



# THE EFFECT OF HOMELESSNESS ON KIDS' BRAINS & WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

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# POVERTY STATS



- 2018 U.S. Census Bureau reported 38.1 million Americans are living in poverty- 11.8%
- Current national poverty line is \$25,750 for a family of 4
- In Illinois 1.6 million live in poverty with 25% coming from rural poverty- 13.5% (Welfare Info)



# POVERTY LEADS TO.....

- Social, emotional, and behavioral problems
- Living in persistent poverty impacts every area of a child's life
  - Lack of nutrition
  - Lack of regular health and dental care
  - Lack of adequate clothing
  - Lack of opportunities for positive social development, psychological, physical, & educational well-being



Risks of unstable housing

# FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HOMELESSNESS

## Common Risk Factors for Homelessness



Addiction



Low or  
No Income



Eviction/Foreclosure



Old Age



Incarceration



Veteran Status



Chronic Illness



Aging Out of  
Foster Care



Domestic Violence



Physical Disability



Mental Illness  
or Disability



Disowned

# THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

Can generate the loss of:

- Possessions
- Privacy
- Security
- Routines
- Community/support systems
- Economic stability
- Family unity



# IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS ON CHILDREN & YOUTH

- Poor nutrition
- Health problems
- Mental health issues
- Education- increased school mobility, high absenteeism, decrease in academic achievement
- Juvenile delinquency
- **Exposure to additional traumatic events (complex trauma)**



# WHAT IS TRAUMA?



Trauma is an **EVENT** (or a series of events) that are **EXPERIENCED** by an individual that is....

- Perceived as a threat to his/her survival
- Overwhelms ability to cope
- Creates feelings of powerlessness
- Produces feelings of isolation and aloneness
- Violates expectations

*(Psychological Trauma: Healing Its Roots in Brain, Body, and Memory, 2015)*



# TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES-IT'S THE INDIVIDUAL'S PERCEPTION

- Forced displacement
- Inconsistent housing and financial resources
- Abandonment
- Neglect
- Life threatening illness of a parent
- Witnessing/victim domestic violence
- Natural disasters
- Death of a loved one
- Serious childhood injury or illness
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Parent in the military/deployment
- Witnessing or experiencing community violence
- Acts or threats of terrorism
- Serious Accident
- Bullying



# FACTS ON TRAUMA AND HOMELESS CHILDREN

- They are sick twice the rate of other children.
- Suffer twice as many ear infections
- 5 times more stomach problems
- Twice as likely to repeat a grade
- Go hungry twice as often as other children
- 1/5 of preschoolers have emotional problems, but less than 1/3 receive care
- Twice the rate of learning disabilities and three times the rate of emotional/behavioral problems
- Half experience anxiety, depression, or withdrawal
- By the age of 8, one in three will have a mental health disorder



## Three Levels of Stress Response

### 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.



# THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON THE BRAIN



The brain goes through rapid changes in the first three years of life.

- The brain doubles in size in its first year of life.
- By age 3, it has reached 80% of its brain volume.
- Toxic stress means that children's brains do not develop the capability to learn, connect, or function normally.

# BRAIN ARCHITECTURE



Newborn



1 Month



9 Months

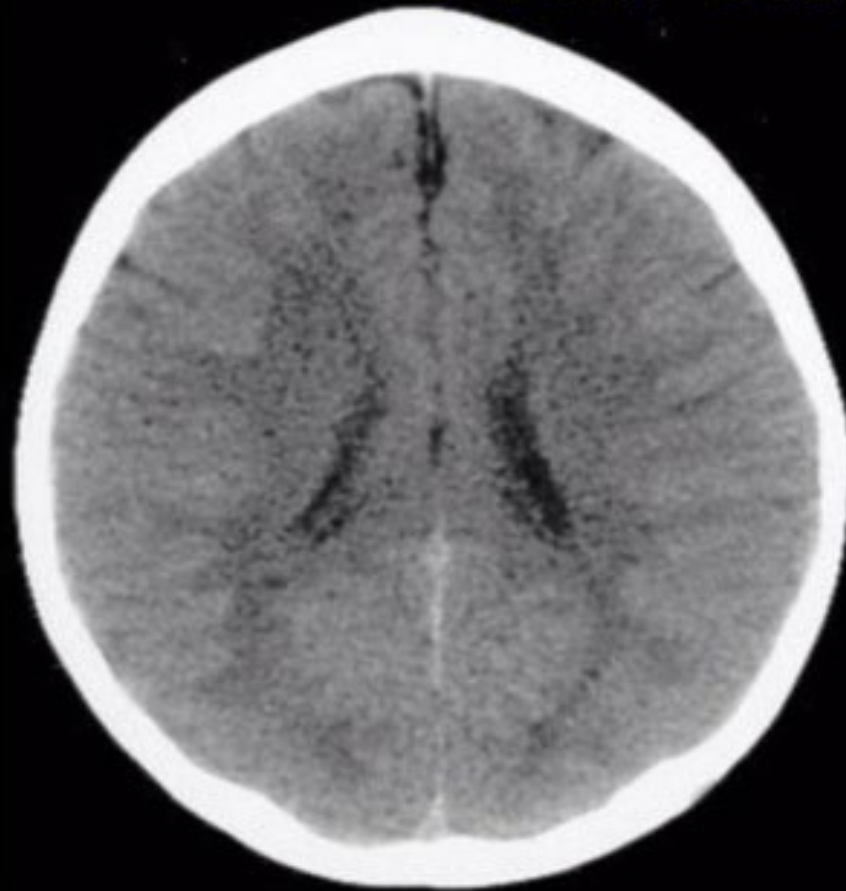


2 Years

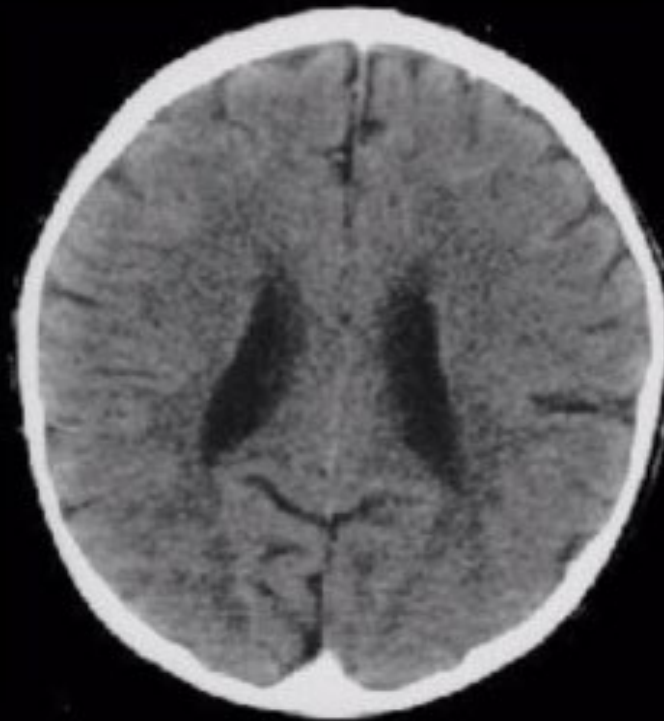


Adult

## 3 Year Old Children



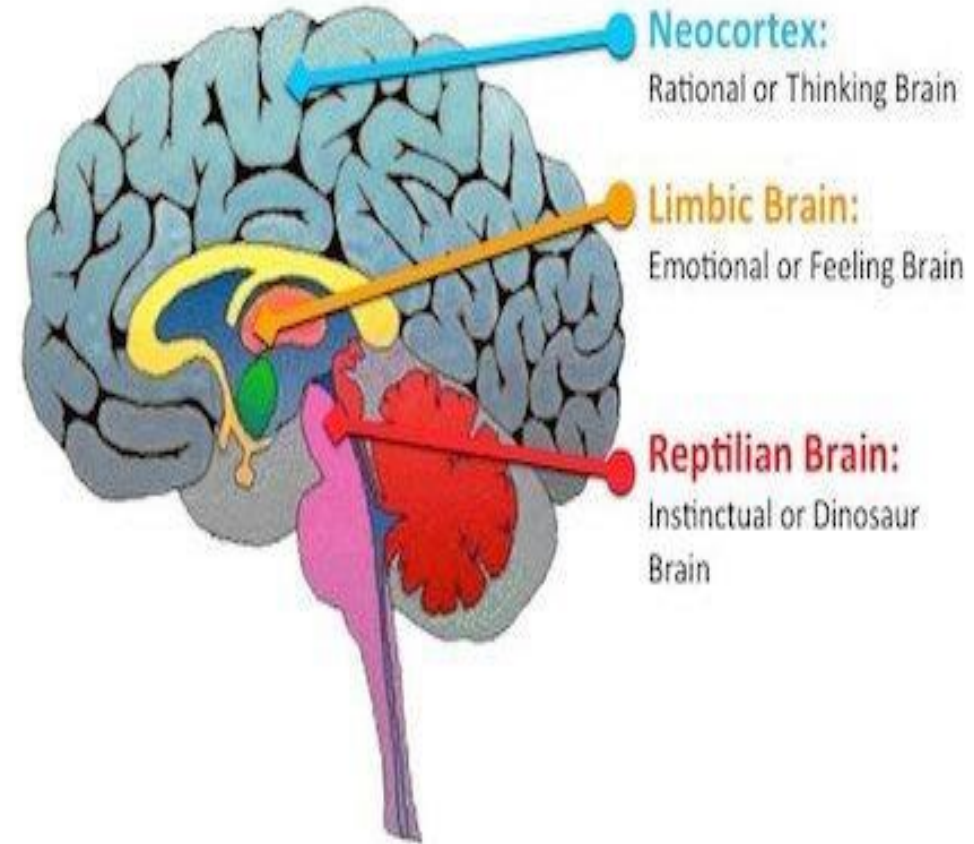
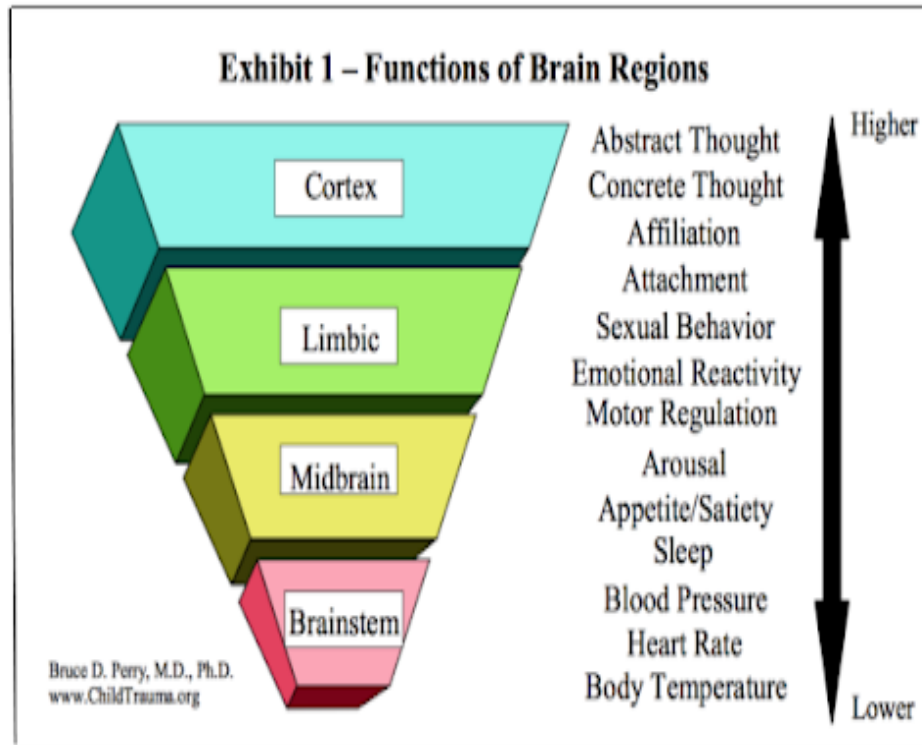
**Normal**



**Extreme Neglect**



# UNDERSTANDING THE BRAIN AND ITS FUNCTIONS



# THESE STUDENTS COME TO SCHOOL.....

- in distress due to the uncertainty of their living situation.
- and struggle to make connections to others and build positive relationships.



# FLIGHT, FIGHT, OR FREEZE

FIGHT



FLIGHT oohata!



FREEZE



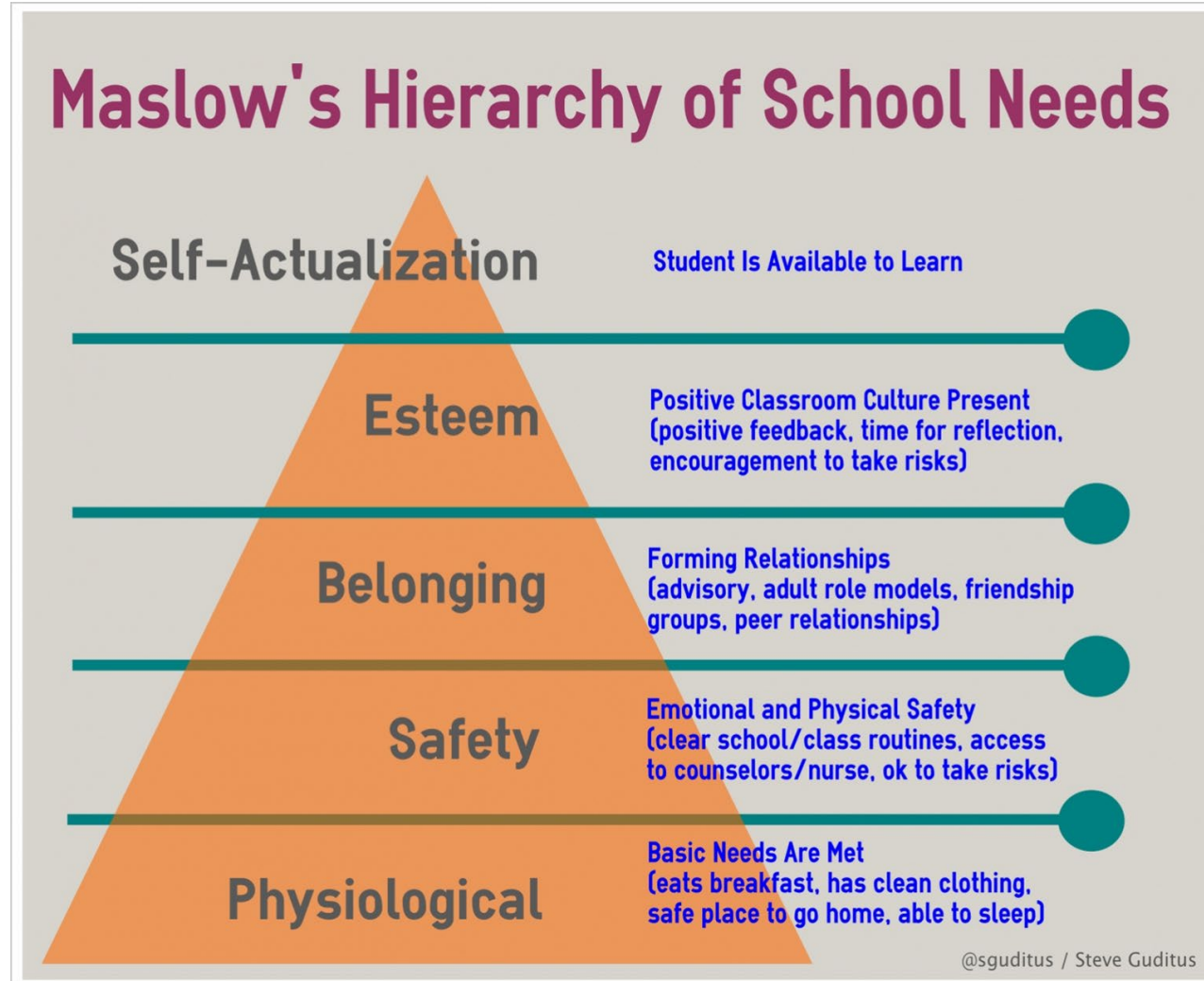
FIGURE 2.1

## What Flight, Fight, or Freeze Looks Like in the Classroom

Flight	Fight	Freeze
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Withdrawing</li><li>• Fleeing the classroom</li><li>• Skipping class</li><li>• Daydreaming</li><li>• Seeming to sleep</li><li>• Avoiding others</li><li>• Hiding or wandering</li><li>• Becoming disengaged</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acting out</li><li>• Behaving aggressively</li><li>• Acting silly</li><li>• Exhibiting defiance</li><li>• Being hyperactive</li><li>• Arguing</li><li>• Screaming/yelling</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exhibiting numbness</li><li>• Refusing to answer</li><li>• Refusing to get needs met</li><li>• Giving a blank look</li><li>• Feeling unable to move or act</li></ul>



# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SCHOOLS?



# COGNITIVE/ACADEMIC

Black and white thinkers, no gray areas

Need to be prepped for changes

All executive functions are affected

- Planning
- Organization
- Problem Solving
- Attention
- Working Memory
- Self-regulation

Difficulty with sequential tasks

Difficulty understanding cause/effect relationships



# LANGUAGE

Difficulty learning and retrieving new verbal information

Easily misinterpret teacher instructions

Don't understand sarcasm, words with multiple meanings, etc.

They take **EVERYTHING LITERALLY!**





# PHYSICAL

Motor Skills

Sensory needs

Smaller in stature

Affects their sleep

Psychosomatic symptoms

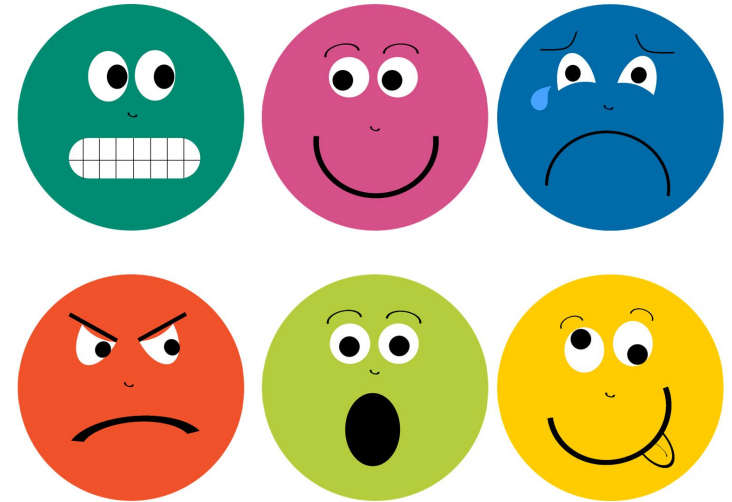
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal
- Body pains



# SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

Difficulty with.....

- taking another's perspective
- understanding reciprocity
- keeping personal space
- picking up on social cues
- regulating emotions



# HOW SCHOOLS CAN BE MORE TRAUMA RESPONSIVE

1. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS!!!!
2. Create safe environments
3. Teach students to regulate their emotions

# TO INCREASE ACHIEVEMENT YOU MUST INCREASE RELATIONSHIPS

- Leave a note on a student's desk
- Make eye contact
- Know/call your student's by name
- Give students understanding and empathy
- Listen to them; give them a voice
- Give each student personal attention (greetings, short talks, compliments, acknowledgements, smiles, high fives)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC3Vsv6OjgA>



"Long term I want student achievement to increase. Short term I want a cup of coffee and a biscotti."

# QUOTES FROM TEACHER OF THE YEAR NOMINATIONS

- “Students love his class because he is able to build strong relationships with him.”
- “There is nothing she won’t do for her students.”
- “He has unending patience; he understands the needs of each student.”
- “She is enthusiastic and extremely supportive of everything students want to try.”

**Common theme???**

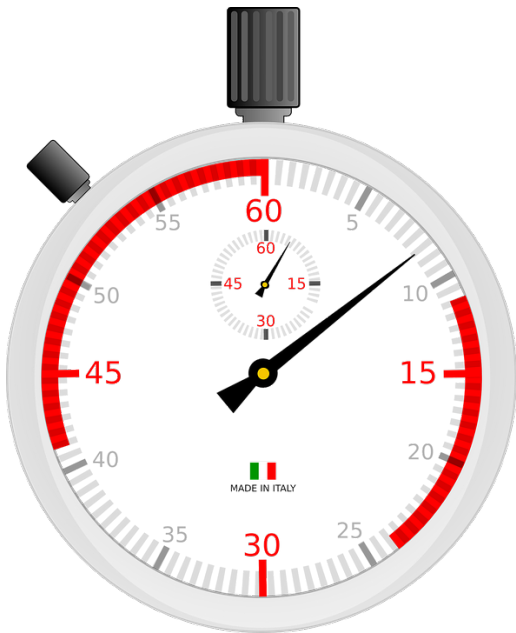




# TWO BY 10 APPROACH

2 Minutes of personal conversation about anything the student wants to talk about (must be school appropriate) for 10 days in a row.

The outcome will be worth the investment.



# IT TAKES A VILLAGE.....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxyxywShewI&app=desktop>

# KNOW ME KNOW MY NAME



# THE POWER OF BEING SEEN

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/power-being-seen>

# SAFE ENVIRONMENTS



- Predictable environment with clear expectations for behavior
- Structure during the class day, try not to deviate from it often
- Quiet, safe place in the classroom for students to go when they are feeling overwhelmed.

# SAFE PLACE IN THE CLASSROOM (PEACE CORNER)





# DE-ESCALATION SPACES

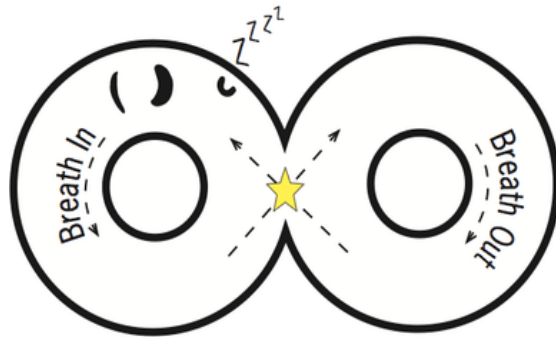
<https://www.edutopia.org/video/creating-dedicated-space-reflection>



# TEACH STUDENTS TO REGULATE THEIR EMOTIONS



## Lazy 8 Breathing



Trace the Lazy 8 with your finger starting at the star and taking a deep breath in.

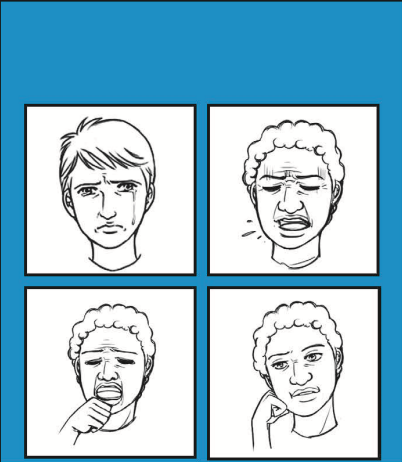
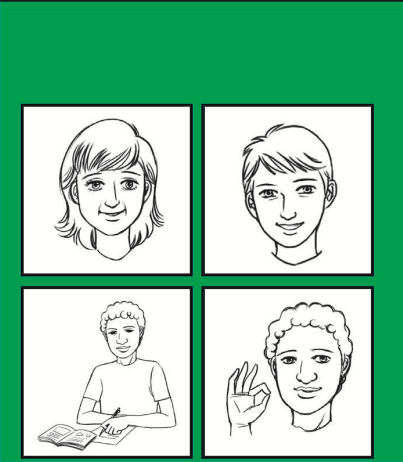
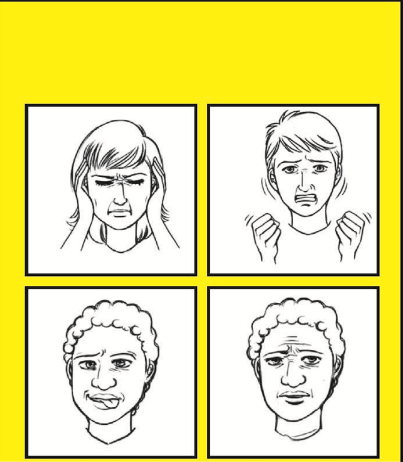
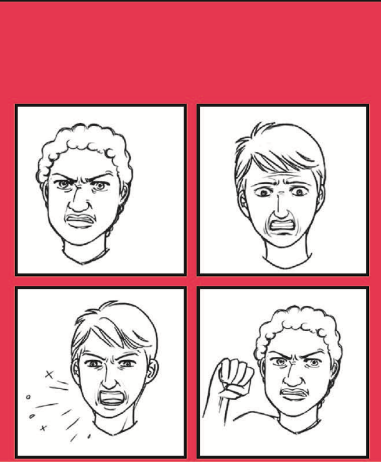
As you cross over to the other side of the Lazy 8, slowly let your breath out.

Continue breathing around the Lazy 8 until you have a calm body and mind.





# The ZONES of Regulation®

			
<b>BLUE ZONE</b> Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	<b>GREEN ZONE</b> Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	<b>YELLOW ZONE</b> Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	<b>RED ZONE</b> Mad/Angry Mean Terrified Yelling/Hitting Out of Control

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjyGcyKljg>

# EMOTIONAL CHECK-INS



# MEDITATION AND TAPPING

Schools ditch detention for meditation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXgpE8ASAGM>

Tapping: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAnQC1Sb530](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAnQC1Sb530)

Tapping tutorial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyHxuTG6jRk>

# IMPLEMENT RESTORATIVE PRACTICES



## The Purpose of Restorative Practices

- To develop community and to manage conflict and tension by ***repairing harm and restoring relationships.***
- The fundamental hypothesis of restorative practices is that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things **with them** rather than ***to*** them or ***for*** them.

# RESTORATIVE PRACTICES CONTINUUM

**informal**

**formal**



# USING CLASSROOM CIRCLES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN EXPERIENCING TRAUMA

Watch this video of a classroom circle and observe the trauma informed strategies that you see being implemented.

<https://www.edutopia.org/video/morning-meetings-building-community-classroom>



PreschoolActivities 11

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# ARE WE DOING ENOUGH???

“Students learn best when they feel safe, when they feel connected and supported by school staff, and when their social, emotional, and physical/health needs are met, goals that are best met through a whole-school approach.” (Ristuccia, 2013)





# THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS



1. Trauma is real.
2. Trauma is prevalent. (More likely than we care to admit, especially in our homeless population.)
3. Trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect development and learning in a multitude of ways.
4. In our schools, we need to be prepared to support students who have experienced trauma, even if we don't know exactly who they are.
5. Children are resilient, and within positive learning environments they can grow, learn, and succeed.



You make a difference for all your students, but  
for a child of trauma, you may be a lifeline.

Be a  
Game Changer  
the world  
has enough  
followers  
ooo

# RESOURCES

Aratani, Yumiko, *“Homeless Children and Youth: Causes and Consequences”*, National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009

Cavanaugh, Brian, *“Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Schools, Beyond Behavior”*, 2016

Craig, Susan, *“Trauma-Sensitive Schools”*, Teachers College Press, 2016

McLeod, Saul, *“Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”*, Simply Psychology.org., 2016

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, *“Effects of Complex Trauma”*, retrieved from [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, *“Childhood Trauma Toolkit for Educators”*, retrieved from [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

# RESOURCES

Tomasello, Dr. Kerri, New Jersey Department of Education, *“Trauma-Informed Schools: Making the Connection with Homelessness and Learning,”* Presentation

Costello, Bob, Wachtel, Joshua, Wachtel, Ted, *“The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians and Administrators”*

Sporleder, Jim, *“Building Trauma Sensitive Schools”*

Perry, Bruce D. MD. PHD., *“The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog”*

[www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)

*“Helping Traumatized Children Learn”* by Massachusetts Advocates for Children

Souers, Kristen, Hall, Pete, *“Fostering Resilient Learners Strategies For Creating a Trauma Sensitive Classroom”*

**THANK YOU!**

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