

# Trauma-Informed Schools

Creating Trauma-Sensitive Learning Environments  
for All Students

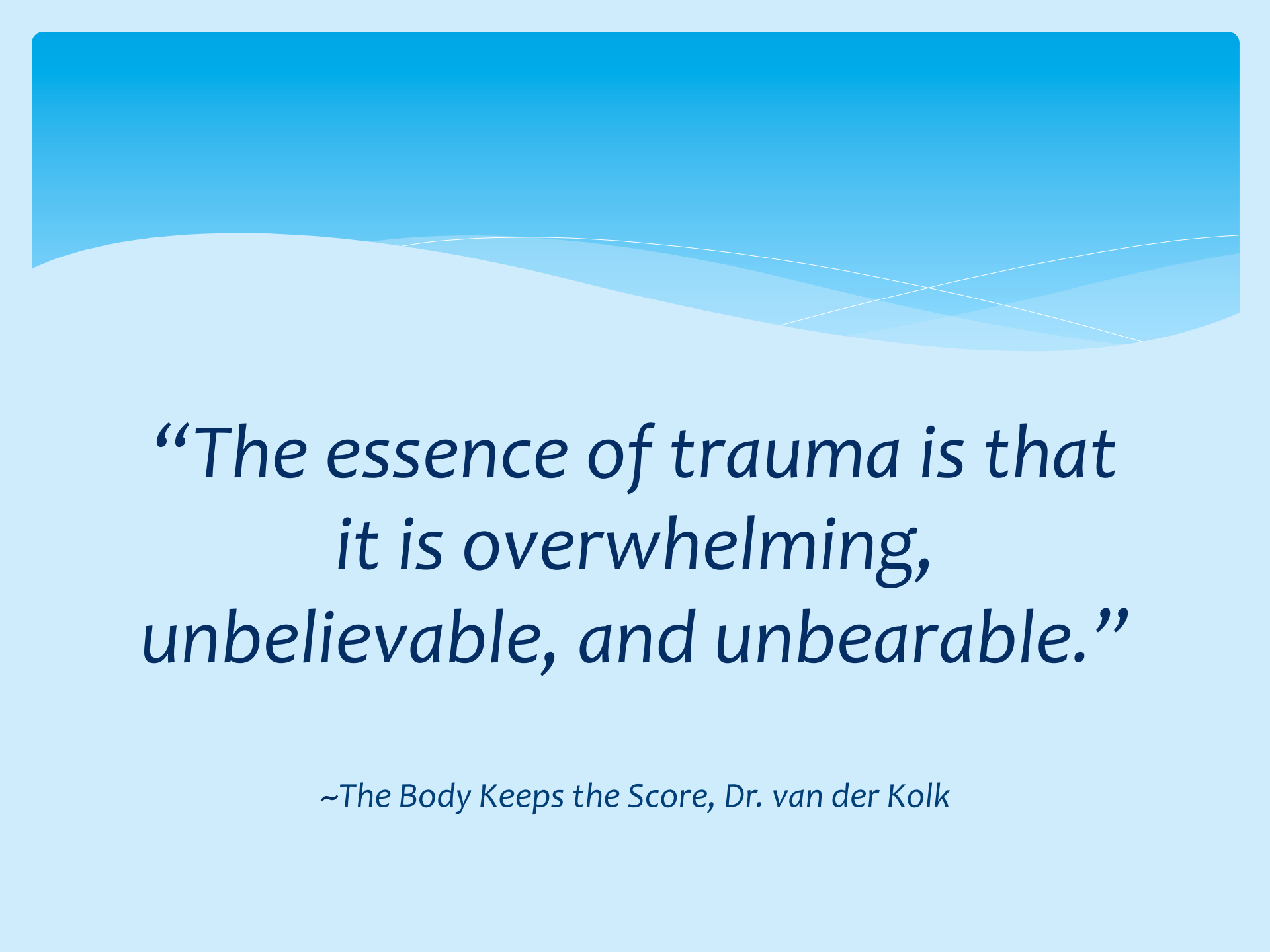
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# Outline of Training

- \* Gain an understanding of trauma and how it affects brain development and learning.
- \* Learn how to work with your staff for a more trauma-sensitive school environment for ALL students.
- \* Review interventions for classroom, individual and group counseling.
- \* Identify ways to take care of yourself while helping students dealing with trauma.

# Important Points to Consider

- \* What works for students with trauma, also works for non-traumatized students.
- \* We're not talking about a "trauma curriculum", but support to access the regular curriculum.
- \* The goal is to address the barriers to learning and provide strategies to remove or minimize them.
- \* We have an obligation to truly understand how students learn and what may be affecting their capacity to learn.



*“The essence of trauma is that  
it is overwhelming,  
unbelievable, and unbearable.”*

*~The Body Keeps the Score, Dr. van der Kolk*

# What is Trauma?

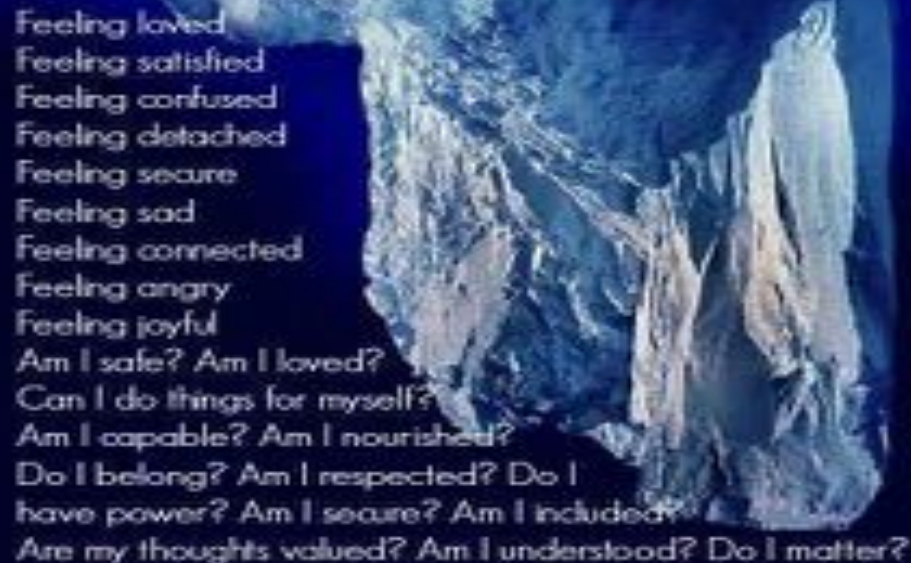
- \* **Trauma** occurs when a person experiences or witnesses an event that overwhelms his or her capacity to cope.
- \* **Trauma may be:**
  1. Unpredictable
  2. Overwhelming
  3. Threatening
  4. Meaningless

# Trauma in Our Students

- \* The **majority of students** in school have been exposed to at least one traumatic event at some point in their lives.*
- \* **Complex trauma exposure** refers to sequential occurrences that are chronic and begin in early childhood.*

# A Child's Behavior is an Iceberg

What you see:



Feeling loved  
Feeling satisfied  
Feeling confused  
Feeling detached  
Feeling secure  
Feeling sad  
Feeling connected  
Feeling angry  
Feeling joyful  
Am I safe? Am I loved?  
Can I do things for myself?  
Am I capable? Am I nourished?  
Do I belong? Am I respected? Do I  
have power? Am I secure? Am I included?  
Are my thoughts valued? Am I understood? Do I matter?

(What's really going on)

# ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences

- \* ACEs are traumatic experiences that occur between birth and age 18.
- \* ACEs include Abuse, Neglect, and Household Dysfunction.
- \* High ACE scores in children affect students' readiness to learn.
- \* High scores lead to higher issues with attendance, learning, social, emotional, and behavioral challenges in the classroom.



# ACE Factors

Abuse	Neglect	Household Dysfunction
Physical	Physical	Mental Illness
Emotional	Emotional	Witnessing Domestic Violence
Sexual		Separation or Divorce
		Incarcerated Relative
		Substance Abuse

# The Impact of High ACE Scores

- \* Higher ACE Scores = Higher Chance of Poor Outcomes
- \* 4 ACE Score = TWO times the Risk of Cancer and Heart Disease
- \* 5 ACE Score = EIGHT times the Risk of Becoming an Alcoholic
- \* 6 or More ACEs = TWENTY Years Lower Life Expectancy

# Facts About Trauma

- \* Before the age of 4, 1 in 4 students will witness or experience a traumatic event.
- \* By age 16, more than 2/3 will have witnessed or experienced trauma.
- \* Nearly 41% of Iowa public school students are living near or below poverty levels.
- \* Between 50-80% of students living in poverty have experienced some form of trauma.

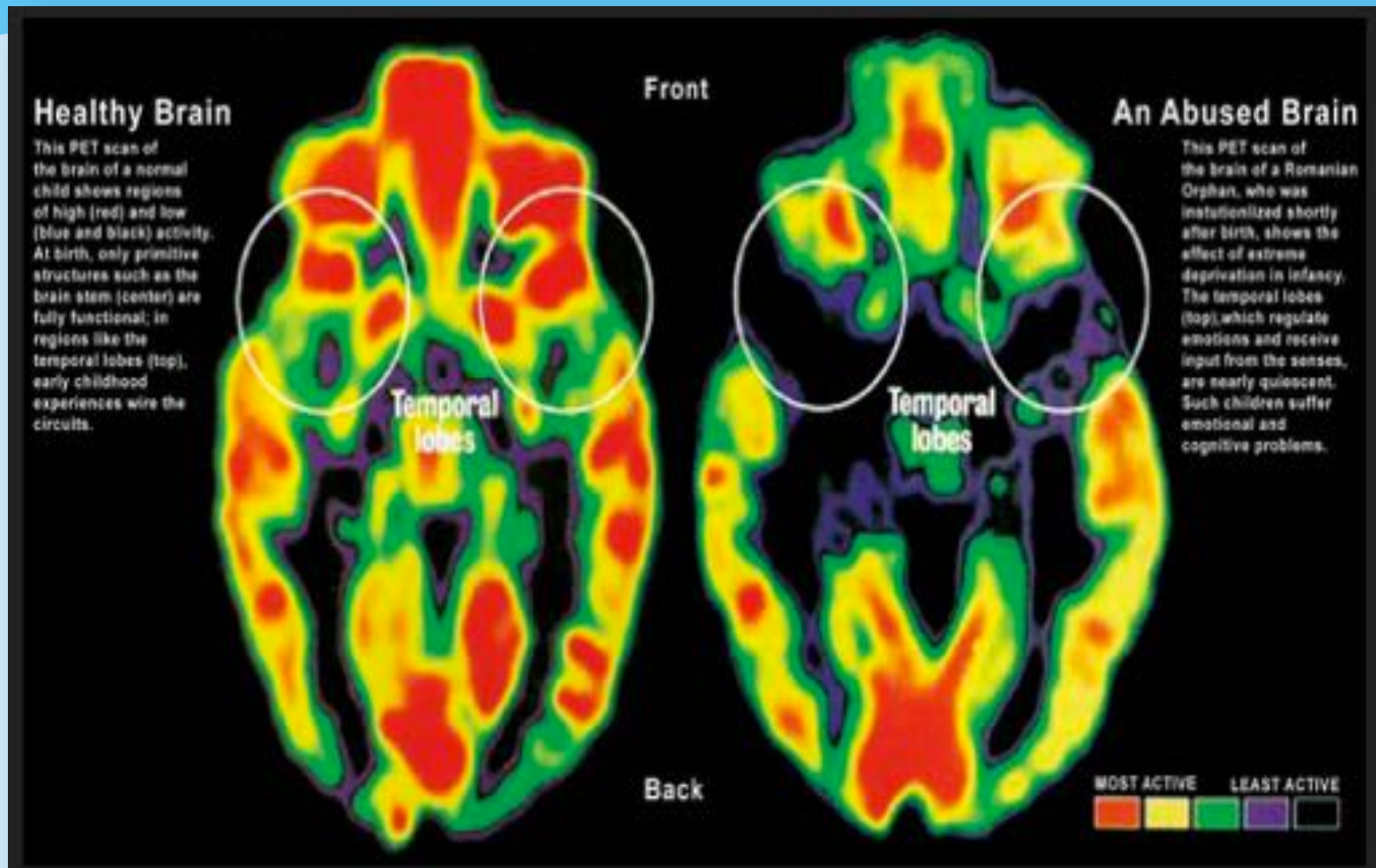
# Effects of Trauma

- \* Trauma is toxic to the brain AND the body.
- \* Trauma changes the brain structure and the processes of the brain.
- \* Good news! The neuroplasticity of the brain allows it to heal.
- \* Bad news! If stress is too severe and ongoing, certain brain structures are irreparably harmed, especially the hippocampus.

# MRI of Two Brains



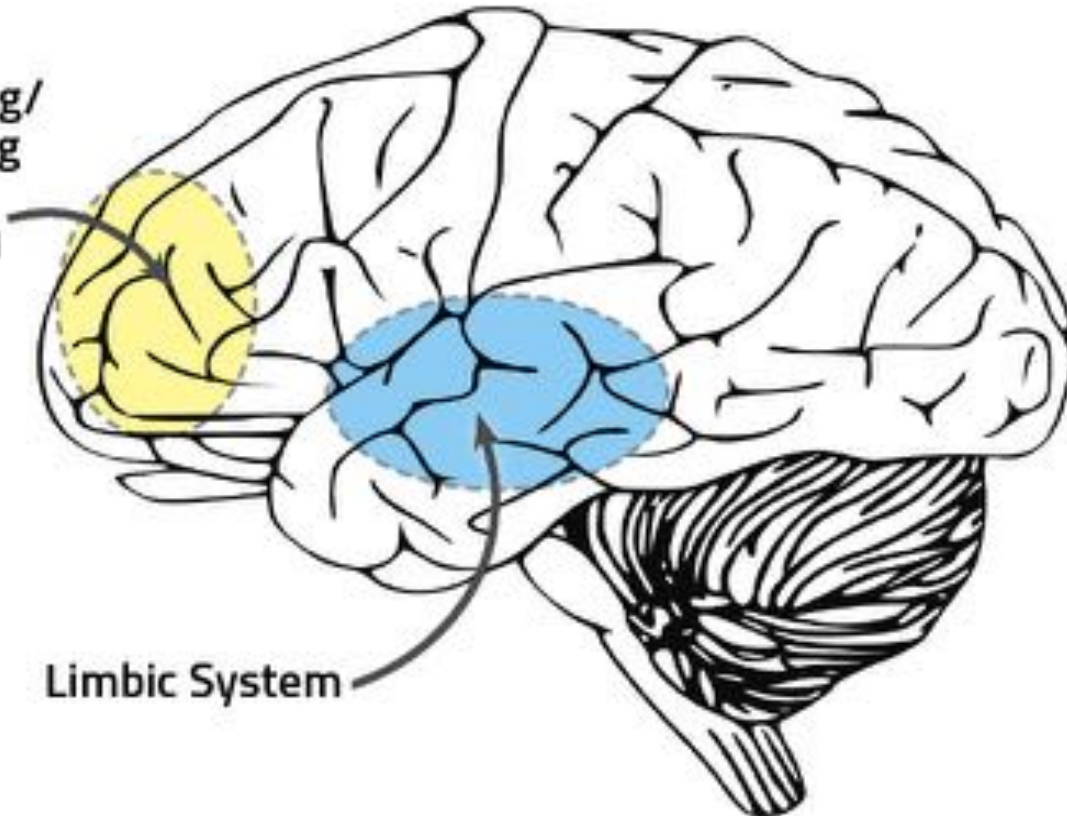
# PET Scan of Two Brains



# The Brain's Response to Stress

**Learning/  
Thinking  
Brain**  
(Prefrontal  
Cortex)

**Limbic System**



# Hand Model of the Brain

- \* **The Upstairs Brain** – is where we make good decisions and do the right thing, even when upset or angry.
- \* **The Downstairs Brain** – is where really big emotions come from (e.g., love, anger, frustration) and is where we do or say things we're not proud of.
- \* **“Calm Down” Strategies** helps activate the upstairs, so we can reason and make good decisions.



# The Stress Response

**WE'RE IN  
SURVIVAL MODE  
RIGHT NOW.**

QUOTEHD.COM

Rick Sweet

# Student of Trauma To Do List

Things to do today

1. get up

2. survive

3. go back to bed

Trauma in Students

# Behaviors We Might Observe in The Classroom

# What It Looks Like In the Classroom

Fight	Flight	Freeze
Acting Out	Withdrawing	Exhibiting Numbness
Behaving Aggressively	Fleeing the Classroom	Refusing to Answering
Acting Silly	Skiping Class	Refusing to Meet Needs
Exhibiting Defiance	Daydreaming	Giving a Blank Look
Being Hyperactive	Seeming to Sleep	Feeling Unable to Move
Arguing	Avoiding Others	
Screaming/Yelling	Hiding or Wandering	
	Becoming Disengaged	

# Trauma in Preschool Students

- \* Separation anxiety or clinginess
- \* Regression or lack of developmental progress
- \* Re-creating the traumatic event in play or drawings
- \* Increased physical complaints
- \* Changes in behavior, sleep, appetite, attention
- \* Increased irritability, anxiety, fears, or worries

# Trauma in Elementary Students

- \* Anxiety or worry about safety of self and others
- \* Changes school performance and/or absenteeism
- \* Distrust of others and difficulty with authority
- \* Statements and questions about death and dying
- \* Behaviors such as angry outbursts, aggression, ADHD, easily gives up, difficulty with peers

# Trauma in Junior High Students

- \* Irritability with friends, teachers, events
- \* Discomfort with feelings, such as revenge
- \* Sleep and/or Eating Disorders
- \* Withdrawal from others or activities
- \* Worries about reoccurrence of violence

# Trauma in High School Students

- \* Negative impact on issues of trust of others
- \* Heightened difficulty with authority and criticism
- \* Increase in impulsivity and risk-taking behavior
- \* Increased risk for substance abuse
- \* Repetitive thoughts/comments about death or dying



# What's Predictable is Preventable

*“ACEs are not a destiny, but a tool for understanding their risks and empower them to make changes for themselves and for their children.”*

~Dr. Robert Anda

The students who challenge their  
teachers the most,



Simple  
Teaching  
Strategies

need their teachers the most.

# How Schools Can Help Them

- \* Ignore the Behavior When Possible, but Not the Child
- \* Not “Excusing” Behavior, Seeking to “Understand”
- \* When the Behavior is Small, Try and Redirect or Redo
- \* Routines, Choices, Clear and Firm Limits
- \* Increased Support and Encouragement
- \* Avoid Power Struggles

# What Students Need at All Levels

- \* A Safe Place for Sharing What Happened
- \* Behaviors May Be Related to Trauma
- \* Sensitivity to Triggers AND Around Anniversaries
- \* Protection in Place For All Students
- \* Adults Who Don't Re-Enact Students' Trauma

# Students with Trauma Also Need

- \* Healthy Relationships - to help brain adapt and recover
- \* Safety - Instead of thinking “What’s the punishment?” try and think “How do I make this child feel safe?”
- \* Predictability - If it’s predictable, it’s preventable.
- \* Disciplining - without harsh language or shaming

Specific Classroom Strategies

# Interventions for ALL Students

# Building “Resilience” Using The ARC+ Model

- \* **A... Attachment** – Relationship: Feeling Loved
- \* **R... Regulation** – Feelings, Thinking Skills
- \* **C... Competence** – Strengths, Successes
- \* **+... Community** - Belongingness

# Classroom Strategies to Promote Attachment

## ~Relationship~

- \* Create a Safe, Nurturing, Structured Classroom with Limits
- \* Greet Each Student by Name With a Smiling Face
- \* Get to Know Them AND Their Parents
- \* Model Empathy – Listen, Understand, Help Them Grow
- \* Involve Them in the Operations of the Classroom



# Classroom Strategies to Promote Regulation

~Feelings & Thinking~

- \* Maintain Regular Routines and Structure
- \* Model Emotional Skills – Gratitude, Respect, Empathy
- \* Talk in a Calm/Quiet Voice, At or Below Their Eye Level
- \* Mindfulness and Relaxation Activities - [GoNoodle.com](http://GoNoodle.com)
- \* Movement - Stretching, Yoga

# Classroom Strategies to Promote Competence

## ~Strengths & Successes~

- \* Provide Timely Feedback, Be Predictable
- \* Focus on Their Strengths, Build on Them
- \* Break Down Written Instructions
- \* Use Post-It Notes on Desks and/or Visual Signals
- \* Vary Teaching Strategies - Between Eyes, Ears, and Skin

# Classroom Strategies to Promote Community

## ~Belongingness~

- \* Assigned Seating – “A Place Where They Belong”
- \* Post Photos of Students Around the Classroom
- \* Provide Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Learning
- \* Have Lunch With Small Groups of Students
- \* NO Tolerance for Hurtful Teasing or Bullying
- \* Student CARE Teams

# School-Wide Strategies

- \* Safe and Secure School Grounds and Buildings
- \* School Staff Clearly Articulates and Implements Expectations and Procedures
- \* Family Members Feel Welcomed as Partners
- \* School Staff Models Prosocial Behaviors, Including Kindness and Respect for ALL Students and ALL Staff Members
- \* The “FIVE Positive Greetings” Challenge

# Crisis De-escalation

- \* Avoid Adding to an Upset Student's Stress
- \* Follow These Guidelines:
  1. Remain Calm
  2. Focus on Connection, Not Control
  3. Communicate at the Brain's Level of Functioning
  4. Let the Student Talk
  5. When Calm, Collaborate Consequences

# School Counseling Interventions

The slide features a solid blue background. At the bottom, there are several overlapping, wavy, light blue shapes that create a sense of movement and depth, resembling stylized hills or waves.

# Classroom Counseling Ideas

- \* Teach Progressive Muscle Relaxation Techniques
- \* Practice Visual Imagery Relaxation
- \* Use the Upstairs/Downstairs Brain as a Discussion Tool
- \* Teach I-Statements
- \* Reinforce the Importance of Asking for Help

# Counselor-Led Classroom Interventions

- \* Calming Corner – *“The Chill Zone”*
  - \* A comfortable place in the classroom where students can go to calm down.
- \* *Fix the Behavior – “The Think Spot”*
  - \* A place in the classroom where students can reflect on and fix their mistakes.



# The Chill Zone

## Chill Zone Procedures

- 1. Signal that you need to go the Chill Zone.
- 2. Wait for the teacher to signal you can go.
- 3. Walk silently to the chill zone.
- 4. Sign in.
- 5. Choose one item to use from the tool-kit.
- 6. Begin timer.
- 7. Chill.
- 8. Once timer is up, clean up and quietly return to your seat.

# The Think Spot

## FIX IT PROCEDURE

1. My teacher shows me this signal.



2. I think about what I am doing and what I need to do.



3. I show my choice to my teacher



and fix it right away.

4. I stay with the group, learn, and avoid trouble.



# THINK SPOT PROCEDURE

1. I walk to the think spot.



2. I sit in the chair or spot.



3. I am silent.



4. I do my paper.



5. I turn and face the teacher.



6. I join the class when I am invited back by the teacher.



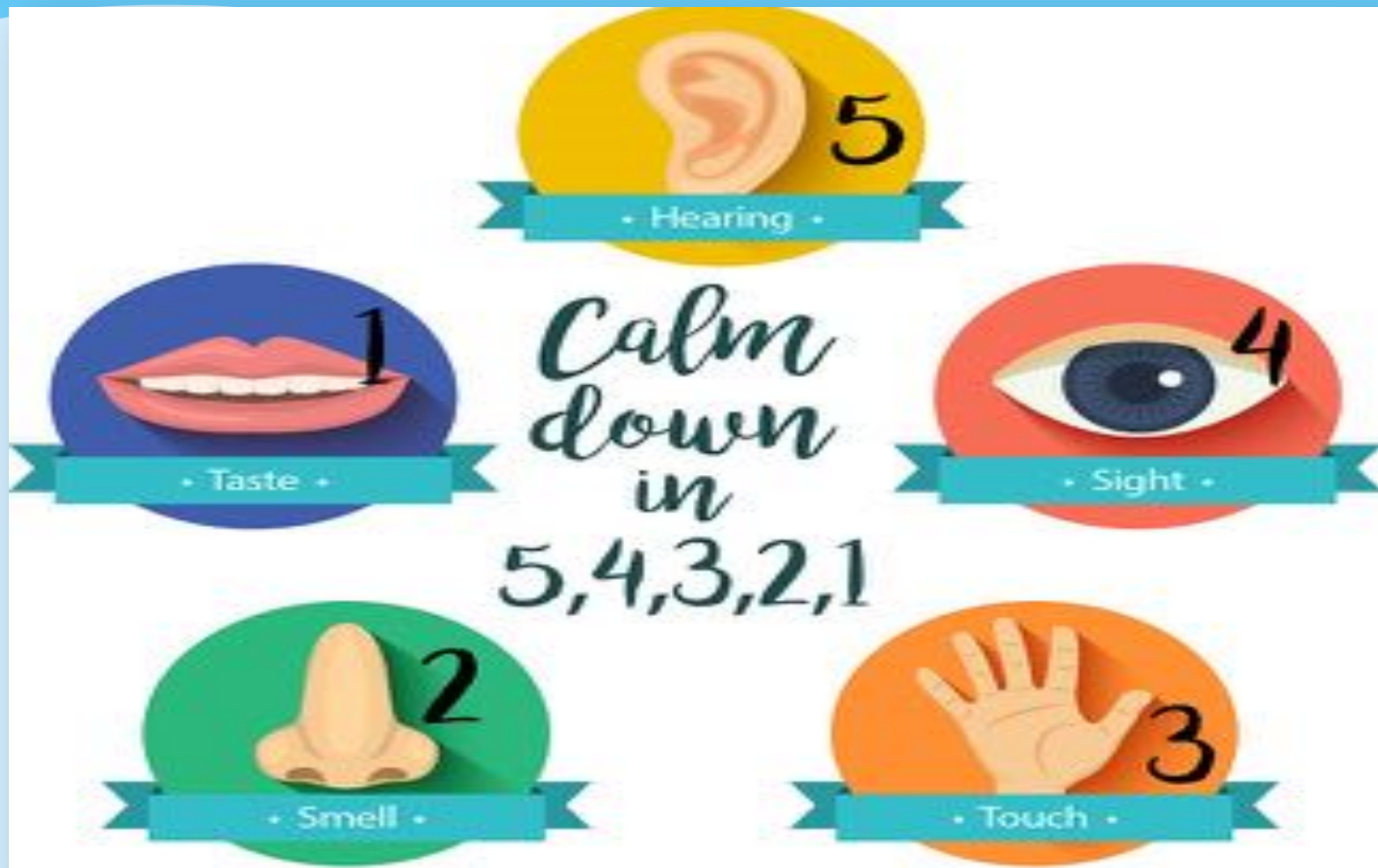
# Individual and Small Group Counseling Interventions

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# Individual/Group Interventions

- \* Grounding Activity Cards
- \* Create a Long List of Calming Strategies
- \* Focused Breathing, Relaxation, Imagery
- \* Shoulder/Knee Pats
- \* Art – “Can you draw it?”
- \* Let’s Change the Ending – Storytelling

# Mindfulness – Calming the Senses



# Window of Tolerance

## Hyper-Arousal

Emotional overwhelm, panic, feeling unsafe, angry, racing thoughts, anxiety, etc.

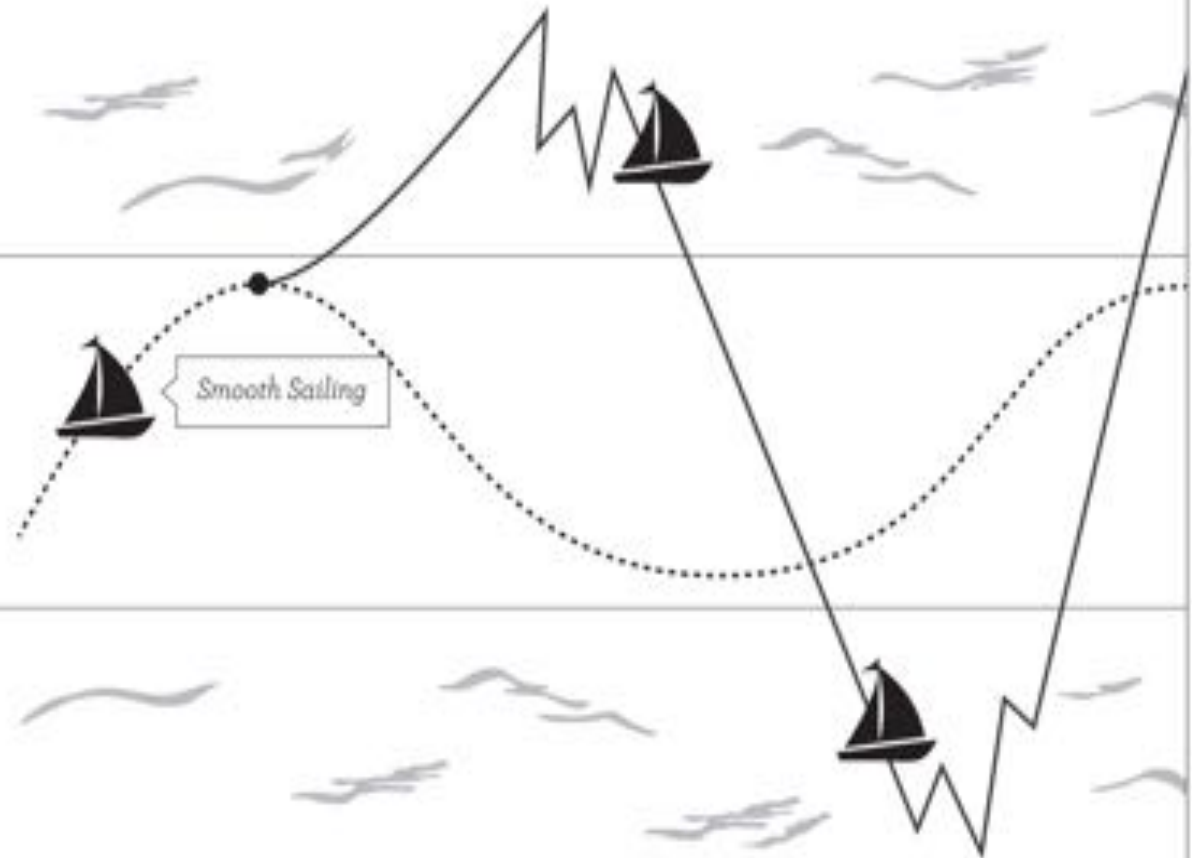
## Window of Tolerance

OPTIMAL AROUSAL ZONE

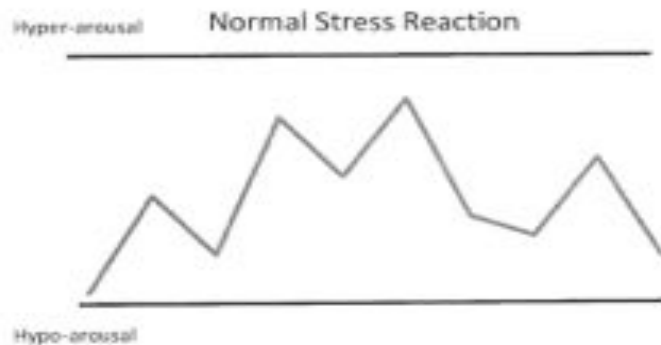
Carrying on with daily life in the river of well-being

## Hypo-Arousal

Numb, no feelings or energy, can't think, shut down, ashamed, disconnected, depression, etc.

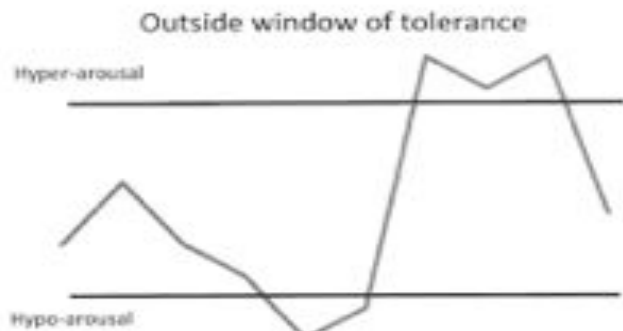


## Window of Tolerance



Three things to help when someone is hyper aroused:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

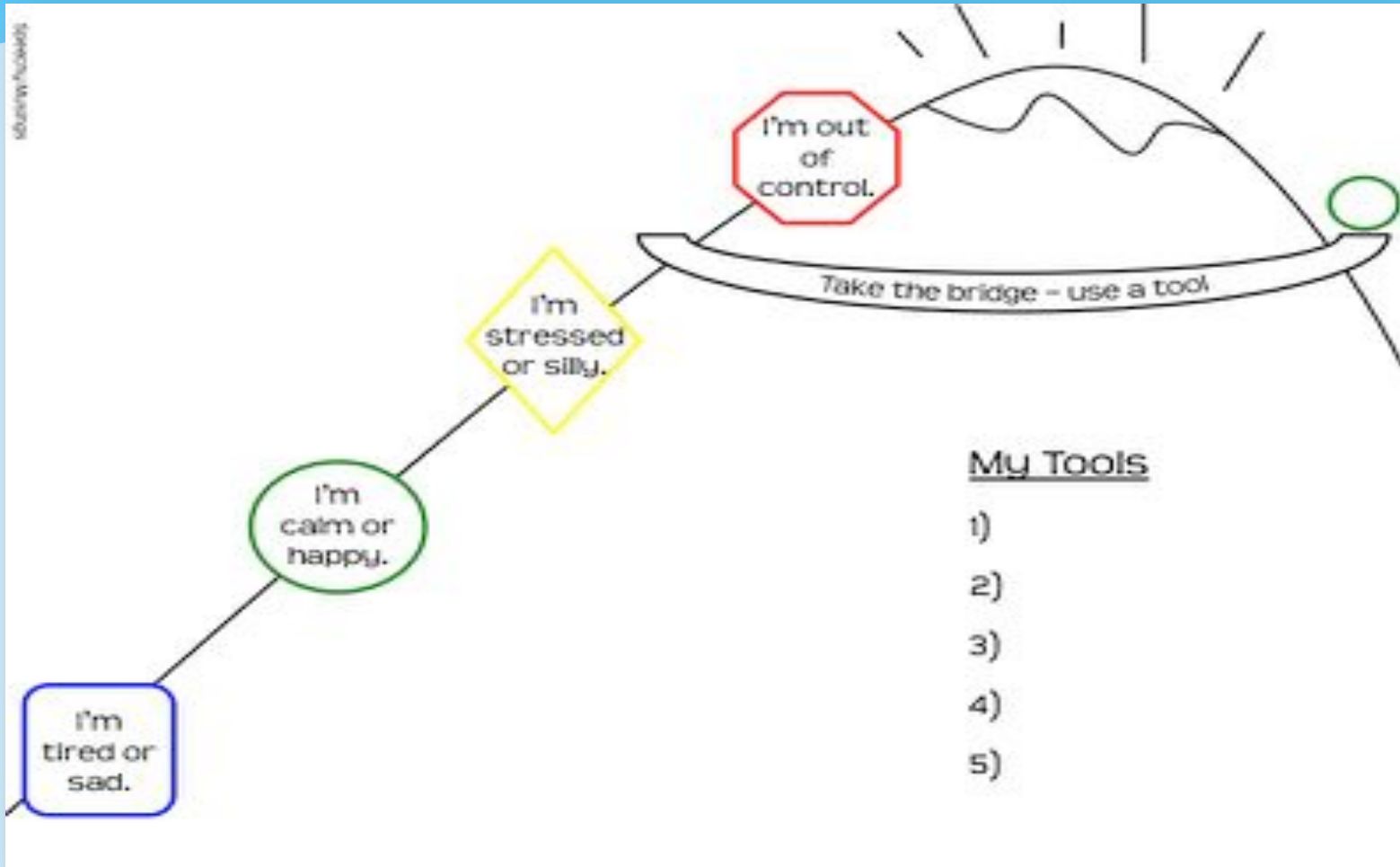


Three things to help when someone is hypo aroused:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



# Track Your Zone



"Be a rainbow  
in someone  
else's cloud."

-MAYA ANGELOU

# Some Helpful Phrases

- \* “I am here; you are safe.”
- \* “It’s scary AND...”
- \* “What do you need from me?”
- \* “I don’t even know what to say right now. I’m just so glad you told me.”

# The School Counselor's Role

- \* Educate the Child on Normal Trauma Reactions
- \* Increase Social Problem Solving Flexibility
- \* Respect Cultural and Spiritual Perspectives on Trauma
- \* Help Them With Safety Plans
- \* Provide an Expectation of Full Recovery – Give Them Hope!

# Clarifying Our Role

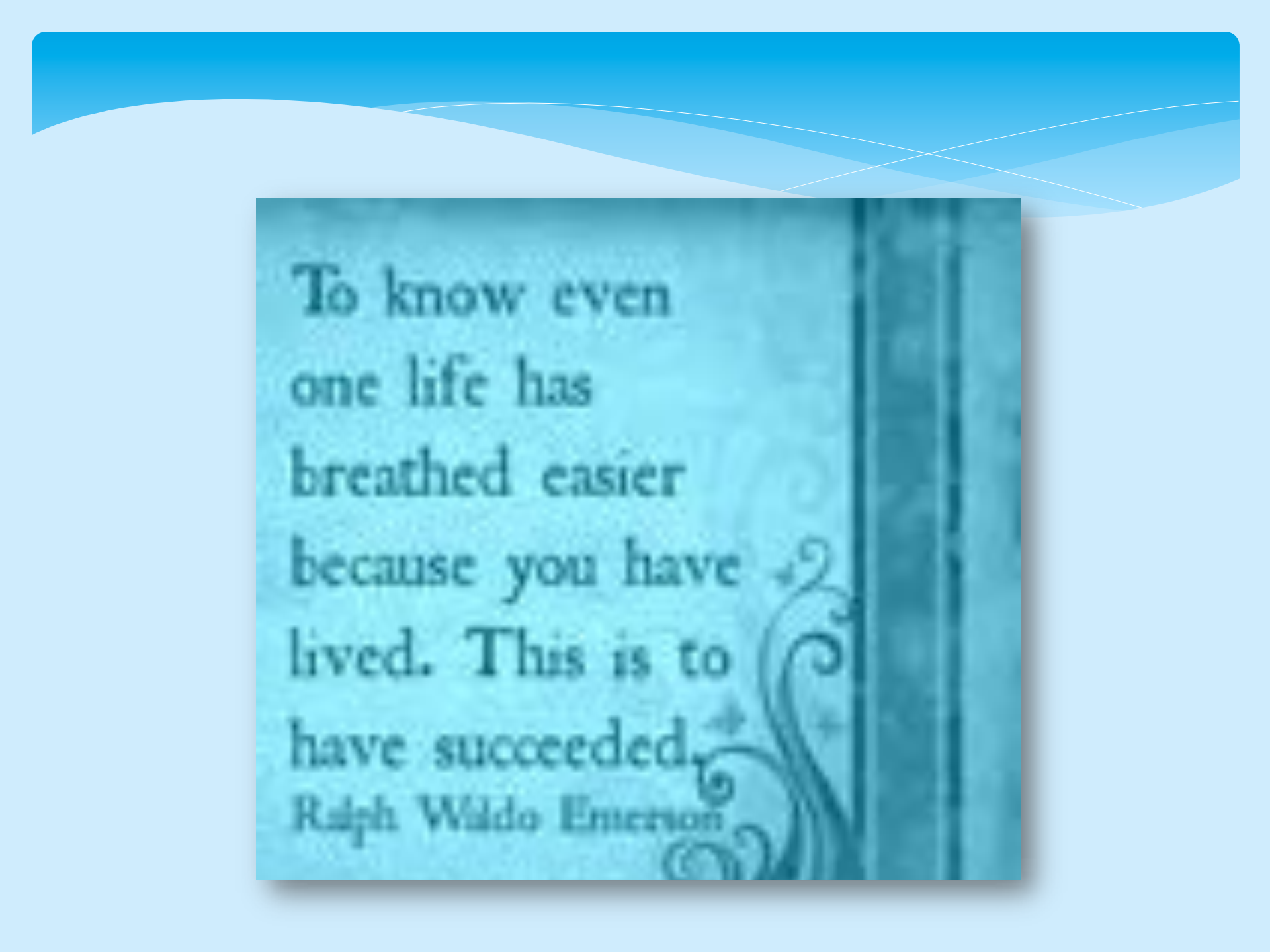
- \* Direct Exploration of the Trauma is NOT Appropriate for the School Counseling Environment
- \* Offer Referrals for Effective Trauma-Focused Therapy
  - \* Know Available Resources in Your Area
  - \* Which therapists are trained in EMDR or TF-CBT?
  - \* Keep Referral Lists Up To Date

# Taking Care of YOU

- \* Stressed brains can't learn, AND stressed brains can't teach.
  - \* Meditate, talk, yoga, exercise, calming strategies
  - \* Relaxation, time for self, family, friends, hobbies
- \* Know your stressors and triggers
  - \* Exhaustion, rigid expectations, previous trauma, fears
  - \* Ask for backup, if you feel like “losing it”!
- \* Be a smart lifeguard and don't jump in to save them, throw them a lifeline!

# Things to Remember

- \* “Survival Mode” is Not the “Learning Mode”
- \* Our Goal – Minimize Triggers & Increase Learning
- \* Not Seeking Attention, Seeking Connections
- \* Forever Changed, Not Forever Damaged
- \* There’s Always A Window
- \* Tribute Speech



To know even  
one life has  
breathed easier  
because you have  
lived. This is to  
have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson



# Resources

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