

# TRAUMA AND WORKING WITH VULNERABLE FAMILIES: RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING

# What is Trauma?

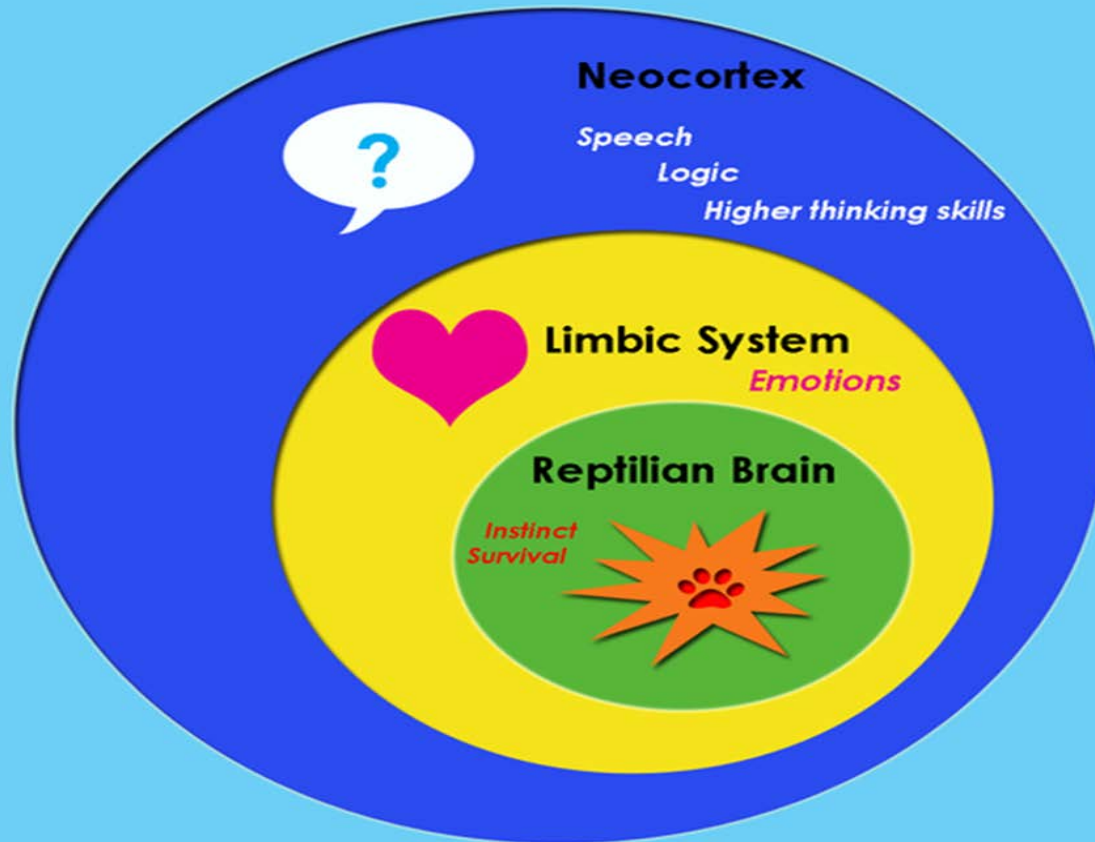
- **An event (or series of events) that can cause a person to experience harm in a physical and/or emotional way.**
- **Can have adverse effects in a person's functioning.**
- **Comes from the Greek word meaning wound.**

# What Does Trauma Look Like?



# Trauma Affects the Brain

## The Triune Brain Model



# Trauma Affects Mind/Body



# Underlying Factors

## Intrinsic

- ▣ Temperament
- ▣ Prior Exposure
- ▣ Self-Esteem
- ▣ Self-Efficacy
- ▣ Adaptive Skills

## Extrinsic

- ▣ Culture
- ▣ Relationships
- ▣ Social Support
- ▣ Systems
- ▣ Environment

# Racism Contributes to Trauma

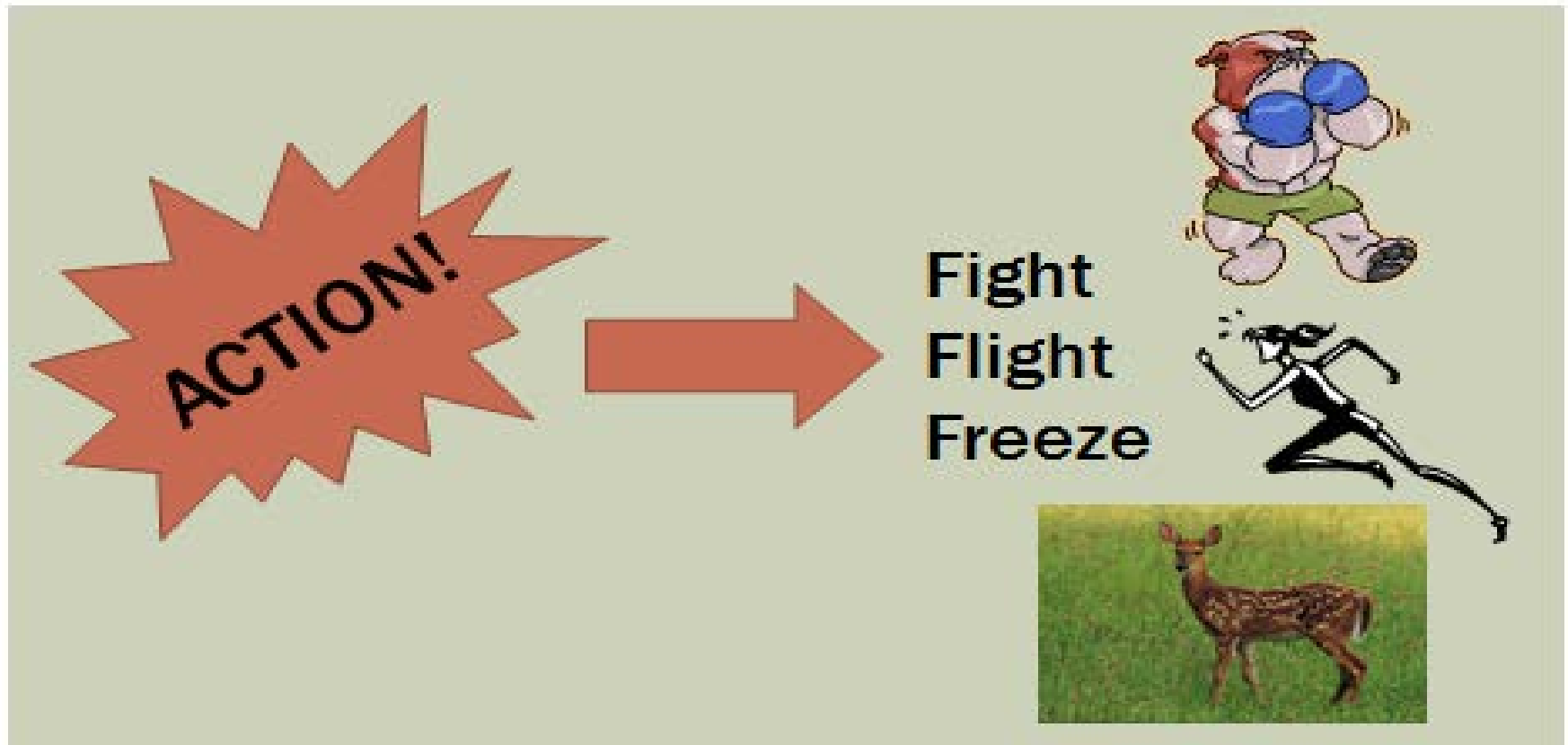


“In addition to terrifying events such as violence and assault—relatively more subtle and insidious forms of trauma such as discrimination, racism, oppression, and poverty—are pervasive and, when experienced chronically, have a cumulative impact that can be fundamentally life-altering.”

Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice

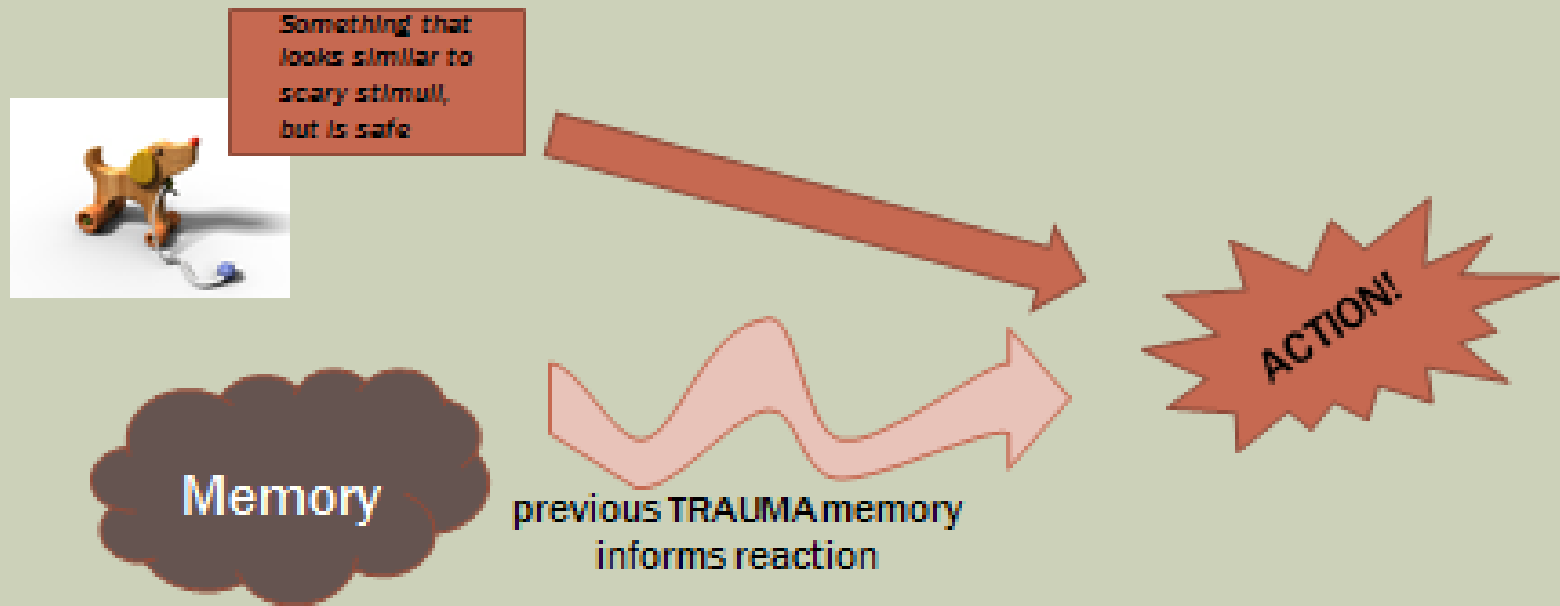
<http://www.nonviolenceandsocialjustice.org>

# Reaction to Unsafe Stimulus





# Triggers



"It is therefore extremely important to understand how seemingly innocuous stimuli can create these extreme survival-motivated responses, in order to help... (people)...respond in more adaptive ways" (Saxe, Ellis & Kaplow, 2007).

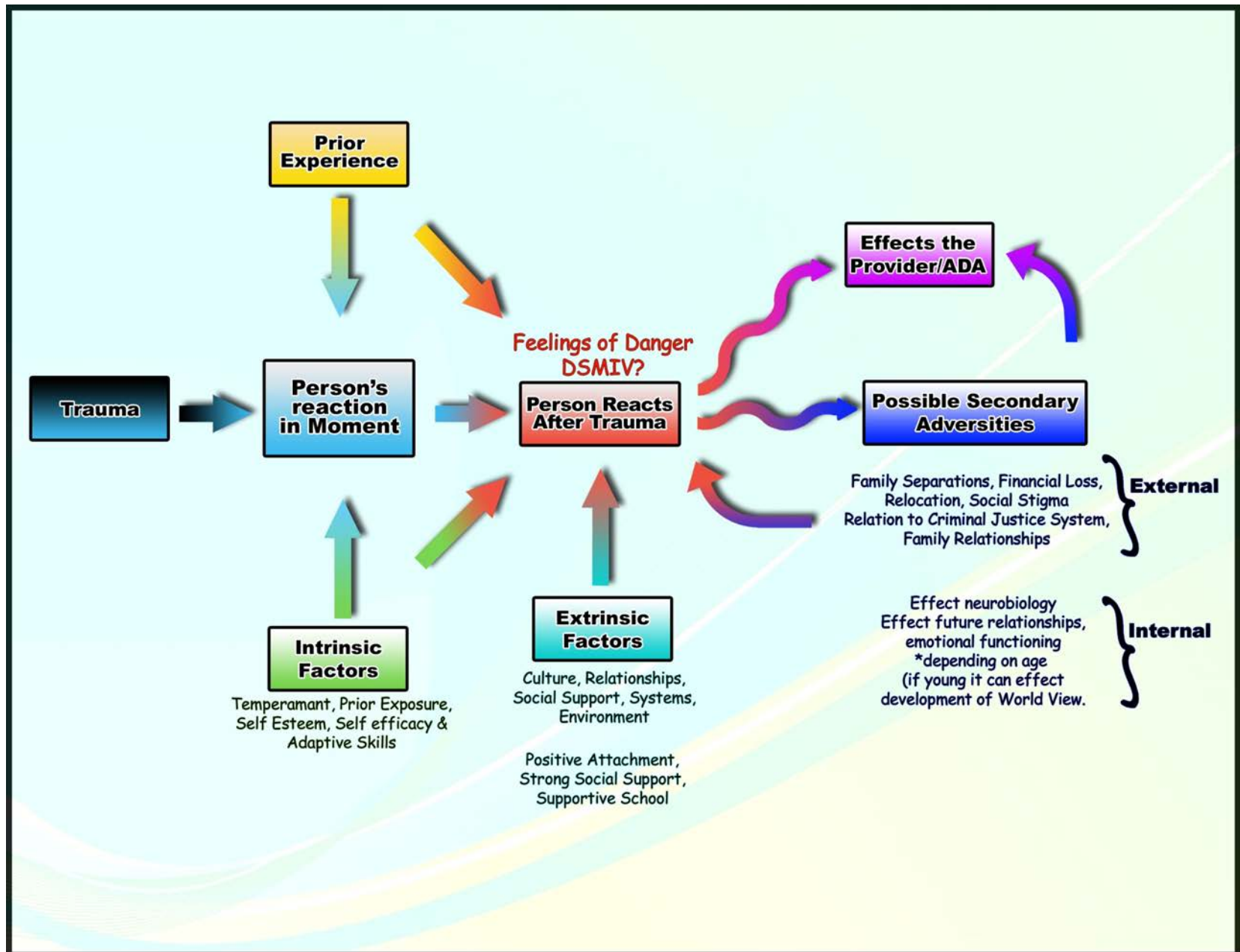
# Secondary Effects of Trauma

## External

- ❑ Family Separations
- ❑ Financial Loss
- ❑ Relocation
- ❑ Social Stigma
- ❑ Family Relationships
- ❑ Relationship with the Criminal Justice System

## Internal

- ❑ Emotional Functioning
- ❑ Development of World View
- ❑ Influences Future Relationships
- ❑ Affects Neurobiology



# Effects on Children

- ❑ Sleep disturbances/Nightmares
- ❑ Difficulty concentrating
- ❑ Eating disturbances
- ❑ Easily Irritated
- ❑ “Regressive” behaviors
- ❑ Frequent physical complaints
- ❑ Over protectiveness

# Trauma-Informed Approach at KCDAO

- Social workers facilitating conversations
- Trauma-informed forensic interviewing
- Name what isn't being said!
  - ▣ Discuss barriers and fears that the victim is experiencing
  - ▣ Talk about race/culture/age/sexuality
- Individualize the victim
  - ▣ Move away from a standard paradigm of the victim
  - ▣ Fluid understanding of the victim

# Reframing the Questions

- What can you tell me about what happened? Can you tell me more?
- What was your thought process during the incident?
- 5 senses
- What were your reactions – physically, emotionally?
- What was the most difficult part of this experience for you?
- What, if anything, can you not forget about what happened?
- *Clarify the incident(s)*

*Russell W. Strand, U.S. Army Military Police School, FETI -  
Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview*


# Case Examples

- Daylie
  - Early forties, Caribbean
  - Domestic violence; Strangulation
  - Presentation: Depression
  - Effects on young children (son) and family unit (mother and extended family)
- Charlene
  - Mom in thirties, daughter pre-teen – teen, Caribbean
  - Familial history of violence in home
  - Presentation: Angry
  - Effects on daughter; family struggles when daughter acts out and later comes out
- Charlie
  - White transgender male in late teens
  - Sex assault victim
  - Homeless, trafficking, no safe place -- vulnerable
- Discussion points: Difficult conversations (sex, safe sex, multiple partners, hx of trauma, trafficking, etc...)

# What can we do?

- ❑ Listen without judgment
- ❑ Respect the witness' right to self-determination
- ❑ Dispel misconceptions about family violence
- ❑ Normalize
- ❑ Don't give false hope
- ❑ When you are unable to answer questions, refer witness to agencies that may provide that information





How can the trauma lens be utilized  
by educators?

# Vicarious Trauma

- Deep changes within a helper as a result of our ongoing empathic engagement with trauma survivors.
- Characteristics include overwhelming feelings, profoundly disrupted beliefs; acute episodes of emotional overload; periods of emptiness, alienation, and distance from work.

# Contact Information

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