



**Empowering Adults to Help
Students Succeed:**

**Building Capacity to Address
Challenging Student Behavior**

Today's Objectives

- Better understanding of adverse childhood experience, trauma, and stress on behavior.
- Think differently about challenging behavior.
- Explore techniques that you can use to help young people buffer stress, self-regulate, redirect their energy, and solve problems.

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Why is Everyone Talking About Trauma?

Adverse Childhood Experience Study (1995-97; 17,000 adults)

- Asked adults about their experiences as children with regard to violence, abuse, and neglect.
- Asked adults about their experience with immediate family who were incarcerated, used drugs, or had a mental health diagnosis.
- Found 61% of adults had one or more ACES; 50% had two or more; and nearly 20% had four ACES.

Why is Everyone Talking About Trauma?

Exponential risk of 4+ ACES

- Poor health outcomes for life
 - Died at an earlier age or decreased life span
 - Alcoholism
 - Suicide
 - Heart disease, stroke, inflammation, chronic stress, and lung cancer
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- Led to trauma responsive health care first
 - Investigations of trauma on learning outcomes
 - Trauma responsive practices in education and other youth serving settings

Adolescent Trauma and Mental Health in CO

2019:

- In Colorado, 11% of children 17 and under had three or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)*.
- One in four high school students felt sad and hopeless for at least two weeks, disrupting normal activities.

Adolescent Trauma and Mental Health in CO

In 2021, Children's Hospital declared a state of emergency:

- Two out of three young people express feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.
- Behavioral health visits increased by 90%.

National Survey of Students 2022



In 2022, *Youth Truth* surveyed 222,837 students at 845 schools across 20 states, including Colorado. (97,714 respondents/222 high schools)

- “Depression, stress, and anxiety” is the most prevalent obstacle to learning for secondary students at every grade level from sixth through 12th grade.
- At every grade level, there is a gender happiness gap and a larger percentage of males report feeling happy about their lives than their classmates who identify as female or non-binary.

Absenteeism 2022

- In 2022, 25% of US students missed more than 10% of the school year, an additional 6.5 million students to the 15% prior to the pandemic.
- 300,000 Colorado students (35%) were chronically absent in 2022.
- Colorado has the seventh highest percentage of chronically absent students in the US.

4 R's of Trauma Informed Practice

- **Realize** the widespread impact of trauma and understand the potential paths for recovery.
- **Recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma.
- **Respond** by integrating knowledge about trauma into practice, procedures, and policy.
- **Resist re-traumatization** of young people through the way we react.

Adversity doesn't just happen **to** children, it happens **inside** their brains and bodies.

BRAIN LEARNING CENTERS

Prefrontal Cortex

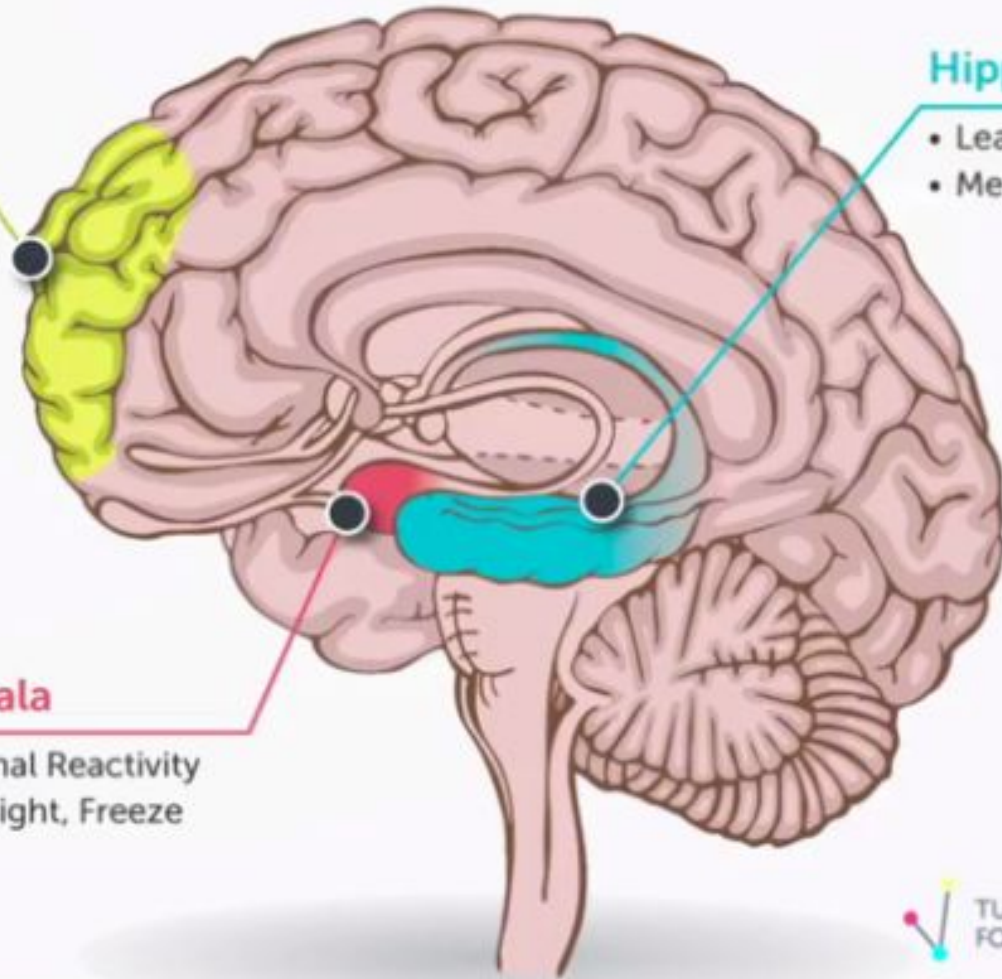
- Executive Function
- Self-Regulation
- Attention

Hippocampus

- Learning
- Memory

Amygdala

- Emotional Reactivity
- Flight, Fight, Freeze



Understanding Behavior as Biology

There are only two states your brain and body can be in:

- Regulated
- Dysregulated

Oxytocin & Cortisol

What you want to avoid:

Cortisol Flooding

- Escalation Zone!
- 18 minutes; dysregulation; wait it out!
- Constant “flatline” chronic cortisol release
- Prefrontal cortex intentionally “impaired” so you can handle threat (run, hide, or fight)

What you want to set in motion:

Oxytocin Cascade

- Warm, hopeful feelings
- Certainty of care – it’s not called the “cuddle hormone” for nothing!

Recognize: What Does Trauma & Anxiety “Look Like?”

- Externalizing: Strong emotions such as tears, quick to anger, afraid
- Internalizing: Flat affect, numb, completely disengaged
- Easily frustrated
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or nightmares; sleepy at school
- Headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and skin rashes
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- Non-compliant or oppositional

Recognize: What Does Trauma & Anxiety “Look Like?”

- Uncomfortable with transitions and routine changes
- Jumpy or easily startled by sudden sounds or movements such as bells, sirens, doors slamming, changes in lighting, or unanticipated physical contact
- School avoidance or school refusal

Your Threat is not Mine

Common scenario:

Student triggered by a slamming door, or someone making a face or saying a phrase, something said or gestured during passing period, surprise physical contact, etc.

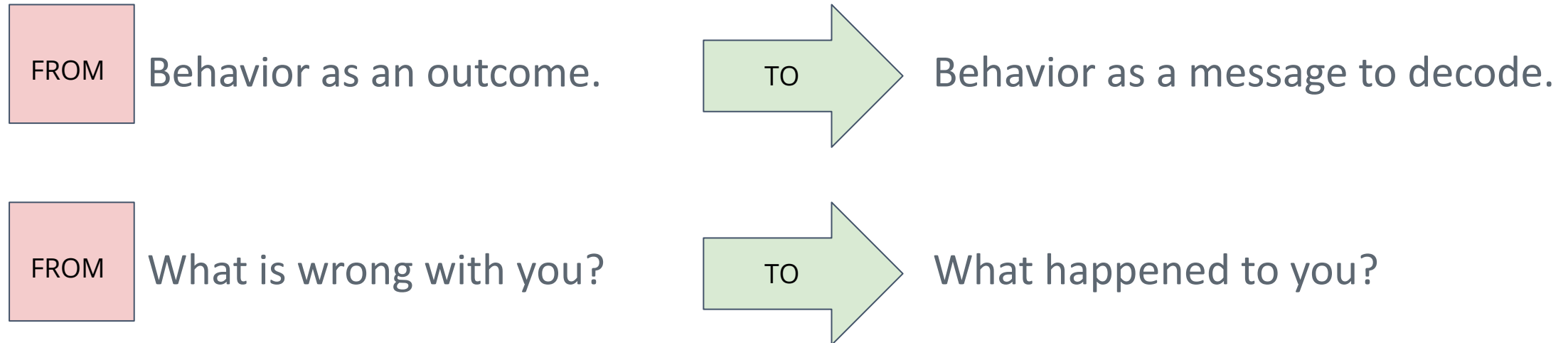
Common response:

Adult looks around, sees nothing “wrong,” sees no “reason for this behavior” because it isn’t their trigger and often views the student’s reaction as “overreacting” or “uncalled for.”

Feelings drive behavior

How you feel
drives *what you do*
and
what you are *able to do*.

Two Critical Mindset Shifts About Behavior



Respond

What diminishes the negative effect of trauma the most?

In a study of young people in the child welfare system, those who had four things were substantially more successful than others:

1. Positive stable relationship over time
2. School success
3. Development of talents and interests
4. Family support

What to do FIRST

- Check your mindset and decode
- Stay regulated yourself
- Ask questions to understand active listening
- Genuine interest
- Talk; connect on a deeper level
- Show yourself
- Positive, caring, dependable, consistent, persistent, notice
- Focus on points of pride and power

Points of Pride and Power

What are “points of pride and power?”

- School successes
- Accomplishments
- Appreciation of something done, said, or noticed
- Improvement
- Talents and strengths
- Things that indicate a bright future ahead

Technique: Calm through breathing

Step 1: “Flower & Candle” exercise: Cross arms, hold an imaginary flower in one hand, a candle in the other; “smell the flower” (deep inhale) and then blow the candle out (strong exhale).

box breathing for older kids

Step 2: Hand to heart. Place your hand over your heart and ask the young person to do the same.

Step 3: Now talk, opening with a soft question.

Technique: Redirect Through Movement

Redirect and Reduce Stress

Did you know that research shows the three most effective ways of managing stress are:

1. Talking with someone you trust
2. Movement
3. Laughing

Technique: Support Problem Solving

Problem Solving Technique 1: Role Play

Unlike modeling, which is used to help students learn one way of doing something (routine, procedure, academic skill, etc.), role play is used in situations that are more nuanced—where there isn't simply “one right way.”

- Role play can be used very effectively with a single young person or group of young people in any setting.
- Advantage: Power, autonomy, choice, critical thinking, executive function, alliance-building, thought partner and ally rather than judgement.

Technique: Support Problem Solving

Problem Solving Technique 2: Create a “Pact” or Alliance:

- Establish a foundation of warmth and trust.
- Determine together a shared goal to reach or problem to solve that the young person agrees would be a benefit.
- Come to an agreement to work on it together.
- Agree on what each of you will do to hold up their end of the agreement.
- Formalize agreement on when you will meet to check-in.

Wrap Up

Addressing challenging behavior is really about changing what we believe about that behavior.

How you feel drives *what you do* and
what your brain and body are *able to do*.

Be curious. Be a detective. Don't take it personally. Connect.

THANK YOU!

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Data shared in this training represents data available in 2023.

