

# The Impact of Domestic Violence Exposure on Children

DEFENDING  
CHILDHOOD  
PROTECT HEAL THRIVE

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# Vicarious Trauma & Self



Think about a child or youth you've known in your work who was/is impacted by violence.



Hold that child with you today, with a sense of possibility for him or her.



We are here in service to all of the children we collectively hold with us today.



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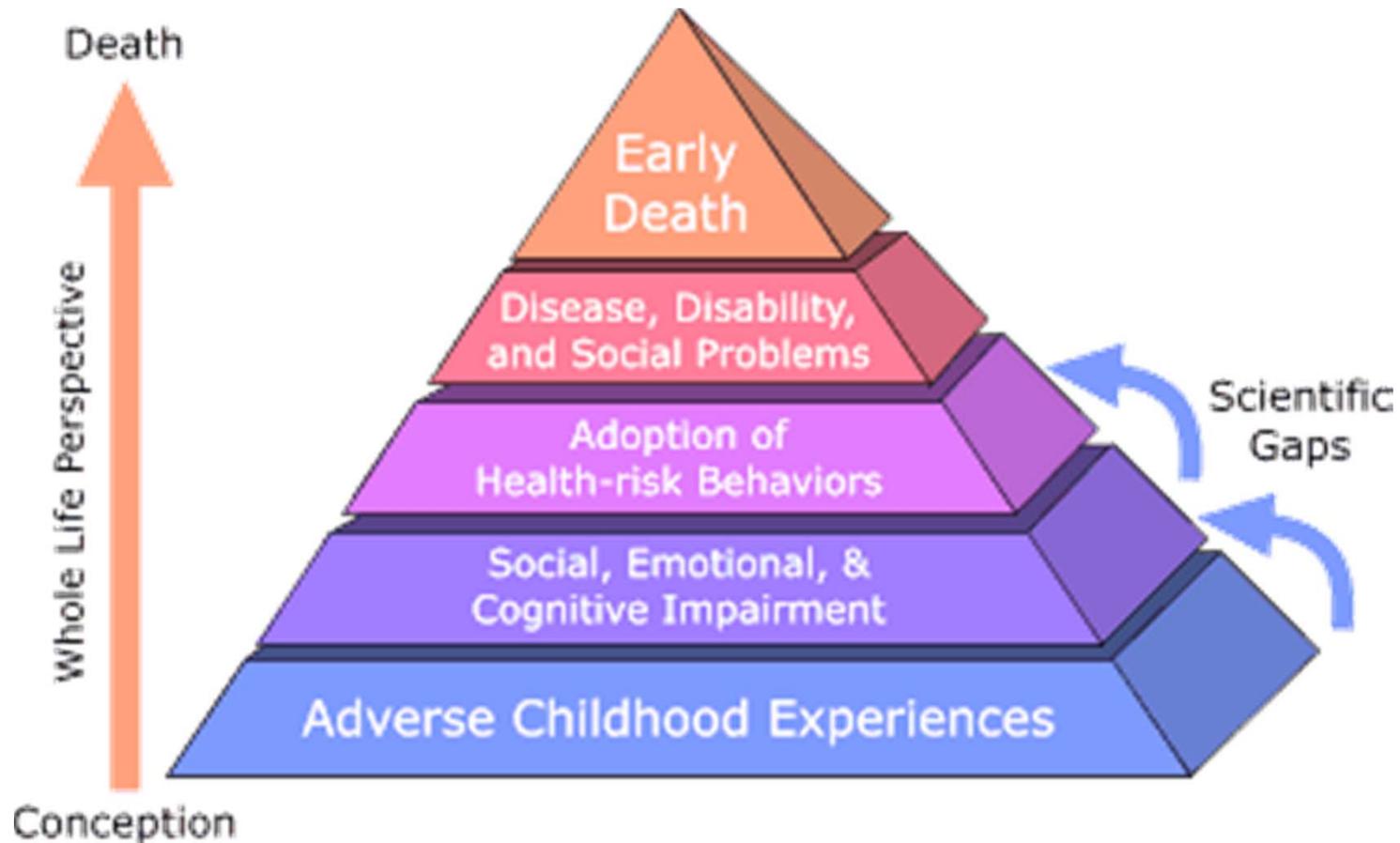
# Early Childhood



# Adolescence



# Adverse Childhood Experiences ([www.ACEstudy.org](http://www.ACEstudy.org))



## ACE SURVEY

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  10. Did a household member go to prison? Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- Now add up your "Yes" answers: \_\_\_\_\_ This is your ACE Score.



# Types of Trauma



Acute

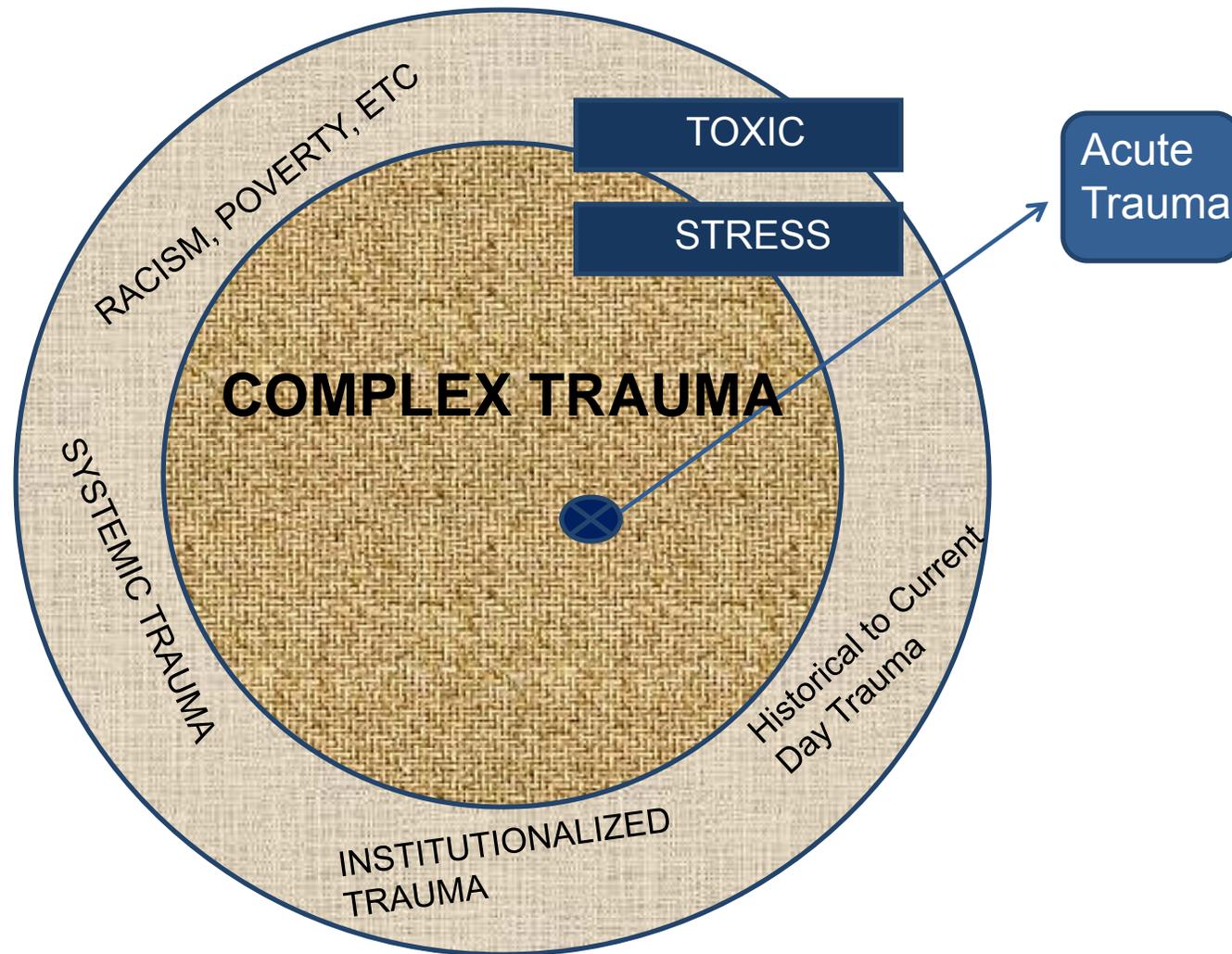


Ambient



Chronic





Erin Fairchild, MSW



# Childhood Exposure to Violence:

The scope of the problem



© Can Stock Photo - csp5010049



Stay Grounded in the Truth



Lots of children & youth are exposed to trauma, yet most aren't traumatized.



# Range of Childhood Violence Exposure

**Physical abuse**

**Sexual abuse**

**Domestic violence**

**Community violence**

**Bullying**

**School violence**

**Gang activity**

**Sexual exploitation**

**Terrorism**

**War, Genocide**

# National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence

(NatSCEV, Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009)

Telephone survey conducted January 2008- May 2008

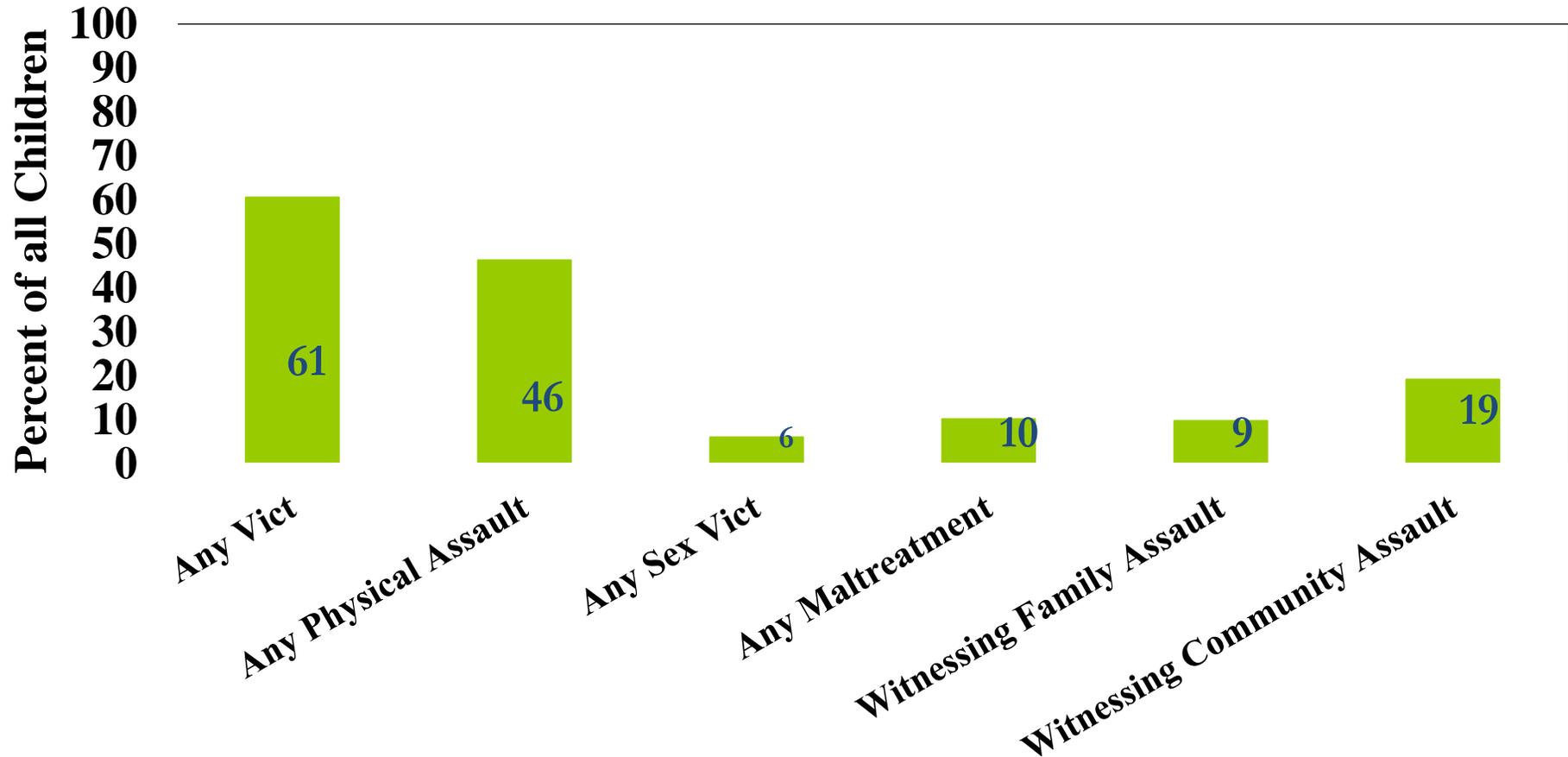
Nationally representative sample of 4549 children age 1 month-17

2454 caregivers of children age 0-9, 2095 youth age 10-17

More than **40 types** of victimization assessed



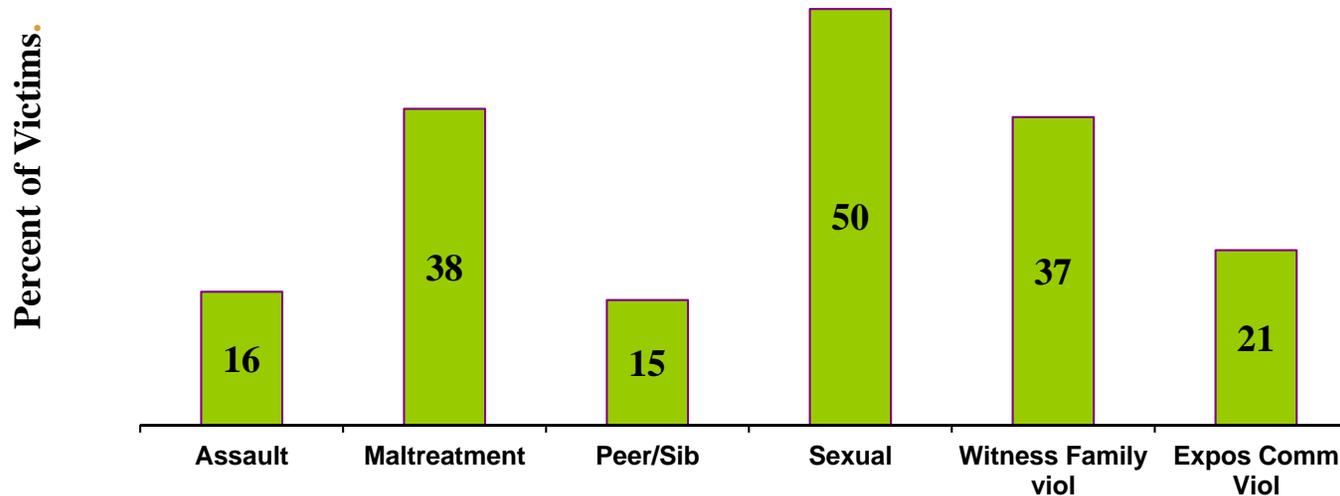
# Victimization in Last Year



The following slides are from **Key Findings from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence and Implications for Assessment**, Sherry Hamblin, Sewanee, University of the South. Used with permission.



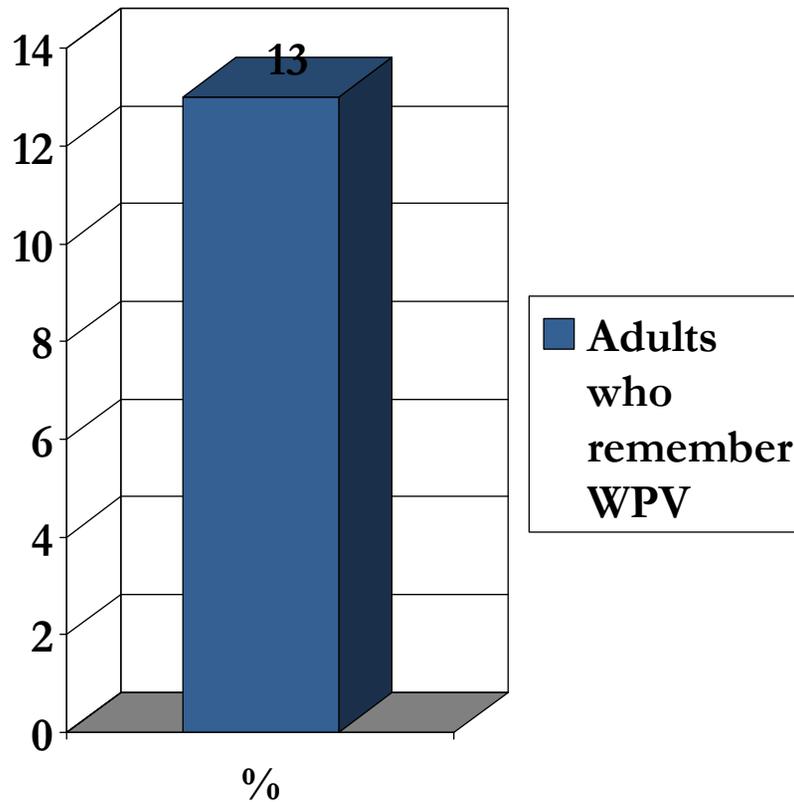
Even poly-victims (>10 unique victimizations) comprise a high % of any particular victimization category:



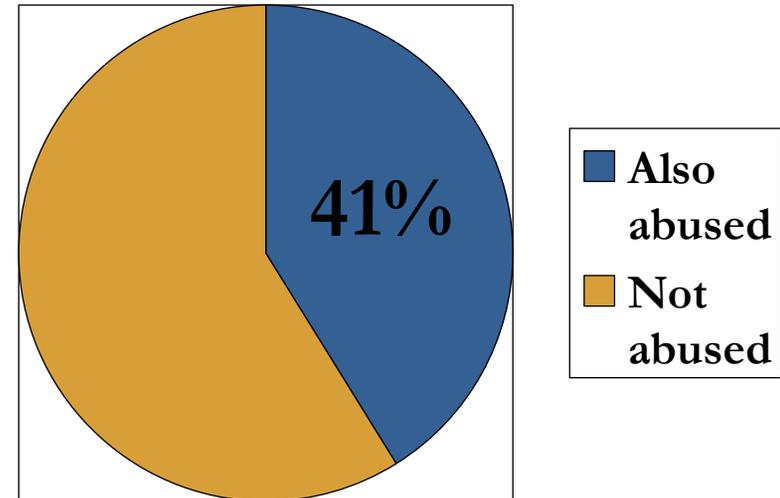
**50% of all the kids who are sexually abused in the previous year (physical abuse & neglect) have experienced more than 10 types of victimization.**



# Witnessing Partner Violence (WPV): Common & co-occurs w/ child abuse



**WPV Youth**  
Review by Appel & Holden, 1998



From Straus, 1992 (1985 NFVR)  
from **Key Findings from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence and Implications  
for Assessment**, Sherry Hamblin, Sewanee, University of the South. Used with permission.

# Polyvictimization and WPV – Odds ratios

**Physical abuse:** 4.99 lifetime, 4.41 past year

**Psychological abuse:** 4.32 lifetime, 3.48 past year

**Sex abuse by known adult:** 5.8 lifetime, 6.13 past year

**Neglect:** 6.17 lifetime, 9.06 past year

**Custodial interference:** 9.15 lifetime, 8.83 past year

from **Key Findings from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence and Implications for Assessment**, Sherry Hamblin, Sewanee, University of the South. Used with permission.



# Compelling Data:

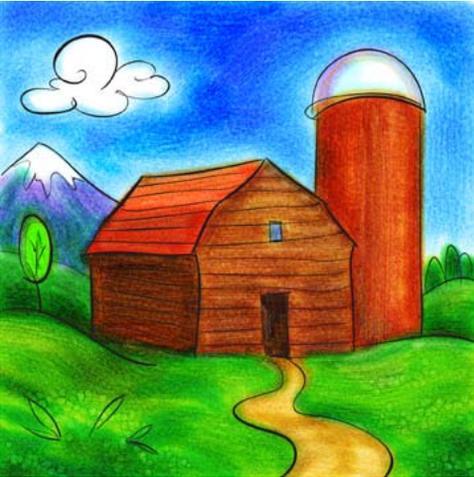
Children and youth are more likely to  
be exposed to violence and crime  
than adults.

Finkelhor 2008

Hashima & Finkelhor 1999

Something is wrong.

# So Now We See What's Wrong With:



# Trauma Informed Perspectives:

TIP

- Culture as healing & resiliency.

TIP

- Children/youth are not willfully bad; they do well when they can.

TIP

- Universal precaution & universal supports

TIP

- “What happened to you?” vs. “What’s wrong with you?”



# Safe Parents May Not Know or Report Depth of Child Exposure to DV



(Johnson et al 2002)



# Why Does This Discrepancy Exist? Discuss.

It's not about bad  
parents.



**27% of children 14-17 report  
witnessing domestic violence in the  
their lifetime (since birth).**

**6.6% in the past year.**

(National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, 2009)

# Brain Break





Child witnessing of  
domestic violence

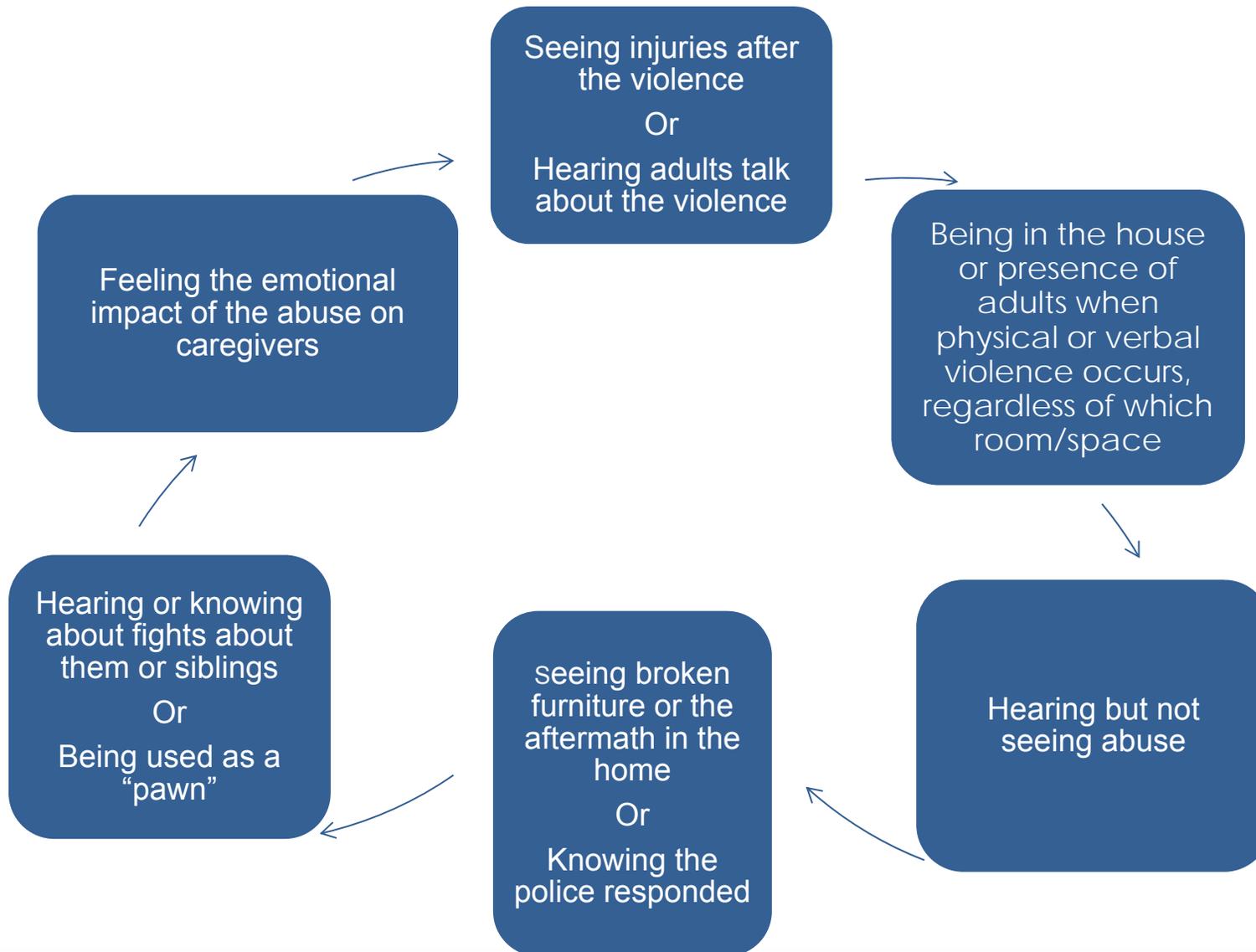
Vs.

Child exposure to  
domestic violence

What we've learned



# “Exposure” Includes:



# HOW BATTERERS AFFECT FAMILY DYNAMICS

## FOSTERING DISRESPECT FOR MOTHER AND HER PARENTING AUTHORITY

### Deliberate Tactics

- interferes with mother's attempts to create structure; contradicts her rules; rewards child's disrespectful behavior to mother; ridicules mother; portrays her as incompetent in front of child.

### Effects of abuse on survivor as parent

- children see their mother as helpless, downtrodden, or stupid. They may acquire the abuser's view of the woman as unworthy of respect and some will see her as a legitimate target of abuse.

### After separation

- vies for child's loyalty by making his home a fun place with no rules; permits activities disapproved of by mother; may alienate child from mother; may use child to send violent or manipulative messages to mother; may seek custody as vengeance.



## **NEGATIVELY INFLUENCING THE MOTHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIP**

**Direct interference** – may prevent mother from comforting distressed child, social isolation

**Indirect interference** – violence fosters depression, anxiety, poor sleeping, rage, loss of confidence so mother might not focus on the needs of children; may increase likelihood of maltreatment, use of drugs/alcohol, or permissive and even neglectful parenting.

**Children's distancing themselves from mother**

**Children may act violently towards mother**



# USING THE CHILD AS A WEAPON AGAINST THE MOTHER

**During the relationship** – Maltreatment, neglect, or other hurtful behavior to child in order to hurt mother; having child spy on mother; deliberate endangerment of child; threats to harm, kidnap, or kill child, leave the family destitute, or call child protective services.

**After separation** – Blaming mother for separation; enlisting child's support to pressure mother for reconciliation; using child to communicate with or spy on mother; seeking custody.



## IMPACTING FAMILY FUNCTIONING

**Sowing Divisions** – Turning family members against each other or creating alliances of some against others by, for example, favoring one child over others; lying; revealing confidences; fomenting conflict; punishing children for the misbehavior of one, etc.

**Scapegoating one child** – Blaming one child for all the problems in the family.

**Chronic fear and emotional deprivation** – Deepen and solidify unhealthy dynamics among family members; children may compete for abuser's attention because his attention and affection are scarce.

**Role reversal** – Parentification of child (i.e. adopting or being given a parental role in the family) and infantilizing of mother may over time see the woman being protected by child; child may try to predict and prevent violence by the abuser.



# Effects of Power and Control on Mother

May believe she is an inadequate parent

Children may lose respect for her and treat her poorly

She may come to believe the excuses the abuser provides for his behavior

May change her parenting style as a response to abuse

Her capacity to manage can be overwhelmed

May rely on survival strategies with negative impact

She may have poor health outcomes due to stress

Attachment relationship between child(ren) and safe parent may be disrupted

Feelings of shame & blame



...And yet

We know that many children and their safe parent are capable of recovering and thriving.



What factors contribute to this type of resiliency?



# Let's Talk About Attachment



# Attachment Plays a Critical Role in:

- ✓ Providing foundation for social, emotional, cognitive & even physical development
  - ✓ Language development
  - ✓ Brain development
- ✓ Forming parenting and relationship templates
- ✓ Curiosity, exploration, fire for learning
- ✓ Establishing self-esteem & concept of self in world; world view



# Falling in Love



How might experiences of trauma & DV interrupt the falling in love process?



**Brain development is like constructing a building. You can always remodel and add-on, but the foundation must be strong.**



As the brain develops upward and outward, emotional regulation skills become more complex, IF we have learned basic emotion regulation.

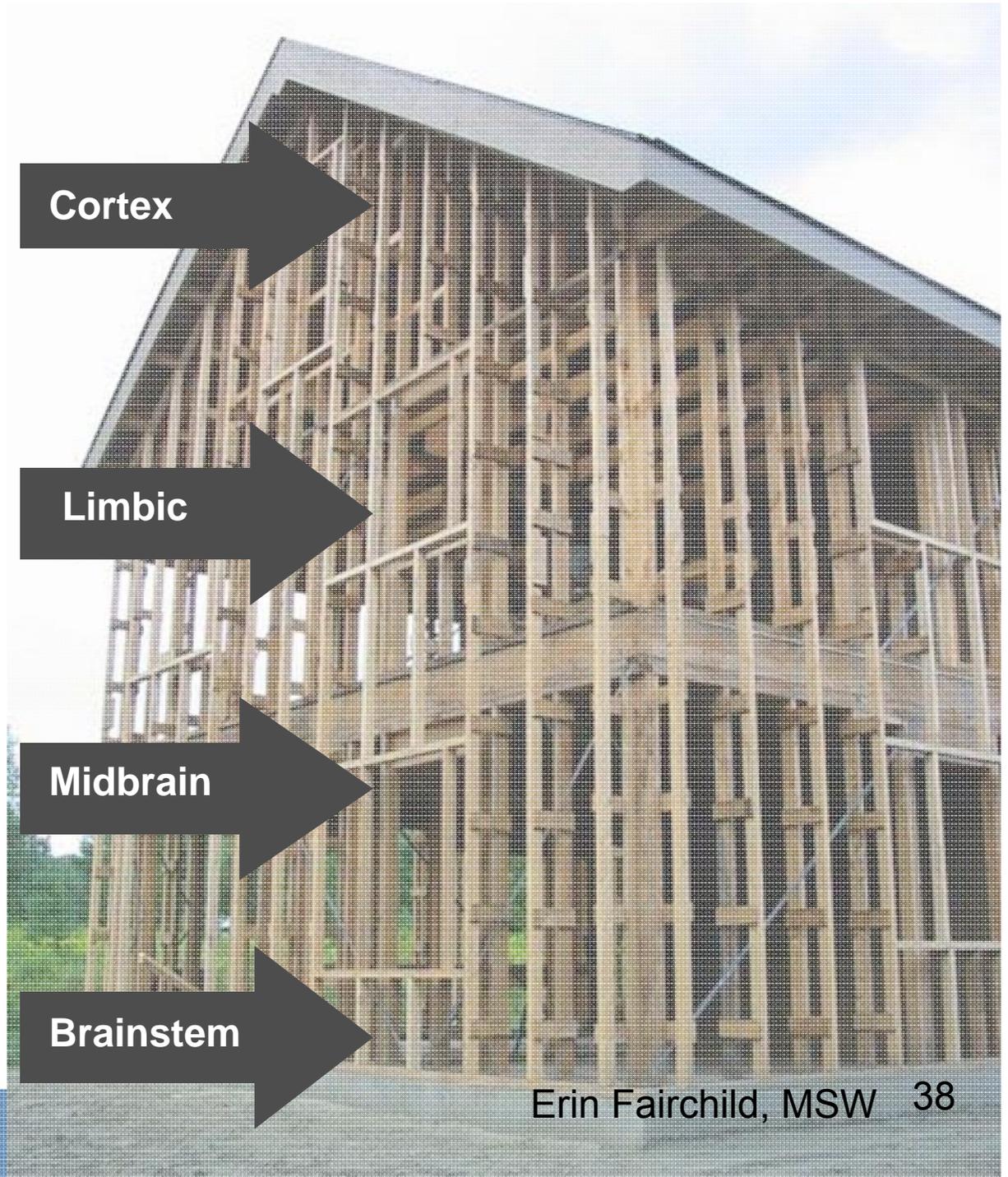
Basic emotional regulation happens here, & is developed by our experience.

Cortex

Limbic

Midbrain

Brainstem



Erin Fairchild, MSW 38

Abstract thought  
Concrete thought  
Affiliation

Attachment  
Sexual behavior  
Emotional reactivity  
Motor regulation

Arousal  
Appetite  
Sleep

Blood pressure  
Heart rate  
Body temperature

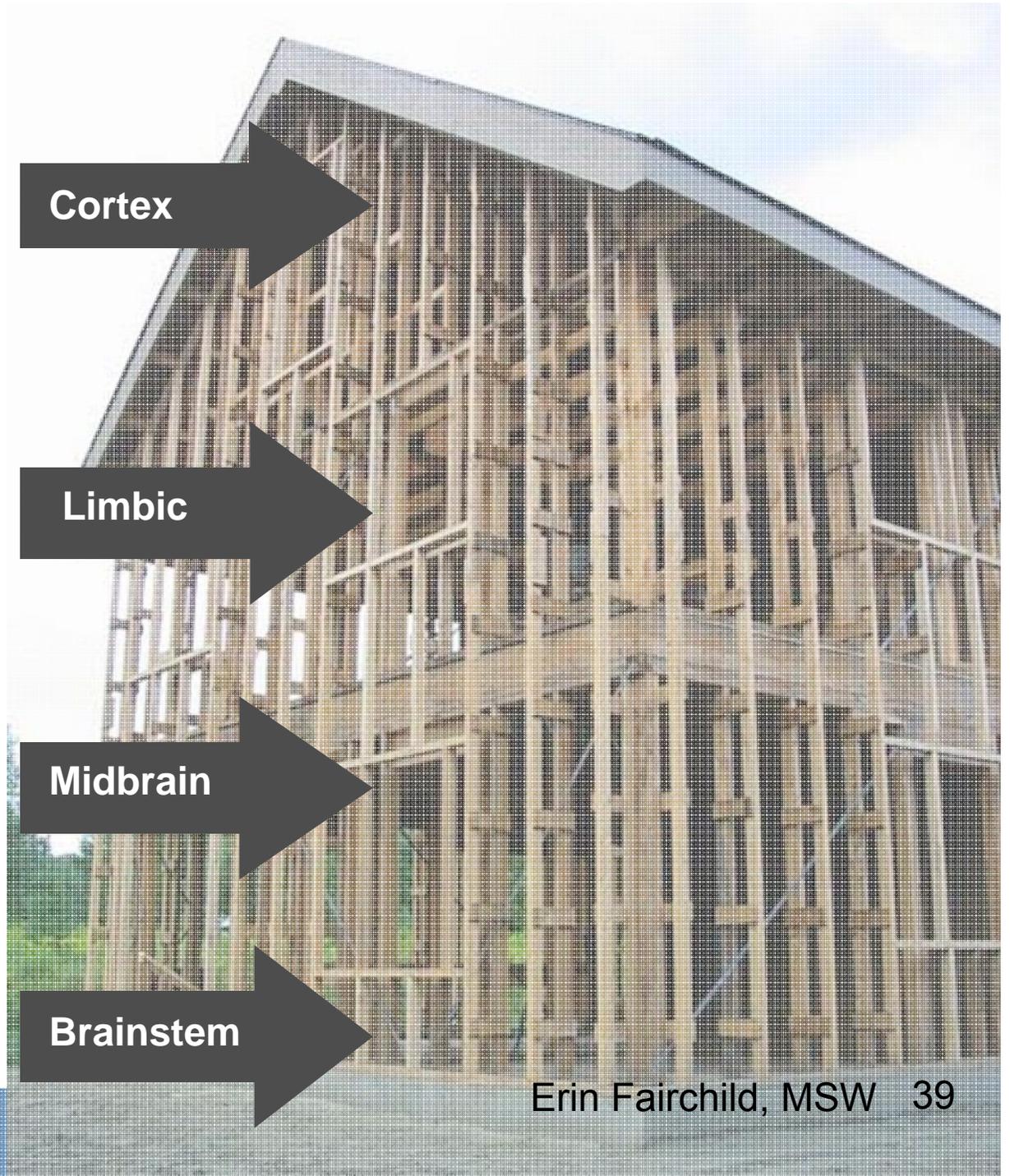
-Dr. Bruce Perry

**Cortex**

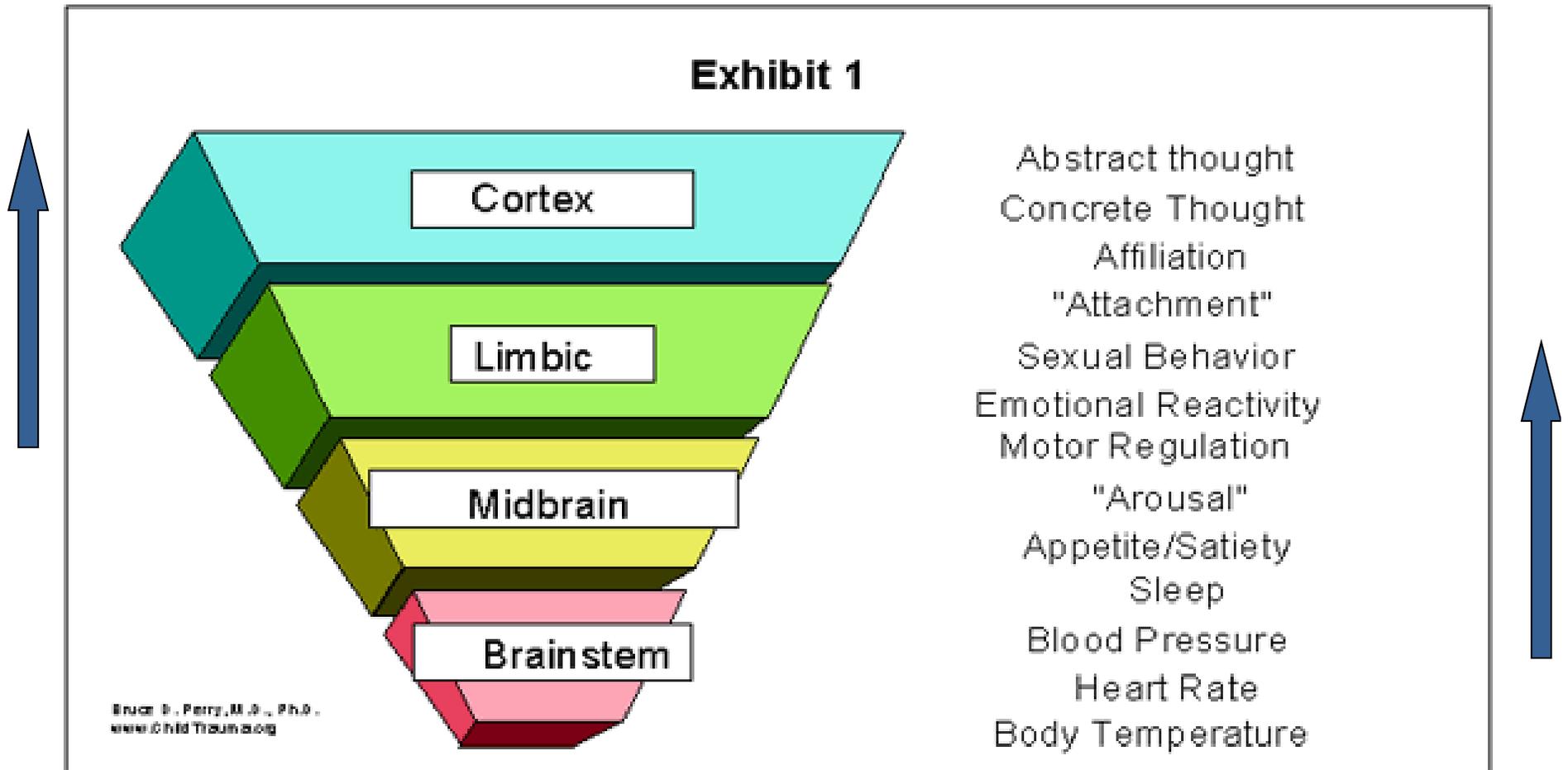
**Limbic**

**Midbrain**

**Brainstem**



# The Developing Brain

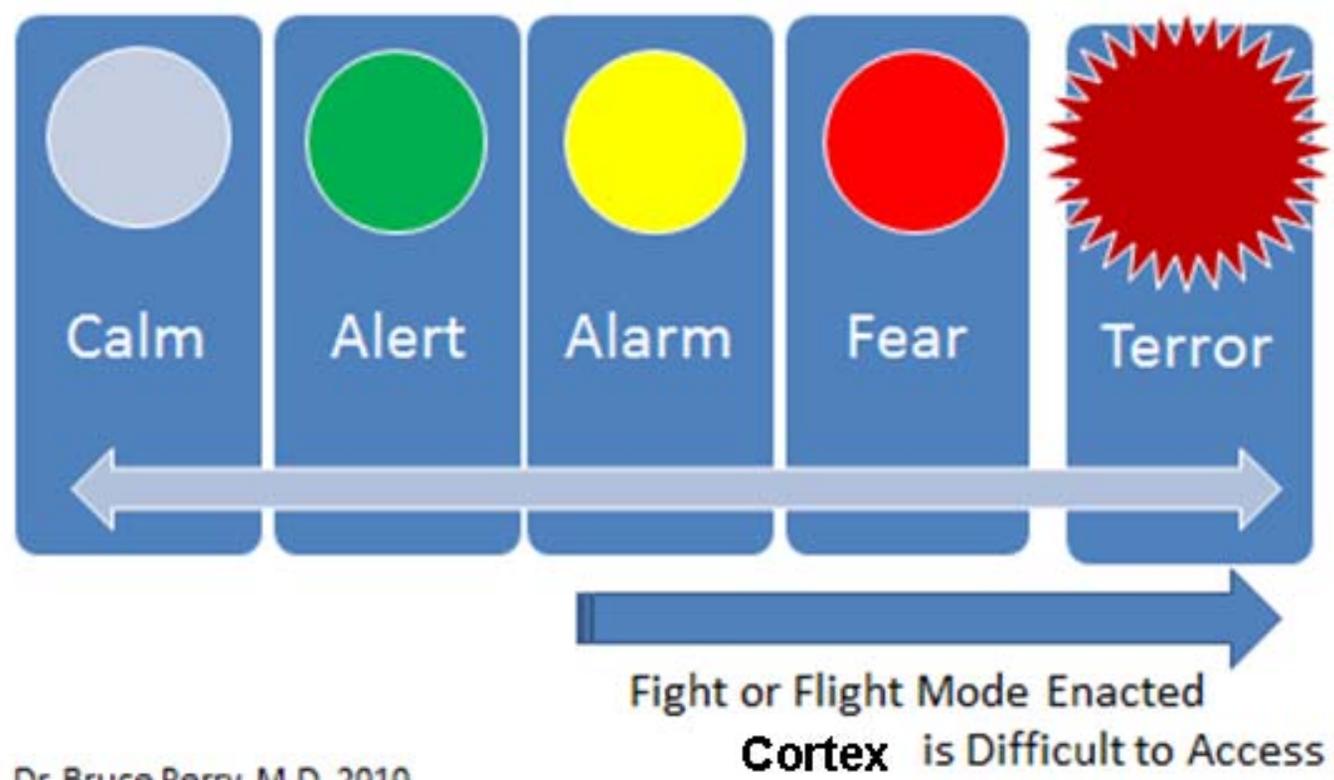


Brain develops from  
the bottom up.

Image by Dr. Bruce Perry, M.D. [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org), used with permission



# Brain States

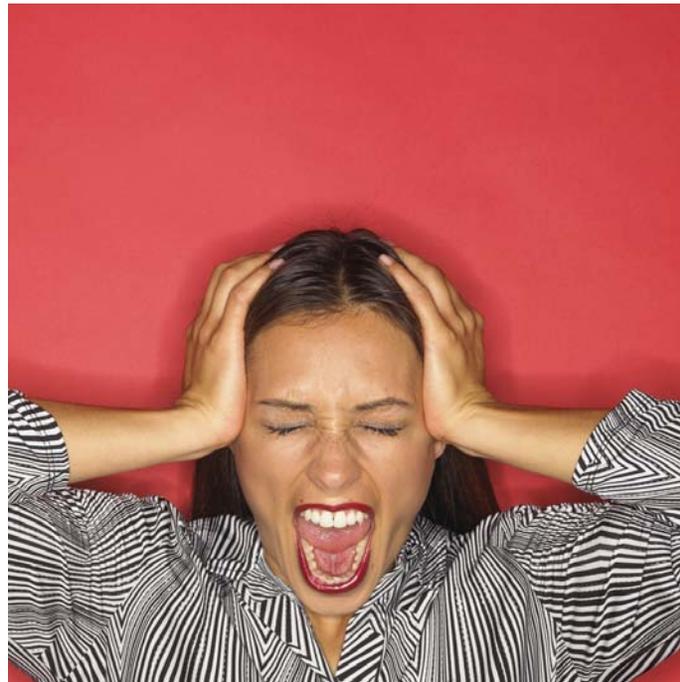


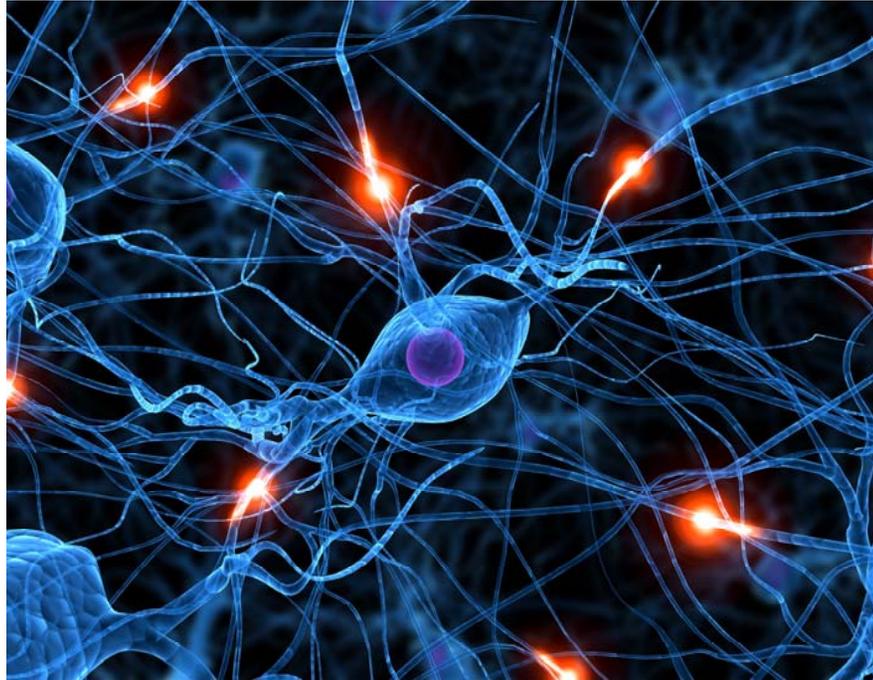
Dr. Bruce Perry M.D. 2010

Image by Dr. Bruce Perry, M.D. Used with permission



# FLIPPING OUR LIDS





“Neurons that fire together, wire together.”

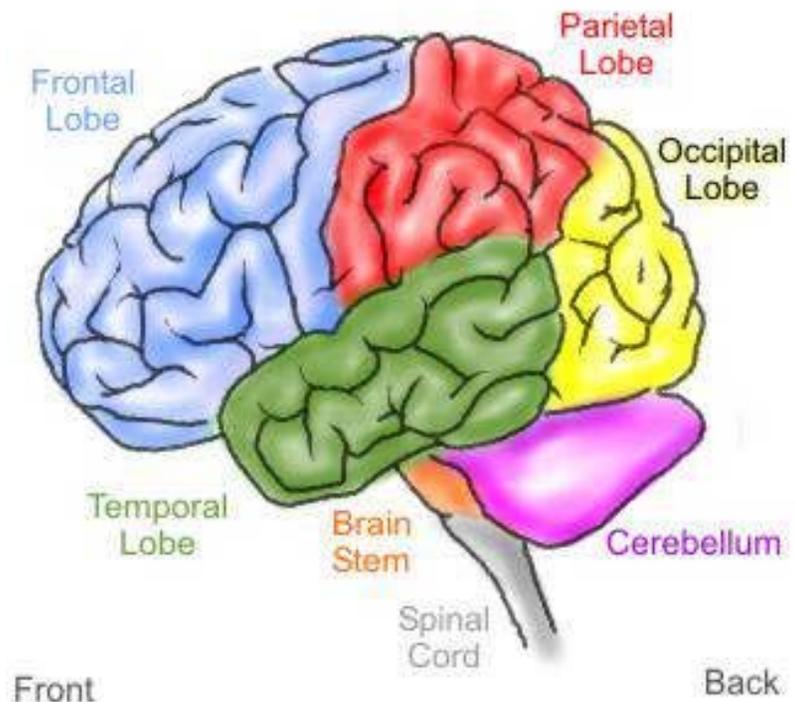
Neural connections are use dependent (“pruning”), with windows of increased elasticity throughout development.

# Repetition Leads to Mastery

Think about how long it takes, with consistent exposure, to learn a new language (outside of early childhood).

In order to master a new skill set, the human brain requires hundreds and hundreds of repetitive, successful experiences.

Regions of the Human Brain.



# The Trauma Brain & Reporting Details of Traumatic Events

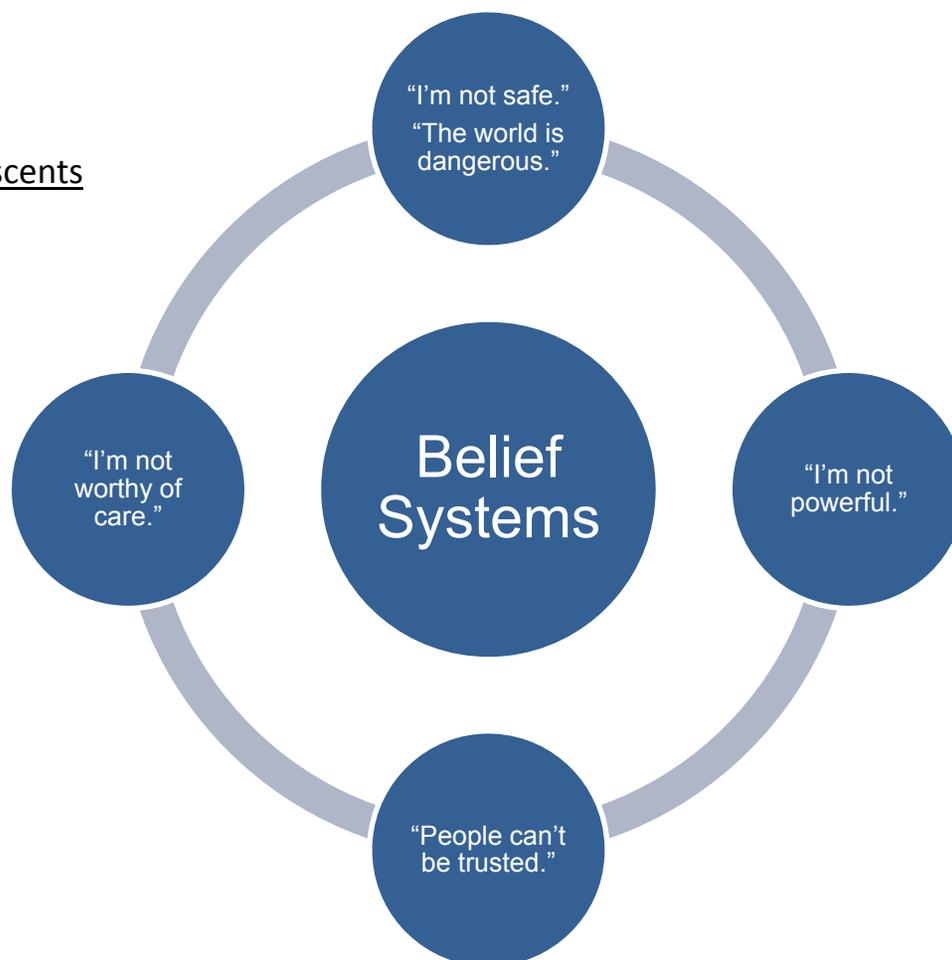


AND  
TRIGGERS



# Children/Youth Who Have Experienced Complex Trauma

From Treating Traumatic Stress in Children & Adolescents  
By Blaustein & Kinniburgh:  
ARC model



# Sample Language



“I care about you. I am going to help you be calm so we can figure out what comes next.”



“You have really big feelings right now, and they seem to be taking over. Let’s take a breath to help you be in charge.”



# Caregivers Matter

To support children exposed, the most effective interventions focus on promoting the safe parent-child relationship.

<http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/interventions-for-children/find-a-program-model/selection-methodolog/>

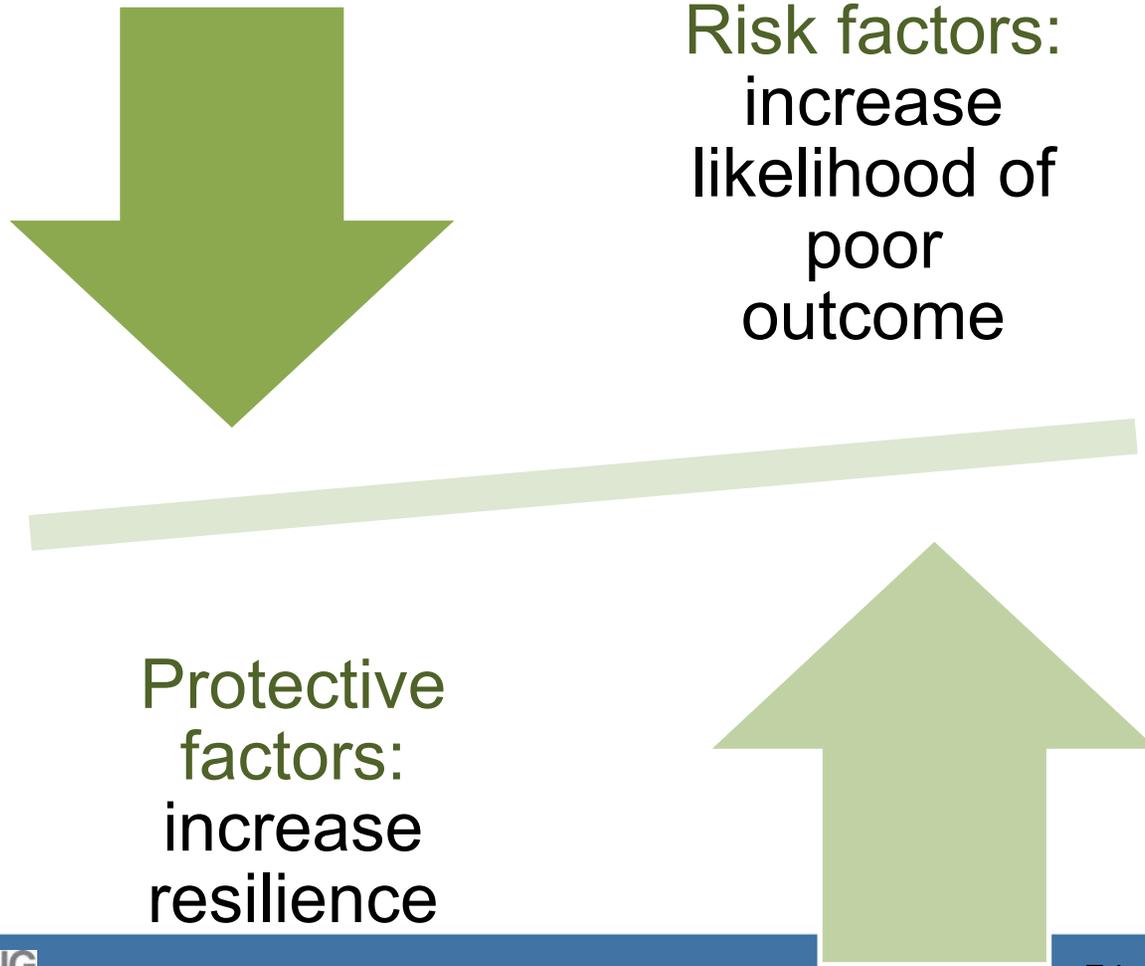
Child Parent  
Psychotherapy

Parent – Child Interaction  
Therapy

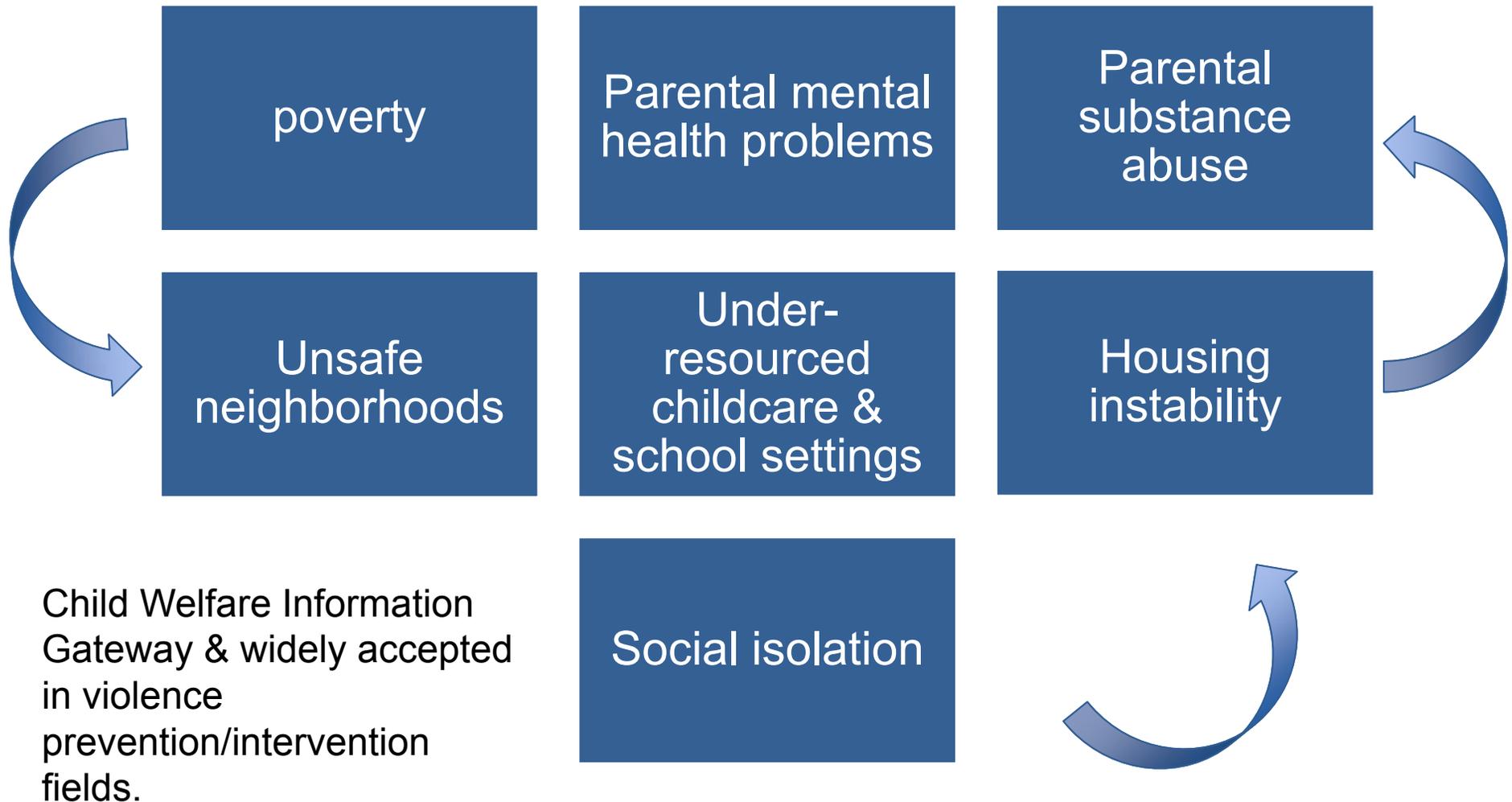
Trauma Focused CBT  
(with parent involvement)



# Multiple Influences on Outcomes



# Risk Factors for CEV



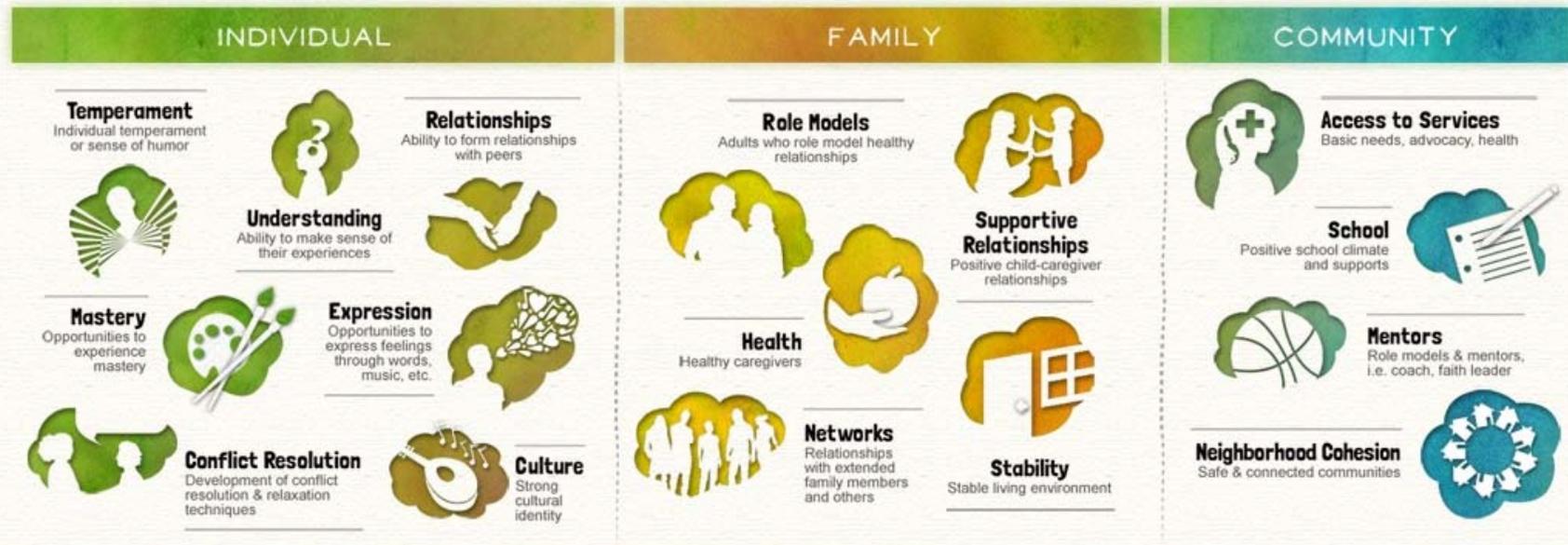
# PROMISING FUTURES PROMOTING RESILIENCY

among children and youth experiencing domestic violence

Almost 30 million American children will be exposed to family violence by the time they are 17 years old.<sup>[1]</sup> Kids who are exposed to violence are affected in different ways and not all are traumatized or permanently harmed. Protective factors can promote resiliency, help children and youth heal, and support prevention efforts.

Research indicates that the #1 protective factor in helping children heal from the experience is the presence of a consistent, supportive, and loving adult—most often their mother.<sup>[1]</sup>

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS THAT PROMOTE RESILIENCY



Get started at [www.PromisingFuturesWithoutViolence.org](http://www.PromisingFuturesWithoutViolence.org)  
 National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)  
 National Dating Abuse Helpline: 1-866-331-9474 or text "loveis" to 77054

*Promising Futures: Best Practices for Serving Children, Youth & Parents is a project of Futures Without Violence*

**FUTURES  
WITHOUT VIOLENCE**

Formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund

The development of this infographic was supported by Grant Number 90EV0401 from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1) Masten, A. S. (2006). Promoting resilience in development: A general framework for systems of care. In R. J. Flynn, et al (Eds.), Promoting resilience in child welfare (3-17). Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press. (2) Hamby, S., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Ormrod, R. (2011). Children's exposure to intimate partner violence and other family violence (pp. 1-12). Juvenile Justice Bulletin – NCJ 252272. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



# Key Elements of Healing

Safety ♥ Close relationship with non-offending parent ♥ Good relationship with siblings ♥ Good information about the abuse ♥ Connection to loved ones, self, community, something larger ♥ Opportunity to express and release emotions with increased feeling word vocabulary ♥ Adults to acknowledge that abuse happened and it's not okay ♥ Opportunities to master SEL ♥ Relationships with safe adults



# Potential Positive Outcomes for Children Who are Supported

- A strong sense of self, “I’m a survivor; I am strong.”
- A sense of achievement for overcoming adversity
- A compassionate connection to others, to self, to culture
- A commitment to bettering the lives of other children, being a safe adult
- Dedication to passions that serve to protect them (music, sports, drama, academics, church, nature, art, etc.)
- A sense of belonging and recognition that they are cared for, that others helped them recover
- Enlightenment and personal growth that comes with healing
- Resilient responses that prevent developmental impacts





**“Some people see scars, and it is wounding they remember. To me, they are proof of the fact that there is healing.”**

**Linda Hogan**



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