

ACES - More than a card in a deck



SNAP-Ed Training

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Safe Zone



Why Learn about Childhood Trauma?

- ▶ Because how we think about a situation affects how we respond to it.
- ▶ Helps us respond in ways that promote positive interactions with others.
- ▶ Helps us avoid re-traumatizing those we serve



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What's in Your Backpack?

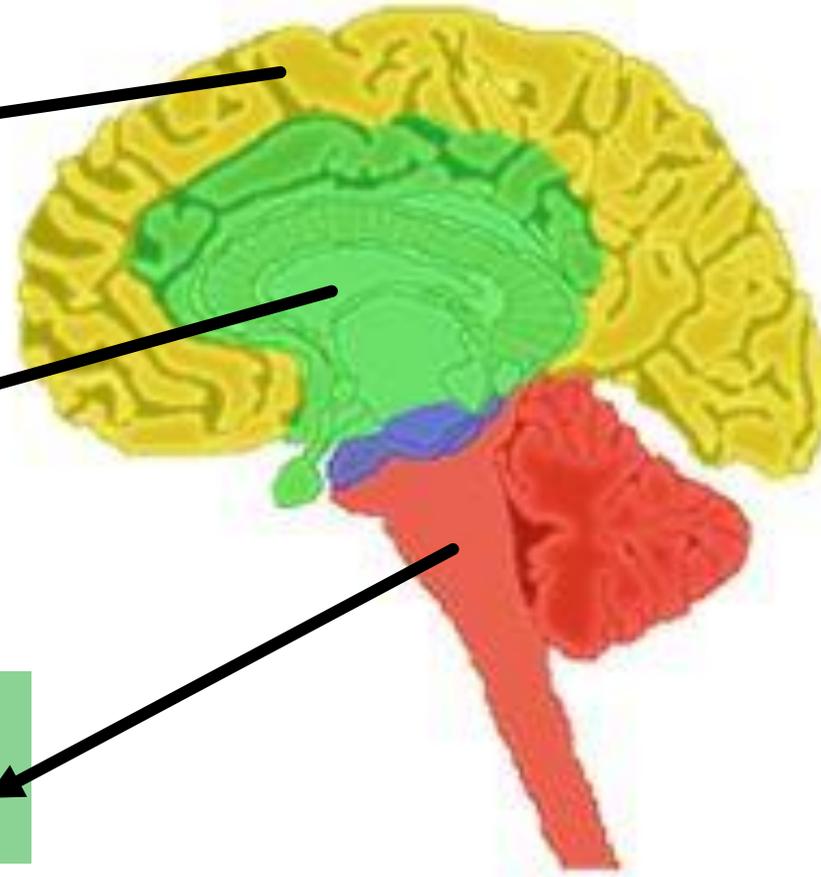


The Brain

Executive State
Cortex
What can I learn from this?

Emotional State
Limbic system
Am I connected?/Am I loved?

Survival State
Brain stem
Am I safe?



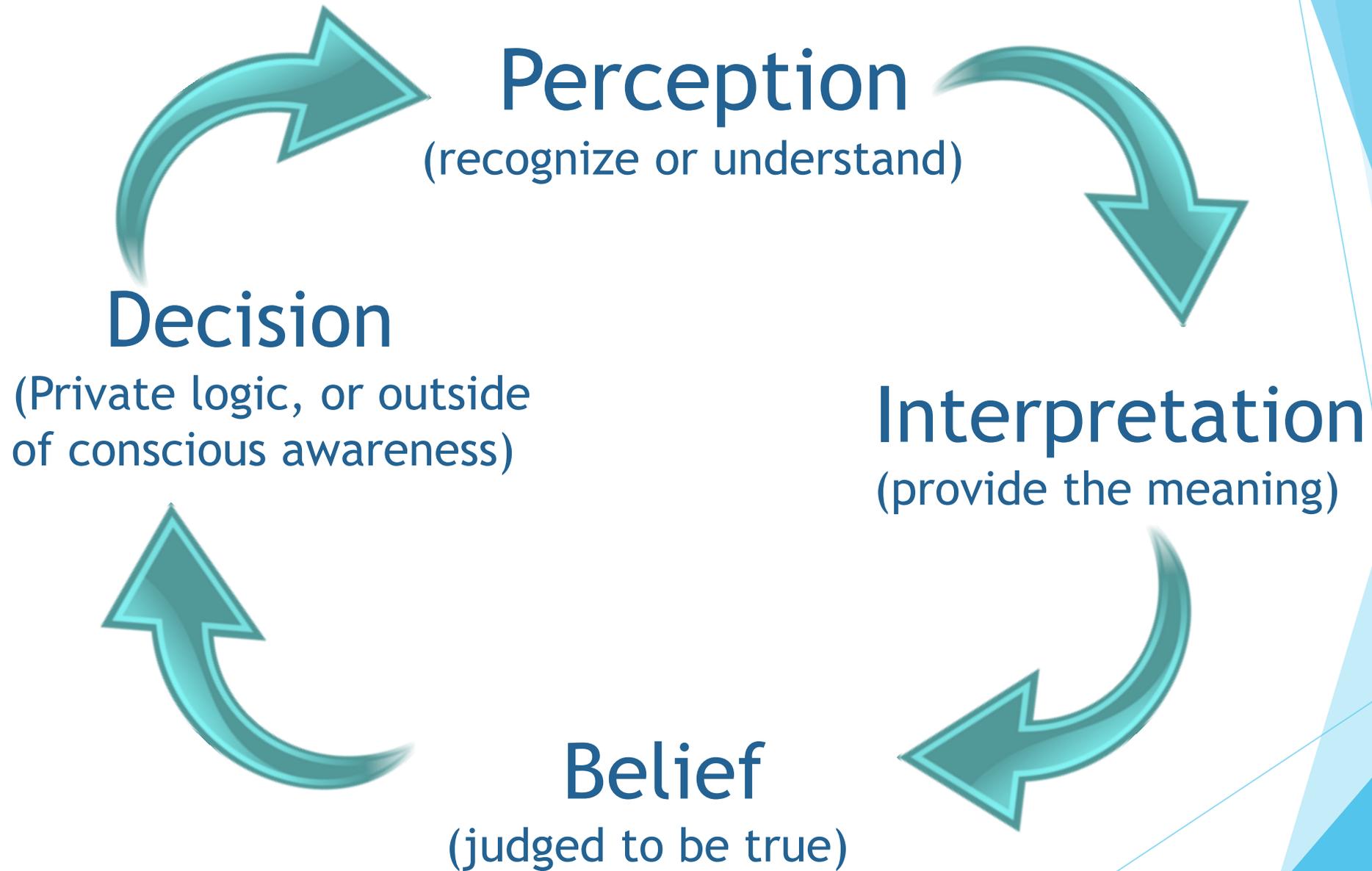
“Attachment is a general term that describes the state and quality of one individual’s ties to another.”

~A. Becker-Weidman, [Creating Capacity for Attachment](#)



The Blueprint

- ▶ Interactions with primary caregivers provide the “blueprint” for infants’ future relationships with others as well as their view of the world:
 - ▶ Who they are
 - ▶ How the world works
 - ▶ What they need to do in order to thrive or to survive



We are constantly making
decisions that look like this:

“In order to belong or be important here I need
to _____.”

OR

“In order to validate what I ‘know’ about the
world, I must prove you wrong by
_____.”

Implications:

- ▶ The problem we see may be a solution to another problem that is not verbalized or outside of everyone's awareness.
- ▶ Mistaken beliefs lead to mistaken decisions.
 - ▶ We tend to take mistaken beliefs for granted, and assume that they are a reflection of reality.
- ▶ Perception is everything!

The Brain's Escalator



Identifying Brain States



Survival state:
Skills tend to be
PHYSICAL



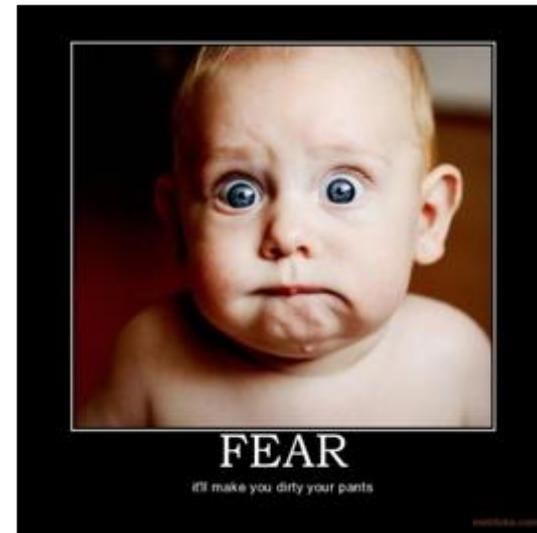
Emotional state:
Skills tend to be
VERBAL



Executive state:
Skills provide problem
solving, win-win
SOLUTIONS

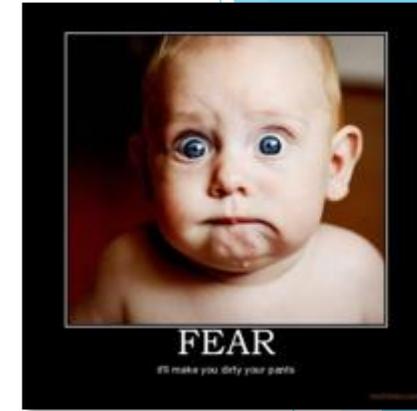
How the Brain Reacts to Fear

- ▶ Threat detected → Cortex shuts down to focus on survival
 - ▶ Bigger the threat the less cortex available
 - ▶ Decreased ability to perceive new stimulus
 - ▶ Tunnel vision → focus on threat
 - ▶ Area for speech shuts down



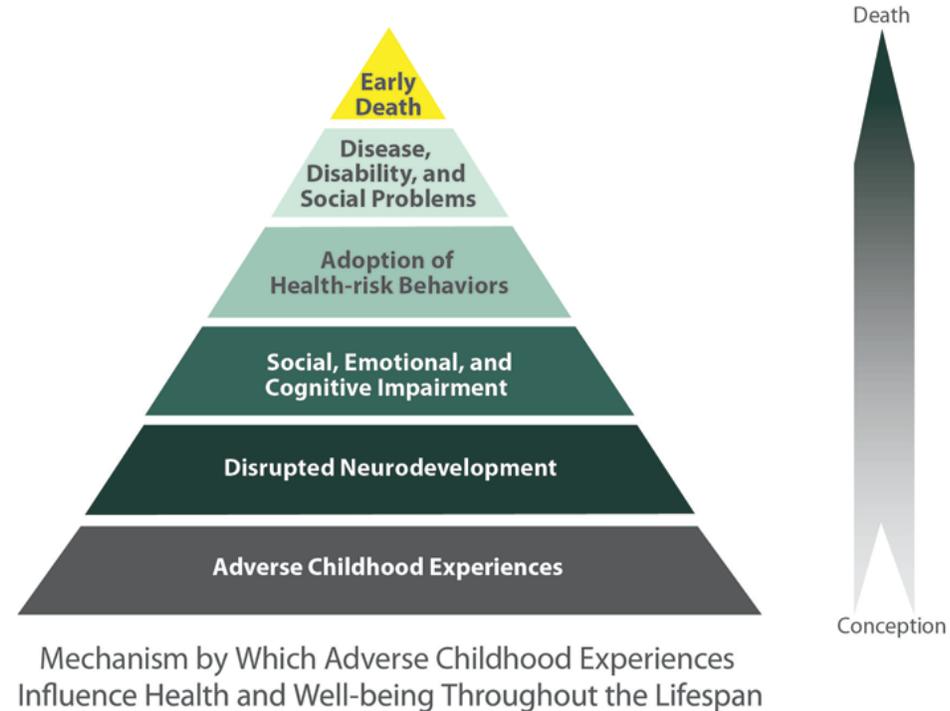
How the Brain Reacts to Fear

- ▶ It's important to keep in mind:
 - ▶ Those we come in contact with aren't necessarily being uncooperative.
 - ▶ They may biologically be unable to communicate with us if they are experiencing a fear response;
 - ▶ Communication difficulties are both expressive and receptive
 - ▶ Remembering “not okay” experiences we have had in the past can trigger a fear response.
 - ▶ From the brain's perspective, it's like the threat is actually happening again.
 - ▶ This is called a trauma reminder.



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

- ▶ Kaiser Permanente and CDC study from 1995 - 1997
- ▶ More than 17,000 participants
- ▶ Primarily white, college educated, middle class cohort



What are ACEs?

“A psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience often involving a sense of intense fear, terror and helplessness.”

(From *Helping Traumatized Children: A Brief Overview for Caregivers* by Bruce Perry)

▶ Abuse

Psychological

Physical

Sexual

▶ Neglect

Emotional

Physical

▶ Household dysfunction

Alcoholism

Loss of parent before age 18 (through death, divorce or parental separation)

Depression or mental illness in home

Mother treated violently

Imprisoned household member

Modern ACEs

- ▶ Bullying (by another child or adult)
- ▶ Witnessing violence outside the home
- ▶ Witnessing a sibling being abused (including a pet)
- ▶ Being placed into foster care
- ▶ Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
- ▶ Being homeless
- ▶ Natural disasters
- ▶ War, including deployment of a parent

Why Do ACEs Matter?

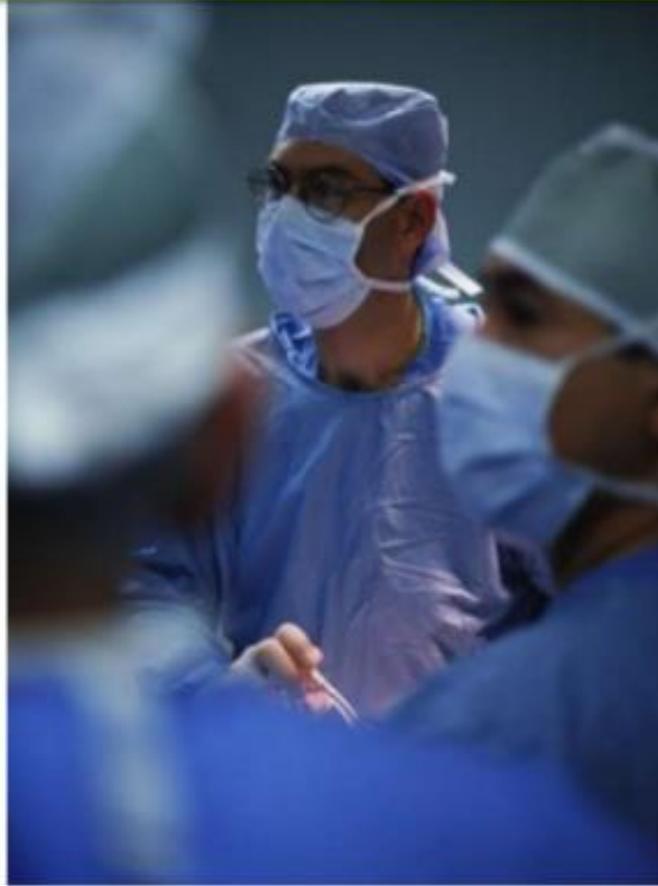
- ▶ Long term exposure to stress hormones affect brains and bodies over the lifespan
 - ▶ Short term exposure (the bear in the woods)
 - ▶ Long term exposure (the bear in the woods lives at home)
 - ▶ **3 or more ACEs prior to age 18** can cause permanent changes in our brains and bodies



ACEs Predict the 10 Leading Causes of Adult Death/Disability

1. Heart disease
2. Cancer
3. Chronic lower respiratory diseases
4. Stroke
5. Unintentional injuries
6. Alzheimer's disease
7. Diabetes
8. Kidney disease
9. Influenza and pneumonia
10. Suicide

ACE Study, Felitti et al. 1998



Common Behaviors

- ▶ Inattention
- ▶ Work avoidance
- ▶ Lack of ability to verbalize emotions
- ▶ Inability to calm down from strong emotional states
- ▶ Distrust of others
- ▶ Rage
- ▶ Physically or emotionally lashing out at others
- ▶ Mental illness
- ▶ Substance use
- ▶ Hypervigilance
- ▶ Impulse control issues
- ▶ Lack of empathy
- ▶ Blaming or shifting responsibility onto others
- ▶ Extreme concern over a pet/something else they can control
- ▶ Lack of awareness of what is happening around them
- ▶ Inability to assess risk or to know who/what is safe

While insecure attachment and trauma are not the same things, children with insecure attachment who experience trauma have no anchor.



Danger or Safety?

- ▶ Those of us with a high ACE score tend to scan for danger.
- ▶ Those of us with a low ACE score tend to scan for safety.

HOW DOES THAT DIFFER?



Early Experiences Matter!

- ▶ The brain functions on a “use it or lose it” basis
- ▶ The threat-arousal management system (fight, flight, freeze) becomes overly developed
- ▶ When the majority of our brain resources are spent monitoring for danger, it takes energy away from the development of the parts of the brain responsible for executive function
- ▶ The integration of reasoning and emotions becomes compromised, resulting in the inability to use the thinking part of the brain to manage the feeling part

A Word about Poverty

- ▶ Poverty and ACEs are two separate things
- ▶ Poverty \neq ACEs
- ▶ Poverty adds stress to any living situation, making it more difficult to manage
- ▶ Those with financial resources are better able to access resources to counterbalance the effects of ACEs

A Recipe for Disaster

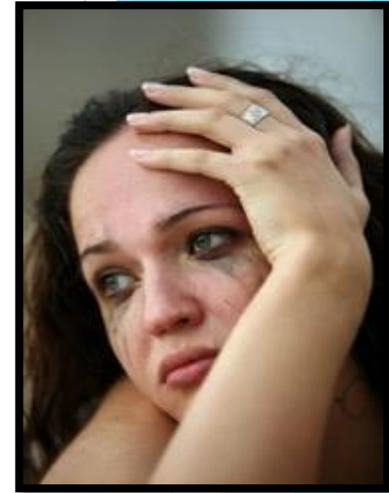
- ▶ 3 Adverse Experiences + 0 safe, stable, caring adult
= Toxic Stress
- ▶ Untreated Toxic Stress → Irreversible Brain Damage

Effects of Domestic Abuse/Other Types of Violence

- ▶ Have higher levels of stress hormones
- ▶ Are functioning most often in their limbic system (emotional brain)
- ▶ Are hypervigilant

The Psychological and Emotional Impact of ACEs

- ▶ Mental health
 - ▶ 4 or more ACEs = 12 fold increase in suicide attempt
- ▶ Stability of relationships
 - ▶ 5 or more = 5 times more likely to be in a violent intimate relationship
- ▶ Performance at school and in the workforce
 - ▶ Increased absenteeism due to physical and mental health problems
- ▶ Substance abuse
 - ▶ Abuses occur in an attempt to cope
- ▶ Shorter life expectancy
 - ▶ 6 or more ACEs = 20 Year shorter life expectancy.



ACEs are common

0 - 33%

1 - 25%

2 - 15%

3 - 10%

4 - 6%

5 or more 11%

ACE's and Food Insecurity

Poor Educational Outcomes

- ▶ Abuse
- ▶ Neglect
- ▶ Family Instability

Mental Health Issues

- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ Drug & Alcohol Use
- ▶ Relationship Instability

We are Having the Wrong Conversation

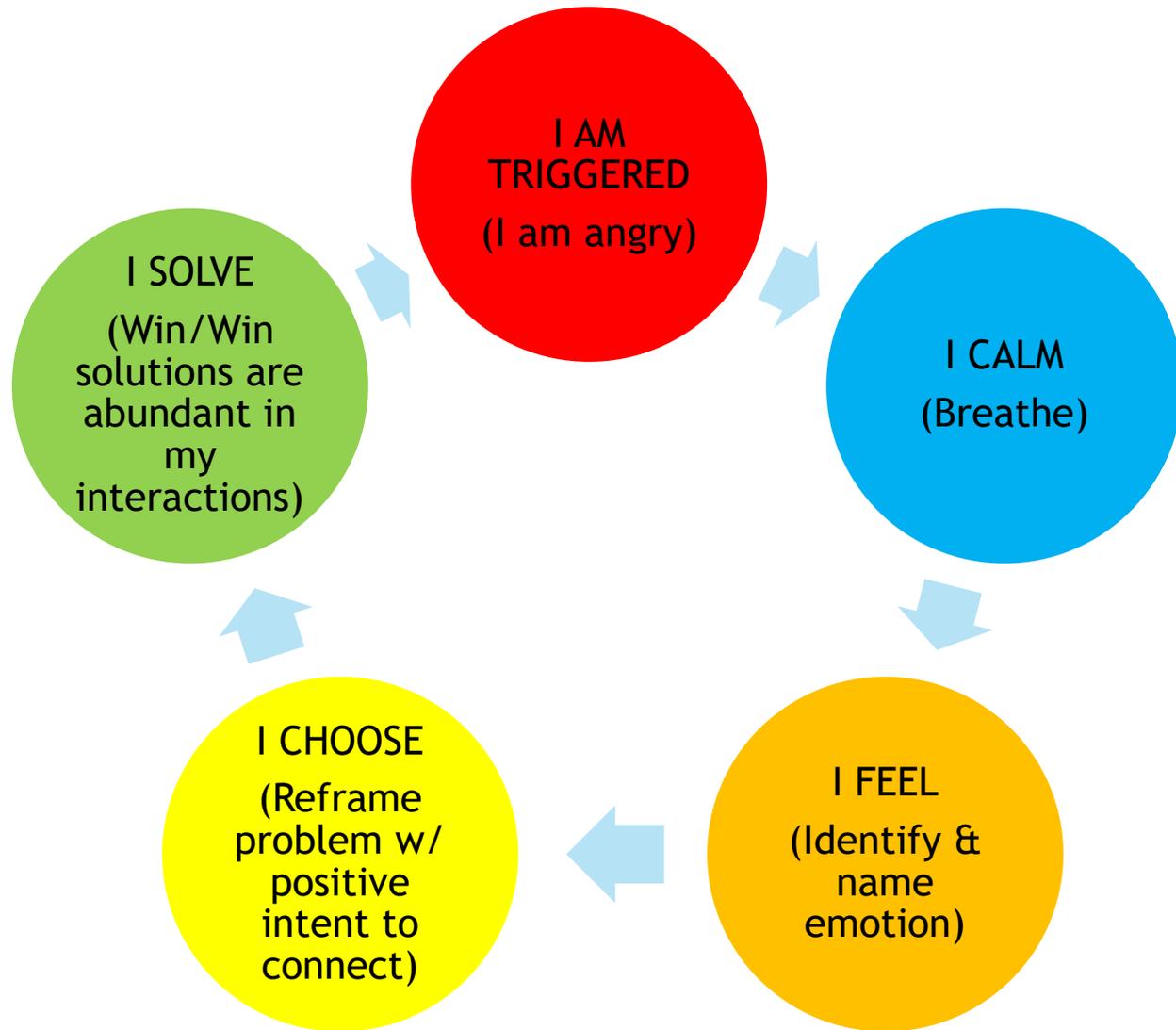


Resilience

- ▶ The ability to “bounce back” despite the “not okay” things that happen
- ▶ The more capable we are of “bouncing back”, the less these “not okay” things will have negative effects over time
- ▶ Two things influence how capable a person is of “bouncing back”:
 - ▶ How they are able to make meaning of what happened
 - ▶ The network of “safe” connected people that they have in their life



5 Step Regulation Process



Adapted from Children's Resilience Initiative
Walla Walla, WA

Self wellness and resilience!

This is very hard work, take time to refill your cup, as it hard to give to others, if your cup is empty.



Questions?



The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The text is centered on a white background that occupies the left and middle portions of the frame.

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