



Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: What Happens When Childhood is Not Safe

Louise Godbold
Co-Executive Director



Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES)



Adverse Childhood Experiences

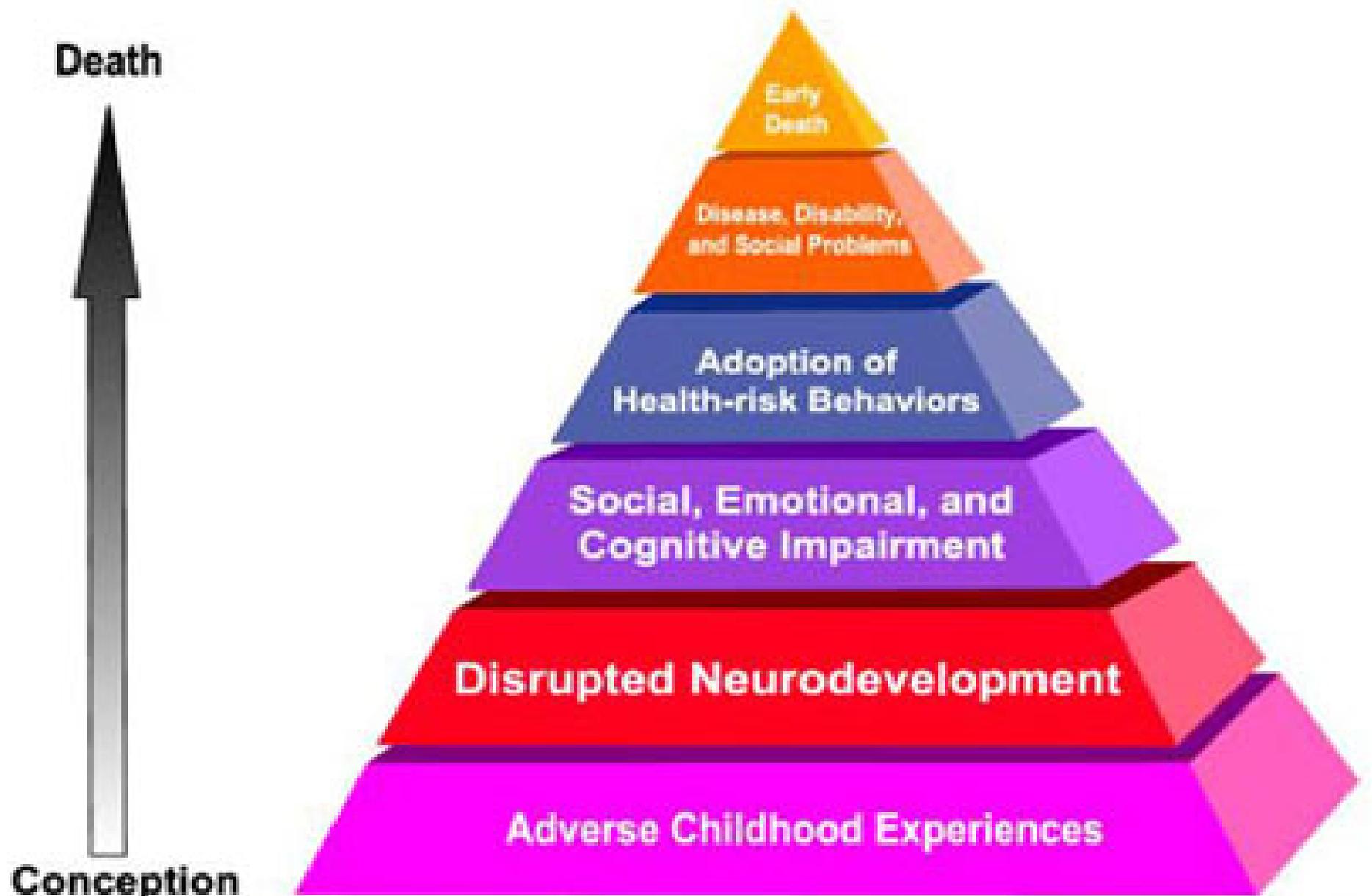
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
- An incarcerated household member
- Someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal
- Mother is treated violently
- One or no parents
- Emotional or physical neglect



ACEs First Question:

“Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often...

Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?”



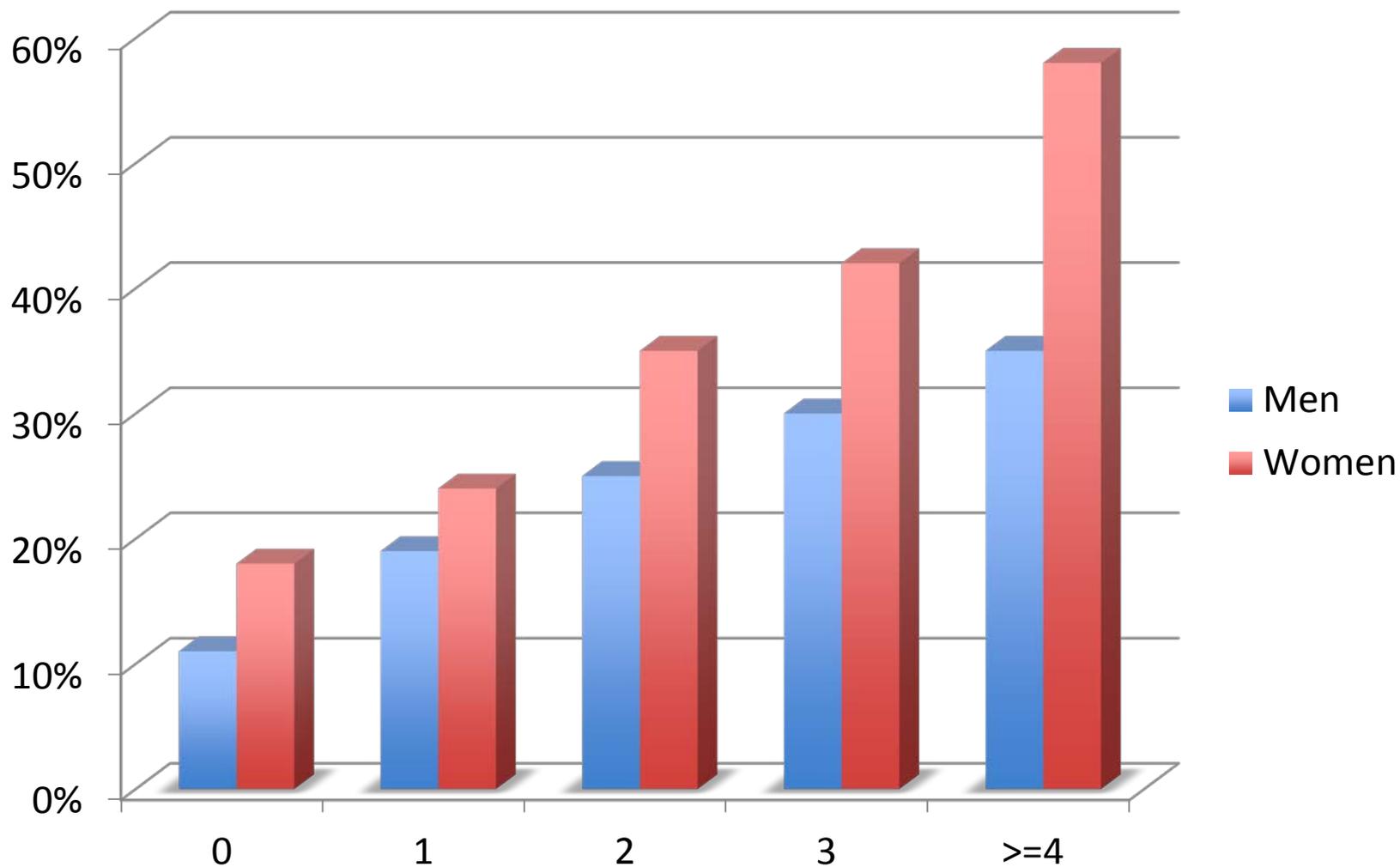
Mechanisms by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

Social & Historical ACEs

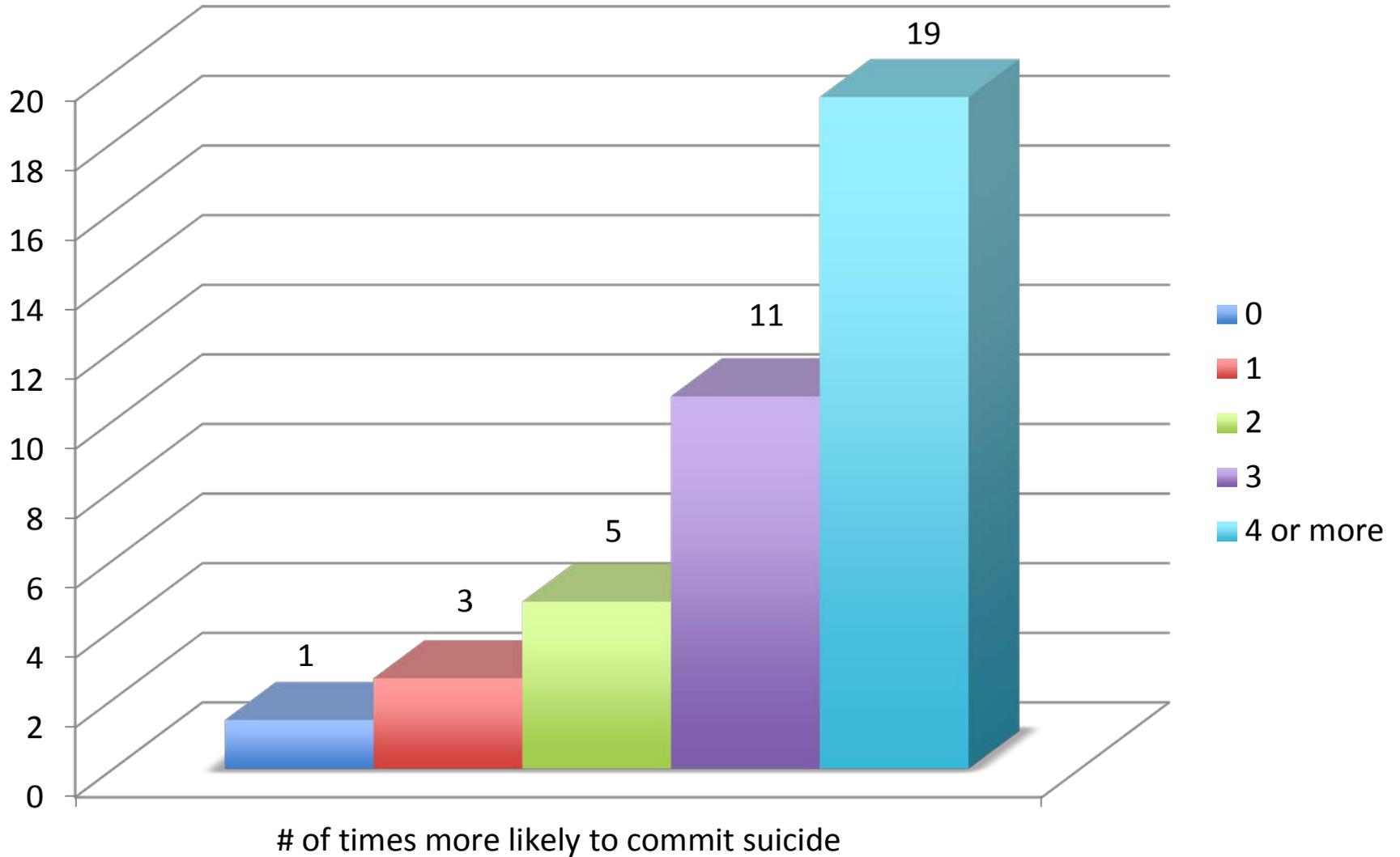
- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Community violence
- Racism
- Homophobia
- Forced separation



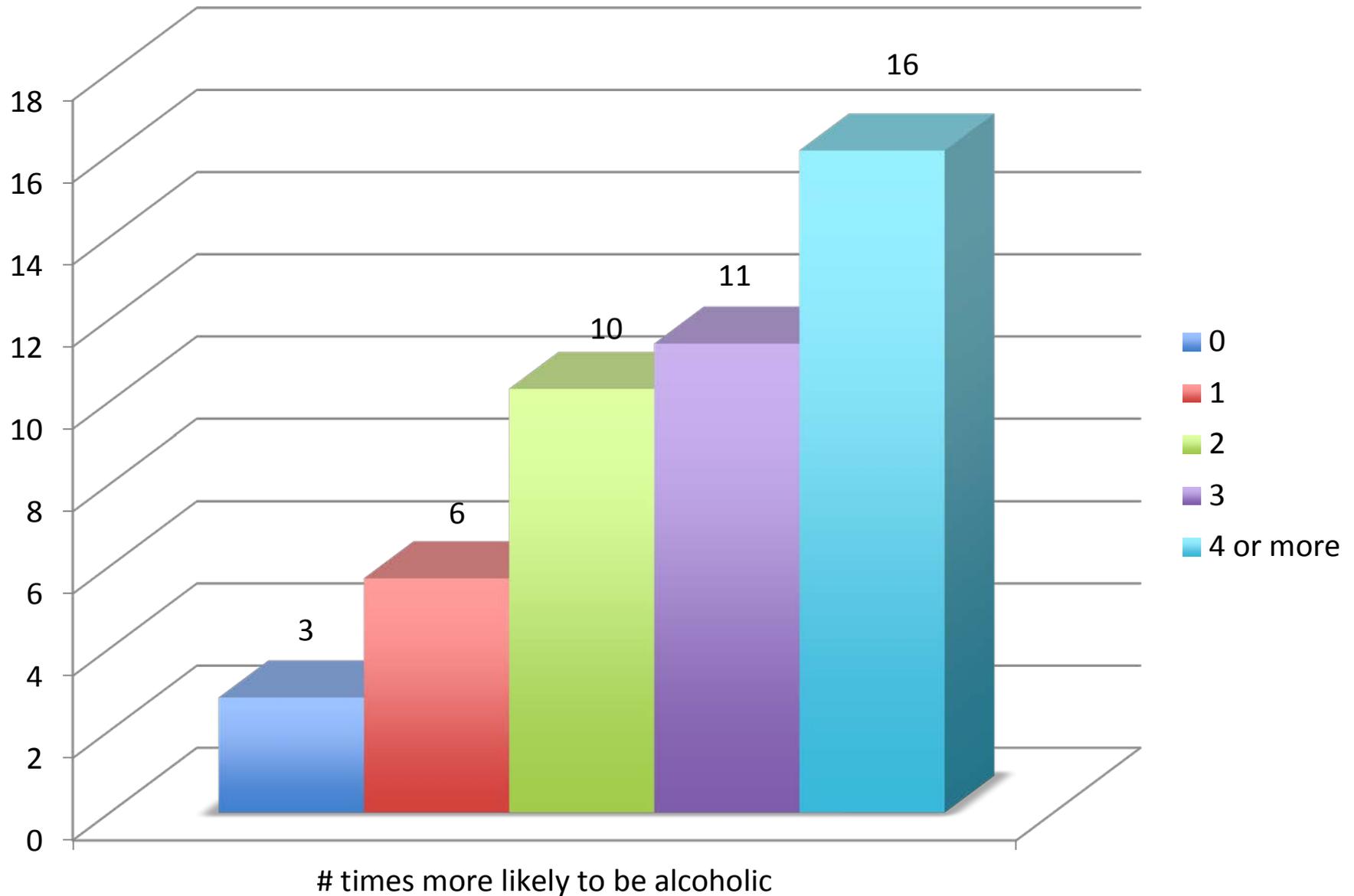
ACES Score and Chronic Depression



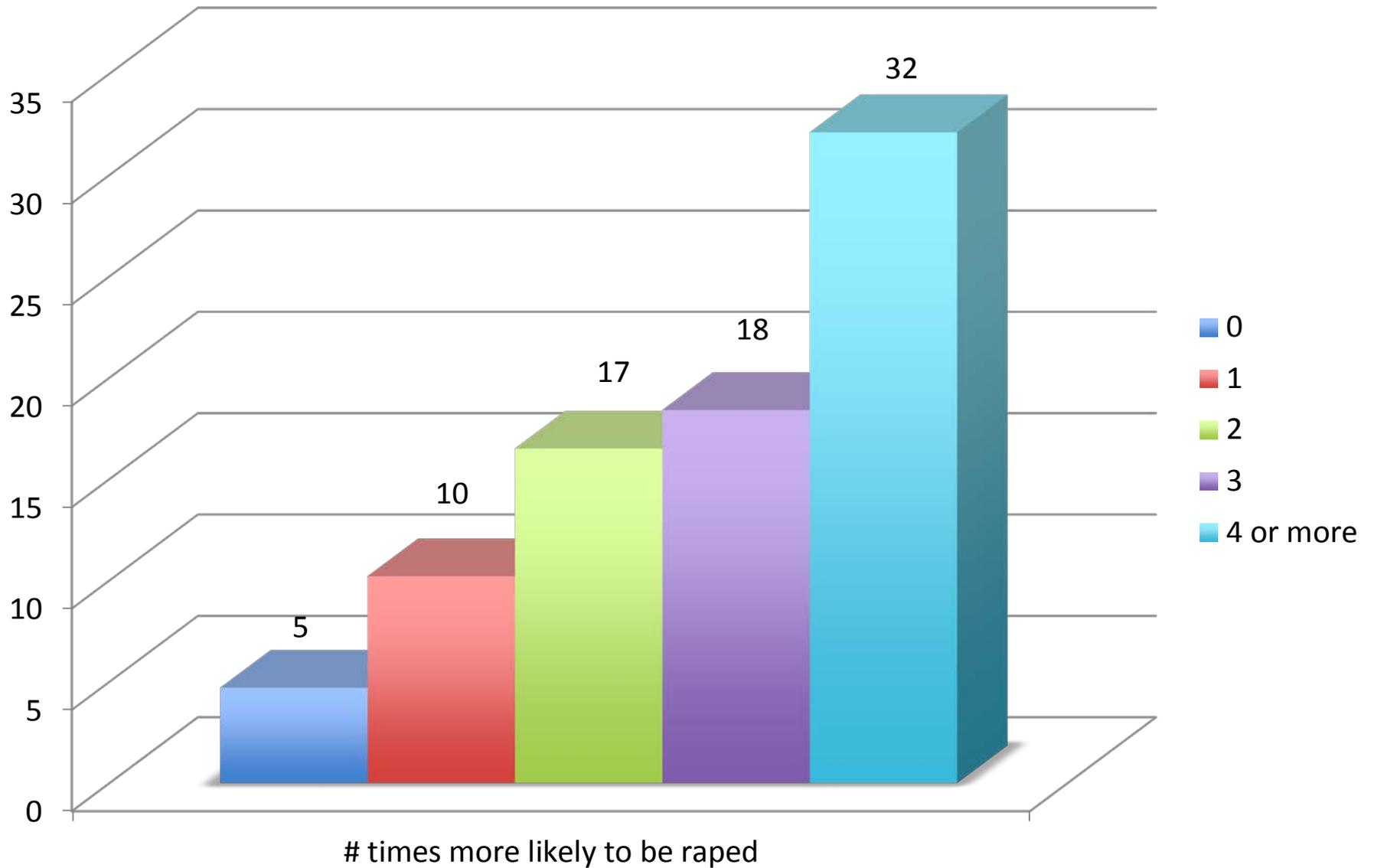
ACES Score and Suicide



ACES Score and Likelihood of Alcoholism



ACES Score and Rape



ACEs Increase Likelihood of Heart Disease*

- Emotional abuse 1.7x
- Physical abuse 1.5x
- Sexual abuse 1.4x
- Domestic violence 1.4x
- Mental illness 1.4x
- Substance abuse 1.3x
- Household criminal 1.7x
- Emotional neglect 1.3x
- Physical neglect 1.4x





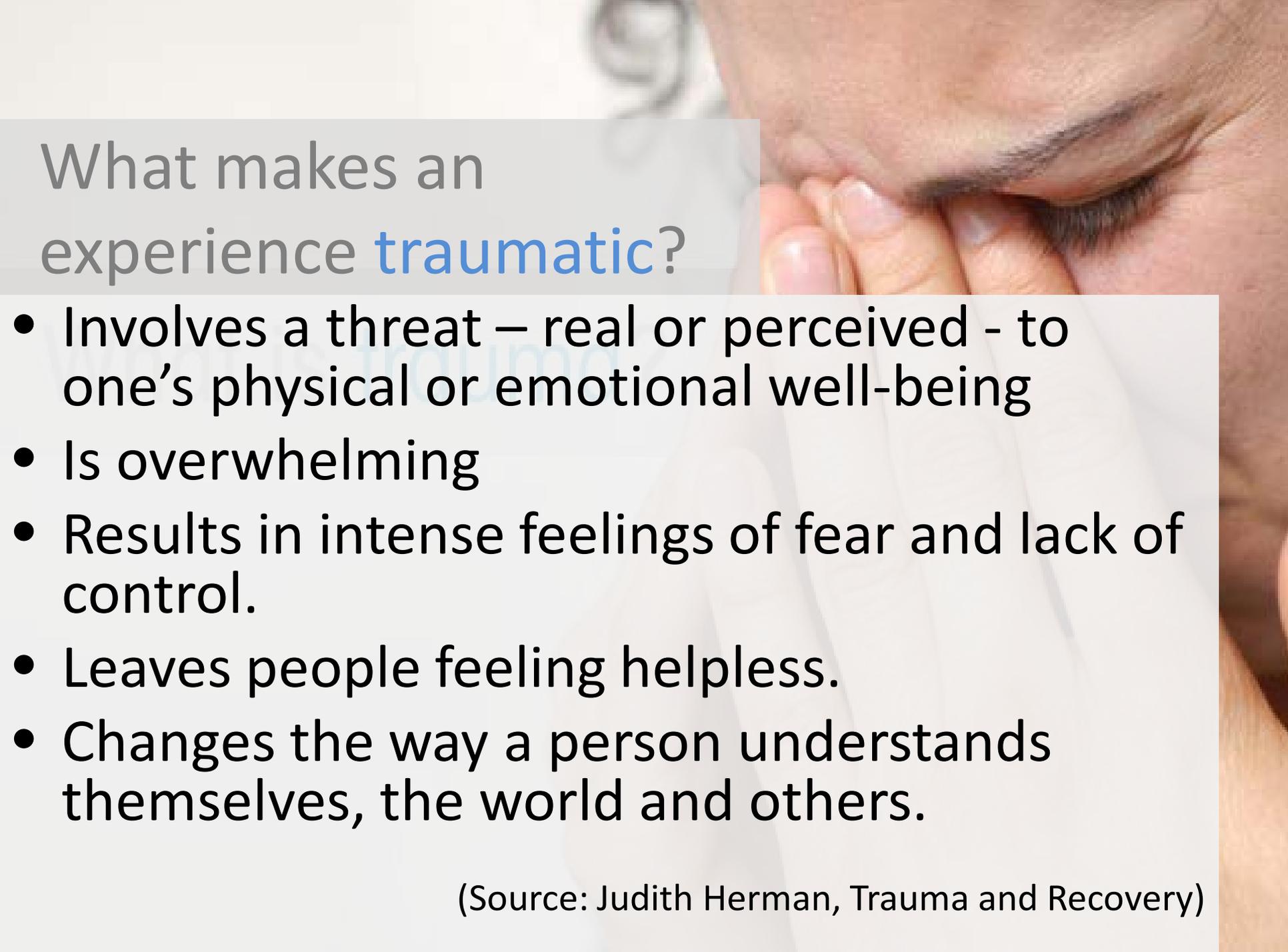
**6+ ACEs =
early death**

Av. died at
60 vs. 79 yrs

...without intervention

What is **trauma**?





What makes an experience **traumatic**?

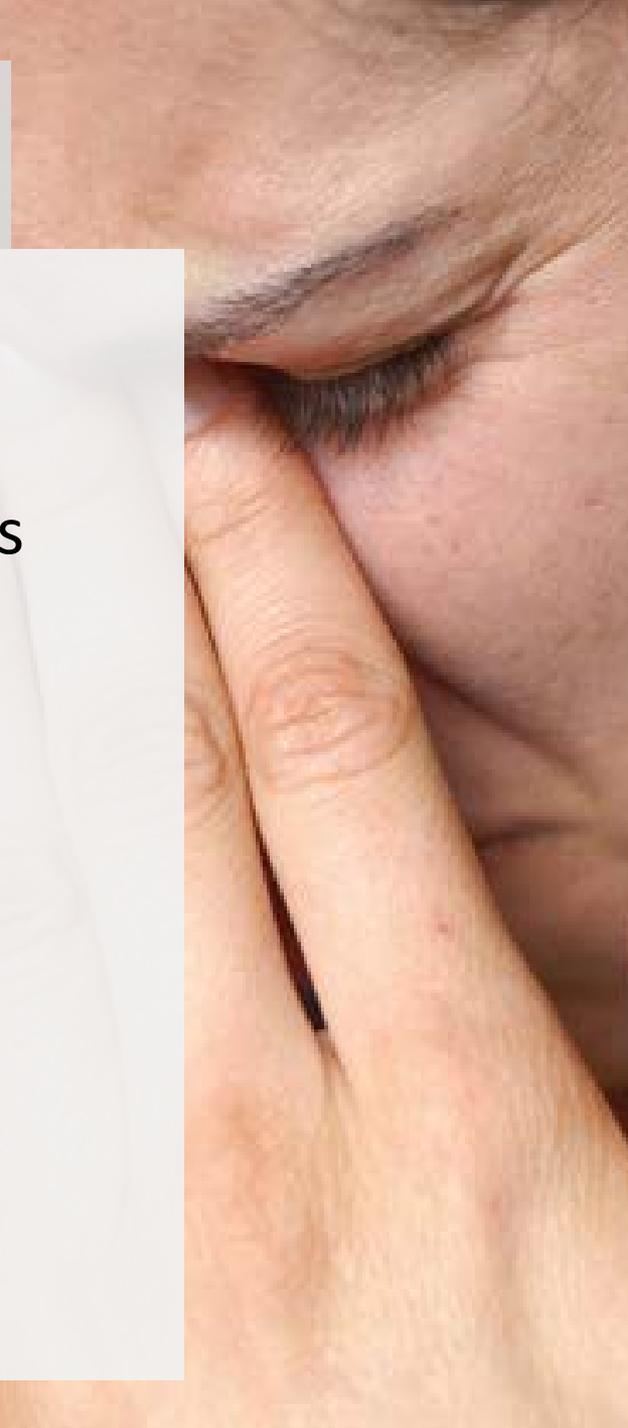
- Involves a threat – real or perceived - to one's physical or emotional well-being
- Is overwhelming
- Results in intense feelings of fear and lack of control.
- Leaves people feeling helpless.
- Changes the way a person understands themselves, the world and others.

(Source: Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery)

Intergenerational Trauma

- Slavery and colonization
- Holocaust/genocide survivors
- Survivors of catastrophic natural disasters
- Imprisonment
- Forced displacement
- Trafficking
- Domestic violence
- Physical, emotional and sexual abuse

All trauma is intergenerational unless it is healed!



Complex Trauma:

“Subjection to a totalitarian control over a prolonged period. Examples include hostages, prisoners of war and concentration camp survivors.”

Trauma and Recovery
Judith Herman, M.D.

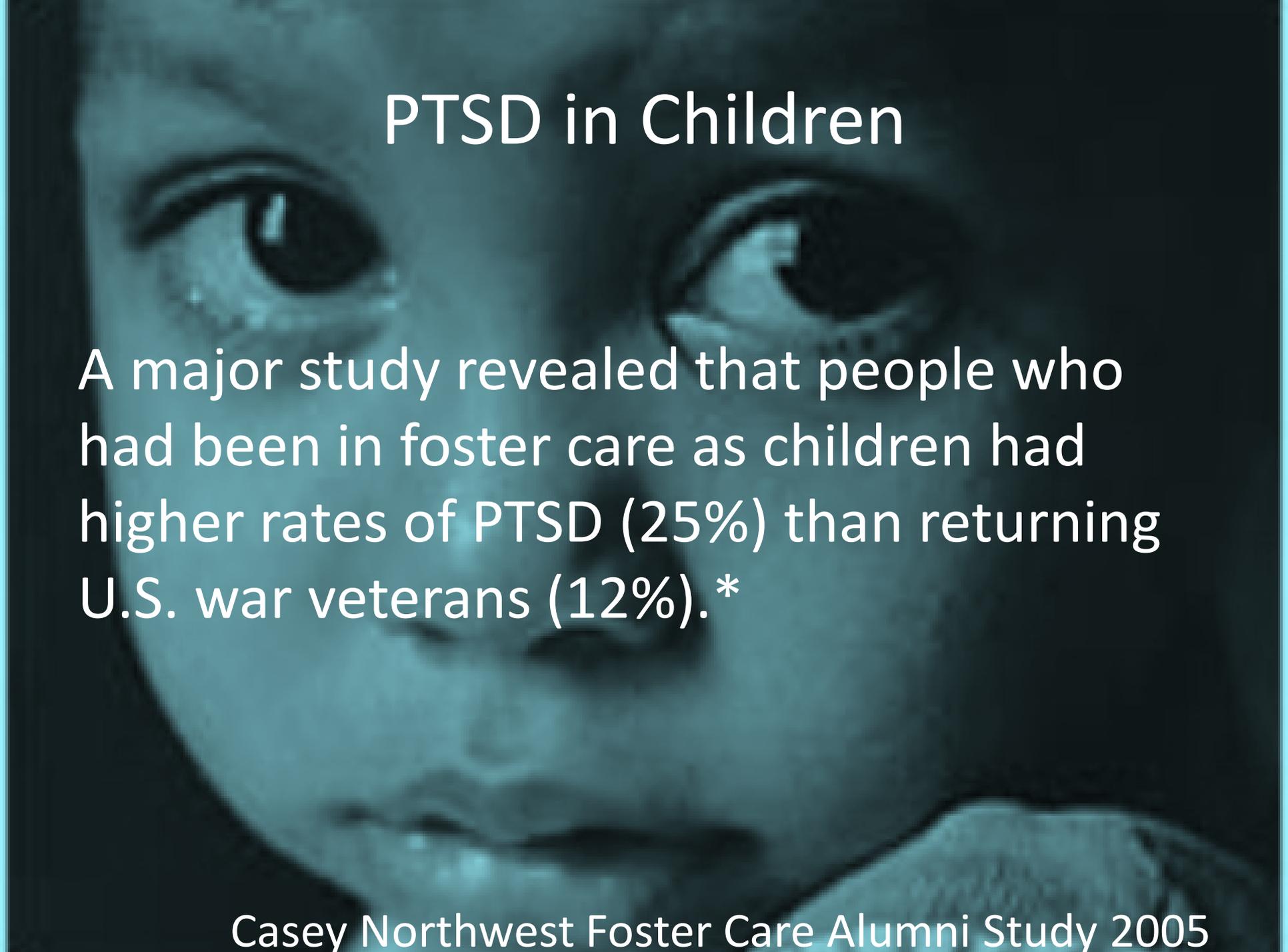




Developmental Trauma

“Where trauma meets attachment”

- Dr. Bessel van der Kolk

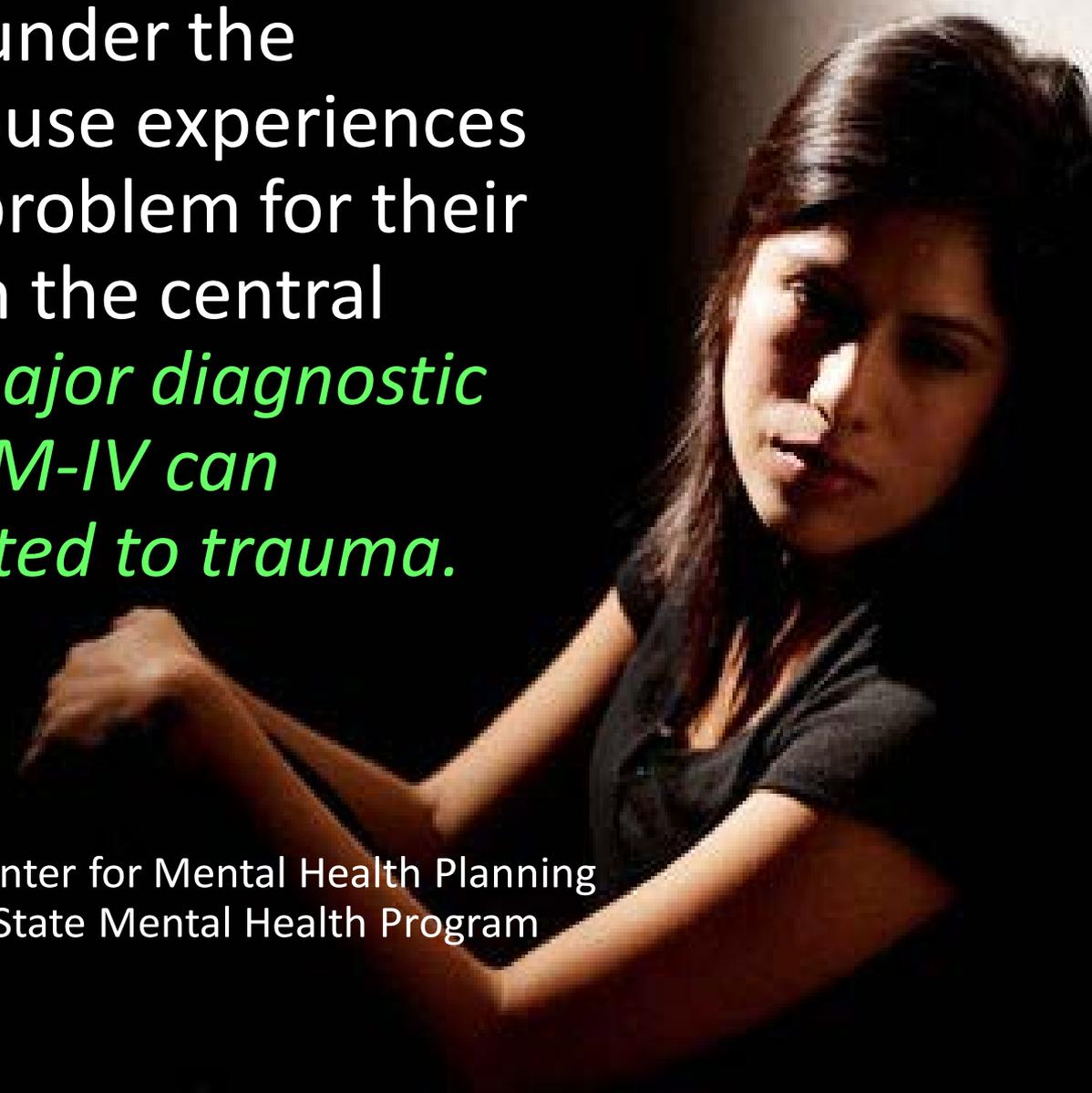


PTSD in Children

A major study revealed that people who had been in foster care as children had higher rates of PTSD (25%) than returning U.S. war veterans (12%).*

Providers may be under the impression that abuse experiences are an additional problem for their clients, rather than the central problem... *every major diagnostic category in the DSM-IV can sometimes be related to trauma.*

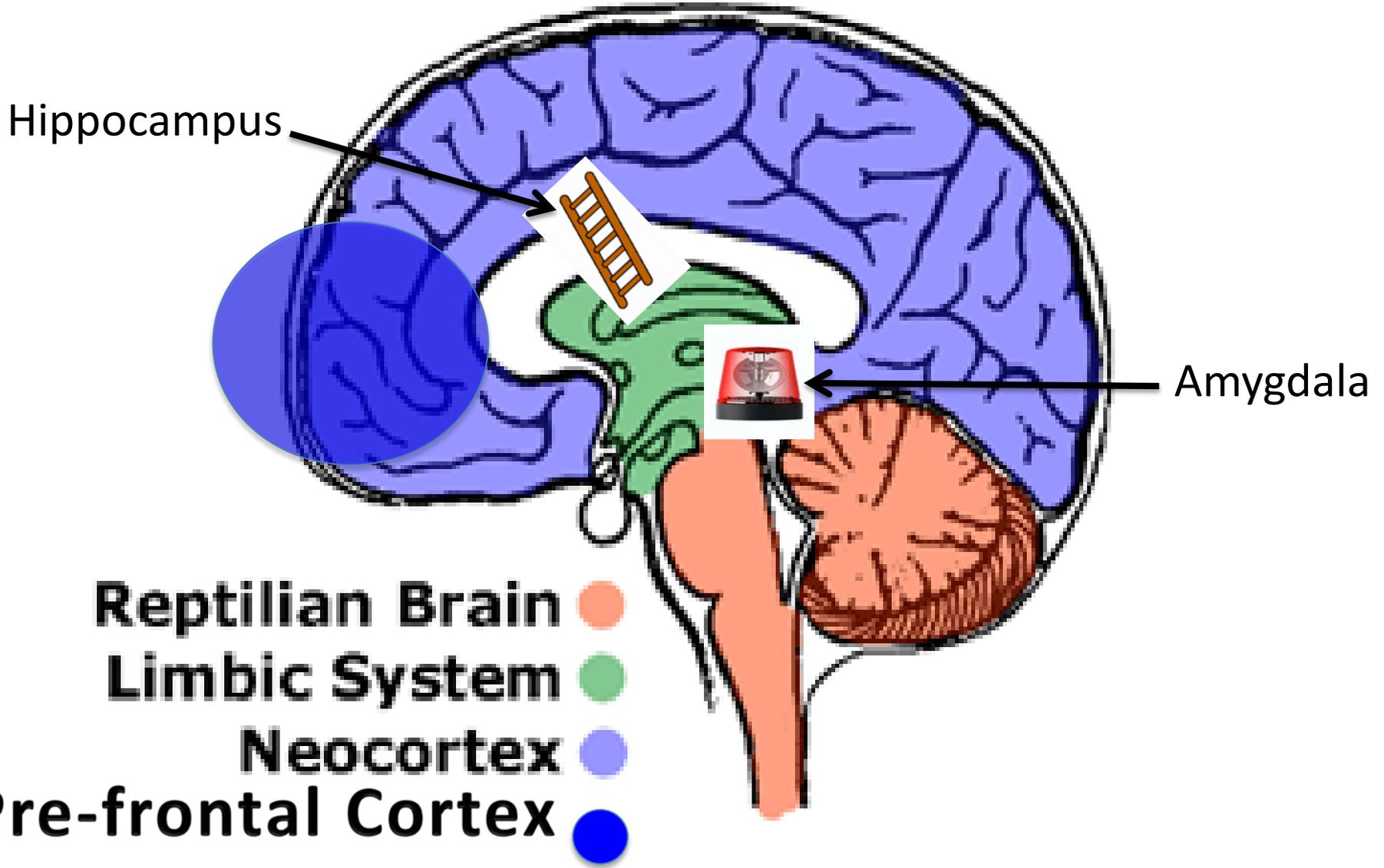
National Technical Assistance Center for Mental Health Planning
and the National Association of State Mental Health Program
Directors





The Brain and Toxic Stress

The Triune Brain



Three Types of Stress

Positive

Brief increases in heart rate,
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable

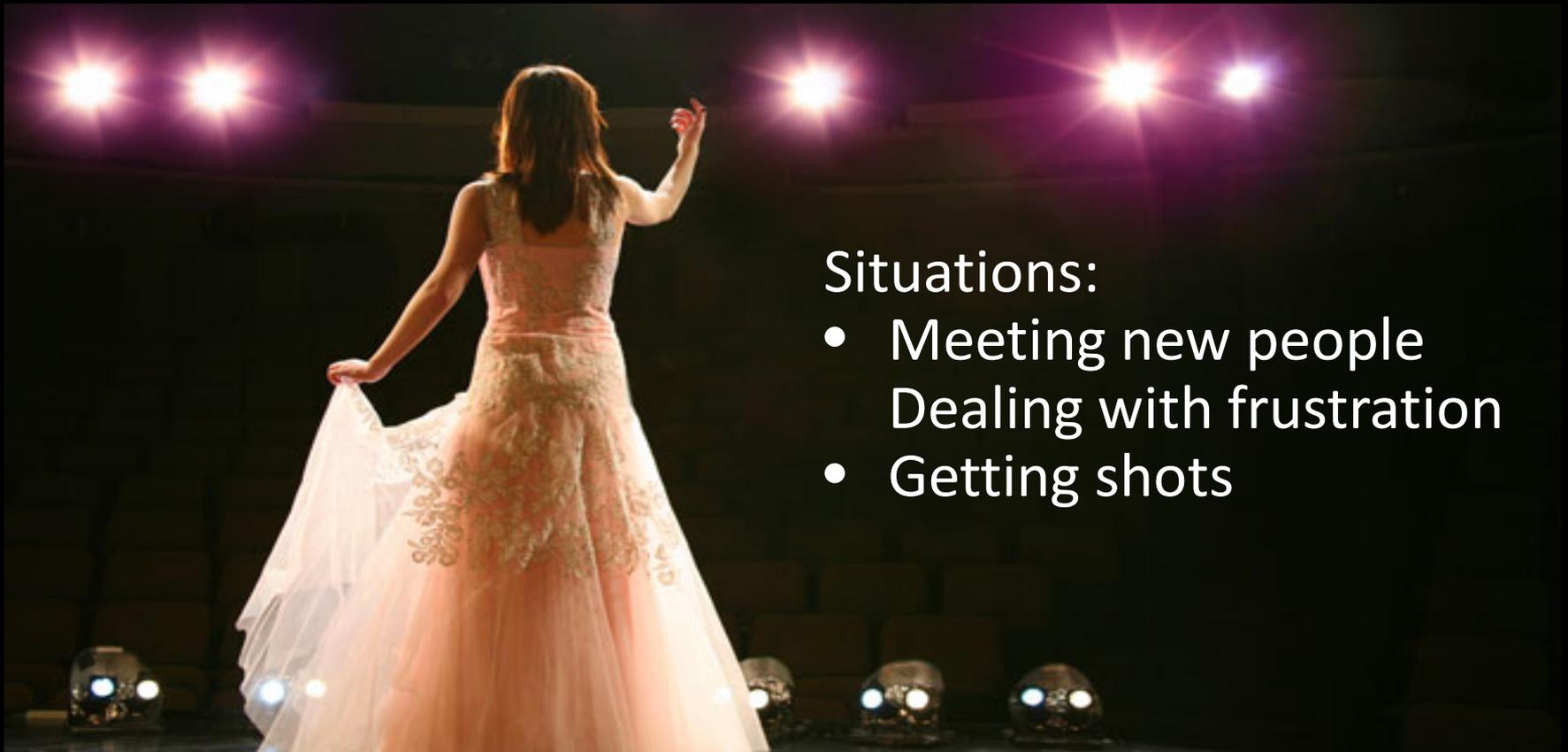
Serious, temporary stress responses,
buffered by supportive relationships.

Toxic

Prolonged activation of stress response systems
in the absence of protective relationships.

Positive Stress

- Is a normal and essential part of healthy development
- Is moderate and short-lived
- Causes brief increases in heart rate or mild changes in stress hormone levels.



Situations:

- Meeting new people
- Dealing with frustration
- Getting shots

Tolerable Stress



- More severe, longer-lasting
- Activates the body's alert systems to a greater degree
- Brain and organs recover **if child has relationship with adults who can help the child adapt**
- Situations: loss of a loved one, parental divorce, a natural disaster, or a frightening injury

Toxic Stress



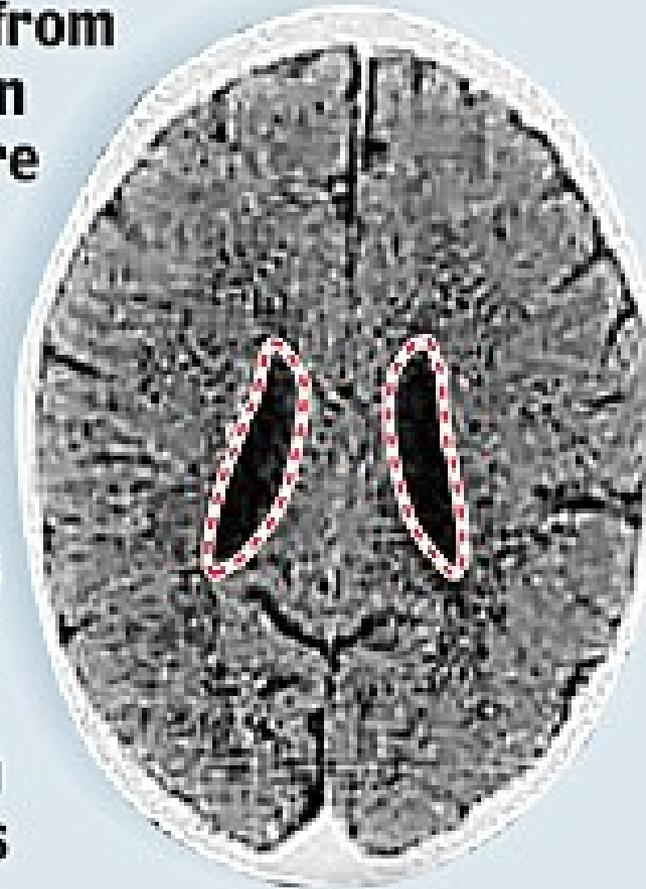
- Is severe and prolonged
- Absent protection of supportive relationships
- Disrupts brain architecture and leads to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, physical and mental health
- Situations: Physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, severe maternal depression, parental addiction, or family violence

NORMAL



These are the brains of two three-year-old children. The image on the left is from a healthy child while the image on the right is from a Romanian orphan who suffered severe sensory deprivation. The right brain is smaller and has enlarged ventricles - holes in the centre of the brain. It also shows a shrunken cortex - the brain's outer layer.

EXTREME NEGLECT





Stress and the Nervous System



THE EFFECTS OF HIGH CORTISOL LEVELS



Higher blood pressure



Lowers body's ability to fight off disease and infections



Increases blood sugar levels, which may affect people with diabetes or a family history of diabetes



Causes increase in fat storage, especially around the abdomen

All of which can contribute to an increased chance of heart problems.



Low levels of cortisol cause:

- Chronic fatigue (cortisol is needed to get you up in the morning)
- Early onset and increased aggression in boys
- Allergic responses (overactive histamine)
- Low blood pressure
- Skin discoloration
- Craving for salty food
- Foggy brain, mild depression

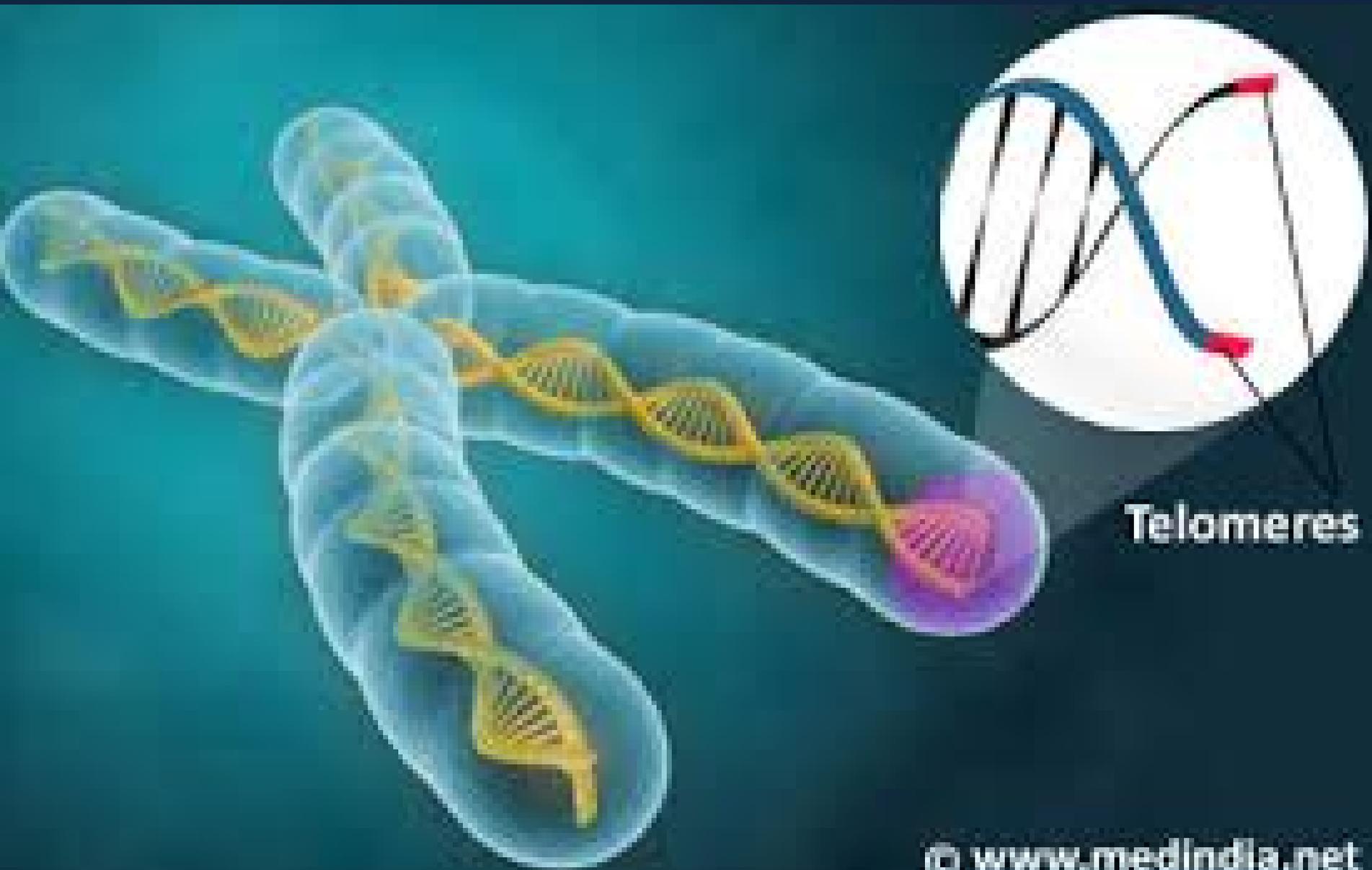




The Rescuing Hug



Stress on a Cellular Level



Telomeres



Second Hand Stress



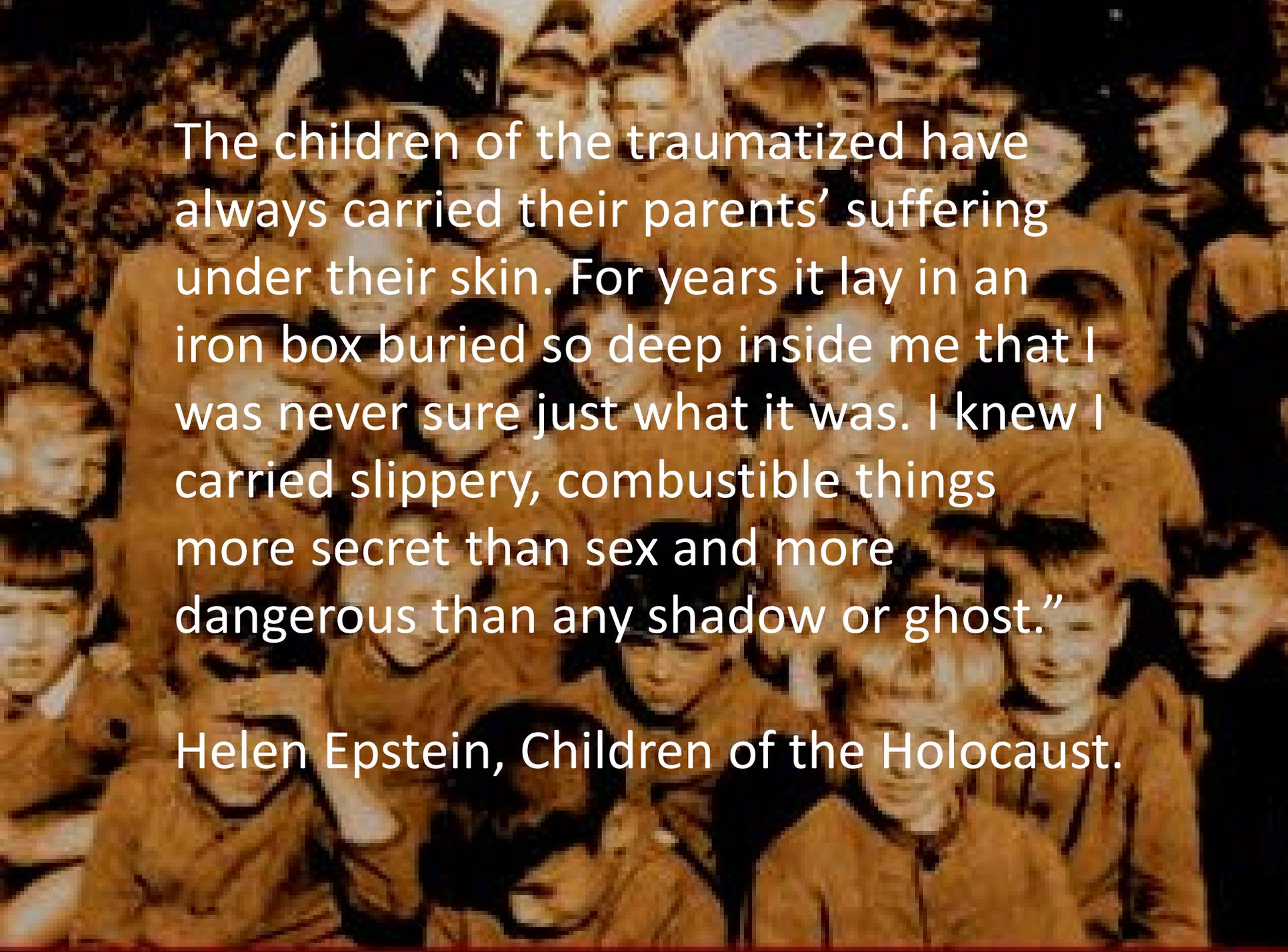
Epigenetics







Studies on humans suggest that children and grandchildren may have felt the epigenetic impact of such traumatic events such as famine, the Holocaust and the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

A large group of children, likely from a concentration camp, are shown in a photograph. They are wearing brown uniforms and are looking towards the camera. The image is used as a background for the text.

The children of the traumatized have always carried their parents' suffering under their skin. For years it lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was. I knew I carried slippery, combustible things more secret than sex and more dangerous than any shadow or ghost."

Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust*.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands, one holding a small, light-colored object, possibly a piece of fabric or a small toy, against a warm, orange-toned background. The lighting is soft and warm, creating a sense of intimacy and focus on the hands and the object they are holding. The background is a solid, warm orange color, which makes the hands and the object stand out.

Stress in Utero

- Stress hormones constrict oxygen to baby and can trigger early birth.
- Placenta (& baby's brain) contains enzyme that neutralizes stress hormones.
- When this barrier is weak or overcome by stress, a child will have a more easily activated amygdala (emotion and fear).

Stress 'Caught'

- Study with two groups of women. Those receiving negative feedback had elevated heart rates, so did babies when reunited with mother.
- Babies from high conflict homes respond to angry voices even when asleep.





Trauma Responses & Symptoms



Stone age brains



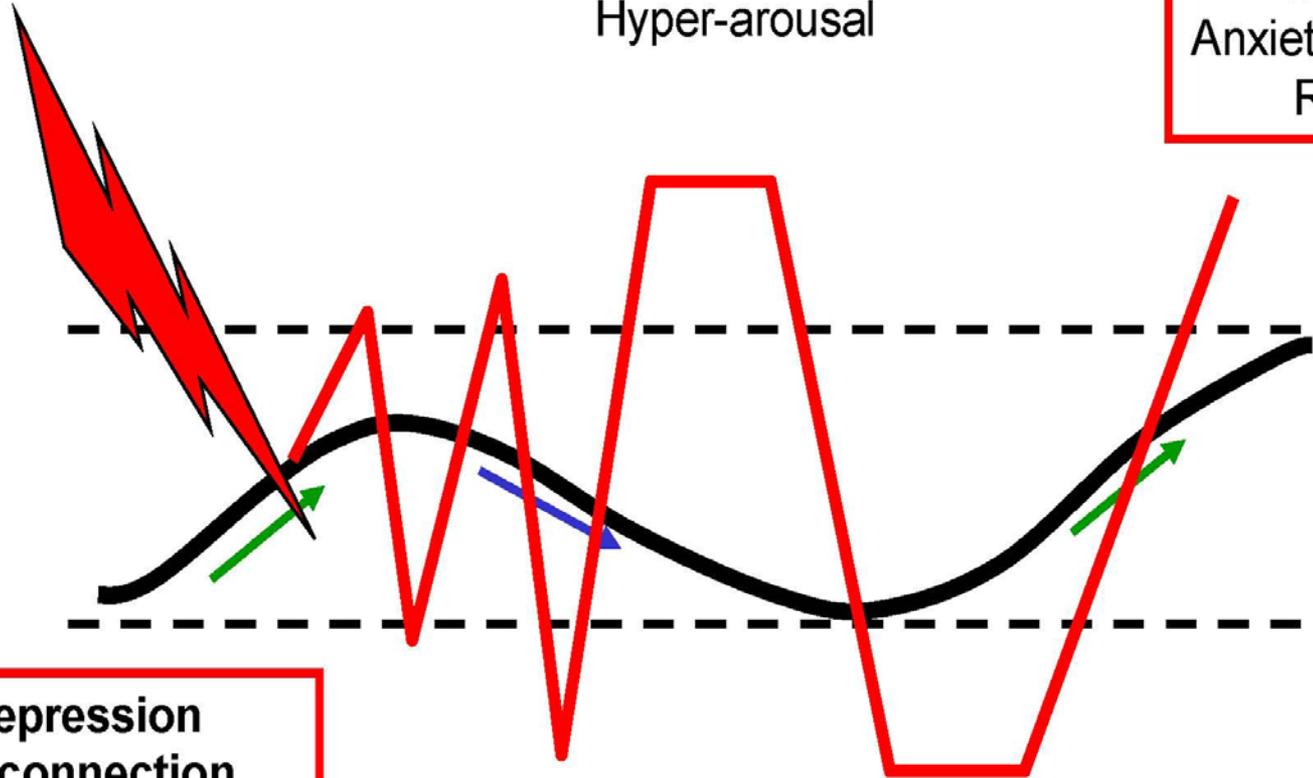
in the 21st century

Traumatic Event or Traumatic Triggers

Bumped out of Resilient Zone

Hyperactivity
Hypervigilance
Mania
Anxiety & Panic
Rage

Stuck on "High"
Hyper-arousal



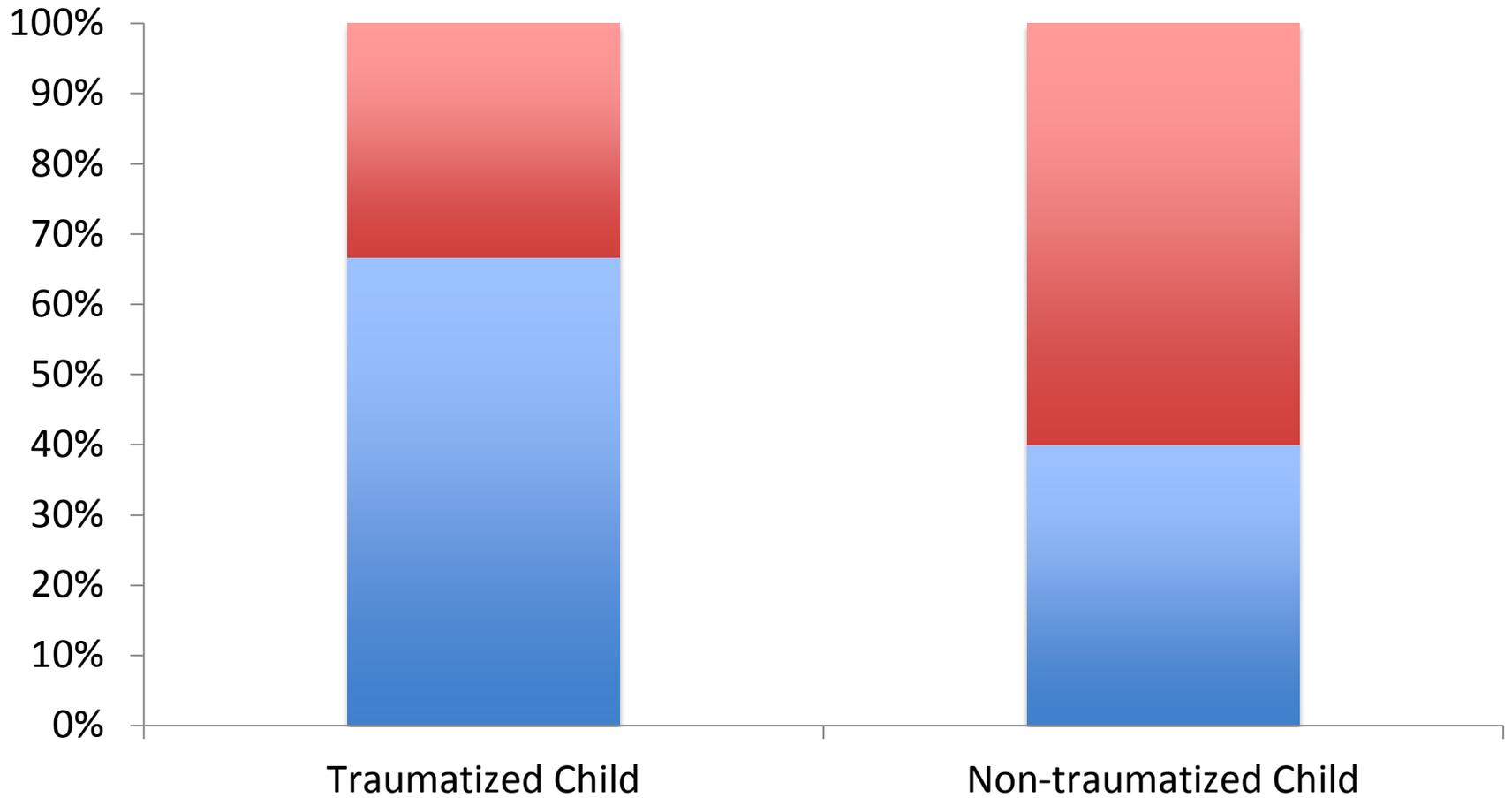
resilient zone
Balancemind™

Depression
Disconnection
Exhaustion/Fatigue
Numbness

Bumped out of Resilient Zone

Stuck on "Low"
Hypo-arousal

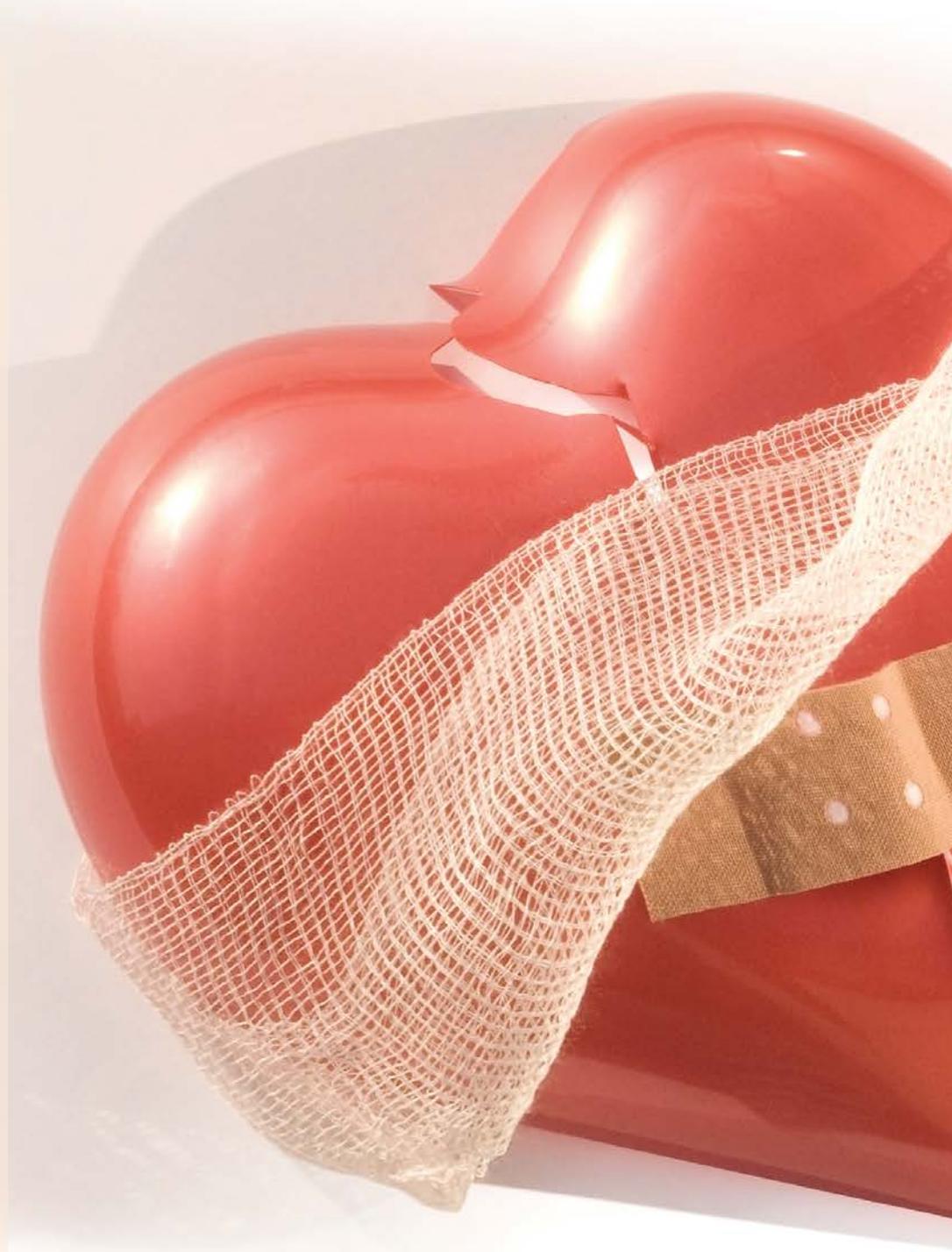
Window of Tolerance



Self Injury



- Driving drunk
- Picking fights
- Self denial
- Isolation
- Unhealthy eating
- Not going to doctor's
- Beating self up on inside



A cinematic still from a movie. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark uniform with a red stripe on the shoulder, looks back over her right shoulder with a serious expression. In the background, a man in a dark suit and red tie walks away from her down a brightly lit hallway. The word "Relationships" is overlaid in the center-right of the image.

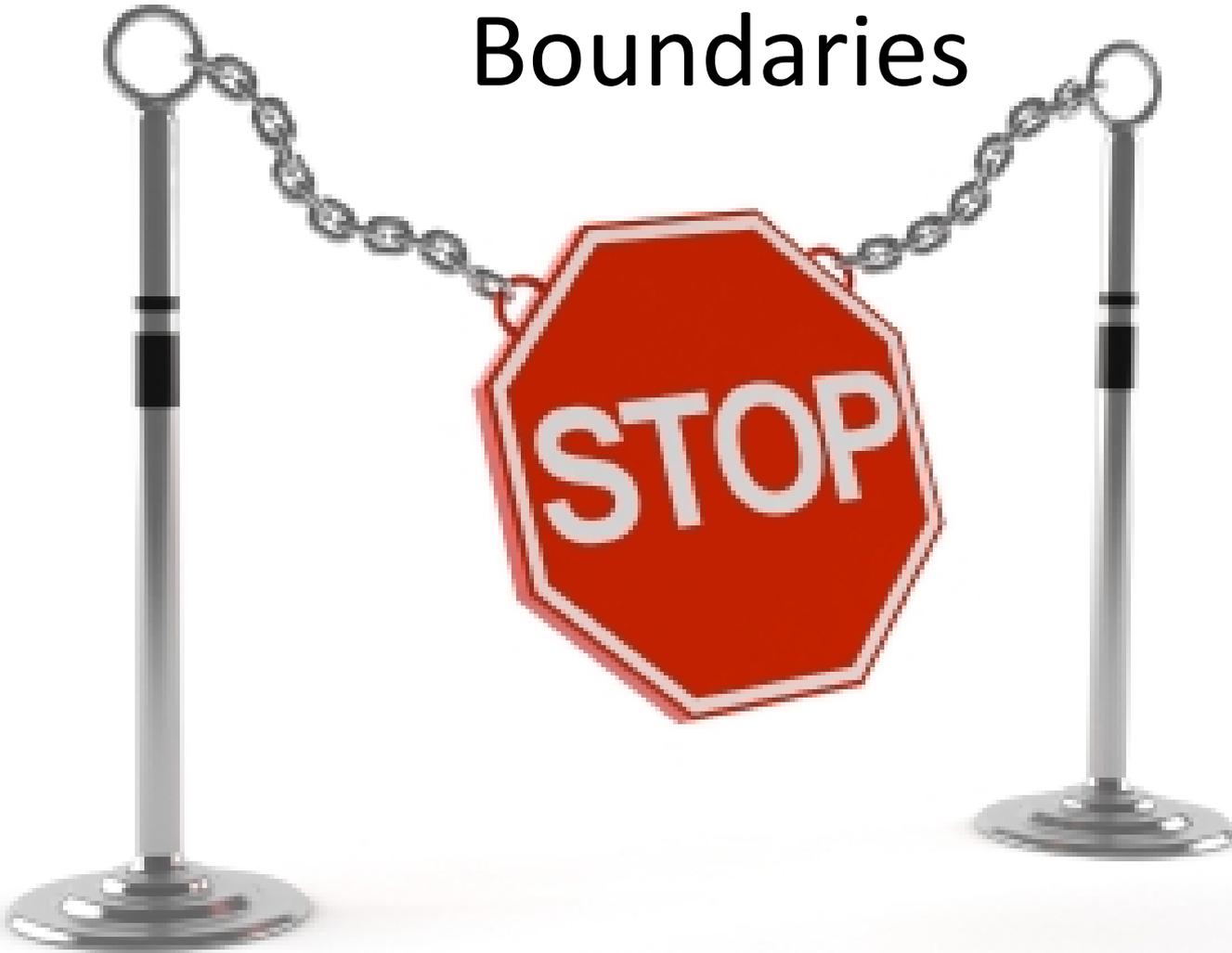
Relationships

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red jacket, is shown in profile, looking back over her right shoulder. She is in a crowded, brightly lit indoor setting, possibly a hallway or a public space. The background is blurred, showing other people in motion. The overall tone is warm and slightly hazy.

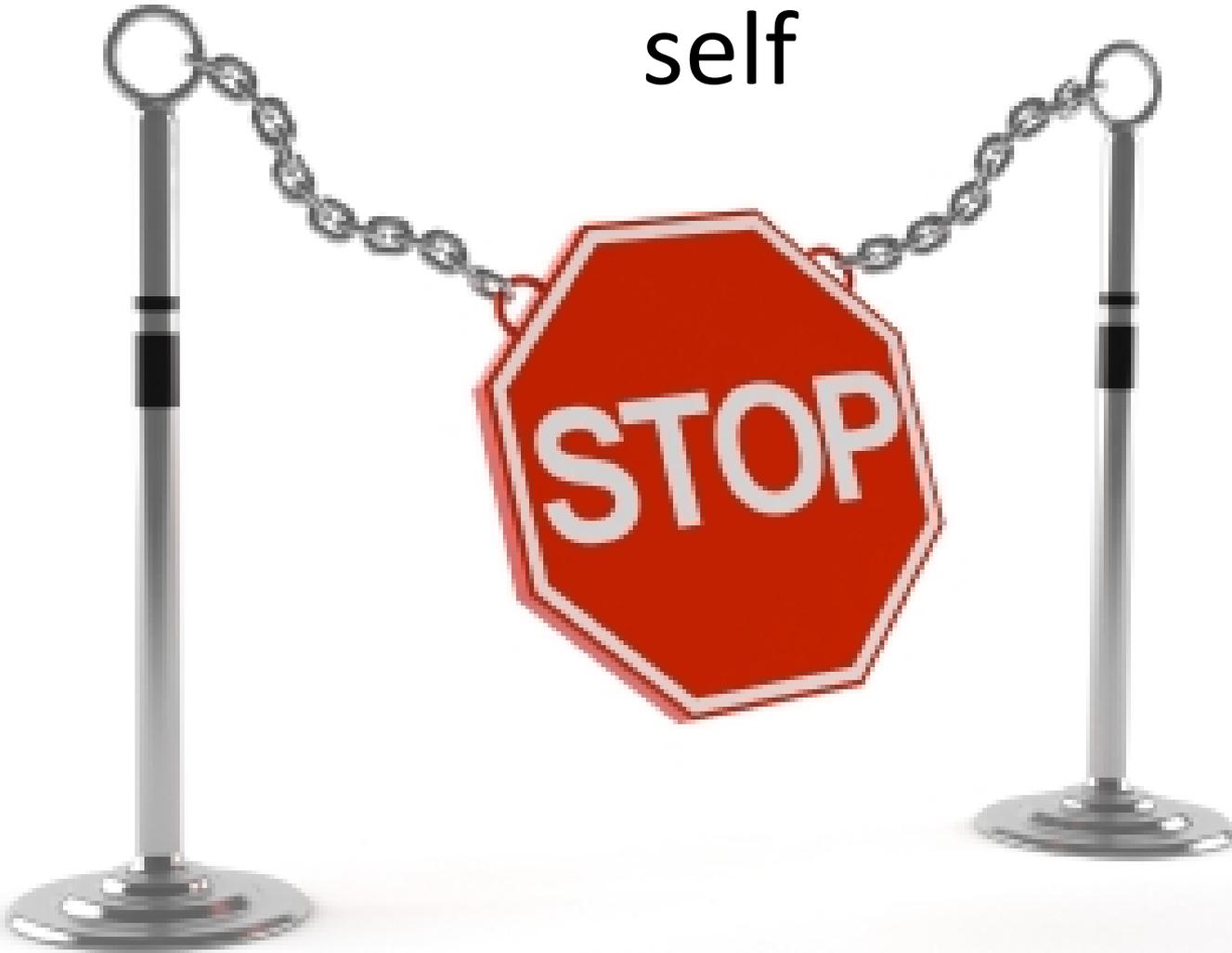
Don't trust anyone
who doesn't act
or look like you

Quickly
enmesh with
those who do

Boundaries



Not able to abide by limits set for
self



Sex



Avoid or go on binges
Feeling of being bad or rotten

Paranoia



Everyone's laughing
at me

Brief psychotic breaks



Loose it then
recover

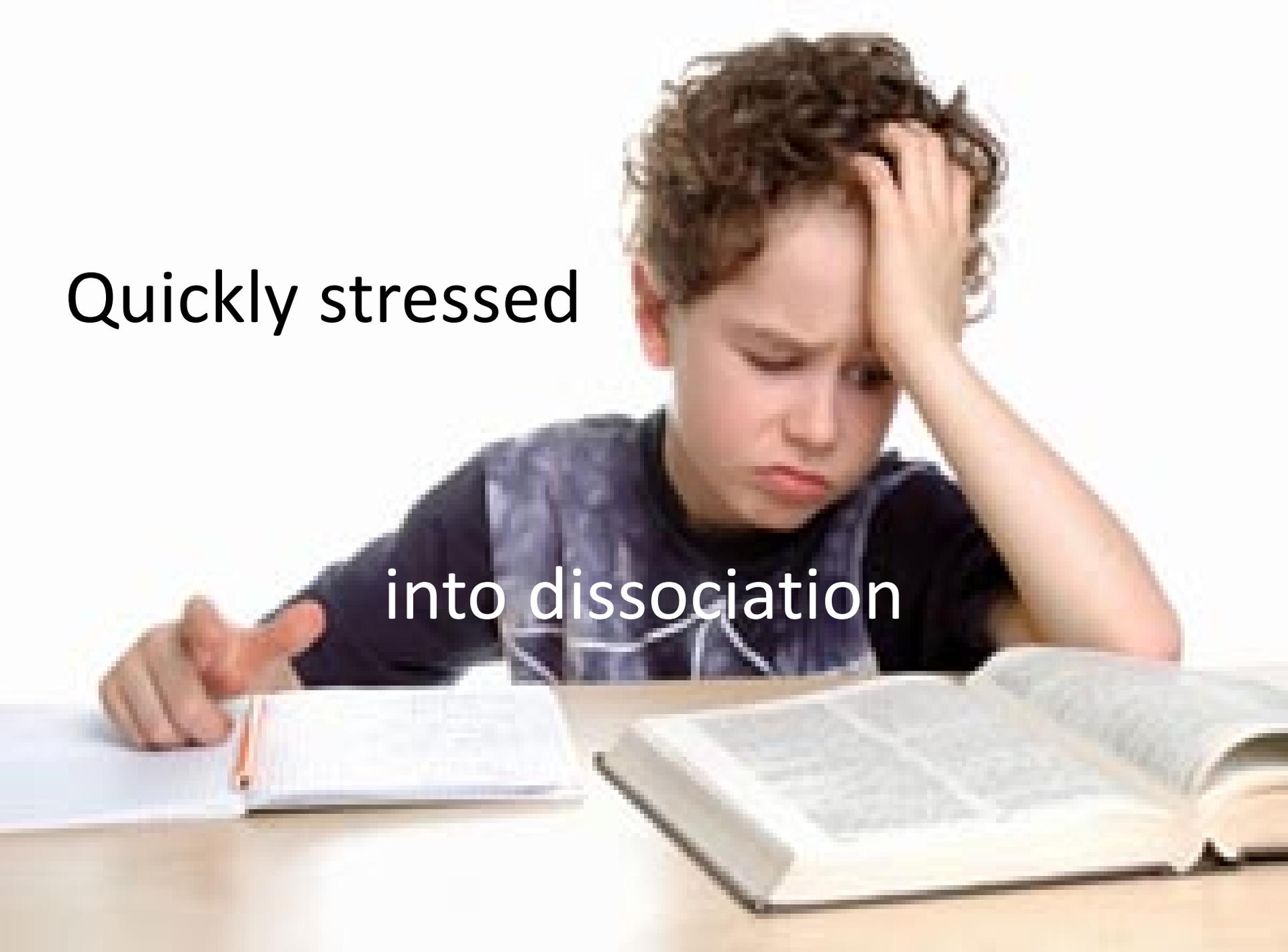


The body remembers

Somatic symptoms

Quickly stressed

into dissociation



Reenactment



If abandoned, create
scenarios of abandonment

Loss of Sense of Self

Faking it

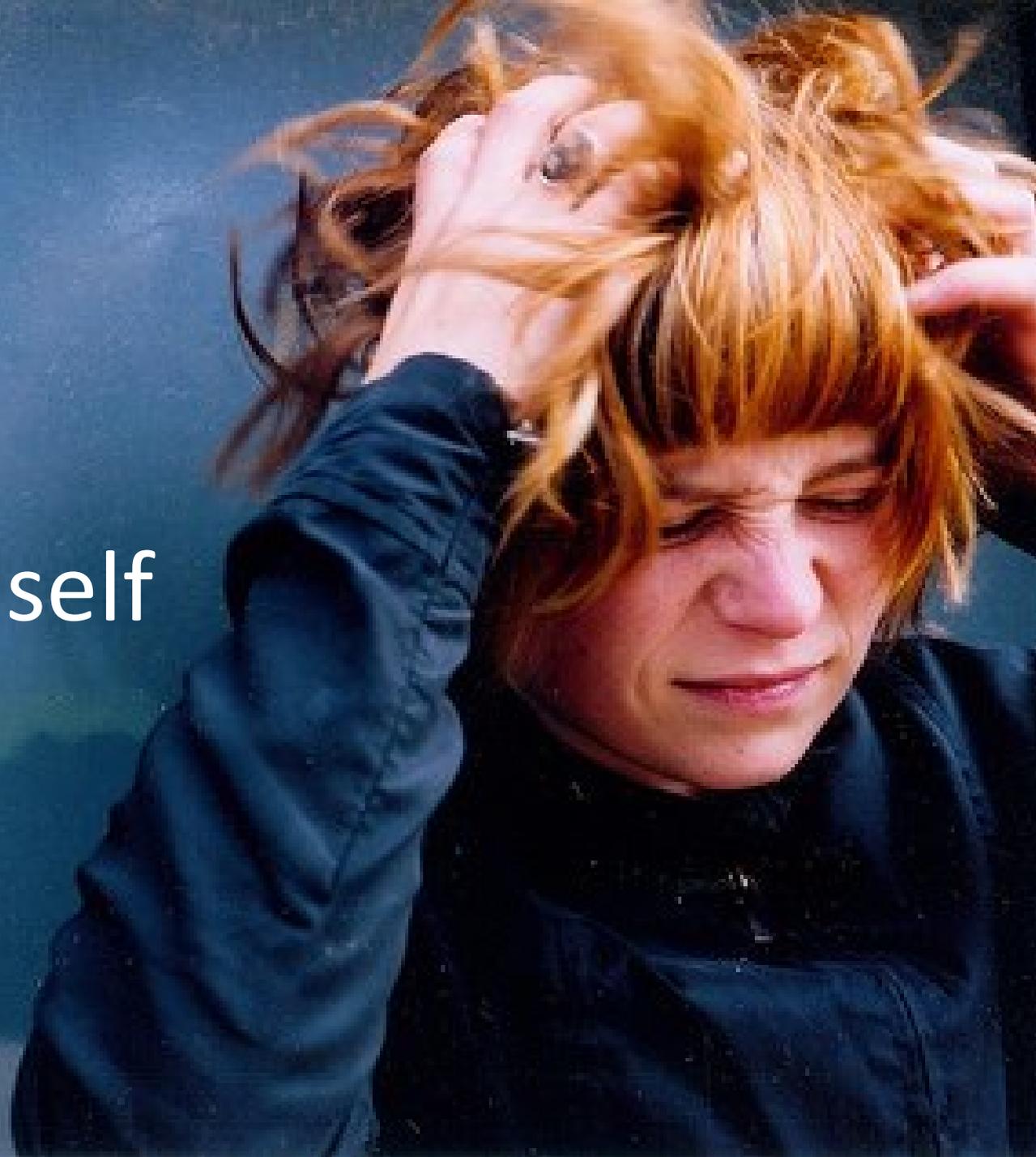
Feeling phony



“You are the problem!”



Victimize self



Trauma Symptoms in Children

- Regressive behavior
- Fear of separation from parent
- Repetitive play
- Withdrawn
- Aggressive
- Spaced out
- Night terrors



A safe, stable, and nurturing relationship
with a caring adult



can help children overcome trauma

(CDC)