

**“Yours, mine and ours: Promoting service coordination for children and youth exposed to violence”**

**5th Annual Conference on Best Practices and Guidelines for Nonpublic Special Education Programs**

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## Goals for this session:

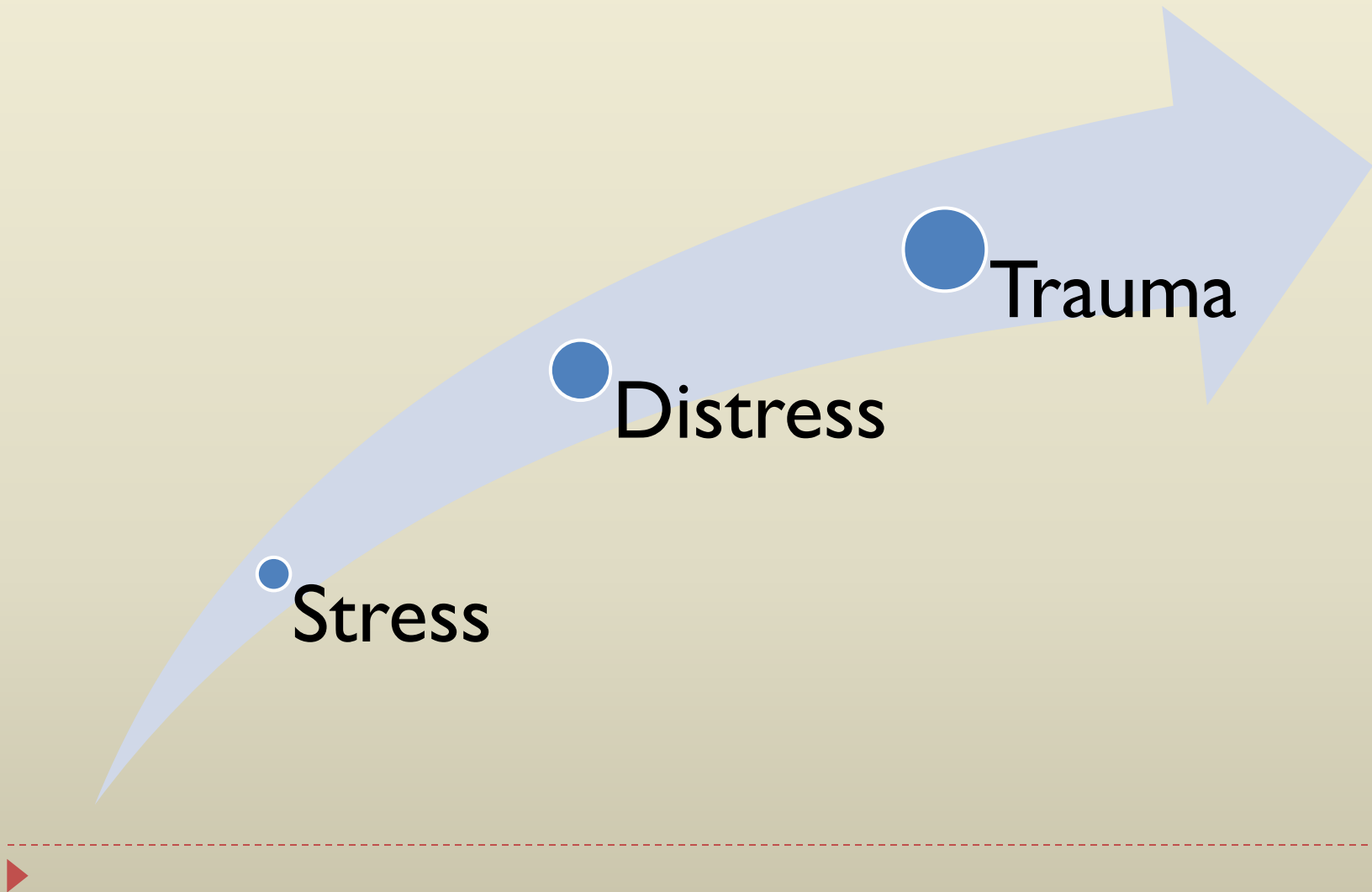
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- ▶ To develop an understanding of the varied manifestations of complex trauma in children;
- ▶ To develop skills as educators and clinicians for supporting youth that have been exposed to trauma and other adverse experiences by developing skills of emotional regulation;
- ▶ To develop skills to enhance service coordination to address trauma issues for the child and family.



# What makes an experience traumatic?

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# Trauma:

“Psychic trauma occurs when an individual is exposed to an overwhelming event and is rendered helpless in the face of intolerable danger, anxiety, or instinctual arousal. (Eth and Pynoos, 1985, p. 23).

- ▶ The perception of threat/ danger
- ▶ The internal experience of being helpless



## Components of Trauma

- ① The event:
- ② The experience of the event:
- ③ The effects of the event



# The events

- ◉ **Sexual Abuse**
- ◉ **Physical Abuse**
- ◉ **Psychological Maltreatment**
- ◉ **Neglect**
- ◉ **Community Violence**
- ◉ **School Violence**
- ◉ **Domestic Violence**
- ◉ **Traumatic Grief**
- ◉ **Natural or Man-made Disaster**
- ◉ **Terrorism**
- ◉ **Medical Trauma**
- ◉ **Refugee Trauma**



# Complex Trauma (Ford & Courtois p. 13)

1. Exposure to extreme stressors {Events};
2. Repetitive and prolonged {Duration};
3. Involve harm or abandonment by primary caregivers {Relationships};
4. Occur at developmentally vulnerable times in the child's life {Development}



# Opportunities and Threats:

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**EMOTIONAL  
REGULATION  
& SOCIAL EMOTIONAL  
LEARNING**



## **“Normal” {Good Enough”} Development:**

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- ▶ All children need to learn skills of emotional regulation;
- ▶ In healthy families these skills are learned through:
  - ▶ Consistency
  - ▶ Attuned Emotional Responses/Validation
  - ▶ Explicit teaching
    - ▶ Reinforcing desirable behavior
    - ▶ Setting limits on undesirable behavior



# We learn to use our words!

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## ▶ **Affect**

### **Identification**

- ▶ A range of feeling words;
  - ▶ Identifying the internal experience; [Thoughts, sensations in the body]
  - ▶ Learning to read the cues of others;
  - ▶ Connecting feelings to experiences in the world.
- ▶ **For youth that have experienced trauma:**
  - ▶ Chronic threat results in hypervigilance which leads to:
  - ▶ Misreading the cues of another;
  - ▶ Always seeing threat/danger;
  - ▶ Misreading your own internal experience.
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# We learn to express ourselves appropriately: Affect Expression

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- ▶ Can you recall a time when you mimicked your parents and said something inappropriate?
- ▶ Or perhaps you told *family business*, much to their horror!
- ▶ Over time you learned who was safe, appropriate, and in general ,ways to express ourselves in relation to:
  - ▶ **Anger** [boys & girls may get different rules;
  - ▶ **Fear**- again gender may influence;
  - ▶ **Needs** for attention
  - ▶ **Sharing** ideas, thoughts, observations.
  - ▶ **Coaching** results in increased problem solving and ability to navigate the social world.



# We are soothed: Affect Modulation

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- ▶ Maintaining optimal levels of arousal:
- ▶ Never too hungry, tired, cold, generally over-stimulated;
- ▶ Receiving cues about internal states:
  - ▶ Are you hungry?
  - ▶ Do you need to potty?



## **Complex trauma compromises this capacity:**

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- ▶ There must be a problem in the primary interpersonal/ caregiving relationship to meet the criteria for complex trauma:
- ▶ Factors such as substance abuse, parental mental illness, interpersonal family violence; wreak havoc on parental consistency and attunement.



# The child sends signals of need and for care that are not received:

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- ▶ So they get loud;
- ▶ Inappropriate;
- ▶ Shut down {I'm fine
- ▶ And they act out behaviorally in a variety of ways.



# SEL Competencies:

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- ▶ Self-awareness- accurately assessing one's emotions, values, strengths, and capacities.
- ▶ • Self-management- managing emotions and behaviors; persevering in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- ▶ • Social awareness- showing empathy and understanding for others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences.



# SEL Competencies

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- ▶ Relationship skills- establishing and maintaining positive relationships based on cooperation; preventing and constructively resolving interpersonal conflict.
- ▶ Responsible decision making-making constructive choices about personal and social behavior.

Source: *The Handbook on Family and Community Engagement*

[[www.families-schools.org](http://www.families-schools.org)]

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# Assessing parent capacity through the CANS:

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- ▶ Youth receiving services through the child welfare system have the benefit of ongoing monitoring, assessment and intervention planning in a variety of domains using the CANS- Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool. In the area of social/ emotional development the following caregiver items are highly relevant:
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## CANS- SEL Items

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- ▶ **117. PARENT/CAREGIVER'S ABILITY TO LISTEN AS PARENT** - *This item refers to the parent/caregiver's ability both to sit quietly and listen and to actually hear and understand things other people tell them about their parenting style and their children's needs and strengths.*
- ▶ **118. PARENT/CAREGIVER'S UNDERSTANDING OF IMPACT OF OWN BEHAVIOR ON CHILDREN** - *This item is intended to describe the degree to which a parent/caregiver has self awareness regarding how his/her actions and behavior affect his/her children.*



## CANS- SEL Items [continued]

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- ▶ **119. EMPATHY WITH CHILDREN** - *This item refers to the parent/caregiver's ability to understand and respond to the joys, sorrows, anxieties and other feelings of children with helpful, supportive emotional responses.*
- ▶ **120. ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE** - *This item describes the parent/caregiver's ability to articulate in an understandable way their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and concerns regarding parenting and children's needs and strengths.*



## **Why coordination matters:**

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- ▶ For traumatized youth, there are going to be developmental delays in social/ emotional skill development;
- ▶ Trauma-informed clinicians may be actively engaging the family in supporting social/ emotional areas of skill development.
- ▶ Communication/ coordination allows us to align our efforts.




# Trauma/ safety and skill development

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- ▶ Safety must be established in order to acquire, maintain and access [use] the skills that are learned:
- ▶ Safety is often not objective/ but subjective;
- ▶ Traumatized youth may be triggered by seemingly benign events that are perceived by them as **profound threats** to survival triggering intense reactions that seem out of proportion to the provocation.
- ▶ Children do not feel safe when they cannot trust themselves/ their own reactions.

## Unless you are never safe:

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- ▶ “There is something so crazy here that it defies description, as if safety is a mirage that is actually a mirror that is actually a cobra. Englewood and West Englewood mock the very reason our nation was created. What is freedom when poor people are locked in houses that have no value, from which they are economically incapable of fleeing - and when they come out they may die without warning? Citizens become prey. The world becomes haunted. Instead of flowering, children’s brains are blunted by the toxins of fear. Joyous play - the single most glorious outgrowth of free and empowered human society - vanishes.” [Rick Telander-Chicago Sun Times, 9/28/11]
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# TRIGGERS/TRAUMA REMINDERS

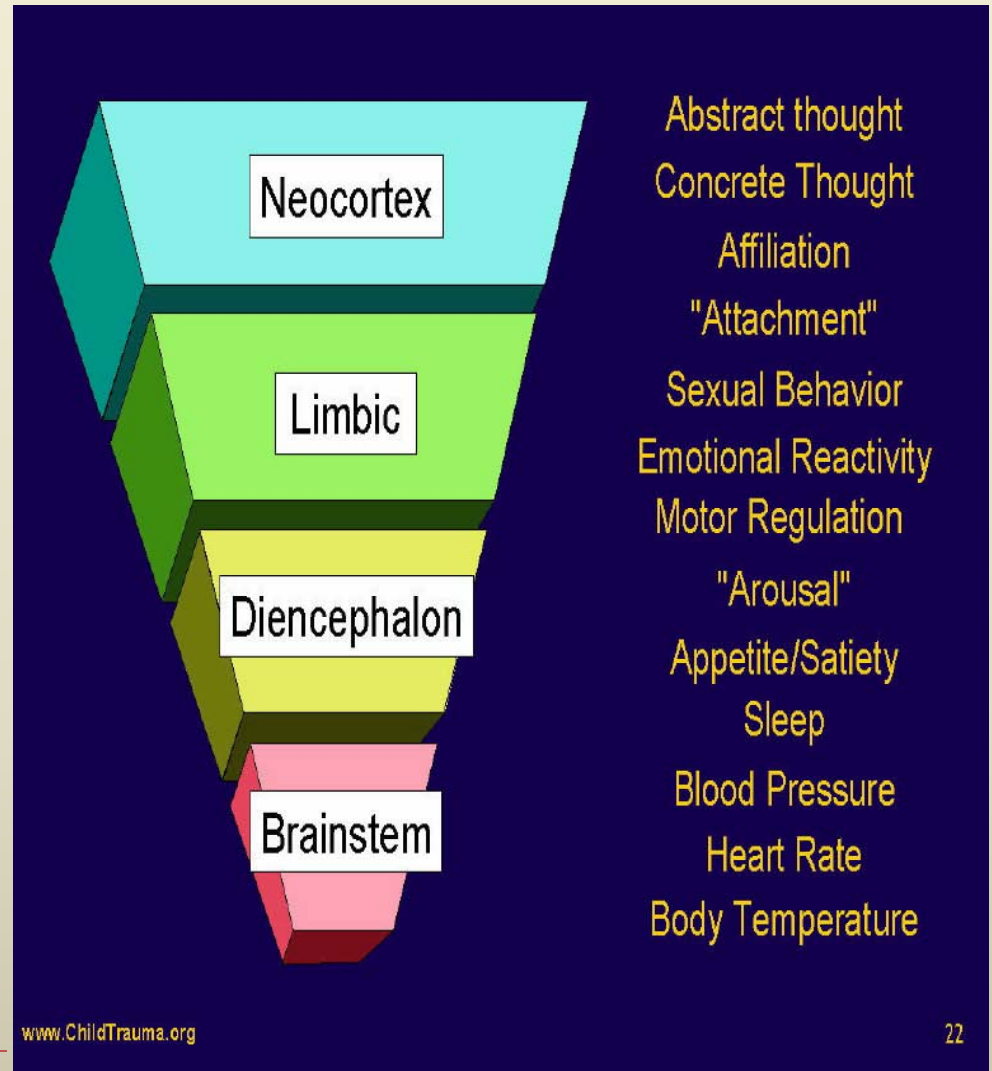
*“People, places, activities, internal sensations, or other things that trigger memories of a trauma experience. Trauma reminders can cause feelings of fear or distress or put people “on alert.” Trauma reminders can “restart” posttraumatic stress reactions or behavior even years after a traumatic event has occurred.”*

[www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org)



# Trauma & Brain Development

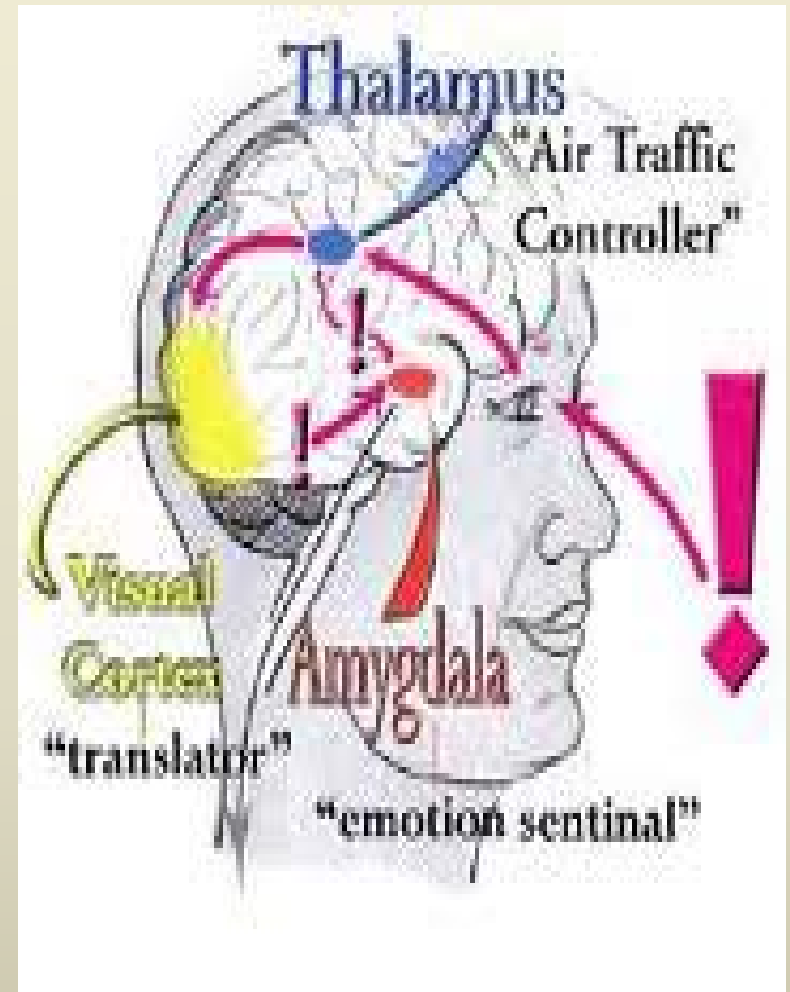
- ▶ The brain is adaptive (a key survival need);
- ▶ The brain is organized hierarchically;
- ▶ Human brain development is relationship-based



# The [emotional] limbic brain:

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- ▶ Threat (Release of noreadrenaline-stress hormones)
- ▶ Fight or flight
- ▶ Freeze [the dissociative response]
- ▶ **The amygdala**
  - ▶ Alarm central
  - ▶ Chronic hyperarousal [dissociation & hypervigilance]
  - ▶ When unsafe the child's brain may be emotionally hijacked making acquired skills unavailable;



## Behavior or Emotions?

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- ▶ Is it possible that our focus on disruptive behavior distracts from our focus on social and emotional learning?

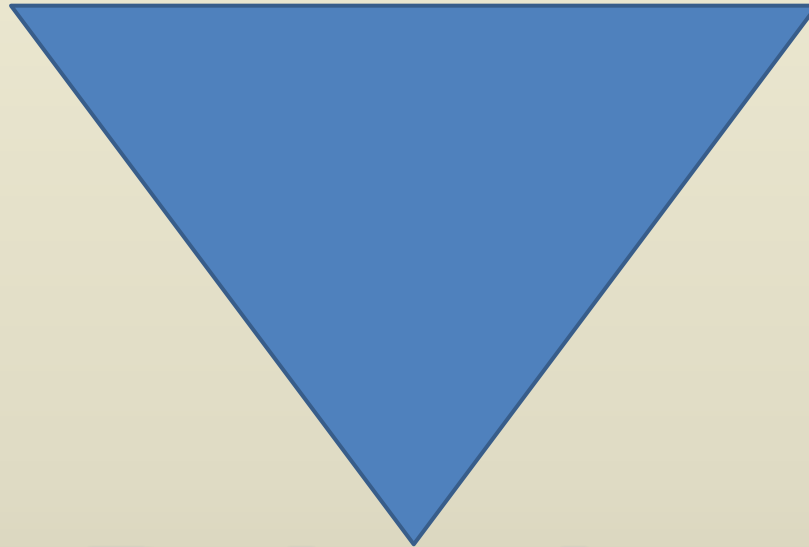


# The Cognitive Triangle:

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**Thought**

**Feeling**



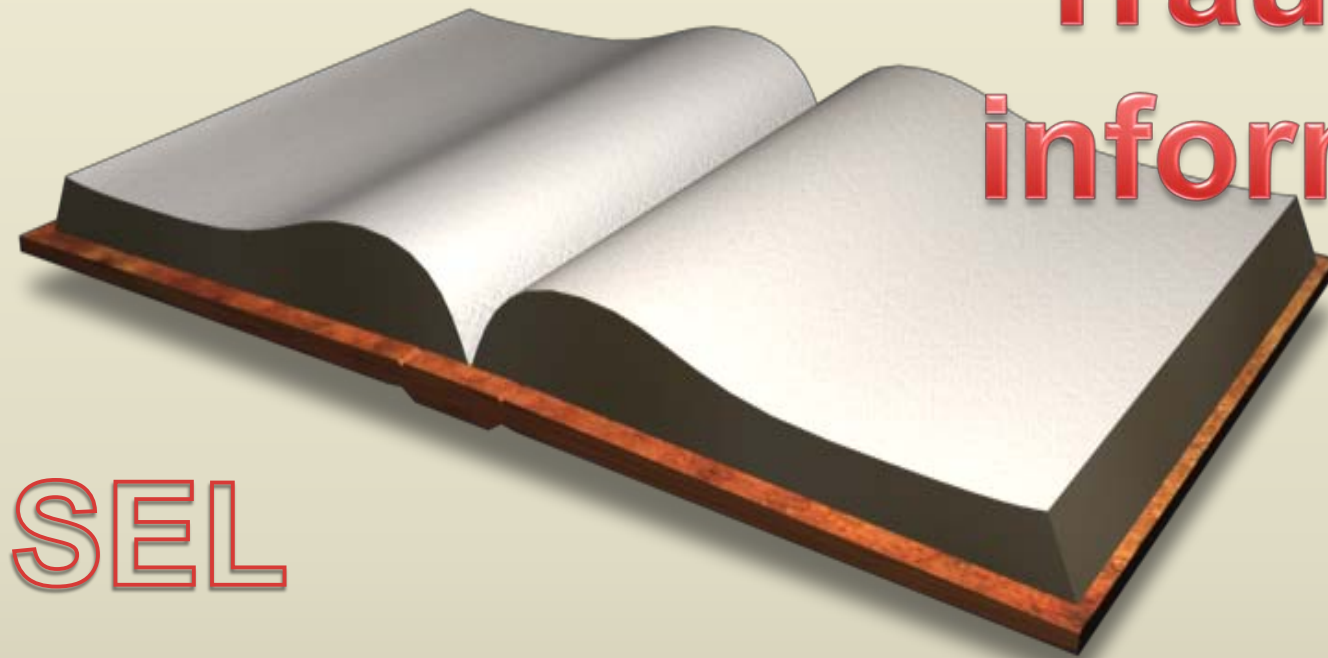
**Behavior**



# Getting on the same page:

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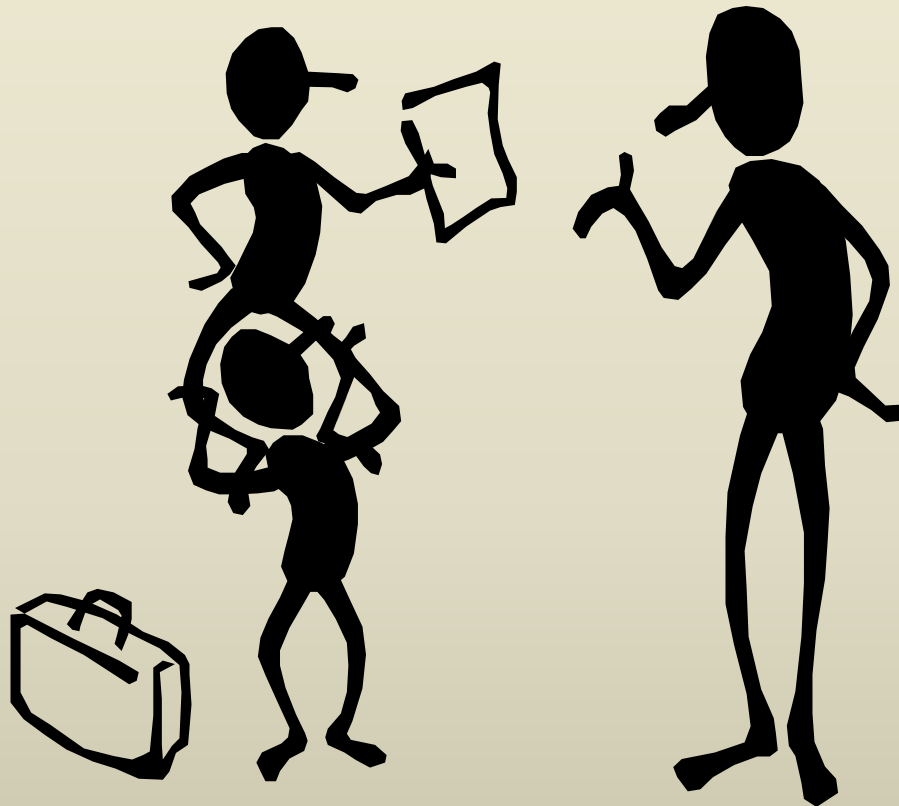
**Trauma  
informed**



**SEL**



***Sadly folks in education, mental health, & child welfare may not see this rich potential for collaboration!***



# Evidence-based practices for trauma:

## **Four goals for Trauma Treatment:** NCTSN

- (1) ***Safety*** in one's environment, including home, school, and community,
- (2) ***Skills development in emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning,***
- (3) ***Meaning-making about past traumatic events***  
they have experienced so that youth can consider more positive, adaptive views about themselves in the present, and experience hope about their future, and
- 4) ***Enhancing resiliency and integration into social network.***



# Creating Partnerships:

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Home

School

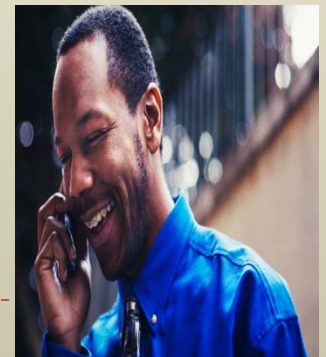
Community- Clinical Team

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## **Specific things that work:**

- ▶ Maintaining Communication
- ▶ The toolkit for educators [NCTSN]
- ▶ Increasing trauma-informed services
- ▶ Increasing SEL in schools/ after school programming;
- ▶ Individualized modifications within universal programs [PBIS/ SEL]



## Supporting Modulation in Schools:

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- ▶ Relaxation Skills for all;
- ▶ Activities that support focus/ self-soothing [puzzles], stress balls;
- ▶ Opportunities for physical movement;
- ▶ People plans- school social worker;
- ▶ Collaborate with the youth and family on what may work in light of their treatment experiences.



## **Engaging the family:**

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- ▶ Psychoeducation;
- ▶ In identifying the cues of escalation;
- ▶ Providing rationales for SEL or EBP's;
- ▶ Sticking with it-perseverance;
- ▶ Appeals to the best self;
- ▶ Family friendly scheduling
- ▶ Other ideas....



# What challenges you the most?

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- ▶ All caregivers/ **including educators** must use reflective skills to tune into their emotional life;
  - ▶ We model/ guide and express a great deal!
- ▶ Is there a social/ emotional behavioral “type” that challenges you?
  - ▶ The needy child;
  - ▶ Shut-down, hostile, aggressive;
  - ▶ The ring leader- attention seeking, pulls others in;
- ▶ What are the SEL skills that they need most?



# Support for this hard work is essential:

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- ▶ Teamwork;
- ▶ Self-care;
- ▶ Work/ Life Balance;
  
- ▶ Escape
- ▶ Honest venting and use of social supports



# Thank You

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## ▶ **Presenter Contact:**

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