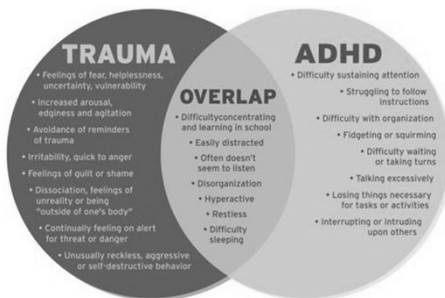


ABC Soup – Mental Health Diagnoses

- Attention Concerns
 - ADHD, Intellectual Impairment, Learning Disorder (various), Anxiety Disorder
- Learning Difficulties
 - Intellectual Impairment, Reading/Math Disorder, Nonverbal Learning Disorder, Language Disorder, Anxiety, Substance Use
- Emotional Problems
 - Anxiety Disorder, Depressive Disorder, OCD, PTSD
- Social Concerns
 - PTSD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Nonverbal Learning Disorder, Social Phobia, Selective Mutism
- Disruptive Behaviors
 - ODD, ADHD, PTSD, Anxiety/Depression

4

Symptom Overlap



5

Diagnostic Limitations



6

Below the Iceberg – Early Experiences

- All children have experienced some degree of loss
- Many (though not all) children enter kinship homes following some degree of early adversity:
 - Poor prenatal care/uterine substance exposure
 - Inconsistent caregiving
 - Lack of nurturing /neglect
 - Unresolved physical pain/hunger
 - Chaotic/Unpredictable care
 - Chronic environmental stress
 - Persisting fear
 - On-going physical threat

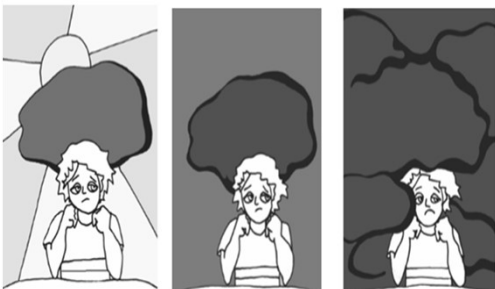
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Reactions to Removal



8

Loss, Adversity, and Trauma



9

Impact of Loss/Trauma

- The impact of loss/trauma depends on several factors, including:
 - Age and developmental stage
 - Perception of danger
 - Lived experience or witness to event
 - Sense of predictability/control
 - History of early adversity/traumatic experiences
 - Adversity experienced following the event
 - The presence/availability of others who can offer protection and ensure safety/stability

10

Stress in Young Children

Stress that is:

Chronic,
Severe,
Unpredictable

TRAUMA (TOXIC)

RESILIENCE

Stress that is:

Limited,
Moderate,
Predictable

11

Stress Response System

- Brain responds to perceived threat in multiple ways:
 - Flock (gather social resources)
 - Freeze (assess threat and ↓ visibility)
 - Flee...If cornered, then Fight (↑ heart rate, ↑ adrenalin)
 - Dissociate if threat is inescapable (↓ heart rate, ↑ opiates)
- This stress reaction can become “wired” in over time as a biological memory if stressors are chronic
- Youth who experienced trauma may (over)respond to later stressors with social-seeking (flock), withdrawal (freeze), overactivity (flight), or aggression (fight)

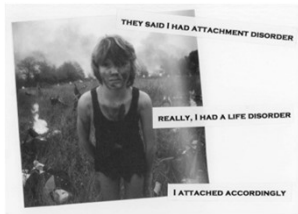
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Stress Model of Behavior Regulation

- Young children are inherently dependent on others for self-regulation (i.e., ability to tolerate stress)
- When infants and young children develop in chronically stressful environments their bodies remain in a state of elevated distress
- Chronic elevation of stress response system leads to
 1. A body that is sensitized to stress
 - AND
 2. A child who struggles to calm themselves

13

If early environments primed the brain/body for ongoing “threats,” later behavior can be extremely challenging.



When we label behaviors as “good” or “bad,” we forget that children’s behavior is reflective of their earlier experiences.

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Impact on Behavioral Functioning

- Children who have had early traumatic experiences often respond to later stress with:
 - Hyper-Vigilance
 - High social seeking (flock)
 - Detachment, Numbing, Withdrawal (freeze)
 - Anxiety and Terror (freeze/dissociation)
 - Anger and Aggression (flee/fight)
- These patterned stress responses can lead to high reactivity, excessive seeking/withdrawal, poor impulse control, or aggression towards others – these behaviors underlie many mental health diagnoses

15

Impact on Cognitive Functioning

- The more “activated” the stress response, the more difficult it is to acquire/demonstrate knowledge
- Problems with attention, engagement, information processing, planning
- Children with cognitive difficulties show patterns of quick regression in times of stress
- Other children who have appropriate cognitive skills may act out with more intensity

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Impact on Academic Development

- Early adversity reduces one’s attention span, ability to concentrate, and to organize
- Learning is impeded in times of overwhelming stress
- The stress of academics can increase helplessness in vulnerable youth, making it more likely they will give up and shut down



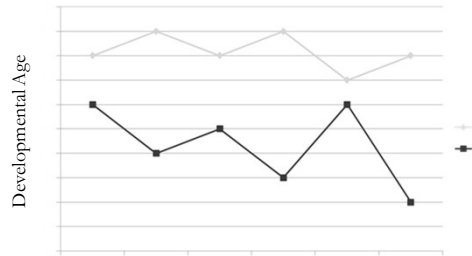
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Impact on Social Functioning

- The more “activated” the stress response, the more difficult it is to interact positively
- May be hypersensitive (and over-reactive) to perceived anger/rejection
- When brain remains in “survival mode,” there is less room for considering the feelings of others
- Peer interactions may overwhelm coping responses; may need an adult nearby to facilitate social interactions

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Effects of Early Adversity on Later Development



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Adversity & Mental Health

- Anxiety/Fear (flock, freeze, flee, fight) is the hallmark of early adversity and can be persistent beyond the stressor(s)
- This compounds the concerns noted with typical brain changes in the t'ween/teen years:
 - Reduced stress tolerance
 - Difficulty handling hormonal changes
 - Poor mood stability
 - Greater "reward focus" (disregard risks)
 - Limited planning

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Understanding Behavior

- In some cases, challenging behavior (e.g., lying, aggression) reflects a patterned response to stress
As such, it represents a neurological "habit" that may be less intentional than perceived
- The patterned stress response (while problematic within our homes) may have been critical to survival within the context of early adversity
- Healing relationships support new brain patterns and allow (over time) increased capacity for a child to maintain lower arousal in response to changes in the environment (i.e., stress)

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Potential Stress Reaction

- Reconceptualizing Lying:
 - Arises from a state of stress
 - Often occurs in response to perceived 'threat'
 - Is often "indirect communication" of some need
 - May be the sign of a scared child, not a manipulative child
- As parents, your children need you to:
 - **Connect** first, before confronting
 - Give child time/space to think before they respond
 - Seek patterns of lying to understanding their meaning
 - Acknowledge fear:
 - "What are you scared will happen if you tell the truth?"
 - Make it safe to tell the truth

22

Potential Stress Reaction

- Reconceptualizing Aggression:
 - Potential fear-based behavior, arising from a state of stress
 - Could represent over-patterned "fight" response when "freeze/flee" were previously ineffective
 - Triggers fear response in parent, which furthers the cycle
 - May be the sign of a scared child, not an angry child
- As parents, your children need you to:
 - Maintain positive interactions and promote shared affect
 - Regulate your own reaction – The "powerful" amygdala soothes the vulnerable amygdala
 - Seek patterns of aggressive responses to predict their occurrence
 - Prevent escalation through coaching/empathy

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In the Face of Misbehavior

At the core of every problem is an issue of:

- I am not lovable.
- I don't deserve love.
- I am unworthy.
- People cannot be trusted.

At the core of every solution:

- I am worthy and deserve love.
- I can find the peaceful solution to this.
- I have value and am lovable.
- I trust us to work this out by staying connected.

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Attending to Behavior

To prevent problems:

- Establish safety
- Be patient with establishing relationship
- Name emotions (be sure to label ☺ and ☹)
- Nurture often
- **Redirect** when possible (punishment = shame)

Escalation:

- Is he feeling safe? Is she overstimulated?
- Seek to soothe/calm first
- Stay close (but talk less)
- Allow child to repair once regulated

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Emotional Stuck Points

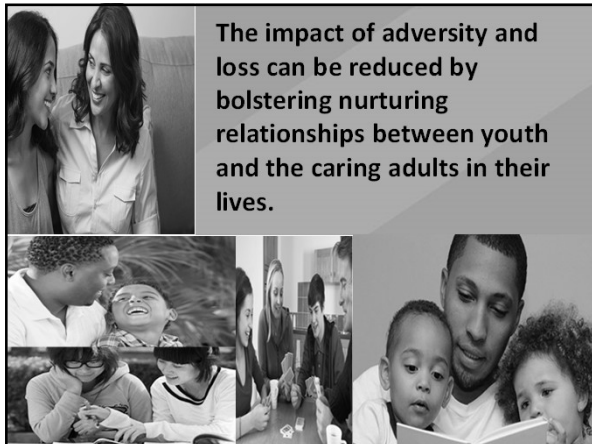
- Fear: *The world is/was unpredictable and chaotic.*
- Grief: *What else could I lose?*
- Instability: *Will I have to move again?*
- Reason for placement: *What's wrong with me?*
- Loyalty: *Can I love both moms?*
- Difference: *Are their other families like mine?*

These can lead kids to struggle with aspects of loss/grief, perceived rejection, guilt/shame, and (lack of) control

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The impact of adversity and loss can be reduced by bolstering nurturing relationships between youth and the caring adults in their lives.

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Promoting Healing Relationships

Promoting a healing relationship starts at the top

- Understand your triggers - Exploring own triggers can interrupt automatic reactions and allow you to be more reflective in parenting
Have you made sense of your relationship/emotions towards first parents?
- If triggered, don't just do something, **WAIT**....so that you can best soothe your child's physiology (i.e., move him into a "calm state" so that he is receptive to learning)

29

Promoting Healing Relationships

- Relationship is the primary mechanism for change
Positive interactions soothe the stress response system and allow the youth to be receptive to new learning
- Monitor interpretation – The way we label a behavior will guide the response...When in doubt, make benign attributions
- Avoid personalizing youth's behavior....They are not doing it "to" you, some behaviors may have helped them survive
- Use "compassionate curiosity" and connectedness to understand behavior before responding

30

Promoting Healing Relationships

- Reduce use of punishment
Over-use of punishment reinforces the youth's negative self-view, replicates unhealthy relationship patterns, maintains emotional distance, and engenders revenge
- Discipline = "To Teach"
A child must be physiologically calm to "learn the lesson"
- It about CONNECTION, not compliance.... Goal is not to "fix" or control, but rather to CONNECT to create opportunities for growth

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Promoting Healing Relationships

- Reduce your "fighting words" (threats, orders, commands)

You cant watch TV until your homework is done!

Don't you talk to me that way!

You're not going anywhere until your room is clean.

Feel free to watch TV **as soon as** you finish your homework

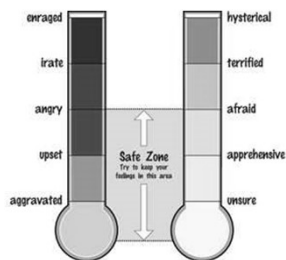
I'll be glad to talk after you have calmed down

I can share the car when your room is clean

32

Promoting Healing Relationships

- Support youth's awareness of her physiological reactivity to promote shared problem-solving



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Promoting Healing Relationships

- Give youth their story and help them understand early experiences and goodbyes
Name it to tame it!
- Youth need support creating their life narrative and understand that decisions were out of their control and NOT because of them!
 - Lifebooks
- This story is the foundation for family conversations that can reduce shame, lessen isolation, honor grief, & promote healing over the lifespan

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Name It to Tame It

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/>



Helping Kids Grieve
Coping with the loss of a loved one brings enormous challenges. With love and support, children can start to heal.



Offering Comfort
In the face of challenges big and small, little ones need lots of help from caring adults to grow and thrive. Comforting nurturing touch is actually necessary for healthy brain.



Parental Addiction
Resources and support for families struggling with parental addiction.



Resilience
Giving children tools to overcome both little and big challenges will help them to learn and grow.



Traumatic Experiences
Grown-ups hold the power to help lessen the effects of traumatic experiences.



Family Homelessness
Living over a home brings enormous challenges. And yet families are incredibly strong and determined to create a better future.



Foster Care
As an adult involved in foster care, you have an enormous job building and stabilizing family structure and children's sense of safety.



Coping With Incarceration
With adults' love and support, kids can cope with the incarceration of a loved one.

35

Preschool Story

Everyone has a first mommy and first daddy. Sometimes kids can stay with first mommies/first daddies and sometimes they can't. There are many reasons for this. When you were born, @ was your first mommy; * was your first daddy. * did not know how to be a daddy and still struggles to follow adult rules. It is not safe for kids to be with him. That is why you don't know him. Mommy @ wanted to be your mommy forever. But her body got so, so sick and stopped working. She died, which means that she cannot talk to us or play with us. It makes us sad that Mommy @ died. You were there when Mommy @ died - you might have questions or memories from that night. Mommy @ died because her body stopped working and doctors couldn't fix it... You did not do anything wrong. When Mommy @ died, we adopted you which means you will be a part of this family forever!

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Termination of Parental Rights

- A judge decided that (Parent) could not be your forever mom/dad because they couldn't remember all the safety rules.
- (Parent) made the decision because they cannot be the kind of mom/dad they want to be and the kind of mom/dad they know you need. They tried but it did not work. It was just too hard for them.
- (Parent's/Judge's) decision was not because of anything you did or said; this was a grown-up problem (decision).
- (Parent) has many helpers; he/she will be OK. It will always be ok to talk about (Parent) with me.
- Other kids have had to say goodbye to their first mom/first dad too. Would you like to meet some?

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Brave Conversations

- Reflect on your own internal fears/beliefs about youth's experiences and their first parents
- Mention topic early and look for natural openings
- Conversation is a PROCESS not an event
- Be sure to LISTEN, not just lecture
- Just because your child doesn't bring up _____ doesn't mean they don't think about it

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Youth Need Us To:

- Recognize that removal can be traumatic
- Understand that early experiences may impact later development and behaviors
- Reassure them that they are valuable and worthy
- Acknowledge their emotional world and ensure safety
- Help them integrate foster care/adoption experiences
- Take care of ourselves with our own buffering relationships!

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I Encourage You To:

- Nurture adult relationships – Find your community
- Play adoption with young children & revisit adoption stories with teens
- Be curious about your child's experience and emotions
- Acknowledge first parents and create life narrative
- Connect daily and laugh as a family!
- Seek support if overwhelmed
- Prioritize your mental health/wellness needs

40

Caring for Self



Self-care plan should include:

- adequate sleep
- nutrition
- leisure activities
- healthy boundaries
- regular exercise
- limited drug/alcohol use
- time alone (however brief)
- supportive adult social connections

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GrandFamilies.org

PROJECT

Grandfamilies.org

Grandfamilies.org serves as a national legal resource in support of grandfamilies within and outside the child welfare system.

Grandfamilies.org is a collaboration among: Generations United, The American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and Casey Family Programs.

The goals of Grandfamilies.org are to:

- educate individuals about state laws, legislation and policy in support of grandfamilies,
- assist interested policymakers, advocates, caregivers, and attorneys in exploring policy options to support relatives and the children in their care, and
- provide technical assistance and training.

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Kids Matter – Kinship Resources

414.344.1220

adam@kidsmatterinc.org

Donate

Volunteer

Empire

KIDS MATTER INC.

Who We Are ▾What We Do ▾Get Help ▾Take Action ▾



KINSHIP RESOURCES

<https://kidsmatterinc.org/get-help/for-families/kinship-care/kinship-resources/>

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WI – Adoption and Permanency Support



wisconsin

Adoption & Permanency Support

HOME

ABOUT US

ADOPTEE

PROFESSIONALS

EDUCATION

ADOPTEE SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

The Wisconsin Adoption & Permanency Support program offers supportive services that cover a wide continuum of needs for Wisconsin's adoptive & guardianship families, adult adoptees and birth families. Our program is built on collaboration with individuals, professionals, organizations and community members throughout Wisconsin who are impacted by adoption & guardianship.

<https://wisapsp.org/>

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ChampionClassrooms.org



A PROGRAM OF THE COALITION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

SIGN IN

CART (0)

ABOUT US

RESOURCES

TRAINING



Champion Classrooms

Offering foster, relative, and adoptive parents opportunities to grow in knowledge, confidence, and strength.

REGISTER HERE

45

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HealthyKidsLearnMore.com

Skills Learned

Healthy Minds aligns with National and Wisconsin Health Education Standards as well as the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Social and Emotional Learning Competencies. Using online and offline classroom activities, the courses will address:

- Recognizing feelings and emotions and learning how to deal with them
- Empathy and compassion
- Stress
- Healthy relationships
- Common mental health disorders and concerns
- How to get help when needed



Online, self-paced (3 hour), youth-focused, social-emotional lessons

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GrowingMindsToday.com



Growing Minds

ABOUT MINDFULNESS TAKE FIVE EDUCATORS LEARN ABOUT US



Take Five

Growing Minds is introducing Take Five: a series of animated mindfulness videos that make it easy for teachers and others to bring mindful awareness practices into classrooms, meetings or homes, without having to be an expert in mindfulness!

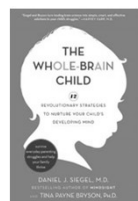
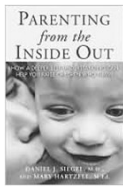
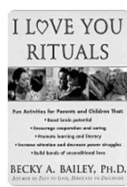
Take Five offers three types of guided exercises and practices that:

1. Develop focus and attention skills
2. Cultivate everyday kindness strategies, including compassion and gratitude, and
3. Reset and attune the mind-body connection through movement.

With the guidance of nurturing voices, beautiful scenery and soothing instrumental music, any class or group can take 5 breathers or 5 minutes to be mindful and notice how they are feeling. Each Time Take Five is used, more intentional and less reactive behavior is being cultivated.



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