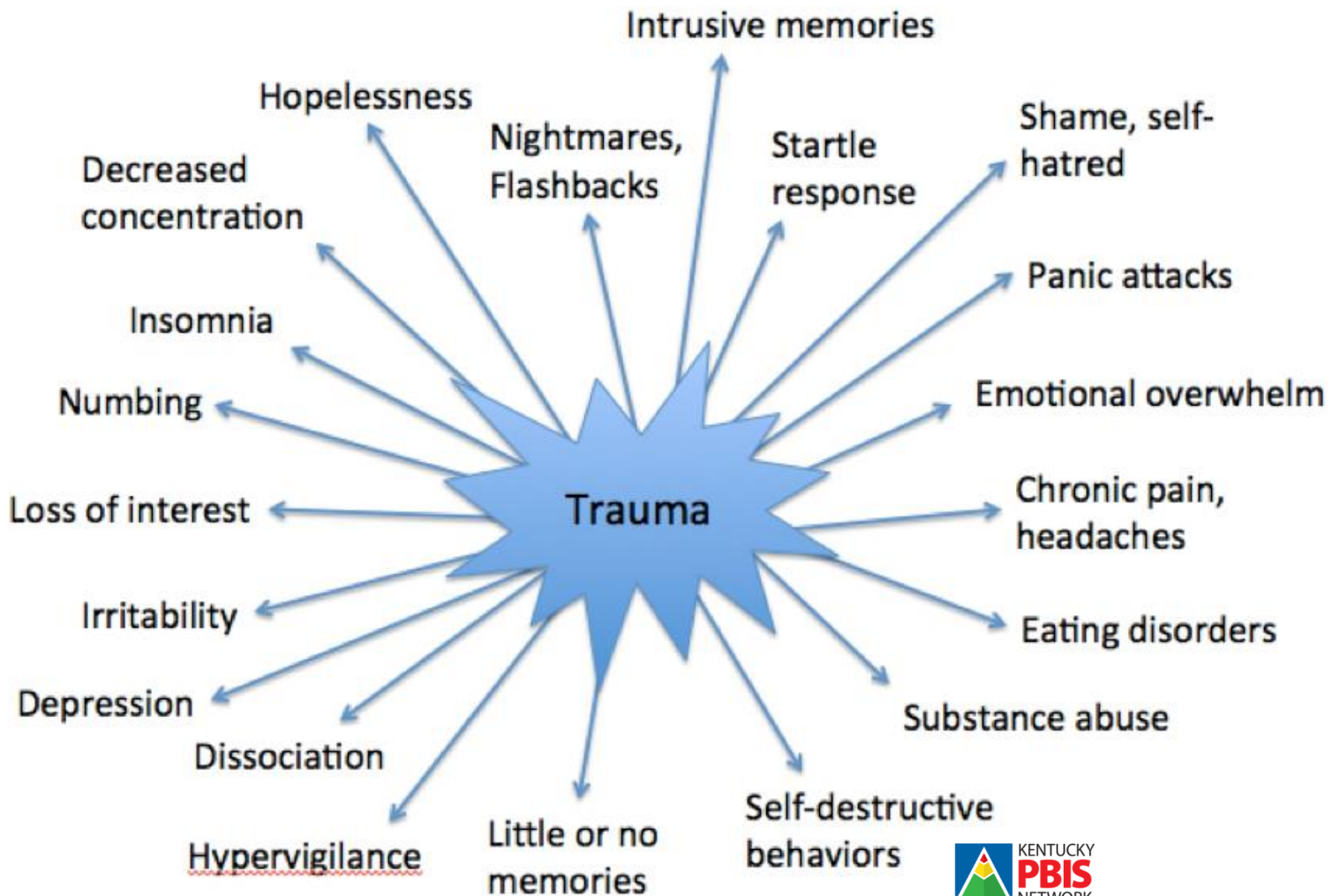
- Step out and take a break when needed.
- Talk to someone you trust.
- Use relaxation strategies.

Create 2 columns with the following headings...



What is Trauma?

- Witnessing or experiencing an event that poses a real or perceived threat of death, serious injury, or sexual violation
- The event and the individual's unique experience and perception of the event



Adapted from Janina Fisher

ACES
QUESTIONNAIRE
ACTIVITY

HO-1

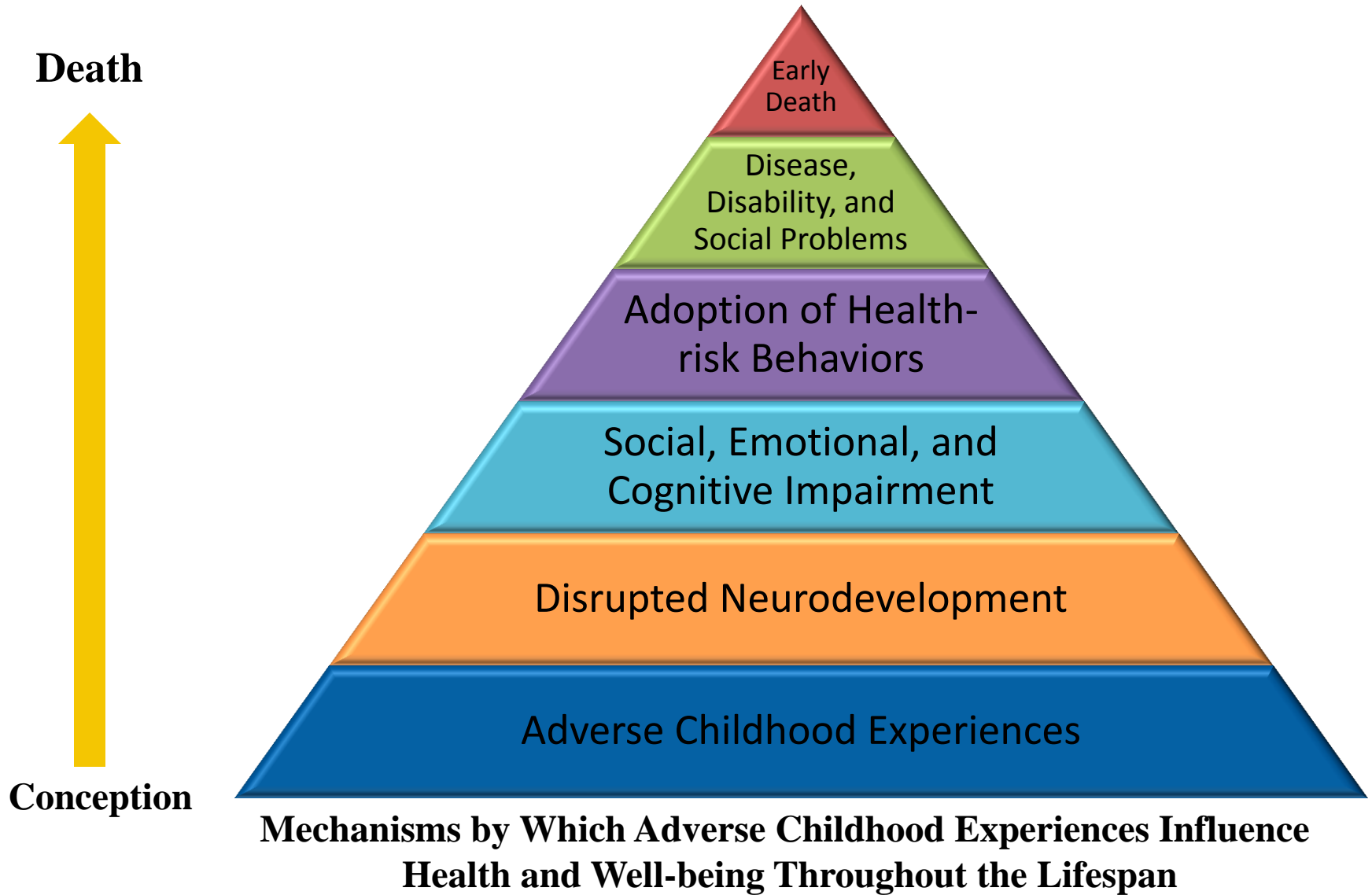
What They Found

1. ACEs are common
2. ACEs occur together
3. ACEs are powerfully predictive of adult outcomes
4. The effects of ACEs are strong across groups of people with different backgrounds

ACE & School Performance

- Traumatized children are:
 - 2.5x more likely to fail a grade in school
 - score lower on standardized achievement tests
 - more likely to have struggles in receptive & expressive language
 - suspended & expelled more often
 - more frequently placed in special education

Long-Term Trauma Impact–ACE Pyramid: CDC



How Common is Trauma?

- A good estimate is that 1 in 4 students has had some trauma exposure
- In 2013, 20,005 children were victims of abuse or neglect in Kentucky, a rate of 19.7 per 1,000 children, representing a 14.8% increase from 2012. Of these children, 99.0% were neglected, 10.1% were physically abused, and 4.4% were sexually abused.
- The number of child victims increased 23.6% in 2015 in comparison to the number of victims in 2009.
- Of Kentucky children in out-of-home care in 2013, 76.0% were white, 9.8% black, 6.6% Hispanic.

Child Welfare League of America, from data from the US Department of Health and Human Services, 2013, 2014, 2015.

<http://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015-State-Fact-Sheet-Kentucky.pdf>

Do you have students who:

- witnessed domestic violence?
- are physically, emotionally or sexually abused?
- are neglected?
- are homeless?
- have family members in the military who are fighting overseas?
- have experienced a natural disaster (e.g., tornado, house fire)?

Do we have students who:

- have been in a serious accident (e.g., car accident)?
- have been a victim of physical or sexual assault?
- have lost a loved one?
- live in homes with family members who abuse alcohol or other drugs?
- live in homes with family members with untreated mental illness?

Trauma Changes the Way Children Interact with Others

- Children who have experienced trauma **may be distrustful or suspicious of others,** leading them to question the reliability and predictability of their relationships with classmates and teachers. Research indicates that children who have been exposed to violence often have difficulty responding to social cues and may withdraw from social situations or bully others

The Trauma Lens

A shift in perspective
from:

*“What’s wrong with
you?”*

to

*“What happened to
you?”*



Trauma-Sensitive Lens



- A lens through which we evaluate student behavior & student supports
- Drives not only what we do, but how we do it
- Focus is on the underlying need

Without a Trauma-Sensitive Lens

Choosing to act out & disrupt classroom
(e.g., disrespectful or manipulative)

Anger management problems,
uncontrollable, destructive

Needs consequences to correct behavior

Refer for ADHD evaluation

- *Adapted from Daniel & Zarling (2012)*

How do we see these students?

Without a Trauma Lens

- Anger management problems
- May have ADHD
- *Choosing* to act out & disrupt classroom (e.g., disrespectful or manipulative)
- Uncontrollable, destructive
- Non-responsive

Uninformed response

- Student needs consequences to correct behavior or maybe an ADHD evaluation

Adapted from Daniel & Zarling (2012)

With a Trauma Lens

- Maladaptive responses (in school setting)
- Seeking to get needs met
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Lacking necessary skills
- Negative view of world (e.g., adults cannot be trusted)
- Trauma response was triggered

Trauma-informed response

- Student needs to learn skills to regulate emotions, and we need to provide support

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The Invisible Backpack

Trauma shapes children's beliefs and expectations about:

- Themselves
- The adults who care for them
- The world in general



For trauma exposed youth these thoughts often revolve around feelings of not being safe, not being cared for or not being worthy.

The Invisible Backpack

- Many who survived trauma have learned to expect and believe the worst about themselves and about the people who care for them.
- These beliefs and expectations are like an “Invisible Backpack” that children carry with them from placement to placement, from school to school, and from childhood into adulthood.



Invisible Backpack Messages

- I am unlovable
- No one will take care of me
- Adults will hurt me
- Adults lie
- No place is safe
- You can't hurt me, I'll get you first
- I am invisible
- I am worthless.
- I am always in danger of being hurt or overwhelmed.
- I am powerless.



Negative Beliefs in the Backpack about People

- Others cause pain, not comfort.
- Others are not safe and cannot be trusted.
- The world is a scary and dangerous place.
- You are unresponsive.
- You are unreliable.
- You are, or will be, threatening, dangerous, rejecting.



“Repacking the Backpack”

- What can we do to repack the Backpack with more positive beliefs and experiences?
- How can we help a child to become more resilient and to believe that he/she are safe, capable, and lovable?
- How do we protect a child from harm to allow him/her to view the world as safe?
- How do we nurture child's strengths and respond to his/her needs, and help a child feel capable of navigating the world?



“Repacking the Backpack”

How can we promote resilience in the student by making him or her feel:

- Safe?
- Capable?
- Likeable/Lovable?





Cognitive Distortions

- A student who thinks any criticism or correction means that you don't like him/ her
- A student who believes she can NEVER do anything well
- A student who assumes NO ONE has any faith in him or his ability to do well so there's no point in trying
- A student who thinks she is STUPID even when she gets things correctly
- A student who assumes EVERYONE IS ALWAYS OUT TO GET HIM – to trick him, humiliate him, embarrass him in front of others
- A students who assumes you are NOT telling the truth



Responding to Cognitive Distortions

Negative Message/ Distorted Thought	Repacked Message	Reality Based Message
I'm no good	You are very helpful to me when you...	You are good at.... <i>be specific and sincere</i>
I can't do anything right	I like the way you...	This is something you did/ do well/ right.... <i>be specific and sincere; don't assume the child recognizes this</i>
I'm stupid	"You are on the road"... (+2 not -18) a la Rita Pierson	The reason we have school is because we all have to learn. If kids knew everything on their own, I'd be out of a job!
No one cares about me	I am glad you are in my class/ here today because...	I noticed that _____ wanted to play/ talk/ have you in their group....
It doesn't matter what I do now, it will never get better	I am so glad you did.... because now you/I can....	Remember when you were learning (<i>something academic/behavioral</i>), how hard it was? Now think about how easy it is for you. Learning something new is hard, but it does get easier with time and practice.

Giving a Safety Message

Use phrases like:

“I will work hard to keep you safe in my classroom”

“I will do my best to get you to a safe place”

“You are always able to come to me if you are feeling scared. I will always do my best to help you”

“I am a safe person to talk to. I will always respect your thoughts and feelings”

Avoid phrases like:

“No one will ever hurt you again”

“I promise you will not have to go home to your mother”

“Nothing bad will ever happen to you at school”

“Keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself at school”

Trauma Reminders/Triggers

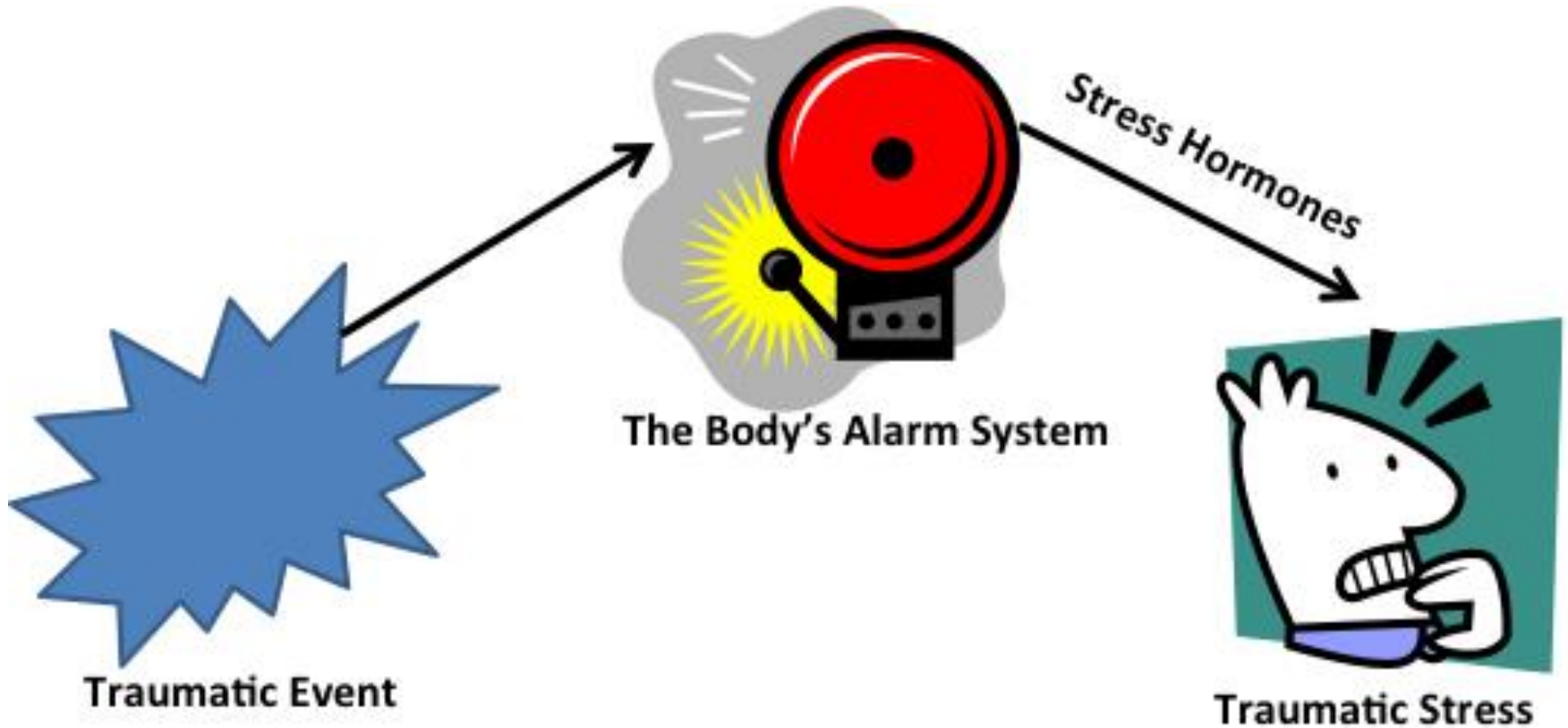
Can be stimuli in the external environment

- Sight
- Sounds
- Taste
- Smells
- People
- Places

Can be stimuli in the internal environment

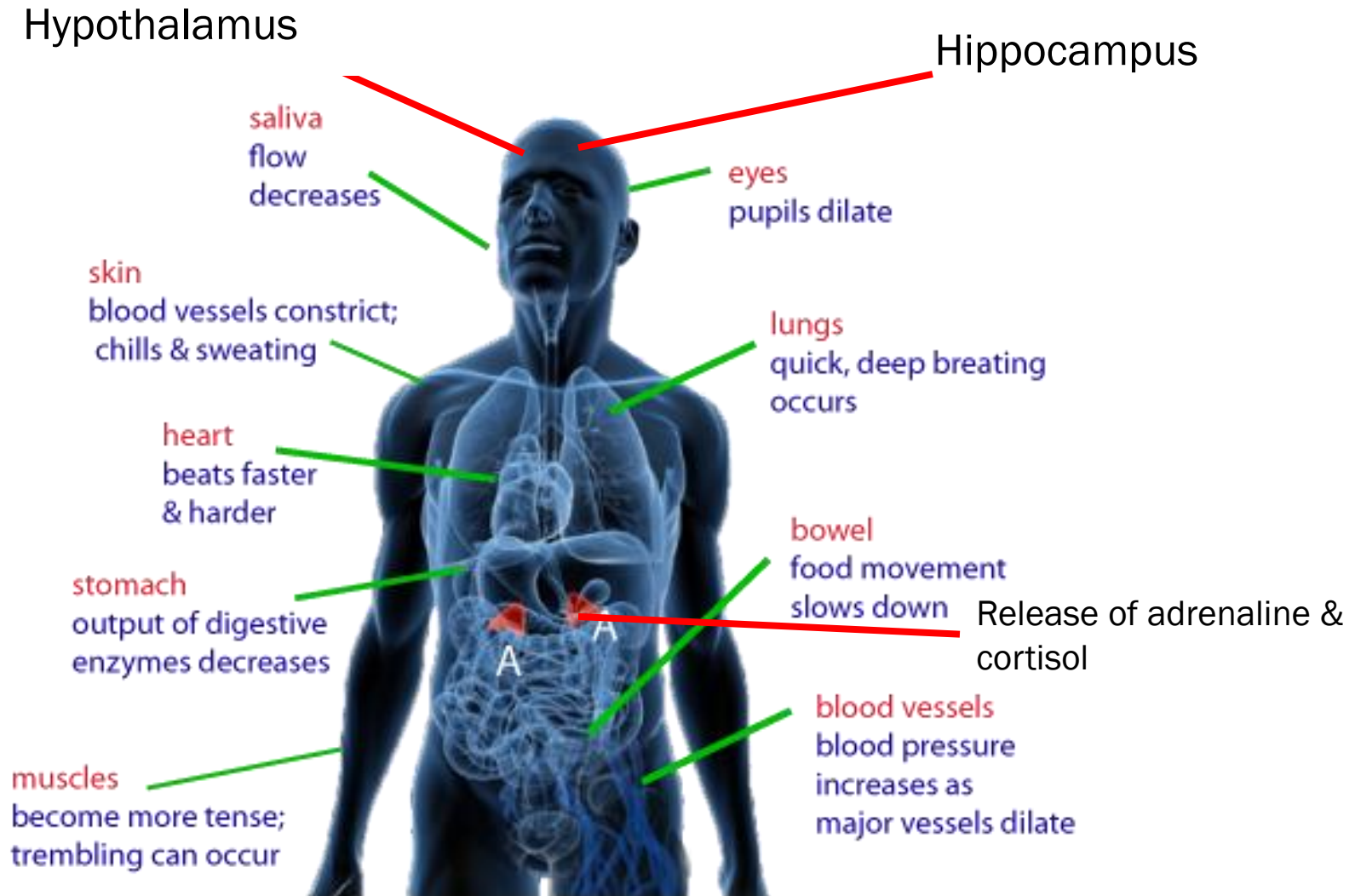
- Feelings
- Thoughts
- Memories

Traumatic Stress Response Cycle



Source: Georgetown University Center for Child & Human Development. (n.d.). *Stress and the developing brain: The stress response*. Retrieved from Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation website: http://www.ecmhc.org/tutorials/trauma/mod2_1.html

Fight, Flee, or Freeze (to protect)



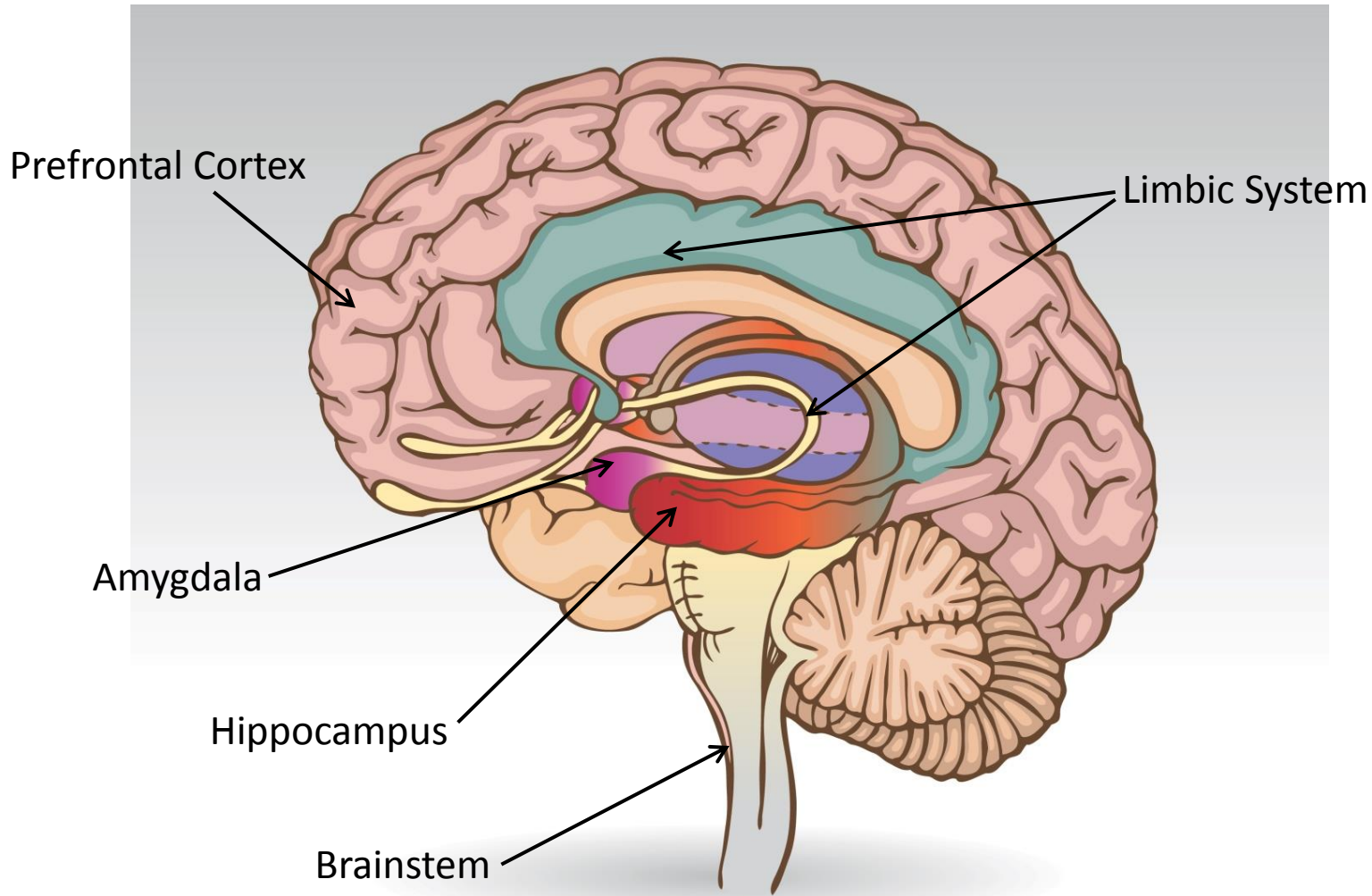
Key Insight

- Because of constant exposure to violence and trauma, children and youth can become locked into a permanent state of Fight/Flight.
- **This makes these children and youth react to normal experiences as if they were life and death threats.**
- This is not a rational/cognitive process. It is wired into their physiological response.

- Children and adolescents in urban environments experience higher rates of exposure to violence.
- As a result, trauma experienced during these sensitive periods has the potential to be particularly harmful to brain development. Traumatic experiences can actually change the structure and functioning of a child's brains through the activation of stress response systems.

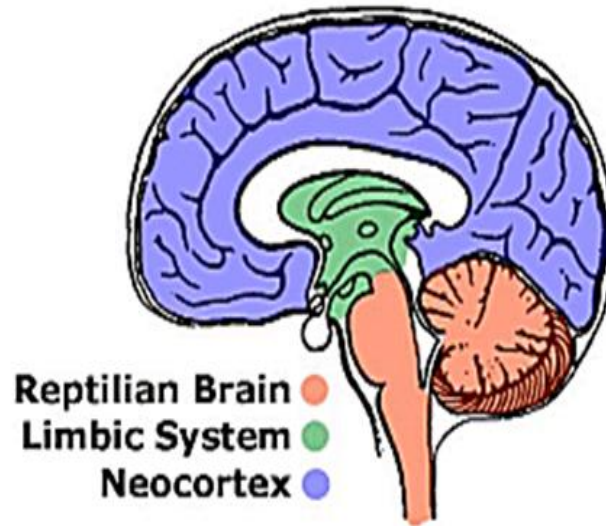
- When youth are in a “triggered” state, the “learning brain” (higher functions of the frontal lobe) goes offline.
- Verbal warnings or rational arguments that make demands on these higher functions may escalate the situation as youth are physiologically unable to access these functions when they are in a triggered state.

Diagram of the Brain

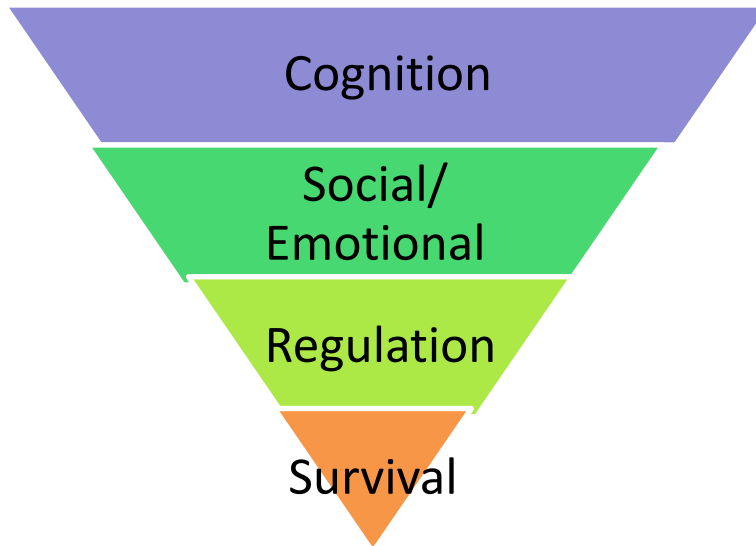


Adapted from https://usercontent2.hubstatic.com/6685109_f260.jpg

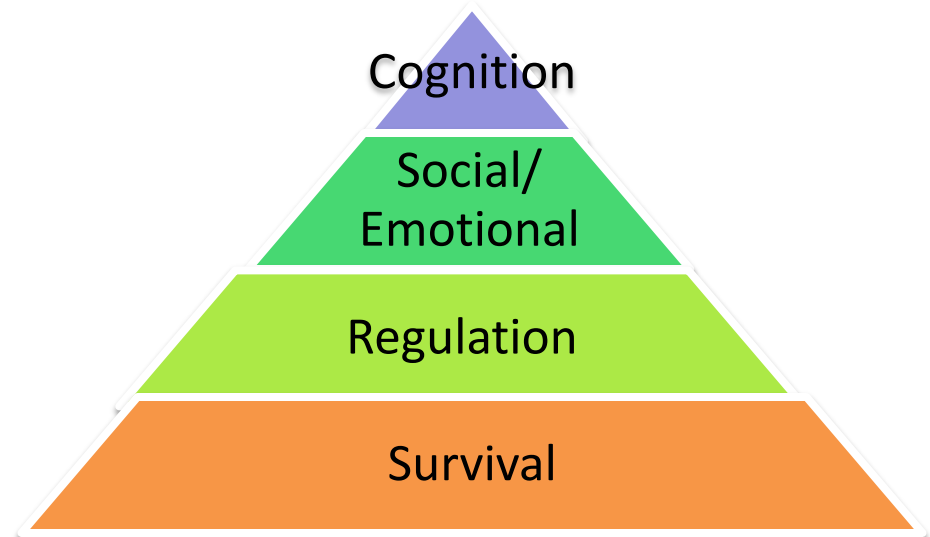
Trauma & Brain Development



Typical Development

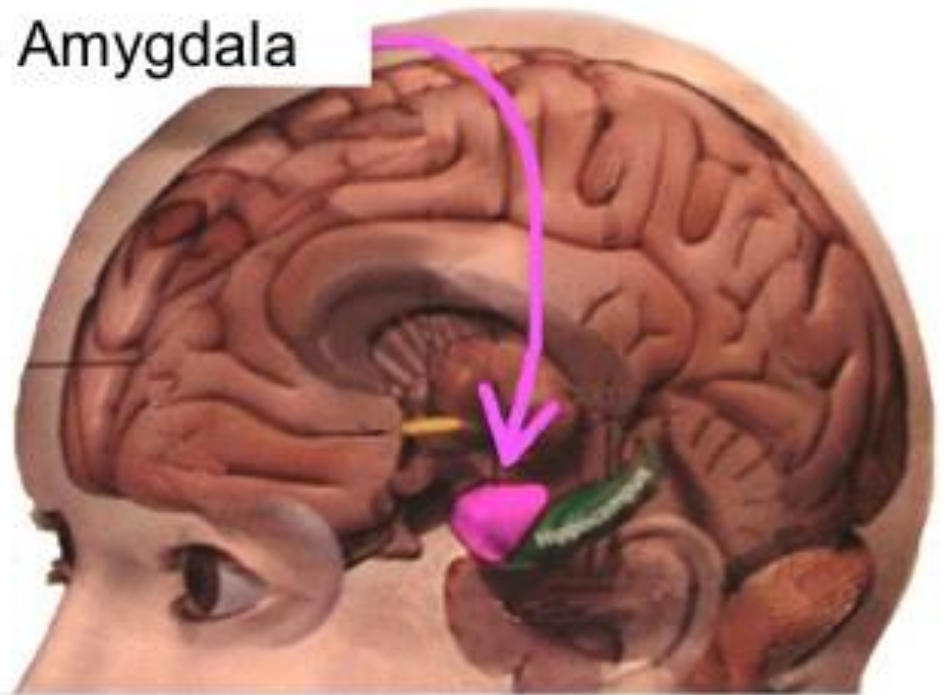


Developmental Trauma



Fight, Flight or Freeze?

Once the amygdala is activated in class, it takes *at least 30 – 90 minutes to calm down for quality learning.*



Threats, insults, put-downs and sarcasm activate the amygdala

• Slow Down

- take a time out
- sit comfortably
- one thought at a time
- pay attention to natural rhythm of breath



• Orient Yourself

- look around, notice surroundings: where you are, who is with you
- focus on something of interest you can see or hear

• Self-Check

- how much stress?
- how much control?
- if needed, use a stressbuster



**But What Do I
Actually Do
Differently?"**

Establish a Predictable Environment

Define and teach classroom routines

- **How to enter class and begin to work**
- **How to predict the schedule for the day**
- **What to do if you do not have materials**
- **What to do if you need help**
- **What to do if you need to go to the bathroom**
- **What to do if you are handing in late material**
- **What to do if someone is bothering you**
- **Signals for moving through different activities**
 - **“Show me you are listening”**
- **How to determine if you are doing well in class**
- **Establish a signal for obtaining class attention**
- **Teach effective transitions**

Creating a Predictable Classroom

- Greet positively at the door
- Teach attention signal
- Beginning/ending of class ritual
- Teach behavior expectations
- Classroom celebrations
- Acknowledge appropriate behavior

Why Being Calm and Respectful is Important

- Calm and respectful adult responses model appropriate behavior for students**
- Emotional and disrespectful adult responses may escalate the emotional intensity of a situation or create a power struggle**

‘Trauma-Sensitive’ Instructional Correction Procedures

Assess the student’s situation

- What does the student need at this time?
- How emotionally activated is the student?
- Does the student feel safe?
- Are there any trauma reminders at work?
- What’s my tone of voice?
- Am I at the student’s level?
- Is there a need for more privacy to address this?

Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Trauma-sensitive schools acknowledge the prevalence of traumatic occurrence in students' lives & create a flexible framework that provides universal supports, is sensitive to unique needs of students, & is mindful of avoiding re-traumatization.



School-Wide Efforts Aligned with Trauma Informed Care

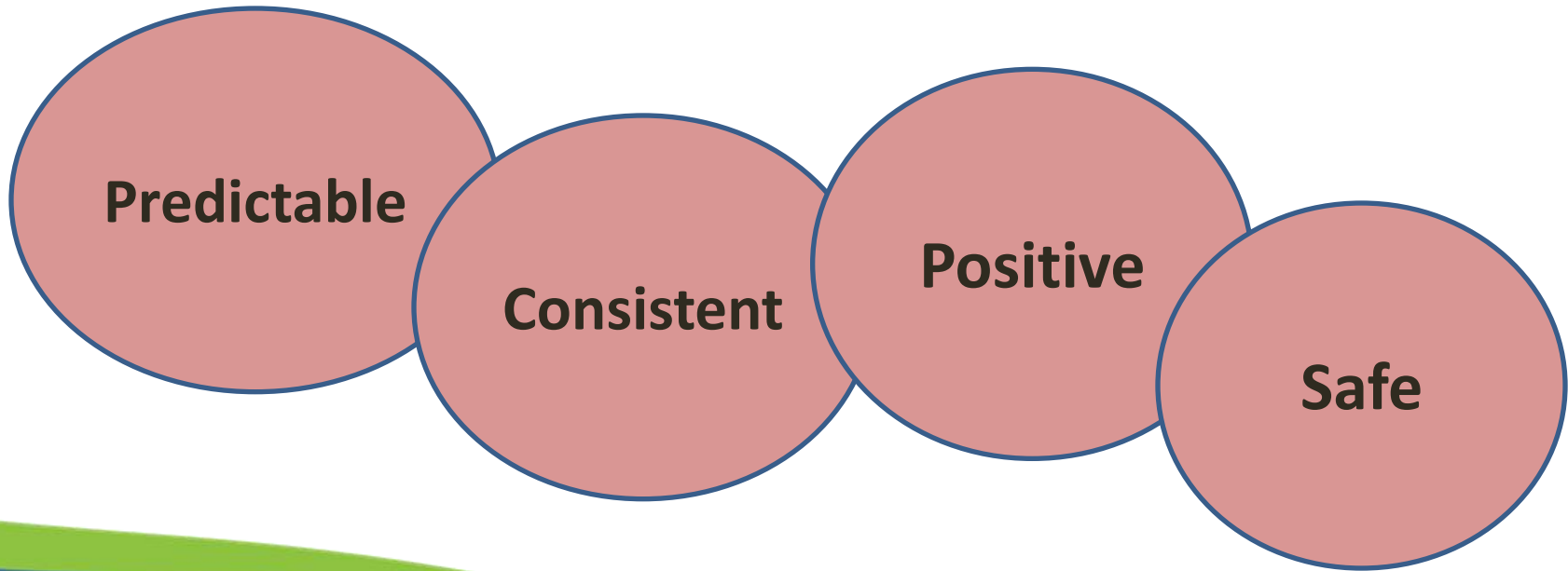
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Restorative Practices
- Mindfulness Practices
- School health or wellness centers
- Any organized, structured, ongoing and intentional effort that partners with teachers to take the extra time to respond to student needs instead of punishing behaviors that are simply symptoms of these needs

PBIS and Trauma-Sensitive Schools

“The fundamental purpose of PBIS is to make schools more effective & equitable learning environments.”

Rob Horner

Co-Director of the OSEP Technical Assistance Center for PBIS



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