



# Wellness Workshop

## Trauma Responsive Strategies for Supporting our Kids and Teens

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&

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# About Us

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# What is Trauma?

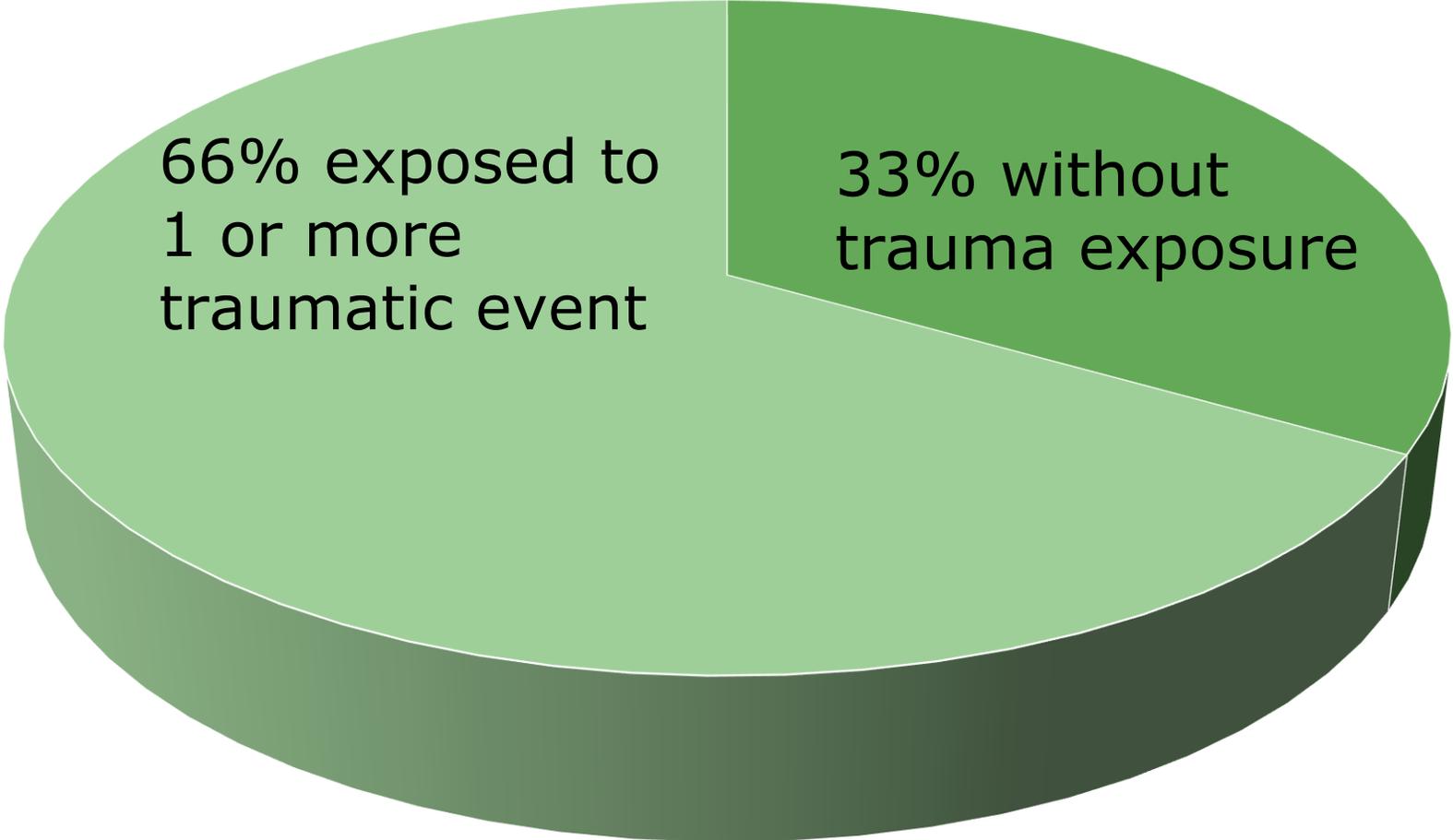
“An emotional response to an event or experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing”



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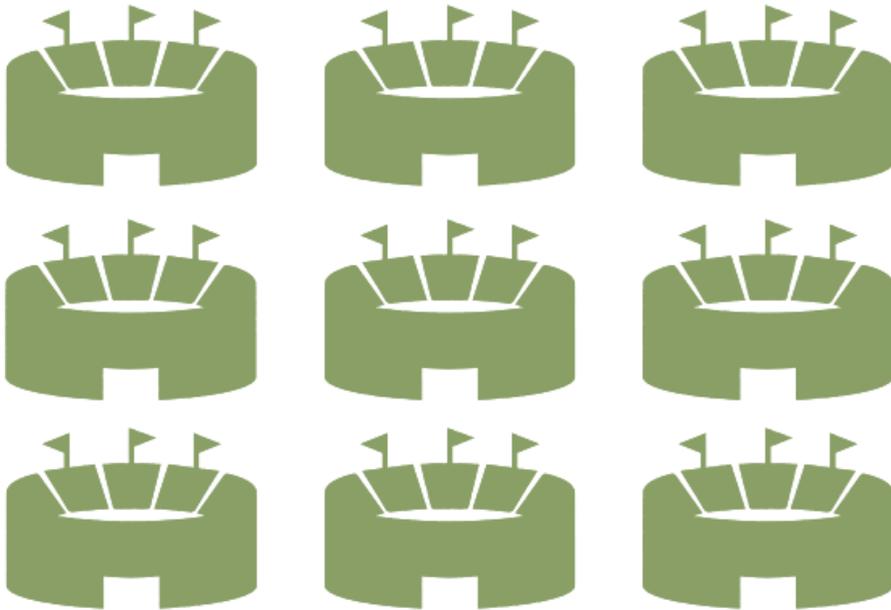
# How Common is Trauma Exposure in the US?

Rates of Exposure to 1 or More Traumatic Event by age 16

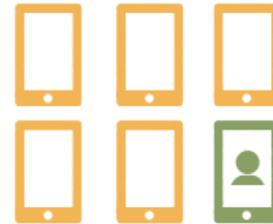


# How Common is Trauma Exposure in the US?

Each year, the number of youth requiring hospital treatment for physical assault-related injuries would fill **EVERY SEAT IN 9 STADIUMS.**<sup>3</sup>



**1 IN 4 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS** was in at least **1 PHYSICAL FIGHT.**<sup>4</sup>

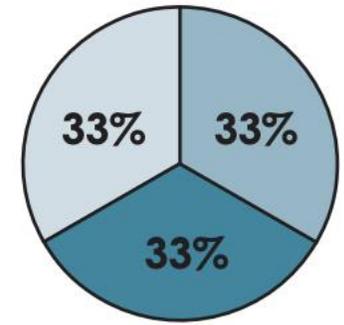
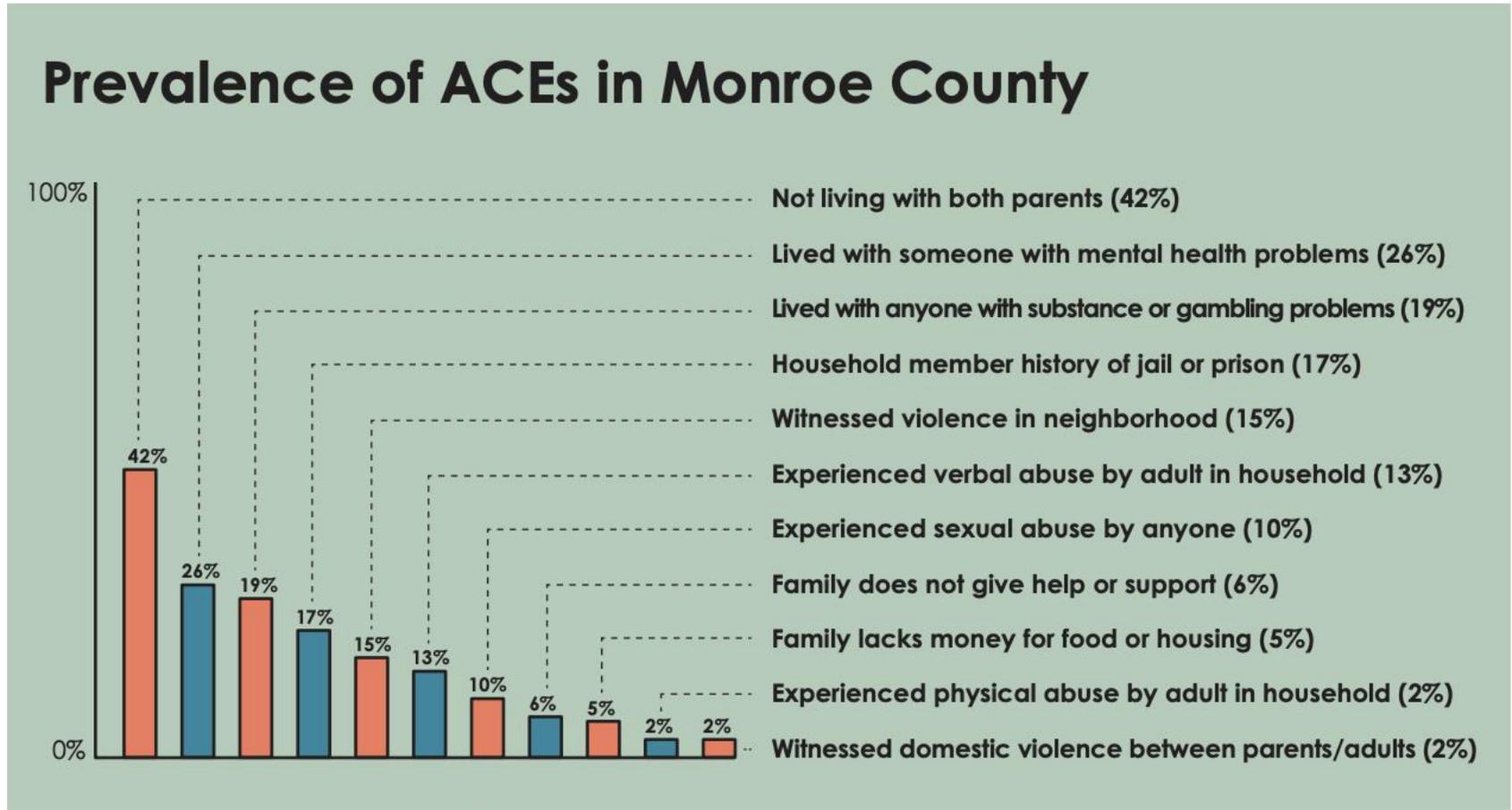


1 in 5 high school students was bullied at school; **1 IN 6 EXPERIENCED CYBERBULLYING.**<sup>5</sup>

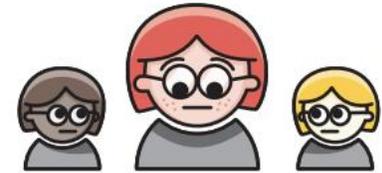


**19%** of injured and 12% of physically ill youth have post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>6</sup>

# Trauma Exposure on a Local Level



- 0 ACEs
- 1 ACEs
- 2+ ACEs



One in three Monroe County high school students have experienced 2 or more ACEs.

# Examples of Potential Traumatic Events

Community or school violence

Psychological, physical, sexual abuse, or neglect

Witnessing/experiencing domestic violence

Sudden or violent loss of loved one

Military family-related stressors

Serious car accident

Bullying or cyberbullying

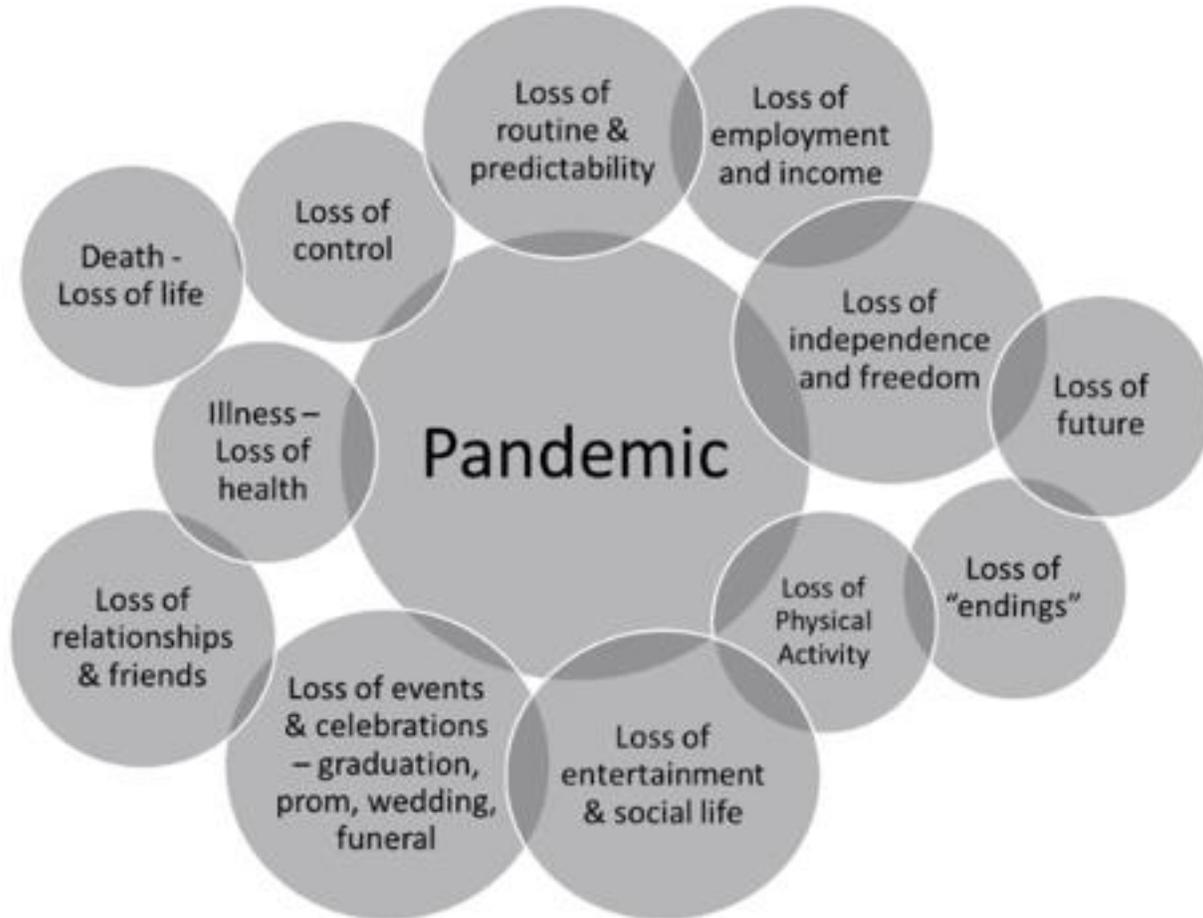
Life-threatening illness

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



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# COVID-19 PANDEMIC- Collective Trauma



# Positive Stress & 'Steeling'

*Not all stress is bad.*

Stressors can be positive, tolerable, or toxic (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

**Supportive and caring adults** are necessary to help children learn to cope with positive and tolerable stressors.

**Steeling**, or **stress inoculation**, refers to the beneficial effects of brief stress exposure (Rutter, 2012).

Positive Stress

Tolerable Stress

Toxic Stress  
(*ex. child maltreatment*)

# Trauma Exposure: Survival Response

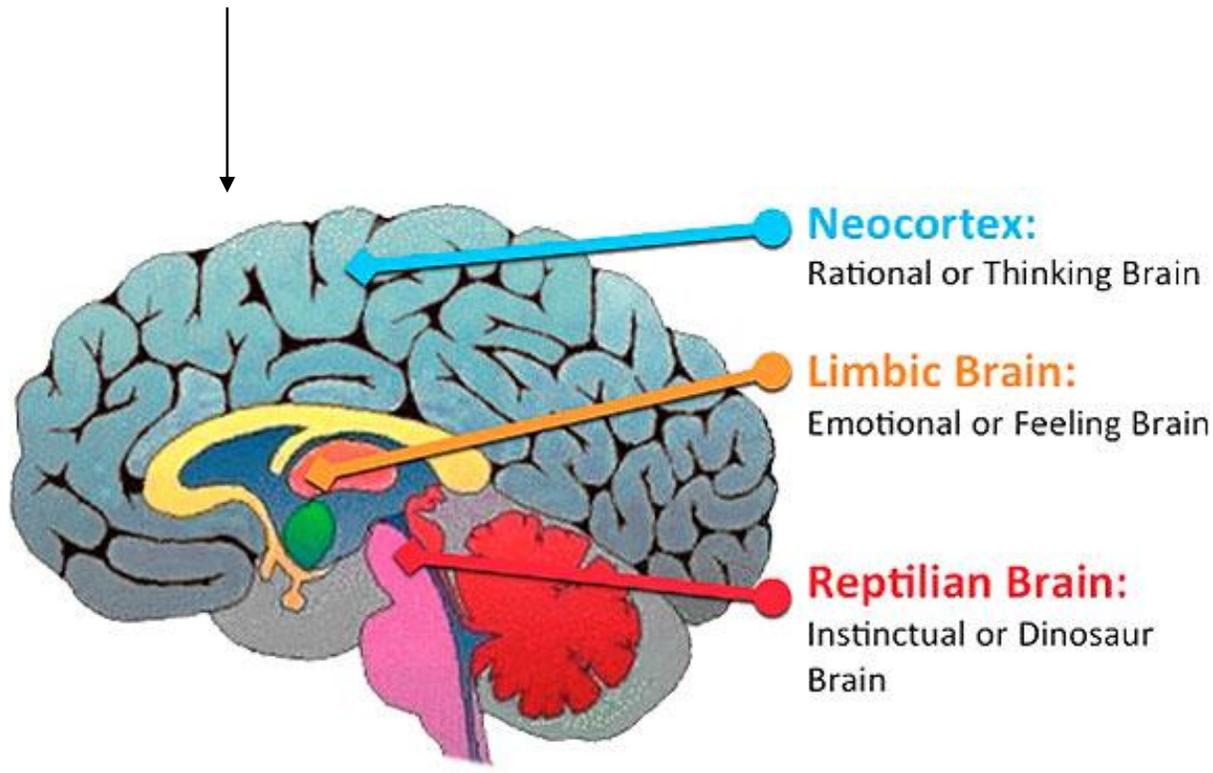


Once we've experienced trauma, our nervous system gets easily **'stuck on high'** (hypervigilant, panicky, manic, angry, nervy) or **'stuck on low'** (depressed, numb, lethargic) or oscillates between the two.



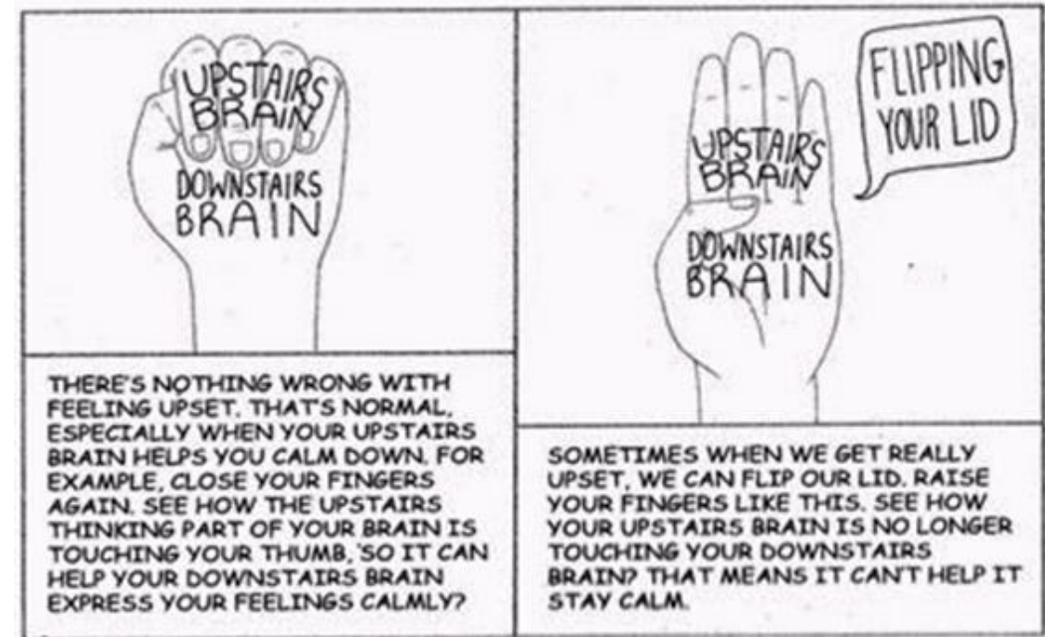
# Trauma & the Brain

## Learning Brain



## Survival Brain

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# Recognizing the Impact of Trauma on Youth

**Consider Joy.** Her teacher brought the sixth grader to the school nurse because she was complaining of a stomachache. The teacher was concerned about Joy's complaint and explained to the nurse that, while Joy had always been an enthusiastic and hardworking student, recently she had not been paying attention or completing her work. In the nurse's office, Joy was quiet and withdrawn, but eventually admitted that she had witnessed a girl being beaten by another student the previous day. She was sad, frightened, and afraid for her safety.

**Another example is Alexa.** Alexa, a four-year-old girl, has been kicked out of two other preschools and is about to be expelled from her current school. She curses at teachers, hits, kicks, and scratches other students, and bangs her head on the table when she is frustrated. Alexa's behaviors are most difficult when transitioning from one activity to another. When the teacher meets with Alexa's father, the father reports that Alexa's mother uses drugs, that Alexa has seen her mother arrested by the police, and that Alexa's mother often does not come home at night.

# Common Signs of Trauma Stress: Preschool Age

- Feeling **helpless/uncertain**
- **Fear of being separated** from their parent/caregiver
- **Irritability, anger, sadness**
- **Sleep** difficulties; nightmares
- **Eat** poorly
- Regressive behaviors
- **Difficulty regulating emotions**



# Common Signs of Trauma Stress: Preschool Age

## What might we see?

- **Screaming/crying/large meltdowns**
  - Seemingly small situations, like changes in routine
  - Separating from parents
- **Difficulty** falling asleep, waking often, **nightmares**
- **Toileting accidents, bed wetting**
- Baby talk
- Decreased eating, weight loss
- **Talking about the trauma** or acting it out with dolls



# Common Signs of Trauma Stress: Elementary Age

- Become **anxious or fearful**
- Feel **guilt** or shame
- **Sleep** problems; nightmares
- Difficulty **concentrating**
- **Changed view** of the world/others
  - *E.g., "the world is scary and unsafe;" "there is no one I can trust"*
- **Difficulty regulating emotions** → Strong emotions/numbness
- Physical pains
- Changes in **behaviors, school performance & engagement**
- Sensitive to stimuli (e.g., lights, noise, etc.)



# Common Signs of Trauma Stress: Elementary Age

## What might we see?

- **Worries** about their own/other's safety
- Becomes extremely **clingy**
- Struggles to pay **attention** in class; "spaces out"
- **Large emotional/behavioral reactions**
- **Stomachaches** or **headaches**
- **Over/under-react** to stimuli
  - E.g., bells, physical contact, doors slamming, sirens, lighting, sudden movements
- Interpret others as **hostile** → so act out angrily in response



# Common Signs of Trauma Stress: Middle & High School Age

- Feel **depressed**, alone, **anxious**
- **Guilt**/shame
- **Sleep** problems; nightmares
- Difficulty **concentrating**
- **Risky** behaviors; using alcohol/drugs; self-harm
- **Difficulty controlling emotions** → strong emotions & behaviors, or numbness
- Changes in **behavior** (e.g., relationships, grades, attendance)
- Changed **view** of the world/others; **mistrust**
- **Denial** of difficulties (e.g., “I’m okay; nothing’s wrong”)
- **Physical pains**



# Common Signs of Trauma Stress: Middle & High School Age

## What might we see?

- Daydreaming/**zoning out**/blank look
- **Acting out** aggressively, defiance, arguing, screaming/yelling
- **Acting silly**; being hyperactive
- Avoiding schoolwork/chores; **“Who cares?” “What’s the point?”**
- **Trouble staying focused** & participating at school, refuses to answer
- **Numbness**, withdrawal, **disconnection**
- **Stomachaches, headaches**
- Over/under-react to **stimuli** (e.g., bells, physical contact, sudden movements)
- Interpret other people as **hostile**, so act out angrily in response



# How Can We Help Support Youth Exposed to Trauma?

**A child's caregiving system – both at home and school – plays a critical role in resilience & recovery**



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Source: [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)



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# Re-Establish Safety & Stability

- Remind your child they are safe
- Speak in a calm voice; be nurturing and affectionate
- ***Offer Empathetic Reflection***

"Don't worry, you're fine!  
There's no need to be scared."

"You're really worried.  
I understand that.  
Other kids feel that way after a stressful  
or scary event."

"I'm scared  
about going  
back to school."





# Re-Establish Safety & Stability

- Maintain **structure, routine & predictability** both at home and at school
  - Write out a schedule; prepare children for transitions
- Set **boundaries** and limits with **consistency & patience**
- Be sensitive to children's individual **triggers**
  - Alert school team to possible triggers & create plan for advanced warning
  - Warn about something out of the ordinary (e.g., turning off lights/making a sudden loud noise)
- If needed, develop safety/coping plan with your student's school team



# Emphasize Relationship & Connection

**Warm and trusting relationships with adults are the foundation for learning, motivation, and resilience**

**Friendships are also important for learning and development, and kids thrive on social interactions with their peers**



# Emphasize Relationship & Connection: Family & Friends

- Plan for **one-on-one, special time** with your child that is *NOT contingent* on how they behaved that day
  - *Consider: Where can I find even 10 minutes in my day?*
- **Plan** opportunities for high-quality, whole family togetherness
- Tell your child you **value** them
- Pay extra attention to **praising positive efforts & behaviors**
- **Check-in** on a regular basis



# Check-in on a Regular Basis: Tips for talking to your kids

I've noticed you've been angry a lot. Can we talk about it?

I can understand why you feel that way – sometimes when I'm feeling like that I \_\_\_\_\_”

That sounds really tough . . . Thanks so much for sharing with me.



**Take time to *listen*—without judgment.**

**Empathize & Validate their concerns**

**Talk about what you do to cope  
Don't worry about having all the answers right away**

# Emphasize Relationship & Connection: School



Family & school partner together to **identify adults at school** that child trusts and enjoys

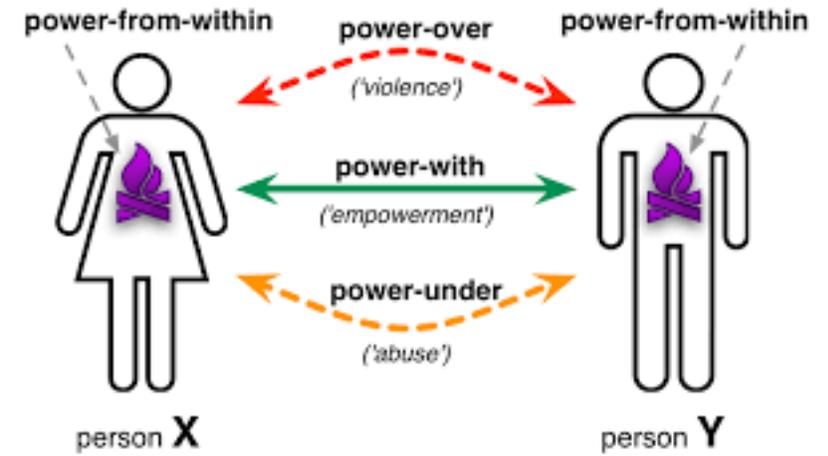
**Set up regular opportunity** for child to spend time with the adult, not contingent on child's behavior

Consider other avenues for **building connection at school** (e.g., building peer relationships through "lunch bunch," etc.)

**Daily Check-In/Check-Out** with trusted adult

# Regain Sense of Control: Elevate Voice & Choice

- **Empower** your child & encourage self-advocacy
- **“Power with”** rather than “power over” strategies
- Offer opportunities for **choice**
- **Collaborative** Problem-Solving
- Ask for their **opinion, perspective, & preferences**



# Build Healthy Strategies for Coping

- Children exposed to trauma often have **difficulty regulating emotions & take longer** to calm down
- Expect **large emotional/behavioral responses**
- **Respond calmly and supportively**
  - Label aloud feelings as you see them
  - Remind children (and yourself!) that ***all feelings are good feelings*** — and we can use strategies to calm big feelings
- Use **child and teen literature** to normalize emotions & discuss hardship
- Rid 'over-reacting', 'over-sensitive', or 'over'-anything from your vocabulary.

# Build Healthy Strategies for Coping

## Frequent teaching and modeling of coping strategies

- *Deep breathing, mindful coloring or drawing, listening to calming music, asking for help, taking breaks, and thinking positive thoughts*
- *What do you, as a parent, do to cope?? Do it with your child or teen.*

<p>Deep Breathing</p> 	<p><b>Critical Coping Strategies to Teach Kids</b></p> <p><small>www.thepathway2success.com</small></p>	
<p>Journal Writing</p> 	<p>Using Positive Self-Talk</p> 	<p>Practicing Gratitude</p> 
<p>Mindful Coloring</p> 	<p>Writing a List of Choices</p> 	<p>Exercising</p> 



### Take a Deep Breath

Smell the flower



Blow the pinwheel



# What's Co-Regulation and Why Does it Matter?



# Coping Corner at Home & in the Classroom

Safe space to calm down when children are feeling a big, intense emotions

## Common items to include in Calm Corner:

- Blanket/weighted blanket
- Beanbag chair
- Calming jar
- Fidgets (e.g., stress ball, fidget toys, play dough)
- Coloring items
- Something to help them breathe calmly (e.g., bubbles, pinwheel)
- Calming audio for older youth (e.g., music, CALM app)



# Shifting Negative/Unhelpful Views of Self & Others

Focus on the positives-

*Pay extra attention to noticing aloud your child's positive efforts or behaviors*

*"Catch them being good"*

Help your child to identify their **inner strengths**; encourage positive self-talk

**Consider a school-home daily report card, only focused on positive behaviors**

Remind child they are not responsible for the trauma/stressors

Provide reassurance that child is safe

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[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org); Hoover, Bostic, & Lever, 2021

 My Inside Strengths



My strengths are:

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Some strengths to consider:

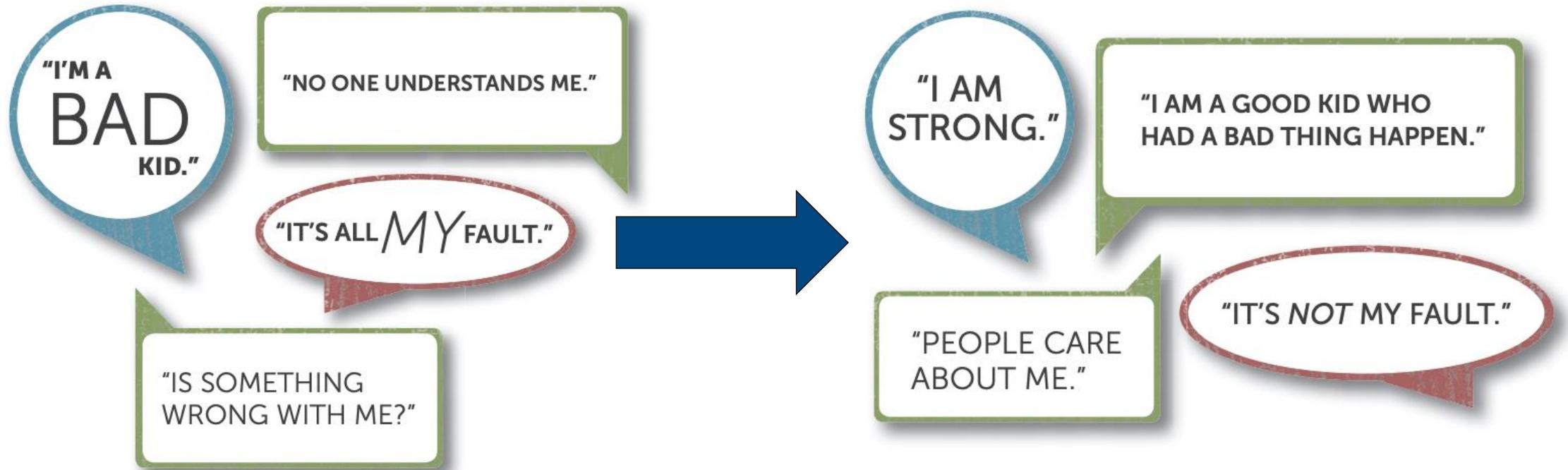
Patient	Good listener	Funny	Dependable	Hardworking	Adventurous
Kind	Honest	Good Friend	Calm	Thoughtful	Funny
Sporty	Artistic	Fun	Helpful	Caring	Creative
Giving	Brave	Confident	Cheerful	Polite	Focused
Problem-Solver	Understanding	Smart	Curious	Enthusiastic	Athletic
Easy-Going	Loyal	Intelligent	Respectful	Peacemaker	Outgoing



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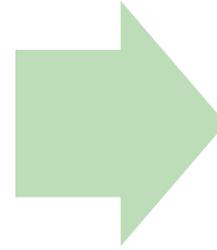
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# Helping to Shift their Internal Dialogue



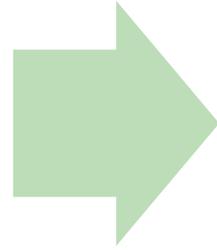
# View Behaviors through a Trauma-lens: Shifting the Dialogue in our Heads

“What is WRONG with this child?”



“What HAPPENED to this child?”

“This child WON’T behave appropriately”



“This child CAN’T behavior appropriately” “What supports and skill-building do they need to be able to?”  
\*“Kids do well if they can”

“This child is acting out on purpose; this child is trying to push my buttons; they are choosing not to learn”



Take a deep breath- “This child has gone through hard things. These are normal responses to trauma”

# Secondary Traumatic Stress



**Emotional distress** from **hearing** about the **another's trauma**

*"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."*

Rachel Naomi Remen, MD,

Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal, 1996

**PUT ON  
YOUR  
OWN  
OXYGEN  
MASK  
FIRST.**

## **Taking Care of Ourselves!**

Are your **fundamental needs** met (food, sleep, exercise, social connection)?

**Be aware of your self-talk** (fuel or put out the fire)

- *Focus on helpful, realistic thoughts- “I’m doing the best I can;” “My family is strong, we can get through this,” “I can get additional support”*

**Express how you are feeling** (journal, share with a partner or friend)

What **calms** your brain and body?

**10 intentional minutes for yourself-** when can it fit in your day? (*get creative... on your drive to work?*)

What’s **one small thing** you’d like to try to do more?

**Seek out formal or informal support** from friends/family or professionals

# When to Get Additional Help

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Impairment becomes daily, chronic, or severe – school, home, friends

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When a family starts living life **AROUND** the trauma or behavioral problems

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Concerns have stayed same or worsened even despite the changes we've made

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It's causing the family significant distress

***If you are unsure of if your child needs to speak to a professional  
–  
it is better to ask for help and not need it, than not ask at all.***

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# What Additional Help is Out There?

## Therapy with a mental health clinician

- Gold Standard: Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



Mental health counseling that has been demonstrated to be effective in helping children deal with traumatic stress reactions typically includes the following elements:

- Education about the impact of trauma
- Helping children and caregivers re-establish a sense of safety
- Techniques for dealing with overwhelming emotional reactions
- An opportunity to talk about and make sense of the traumatic experience in a safe, accepting environment
- Involvement, when possible, of primary caregivers in the healing process

**Medication management** of mental health symptoms through primary care provider or psychiatrist

# Places to ask for help:

## ***Teachers, Coaches, Principals, School Counselors, School Psychologists, School Social Workers, Behavior Specialists***

- Reach out - They're here for you and your kids! *Access contact information for local agencies via RH website (click Student services tab and then Mental Health/Wellness Tab)*

## ***Talk to your Pediatrician***

- Local pediatricians are very well-versed in child behavioral health

## ***Child, Teen, & Family Behavioral Health***

- **UR Medicine: Pediatric Behavioral Health & Wellness** – (585) 279-7800
- **Genesee Mental Health Center** – (585) 922-7770
- **Liberty Resources Behavioral Health** – (315) 498-5961
- **Catholic Family Center** – (585) 546-7220
- **Villa of Hope** – (585) 328-0834

## ***Crisis Call Lines***

- **Monroe County:** 211/Lifeline
- **NYS Mental Health Call Line:** 1-844-863-9314
- **UR Medicine: Behavioral Health Crisis Call Line** 585-275-8686
  - *Monday-Friday: 7 am - 8 pm; and Saturday, Sunday and Holidays: 10 am - 6:30 pm*

# Where Can I Find Trauma-Focused Therapy?

**Mount Hope Family Center** - <https://www.psych.rochester.edu/MHFC/community-services/>

**Bivona Child Advocacy Center** - <https://www.bivonacac.org/>

**REACH** - <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/community-outreach-programs/reach-program.aspx>

**Society for The Protection of Care of Children (SPCC)**

- 585-325-6101

**Linden Oaks Sexual Abuse Treatment Services (LOSATS)** - <https://www.losats.com/>

**RESTORE Sexual Assault Services** - <https://restoresas.org/>

**UR Medicine Pediatric Behavioral Health & Wellness Clinic** -

<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/behavioral-health-wellness.aspx>

# Resources

## Trauma-Specific Online Resources

**TIG: The consortium on Trauma, Illness, and Grief in schools** - <https://www.tigconsortium.org/>

**Transform Research Center** - <http://thetransformcenter.org/community-resources>

**National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative (NCSTI)** - <https://www.nctsn.org/>

**Child Mind Institute** – <https://childmind.org/topics/trauma-grief/>

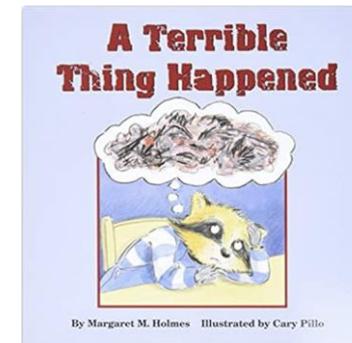
## Books

### **For Kids:**

- A Terrible Thing Happened- Margaret Holmes
- Help Your Dragon with Trauma- Steve Herman

### **Parents/Providers:**

- The Whole-Brain Child, Daniel Siegel, MD & Tina Bryson, PhD
- Trauma through a Child's Eyes, Peter Levine & Maggie Kline



# Resources

- [Children's Institute](#) has a host of tools for fostering resilience and Social & Emotional Learning
- [Kids Thrive585](#) offers family-friendly links to a wide variety of community resources.
- [United Way/211](#) can provide personalized support in navigating these many resources
- [UR Medicine Pediatric Behavioral Health & Wellness](#) has tools for [families & school teams](#)
- [Psychology Today](#) to identify private practitioners
- [Child Mind Institute](#) offers excellent evidence-based articles for **families & school staff**

# Resources

## **Mental Health Association - <https://www.mharochester.org>**

- Peer Advocates: Caregivers who have experienced what the family is going through
- Parenting education & support
- Teen Support Group- PEACE (Peers Encouraging a Caring Environment)
- Drop-in Coffee-Talks

## **Starbridge Educational Advocacy - <http://www.starbridgeinc.org/>**

## **Parent to Parent of New York State - <http://parenttoparentnys.org>**

# Resources

## “What do I do?” Trauma-Informed Support for Children

- 1 Create safety**  
 If the child is overwhelmed, perhaps guide them to a quiet corner or allow them to decompress by visiting the restroom. If you are in a classroom, maybe you have a peace corner that you've outfitted with blankets or a screen so that it feels like a safe place.
- 2 Regulate the nervous system**  
 Stress brings a predictable pattern of physiological responses and anyone who has suffered toxic stress or trauma is going to be quickly stressed into hyperarousal (explosive, jittery, irritable) or hypoarousal (depressed, withdrawn, zombie-like). No matter how ingenious our regulation strategies, how artsy-crafty we get with tools, the child has to find what works for them.
- 3 Build a connected relationship**  
 This is the number one way to regulate the nervous system. When we are around people we care about, our bodies produce oxytocin, which is the hormone responsible for calming our nervous system after stress. If we stay connected, then eventually the calm discussion of each person's feelings and needs can take place.
- 4 Support development of coherent narrative**  
 Creating predictability through structure, routines and the presence of reliable adults helps reduce the chaos a child may feel and allows them to start creating the kind of logical sequential connections that not only help them understand their own narrative, but are also the fundamental requirement of many types of learning.
- 5 Practice 'power-with' strategies**  
 One of the hallmarks of trauma is a loss of power and control. When someone is wielding power over you with no regard to your thoughts or feelings, the toxic shame of the original trauma may come flooding back. As adults, we should use our power well. If we model a 'power-with' relationship with children it's our best chance of creating adults who will treat others with dignity and respect.
- 6 Build social emotional and resiliency skills**  
 Trauma robs us of time spent developing social and emotional skills. The brain is too occupied with survival to devote much of its energy to learning how to build relationships and it's a good chance we didn't see those skills modeled for us. Learning to care for one another is the most important job we have growing up.
- 7 Foster post-traumatic growth**  
 We know that there are qualities and skills that allow people to overcome the most devastating trauma and not just survive but find new purpose and meaning in their lives. Problem solving, planning, maintaining focus despite discomfort, self-control and seeking support are all known to lead to post-traumatic growth and are skills we can foster in children.

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### DOs AND DON'Ts OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED COMPASSIONATE CLASSROOM

**1 CREATE A SAFE SPACE**  
Consider not only physical safety but the children's emotional safety as well.

**2 ESTABLISH PREDICTABILITY**  
Write out a schedule and prepare children for transitions. It helps create a sense of security and safety.

**3 BUILD A SENSE OF TRUST**  
Follow through with your promises and in situations where changes are unavoidable be transparent with your explanations.

**4 OFFER CHOICES**  
Empower students and offer "power with" rather than "power over" strategies.

**5 STAY REGULATED**  
Help your students (and yourself!) stay in the "Resiliency Zone" to promote optimum learning. Have regulation tools ready to help students bumped out of the zone into either hyperarousal (angry, nervous, panicky) or hypoarousal (numb, depressed, fatigued).

There's really only one **DON'T**  
Let's not punish kids for behaviors that are trauma symptoms.

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# Resources

NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

## Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators



NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



### Assisting Parents/Caregivers in Coping with Collective Traumas

In the past year there have been a multitude of traumas that each of us have experienced or witnessed through media exposure. These include the ongoing pandemic, economic hardship, violence and abuse, racism and discrimination, policy changes that negatively impact specific groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ people, immigrants) and system failures (e.g., health disparities, police brutality). There have also been numerous stressors including balancing work and parenting demands and managing other obligations at home and/or in our personal life. This combination of traumas and stressors may feel overwhelming right now. This may be especially true if you have experienced prior traumas and are being reminded of those past experiences.

Below are strategies to help you cope right now.

- **Have compassion for yourself and others.**  
Acknowledge that you are experiencing a lot right now. You may not be able to show up in the same ways you could before. That is okay. You are doing your best. Assume the same for your family, co-workers, and friends. Be flexible when considering what you can do. Consider the perspective of others to help you connect to their emotions and empathize with their experiences.
- **Acknowledge how your identities are being impacted.**  
You may feel a heightened level of threat, fear, or lack of safety when aspects of your identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, and religion) are being targeted by violence, policy changes, hate speech and/or other actions. This also may increase your sense of feeling isolated or cut-off from your loved ones, co-workers, or wider community. Find ways to get support from those who share your identities or are allies who understand how these traumas and stresses are impacting you.
- **Self-reflect before reacting.**  
Take a moment to consider how a situation is impacting you before reacting to others. Your emotions are valid. Your feelings of anger, bitterness, grief, and fears about the future need to be acknowledged before deciding how to respond. You may have to take care of yourself before assisting someone else. Know these feelings may persist. Sometimes, just taking a moment for a few slow breaths can help as you gather your thoughts.
  - Reflect on your potential implicit biases (i.e., attitudes or stereotypes about others you may hold without being truly aware of these views or beliefs) and adjust your response to reflect understanding, caring, and support.
- **Search for meaning.**  
You may be observing that systems and institutions are failing to protect those they are meant to serve. This can challenge your trust in other people, your religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs, or the ways you think about or view the world. Searching for meaning in the face of discrimination and hate is extremely challenging, only adding to your existing feelings of distress. Reading relevant resources and talking to trusted friends, family members, co-workers, and faith leaders can help you develop or discuss your ideas about why stressful and traumatic things happen and how you can cope with them.
- **Limit media and social media exposure.**  
Media and social media coverage are constant. At times we feel obligated to "witness" the pain of others, however, you can pace yourself by limiting access to news during blocks of the day to connect to people, pets, nature, or activities that restore and heal. Be cognizant of how you react to news alerts and either disable them or put your devices aside during important tasks that require your focus.

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