

Poverty and Traumatic Stress: Strategies for Building Family Resilience

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Continuing Education Commercial Disclosure

I, Laurel Kiser, have the following commercial relationship(s) to disclose:

- Book royalties
- Grant support
- Training and consultation contracts
- Speakers fees

Agenda

- Poverty as Context
- Impact on Families
- Building Resilience

As a result of attending this workshop, attendees will ...

1. understand the context of urban poverty
2. review adaptations that children and families make given exposure to chronic stress and multiple traumas
3. gain ideas about how to increase the natural healing resources of families

POVERTY AS CONTEXT

Life in Poverty

Addictions

Social & System Demands

FINANCIAL
INSTABILITY

DISCRIMINATION
& STIGMA

DAILY HASSLES



Loss & Grief

VIOLENCE

RESIDENTIAL
INSTABILITY

Neglect

Isolation



Economic Hardship

- No living wage
- Limited opportunity
- Never having enough
- Welfare and Aid to Dependent Families

Separate and Unequal

- Concentrated poverty
- Discrimination
- Segregation, isolation, and mistrust
- Neighborhood disintegration
- Residential instability
- Inadequate transportation
- Inferior education systems
- Police brutality
- Healthcare disparities
- Food deserts
- Community violence

Intergenerational Poverty

- Skipped generation
- Multi-generation families
- Patterns of lack of protection
- Cycles of violence and loss

Synergistic Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Females
 - 2 or more ACEs
 - sexual abuse with
 - DV
 - victim of crime
 - **poverty**
 - parental mental illness
 - loss of parent
- Males
 - 3 ACEs
 - **poverty** with
 - sexual abuse
 - parental substance abuse
 - loss of parent

CANarratives.org

Data from the National Comorbidity Survey – Replication Sample
Putnam, Harris, Putnam. J Traumatic Stress, 26:435-442, 2013.

Continuous Trauma: What if Trauma Isn't "Post"?

- Ongoing, realistic threat and danger from multiple perpetrators across multiple sites (home, neighborhood, school, transport routes) = an absence of safe spaces
- Violence as a condition rather than an event
- Anticipation of future harm is realistic, and recovery from each incident of danger must happen in an environment of ongoing threat
- Activation of 'survival brain' is not a false alarm

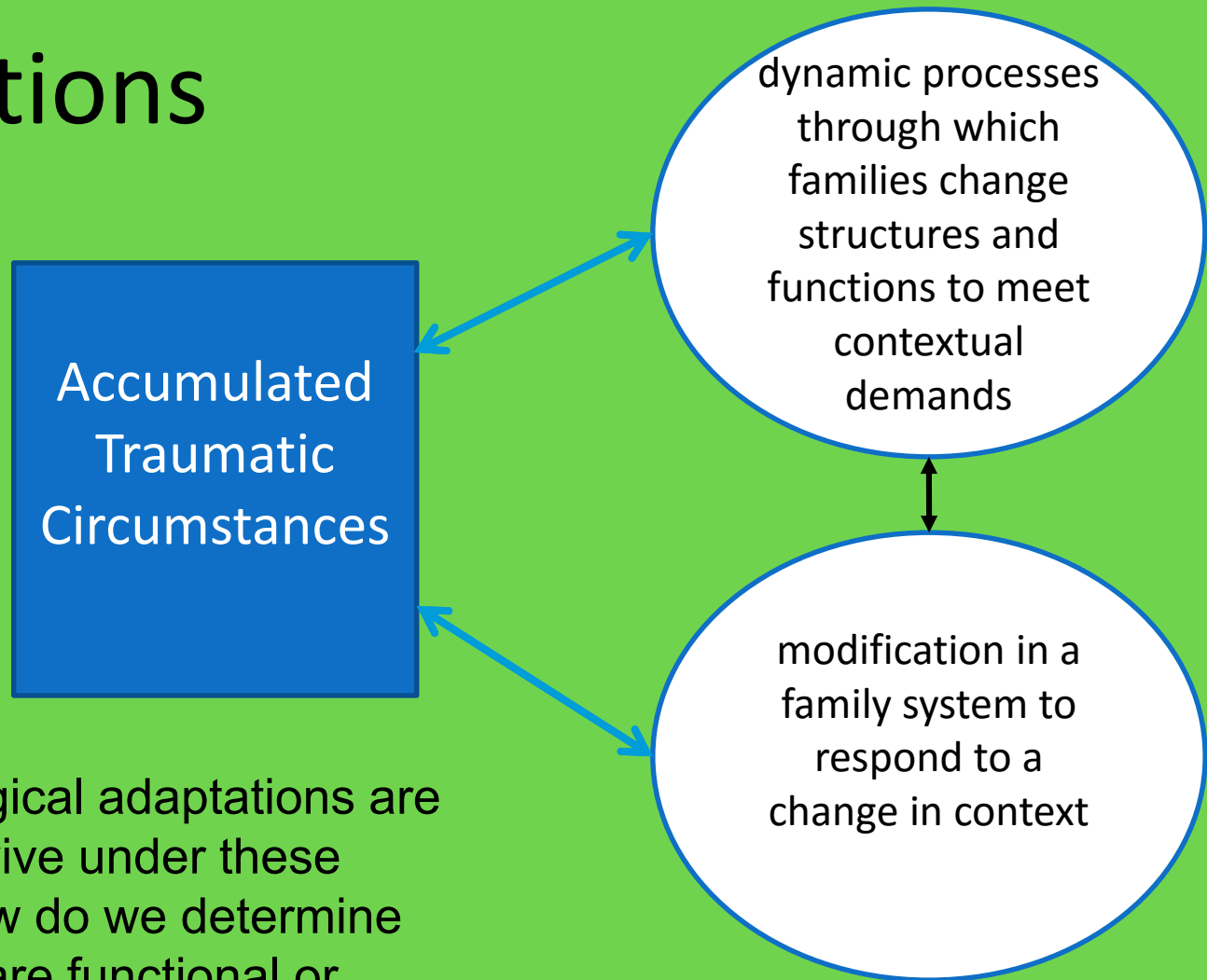
Associate Professor Debbie Kaminer
Department of Psychology
University of Cape Town

Accumulated Traumatic Circumstances

- exposure to multiple and on-going stressors
- repeated cataclysmic events (or traumas)
- along with associated secondary stressors including ***continued threats***

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Adaptations



What psychological adaptations are required to survive under these conditions? How do we determine whether these are functional or maladaptive? What does 'helping' or 'recovery' mean if conditions do not change?

-Debbie Kaminer

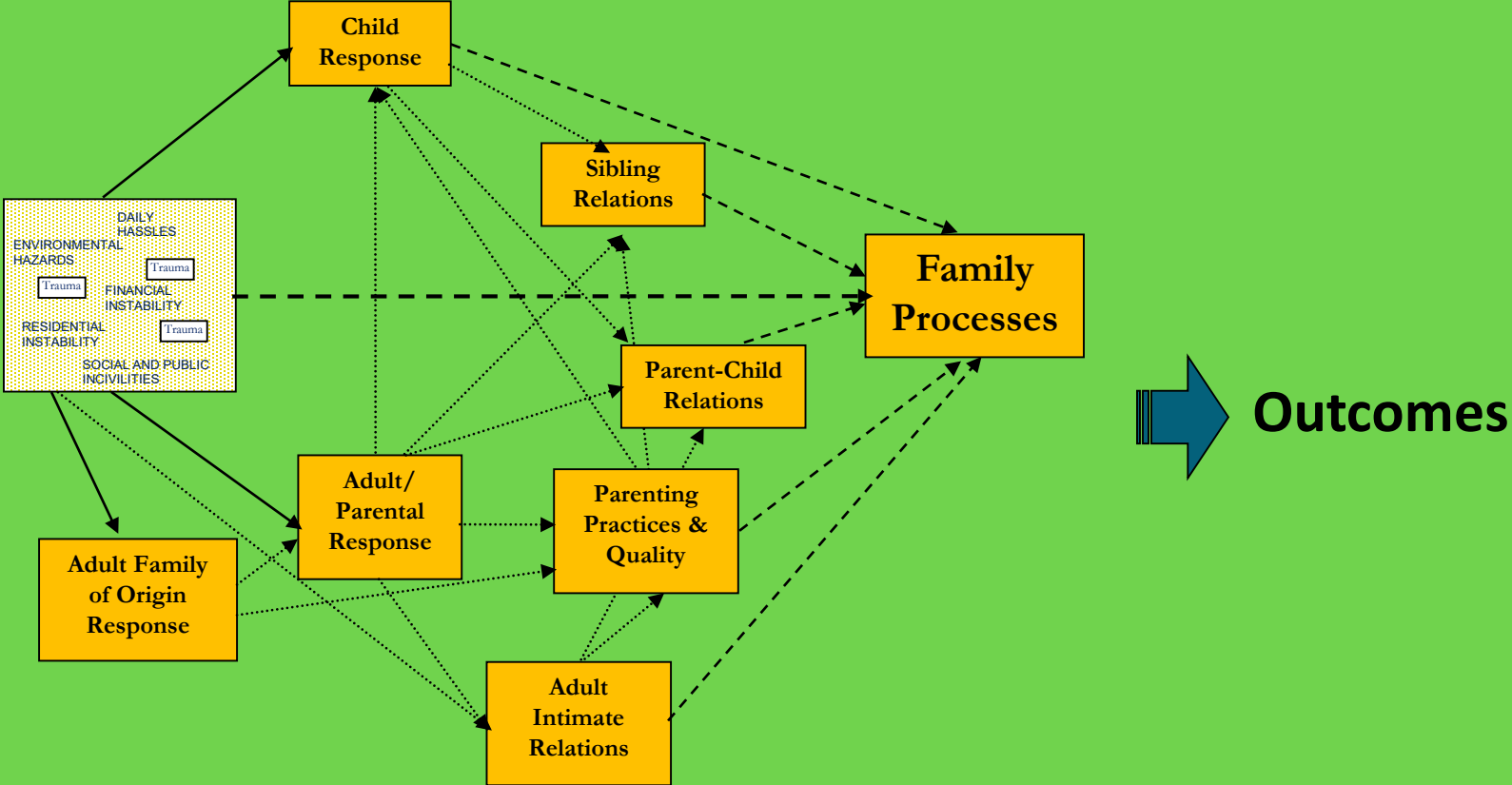
What do we mean by "survival tools"?

Survival tools usually help us to...

- escape or deter perceived threats
- alleviate pain or distress caused by a perceived inescapable threat

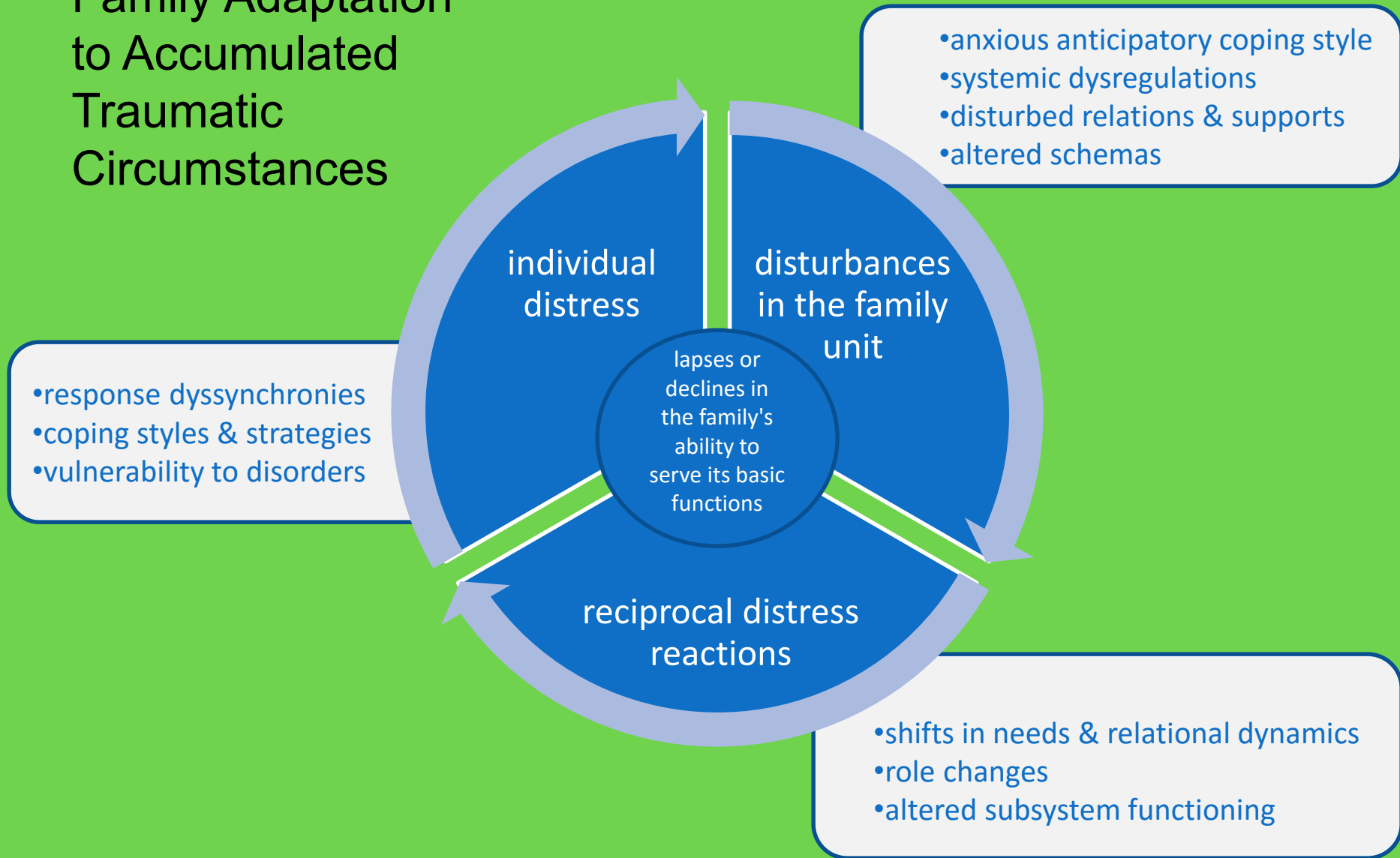
We can think of survival tools as ways that any reasonable family would act in order to escape a threat or alleviate pain.

The Impact of Poverty and Trauma on Family Systems



Time* Acute and longer-term effects
 Individual development
 Family life cycle

Family Adaptation to Accumulated Traumatic Circumstances



(Kiser, Gardner, Strieder, Collins, & Connors, 2013)

Anxious Anticipatory Coping Style

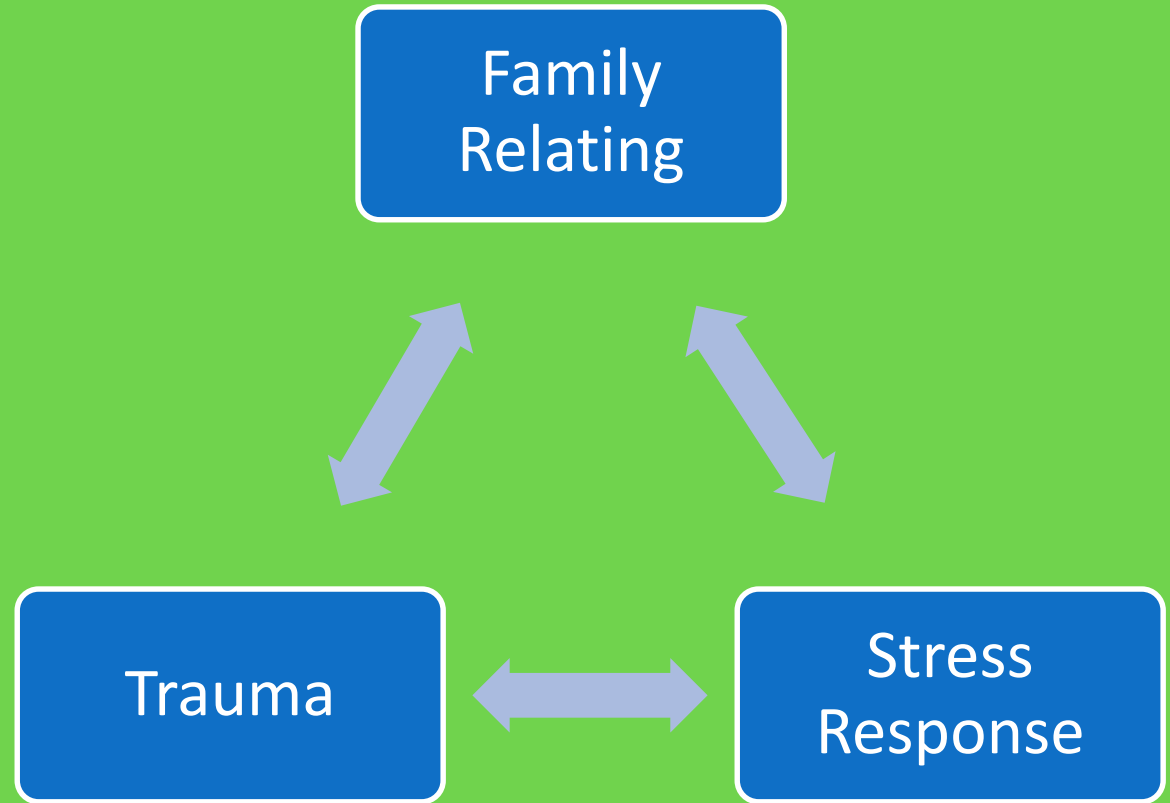
“anticipatory stress, by its very nature, is a cognitive construct which is ‘learned’ (Logan, Risner, & Muller, p. 9).”



Systemic Dysregulations

- Chronic wear and tear
- System no longer efficient at responding to the environment
- Alterations in physiological response within the family context
 - Safety system dysregulation
 - Difficulty modulating negative affect with heightened risk for conflict and violence

- Social context influences the stress response through physiological and cognitive processes



Disturbed Relations & Supports

Intra-familial

- Compromised family solidarity
- Poor communication channels
- Heightened levels of negativity and conflict
- Decreased relational security
- Family membership transitions or dissolution

Extra-familial

- Mistrust
 - negative representation of relationships
 - suspiciousness
- Heightened levels of negativity and conflict
- Social withdrawal and isolation

Supports

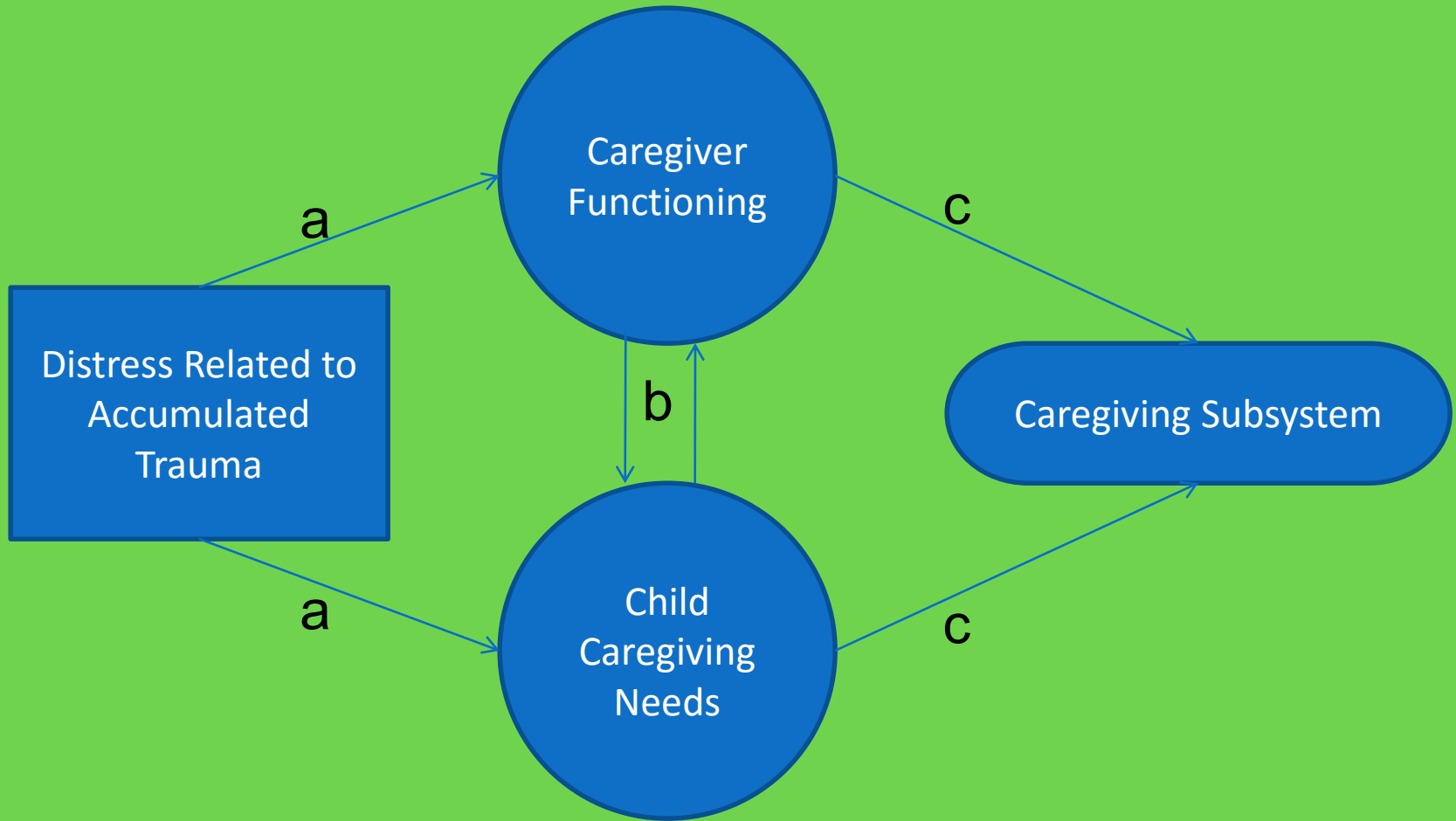
- Difficulty identifying resources
- Difficulty asking for or accepting support
- Compromised and burned out support network
- Limited or absent reciprocity
- Avoidance of help-seeking

Altered Schemas*

- Family schemas become consistent with traumatic exposures
 - biased family appraisals and inferencing regarding risk, danger and ability to cope
 - rules, beliefs, and world views changed

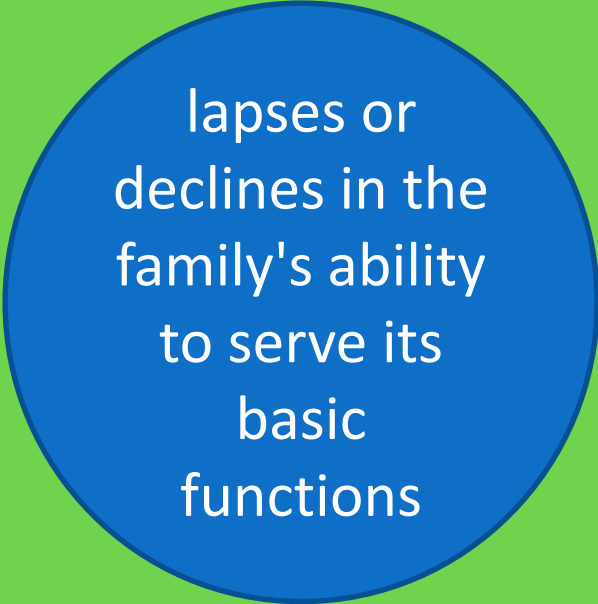
*may increase individual family members vulnerability to PTSD when exposed to trauma
(Weingarten, 2004)

Reciprocal Distress Reactions



Response Dyssynchronies

- Different traumatic exposures
- Differing appraisals of events and contexts
- Continuum of responses
- Individual, developmentally appropriate coping strategies and styles
- Developmental differences in response to trauma



lapses or
declines in the
family's ability
to serve its
basic
functions

1. Struggle, and often fail, to provide safety, stability, and emotional security
2. Low or altered source of identification or sense of belonging
3. Decreased intergenerational transmission of protection and attachment
4. Limited resources for relating to the larger community

STRATEGIES TO BUILD FAMILY RESILIENCE



- Capacity to cope with stress, overcome adversity and thrive despite (and perhaps even because of) challenges in life
- The capacity of a **dynamic system** to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development

Panter-Brick & Leckman (2013); Masten (2011)

Families Who Thrive

- Acceptance of stressor
- Family-centered locus of problem
- Solution-focused problem-solving
- High tolerance
- Commitment
- Open, effective communication
- High cohesion
- Flexible roles
- Structure & predictability
- Efficient resource utilization
- Self-efficacy
- Shared beliefs



**Intervention for Families
Impacted by Trauma**

Ties to Trauma Treatment

Focus	Components	Links to EBPs
Physiological	Enhancing safety	cognitive therapy, exposure therapy, anxiety management training, mindfulness, kinesthetic activities
	Stress inoculation skills	
	Exposure with response prevention	
	Mastery	
Cognitive	Psychoeducation	cognitive therapy, anxiety management training, evaluation/ reframing of cognitions
	Cognitive processing	
	Narrative	
Behavioral	Behavioral regulation (limits)	anxiety management training, kinesthetic activities
	Parenting skills	
Affective	Affective regulation	anxiety management training, direct exploration of the traumatic experience
	Narrative	
Social	Attachment	support, anxiety management training
	Narrative	

Protective Family Coping Resources

- complex behavioral repertoires and skills characterized across the following dimensions:
 - Deliberateness
 - Structure
 - Connectedness
 - Resource Seeking
 - Co-regulation & Crisis Management
 - Positive Affect, Memories, & Meaning

Practice-based Evidence on SFCR

- Sample
 - included 185 families, pre/post data on 103 families
- Feasible
 - works in multiple types of sites
 - with families who have experienced many types of severe adversity and trauma
- Tolerable
 - data indicates that 50% of families taking part in the 15-week model are attending 11 or more sessions
- Effective
 - children experience significant reductions in symptoms of PTSD and in behavior problems
 - families gain skills in coping and stress reduction, and demonstrate healthier functioning

(Kiser, et al, 2010; Kiser, et al, 2015)



- Family celebrations
- Traditions
- Daily routines

Family Rituals



Ritual Family Tree

Growing Your Tree

Holidays _____

Daily Routines _____

Vacation _____

Leisure _____

Reunions _____

Anniversaries _____

Religion and Religious Practices _____

Foods _____

Legends _____

Celebrations _____

Other _____

Sharing your heritage

Discuss a particular ritual or tradition that is special to your family.

What makes it special? Has it changed over time?

How can you make sure that this ritual continues in your family?

Shared Family Meals

Why are shared meals important?

- supports psychosocial development
- decreases behavior problems
- limits engagement in risky behavior
- improves academic achievement

Shared Family Meals

How do we make it work?

- Eat together often
- Limit distractions
- Make it special
- Talk about important stuff

What can
do to

What are you
learning about
in school?



Telling Family Stories

How Family Members Work Together to Tell a Good Story

- each member contributes
- give and take
- reflectivity
- multiple viewpoints considered and integrated into a shared version
- both positive and negative affect is acceptable

Story-Telling Ideas

- “Do You Know?”
- Visioning
- Reminiscing
- Values clarification
- Moral dilemmas
- Stories along the family timeline
- Family heroes and villains



Healing Aspects of Trauma Narrative

“Telling the story of the trauma pain allows the other family members to help you continue the story while changing the story line in a way that results in a better ending”

- Lantz & Raiz, 2003, p.169

- Gradual exposure (approach vs. avoid)
- Desensitization/co-regulation
- Cognitive processing
- Re-construction of the story
- Integration of experience into coherent identity



“Are you ready to hear this, its an ear breaker.”

Daily Routines



Poverty

meeting basic needs + daily hassles =
high number of routines with
low value

“the stress potential of life events is most clearly seen in its ability to disrupt family routines and add to daily hassles”

-Fiese & Wamboldt, 2000, p. 410-411

Worksheet: Step 1

Developing Routines

Routines are the things we do the same way everyday, day after day. Routines can be developed by breaking certain activities down into steps and deciding what, when, and where each activity is done.

Pick a time of day when you need to get something done on a regular basis. Getting going in the morning, getting ready for bed are some examples. Break this activity down into the small steps it takes to get the job done. Then write out the when and where of each step. Be very specific as you fill in each box.

ROUTINE: _____



Steps	Who	When	Where
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Bedtime Routines

A regular bedtime and a good night's sleep are related to:



Behavior – when caregivers establish a regular bedtime, behavior problems go down.

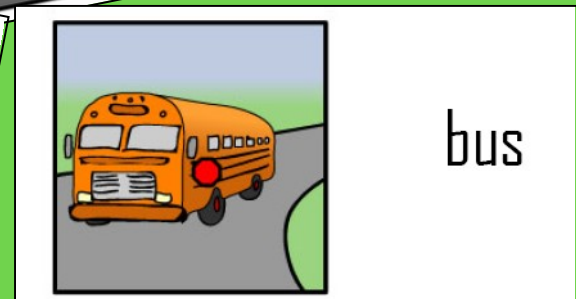
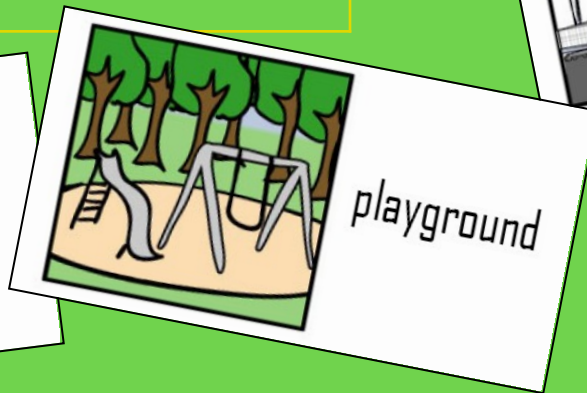
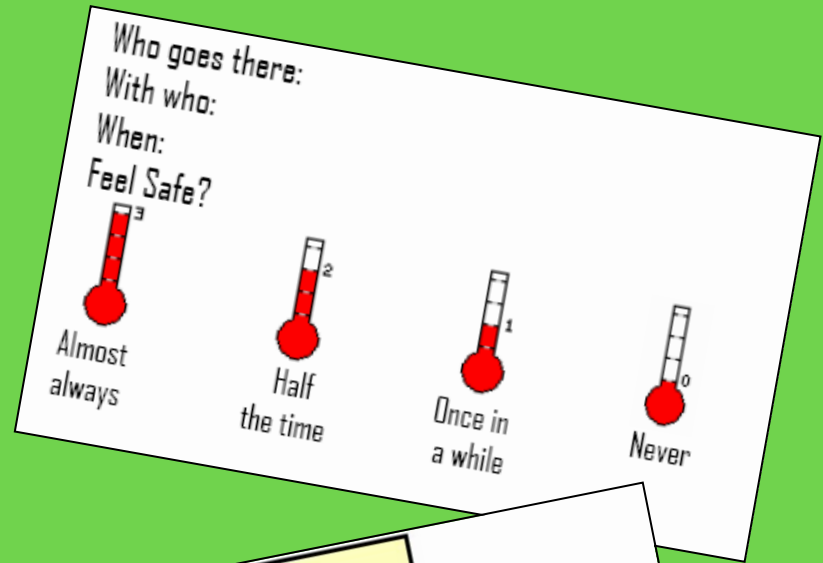


Regulation – structured nighttime activities may be associated with physiological and emotional regulation.

Anticipatory Anxiety and Safety

Safety Mapping Activity

Invite the family to draw a map of their community/neighborhood. Identify places, rooms, houses, schools, stores, hospitals, churches, relatives' and friends' homes, etc. Include the place(s) where violence has occurred and places the family considers safe.



Stress Inoculation

- Teaching relaxation skills
 - Focused or controlled breathing
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
 - Safe place imagery
 - Mindfulness
 - Other calming activities
- Establishing a relaxation routine



Communicating Values

- Clarification of family values

Here are some values that some families think are important:

Family time

Love

Respect

Sharing

Affection

Privacy

Religion

Education

Fun

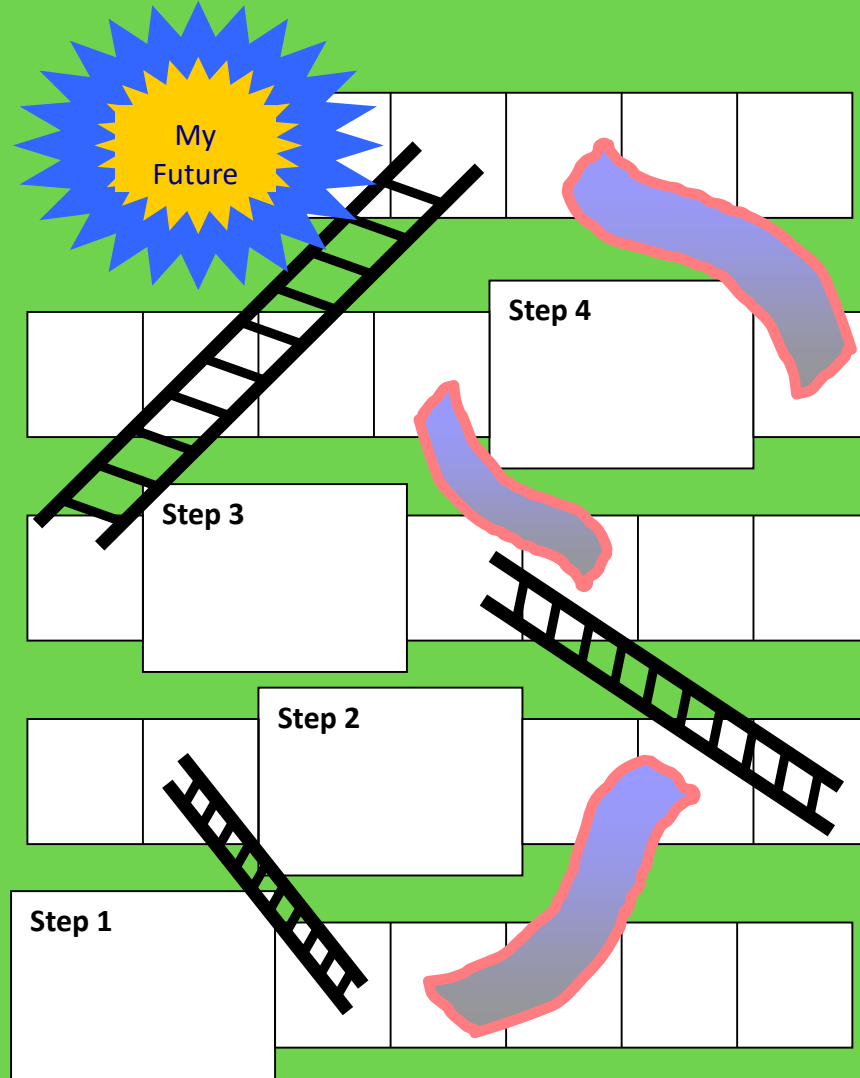
Money

Work

Home

- Living our values

Path to My Future



Child-friendly Activities to Teach about Problem-Solving

Harold and the Purple Crayon

By Crockett Johnson

So he put a frightening dragon under the trees to guard the apples.

It was a terribly frightening dragon.

It even frightened Harold. He backed away.

His hand holding the purple crayon shook.

Suddenly he realized what was happening.

But by then Harold was over his head in an ocean.

He came up thinking fast.

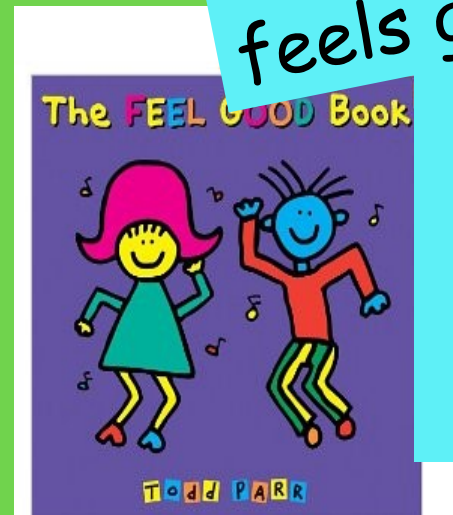
And what did he draw?



Adding to the Family Scrapbook

Making Positive Memories

- Play
- Positive experiences
- Affection
- Laughter



“Getting tickled
feels good”

What
feels
good to
you?

Fun & Laughter Promote Resilience



- Fun and laughter help people relax physically and mentally.
 - Laughter, like mild exercise, increases blood flow and exercises the muscles.
 - Fun and laughter help people see the light side of stressful situations.
- Fun and laughter help us develop a positive, optimistic outlook on life. Humor helps us see the “big picture,” notice the good as well as the bad, and create positive visions of the future.
- Humor, laughter, and family fun build positive family relationships, which are central to healthy development.

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