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State Capacity Building Center

Trauma-Responsive Infant and Toddler Care: Supporting a Path of Healing and Resilience

South Carolina's Baby Jam
January 21, 2023

Holly Wilcher, Infant/Toddler Technical Assistance Specialist

Welcome



Holly Wilcher, Ph.D.,
Child Care State Capacity
Building Center,
Infant/Toddler Specialist
Network

North Star



Session Objectives

- ◆ Define and explore the concept of *trauma*.
- ◆ Discuss protective factors and resilience in the context of trauma.
- ◆ Explore trauma-responsive care strategies and practices.
- ◆ Discuss the importance of caregiver wellness in supporting children who've experienced trauma.

Session Agenda

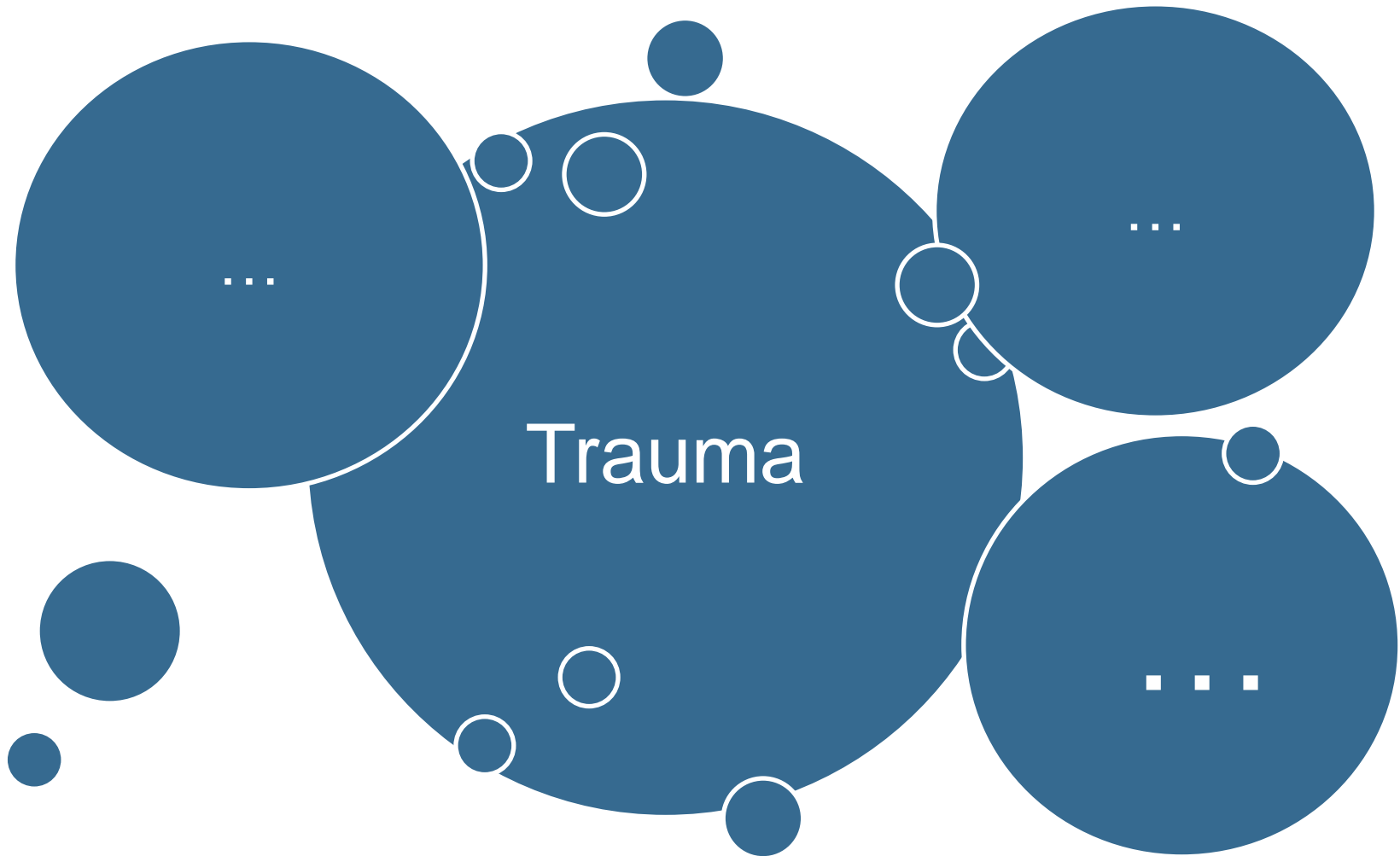
- ◆ Overview of Trauma
- ◆ Protective Factors and Resilience
- ◆ Trauma-Responsive Caregiving Strategies and Practices
- ◆ Caregiver Well-Being
- ◆ Reflections and Wrap



Importance of Disclaimer



What Comes to Mind?





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Overview of Trauma

Trauma Definition

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration “describes individual trauma as resulting 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 adverse **effects** on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.’”

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). *Trauma and violence*, para. 2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.samhsa.gov/trauma-violence>

Early Childhood Trauma

Early childhood trauma happens when a child experiences an event that is emotionally painful or distressful, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects.

Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous stimuli overwhelm the child's capacity to regulate emotions.

Sources: Early Trauma Treatment Network. (n.d.) *Trauma definition*. University of San Francisco.

Saakvitne, K., Gamble, S., Pearlman, L., & Tabor Lev, B. (2000). *Risking connection: A training curriculum for working with survivors of childhood abuse*. Sidran Press.

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.”

Source: Center on the Developing Child. (2017). *Toxic stress*. Harvard University. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

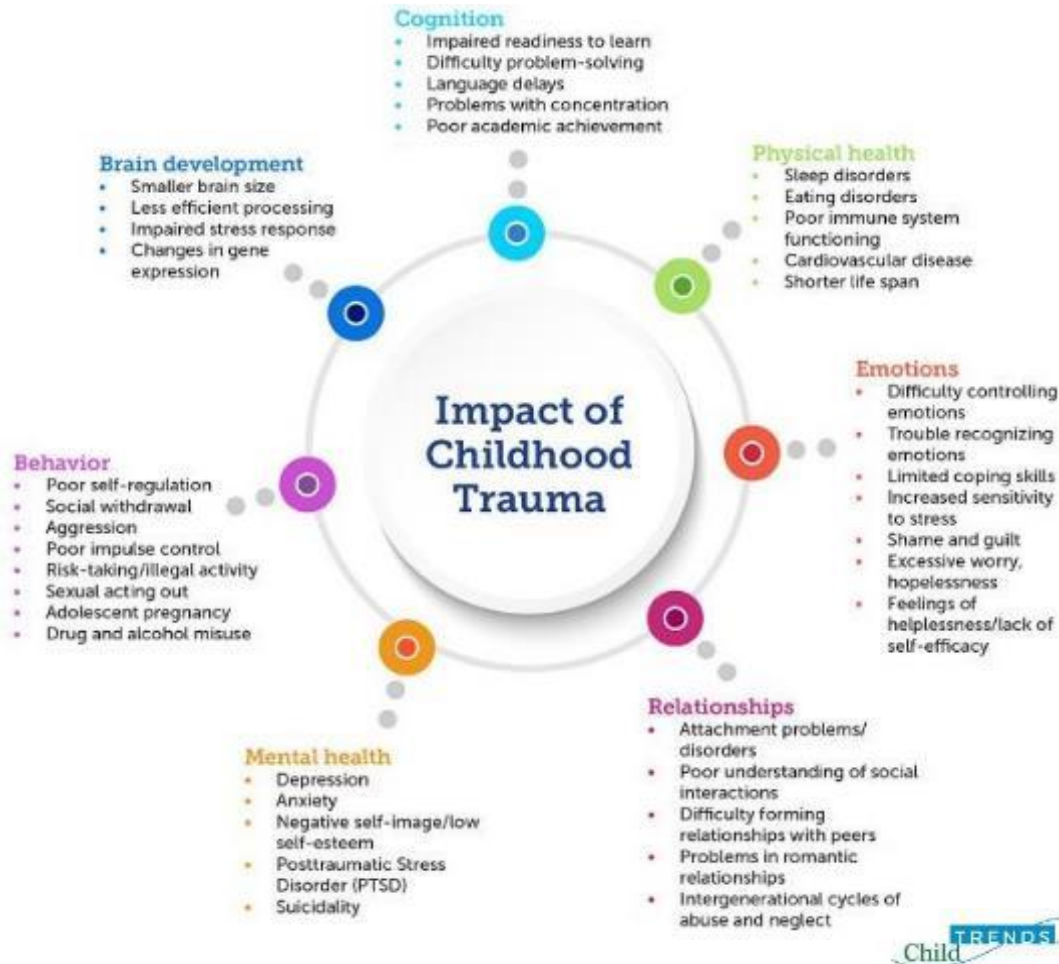
Trauma – A Risk Factor

“Circumstances, characteristics, conditions, events, or traits at the individual, family, community, or cultural level that may increase the likelihood a person will experience adversity.”

Source: Bartlett, J. D., & Steber, K. (2019). *How to implement trauma-informed care to build resilience to childhood trauma*. Child Trends. https://www.childtrends.org/publications/how-to-implement-trauma-informed-care-to-build-resilience-to-childhood-trauma#_ftn40

Trauma Can Influence All Aspects of Development

Impact of Childhood Trauma



Source used with permission: Bartlett, J. D., & Steber, K. (2019). *How to implement trauma-informed care to build resilience to childhood trauma*. Child Trends. https://www.childtrends.org/publications/how-to-implement-trauma-informed-care-to-build-resilience-to-childhood-trauma#_ftn40



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Protective Factors and Resilience

Protective Factors

- ◆ Characteristics, conditions, or events that promote healthy development and minimize the risk or likelihood a person will experience a particular illness or event, or its related negative outcomes
- ◆ Resources, processes, or characteristics that help an individual buffer risk and build resilience
- ◆ Characteristics, people, and supports that help a person get through tough times. They are our 'umbrellas in a rainstorm'
- ◆ Can be built and strengthened over time



Sources: Bartlett, J. D., & Steber, K. (2019). *How to implement trauma-informed care to build resilience to childhood trauma*. Child Trends. https://www.childtrends.org/publications/how-to-implement-trauma-informed-care-to-build-resilience-to-childhood-trauma#_ftn40

Devereux Center for Resilient Children. (n.d.) *Defining protective factors*. <https://centerforresilientchildren.org/free-resources/#:~:text=What%20are%20protective%20factors%3F,built%20and%20strengthened%20over%20time.>

Types of Protective Factors



- ◆ **Environmental:** Safety of where the baby lives; quality of the programs and services available to him or her
- ◆ **Familial:** How loving and caring a baby's family may be; how much time and support a baby's family offers each other
- ◆ **Within-child:** Temperament, abilities, skills, and characteristics that make a baby or toddler

Source: Devereux Center for Resilient Children. (n.d.) *About resilience*. <https://centerforresilientchildren.org/home/about-resilience/>

Most Important Protective Factor

Early childhood resilience research tells us the **strongest** protective factor for children is at least one **relationship** with a caring, prosocial, responsive adult.



Source: Bartlett, J. D., & Steber, K. (2019). *How to implement trauma-informed care to build resilience to childhood trauma*. Child Trends. https://www.childtrends.org/publications/how-to-implement-trauma-informed-care-to-build-resilience-to-childhood-trauma#_ftn40

Resilience—Ordinary Magic

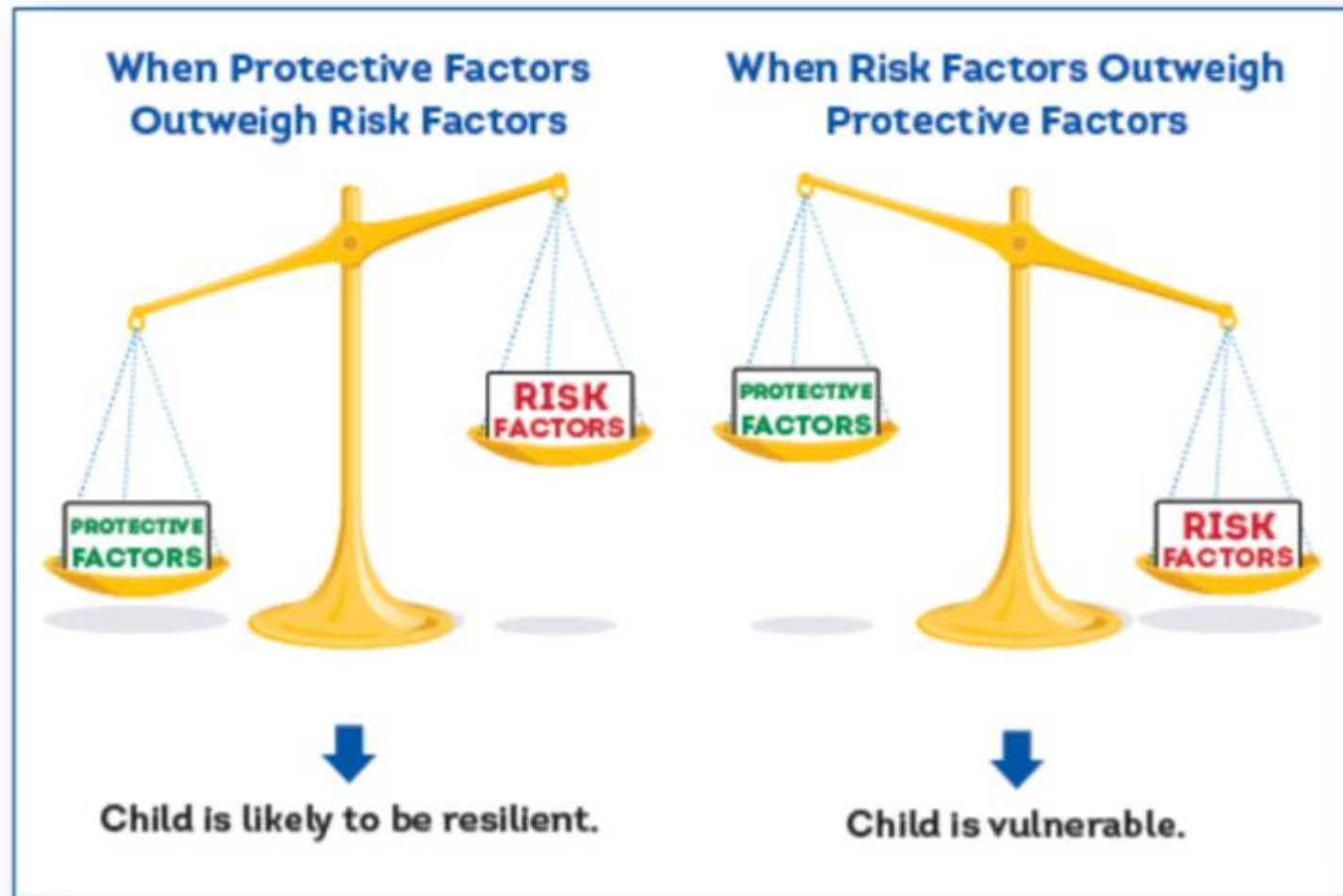
“Resilience typically arises from the operation of normal rather than extraordinary human capabilities, relationships, and resources. In other words, resilience emerges from *ordinary magic*.”

“The conclusion that resilience is made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes offers a more positive outlook on human development and adaptation, as well as direction for policy and practice aimed at enhancing the development of children at risk for problems and psychopathology.”



Source: Masten, A. S. (2015). Ordinary magic: Resilience in development. Guilford Publications. p. 8

Resilience Scale



Source: Devereux Center for Resilient Children. (n.d.) *About resilience*. <https://centerforresilientchildren.org/home/about-resilience/>
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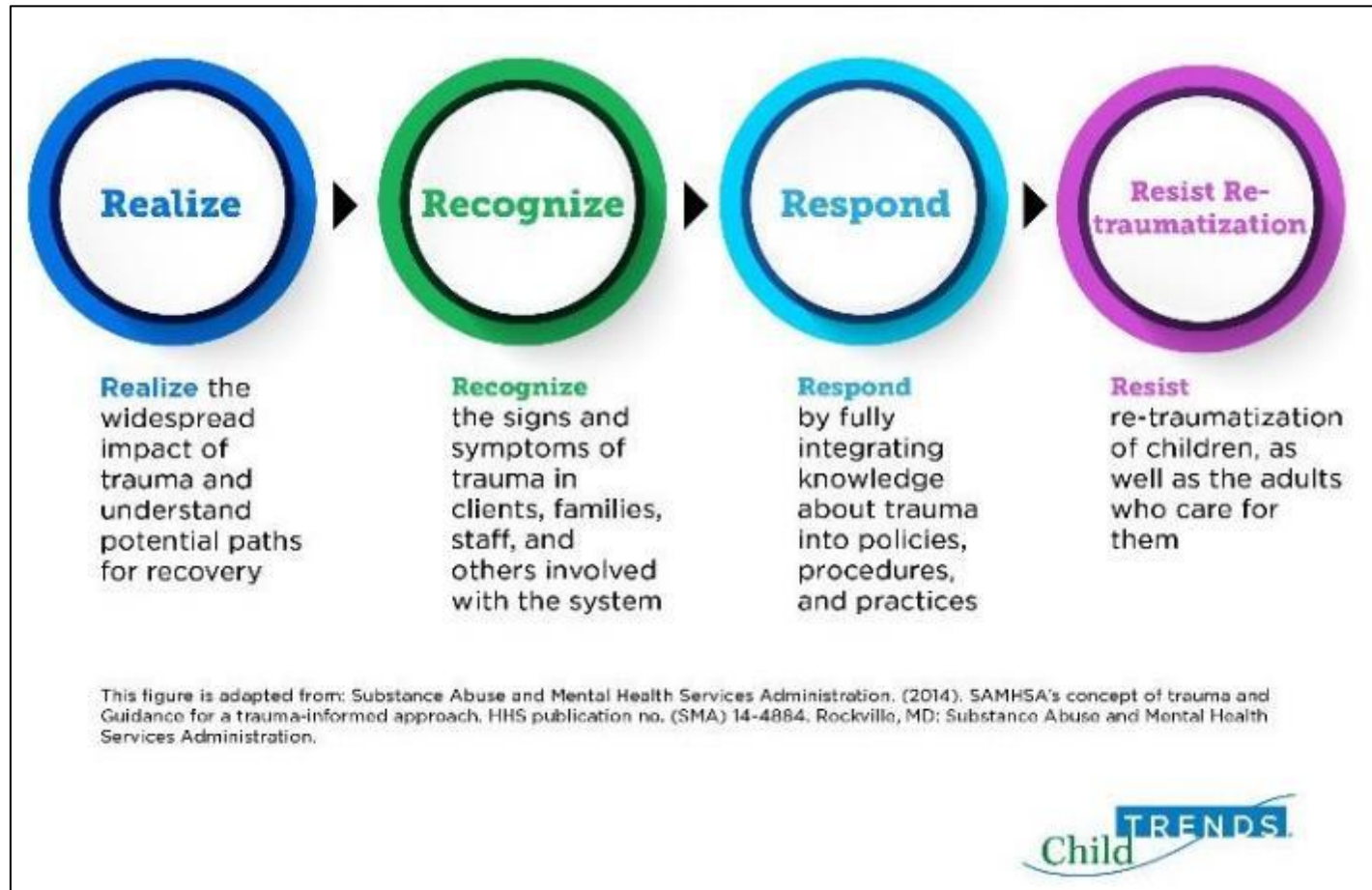


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Trauma-Responsive Care

Four Rs of Trauma-Informed Care



Source used with permission: Bartlett, J. D., & Steber, K. (2019). *How to implement trauma-informed care to build resilience to childhood trauma*. Child Trends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/how-to-implement-trauma-informed-care-to-build-resilience-to-childhood-trauma>

What Is Trauma-Responsive Care?

“Looking at every aspect of an organization’s programming, environment, language, and values and involving all staff in better serving children who have experienced trauma.”

- Recognizes and responds to the impact of traumatic stress on children, caregivers, and service providers
- Trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills infused into programs’ and agencies’ organizational cultures, practices, and policies
- Collaboration to maximize physical and psychological safety and facilitate the recovery of the child and family and support their ability to thrive

Sources: Covington, S., & Bloom, S. L. (2018). *Moving from trauma-informed to trauma-responsive: A training program for organizational change*. Hazelden Publishing. <https://www.hazelden.org/store/item/520203>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.). *Creating trauma-informed systems*. <https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/creating-trauma-informed-systems>



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Trauma-Responsive Caregiving Strategies and Practices

Trauma-Responsive Strategies



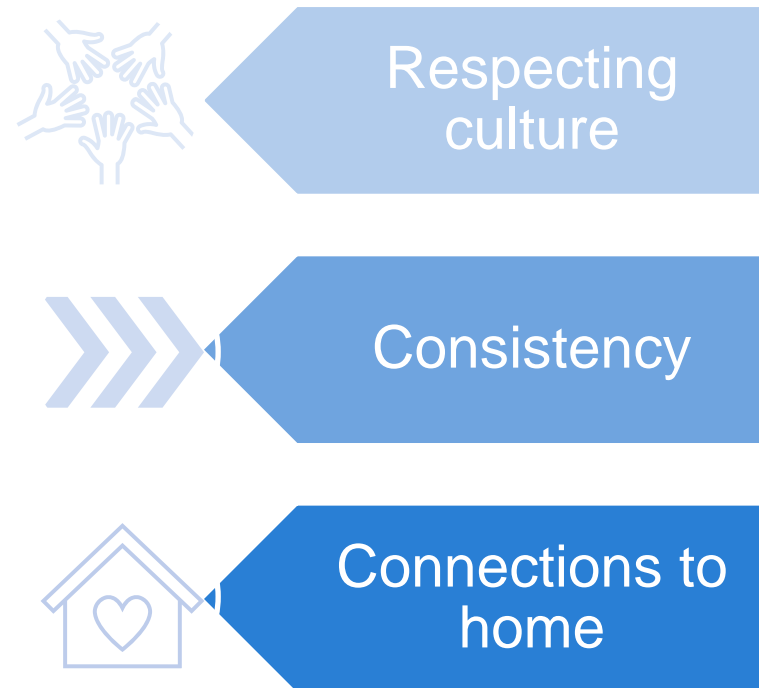
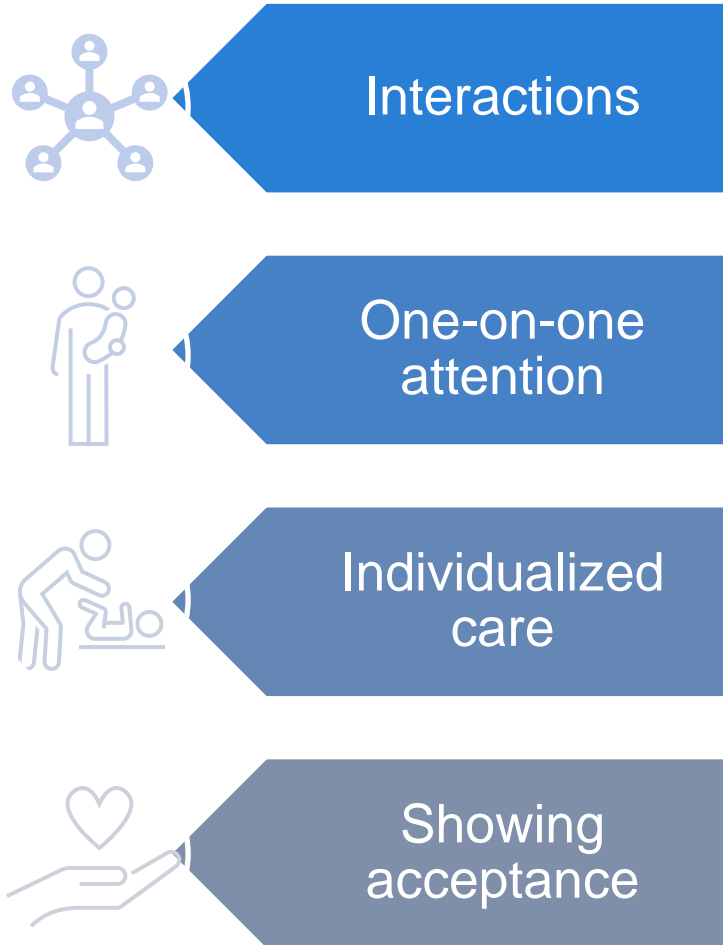


What is your favorite activity to do
with a baby or toddler?

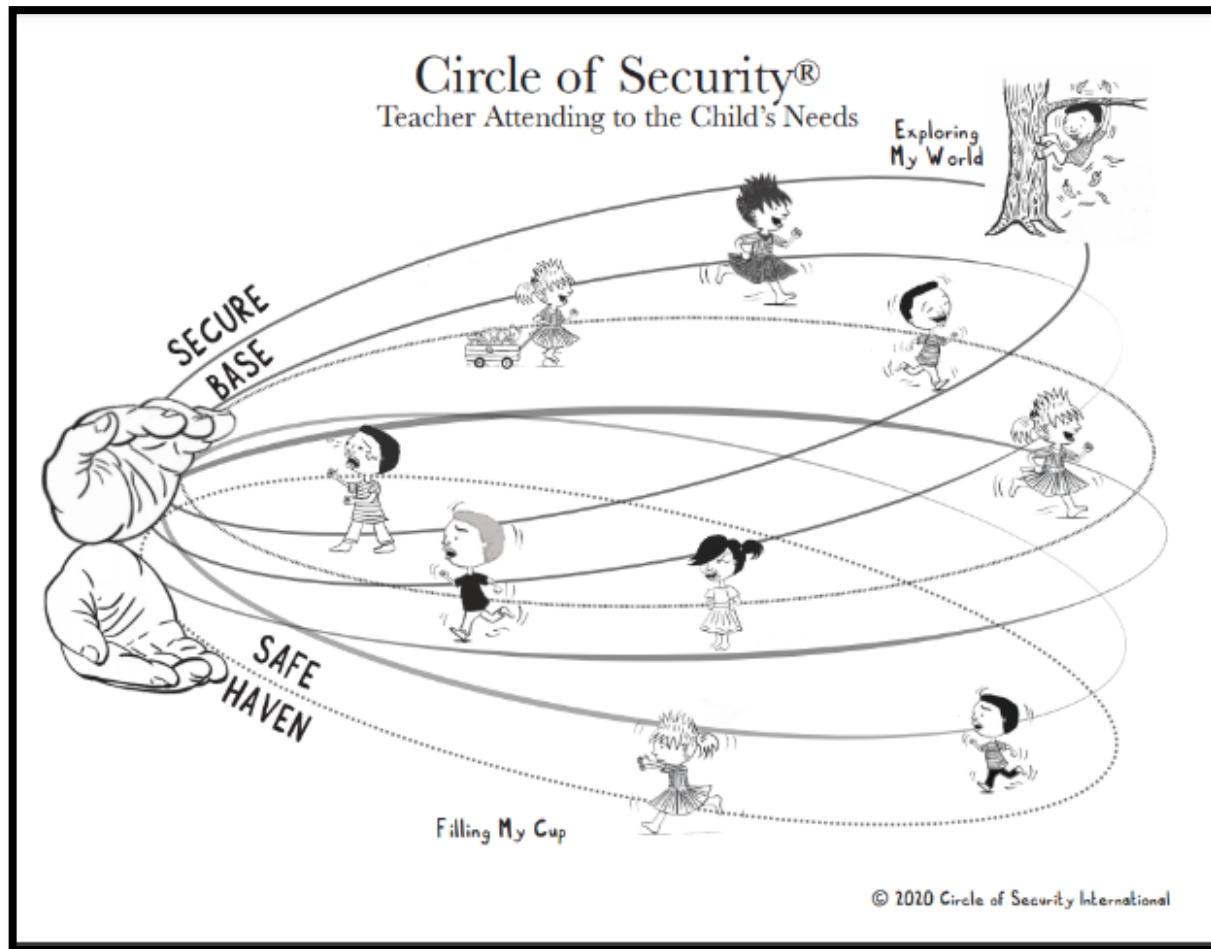


Relationships Are
the Number One
Strategy!

Building Secure Attachment, Trust, and Creating Healthy Relationships



A Strong Base for Infants and Toddlers

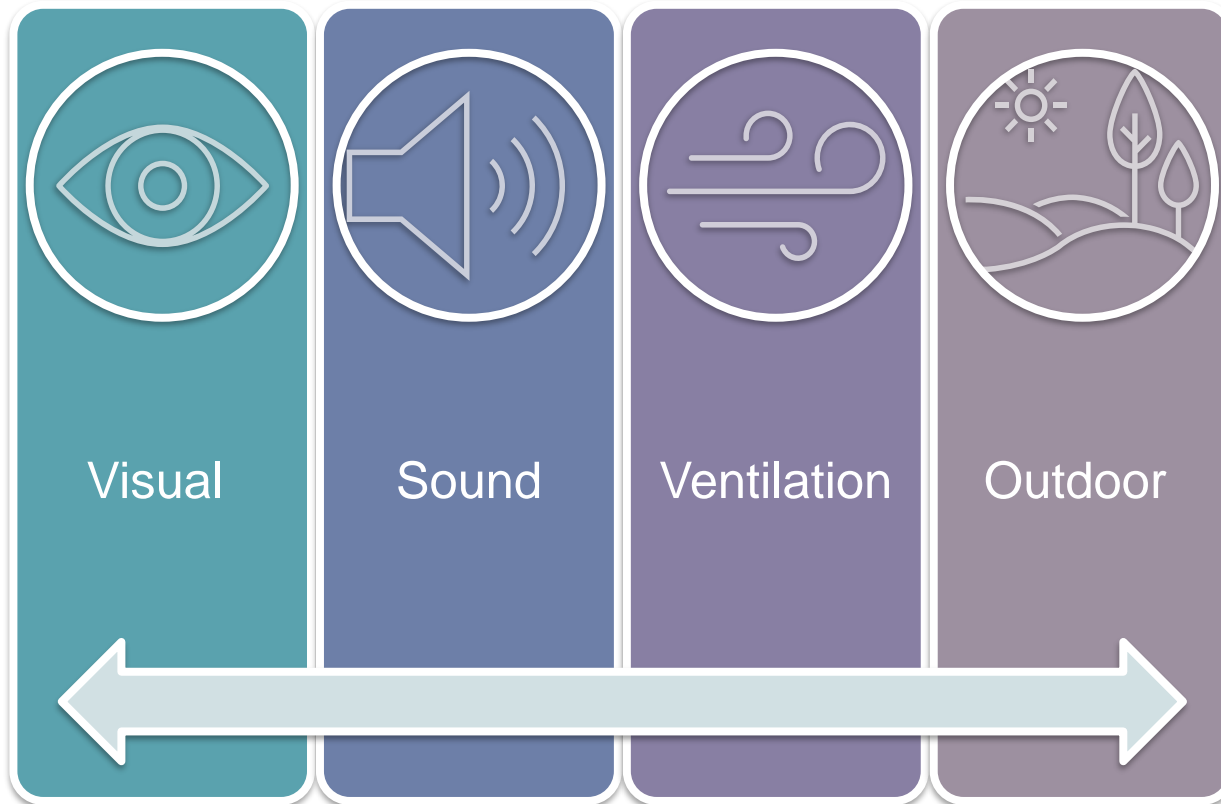


Source used with permission: Circle of Security International. (n.d.). Circle of security parenting-classroom approach. *The Teacher's Circle*. <https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/classroom-approach/>

Your Container



Trauma-Responsive Environments



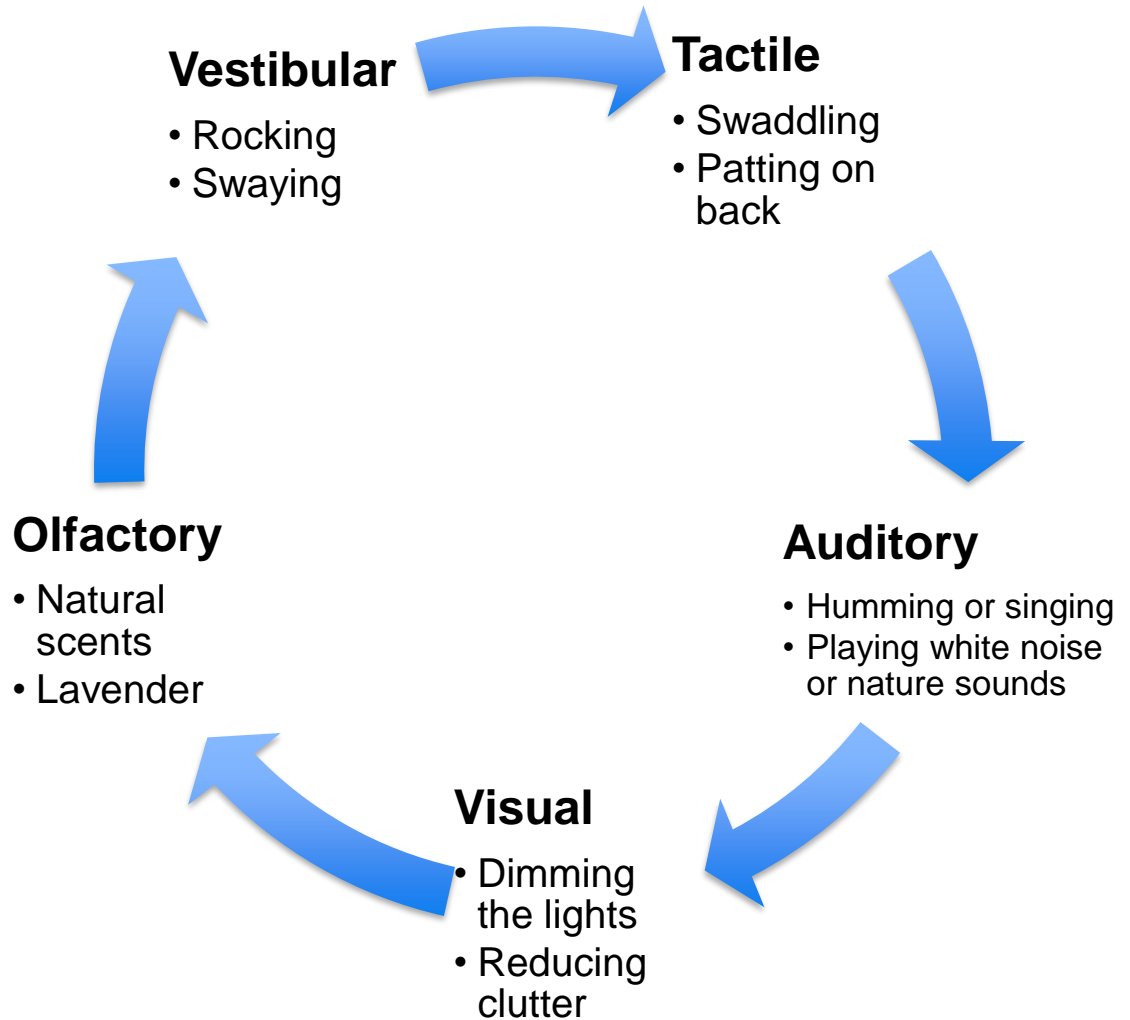
Rhythm of Life

- ◆ Mother's heartbeat
- ◆ Sound of mother's voice
 - Fetus starts to hear at about 24 weeks of gestation



Eck, A. (2015). Babies rely on mother's voice and heartbeat to develop healthy brains. Retrieved on December 3, 2018, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/babies-rely-on-mothers-voice-and-heartbeat-to-develop-healthy-brains/>.

Helping Babies Co-Regulate and Self-Soothe



Source: Sorrels, B. (2015). *Reaching and teaching children exposed to trauma*. Gryphon House.

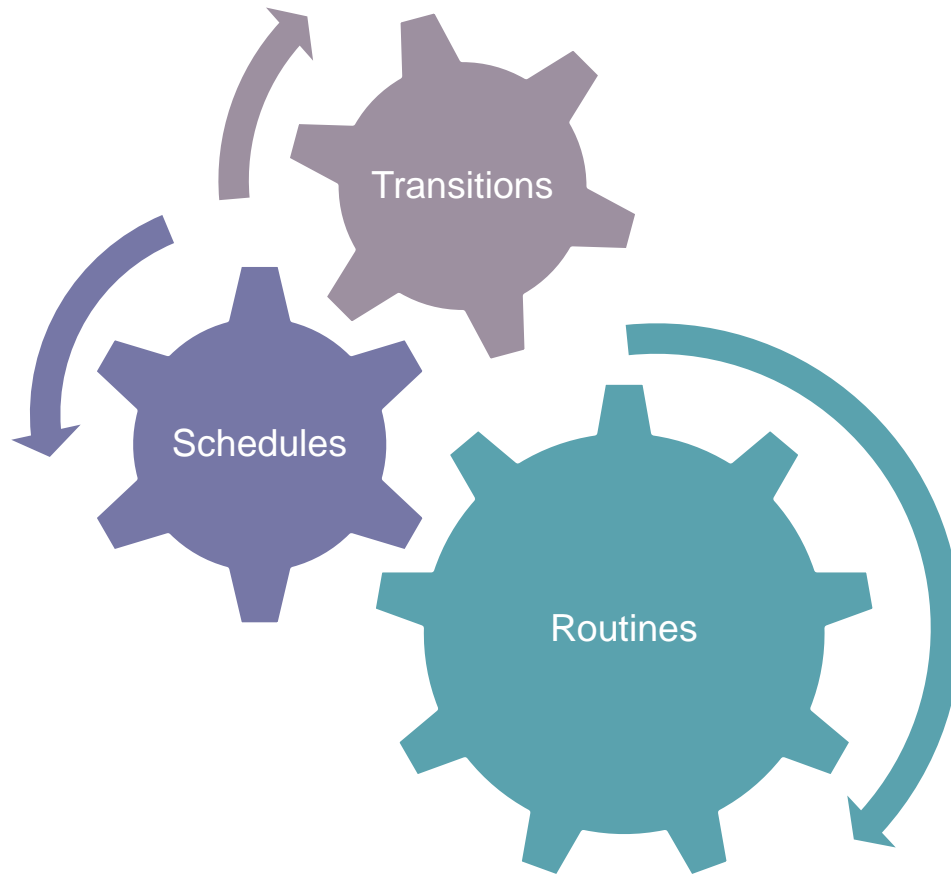
Physical Environments

How can physical environments promote emotional safety for infants, toddlers, and young children?

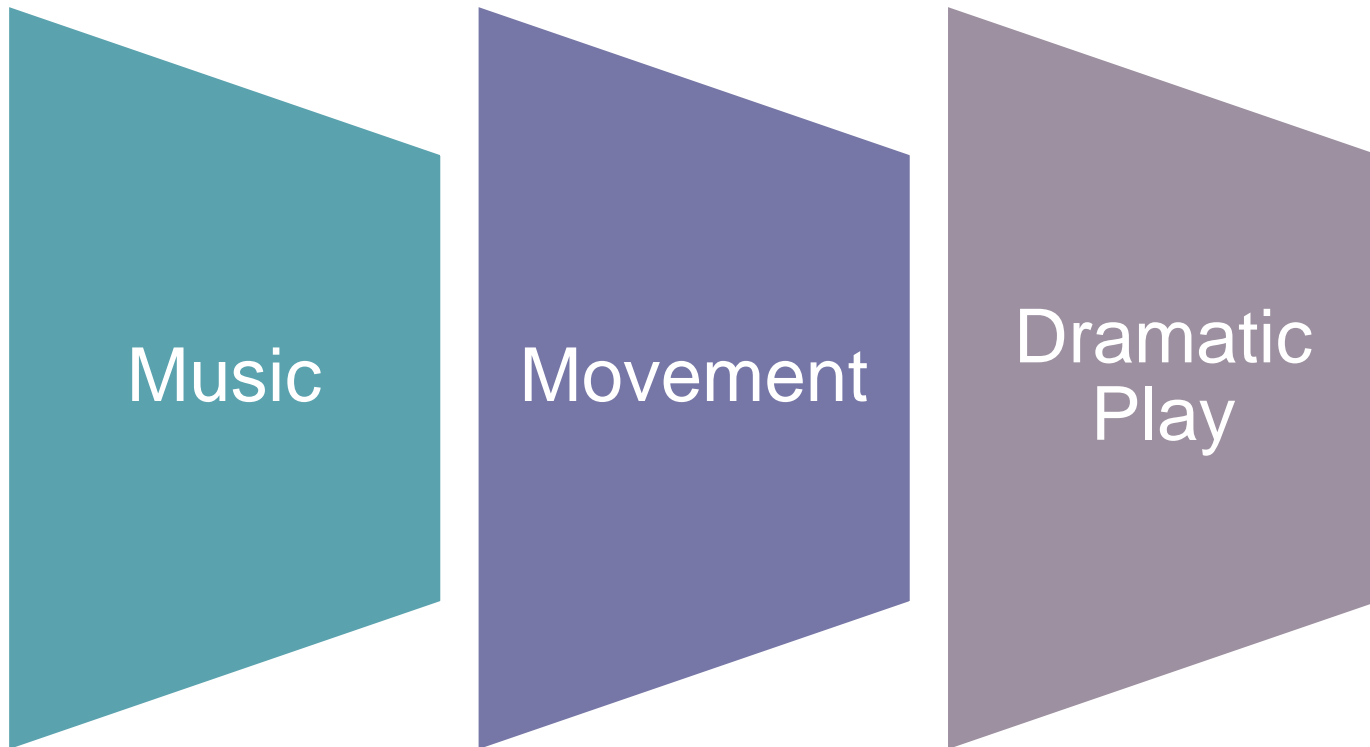
- ◆ Small groups
- ◆ Private places
- ◆ Individual place
- ◆ Familiar photos, preferred toys
- ◆ Predictable placement of materials
- ◆ Calm surroundings
- ◆ Natural spaces (indoor and outdoor)



Caregiving Schedules and Routines



Trauma-Responsive Play Strategies



Play!

- ◆ Minimizes fear
- ◆ Gives control
- ◆ Practices life skills
- ◆ Promotes social emotional competence
- ◆ Provides an avenue for self-expression



Source: Sorrels, B. (2015). *Reaching and teaching children exposed to trauma*, p. 203. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.

Physical Activity



Indoor space for active play

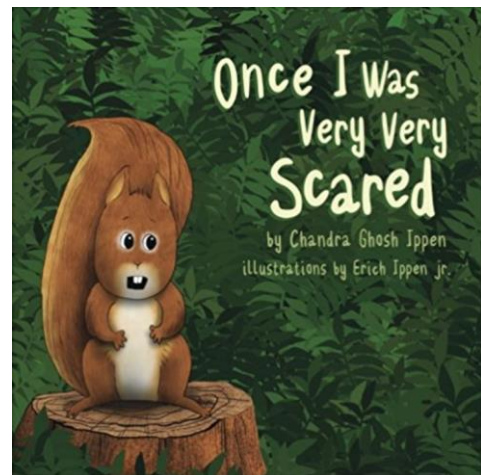
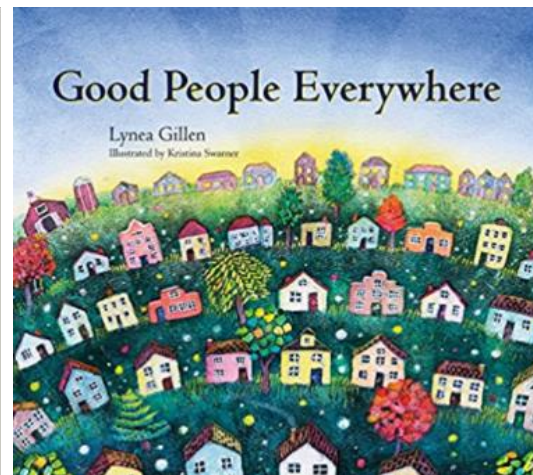
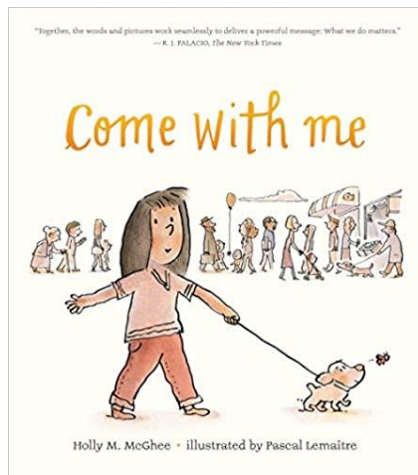
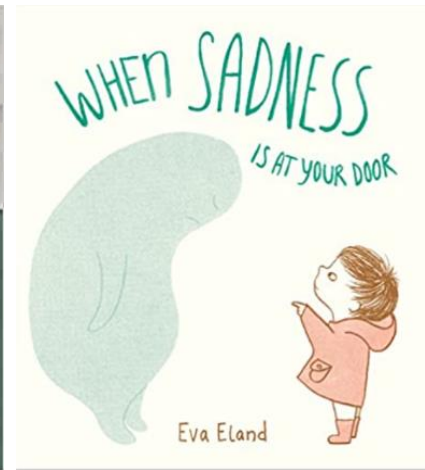
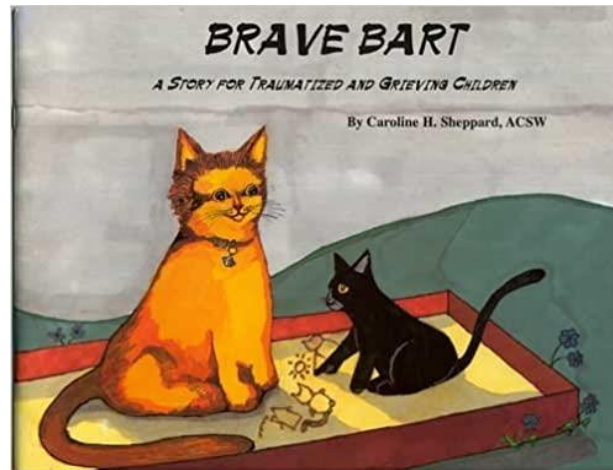
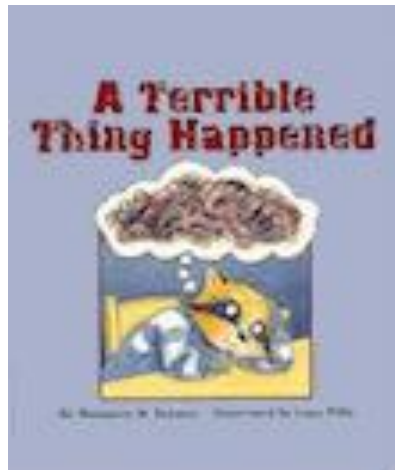
At least 20 minutes every 2 hours

Rough and tumble play area

Abundant access to outdoor areas with natural spaces



Books to Help Toddlers with Trauma





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Supporting Cargiver Wellness

Reflecting on Our Resilience





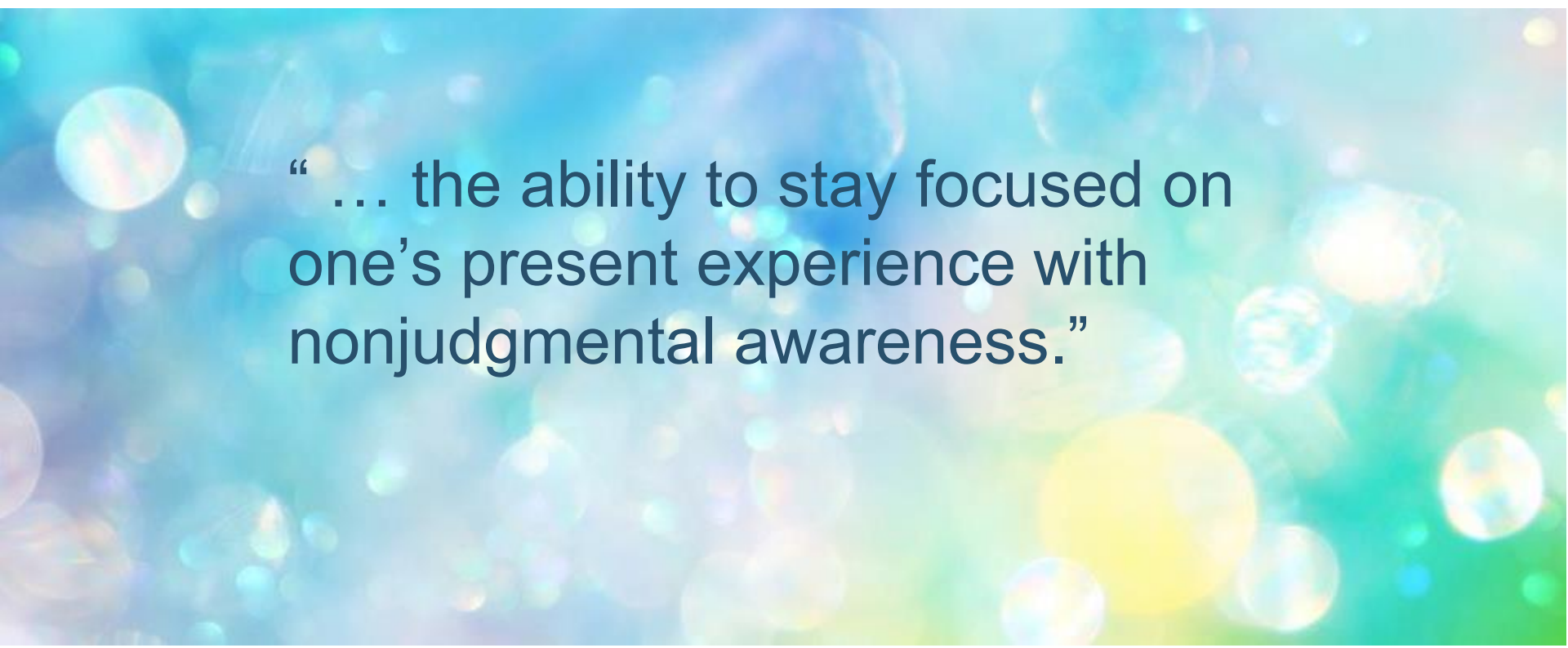
“ ... taking care of
children requires taking
care of their caregivers.”

Source: Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). *Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*, p.7. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/worthy-work-still-unlivable-wages/>

How Full Is Your Pitcher?



What Is Mindfulness?



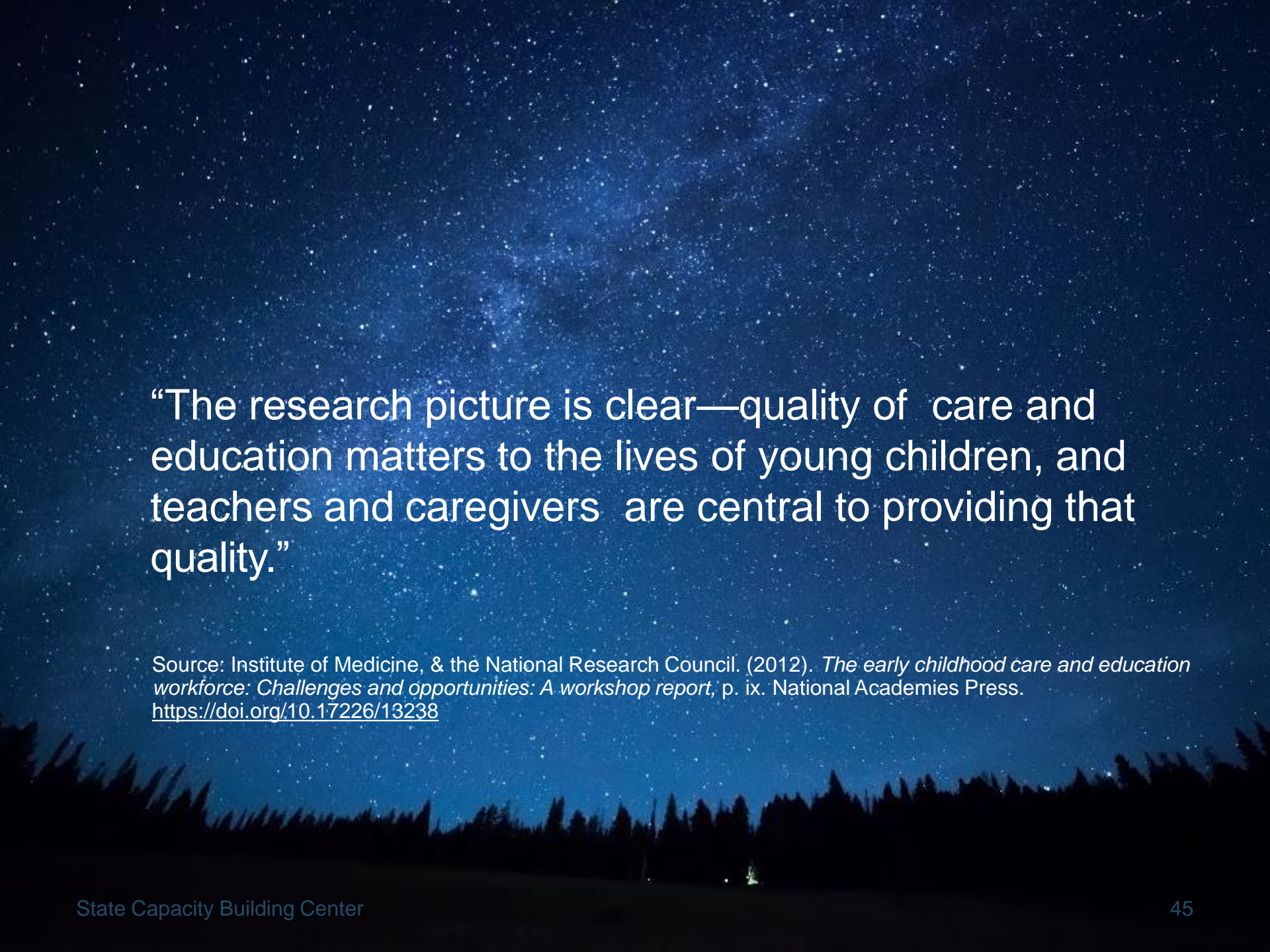
“ ... the ability to stay focused on one’s present experience with nonjudgmental awareness.”

Source: Jennings, P. A. (2015, March 30). Seven ways mindfulness can help teachers, para. 2. *Greater Good Magazine*. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/seven_ways_mindfulness_can_help_teachers

Three Minutes to Mental Health Improvement

- ◆ I will focus on ...
- ◆ I am grateful for ...
- ◆ I will let go of ...





“The research picture is clear—quality of care and education matters to the lives of young children, and teachers and caregivers are central to providing that quality.”

Source: Institute of Medicine, & the National Research Council. (2012). *The early childhood care and education workforce: Challenges and opportunities: A workshop report*, p. ix. National Academies Press.
<https://doi.org/10.17226/13238>



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Reflections and Wrap-up

Major Take-Home Messages



- ◆ Trauma is an experience in which factors overwhelm young children's capacity to regulate emotions.
- ◆ While adverse experiences are common in early childhood, the factors that serve to protect children against trauma and promote resilience are also *ordinary*.
- ◆ Traumatic experiences affect the family and broader caregiving system.

Major Take-Home Messages



- ◆ Protective factors can reduce the adverse effects of trauma and foster resilience.
- ◆ The single most important protective factor among children who do well and become resilient—despite early adversity—is the presence of at least one supportive, responsive adult in their life.
- ◆ Trauma-responsive care is an effective healing-centered practice and protective factor that fosters early childhood resilience.

Reflection

What is something I heard today that takes my thinking in a new direction?

Something new you will try?



**State Capacity Building Center,
A Service of the Office of Child Care**

9300 Lee Highway

Fairfax, VA 22031

Phone: 877-296-2401

Email: CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info

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