



# EDUCATING CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

Cleveland Metropolitan School District  
Humanware/SEL

# CLEVELAND CHILDREN AT A GLANCE

- According to National Center for Children in Poverty, Cleveland has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest rate of children leaving in poverty in the nation.
- 53.9% of children with poverty designation



# QUESTION???

What is Trauma?



- Take two minutes and come up with your definition

# DEFINITION

- TRAUMA is not an event itself but a response to stressful one or more events in which one's ability to cope is undermined



# WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF TRAUMA?

Take two minutes and formulate some examples.



# EXAMPLES OF TRAUMA

- Abuse: Physical, Sexual, Emotional
- Witness of Violence Acts
- Homelessness
- Residing with a parent or caretaker experiencing substance abuse
- Lacking of fundamental necessities such as food

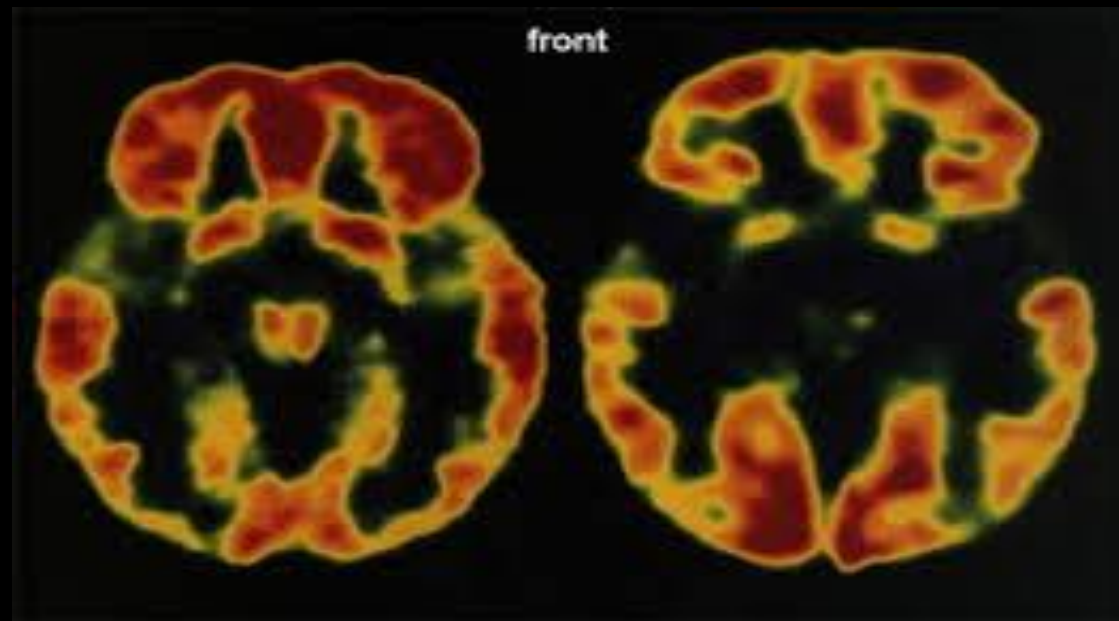




- According to ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) nearly 50% of children have experienced trauma
- This percentage drastically increases in poverty environments.

# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

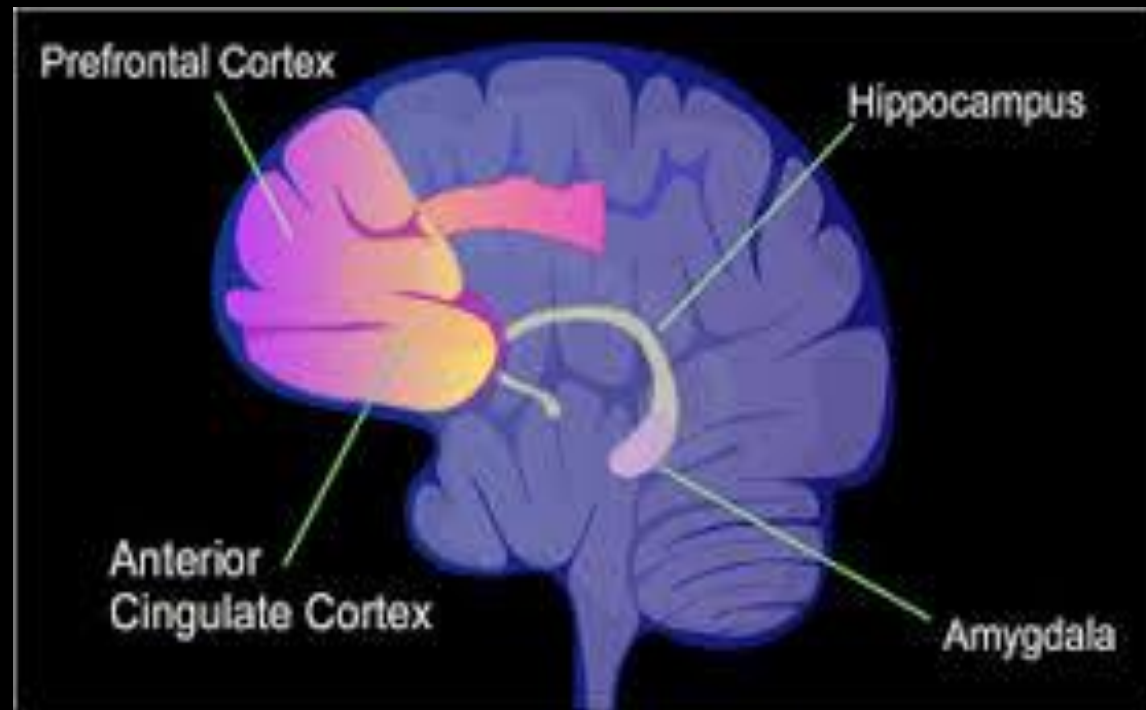
- Observe the two brains, what are some differences?
- Which brain is that of a child from trauma?





# BRAIN ANATOMY 101

- Trauma creates neural damage in these components of the brain



# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

- Trauma Diminishes
  - Concentration
  - Memory
  - Organizational and Language  
Acquisition abilities

## TRAUMA EFFECTS ON COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

Children from trauma have a weakened pre-frontal cortex which makes it harder to retain information

Children from trauma also have a stronger filter for long term memory which serves as a defense mechanism



# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

- “Fight of Flight”
  - When a child is in this mode, all non-critical information is tuned out that is not deemed necessary for survival.
  - The only way to for the child to exit this mode is for that child to feel safe



PLEASE WATCH

# QUESTION

- What did you experience physically?
- What did you experience emotionally?
- What did you feel when asked the question by the “teacher”?



# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

- Dissociation

- If it is deemed that fight or flight cannot occur the child will exit the world in place of a safe fantasy world

- excessive daydreaming
    - denial of real occurring events
    - complete withdrawal

# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONING

- Children from trauma have a disillusioned view that the entire world is dangerous based on their experiences



# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONING

- What type of behaviors do you think children enact to cope with their perceived dangerous environment?



# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONING

- These coping behaviors can be categorized as either externalizing (acting out) or internalizing (withdrawing)
- Some behaviors include:
  - Verbal Combativeness
  - Non-compliance with directives
  - Impulsivity/Reactivity
  - Perfectionism

## TRAUMA EFFECTS ON BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONING



- Children from trauma have a need to control their environment to make themselves feel safe. This control can lead to conflicts within the classroom.
- Relationships are hard to solidify as children of trauma are often mistrusting of adults.

# TRAUMA EFFECTS ON BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONING

- It is possible to re-traumatize a child knowingly or unknowingly
- Children of trauma have “triggers”. These triggers could entail any one of the five senses which is then linked to a traumatic memory. When triggered the child will enter “fight or flight”
  - \*Note, younger males tend to fight when triggered



# BARRIERS TO EDUCATING CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

- Trauma is viewed as a home problem
- The child is blamed for behavioral and academic issues
- Personal feelings of helplessness
- Lack of understanding and resources for handling trauma
- Balancing individual student needs with the needs of the whole class

# STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATING CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

## Islands of Competence

- Allow for children to be successful in areas of strengths. This allows for familiarity and satisfies the need for control.
- Success in areas of competence allows for the child to build a base in which new information can be acquired.

# STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATING CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

## Predictability

Classroom routine is essential in letting a child know he or she is safe

- a. Post daily schedule
- b. When possible inform child of change in schedule
- c. Predictability in lessons (structured work groups)

# STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATING CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

## Predictability

- d. Constant reminders of transition and effective communication of expectations during transitional times

# STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATING CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

Break down tasks to minimize anxiety

- Step by Step Reveal
- “Portion Control”
- Utilize islands of competence in conjunction with this

# STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATING CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

## De-escalation

- I messages vs. You messages
- Drain off
- 2x10 Technique





# LINKS

- <http://traumasensitiveschools.org/>
- <http://traumasensitiveschools.org/tlpi-publications/>
- <http://www.mentalhealthconnection.org/pdfs/perry-handout-effects-of-trauma.pdf>
- <http://www.leadershipcouncil.org/1/res/brain.html>
- [http://www.nctsnet.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/training\\_curricula/impact.pdf](http://www.nctsnet.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/training_curricula/impact.pdf)

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