

# **Little People Big Feelings**

**THE BRAIN, BEHAVIOR, AND OUR RESPONSE**

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# What are we doing today?

- ▶ 1. Define Trauma
- ▶ 2. Parts of the Brain
- ▶ 3. Behavior and Communication
- ▶ 4. Building Relationships
- ▶ 5. Helping your child with anxiety
- ▶ 6. Regulating practices
- ▶ 7. Self Care

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# What is trauma to you?

- ▶ Take a few minutes to think about what your definition of the word trauma is.

# Trauma- Definitions

- ▶ What is Trauma?

- ▶ By the National Council for Behavioral Health.



- ▶ - Many of us think of trauma only as huge, horrible, life altering events.
    - ▶ - These things are traumatic; however these are not the only traumas. Trauma is anything that is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience or ongoing experience that causes toxic stress.
    - ▶ - We have all experienced more traumas than we realize.
    - ▶ - 26% of all U.S. children will experience or witness a traumatic incident before turning 4 years old.

# Levels of Stress

## Positive Stress

Moderate, short-lived stress responses that are normal part of life and healthy development. A child can learn to manage and control these experiences with support of caring adults in context of safe, warm, and positive relationships.

## Tolerable Stress

Stress responses that could affect brain architecture but generally occur for briefer periods which allow brain to recover and thereby reverse potentially harmful effects.

## Toxic Stress

Strong, frequent or prolonged activation of body's stress management system. Stressful events that are chronic, uncontrollable, and/or experienced without child having access to support from caring adults.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2009



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90% of brain development happens before age 5.

▶ 26% of children will have experienced high levels of toxic stress by the age of 4.

# What is an ACE?

- ▶ -The original ACE Study was conducted at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 with two waves of data collection. Over 17,000 people were studied.
  - ▶ Abuse, Neglect, Household Challenges
  - ▶ Family history and health history questionnaires were given to all participants
  - ▶ Almost two-thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE, and more than one in five reported three or more ACEs.
  
- ▶ After the quiz we will talk more about the affect multiple ACE's have on children
  
- ▶ [What is an ACE?](#)
  
- ▶ [ACE Quiz](#)





**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):**  
Events that occur during a person's formative years that influence physical and mental health into adulthood.

## THE THREE TYPES OF ACEs



Abuse



Neglect



Household Dysfunction

## SIGNS YOUR CHILD MAY BE IMPACTED BY ACEs



Anger management problems



Manipulative



lack of motivation

### When developmental trauma is present



View humans as threats, not friends



Believe bad things happen on purpose

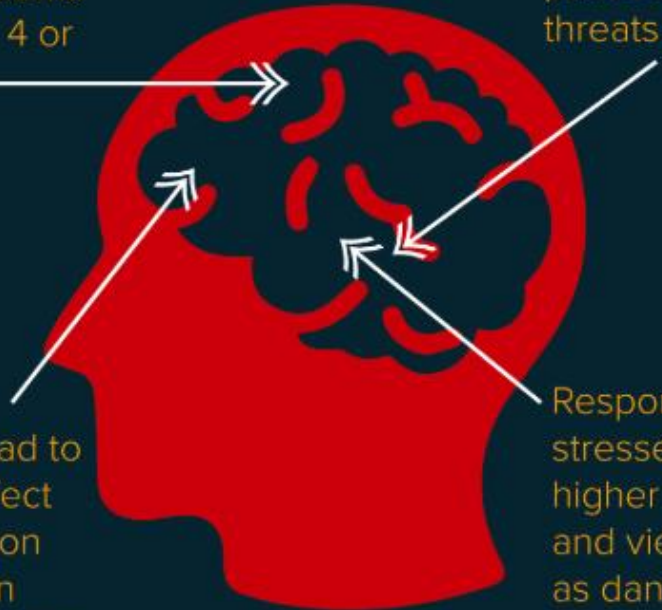


Avoid risks at all costs

When an ACE occurs, the child's brain is flooded with adrenaline in what is often called "Fight or Flight". While this reaction helps the child react to any immediate dangers, it becomes toxic when turned on for too long.

**32x** more likely to have learning or behavior problems in school with 4 or more ACEs

Brain development is paused to deal with threats to safety



This stunted growth can lead to a snowball effect of poor decision making and an inability to process fear appropriately

Respond to daily stresses with higher anxiety and view them as dangerous

- More likely to have learning challenges
- More likely to have behavioral challenges
- Increased anxiety
- Slowed brain development
- Health challenges

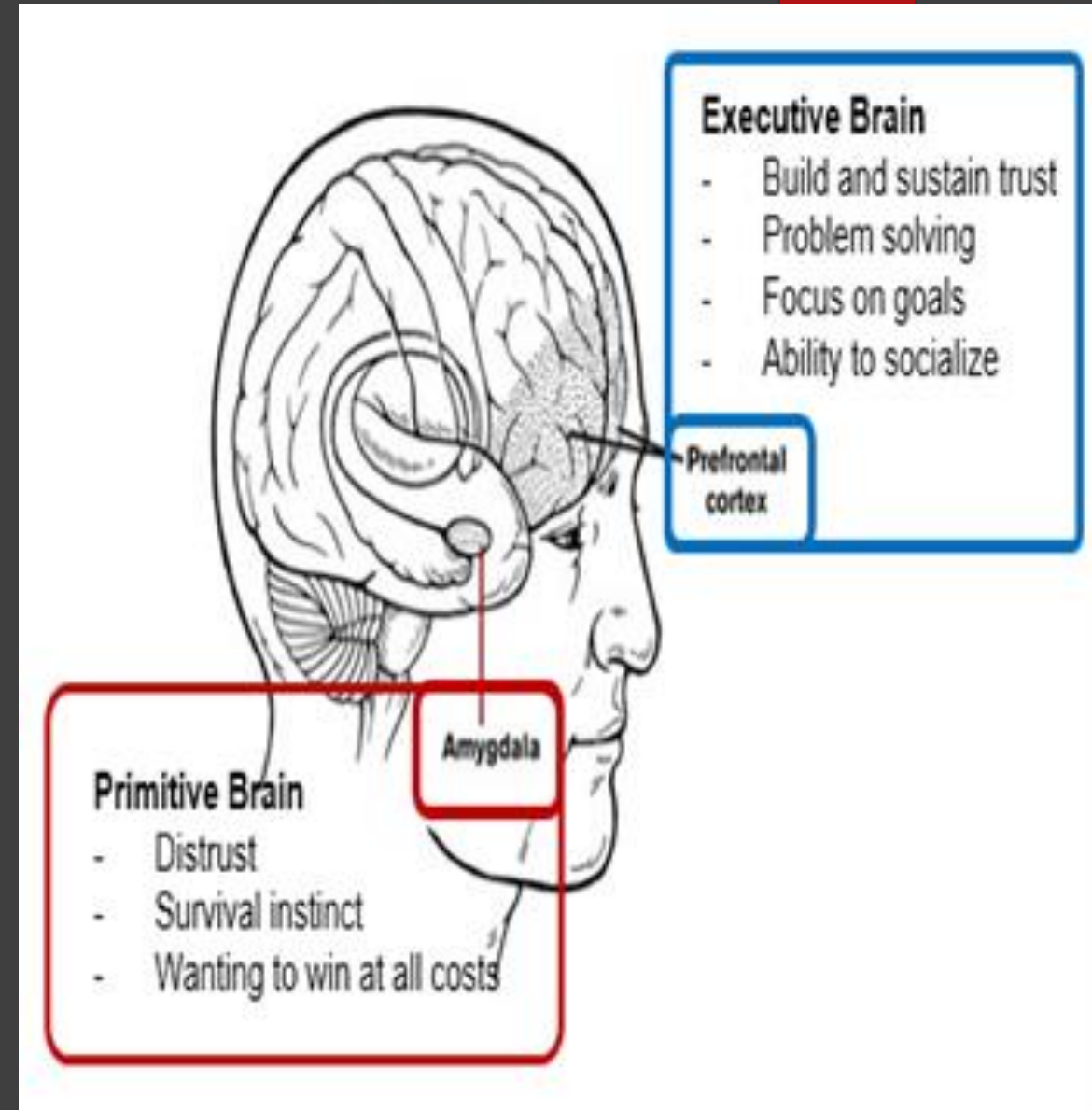


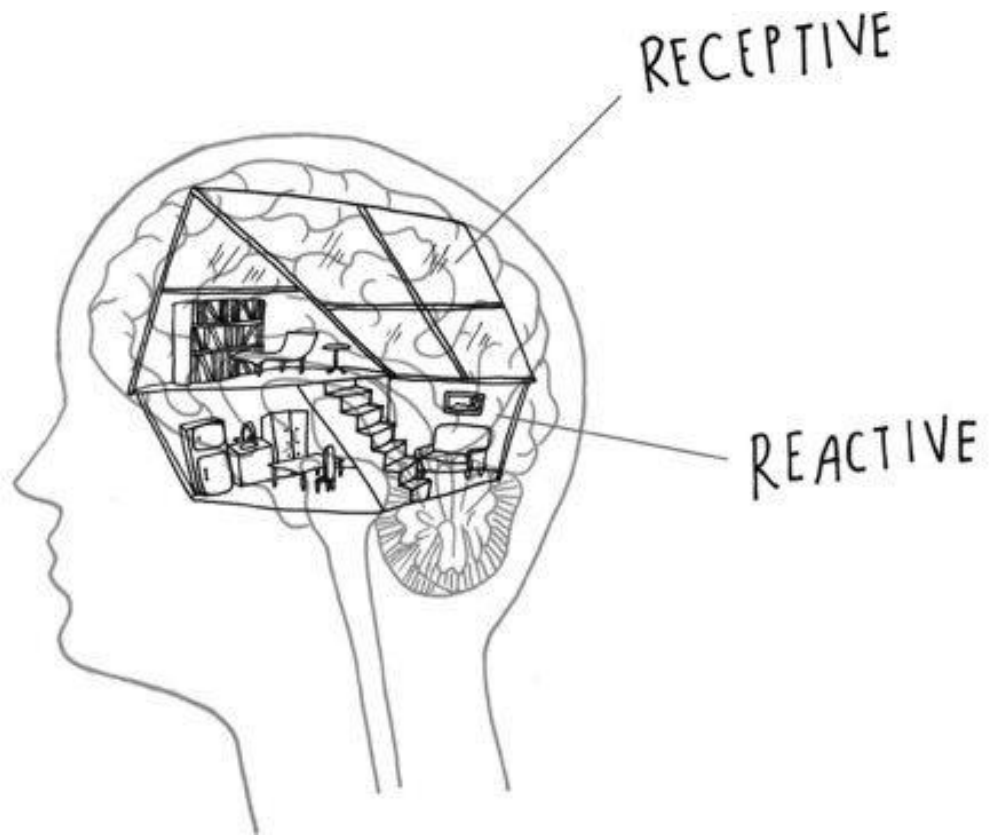
# New Information....

- ▶ Over 48% of all American children come to school with at least one ACE (adverse childhood experience)
- ▶ Increased exposure to gun violence
- ▶ Victim or exposure to racism or forms of bigotry and hate

# Parts of the brain and development

- ▶ Brain is built for connection, survival, emotions and learning
- ▶ Relationships and healthy attachments is what develops the brain from the start.
- ▶ Your brain develops from back to front
  - ▶ Brain stem - sensations (connects body to brain)
  - ▶ Cortex - language and words
  - ▶ Amygdala - Feelings/Survival
  - ▶ Frontal lobe - executive functions
- ▶ We are FEELING creatures that think
- ▶ Our #1 job is to survive





Upstairs Brain

Vs.

Downstairs  
Brain

# Parts of the brain and development

- ▶ A brain filled with anxiety, chronic stress, or adversity will not learn.
- ▶ Kids in in a chronic stress state have not had buffers (adults to teach them regulation) so their brain develops in the fight or flight mode constantly
- ▶ If you lack a deep memory of feeling safe and loved, the receptors in the brain that respond to human kindness fail to develop
- ▶ Without attachment , the sensory and motor systems are compromised- these are the fundamental building blocks of emotional and behavioral regulation
- ▶ The right hemisphere responds to negative emotions while the left hemisphere responds to positive emotions.

# Behavior and Communication

- ▶ Stress responses
- ▶ All behavior is some form of communication. It's trying to share a survival mechanism, emotion, or thought with you.
- ▶ Negative behavior results from a stress response. If you respond from your stress response to their stress response then nothing will come about it. We will just see a short term compliance and not a behavioral change
- ▶ Chronic stress/adversities are carried in the body
- ▶ When we are living in survival mode, with our stress response turned on all the time, we can really focus on only three things!

## • Three Questions...

• **Body- Am I ok?**

• **Environment-Where is it safe?**

• **Time- How long will this last?**

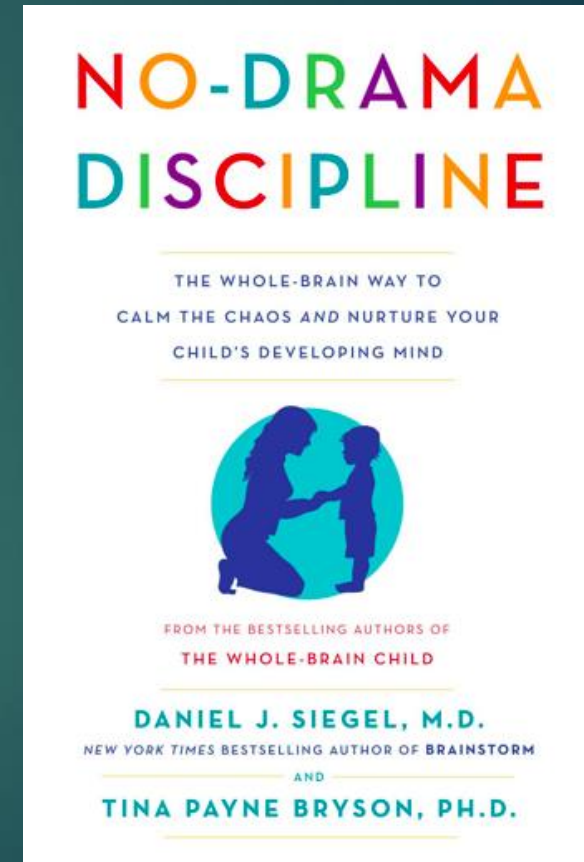


# Effect of positive relationships

- ▶ Every positive experience and connection we create for a child architecturally changes life trajectory and brain function. IT REWIRES THE BRAIN!
- ▶ Built in attachment strongly motivate us to seek out positive bonds with caring adults
- ▶ ONE healthy relationship with a child in a chronic adverse or agitated state can change their brain forever
- ▶ Adverse childhood experiences always affect relationships and the ability to emotionally regulate. When we feel safe, we learn, and we're willing to learn.

# Building Relationships

- ▶ There are three questions that will shift the brain:
- ▶ **What do you need?**
- ▶ **How can I help?**
- ▶ **What can we do to make this better?**
- ▶ **Emotional Responsiveness**

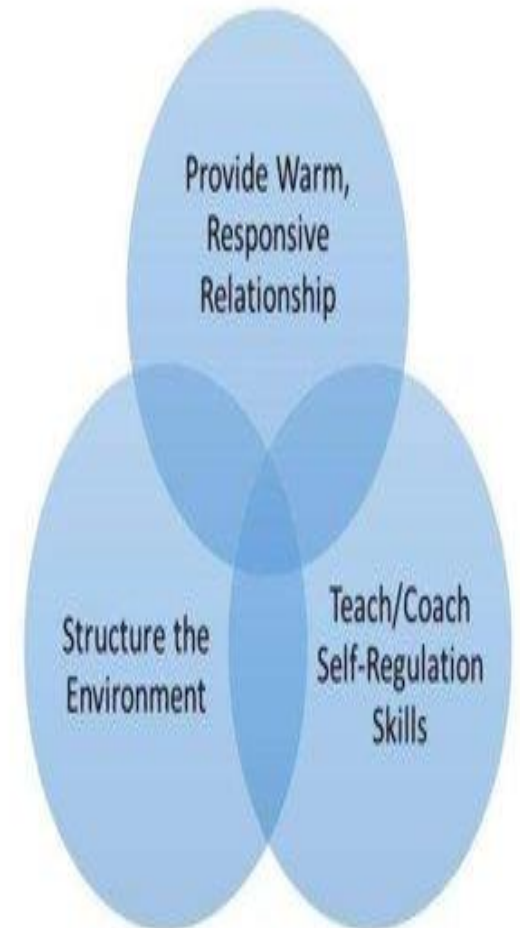


# Self/Co Regulation

- ▶ Provide a warm, **responsive relationship** where children feel respected as individuals, comforted and supported in times of stress, and confident that they will be cared for no matter what.
- ▶ **Structure the environment** to make self-regulation manageable, providing a buffer against environmental stressors.
- ▶ **Teach and coach** self-regulation skills through modeling, instruction, opportunities for practice, prompts for skill enactment, and reinforcement of successive approximations. Name emotions and validate them when you see them. Practice through play!!!

- ▶ [Co-Regulation/Building Attachment](#)

## How to Co-Regulate



# What Does This Look Like?

- ▶ Ways to nurture self-regulation at home are:
- ▶ **Routines** – establishing, explaining, and sticking to a schedule for bedtime, playtime, TV time, mealtime, etc. Help the child learn the routine so s/he can regulate him/herself. For example, set a timer to go off when it is 5 minutes to bed time. When the child hears the bell, s/he knows that it's time to brush teeth.
- ▶ **Play** – because it helps us all, children particularly, naturally self-regulate as well as bond with parents. Play also nurtures basic self-awareness and control skills, such as grounding, centering, sharing, and waiting. Play and movement in all forms also develops fitness, health, self-awareness, kinesthetic and proprioceptive awareness, the reticular activating system (for processing and filtering sensory information), attention span, focus, self-control, physical coordination (which fuels cognitive coordination), direction following, socialization, and so much more.
- ▶ **Pausing, reflecting, and self-caring** – because this 3 – step routine, when reinforced by parents and practiced regularly, develops mindfulness and the ability to self-regulate, which is a physical skill, and so needs to be practiced just like any motor skill.
- ▶ **More mirroring and less managing** – because when parents name what they see in a child's behavior and emotional state and offer the child tools to support or soothe themselves appropriately, it help that child feel and manage what is going on in their bodies and learn to use tools/activities to self-care and self-regulate. This builds healthy self-esteem and confidence.

# Focused attention practices- regulation techniques

- ▶ Focus on BREATH and focus on the BODY
- ▶ Use the senses
- ▶ Negative thought or emotion will leave the brain within 90 seconds of breathing and movement
- ▶ Peace sign in one hand, okay sign in the other and switch
- ▶ Wink with one eye and snap fingers on opposite hand, switch
- ▶ Take a deep six second inhale reaching arms overhead, exhale while counting back from six and bring arms down
  
- ▶ Remember:
  - ▶ We have to TEACH and model these for our kids
  - ▶ Stress is carried in the body so use the body to get rid of it



# Self care

- ▶ It is important not only too take care of your child but to also remember to take care of yourself

**What is one thing I can do to take care of my mental health?**