



# Making Trauma Informed Decisions for Students

Talya Straughter, DPC, LPC, NCC, MAC, BC-TMH



# Learning Objectives

- Define Trauma
  - Prevalence of Trauma
  - The Impact of Trauma
  - Understanding Trauma
  - Building Relationships
  - Self Care
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- ▶ How would you define trauma
  - ▶ What are some examples of traumatic life experiences
  - ▶ How did those experiences affect you
- 



# What about your school/district

- ▶ Do we have students who ....
  - ▶ witness 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)?



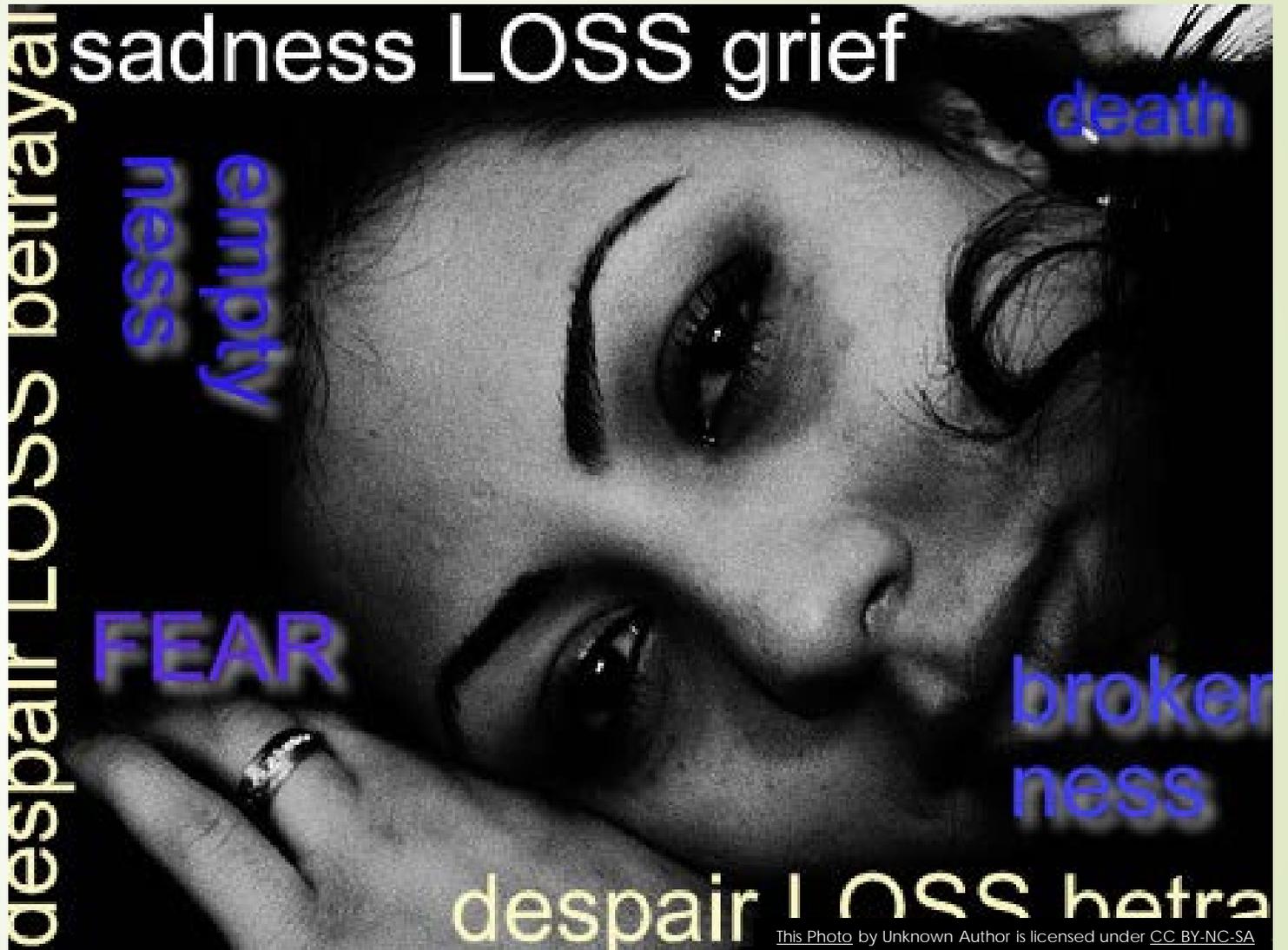
# What about your school/district

- ▶ 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?

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- ▶ Trauma refers to intense and overwhelming experiences that involve serious loss, threat or harm to a person's physical and/or emotional well being.
  - ▶ These experience may occur at any time in a person' life. They may involve a single traumatic event or may be repeated over many years.
  - ▶ These trauma experiences often overwhelm the persons coping resources. This often leads the person to find a way of coping that may work in the short run but may cause serious harm in the long run.

# ACE- Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

- ▶ Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente (an HMO) Collaboration
- ▶ Over a ten year study involving 17,000 people
- ▶ Looked at effects of adverse childhood experiences (trauma) over the lifespan
- ▶ Largest study ever done on this subject





# Prevalence

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)

### Household dysfunction

Substance abuse	27%
Parental separation/divorce	23%
Mental illness	19%
Battered mother	13%
Incarcerated household member	5%

### Abuse

Psychological	11%
Physical	28%
Sexual	21%

### Neglect

Emotional	15%
Physical	10%



# Health risk associated with ACEs

## Behaviors

- ▶ School Absenteeism- tardy & truancy
- ▶ Dysregulated eating (under/over eating)
- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ Suicide attempts
- ▶ Illicit drug use and substance abuse
- ▶ Multiple sexual partners
- ▶ Self-injurious behaviors (ex. Cutting)

## Outcomes

- ▶ Autoimmune disorders
- ▶ Obesity & eating disorders
- ▶ Substance use disorders
- ▶ Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Fetal death
- ▶ Health-related quality of life
- ▶ Risk for intimate partner violence
- ▶ Sexually transmitted infections
- ▶ Unintended pregnancies



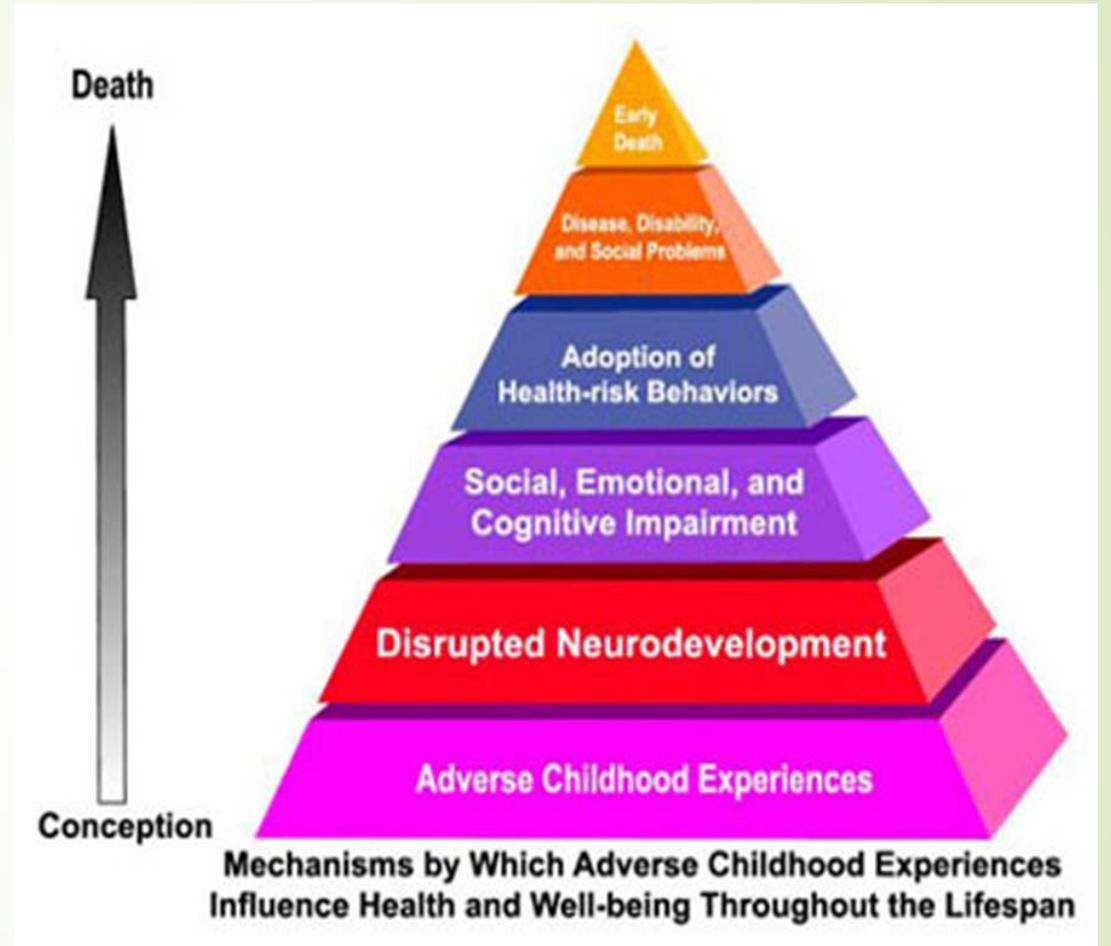
# Impact of Trauma Over a Lifetime

- ▶ Increases the risk of neurological, biological, psychological and/or social difficulties such as:
    - ▶ Changes in brain neurobiology;
    - ▶ Social, emotional & cognitive impairment;
    - ▶ Adoption of health risk behaviors as coping mechanisms (eating disorders, smoking, substance abuse, self harm, sexual promiscuity, violence); and
    - ▶ Severe and persistent behavioral health, physical health and social problems, early death. (Felitti et al, 1998)
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## Impact of Trauma over the Life Span

Effects of childhood adverse experiences

- Neurological
- Biological
- Psychological
- social





# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study

- ▶ Summary of Findings
  - ▶ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are:
    - ▶ very common, and
    - ▶ Strong predictors of health risks & disease from adolescence to adulthood
  - ▶ This combination of findings makes ACEs one of the leading, if not the leading determinant of the health & social well-being of our nation
  - ▶ National study- <http://www.cdc.gov/index.htm>



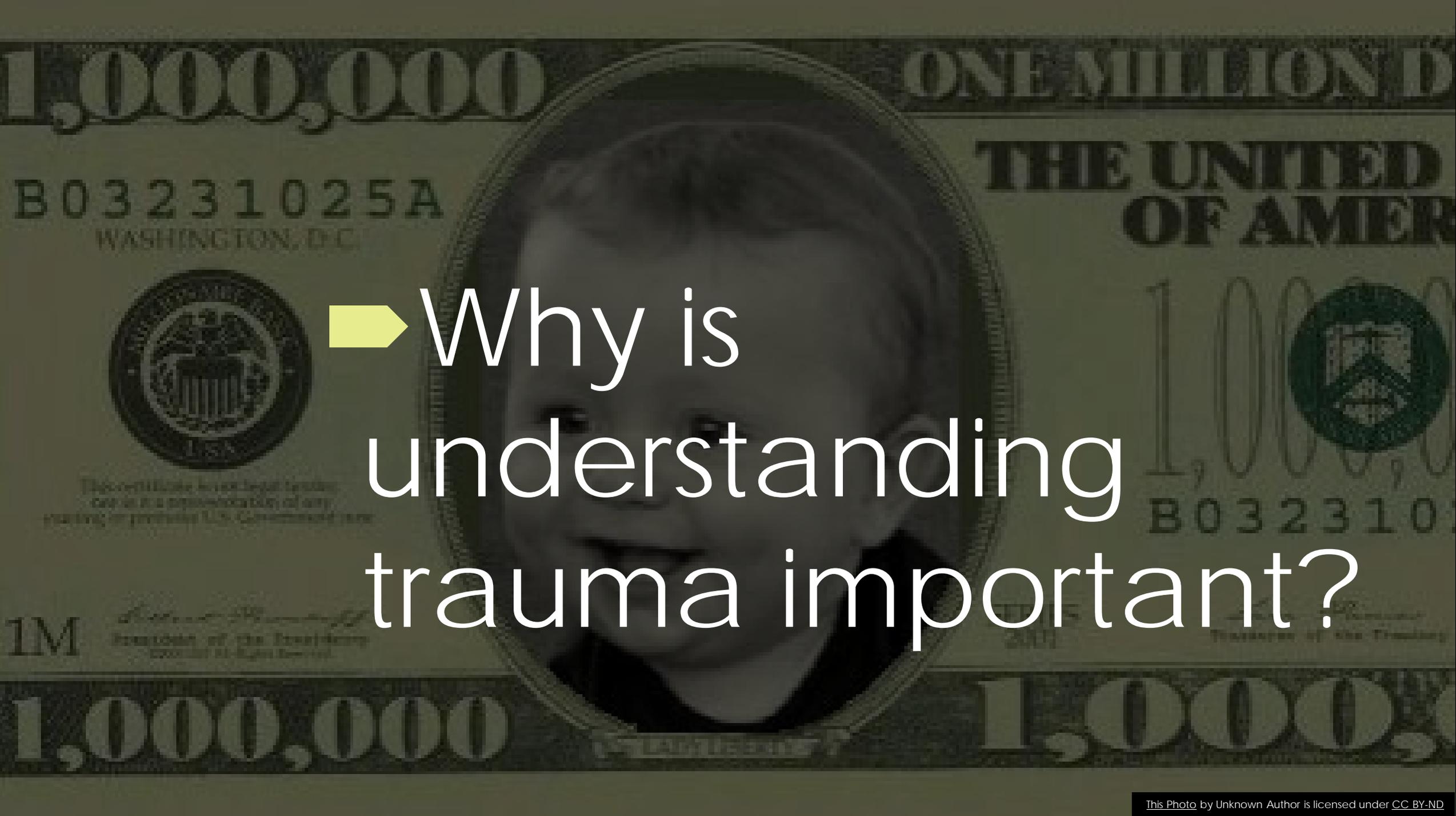
# Untreated adverse early childhood only exacerbate over time





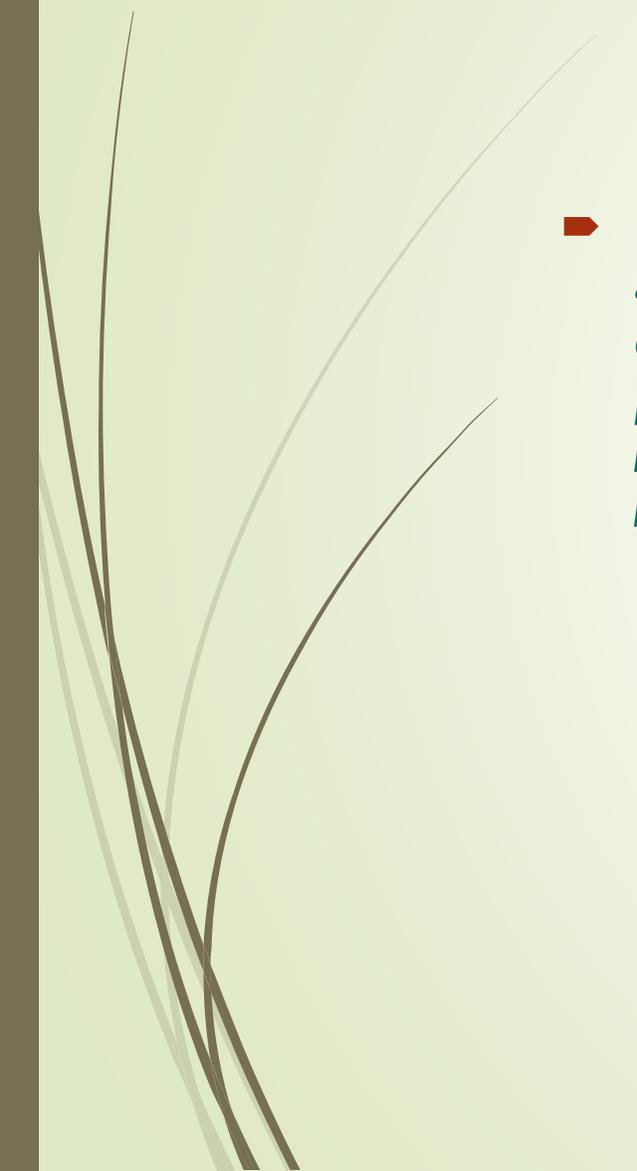
# How does trauma affect people?

- ▶ What have we learned about the affect of trauma on people?
  - ▶ What are some examples of what happens to people who have experienced trauma early in their lives?
  - ▶ What experience have you had working with individuals with trauma histories?
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➔ Why is  
understanding  
trauma important?

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- ▶ To provide effective services we need to understand the life situations that may be contributing to the persons current problems
  - ▶ Many current problems faced by the people we serve may be related to traumatic life experiences
  - ▶ People who have experienced traumatic life events are often very sensitive to situations that remind them of the people, places or things involved in their traumatic event
  - ▶ These reminders, also known as triggers, may cause a person to relive the trauma and view our setting/organization as a source of distress rather than a place of healing and wellness

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- ▶ *“Trauma Informed Care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma...that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors...and, that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.” ~(Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010, pg. 82)*

# Impacts of Trauma

## Impacts on academic performance:

- Reduced cognitive capacity
- Sleep disturbance
- Difficulties with memory
- Language delays

# Impacts of Trauma

## Impacts on social relationships:

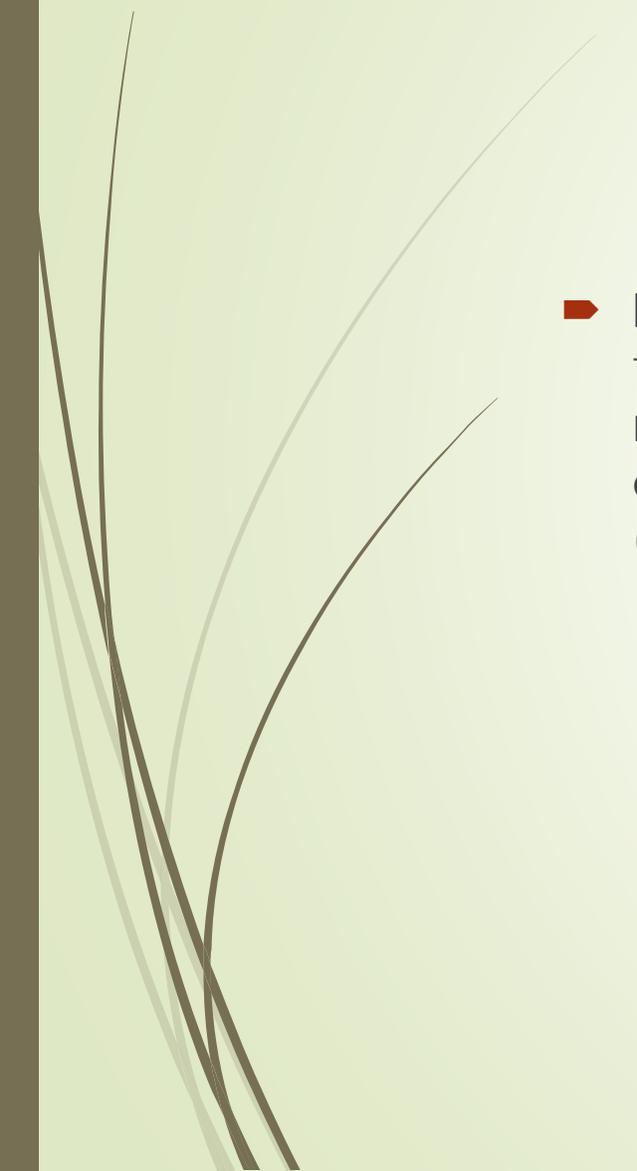
- Need for control
- Attachment difficulties
- Poor peer relationships
- Unstable living situation



- “Hey, I’m Bryce and I’m 9 years old. I just came to live with my grandma because my mom’s boyfriend has been hitting her and then he got really mad one day and hit me in the face and I couldn’t open my eye. I miss my mom and I’m worried about her-she’s all I have, my dad died when I was 5 from drugs.”
- Bryce’s grandmother reports that he is having nightmares and is very “jumpy.” He scares easily at loud noises. Bryce is sometimes withdrawn and will not talk and he has had a few anger outbursts.



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- ▶ Bryce has experienced multiple traumatic events (chronic trauma) such as the death of his father, witnessing family violence, physical abuse by his mother's boyfriend, and separation from his primary caregiver and these events are having an impact on Bryce's functioning and sense of safety (complex trauma).



- ▶ Janie is 4 years-old and CPS has become involved in her family's life due to her mother's use of cocaine. Janie's mother used cocaine about 10 years ago, but had been clean and sober until about 6 months ago. In the past 6 months, Janie has been left in the care of her 7-year-old sister for hours at a time and overnight while her mother is out using drugs. Janie has been exposed to dangerous individuals who have come in and out of the home. Her mother's friends have beaten her due to her crying for being afraid.

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- ▶ Janie has been traumatized due to neglectful supervision by her mother, physical abuse by her mother's friend, and separation from her primary caregiver.
  - ▶ She is displaying effects of trauma through regression to bed-wetting, withdrawal, and her startle reactions.



- Aaron is 15-years-old and has been in the care of his grandparents since he was 6. He was removed from the care of his biological parents for severe physical abuse and neglect. He was found to be malnourished, had multiple bruises and both old and new fractures at the time of removal. Parental rights were terminated and Aaron was placed in an adoptive placement, but before it was consummated the adoptive parents decided they could not adopt Aaron and he was placed in a foster home. Since that time he has had 11 subsequent placements in foster homes and one placement in a Residential Treatment Center.

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- ▶ Aaron's placements report aggressive behavior and unwillingness to follow rules. He has anger outbursts and cannot regulate his emotions. He is currently diagnosed with Bipolar disorder and is on medication. He also has difficulty forming friendships with peers.
  - ▶ Aaron has suffered multiple traumas due to abuse and separation by his parents, a failed adoptive placement, and frequent moves.
  - ▶ The effects of these traumatic events are evident in Aaron's behaviors, emotions, and relationships.

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- ▶ Millie is 15-years-old and lives with her mom and younger sister. Millie's family has become involved with CPS because her mom locks her out of her room. Millie's mother reports that Millie does not follow rules, she leaves the home at random and stays out until 2 in the morning. She believes she is using drugs and having sex. Millie's mother reported that she did not know how to keep Millie from leaving the house other than locking her in her room. Millie refuses to go to school on most days and is failing most of her classes.

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- ▶ Millie started exhibiting rebellious behavior when she was about 14, after she was sexually assaulted by a boyfriend. Millie's mother tried to get her to go to counseling, but she refused to go. Millie also was sexually abused when she was 4 years-old by a cousin that she no longer has contact with. Millie's family has had to move around several times in her life due to her mother's lack of financial resources. Millie was really close to her grandmother throughout most of her life and she died about 6 months ago.

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- ▶ Millie has experienced multiple traumatic events due to sexual abuse and loss of a family member.
  - ▶ Millie's risk-taking behaviors and lack of impulse control is most likely a result of these traumas.



## Behavior

Oppositional behavior

Out burst

Anger

Depression

Withdrawal/ Absences

Argumentativeness

Escalation

Defiance of Authority

## Feeling It is Masking

Fear of Rejection Abandonment

Overwhelmed

Hurt

Lack of Self Worth

Avoidance of Emotions

Testing Relationship

Triggered Trauma Memories

Need for Control

# Change the language

- “What’s wrong with you TO What happen to you.”





# 10 Things to know about Childhood Trauma

- ▶ Children who have experienced trauma aren't trying to push your buttons
- ▶ Children who have been through trauma worry about what's going to happen next
- ▶ Even if the situation doesn't seem that bad to you, it's how the child feels that matters
- ▶ Trauma isn't always associated with violence
- ▶ You don't need to know exactly what's cause the trauma to be able to help
- ▶ Children who experience trauma need to feel they're good at something and can influence the world
- ▶ There's a direct connection between stress and learning
- ▶ Self-regulation can be a major challenge for students suffering from trauma
- ▶ It's okay to ask kids point-blank what you can do to help them make it through the day
- ▶ You can support kids with trauma even when they're outside your

# Describe a Safe Place

- Imagine a time when you received help or support that made you feel safe:
- What did it feel like?
- Who helped?
- What helped?
- What part did trust play in your sense of safety?





# Environment Factors

- ▶ Access, doorways, how many exits?
- ▶ Lighting?
- ▶ Smells?
- ▶ Personal space?
- ▶ Seating arrangement – crowded?  
Too close?
- ▶ Power differential, are your needs met?
- ▶ Is this a calming environment, if not, what would help?





BUILD RELATIONSHIP BASED  
ON TRUST BY...



MAINTAINING  
UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE  
REGARD FOR ALL STUDENTS



CHECK ASSUMPTIONS,  
OBSERVE AND QUESTION



BEING A RELATIONSHIP  
COACH



IT'S ALL ABOUT  
RELATIONSHIPS...



# Ideas for Building Relationships

- Meet and greet at the door/Shake their hands
- Student survey of interests
- Anagram nametags
- Acknowledge students by name
- Personal notes on assignments
- Student of the week
- Classroom morning meetings
- Weekly questions about you
- Weekly ice breakers



# Strategies to Establish Collaboration

- ▶ School Staff – Consult in other classrooms and invite staff to consult in your classroom.
  - ▶ Students – Collaborate with students. They often know what would help them, but no one thinks to ask them.
  - ▶ Family – Provide education, training and support to families in need in a positive, respectful and supportive way.
  - ▶ Community – Partner with mental health providers and others who support children in the community.
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# Responsive Teacher Behaviors

- Creates and/or maintains consistent daily routines for the classroom.
- Tells children when something out of the ordinary is going to occur.
- Offers children developmentally appropriate choices.
- Anticipates difficult periods and transitions and offers extra support during these times.
- Uses techniques to support children's self-regulation.
- Helps students manage their feelings during intense emotional moments by remaining composed and offering empathy and support.
- Is appropriately nurturing and affectionate.
- Uses positive guidance and supportive interventions to help all children
- Goals for achievement of students affected by traumatic experiences are consistent with the rest of the class.



# Create a Sense of Safety

- ▶ Trauma results in a loss of sense of safety
  - ▶ Safety is a human beings number one priority
  - ▶ This includes both physical and emotional safety
  - ▶ Emotional Safety is created by:
    - ▶ Empowering Others
    - ▶ Providing Choices
    - ▶ Fostering Connections
    - ▶ Opportunities to develop Genuine Relationships
- 

# Create a Sense of Safety

- ▶ Provide a safe environment: predictable structure with consistent routines
- ▶ Supervision: eyes, ears, proximity to students
- ▶ Consider a school-wide positive behavior intervention program
- ▶ Create clear expectations during unstructured times (e.g., passing periods, lunch)
- ▶ Provide transition opportunities (e.g., 5 minutes to read a book or a warm-up question)
- ▶ Provide clear pathways to emotional support for students who elect to utilize it





# Create a Sense of Safety

- ▶ Build self esteem
  - ▶ Provide opportunities for students to be successful
    - ▶ Invite a student to participate in a classroom activity in a subject they excel at
    - ▶ Give a student the question they will be asked in front of the class the night before so they can prepare
    - ▶ For a student interested in football, relate their geometry lesson to it
- ▶ Celebrate even the smallest successes
  - ▶ Thank a student for showing up on time
  - ▶ Write them a post it note praising them for turning in their homework



# Provide a Sense of Control

- Give students choices and not ultimatums
- Engage them in a semi-private conversation, instead of in front of classmates
- Limit the number of adults involved; too many educators participating can cause confusion or mixed-messages
- Provide adequate personal space; if the student tells you to back off, give them more space
- Do not block escape routes; when individuals are agitated, they are more likely to experience fight or flight response
- Keep verbal interactions calm and use simple, direct language



# Foster Connections

- ▶ Children need to feel belonging & significance before we can really expect them to respond or care about our rules or limits
- ▶ Healthy relational interactions with safe and familiar individuals can buffer and heal trauma related problems
- ▶ Research shows social connectedness as a protective factor against maltreatment
- ▶ Social milieu (safe environments): major mediator of trauma
- ▶ Create opportunities to develop meaningful relationships between peers including through classroom group work activities or encouraging club/sport participation
- ▶ If a student is struggling, empathize with their situation
- ▶ Allow student to share their experiences on their own timeline
- ▶ Offer support (academic or emotional)
- ▶ If a student needs to be removed from a situation, don't isolate them. Make sure an adult is always nearby to provide support when the student is ready to talk or to help them regulate themselves
- ▶ Check out [www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org) for more

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- ▶ Connections are created by:
    - ▶ Role Modeling
    - ▶ Listening
    - ▶ Being Present
    - ▶ Respectful Interactions
    - ▶ Genuine Interactions
  - ▶ Remember that connections must be built at all levels:
    - ▶ Staff to Student
    - ▶ Staff to Staff
    - ▶ Student to Student
    - ▶ Staff to Caretakers

# Building Relationships in the School

- Give students a voice
- Allow student input on decisions
- Provide suggestions box
- Use student's names
- Greet students in the hallway
- Listen without judgment
- Help them problem-solve ask open-ended questions to further conversation



# Elements of Successful Trauma Informed Schools

- ▶ Leadership Investment & Engagement
- ▶ Perform Assessment
- ▶ Professional Development
- ▶ Access to resources and services
- ▶ Trauma-Informed teaching and nonacademic strategies
- ▶ Trauma-sensitive policies, including disciplinary practices
- ▶ Collaboration with stakeholders

Cole, S.F., O'Brien, J.G., Gadd, M.G., Ristuccia, J., Wallace, D.L., & Gregory, M. (2013). Helping Traumatized Children Learn: Supportive School Environments for Children Traumatized by Family Violence. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Advocates for Children

- All staff:
  - understand what trauma is
  - understand how trauma manifests itself
  - adjust their teaching and discipline styles to meet the needs of traumatized students
  - know where to turn and what resources are available for students they suspect have experienced trauma





# Self-care

- Compassion fatigue is a natural consequence of helping traumatized individuals. It is often due to the empathy the “helper” feels from working with individuals who have suffered.



- ▶ But empathy is a good thing, right?
- ▶ Empathy is defined as the capacity to understand another's state of mind...putting yourself in someone else's shoes.
- ▶ Empathy is a positive trait...as long as you care for yourself too.



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# Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

- Irritability
  - Apathy
  - Loss of Motivation
  - Fatigue
  - Overwhelmed
  - Loss of interest in things you enjoy
  - Intrusive thoughts (especially about work)
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- ▶ Individuals in the helping profession may experience “burnout.” It is important to understand that “burnout” and Compassion Fatigue are very different, but can produce very similar symptoms.
  - ▶ People who are truly “burned out” lose the ability to empathize. Individuals who experience Compassion Fatigue, desire to help and empathize with the children and families they serve. However, they become overwhelmed by their own thoughts and feelings to do so.

- ▶ The good news is, there are things you can do to protect yourself from Compassion Fatigue and to help yourself if you start to experience symptoms of this type of trauma.
- ▶ “It’s not the load that breaks us down...it’s the way we carry it.” - Anonymous

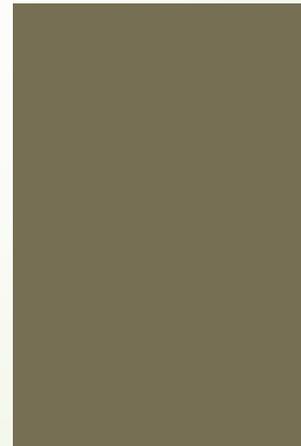


# Tips to prepare to work with victims of trauma

- Maintain a work/life balance
- Eat healthy
- Exercise
- Maintain a good support system
- Don't be afraid to feel emotions
- Never be afraid to laugh



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# Coping with Compassion Fatigue

- Develop a plan to implement healthy behavior
- Develop healthy boundaries
- Do not feel afraid to ask for help
- Use resources available

## Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil

by Joshua T. Dickerson

I woke myself up  
Because we ain't got an alarm clock  
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,  
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform  
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,  
Cause the lights ain't on  
Even got my baby sister ready,  
Cause my mama wasn't home.  
Got us both to school on time,  
To eat us a good breakfast.  
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed  
Cause I ain't got a pencil.

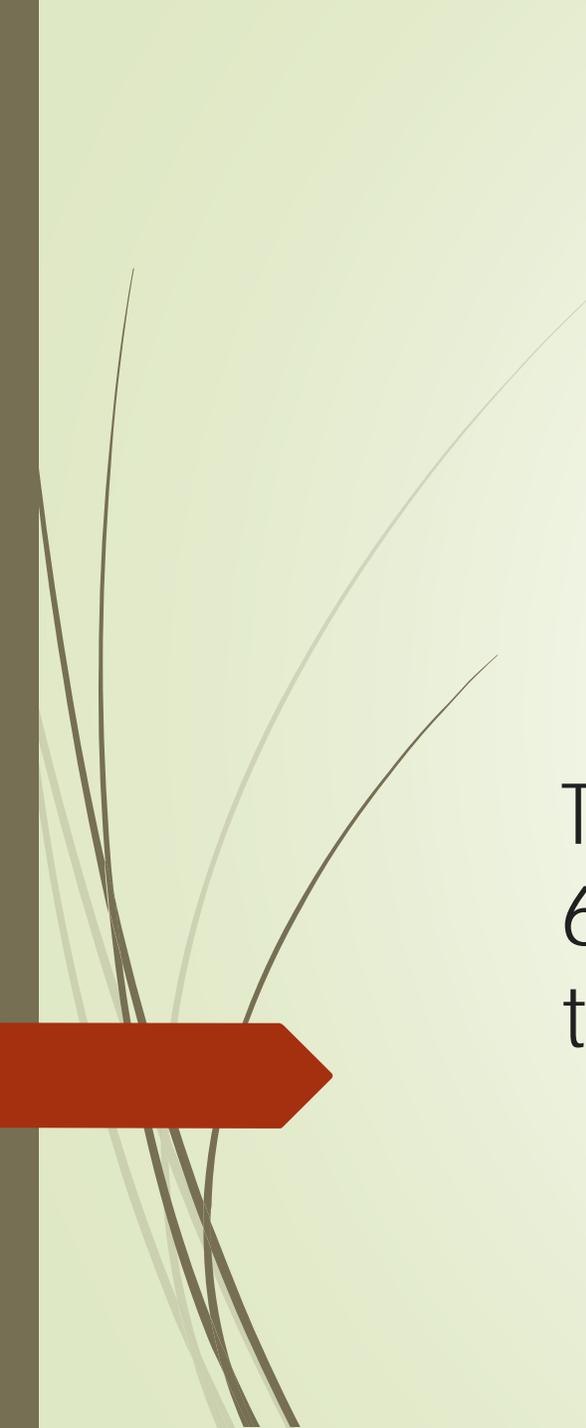




## Next Steps



What would you like to start doing?



Talya Straughter, DPC, LPC, NCC, BC-TMH  
601-952-0515, ext. #4  
talyastraughtercounseling@gmail.com