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JESSICA SINARSKI

● TRUST ● HEAL ● GROW ●

Author

- *Riley the Brave* therapeutic book series
- *Raily el Valiente*
- *Hello, Anger*
- *What's Inside Your Backpack?*

Consultant and Trainer

- Continuing education provider –
- deep dives, topical webinars, live events

Clinical Supervisor

- Group supervision for therapists and social workers

Founder of BraveBrains

- A resource and training platform for PreK-12 educators – equipping staff, empowering students

DISCLOSURE

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Superheroes are born from adversity...

Trauma: Not sure I have the resources to survive.

Chronic/toxic stress and trauma set my nervous system up for a life of survival ON MY OWN.

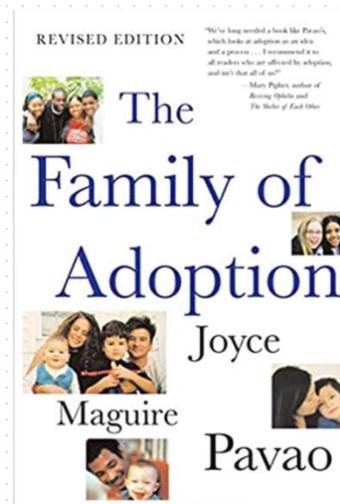
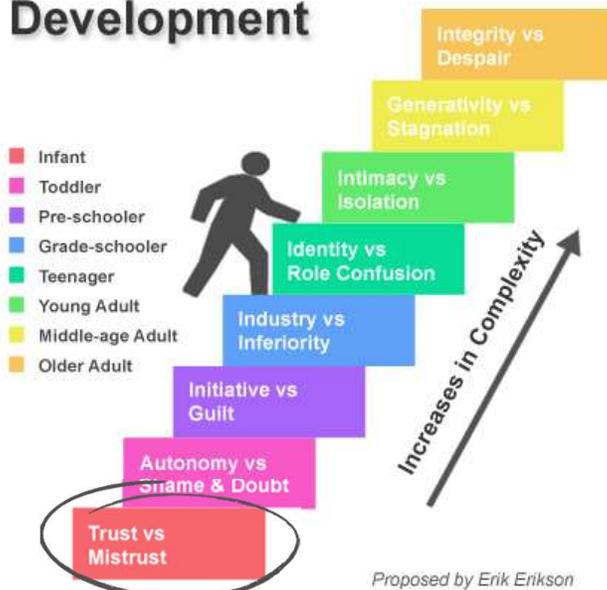
Trying to survive on my own can lead to some behavior that others don't like, and that might not serve me well in the long run.

Healing relational trauma happens in relationship.



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Stages of Psychosocial Development



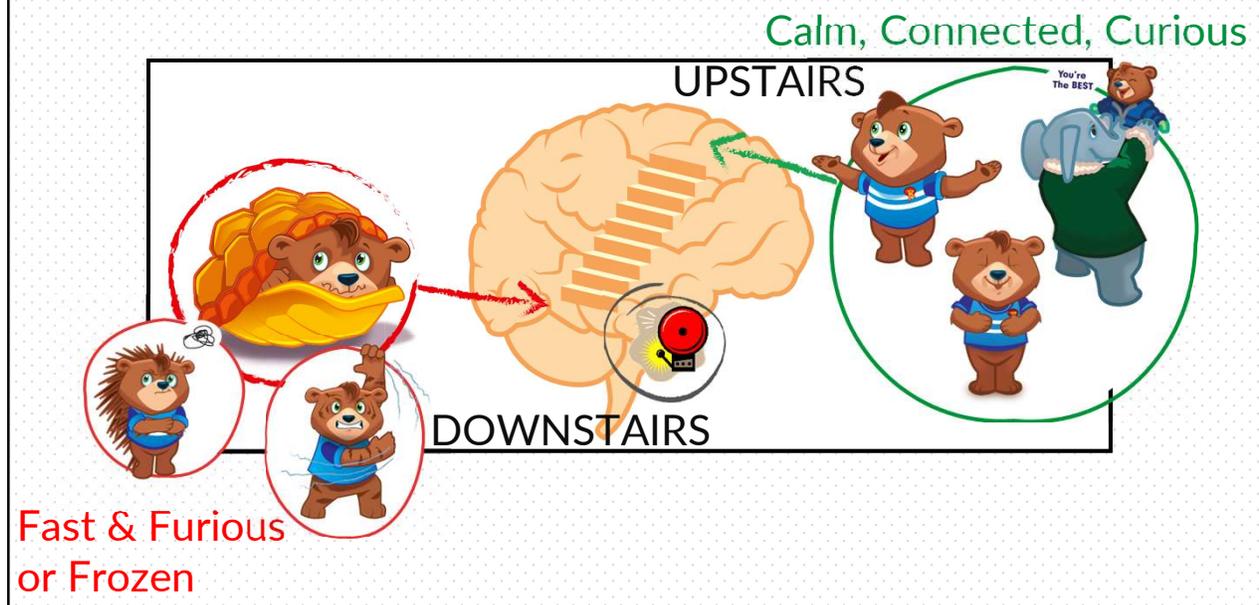
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Increased risk of Mistrust:

- ✓ Pre-natal stress and trauma
- ✓ Attachment rupture
- ✓ Toxic stress, poverty, community violence
- ✓ Pre-verbal grief and loss
- ✓ Sensory processing challenges
- ✓ Developmental delays
- ✓ Environmental stressors
- ✓ Experiencing racism or other forms of oppression and marginalization

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The Brain's Operating Systems:



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When we have well-developed highways to the downstairs brain...

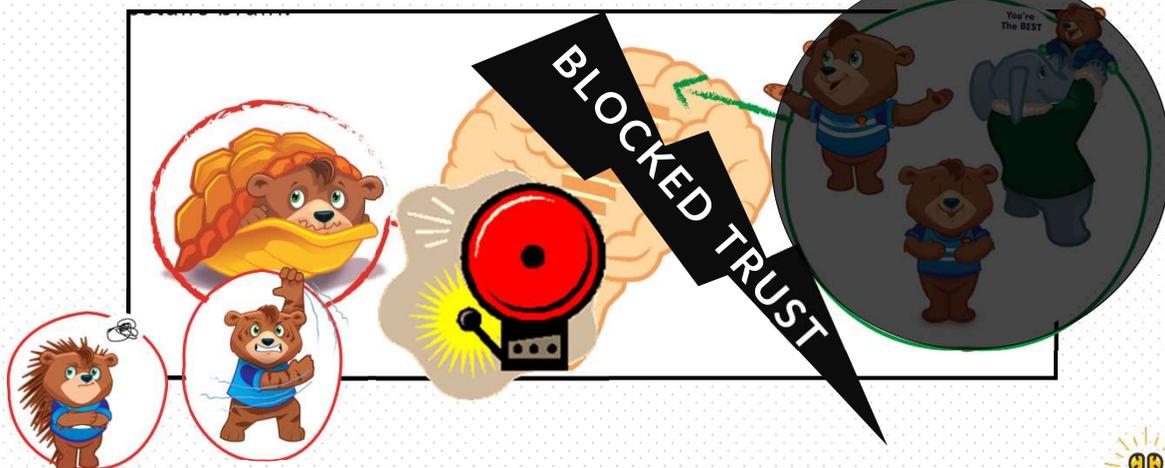
- Lying / Sneaking / Stealing
- Hoarding / Food Issues
- Never Satisfied
- Disrespect / Back Talk
- Automatic "No"
- Sexual acting out
- Running Away
- Difficulty Following Directions
- Meltdowns / Tantrums
- Aggression
- Withdrawal
- Divisiveness
- Bedtime Battles
- Impulsivity / Fidgetiness
- Difficulty Paying Attention
- Seems Selfish / Manipulative



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The Brain Adapts to Survive!

Calm, Connected, Curious

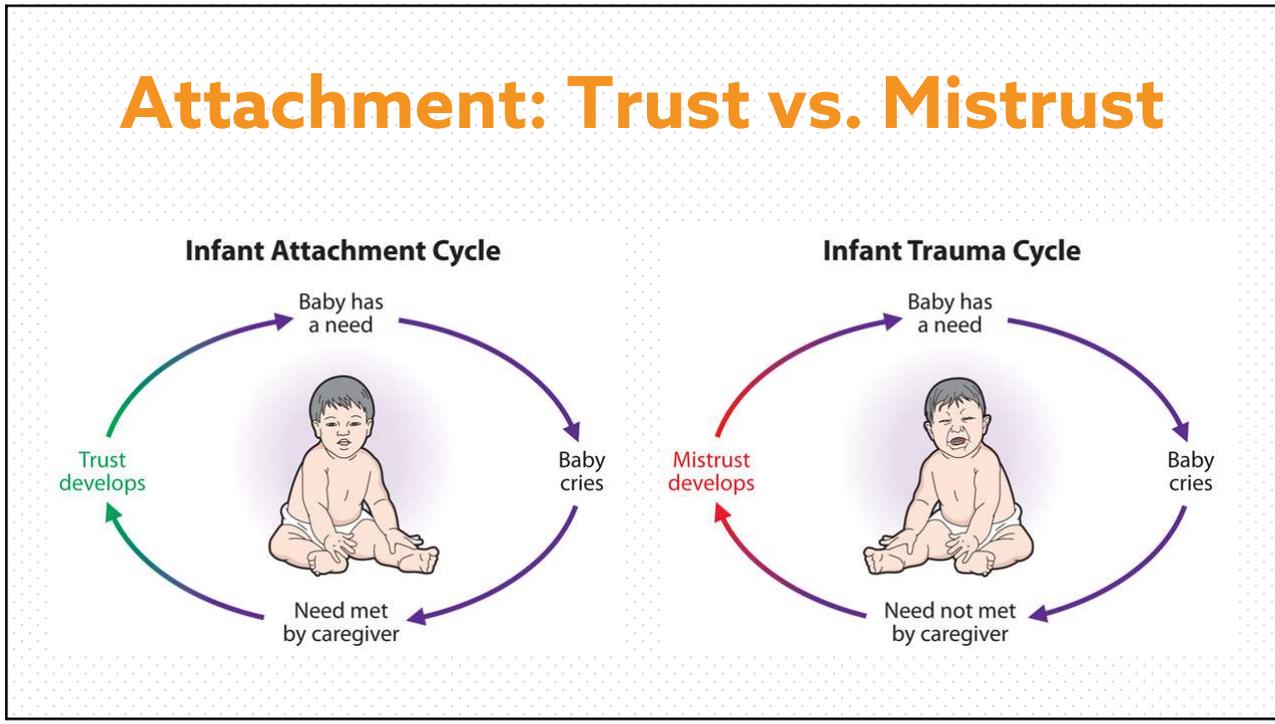


Fast & Furious...or Frozen



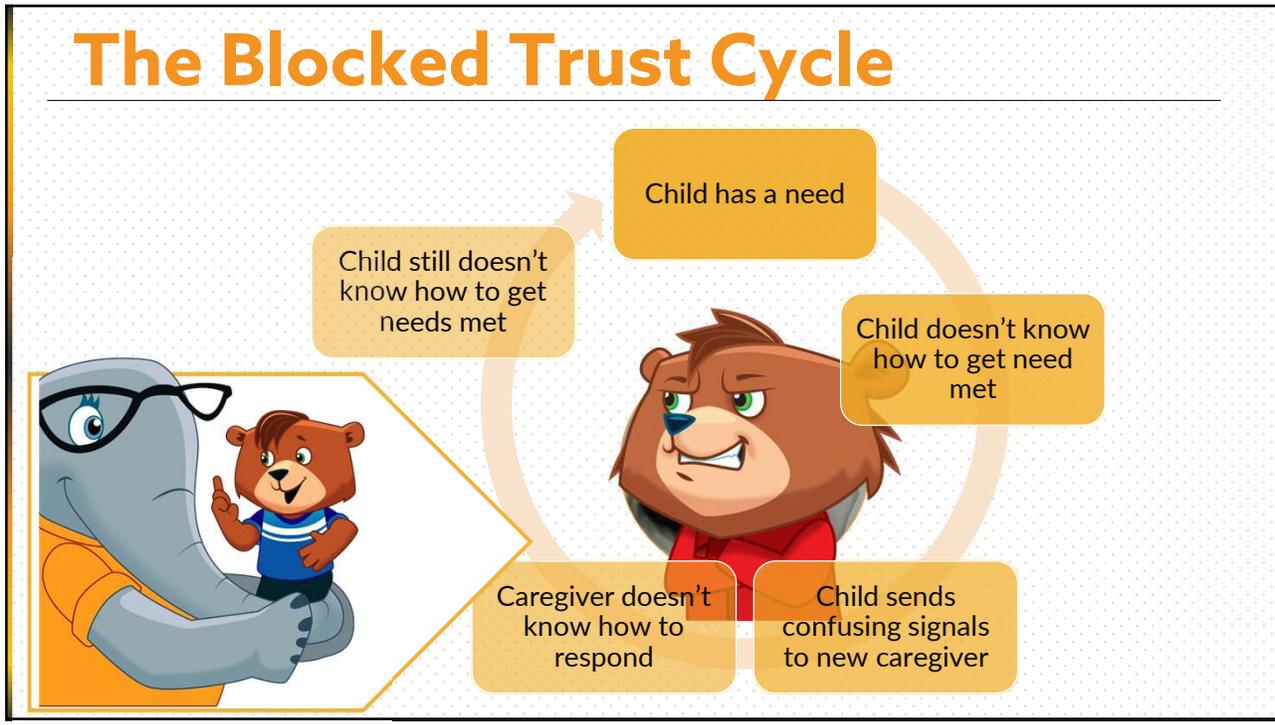
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Attachment: Trust vs. Mistrust



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The Blocked Trust Cycle



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What's happening in the brain?



MORE SELF-DEFENSE / PROTECTION:

- Hypervigilance
- Implicit memories and “false alarms”
- Safety blindness
- Freeze – Automatic orienting to danger
- Heightened need for control
- Resisting (mistrusting) authority, automatic “NO!”
- Self-provisioning (Squirrel moments)



Hughes and Baylin, 2016

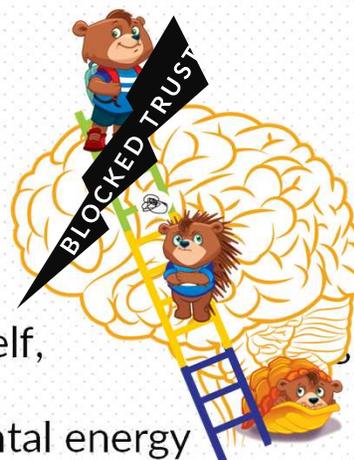


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What's happening in the brain?

SUPPRESS SOCIAL EMOTIONS AND EXEC FUNCTION:

- Suppress social pain
- Increase opioid release
- Suppress empathy
- Suppress guilt and remorse
- Suppress curiosity and delight
- Suppress “reality testing” – lying to self, to survive
- Suppress complexity – too much mental energy



Hughes and Baylin, 2016

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Wired for solo survival!

“Having a Moment”

 I'm having a **PORCUPINE moment** when I'm grumpy, prickly toward others or stuck in my "downstairs brain."

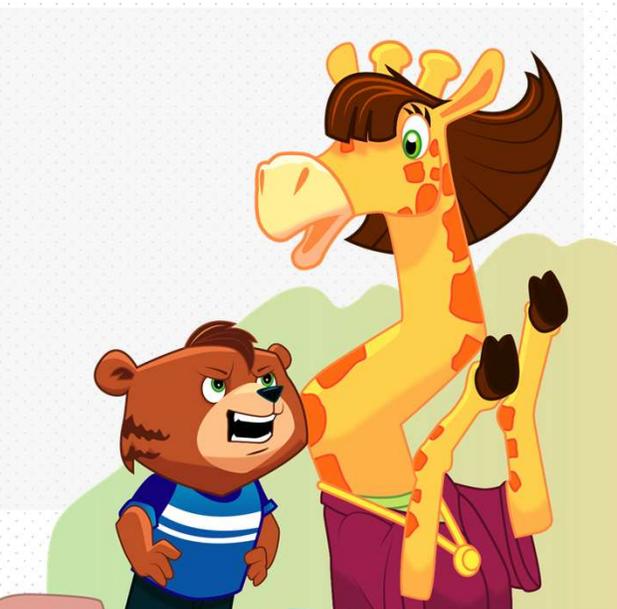
 I'm having a **SQUIRREL moment** when I don't want to share, take other people's things or want everything for myself.

 I'm having a **TIGER moment** when I hurt people or damage things, act big & scary or when I use loud, mean words.

 I'm having a **CHAMELEON moment** when I try to blend in too much, copy others or don't let people say nice things about me.

 I'm having a **TURTLE moment** when I keep to myself, won't talk or have a hard time letting someone help me.

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Learn more at www.BraveBrains.com

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Trauma changes the brain.
The brain controls behavior.
Parents' brains respond to children's behavior.
Trauma begins to change caregivers' brains.

It's a 

BRAIN

Thing!

-Jessica Sinarski



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Blocked Care

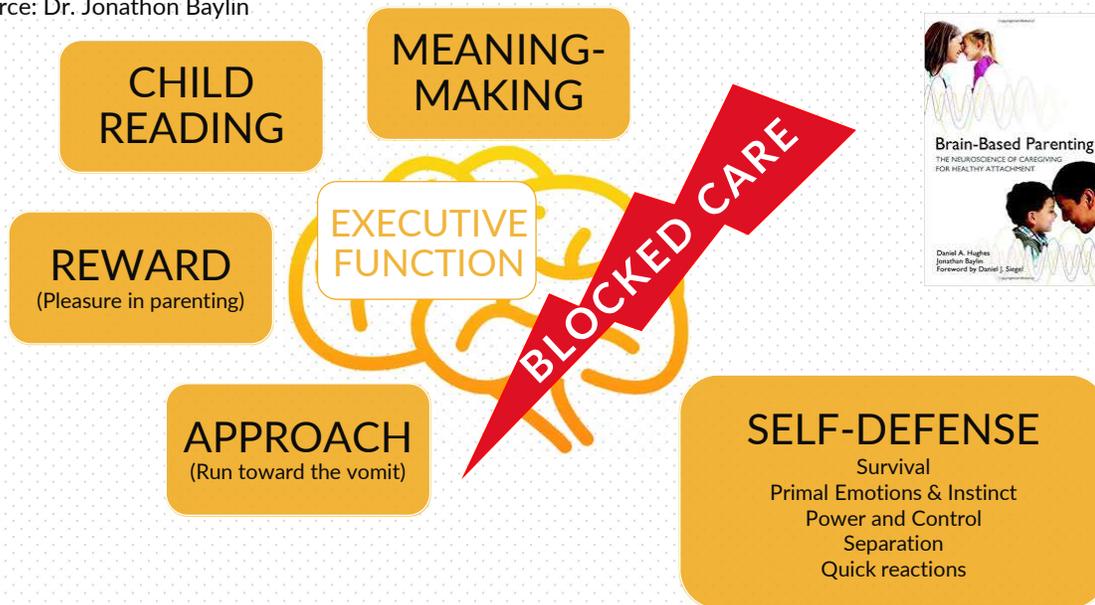
- Too much stress suppresses the higher brain functions needed for caregiving.
- A self-defensive or self-protective stance toward the child.
- Apathy – going through the motions of caretaking but without emotion or nurturing
- It's not about providing effective care, but understanding that caring is breaking their heart.
- Heightened rejection sensitivity



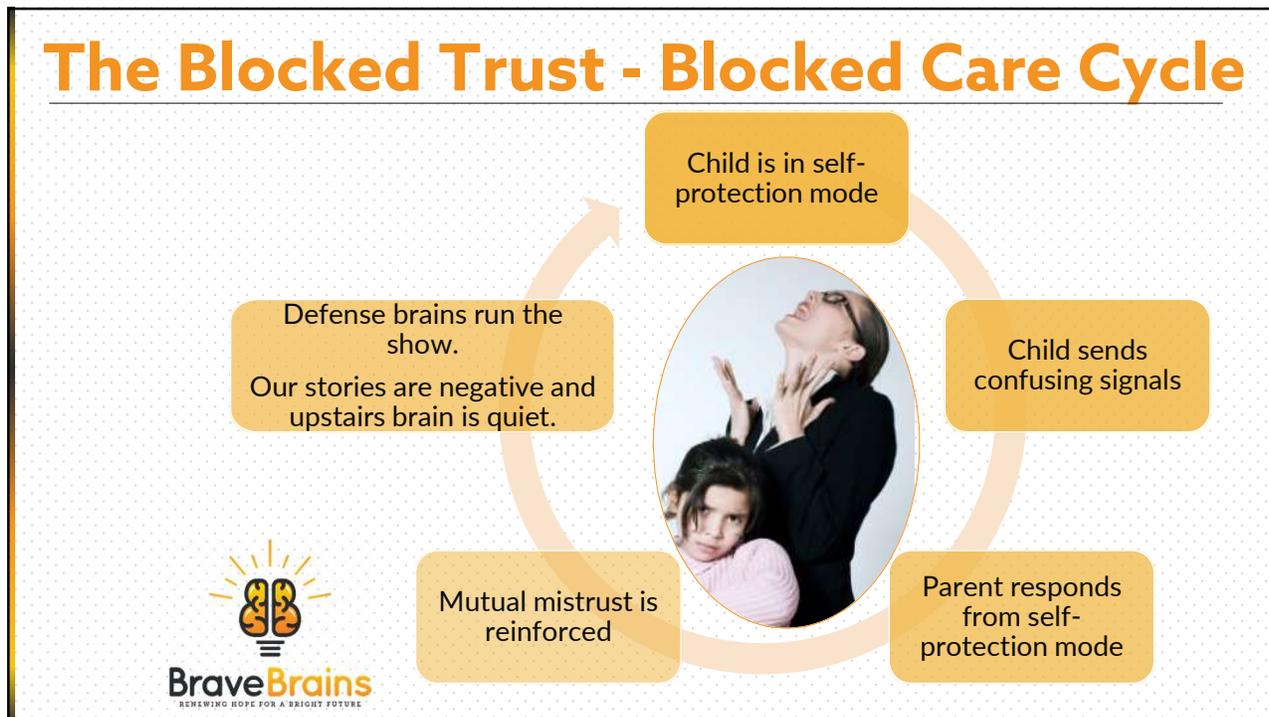
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Five Parent Brain Systems

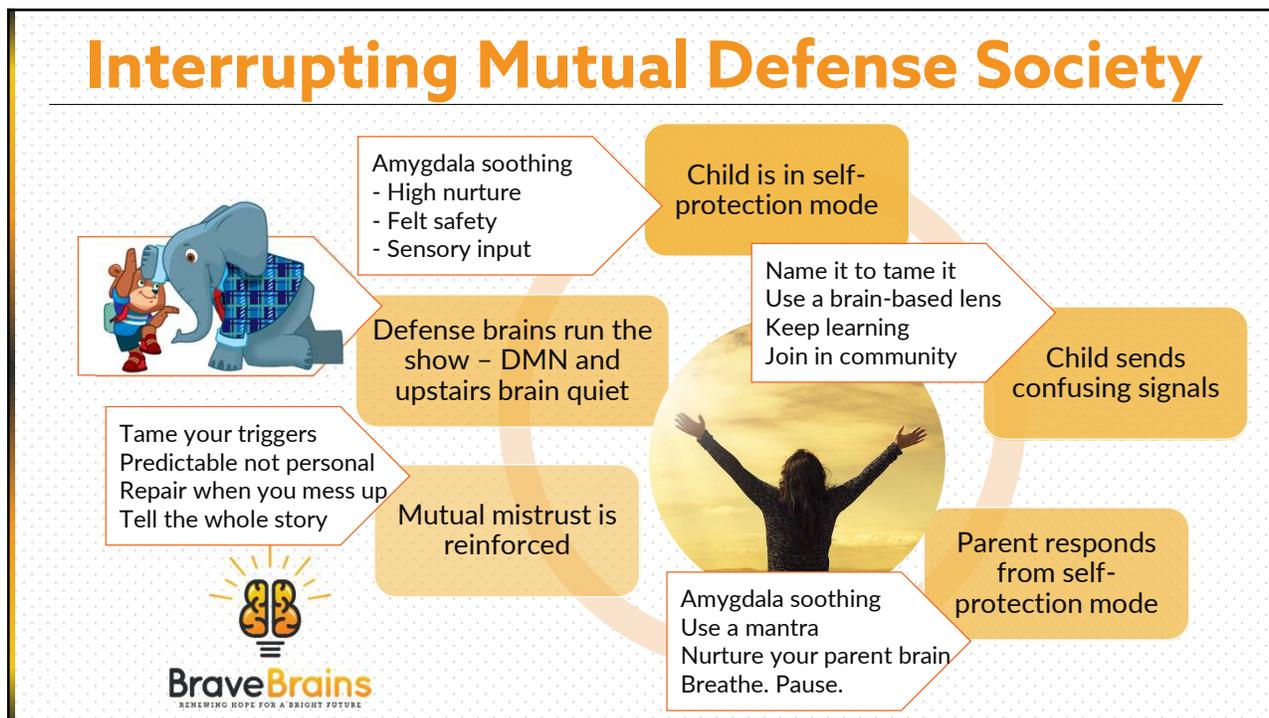
Source: Dr. Jonathon Baylin



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Reaching a brain wired for defense:

- High nurture
 - Physical needs
 - Physical and emotional safety
 - Felt safety
 - Sensory input
- Structure always applied from a base of disarming fear
 - Check in with *my* brain as a parent or caregiver
 - Affirm the emotions (not the behavior)
 - Keep curiosity and compassion alive
 - Don't take negative behavior personally. Remember... it's a brain thing!



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FELT SAFETY:

Deep in the brain

- EYES: Warmth in the eyes
- VOICE: “Mother-ese,” playful or calm tone of voice (one exception with the “tiger moments”)
- TOUCH: Opportunities for safe, playful contact
- BODY LANGUAGE: Open, low, non-threatening
- SENSORY: Rocking, deep pressure, jumping, rolling up in a blanket, noise-cancelling headphones...

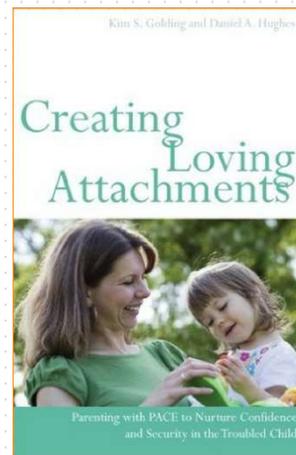
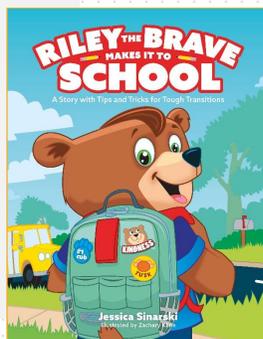


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(S)PACE

Developed by Daniel A. Hughes

- (Self-regulation)
- Playfulness
- Acceptance
- Curiosity
- Empathy



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Getting to know PACE

- More of a way of interacting than a specific technique.
- Important for parents and professionals alike.
- Not linear – mix up those letters as needed
- Impossible to do all the time – there's no such thing as perfect parenting. Repair is an important part of the process
- Powerful for both PACE-ee and PACE-er



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PLAYFULNESS

A state of active enjoyment when with another person that expresses a sense of lightness and hope that all problems can be sorted out together; that nothing is too big.

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Play on the brain:

Nurture oxytocin recovery with safe eye contact, playful touch, and moments of mutual enjoyment!

“Healing Power of Play” at RileytheBrave.org in the Parents Corner.



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ACCEPTANCE

- It is not acceptance of the behavior; it is acceptance of what is underneath...actively communicating that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behavior.
- It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, their inner experience. The child's inner life simply *is*; it is not *right* or *wrong*.
- You can be firm in limiting behavior while at the same time accepting the motives for the behavior.



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Acceptance



- Tone of voice matters – control or connection?
- Look for and name the feeling when possible
- Co-regulate the big feelings

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CURIOSITY

PAUSE before reacting to
“undesirable behavior.”



- Some fascination and a desire to understand before evaluating
- Eventually leads to knowing a child from the inside out

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“She felt understood, and that was a big win.”



- “I wonder if...”
- “It seems like...”
- “When I was little, I really wanted _____ too. I would get so mad. I wonder if that was part of that big tiger moment.”
- “We are going to figure this out together!”



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Curiosity

- With curiosity the adults are conveying their intention to simply understand *why* and to help the child with understanding.
- The adult's intentions are to truly understand and help the child, not to lecture or convey that the child's inner life is *wrong* in some way.
- It is showing a child we are willing to step out of ourselves and allow them to guide us for a moment.
- **Instead of asking:** Why did you do that?
- **Try asking:** What do you think was going on? What do you think that was about? I wonder if...
- Not building a case but understanding the inner world.

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EMPATHY

- I hear you.
- I get how that feels really crummy.
- I wish this could be different too.
- That *is* really sad/scary/hard.
- Ugggghhhh



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Recipe for Blocked Care Recovery?

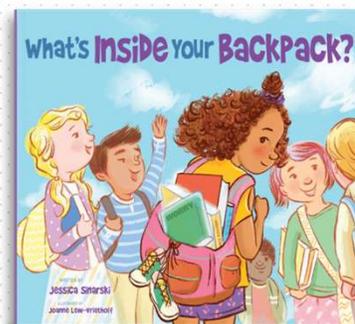
- **Self-Regulation**
Neurobiological self-care and burnout prevention:
physical health, sleep, grief, mental breaks, gratitude, etc.
- **Playfulness**
Joy plan, laughter, little moments of fun
- **Acceptance**
A community that “gets it” without getting stuck
- **Curiosity**
Someone who will non-judgmentally explore
- **Empathy / Compassion**
From self, from trusted others



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Tools for the Toolbox

- Chase the fear
- Celebrate strength
- Learn your child’s language of attachment
- Both / And
- What story are you telling yourself
about your child? About yourself?
- Check the facts
- Imagine with hope



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CLIMBING OUT OF MY DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

PORCUPINE
I FEEL GRUMPY
I WILL REMIND MY BRAIN THAT I CAN NOTICE GOOD THINGS TODAY

TIGER
I FEEL MAD
I WILL REMIND MY BRAIN THAT I CAN SAY OR WALK OR BREATHE OUT MY FEELINGS WITH NO HURTS

SQUIRREL
I FEEL JEALOUS
I WILL REMIND MY BRAIN THAT THIS IS A SAFE PLACE AND I HAVE ENOUGH

CHAMELEON
I FEEL NERVOUS
I WILL REMIND MY BRAIN THAT I AM IMPORTANT, AND THERE ARE SAFE CRITTERS WHO LIKE ME

TURTLE
I FEEL SCARED
I WILL REMIND MY BRAIN THAT I CAN ASK FOR HELP

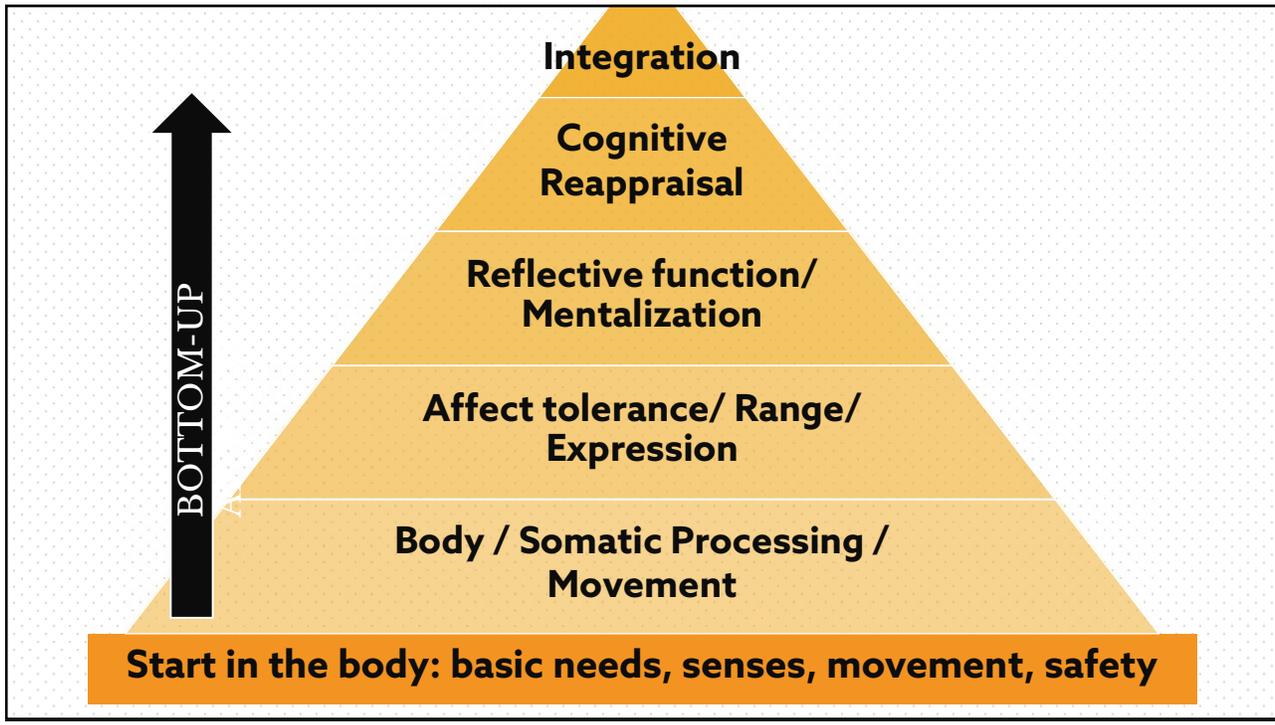
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BraveBrains
AWAKENING ATTACHMENT IN FOSTER, ADOPTIVE & KINSHIP FAMILIES

Strengthen Parent Brains

- Provide felt safety – be a safe big critter for *them*!
- Give brain-based language
- Count the wins
- Nurture play, laughter, and healthy touch
- Connection before/with correction!

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Be a safe big critter...

“Simply put, caregivers, therapists, and teachers and all who want to earn the trust of children with blocked trust have to **become messengers of safety, especially when the child is least expecting kind eyes, kind voice, good touch.**”

- Hughes and Baylin (2016) p. 101



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Why we're here...

- ▶ Reduce disruptive behavior
- ▶ Keep parents engaged
- ▶ Foster lasting connections



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What are you taking with you today?



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f @JessicaSinarski



Questions? Email info@BraveBrains.com

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