



The Adolescent Brain: New Research and its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care

Children's Advocacy Days 2012

Nashville, TN



“Just knowing that brain development does not stop is an enhanced opportunity to overcome negative experiences. This new information not only identifies that traditional thought that youth are stuck at this place and doomed for failure but also outlines what we need to do to turn these traumatic experiences around and rewire the brain and help these youth be successful, regardless of what happened to them.”

Josh, TN



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES
INITIATIVE

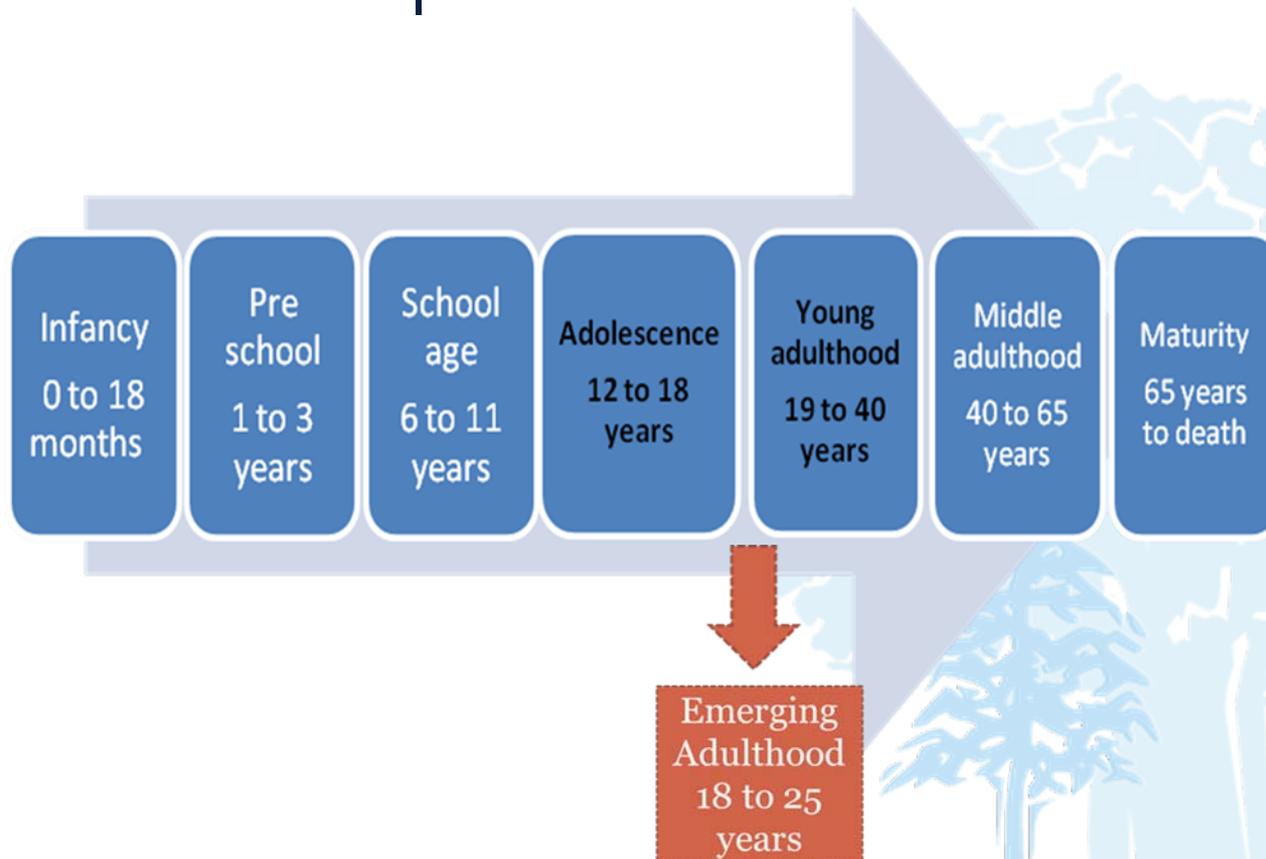
Overview

- **Experience Matters**
- Relationships and Resilience
- Supporting Well Being
- Key Concepts

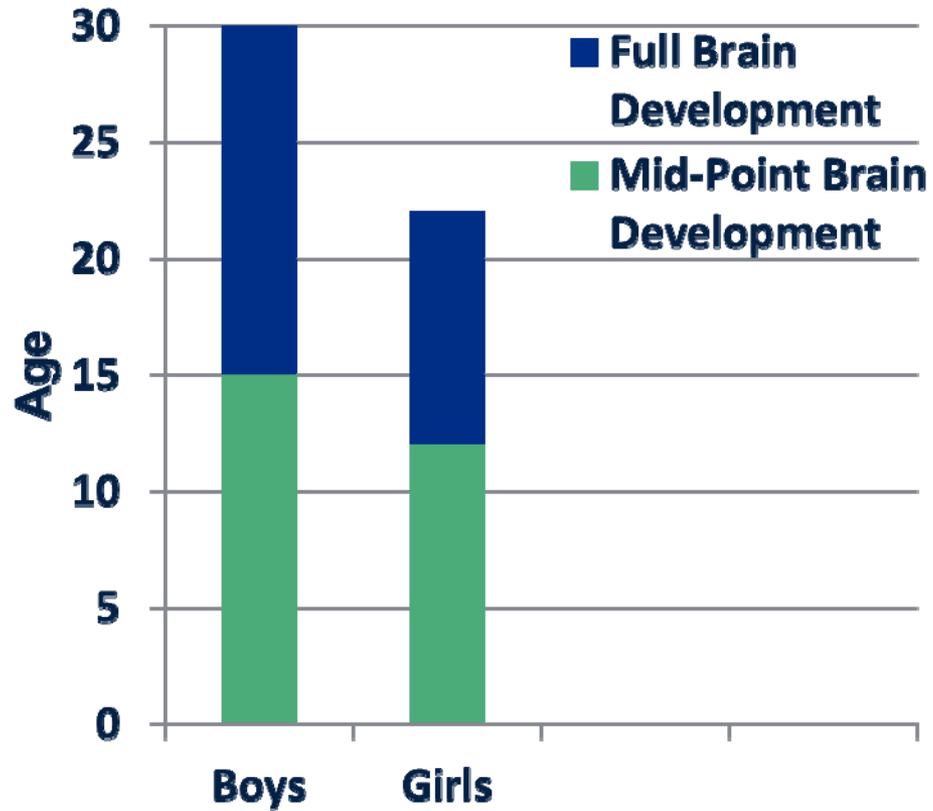


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Emerging Adulthood



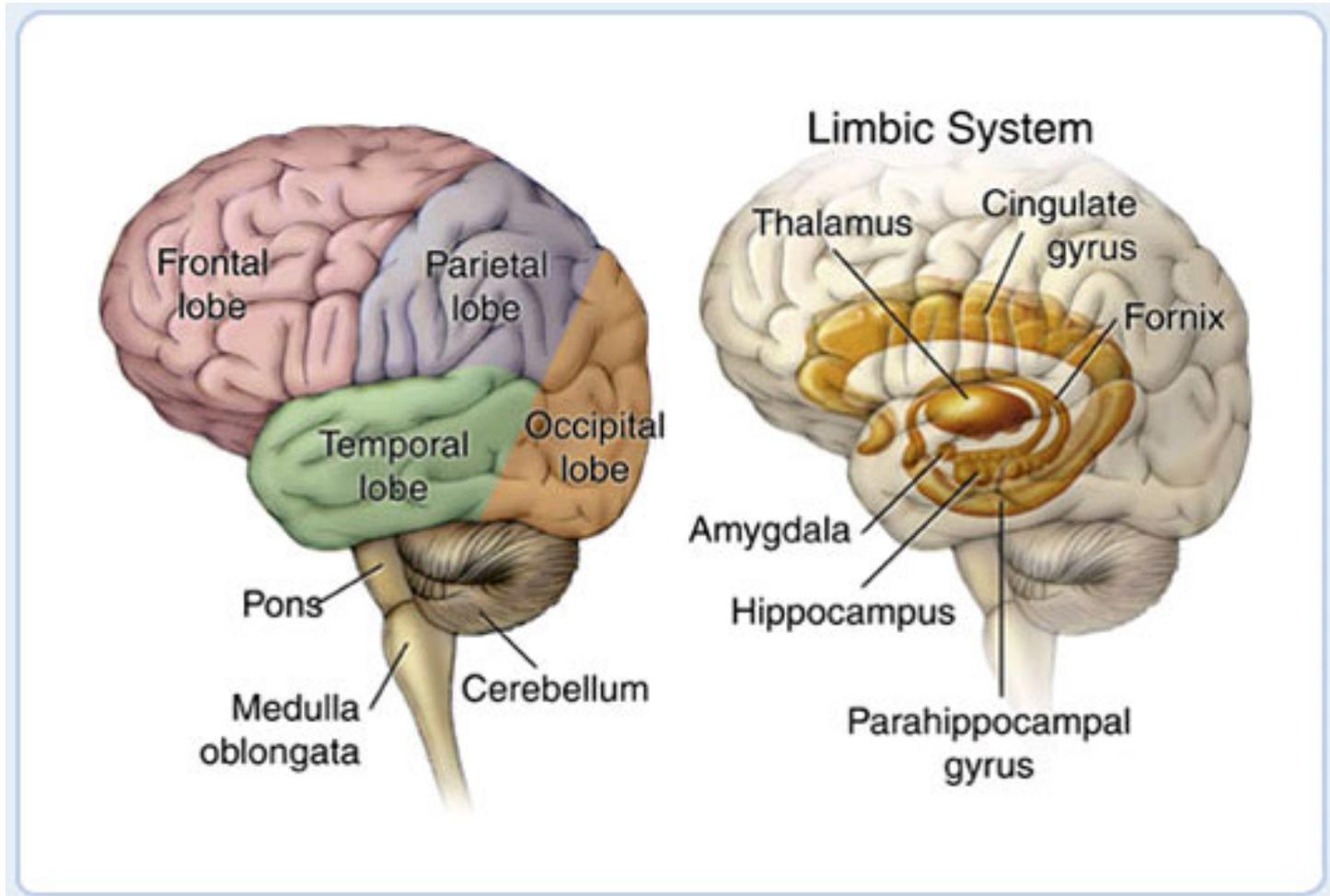
Not Done Yet!





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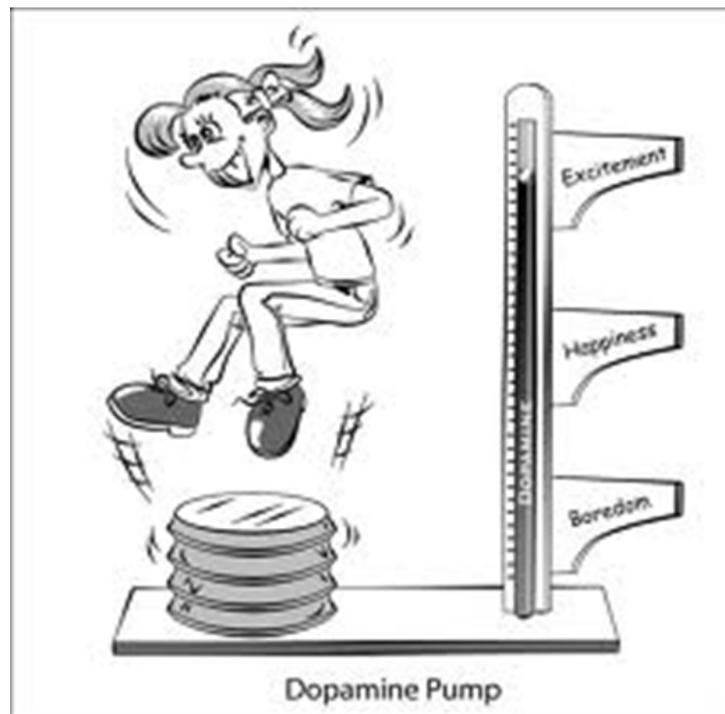
Gradual Development





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Shifting Dopamine



- **Normal risk-taking is a part of healthy development**

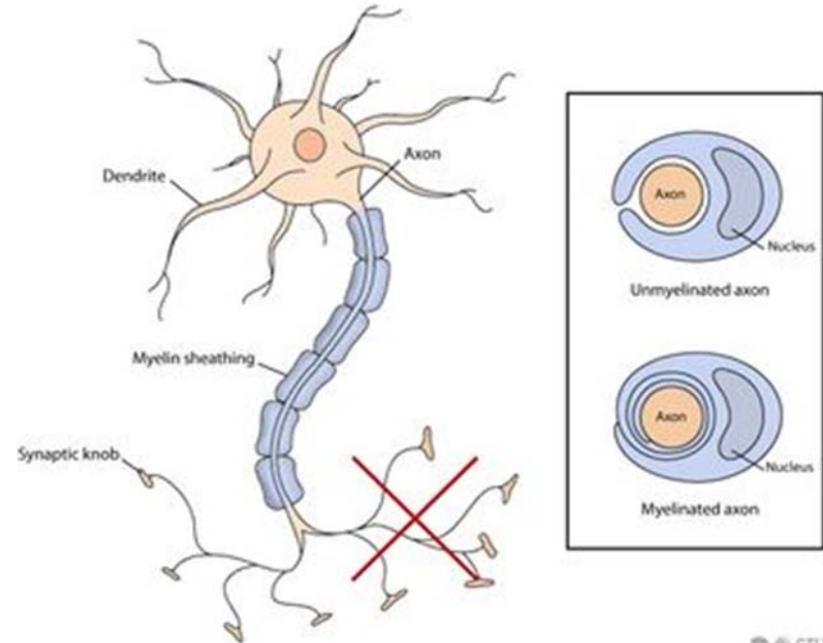


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Network and Wiring Upgrade

- Grey Matter
- Myelination
- Synaptic Pruning

Synaptic Pruning and Myelination



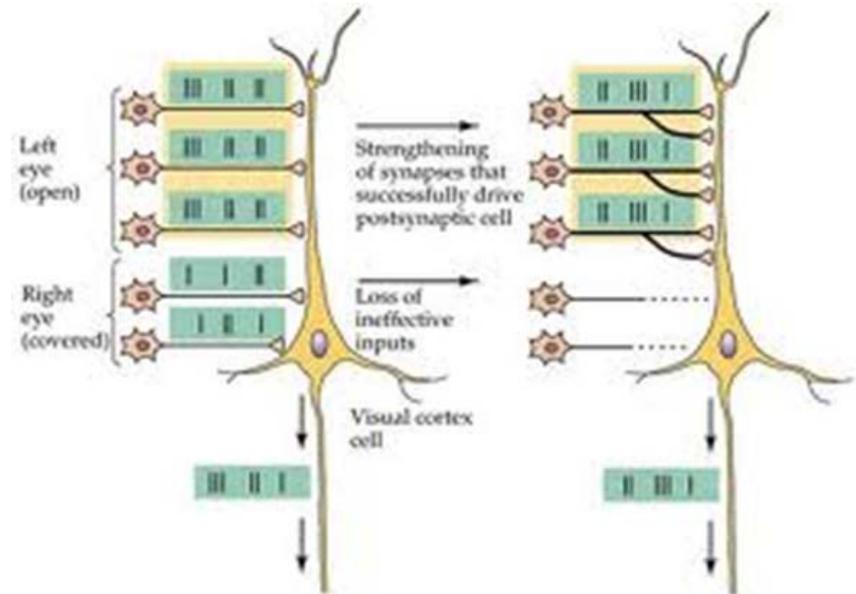
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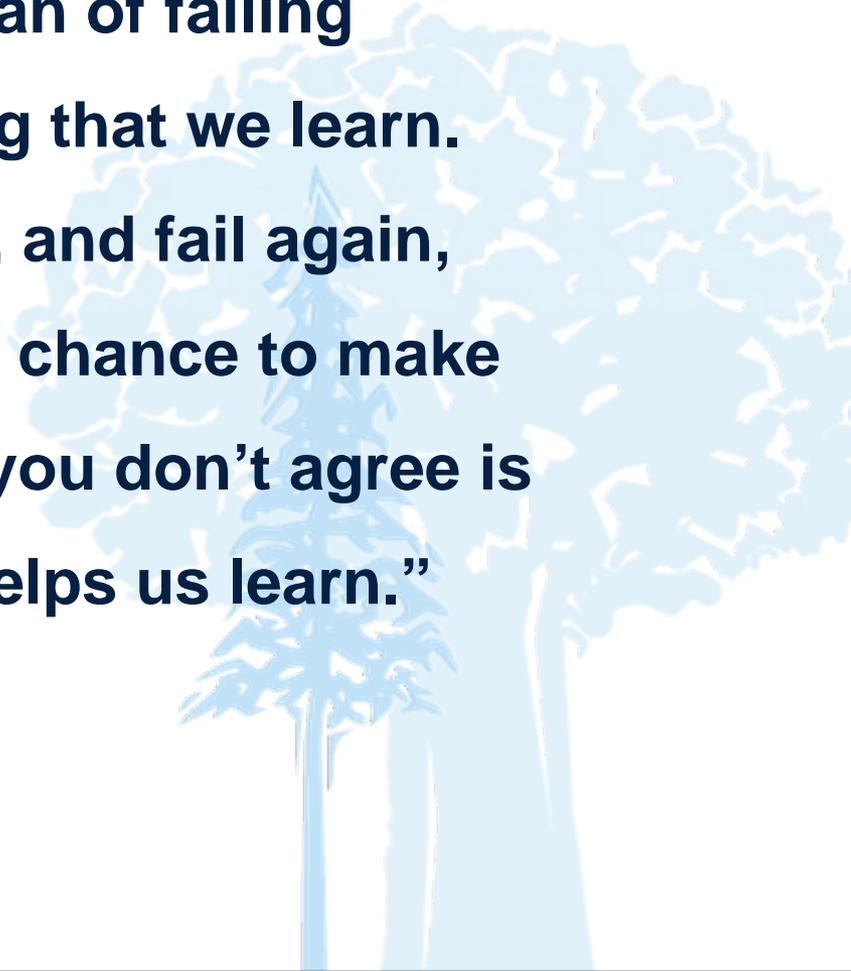


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Understanding Experience

- Use Dependent
- Prunes Redundant Connections
- Enhances Transmission of Brain Messages





“I experienced life both with and without a support system. I’m a big fan of failing because it is through failing that we learn. Secret of success is to fail, and fail again, then fail better. Giving us a chance to make our own decisions even if you don’t agree is so important. If we fail, it helps us learn.”

~Beamer, NC



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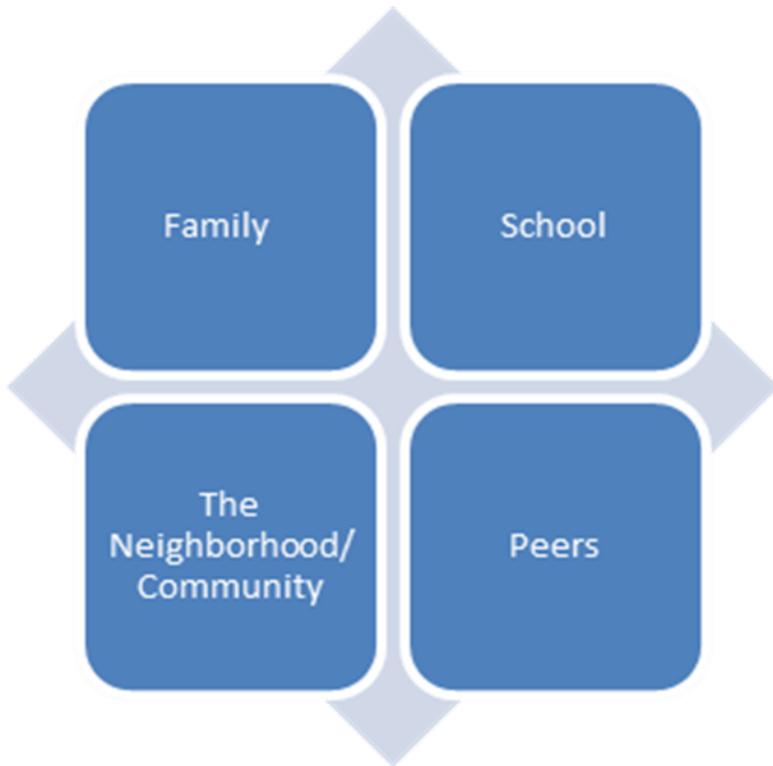
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Social Capital



- **Quantity**
- **Quality**
- **Value**



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Impact of Ambiguous Loss

- Uncertainty
- Lack of Clarity
- Confusion
- Grief





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Stress Continuum

Positive

Brief increases in heart rate,
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable

Serious, temporary stress responses,
buffered by supportive relationships.

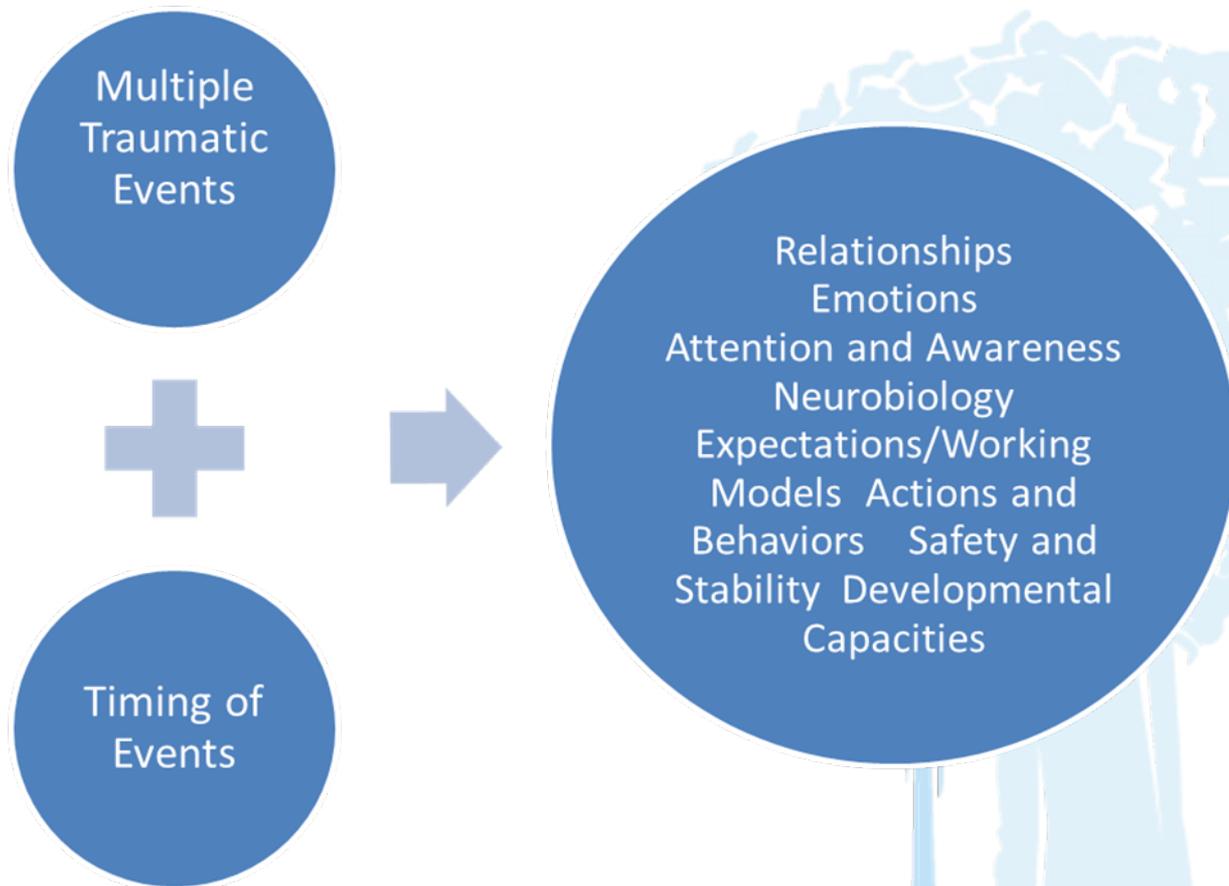
Toxic

Prolonged activation of stress response systems
in the absence of protective relationships.



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Complex Trauma



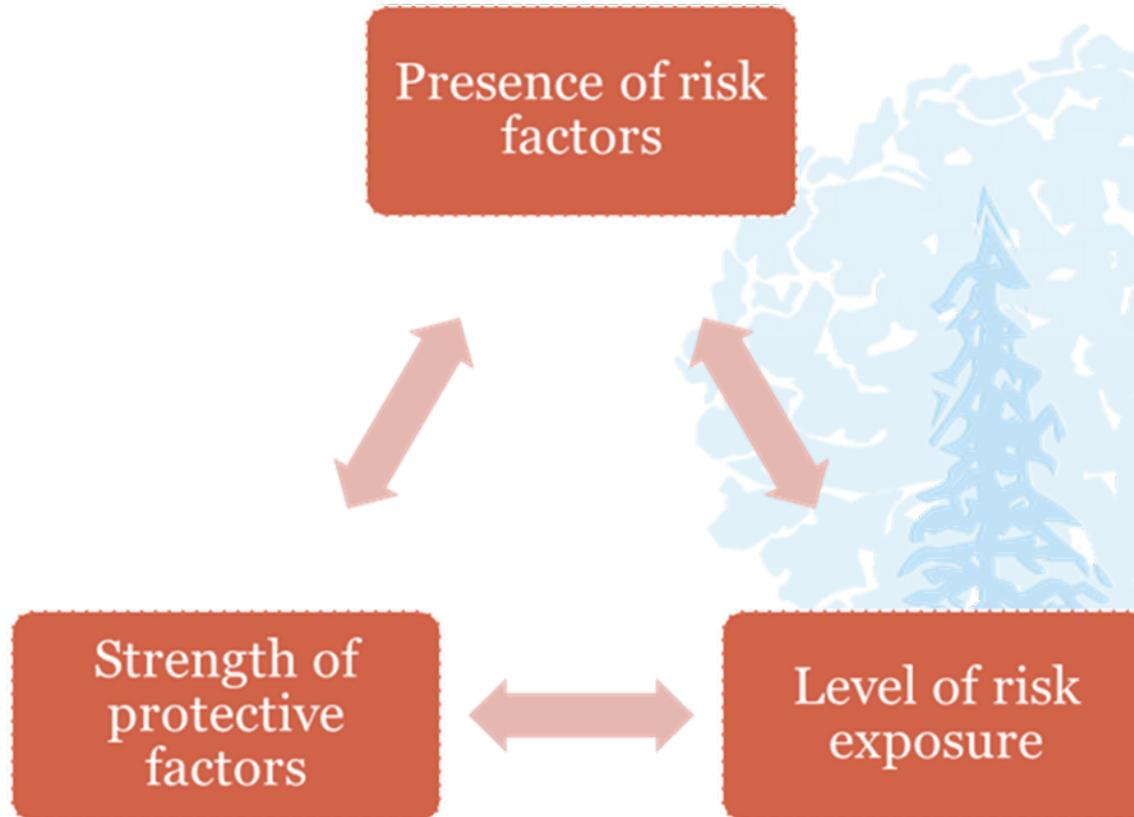


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Neuroplasticity

- Impact of trauma is NOT permanent
- Relationships
- Experiences
- No 'point of no return'

Development of Resilience



“Probably the most traumatic experience was all of the moving I did, moving foster homes is one thing but what I found very challenging was also moving schools because I left a whole support system behind.”

~Josh, TN





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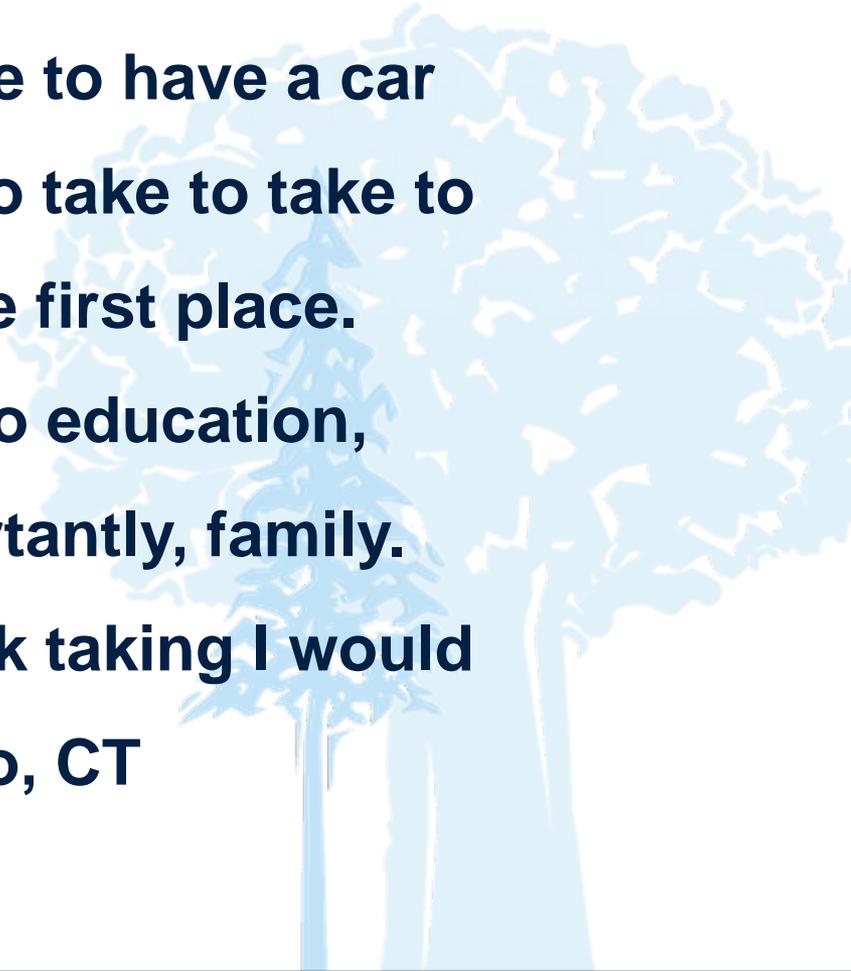


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Positive Youth Development

- Lead, contribute, create
- Focus on internal/external assets
- Learn from teachable moments
- Find and develop passions

“I was given knowledge and power to make decisions on my own. Preparation was important. No one wanted me to have a car but it was the risk I needed to take to take to learn the responsibility in the first place. Having a car opened doors to education, employment and most importantly, family. Without opportunities for risk taking I would not have succeeded.” ~ Sixto, CT





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Interdependent Services

- Stability & Continuity
- Family Connections
- Social Capital





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Authentic Engagement

- Partnerships
- High expectations
- Normative risk-taking
- Supported responsibility

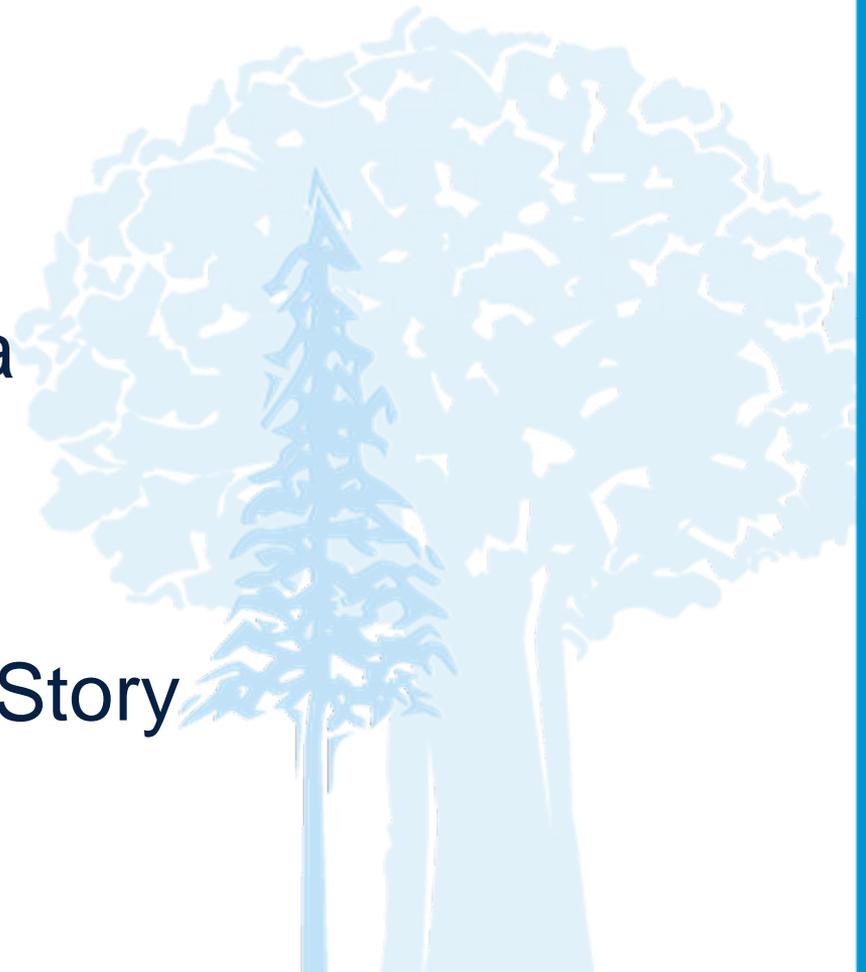




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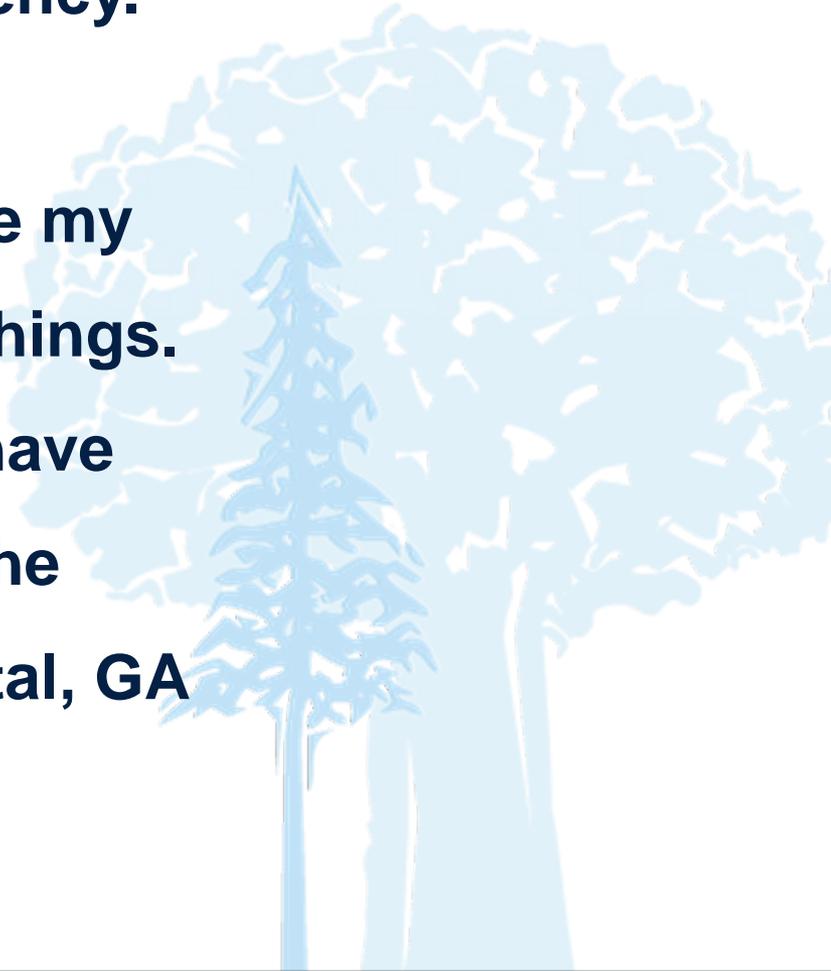
Trauma Informed

- Basic Understanding
- Prevent Added Trauma
- Maximize Safety
- Making Sense of their Story





**“I was familiar with inconsistency.
School was a safe haven.
Extracurricular activities were my
opportunities to experience things.
Is it better for the system to have
control or for youth to have the
opportunity to learn?” ~Crystal, GA**

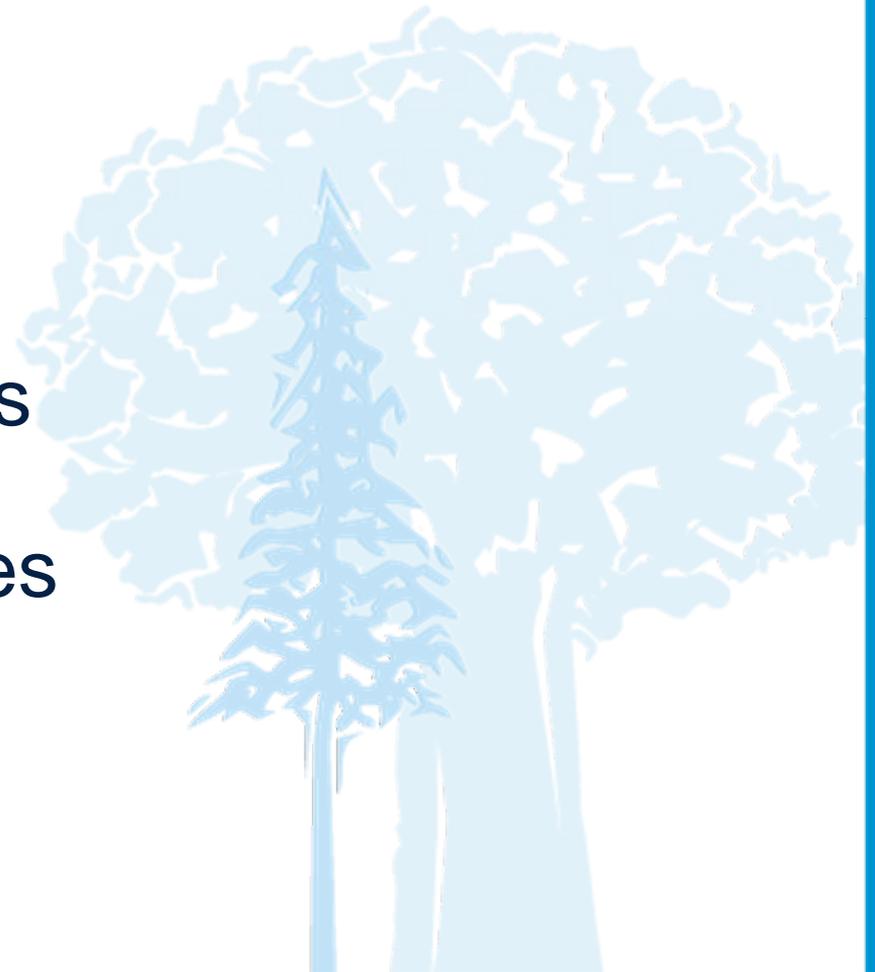




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Extend Foster Care

- Do it Right!
- Focus on Relationships
- Roles & Responsibilities





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Key Concepts

- Opportunity
- Relationships
- Balance





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Thank You!

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