

# Trauma-informed Care: Understanding, Recognizing, and Responding



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# Let's Meet James



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# James

James is a 13 year old male diagnosed with ADHD, combined type, by his pediatrician when he was 8-years-old. He often gets in trouble at home as he forgets to do his chores and has frequent anger outbursts, sometimes leading to destruction of property. James has significant difficulty maintaining attention, and struggles with organization. His teachers say that James can't sit still and often asks to go to the bathroom and makes frequent trips to the nurse. Academically, his grades fell significantly in the second half of the year due to assignments not being turned in and his lack of participation. The school counselor says that she's really worried about James as he's starting to gravitate towards the "wrong crowd".

## What are your first impressions?

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# James (con't)

James lives with his Aunt (legal guardian), biological brother, age 12, and his 8 year old female cousin. His father was killed when James was 2, and his mother was arrested for drug activity when James was 6. Social services became involved at that time, ultimately leading to Aunt obtaining custody that year. James was further exposed to domestic violence between his mother and her boyfriend during a 6 month span when he was 5. His Aunt says that James' behavior is "out-of-control" and has gotten worse as he's gotten older. She says that if things don't get better soon, she may have to find somewhere else for him to live.

## Now, what do you think?

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# Let's Reflect

- How did your impressions differ?
  - How might those impressions impact or inform your decisions or interactions with James and his family?
  - Would those impressions impact any recommendations you would share with school staff or his family?
  - How could this create barriers for James at school?
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Successful interactions begin with our thoughts about the situation:



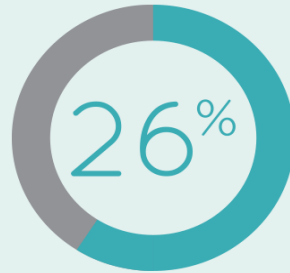
***Your lens is important!***

When you **THINK** differently about a situation, it changes how you feel and ultimately how you respond

# Understand

What trauma is

The impact it has on  
everyone within the  
system



of children in the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn 4.

More than 2/3 of children reported at least one traumatic event by **age 16**

Each year, the number of youth requiring hospital treatment for physical assault-related injuries would fill every seat in **9 stadiums**

Source: SAMHSA



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# What Trauma Is..

- An individual's **perception** and reactions to a stressful life event

**“Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” (SAMHSA)**

- Trauma looks different for **EVERYONE**.
  - Trauma reactions can include a variety of responses
  - Trauma affects one’s ability to manage feelings and behaviors

# Traumatic Events & Types

- Intimate Partner Violence
- Witnessing Violence
- Neglect
- Separation
- Living in Poverty
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Racism
- Sex Trafficking
- Traumatic Grief
- Community Violence
- Cyberbullying
- Bullying
- Institutional
- Refugee Trauma
- Disasters
- Medical Trauma
- Early Childhood Trauma

# Impact

- Trauma impacts all individuals within a system including the system itself
  - Children
  - Families
  - Staff
  - Communities
  - School/Organization

# Recognize

Our own attitudes, values,  
and beliefs and how they  
influence our behavior

When behaviors,  
symptoms, and patterns  
reflect children's past and  
present trauma experiences



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# Self-Awareness

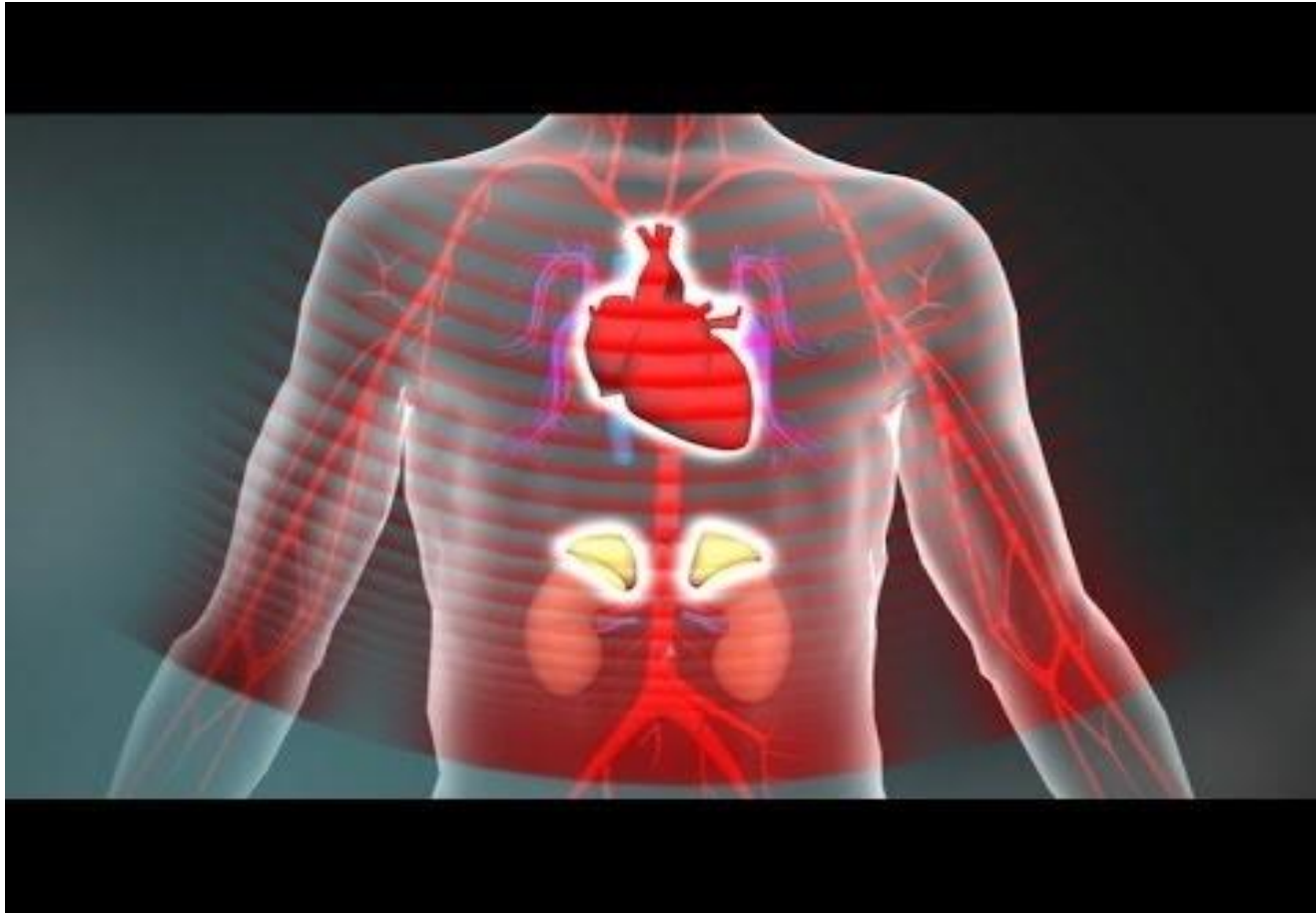
- Understanding your own personal values, family values, cultural values, and bias
    - Are my own experiences coloring my perception of this child/situation?
  - Be aware of your “hot-buttons”
  - Recognizing your own physical and emotional state
    - What am I feeling right now?
  - Recognizing your current stress level
    - What am I feeling today?
-

- What situations are difficult for me in my current setting?
  - Do I show sensitivity and understanding of others' perspectives?
  - Am I open to new ways of thinking that may not be congruent with my values and beliefs?
  - Do I understand emotional cues of others?
  - Do I need additional resources?
  - Do I intentionally work to build trust in my relationships?
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# Stress Response: Fight, Flight or Freeze



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# FIGHT

Yelling, Screaming,  
Using Mean Words

Hitting, Kicking, Biting,  
Throwing, Punching

Blaming, Deflecting  
Responsibility, Defensive

Demanding,  
Controlling

"Oppositional",  
"Defiant", "Noncompliant"

Moving Towards What  
Feels Threatening

Irritable, Angry,  
Furious, Offended  
Aggressive

# FLIGHT

Wanting to Escape,  
Running Away

Unfocused, Hard  
to Pay Attention

Fidgeting, Restlessness,  
Hyperactive

Preoccupied, Busy with  
Everything But the Thing

Procrastinating, Avoidant,  
Ignores the Situation

Moving Away From What  
Feel Threatening

Anxious, Panicked  
Scared, Worried,  
Overwhelmed

# FREEZE

Shutting Down,  
Mind Goes Blank

Urge to Hide,  
Isolates Self

Verbally Unresponsive,  
Says, "I don't know" a lot

Difficulty with  
Completing Tasks

Zoned Out,  
Daydreaming

Unable to Move,  
Feeling Stuck

Depressed, Numb,  
Bored/Apathetic,  
Helpless

# The TRIUNE Brain

## The Thinking Brain.

This is the **neocortex**, responsible for higher functions such as reasoning, language, creativity, and abstract thought.

## The Emotional Brain.

This part of the brain is also called the **limbic system** and is the center for emotions, emotional behavior, and motivation. Within this part of the brain is the **amygdala**, also known as the **sentry**. The role of the amygdala is to determine whether or not something is a threat.

## The Survival Brain.

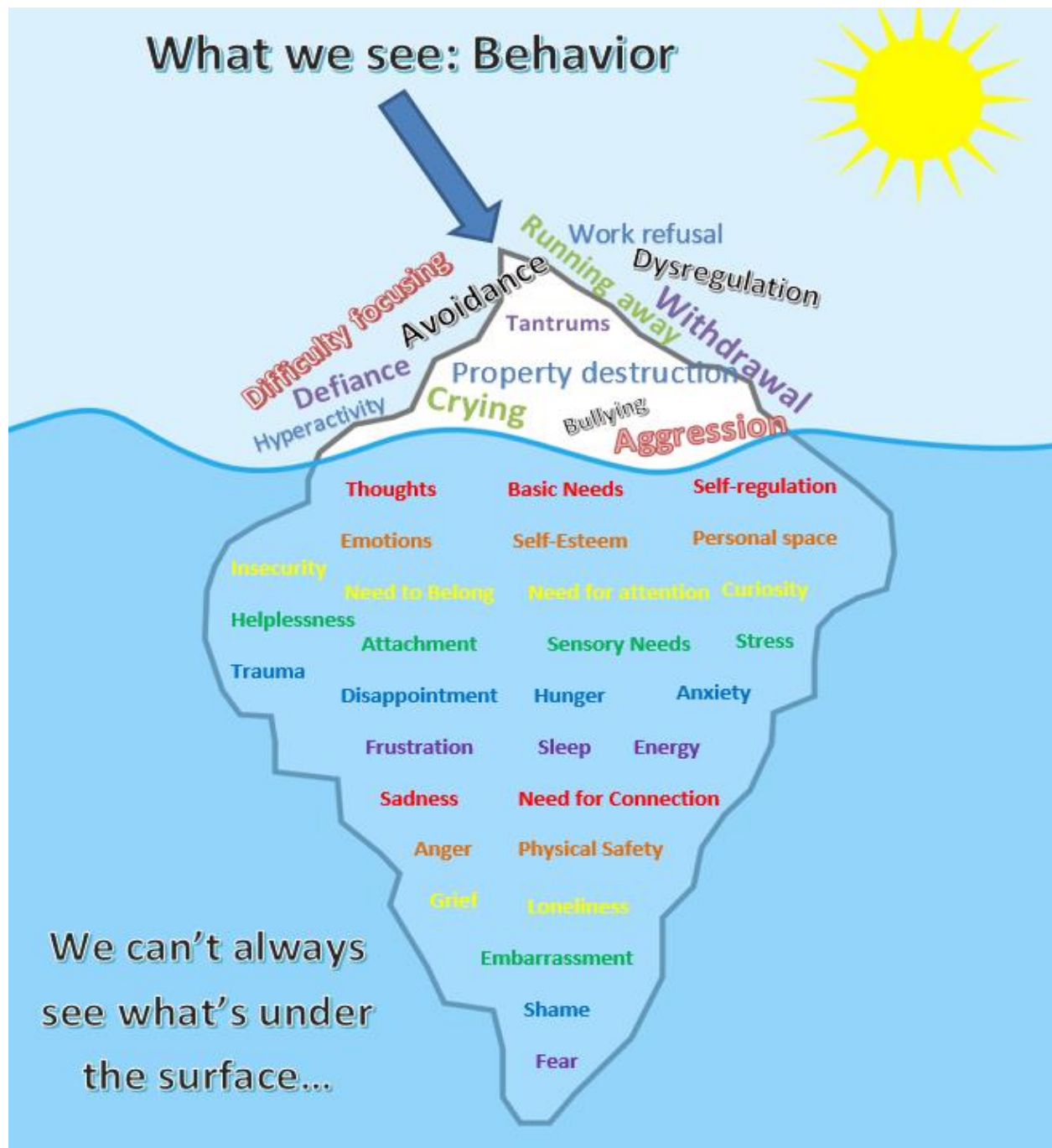
This system of the brain (the **brain stem**) also known as the reptilian brain, is responsible for survival functions such as breathing, heart rate, circulation, and most bodily (autonomic) functions that do not require conscious thought.



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- Overreaction to situations
- Inflexibility
- Self-Injury
- Resistant to transitions and change
- Poor boundaries
- Difficulty Concentrating, organizing, and processing information
- Inconsistent academic performance
- Avoiding behaviors
- Lower IQ and reading ability
- Physical symptoms
- Overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety

# What we see: Behavior



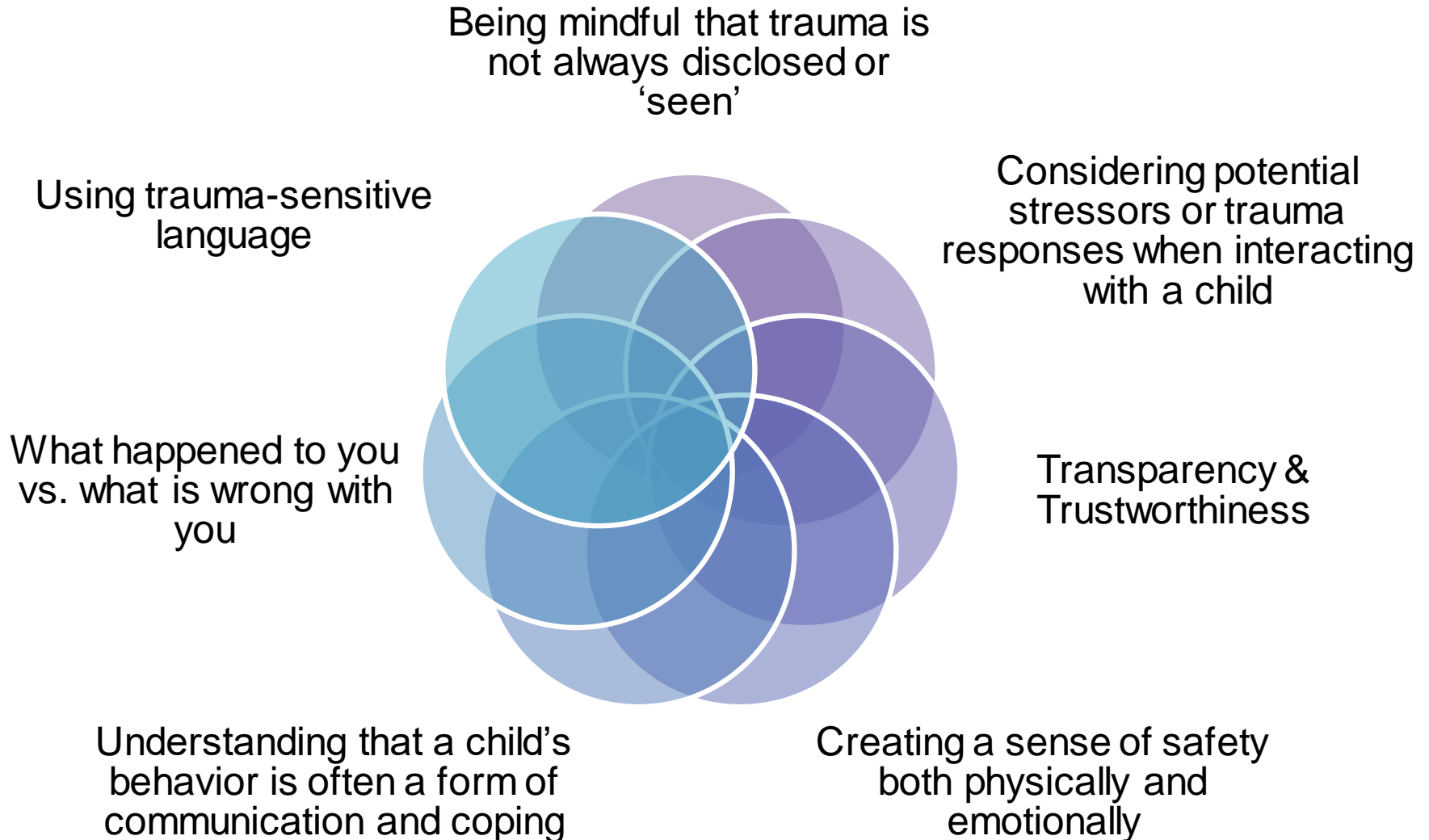
We can't always  
see what's under  
the surface...

# Respond

In ways that avoid  
re-traumatization

Trauma informed  
practice across  
system

# What is “Trauma-informed”?





Policies &  
Practices

Educate Yourself

**Use of  
Relationship**

Listen

Offer choices

Create a Safe  
Environment

Use preferred  
names and  
pronouns

Be sensitive to  
cues in  
environment

Warn children if  
you will be doing  
something out of  
the ordinary

Maintain usual  
routines

Follow schools  
reporting  
procedures

Provide  
reassurance and  
explanations

Respect personal  
space

Ask permission



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# Seek out Support

- Collaborate with families, teachers, school counselor, and personnel to ensure children are getting support
- Connect with resources
- Self Care: Your health and wellbeing is as important as the children you care for



# Self-care

- Managing trauma responses is heavy work. Watch for signs of burnout:
  - Vicarious trauma
  - Compassion fatigue
- Incorporate self-care practices into your daily routine

*be good to  
yourself*

THANK  
YOU FOR BEING YOU  
— & —  
DOING WHAT YOU  
DO



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