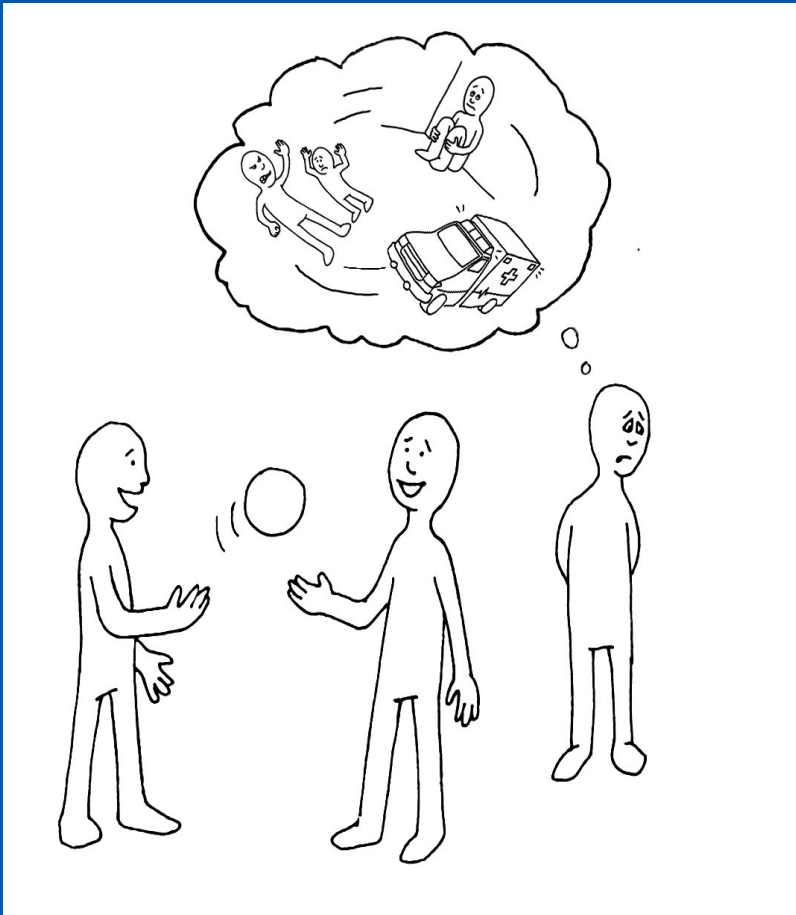


Dealing with the Invisible Suitcase: An Overview of a Workshop for Resource Parents



Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.



BEFORE WE GET STARTED...

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The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

Our Partnership



The National Native Children's Trauma Center



- The materials used in this training are templates of the “Think Trauma” Training, developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
- NNCTC utilizes current research in Indian Country and *tribal* best practices and approaches to support *tribal* children, youth, and families who have experienced traumatic events and those who work in the *tribal* justice system.
- As a Category II Trauma Center in the Network, we are able to utilize all materials and have permission to edit/adapt the training material to better support *tribal* youth serving systems.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



The mission of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and communities throughout the United States.

www.nctsn.org



Introducing...

***Caring for Children Who
Have Experienced Trauma:
A Workshop for Resource
Parents***

Why a Trauma Workshop for Resource Parents?



- Many children in foster care have lived through traumatic experiences.
- Children bring their traumas with them into our homes.
- Trauma affects a child's behavior, feelings, relationships, and view of the world in profound ways.

(Continued)

Why a Trauma Workshop for Resource Parents? *(Continued)*



- Children's trauma affects us, too:
 - Compassion fatigue
 - Painful memories
 - Secondary traumatization
- Trauma's effects—on children and on us—can disrupt a placement.

The Challenge



Caring for children who have been through trauma can leave resource parents feeling:

- Confused
- Frustrated
- Unappreciated
- Angry
- Helpless

The Solution: Trauma-Informed Parenting



When you understand what trauma is and how it has affected your child, it becomes easier to:

- Communicate with your child
- Improve your child's behavior and attitudes
- Get your child the help he or she needs
- Reduce the risk of your own compassion fatigue or secondary traumatization
- Become a more effective and satisfied resource parent

The Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Parenting



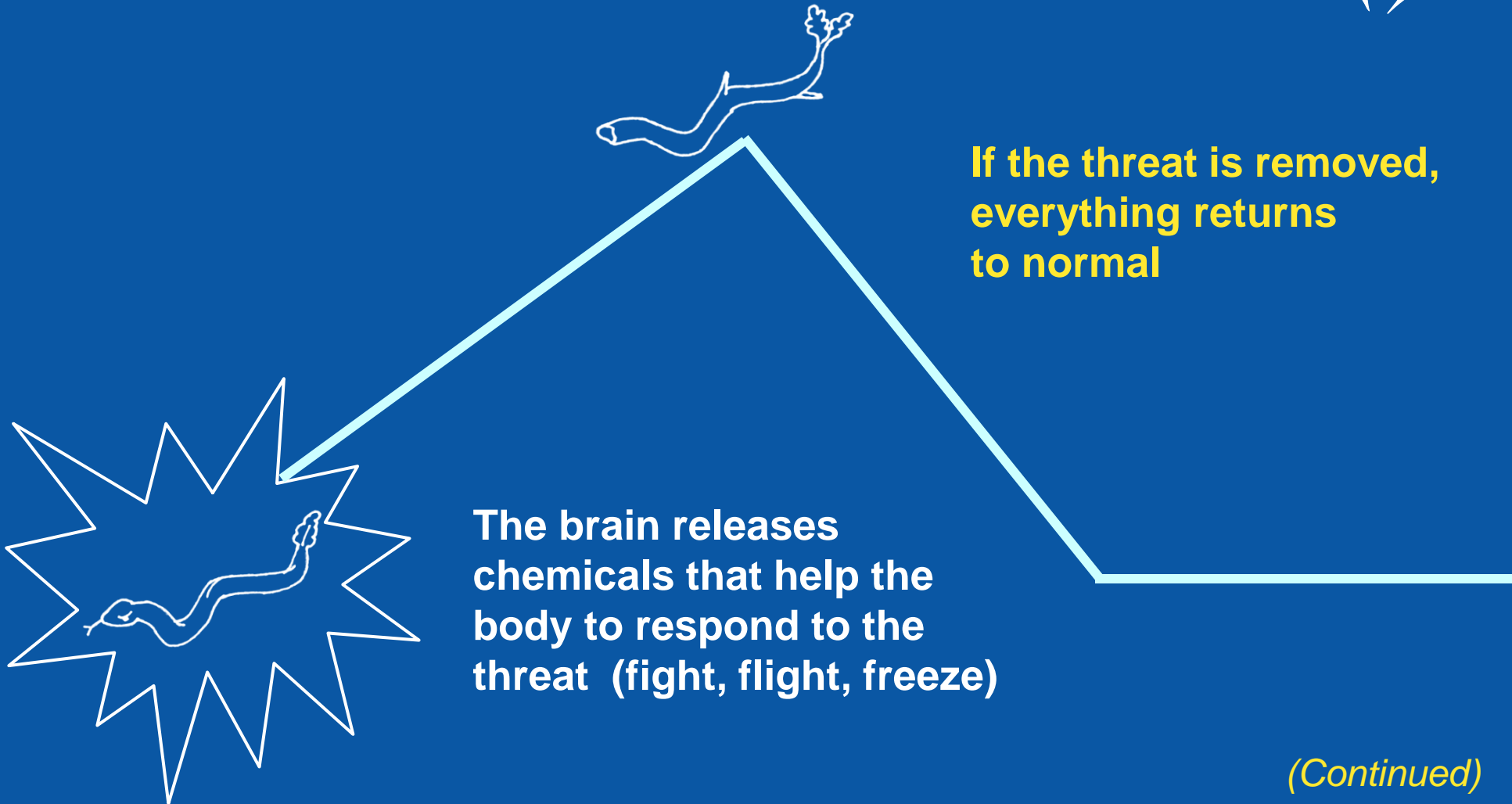
1. Recognize the impact trauma has had on your child.
2. Help your child to feel safe.
3. Help your child to understand and manage overwhelming emotions.
4. Help your child to understand and modify problem behaviors.
5. Respect and support positive, stable, and enduring relationships in the life of your child.
6. Help your child to develop a strength-based understanding of his or her life story.
7. Be an advocate for your child.
8. Promote and support trauma-focused assessment and treatment for your child.
9. Take care of yourself.



What We'll Be Learning Today

- Module 1: Introductions
- Module 2: Trauma 101
- **Module 3: Understanding Trauma's Effects**
- Module 4: Building a Safe Place
- **Module 5: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors**
- Module 6: Connections and Healing
- Module 7: Becoming an Advocate
- Module 8: Taking Care of Yourself

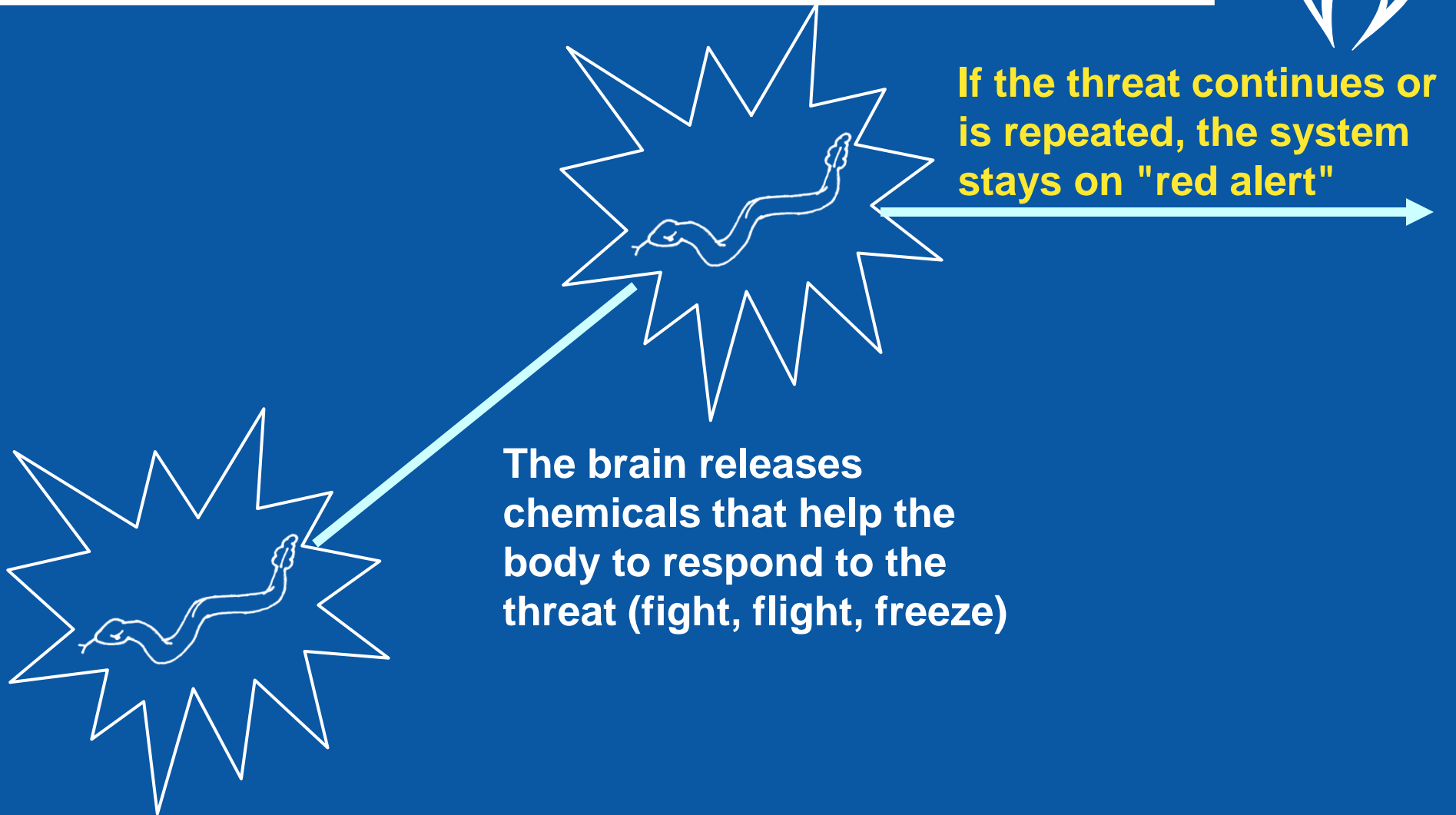
Your Internal Alarm System



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Your Internal Alarm System

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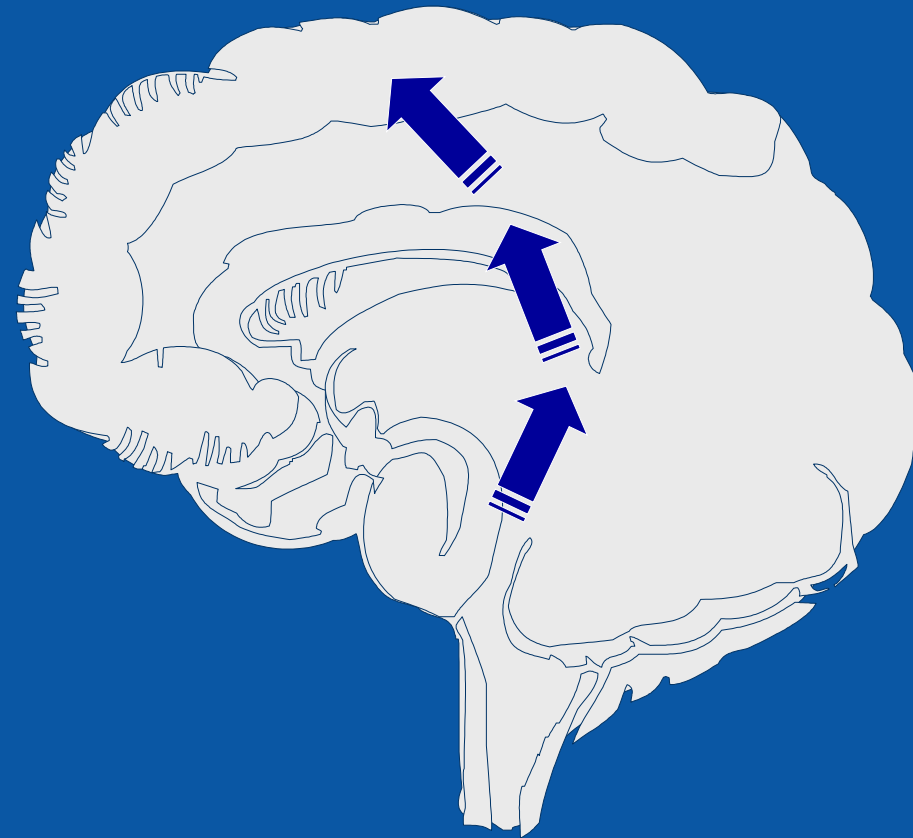
If the threat continues or is repeated, the system stays on "red alert"

The brain releases chemicals that help the body to respond to the threat (fight, flight, freeze)

Experience Grows the Brain



- Brain development happens from the bottom up:
 - From primitive (basic survival)
 - To more complex (rational thought, planning, abstract thinking)



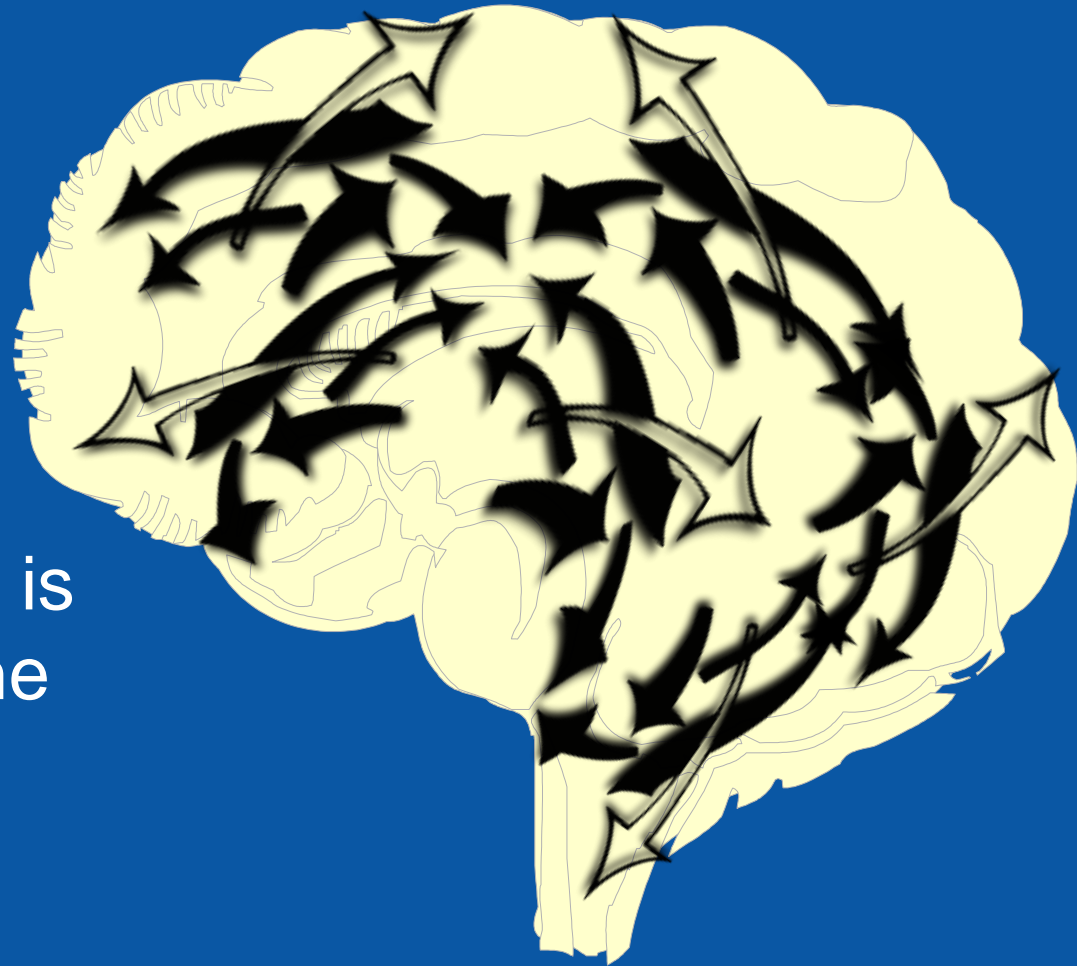
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Experience Grows the Brain

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- The brain develops by forming connections.
- Interactions with caregivers are critical to brain development.
- The more an experience is repeated, the stronger the connections become.



Trauma Derails Development



Exposure to trauma causes the brain to develop in a way that will help the child survive in a dangerous world:

- On constant alert for danger
- Quick to react to threats (fight, flight, freeze)

The stress hormones produced during trauma also interfere with the development of higher brain functions.

Source: Teicher., M. H. (2002). Scars that won't heal: The neurobiology of child abuse. *Scientific American*, 286 (3),68-75.

Young Children (0–5)

Key

Developmental Tasks

- Development of visual and auditory perception
- Recognition of and response to emotional cues
- Attachment to primary caregiver

Trauma's Impact

- Sensitivity to noise
- Avoidance of contact
- Heightened startle response
- Confusion about what's dangerous and who to go to for protection
- Fear of being separated from familiar people/places

(Continued)

School-Aged Children (6–12)

Key Developmental Tasks

- Manage fears, anxieties, and aggression
- Sustain attention for learning and problem solving
- Control impulses and manage physical responses to danger

Trauma's Impact

- Emotional swings
- Learning problems
- Specific anxieties and fears
- Attention seeking
- Reversion to younger behaviors

(Continued)

Adolescents (13–21)

Key Developmental Tasks

- Think abstractly
- Anticipate and consider the consequences of behavior
- Accurately judge danger and safety
- Modify and control behavior to meet long-term goals

Trauma's Impact

- Difficulty imagining or planning for the future
- Over- or underestimating danger
- Inappropriate aggression
- Reckless and/or self-destructive behaviors

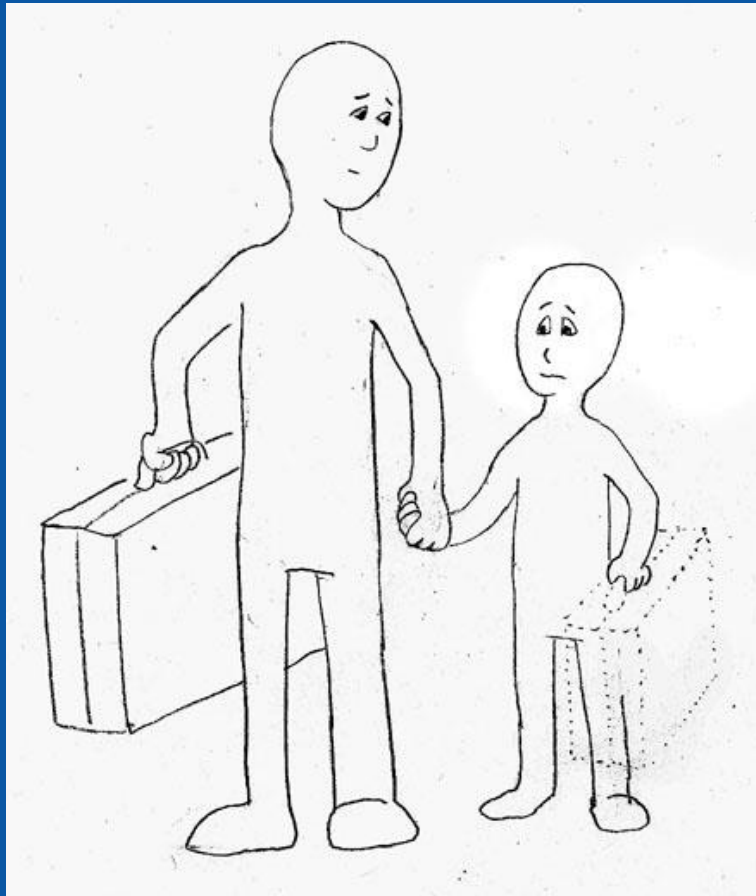
Getting Development Back on Track



- Traumatized children and adolescents can learn new ways of thinking, relating, and responding.
- Rational thought and self-awareness can help children override primitive brain responses.
- Unlearning—and rebuilding—takes time.

(Continued)

The Invisible Suitcase



Trauma shapes children's beliefs and expectations:

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

Meet Maya (8 Months Old)



Maya wakes up crying in the middle of the night.

- When her Aunt Jenna tries to soothe her, Maya arches her back, pushes her hands against Jenna's shoulders, and screams even harder.
- When Jenna tries to make eye contact with Maya, the baby turns her head away.
- "This little baby makes me feel completely rejected," Jenna says. "Sometimes I feel so helpless, I just have to put her down and let her cry."

Maya's History



- Exposure to domestic violence
- Physical abuse, including broken bones and bruises
- Separation from her mother
- Medical trauma, including hospitalization

Maya's Behaviors



- Cries and screams, rejects comfort
- Is easily startled and distressed by loud noises
- Screams when brought to the doctor's office—even before a doctor or nurse has touched her
- Takes comfort from her bottle when it is propped up rather than when it is being held
- Is soothed by a particular piece of music

What's in Maya's Suitcase? (Group Activity)



□

- Beliefs about herself?

- Beliefs about her caregivers?

- Beliefs about the world?

What Trauma-Informed Parents Can Do



- Offer a secure base of love and protection.
- Be emotionally and physically available.
- Recognize and respond to the child's needs.
- Provide guidance and example.
- Provide opportunities to safely explore the world.

Source: Better Brains for Babies. (2007). *Attachments and the role of the caregiver*. Available at <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/bbb/attachCareGiver.php>

Seeing Below the Surface

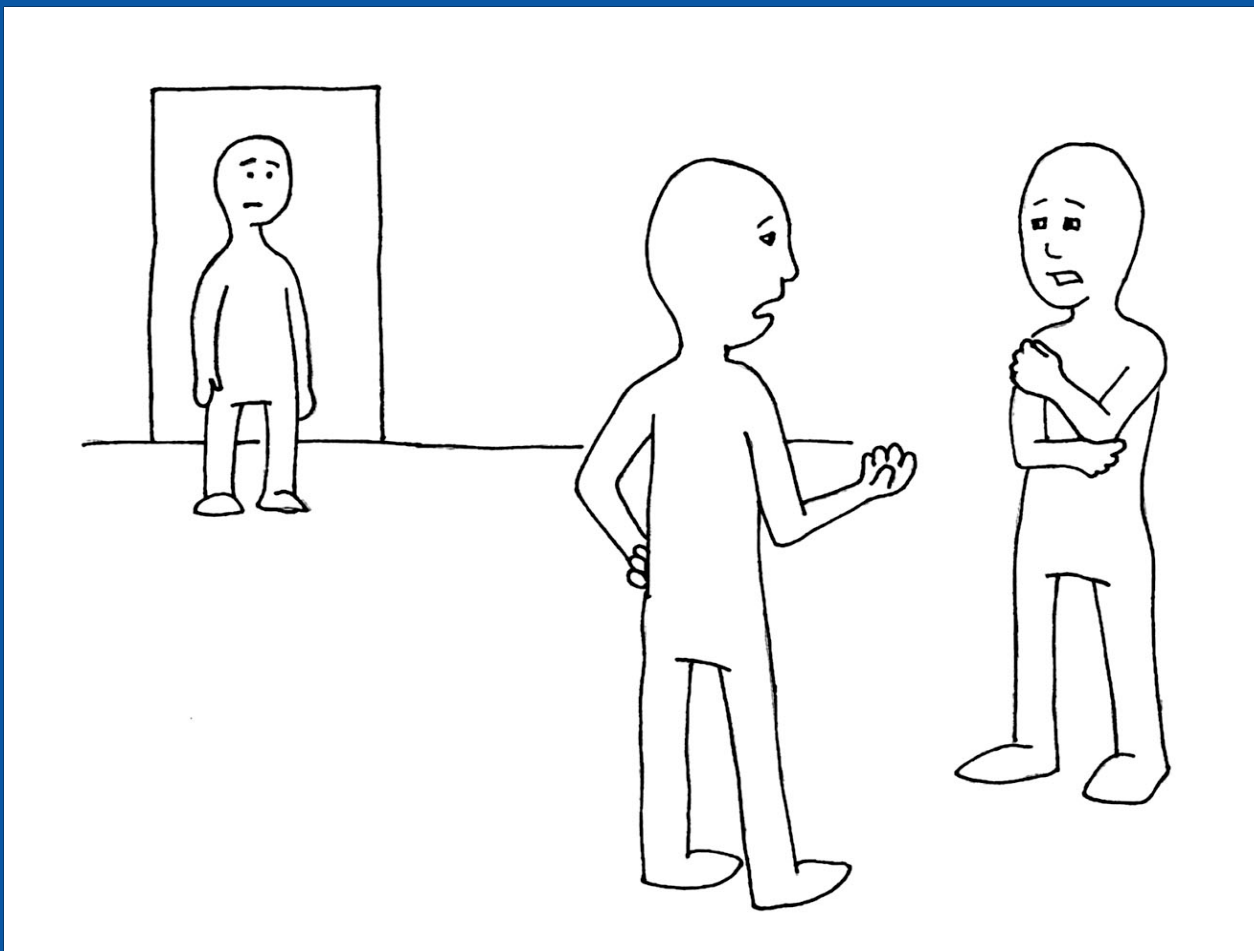


Child's behaviors

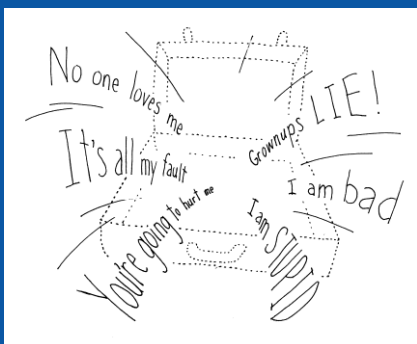


Child's feelings, thoughts, expectations, and beliefs

What If . . . ? (Group Activity)



The Cognitive Triangle



Thoughts ↔ **Behaviors**



Feelings



Trauma and the Triangle



Children who have experienced trauma may find it hard to:

- See the connection between their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors
- Understand and express their own emotional reactions
- Accurately read other people's emotional cues
- Control their reactions to threats or trauma reminders

(Continued)

Trauma and the Triangle

(Continued)



Children may act out as a way of:

- Reenacting patterns or relationships from the past
- Increasing interaction, even if the interactions are negative
- Keeping caregivers at a physical or emotional distance
- “Proving” the beliefs in their Invisible Suitcase
- Venting frustration, anger, or anxiety
- Protecting themselves

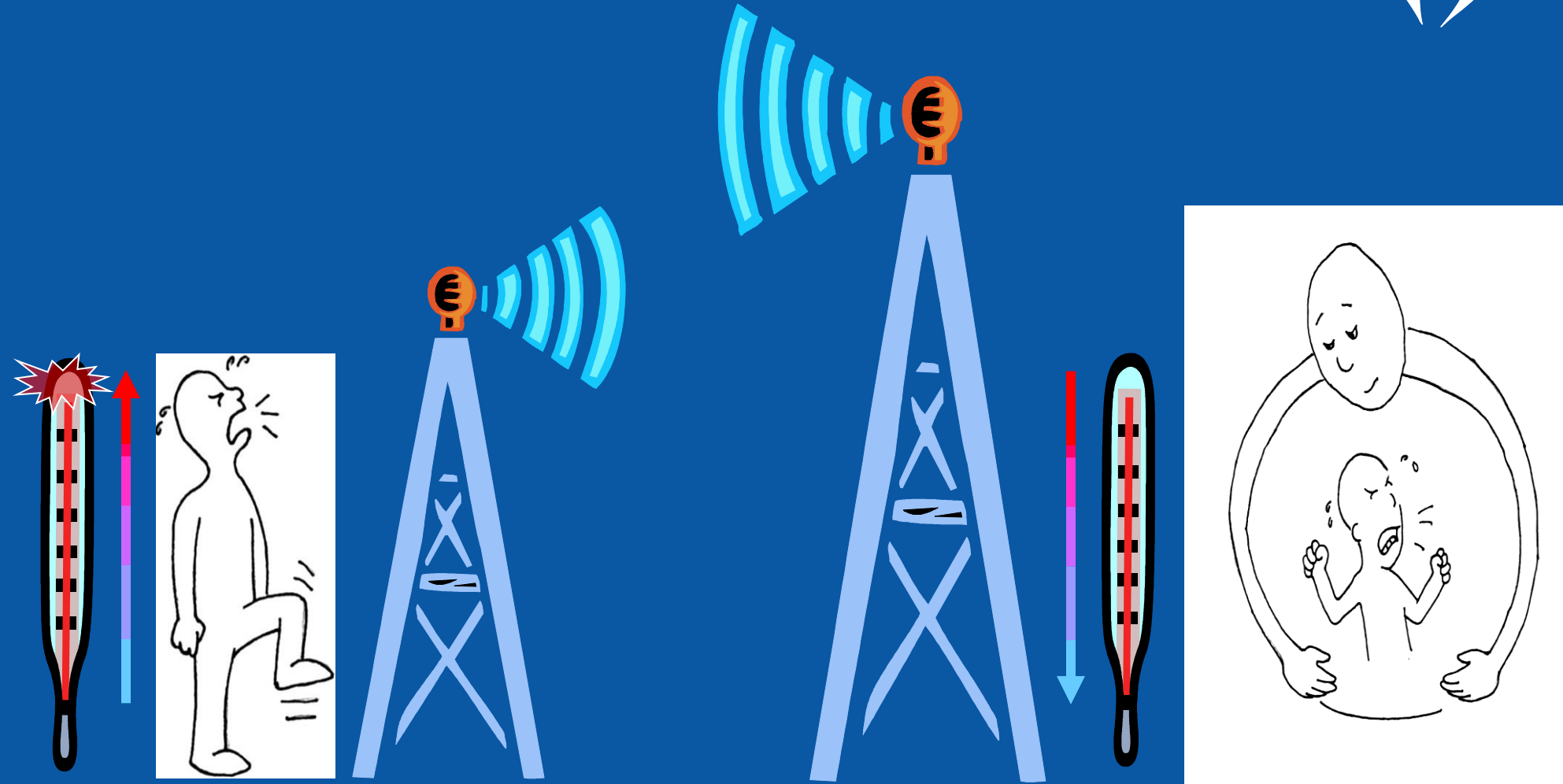
Differentiate



Take care not to:

- “Buy into” the beliefs in their invisible suitcases
- React in anger or the heat of the moment
- Take behavior at face value
- Take it personally

Tune In

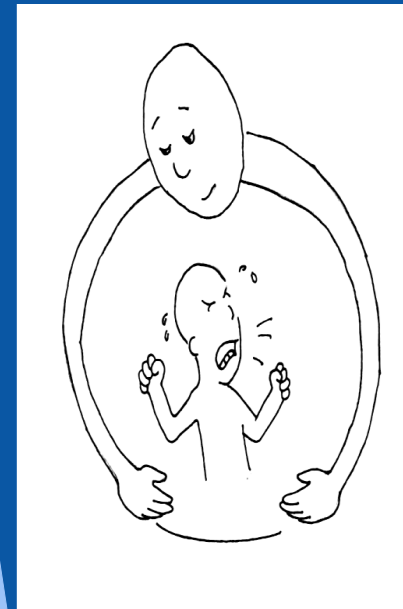
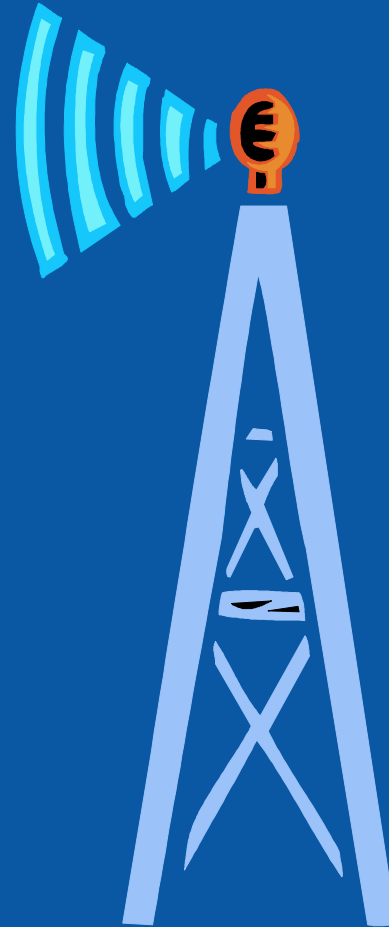


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Tune In *(Continued)*



- Help the child identify and put into words the feelings beneath the actions.
- Acknowledge and validate the child's feelings.
- Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.

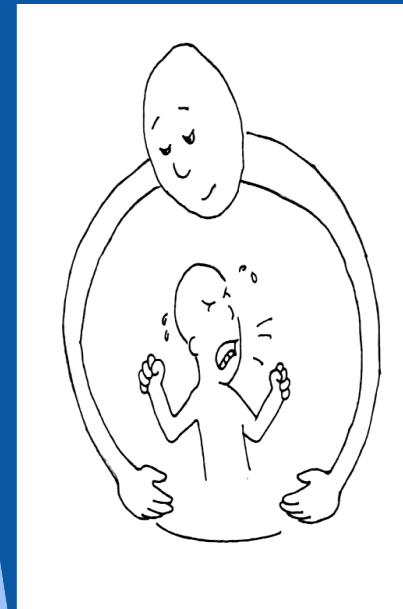
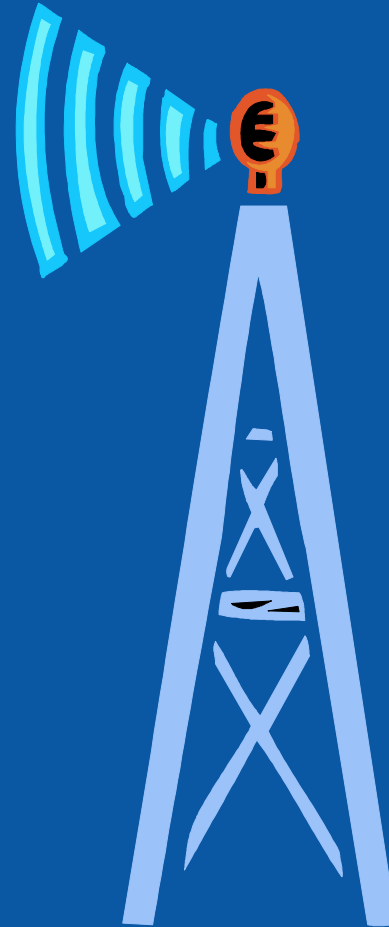


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Tune In *(Continued)*



- Let the child know it's okay to talk about painful things.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences.
- Be reassuring, but be honest.



(Continued)

Set an Example



Express the full range of emotions:

- Stay clear, calm, and consistent.
- Be honest and genuine.
- Let your child know that it's normal to feel different (or mixed) emotions at the same time.

[One day] my rabbit died. I started to cry. That rabbit was so small and defenseless. It needed me and I let it die. Then [my foster mother] hugged me. "If that happened to my cat . . . I would feel the same way that you do," she said. She wanted my rabbit to be buried and offered to buy me another one. That's how I realized she wasn't a fake.

I felt different at that moment. It was like she felt the anger that I had inside of me and was saying that it was OK to feel that way. That it was OK to be sad and for me to let my guard down . . . That it was OK to let someone into my world and let them help me.

— A. M.

Learning to love again. *Represent*. July/Aug 2006.

Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/JulyAug2006/2006-07-04b.htm>

What happened? (Group Activity)



- Why did A. M. react the way she did?
- What did her foster mother do right?
- Have you ever experienced something similar with the children in your care?



Thank you!