

# The Impact of Trauma for Kinship Caregivers

Nancy Muse, MA

July 2, 2020

# What is trauma?

- Trauma is a response to a frightening, dangerous, or violent event or life experience that poses a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity in which a child fears death or serious harm. Witnessing an event that threatens the life or security of a loved one can also be traumatic.
- Trauma is not the event or experience itself but the child's reactions that persist and affect their daily lives *after the events have ended*

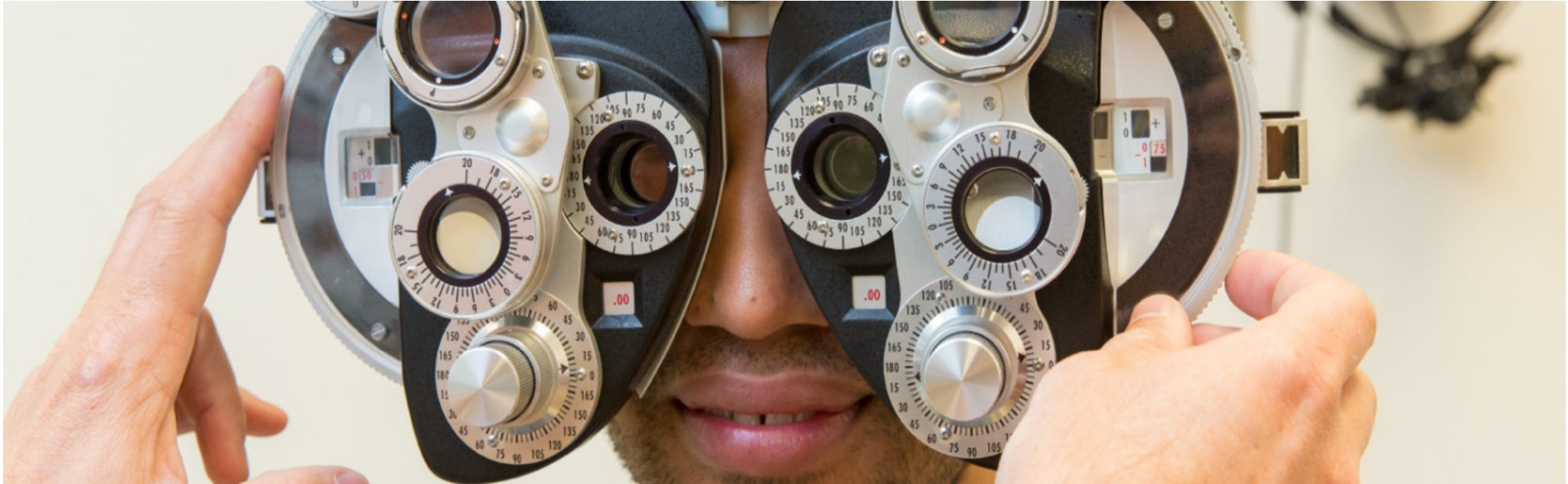
National Child Traumatic Stress Network

# Trauma is Normal

Traumatic stress reactions are normal reactions to abnormal circumstances

SAMHSA (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/>)

# Trauma Is a Lens



If you look at your child through the lens of trauma ...

... a lot of things might seem more clear



Maybe it will help your kids see better, too



# Features of Complex Trauma

- Multiple traumatic events
- Invasive & interpersonal
- Long-term impact
- Abuse or profound neglect
- Begins early in life
- Disrupt child's development & sense of self.
- interfere with formation of secure attachment bond

Complex Trauma Working Group, NCTSN, 2013

# Developmental Trauma

Direct experience or witnessing of multiple or prolonged adverse events with significant disruptions of protective caregiving due to primary caregiver changes, separation, or emotional abuse

Developmental Trauma Disorder Structured Interview for Child (2014)



# What does trauma feel like?

- Strong emotions
  - Terror
  - Helplessness
  - Fear
- Physical reactions
  - Heart pounding
  - Vomiting
  - Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Trauma triggers
  - external reminders
  - internal sensations
  - can be overwhelming

# Signs of Trauma in Children and Adolescents:

- Appetite or sleep issues
- Nightmares
- Belief that world is unsafe
- Poor concentration
- Jumping at loud or unexpected noise
- Moodiness or nervousness
- Inability to go to school or play with friends

adapted from <https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-traumatic-event/signs-of-trauma/>

# Signs of Trauma in Preschool Kids:

- Fearing separation from parents or caregivers
- Crying and/or screaming a lot
- Eating poorly and losing weight
- Having nightmares

SAMHSA

# Signs of Trauma in Elementary School Kids

- Becoming anxious or fearful
- Feeling guilt or shame
- Having a hard time concentrating
- Having difficulty sleeping

SAMHSA

# Signs of Trauma in Middle & High School Kids:

- Feeling depressed or alone
- Developing eating disorders and self-harming behaviors
- Beginning to abuse alcohol or drugs
- Becoming sexually active

SAMHSA

# Impact of Trauma on Attachment:

- Boundary issues
- Mistrust
- Social Isolation
- Interpersonal Difficulties
- Difficulty with Perspective-Taking

# Impact of Trauma on Learning/Cognition:

- Learning and language difficulties
- Problems with executive functions, e.g. attention, concentration, task completion, planning for future
- Difficulty processing new information
- Zoning out in class
- Inability to sit still in class
- Increased school absences

# Physiological Impact of Trauma:

- Disrupted sensorimotor development
- Chronic pain/low pain threshold
- Somatic complaints such as headaches or stomachaches
- Difficulty describing physical/body feelings
- Coordination, balance, & muscle tone issues
- Increased startle response
- Hypersensitivity to sound or touch



# Emotional Impact of Trauma:

- Trouble regulating emotion/mood swings
- Difficulty in describing emotions
- Depression, anxiety, hostility, or irritability
- Feeling worthless or damaged
- Hypervigilance — seeming “on guard”
- Perfectionism/need to control environment
- Rumination/perseverative worry

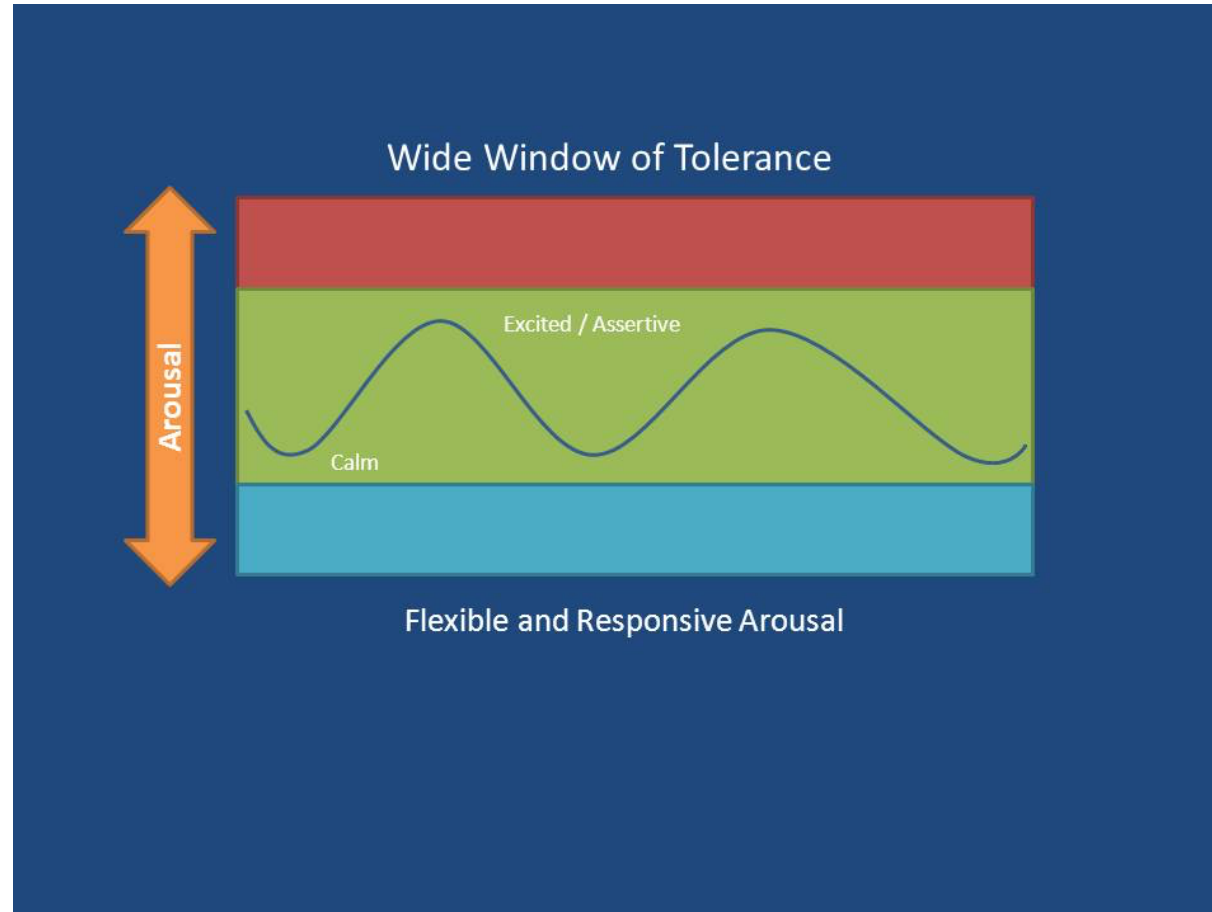
# Behavioral Impact:

- Externalizing behaviors:
  - tantrums/blowups
  - risk-taking, e.g. provoking fights
  - substance abuse or self-harm
  - oppositional/aggressive behavior
- Internalizing behaviors:
  - shutting down/withdrawal
  - passive/resistant
  - inability to initiate or sustain behavior

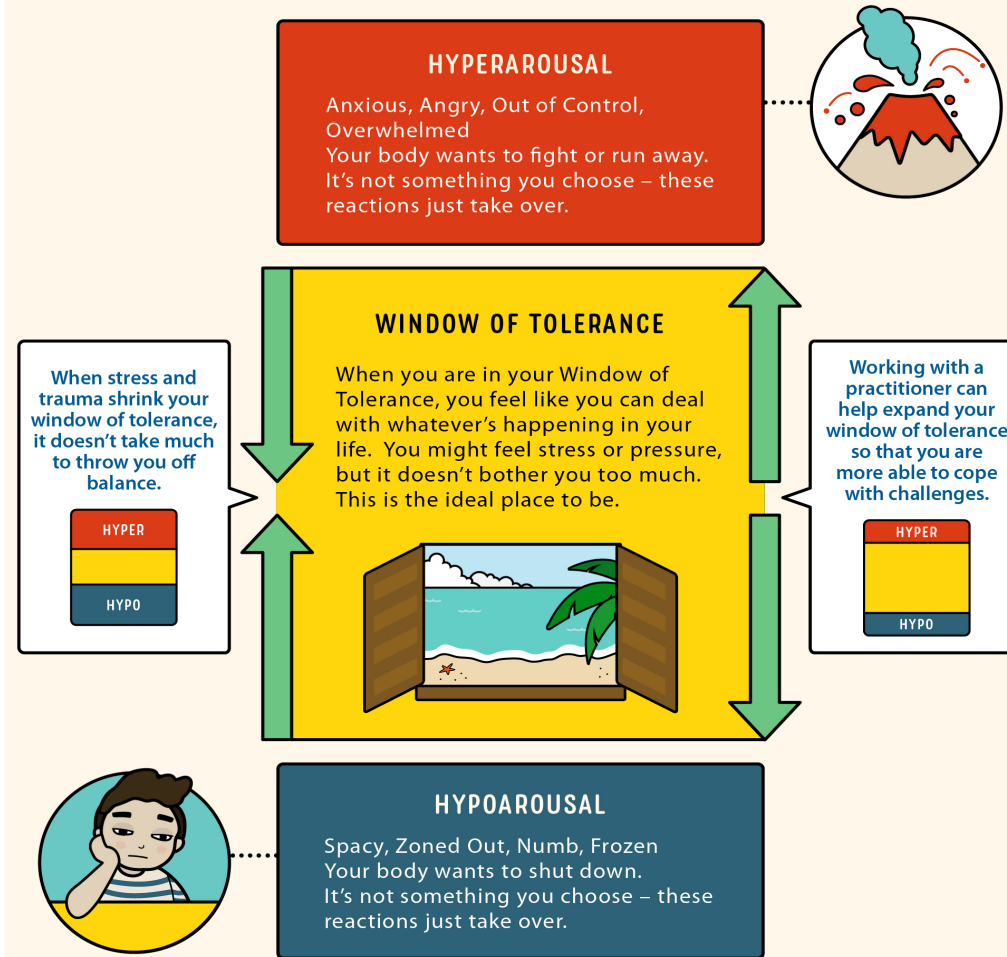
# Impact of Trauma on Sense of Self:

- Lack of continuous, predictable sense of self
- Poor sense of separateness/relational dysregulation
- Poor body image
- Low self-esteem
- Shame and guilt
- Persistent negative self-perception

# Window of Tolerance



# How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance



nicabm

Why is my kid behaving like that?

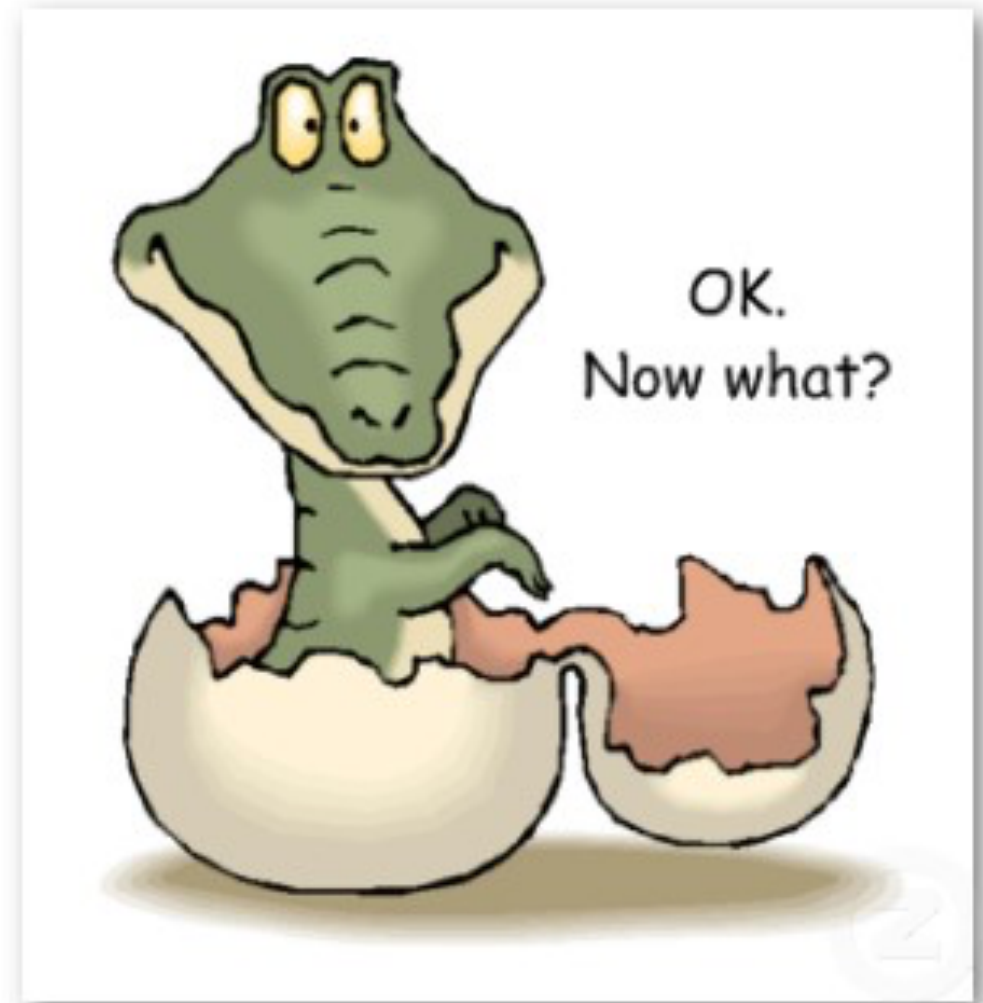


# Trauma and the Brain: Systemic Changes

- Overactive limbic system — emotional center of brain
- Underactive prefrontal cortex — site of planning, learning, decision-making
- Dysregulated autonomic nervous system
  - sympathetic activated for fight or flight
  - parasympathetic activated for shutdown
- Social engagement system not available —
  - Eye contact more difficult
  - Facial expression flattened
  - Voice monotone

So that's where trauma comes from and what it looks like.

Now what?





# Take care of yourself!



# Connection heals!



You cannot spoil a child with love

# Tips for Families

- Safety first
- Assure the child that what happened was not their fault
- Calmly share information
- Maintain routines
- Limit exposure to news coverage
- Respect your child's coping style
- Be a good listener without having to lecture
- Be honest about your own emotions but take care not to overwhelm
- Acknowledge child's feelings/don't deny
- It's OK to say, "I don't know"

# Movement and rhythm help with regulation

- Moving your head through space (vestibular system)  
Cartwheels, handstands and headstands, somersaults, jumping on trampoline
- Using your muscles (proprioceptive system)  
Jumping, crashing, throwing, hanging upside down, doing gymnastics
- Receiving deep pressure  
Big hugs, lying under a heavy blanket, rough and tumble play
- Finding a rhythm through dance, drumming, throwing a ball, clapping, swinging
- Singing with others encourages breathing & connection

# Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Treatment (SMART)

Do try this at home!

SMART at Home Video Series on YouTube:

- Physical Rhythms
- Tactile Regulation
- Vestibular Regulation
- Proprioceptive Regulation

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmrFvHrHGc9ak6avrvVme-w/featured>

# Movement you can do with your kids:

- Body Scan (45 minutes) with Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4gZgnCy5ew&app=desktop#>
- Guided Movement Videos (20 minutes each) and Expressive Arts :  
<https://www.traumaresearchfoundation.org/resources/resource-center>
- Fun Yoga for Young Kids:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=125&v=4ZpkRAcgws4&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=125&v=4ZpkRAcgws4&feature=emb_logo)
- Emotional Regulation Yoga for Teens (12 minutes):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epVF2cvsoUc>
- “Many Emotions” Trauma-Informed Yoga for younger kids:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJUzVA0K32M>

# Links to Online Information:

Fact sheet from SAMHSA with good sections on developmental trauma, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and resilience:

<http://files.constantcontact.com/bde05f96001/33cfa0d8-35ab-4453-abc6-9eb23cdcb10b.pdf?ver=1511887992000>

Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma — Fact sheet with good list of trauma symptoms in young children, school-age children, and teens: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/child-trauma.pdf>

# Resources in Ohio:

- Trauma-Informed Schools and Social Emotional Learning:

<http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Social-and-Emotional-Learning/Social-and-Emotional-Learning-Standards/Trauma-Informed-Schools-and-SEL.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

- Impact of Trauma on Students:

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/PBIS-Resources/Trauma-Informed-Schools/The-Impact-of-Trauma-on-Students>

- Ohio Family Care Association:

<http://ofcaonline.org>



# More from the Child-Mind Institute:

- Free guides for coping with trauma at <https://childmind.org/our-impact/trauma-response/guides/>
- Great guides for helping kids cope with trauma organized by age group: <https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-traumatic-event/signs-of-trauma/>

# National Child Traumatic Stress Network

- Complex Trauma: <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/complex-trauma>
- About Child Trauma Fact Sheet: <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma>
- Families and Trauma: <https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/families-and-trauma>

# Print Resources

*The Body Keeps the Score (2014)* by Bessel van der Kolk

*Healing Trauma (2008), In an Unspoken Voice (2010)* by Peter Levine

*Trauma-Proofing Your Kids (2008)* by Peter Levine and Maggie Kline

*Transforming Trauma in Children and Adolescents (2020)* by Elizabeth Warner, Heather Finn, Anne Westcott, & Alexandra Cook

# At home during Coronavirus Crisis

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network link to story with charming illustrations about “fighting the big virus”:  
[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/special-resource/trinka\\_and-sam\\_fighting\\_the\\_big\\_virus\\_questions.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/special-resource/trinka_and-sam_fighting_the_big_virus_questions.pdf)

Questions or comments?

Please feel free to contact me:

Nancy Muse

[nancywmuse@gmail.com](mailto:nancywmuse@gmail.com)

Thank you!