

Working with traumatized children

-So they have a high ACE score, now what?



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My Background:

- Bachelor's degree in Social Work (UW-Madison)
- Master's degree in Clinical Social Work (UWM)
- 3 Years as a Treatment Foster Care worker
- 34 years as a mental health therapist (20 @CSSW)
- 15 years specialized in childhood sexual abuse
- 33 years specialized in domestic abuse perpetrator treatment
- 12 years Executive Director of mental health clinic (6 years AODA clinic)

DEFINITION OF TRAUMA

THE EXPERIENCE OF FEELING:

- HOPELESS
- HELPLESS
- POWERLESS

WHAT IS THE OVERWELMING UNDERLYING
MOTIVATOR?

FEAR



2 IMPORTANT TERMS:

- EMOTIONAL REGULATION:
- The ability to tolerate stress and remain calm, relaxed and functioning
- EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION:
- Experiencing stress outside of one's window of tolerance resulting in uncomfortable or negative feelings

Breaking point of stress tolerance



Joey



Bobby

BOTTOM – UP CONTROL



“SAFETY FIRST”

- Set the limits that no one can be hurt (trauma kids don't know where the line is)
- The angriest kids are typically the ones who have been both physically and sexually abused
- See children as being “afraid of authority” instead of “having a problem with authority”
- Tell the child: “You're going to be okay”, “I am here to keep you safe”, “my main concern is your safety”, “you're not in trouble”

**“PEACE CANNOT BE KEPT BY FORCE;
IT CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY
UNDERSTANDING.”**

~ ALBERT EINSTEIN



STRATEGIES TO HELP INCREASE FEELING SAFE:

- Oxygen
- Food
- Exercise
- All of these calm the body- *when you calm the body you calm the mind. You want to interrupt the flight, fight or freeze response.

STRATEGIES TO CALM THE BODY AND MIND:

- Don't talk a lot; the mid brain can't process language.
- Say simple sentences like:
 - “It looks like you're having a hard time”
 - “Just let it out; it's okay to cry”
 - “Hey, what's going on for you?”

FACTORS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Keep asking yourself, “what is driving this child’s behavior?”
- What can I do in this very moment to improve my relationship with this child?”
- Keep looking for the fear: “You’re not the boss of me” = “I’m afraid of you being the boss of me.”
- Keep asking yourself, “What else could this mean?” *This helps to change your perspective.

DO'S AND DON'TS:

- Don't tell a person what not to do, i.e.. “Don't come towards me” because the brain works in picture.
- Do tell them what to do to form that picture in their mind, i.e.. “I need you to stay where you are for your safety.”
- Be conscientious of your tone of voice – 85% of a message received in communication is the tone of voice.
- Don't say, “you need to calm down.”

DO'S AND DON'TS CONTINUED

- You can't teach a lesson in the middle of a bad moment (Don't lecture!)
- Avoid using the word "but"
- Offer choices so they feel in control
- Don't rush their explanation. Research shows it takes ~20 minutes for someone to totally calm down

DO'S AND DON'TS CONTINUED

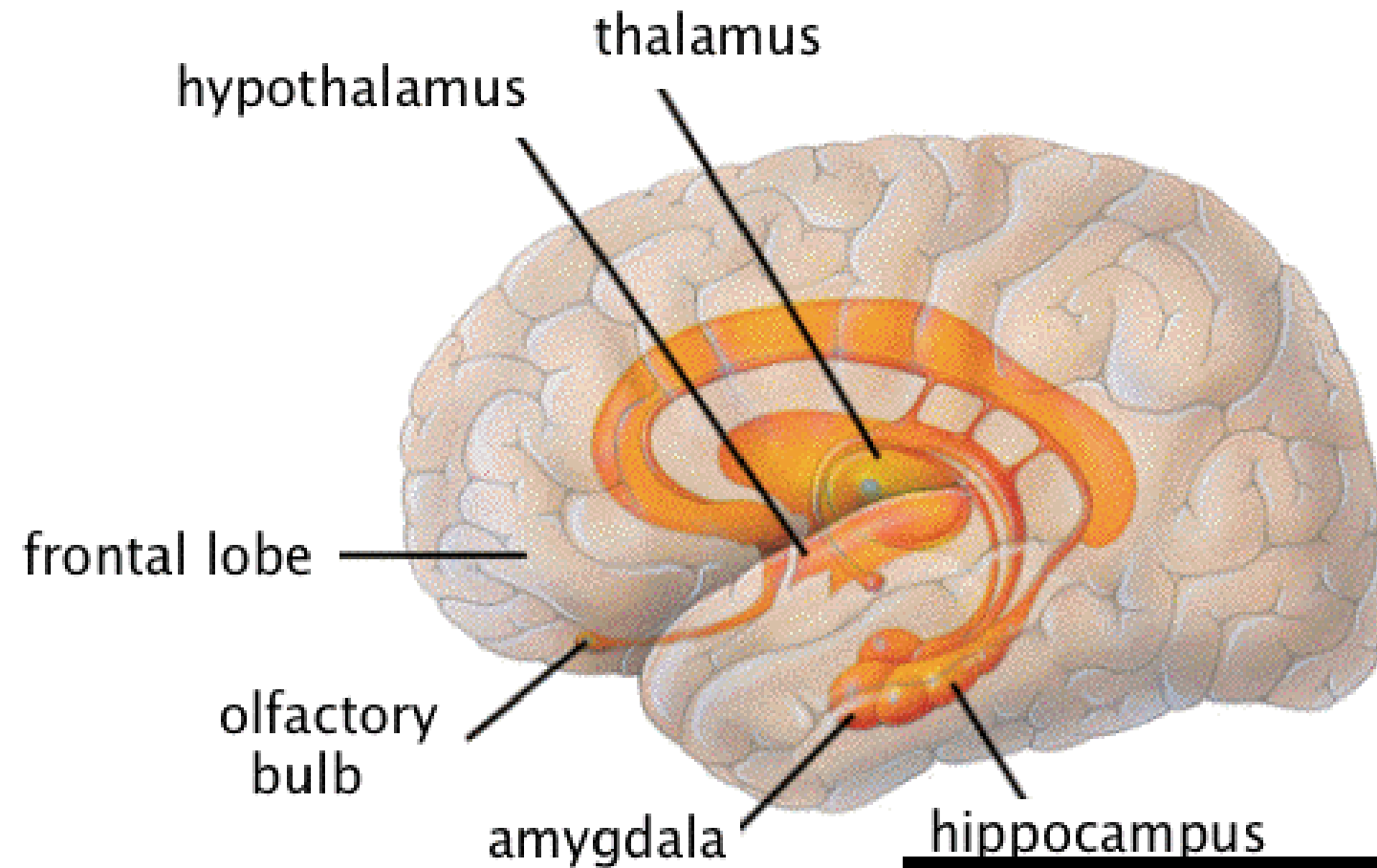
- Don't be afraid to apologize!
- Look for shared agreement on any statement
- Don't hand them a Kleenex – that tells them to stop crying
- Don't use a threat to de-escalate a person who is acting out of fear in a disrespectful/aggressive way
- Use humor if appropriate (kids love to hear us make fun of ourselves)

DO'S AND DON'TS CONTINUED

- If safe, do a “walk & talk” (especially boys)
- Keep offering help even when they turn it down
- Explain to parents/foster parents, “this child has a high sensitivity to stress” or “this child has a low tolerance for stress”
- Ask the child what they need in this moment to feel safe/less stressed

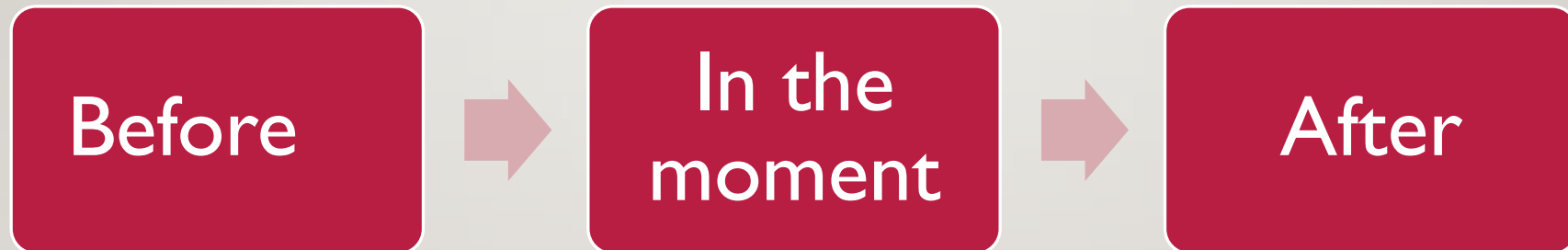
PROGRESSION OF FEELINGS TO BEHAVIORS

- “Sads” turn to “mads”
- “Mads” turn to “means”
- “Means turn to “hurts”



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Strategies Time Line



IN THE MOMENT INEFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Excessive questioning
- Giving logic
- Asking to make a better choice
- Raising your voice
- Ignoring
- Minimizing
- Expressing anger

IN THE MOMENT EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Connecting
- Slowing down
- Breathing
- Understanding
- Sitting
- Validating
- Empathy

AN EMPATHETIC RESPONSE NEVER
STARTS WITH:

“AT LEAST...”

~Brene Brown

HELPFUL PHRASES:

- “Help me to understand what’s going on”
- “How can I help?”
- “I’m here with you, you’re not alone.”
- “I’m here to listen.”
- “You don’t have to carry it all.”

QUESTIONS?



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