

Trauma Informed Schools: Tools for Educators

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Objectives

- What is trauma and why are we focusing on it in schools?
- How are schools addressing trauma?
- What can you do in your district to get started implementing these strategies?

What is trauma?

Trauma can be the result of a single event or repeated/prolonged exposure (complex trauma). Not all involve violence. Trauma might include:


- Separation from a parent, such as incarceration
- Death or serious illness (of student or loved one)
- Natural disasters
- Abuse or neglect - witnessed or experienced
- Exposure to criminal activity
- Homelessness
- Bullying

Types of Trauma


Acute Trauma: Event that occurs at a particular time and place and is usually short-lived (e.g., natural disaster, accident, sudden loss, one-time experience of violence).

Chronic Trauma: Experiences that occur repeatedly over long periods of time (e.g., chronic abuse/neglect, on-going community violence, long-term illness, chronic homelessness, forced displacement, chronic exposure to poverty and deprivation, structural oppression, racism).

Historical trauma: The collective and cumulative trauma experienced by a particular group across generations still suffering the effects (e.g., violent colonization, assimilation policies, slavery, segregation, racism, discrimination).



“Chronic childhood trauma - such as being regularly slapped or punched, constantly belittled and berated, living with a parent who’s alcoholic or depressed - releases a constant flood of stress hormones that damage the structure and function of a child’s developing brain.”



Data on Trauma in School

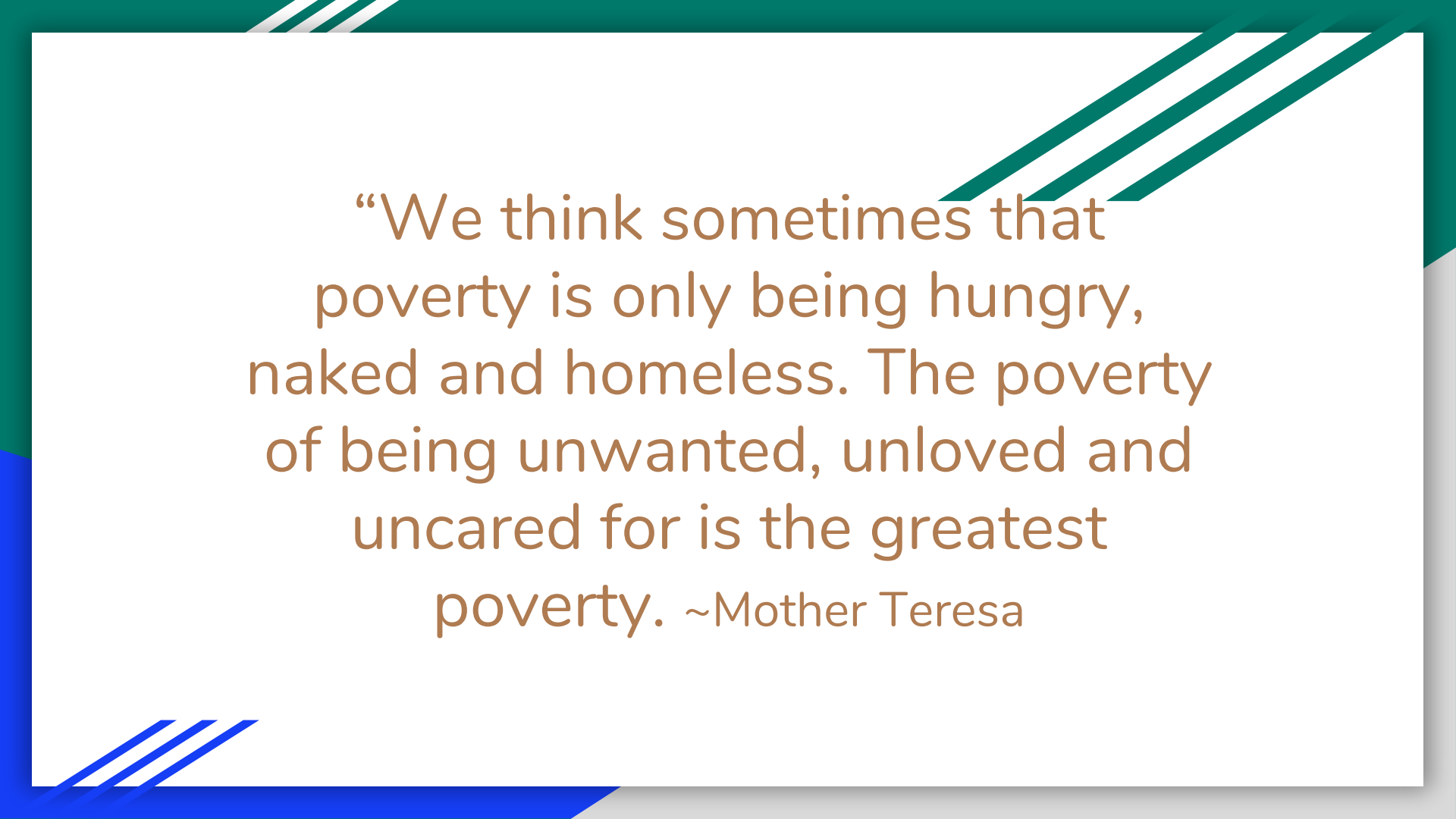
In community samples, more than two thirds of children in the U.S. report experiencing a traumatic event by age 16.

Approximately two out of three children has been exposed to violence.

75% who were victimized reported more than one type of victimization.

1 in 10 report 5 or more exposures to violence.

1 in 3 students show some signs of PTSD in the school setting



“We think sometimes that
poverty is only being hungry,
naked and homeless. The poverty
of being unwanted, unloved and
uncared for is the greatest
poverty. ~Mother Teresa

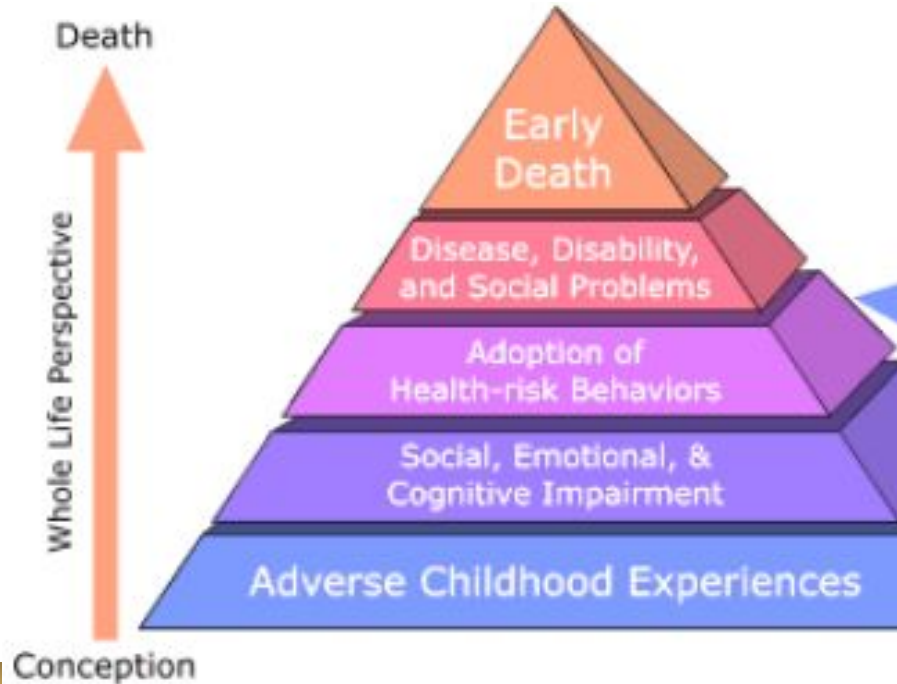
ACE Study

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Study revealed that between half and two-thirds of all school aged children are exposed to one or more ACE that may lead to trauma
- Compared to people with no history of ACEs
 - People with ACE scores of 4 or higher were twice as likely to smoke, seven times more likely to be alcoholics, seven times more likely to have sex before age 15, twice as likely to be diagnosed with cancer, twice as likely to have heart disease, twice as likely to have liver disease, four times as likely to suffer from emphysema or chronic bronchitis
 - People with an ACE score above 7 were thirty times more likely to have attempted suicide
 - Men with an ACE score above 5 were forty-six times more likely to have injected drugs
 - Patients with ACE scores of 7 or higher who didn't smoke, drink, and weren't overweight were still 360% higher risk of ischemic heart disease (the single most common cause of death in the US) (Felitti, 1998)

ACE Study Cont'

An ACE score of 6 is predicted to take 20 years off of your life expectancy with no caring adult intervention



Students without intervention

2.5 times more likely to fail a grade in school

Suspended and expelled more often

More likely to struggle in receptive and expressive language

More frequently placed in special education

****51%** of children with 4+ ACE scores demonstrated learning and behavioral challenges compared with 3% of children with no ACE score

Healthy Brain versus Unhealthy Brain

Has the ability to be kind

Is able to think rationally

Has self-awareness

Has a sense of curiosity because it feels safe

Has a sense of time

Uses higher-order thinking skills

*Uses top down control (executive functioning)

Can't process consequences

Thinks from an emotional platform and is irrational

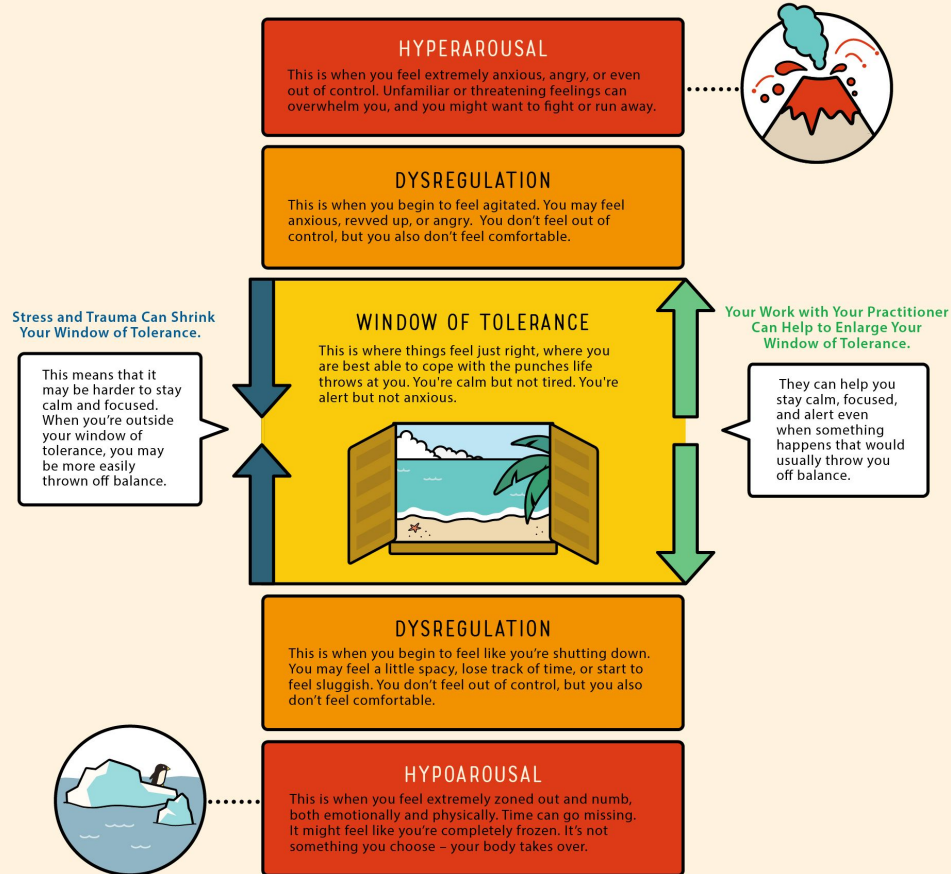
Struggles with memory and focusing

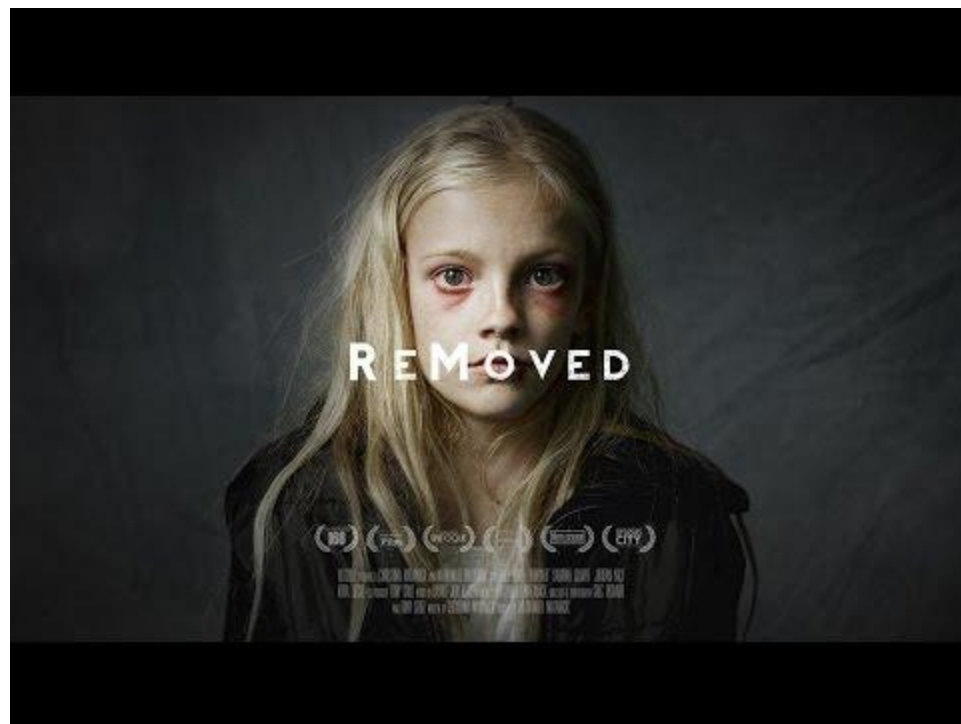
Only understands the moment - now

Becomes more stressed out with traditional disciplinary techniques

* Uses bottom-up control

How Trauma Can Affect Your Window of Tolerance





Effects of Trauma


Behavioral:

- Social Withdrawal
- Aggressive behavior
- Self-medication (i.e. substance abuse)


Social:

- Express of distrust
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Overreact to seemingly benign situations
- Difficult time reading the social cues of others
- Socially isolate due to aggressive/impulsive behaviors

Fortunately, research indicates that children's brains are malleable, and the effects of trauma can be reversed!



“If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.” ~ Abraham Maslow



What does it mean to be trauma-informed?

The first step is to change your lens. Instead of “what’s wrong with them” to “what happened to them?”

Remember -- all behavior has a function and purpose. Students use behaviors to communicate. What are they trying to tell you?

Understand that the brain is impacted physically, chemically and functionally by trauma

A brain in “survival” mode cannot learn!

You don’t have to be a therapist to help.

Fostering Resiliency

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress.

Help students foster resiliency by:

- Building an internal locus of control by helping them understand how they have power over their decisions and lives
- Help them see the value in friends, teachers and other mentors
- Teach conflict resolution
- Teach self-regulation strategies by showing them how to calm themselves
- Help them take responsibility for their actions
- Teach the value of taking care of oneself
- Teach the value and power of optimism

Protective Factors to Promote Resilience

External

Caring and supportive relationships

Supportive/safe environments

Challenging but attainable expectations

Opportunities to belong

Connection to community

Internal

Efficient social skills

Problem solving skills

Sense of purpose

Feelings of being effective

Vision of a better future

Self-regulatory skills

Creating a Relationship-Based Culture

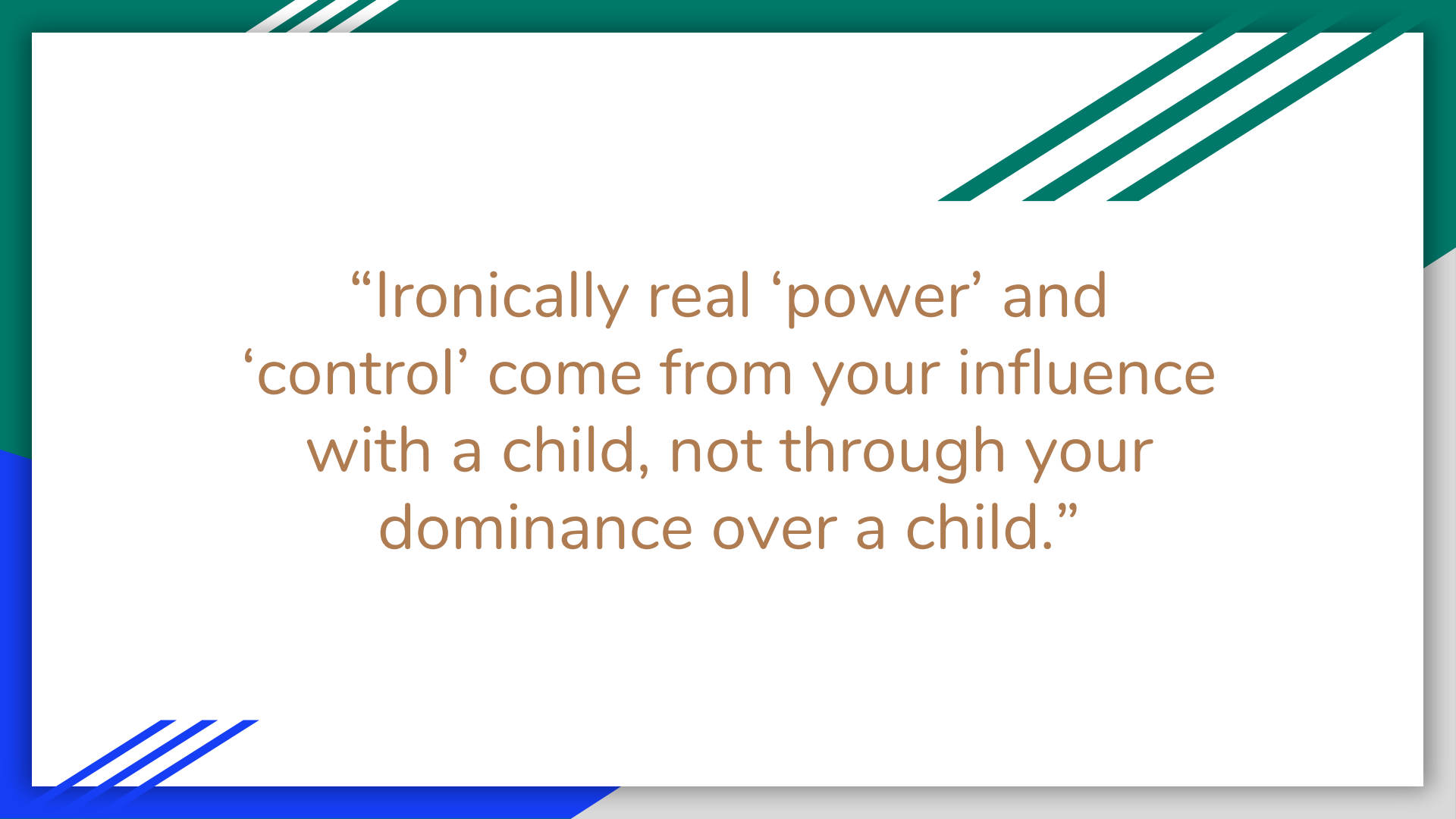
High Visibility and Supervision

Greet Students in the Morning

Have a Presence during Passing Time

Connect with Students in the Cafeteria

Be the last contact after the dismissal bell



“Ironically real ‘power’ and
‘control’ come from your influence
with a child, not through your
dominance over a child.”

Is your classroom Trauma-Sensitive?

Basic Needs

Building Relationships

Greeting Students

Morning Meeting

Mentors

Positive Reinforcement

Build Self-Esteem

Trauma-Informed Approach

- Create a classroom with consistency and routine
- Learn how to recognize survival mode and how to respond with trauma informed strategies
- Make a conscious effort to watch for those who “fly under the radar”
- Students with trauma histories may believe they don’t matter. Give opportunities to shine
- Praise often, and praise publicly. Criticize privately.
- Learn self regulation strategies you can teach your class
- Don’t be afraid to ask what you can do to help them calm down/feel better
- Don’t forget to take care of yourself

Trauma Informed Classroom Strategies

Page 180 & 181 Handout

What do I do if a student gets “triggered” in my room?

- ASK! What can I do to help you?
- Give space and time.
- Stay calm -- speak in a soft, calm tone.
- Reassure them of their safety.
- Offer safe space if available.
 - “I’m here. You’re not in trouble.”
 - “Sit with me.”
 - “You’re allowed to have a voice. Let’s talk.”
 - “I’m sorry this is so hard.”
 - “We’ll get through this together.”

(Sporleder and Forbes, 2016)

Morning Meetings/Circles

The practice of Circles is helpful for building and maintaining a healthy community in which all members feel connected and respected.

The Circle is a simple structured process of communication that helps all reconnect with a joyful appreciation of themselves and others.

It is believed that the regular and routine use of the Circle practice is key in a healthy school community.

Circles Theoretical Foundations

1. The Whole Child Approach
2. The importance of relationships in development and learning
3. A whole-school approach
4. Positive Discipline
5. A Trauma-sensitive learning environment
6. Mindfulness Practice

**Being in positive relationship - the feeling of being recognized, heard, respected, and valued - is itself a form of healing.

Circles Practices

1. Respect - In Circle, each voice is given an opportunity to speak
2. Equality - In Circle, no one is more important or has more rights or power than anyone else; even if they choose not to speak, no one is invisible
3. Empathy - In Circle, we are nurturing and developing our capacity for empathy
4. Problem-solving - The practice of Circle carries an assumption that everyone has something to offer
5. Responsibility - Circles are a space for practicing responsibility with both words and actions
6. Self-regulation and awareness- Participants must wait to speak, listen without responding immediately, and delay their own need to speak
7. Shared Leadership - The Circle allows differing opinions and every member owns the decisions of the circle

Essential Elements of Circles

Seating all participants

Mindfulness Moment

Opening Ceremony - usually something like “How are you today?”

Talking piece

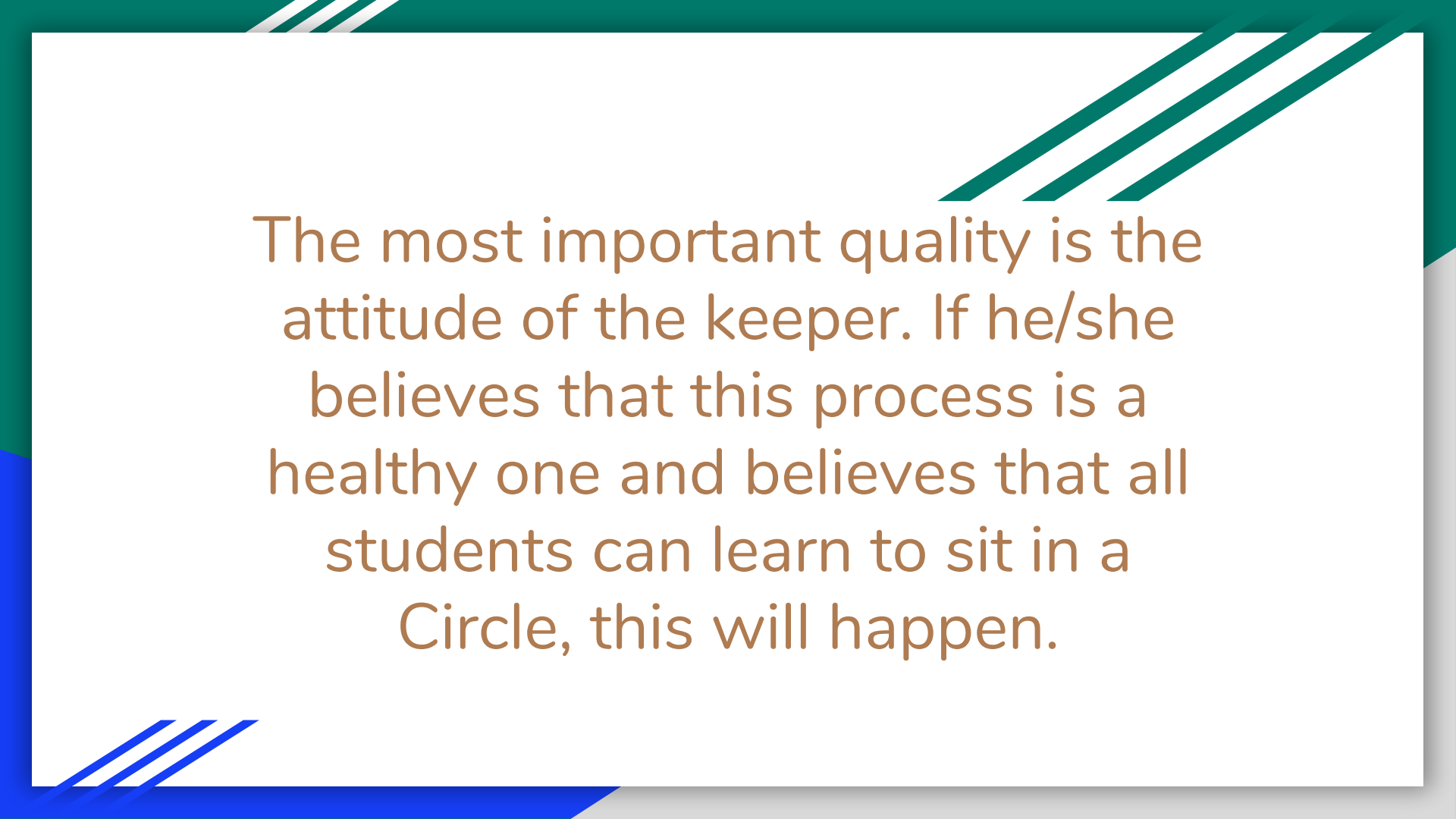
Guidelines for behavior expectations

Guiding questions

Agreements (made by consensus)

Closing Ceremony





The most important quality is the attitude of the keeper. If he/she believes that this process is a healthy one and believes that all students can learn to sit in a Circle, this will happen.

Mindfulness Practice

The Circle process encourages participants to slow down and be present with themselves and others.

Mindfulness is a wellness technique

Scientific research confirms that the regular use of simple mindfulness practice enhances mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

The routine use of meditation practice has been shown to have many beneficial effects for all age groups.

The Mindful Classroom - Why?

Mindfulness training can enhance students' capacities in self-regulation of attention and emotions

School offers an ideal environment for utilizing interventions that promote healthy brain development and function, and foster stress resilience.

Mindfulness practice can strengthen capacities to relate to any experience in ways that are responsive rather than reactive

Also increases self-regulation by developing attentional control through repeated and intentional focusing, sustaining, and shifting of attention

mindfulschools.org

Mindfulness Options

Mindful bodies

Listening mindfully

I Am Peace: Book by Susan Verde

“Just Be” - Kira Willey Song (Speaker used it for no tattling until after the song was over after lunch)

Mindful Eating

Yoga poses to bring calm or energy

*You can also do more guided activities on [gonoodle.com](https://www.gonoodle.com), [brain-breaks.com](https://www.brain-breaks.com) or [mindyet.com](https://www.mindyet.com)



Activity Time! Let's Try a Circle!

Individually Reflect

- What are you already doing that aligns with trauma-informed school practices?
- Identify ONE specific step you can take to advance this work in your district.

Resources

Books:

Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for creating a trauma-sensitive classroom by Kristin Souers

Supporting and Educating Traumatized Students by Eric Rossen and Robert Hull

The Trauma Informed School by Jim Sporleder and Heather Forbes

The Leader in Me by Stephen Covey

The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians, and Administrators by Bob Costello, Joshua Wachtel, and Ted Wachtel

Resources/Intervention

TLPI Publications

<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/tlpi-publications/>

Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition

<http://lookthroughtheireyes.org/ictc/>

Heartland Alliance Program - Intersection of Poverty, Violence and Trauma

<http://2017.ilpovertyreport.org>

Resources/Interventions

Mind Yeti - Guided mindfulness sessions to help kids calm down and focus

Bounce Back Curriculum - School-based group intervention for elementary students exposed to traumatic events.

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) - school-based group and individual counseling designed to reduce symptoms of PTSD, depression, and behavioral problems, and to improve functioning, grades and attendance, peer and parent support, and coping skills

Stop, Breathe, & Think App

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THE **ZONES** OF REGULATION®

A CURRICULUM DESIGNED
TO FOSTER SELF-REGULATION AND
EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Written and Created by
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Foreword and Selected Lessons by
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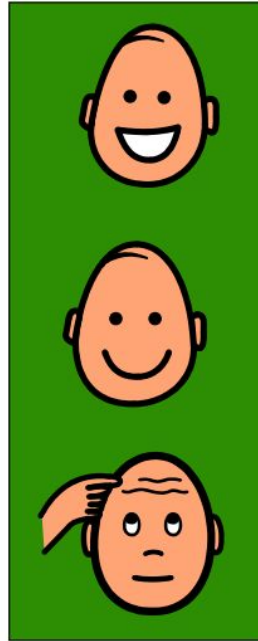
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The Zones of Regulation



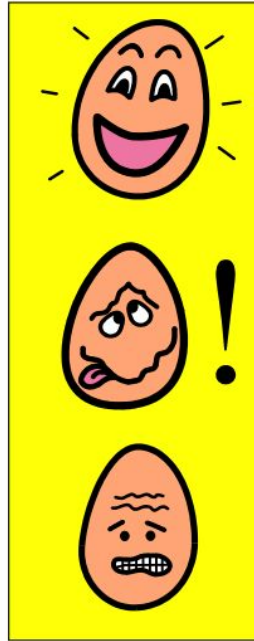
Blue Zone

sad tired
sick moving
tired slowly



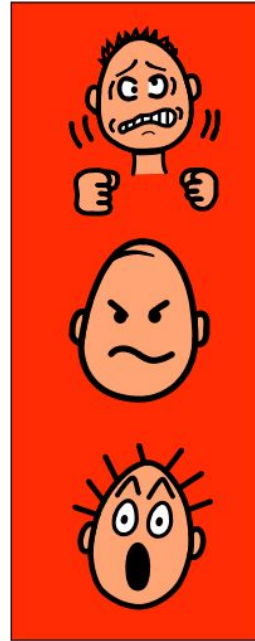
Green Zone

happy
calm
feeling ok
focused
ready to learn



Yellow Zone

frustrated
worried
silly/wiggly
excited
loss of some control



Red Zone

mad/angry
terrified
yelling/hitting
elated
out of control

What are the Zones?

BLUE Zone – Your body is running slow, such as when you are tired, sick, sad or bored.

GREEN Zone – Like a green light, you are “good to go.” Your body may feel happy, calm and focused.

YELLOW Zone – This zone describes when you start to lose control, such as when you are frustrated, anxious, worried, silly or surprised. Use caution when you are in this zone.

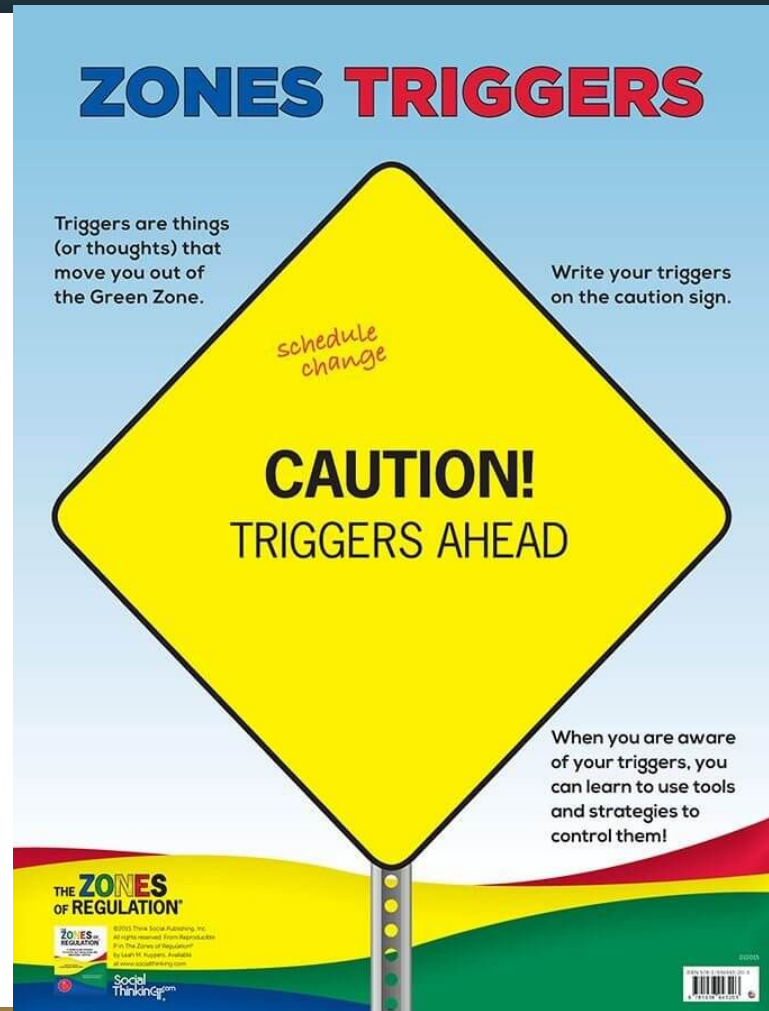
RED Zone – This zone is for extreme emotions such as anger, terror and aggression. When you are in this zone, you are out of control, have trouble making good decisions and must STOP!

Zones Goals

- Identify their feelings and levels of alertness
- Effective regulation tools
- When and how to use the tools
- Problem solve positive solutions
- Understand how their behaviours influence others' thoughts and feelings

Ultimate goal is for students to independently regulate!

Caution Triggers!



Zones Have Different Strategies

- Calming Techniques
- Sensory Supports
- Thinking Strategies

Calming Techniques

- Listening to music
- Relaxation
- Deep breathing
- Counting
- Yoga/Mindfulness

Sensory Supports

- Heavy lifting
- Jumping
- Swinging
- Fidgets
- Running/exercising
- Wall push-ups

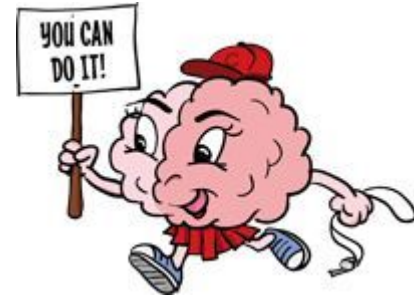
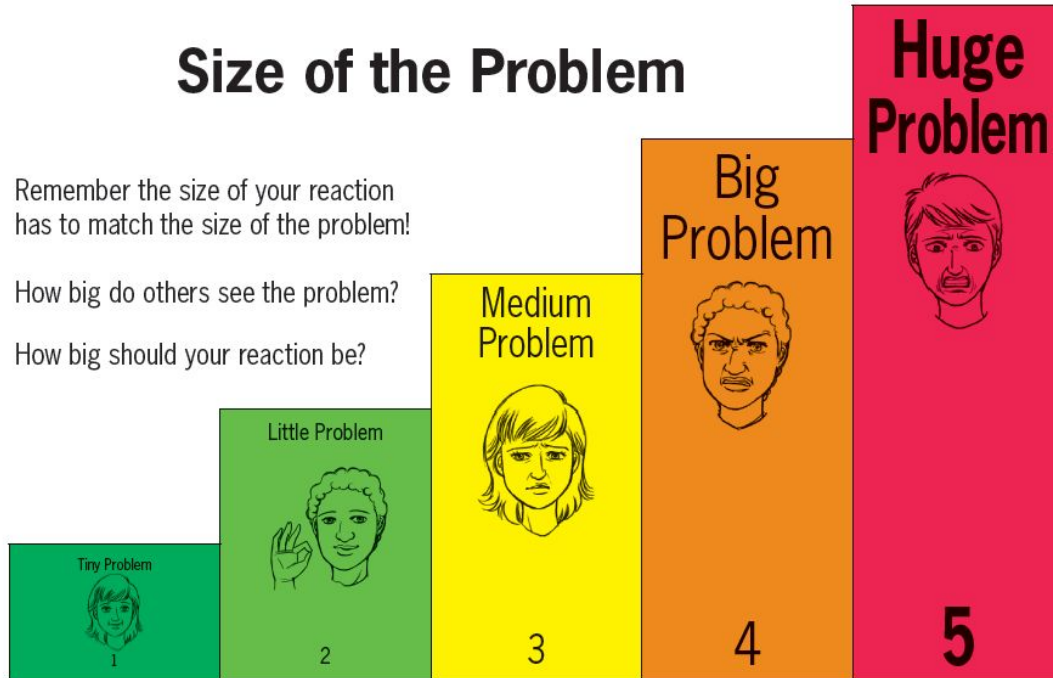
Thinking Strategies

Size of the Problem

Remember the size of your reaction
has to match the size of the problem!

How big do others see the problem?

How big should your reaction be?



Zones

ZONES Tools Worksheet

Name of Tool	Circle the zone or zones you think the tool would help in.				
Belly Breather	Blue	Green	Yellow	<u>Red</u>	None
Drink Water	Blue	<u>Green</u>	Yellow	Red	None
Drink ^{plenty} of fluids	<u>Blue</u>	Green	Yellow	Red	None
More ^{than 5 deep breaths}	Blue	Green	<u>Yellow</u>	Red	None
My Calming ^{sequence}	Blue	Green	Yellow	<u>Red</u>	None
Drink medicine	<u>Blue</u>	Green	Yellow	Red	<u>None</u>
Lazy "S" Breathing	Blue	Green	<u>Yellow</u>	Red	None
Break	Blue	Green	Yellow	<u>Red</u>	None
Talk to Adult	<u>Blue</u>	<u>Green</u>	<u>Yellow</u>	<u>Red</u>	None
Listen to music	<u>Blue</u>	<u>Green</u>	<u>Yellow</u>	Red	None
Take a break	<u>Blue</u>	<u>Green</u>	<u>Yellow</u>	<u>Red</u>	None
Exercise regularly	Blue	Green	Yellow	Red	<u>None</u>
	Blue	<u>Green</u>	Yellow	Red	None