



Dr. Rosemarie Allen  
Associate Professor Metropolitan State  
University of Denver

# Trauma and Resilience in Young Children

# What is Culture?



## **Culture:**

- The way we live
- Values, mores, customs
- Behavioral expectations
- Belief Systems
- Communication styles
- Traditions that are shared and passed between generations



## Culture impacts the way children:

- Learn
- Cope
- Solve problems
- Communicate

Viewing the child through this cultural context provides an understanding of the child and the factors that influence behaviors

(Gay, Geneva 2010. Culturally Responsive Teaching)

# Elements: Of Culture



**We must be aware of our own cultural framework and context**

Kozleski, (2010). Culturally Responsive Teaching Matters! Equity Alliance

# The Cultural Background We Bring With Us:



Kozleski, Elizabeth (2010). Culturally Responsive Teaching Matters! Equity Alliance

## **The Branch/Leaves:** **What we see:**

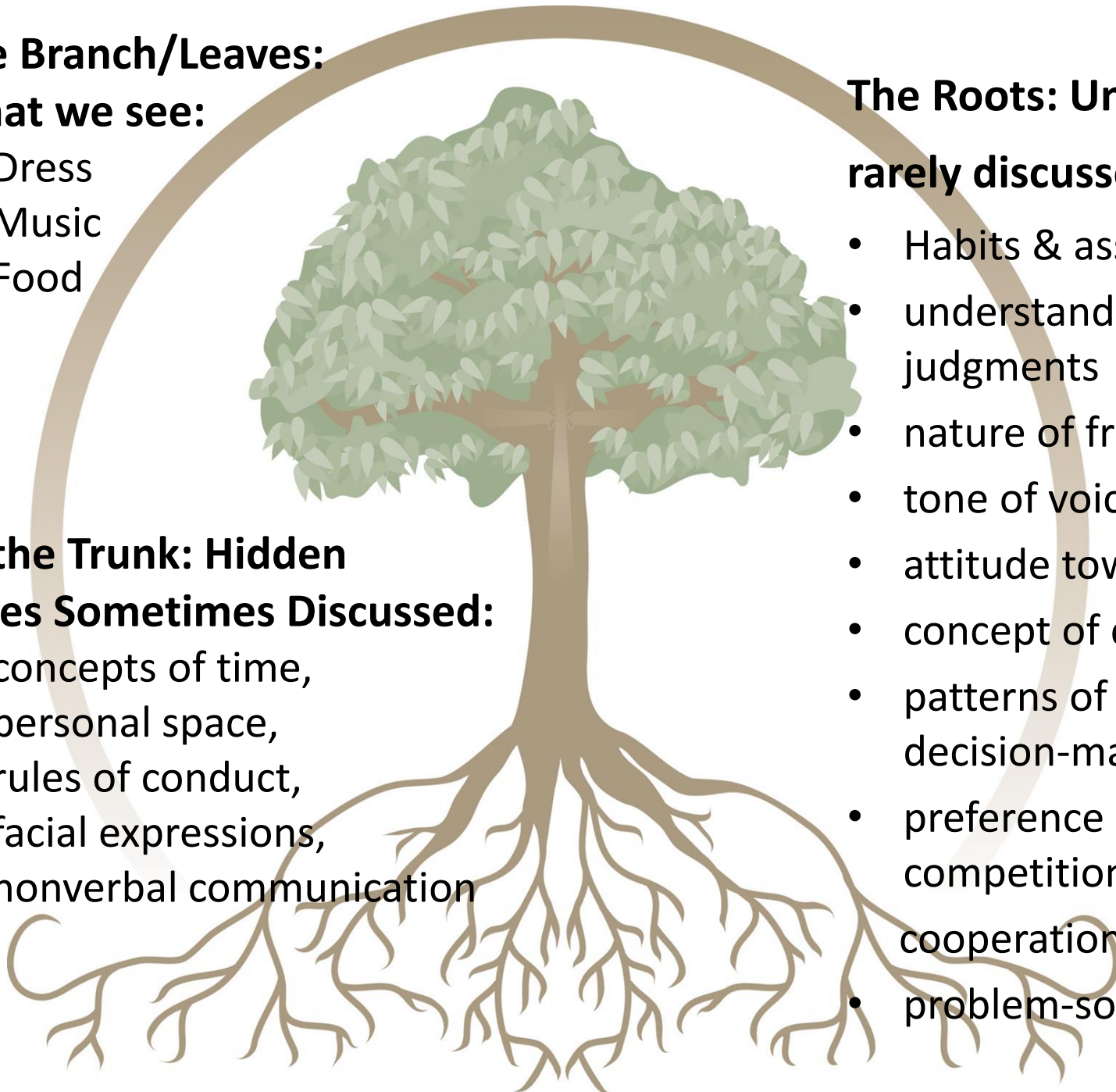
- Dress
- Music
- Food

## **At the Trunk: Hidden** **Rules Sometimes Discussed:**

- concepts of time,
- personal space,
- rules of conduct,
- facial expressions,
- nonverbal communication

## **The Roots: Unseen and** **rarely discussed:**

- Habits & assumptions,
- understandings, values, judgments
- nature of friendships,
- tone of voice,
- attitude toward elders,
- concept of cleanliness,
- patterns of group decision-making,
- preference for competition or cooperation,
- problem-solving



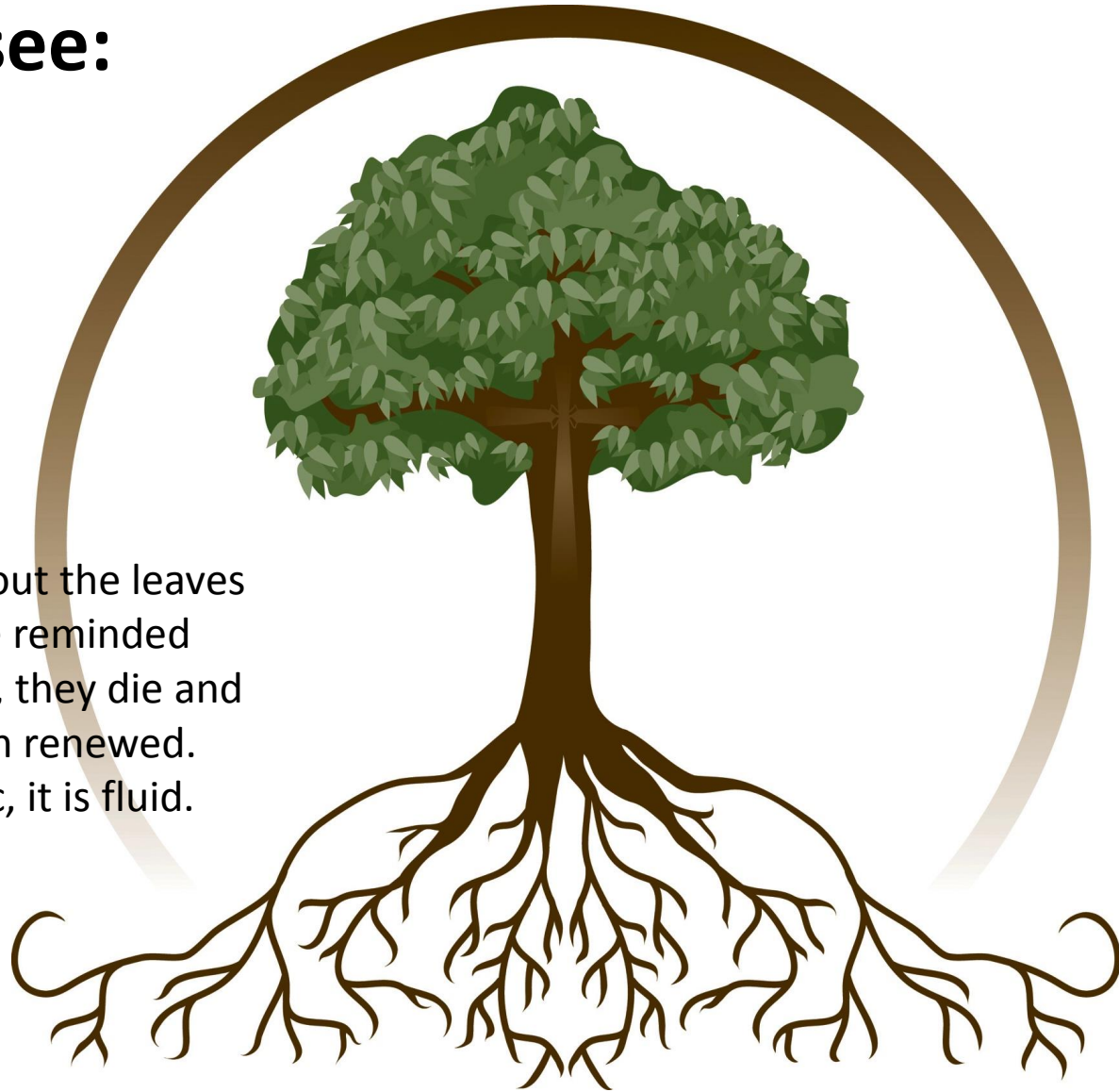


# The Branch/Leaves:

## What we see:

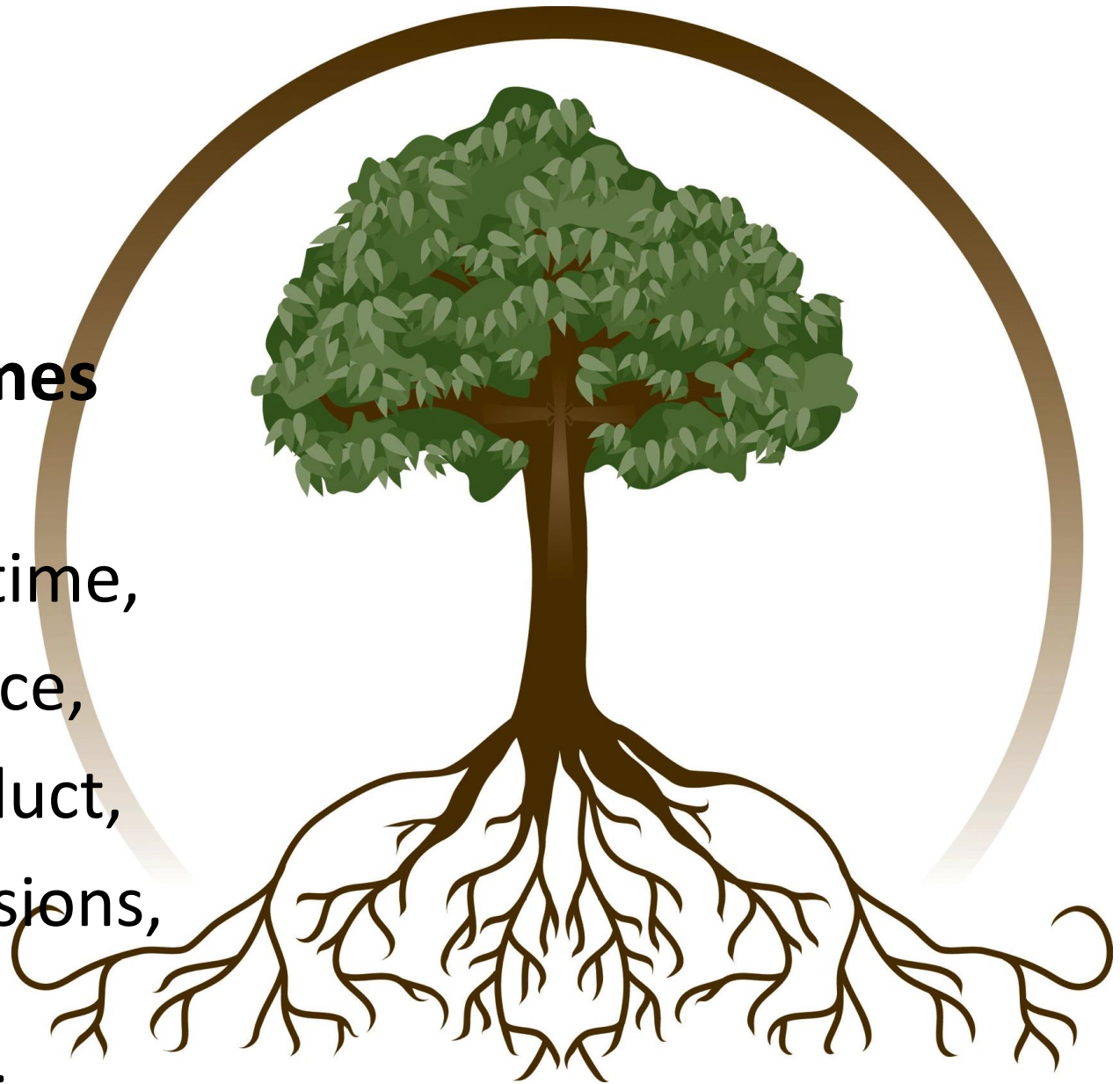
- Dress
- Music
- Food

When we think about the leaves on the tree, we are reminded that leaves change, they die and fall off and are then renewed. Culture is not static, it is fluid.



**At the Trunk:  
Hidden  
Rules Sometimes  
Discussed:**

- concepts of time,
- personal space,
- rules of conduct,
- facial expressions,
- nonverbal communication







## **The Roots: Unseen and rarely discussed:**

- Habits & assumptions,
- understandings, values, judgments
- nature of friendships,
- tone of voice,
- attitude toward elders,
- concept of cleanliness,
- patterns of group decision-making,
- preference for competition or cooperation,
- problem-solving



**Hey girl and then I told him,  
is you crazy?**

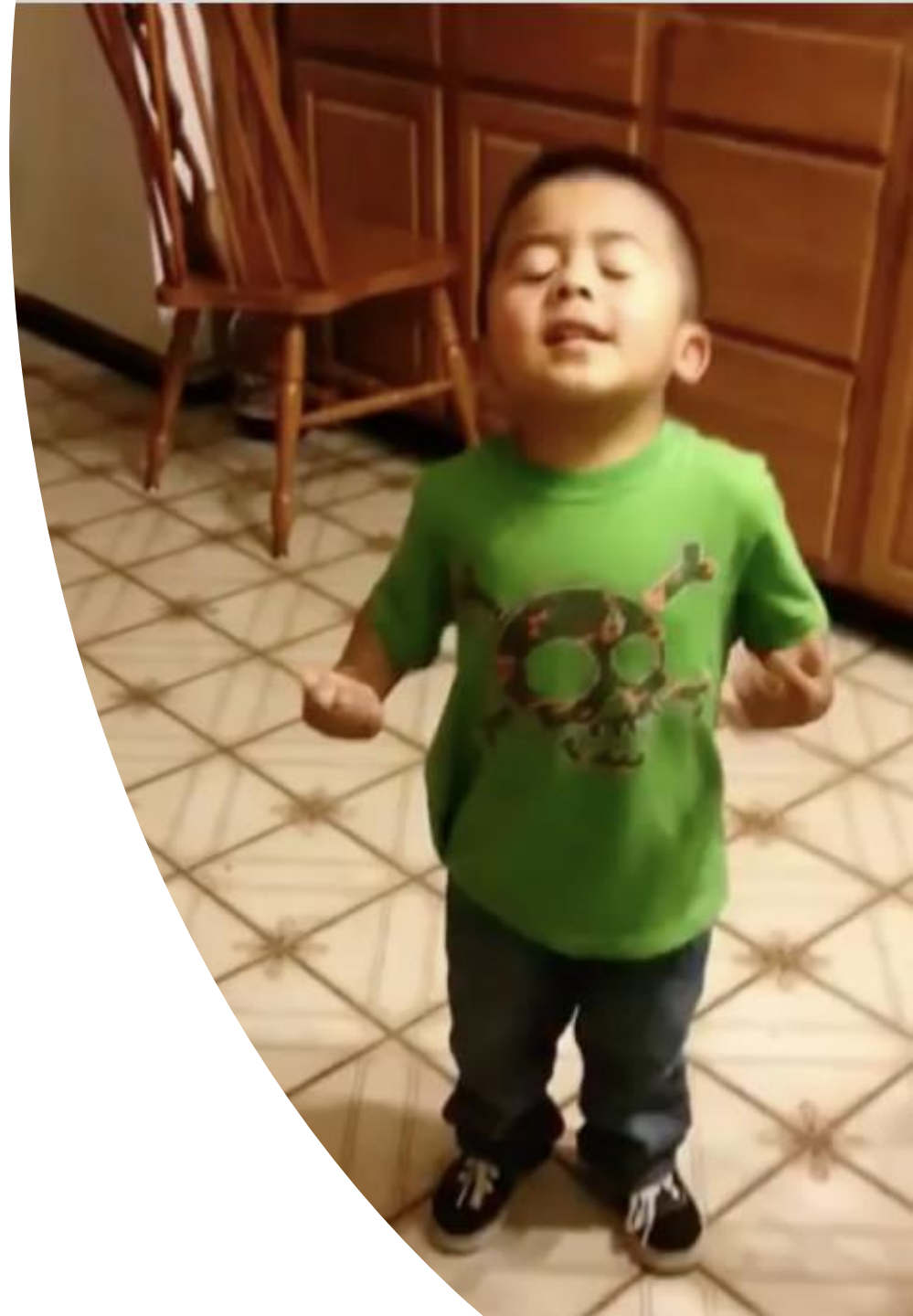


- How do we ensure this little girl's sweet spirit is embraced?
- How do we honor who she is in our classrooms?



How do we honor Mateo  
in our classroom without  
breaking his spirit?

How Do We Ensure  
the Success for  
Mateo?







**DIFFERENT IS NOT DEFICIT**



# Young children and trauma

---

Child traumatic stress occurs when children's exposure to traumatic events overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced.

(Jones, n.d.)



Chronic exposure to toxic stress interferes with child development and may result in 'challenging' behaviors

(Craig, 2016)







# What is Trauma?

Quick and Dirty  
Definition:

- **A Deep Emotional Wound.**
- Toxic Stress (come from Toxic Environments)

(Jones, n.d.)



# Types of Trauma



- Complex trauma
- Family violence
- Medical trauma
- Natural disasters
- Community and school violence
- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Traumatic grief
- Refugee and war zone trauma

Source: Adapted from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network,  
[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)



# Complex trauma

---

Exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events:

- psychological maltreatment,
- neglect,
- physical and sexual abuse
- family violence,

that is chronic and begins in early childhood and occurs within the primary caregiving system

A close-up photograph of a young Black child with short, dark hair. The child is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. Their right index finger is placed in their mouth. The child is wearing a dark, textured sweater. The background is a solid, light gray.

# Family violence

Actual or threatened physical or sexual  
violence or emotional abuse

# Medical trauma

---

Reactions to pain, injury and serious illness or to invasive medical procedures (such as surgery) or treatments (such as burn care)





# Natural disasters

Situations where local, state and/or national agencies and disaster relief services are called into action e.g. fires, floods



# Community and school violence trauma

---

## Examples:

Predatory violence (robbery) and violence that comes from personal conflicts between people who are not known to the child (shootings, stabbings, beatings)

Fights at school, threats to or injury of child





# Neglect

- Neglect includes lack of :
  - Food
  - Shelter
  - Clothing
  - Access to medical and health treatment

# Neglect

---

## Neglect can also include:

- Exposing a child to dangerous environments
- Poor supervision
- Putting a child in the care of someone incapable of caring for the child
- Abandoning a child or expelling a child from home







# Physical abuse


- Causing or attempting to cause physical pain or injury (punching, kicking, hitting, burning or harming a child in other ways)
- Can consist of a single incident or multiple incidents

# Sexual abuse

---

- Includes a wide range of sexual behaviours that take place between a child and an older person
- Behaviours include:
  - Sexual kissing
  - Touching
  - Fondling of genitals
  - Intercourse
  - 'Flashing'
  - Verbal pressure for sex
  - Sexual exploitation e.g. prostitution
  - Exposure to pornography





# Refugee or war zone trauma

- Exposure to war, political violence or torture
- Can be the result of living in a region affected by bombing, shooting or looting as well as forced displacement to a new home due to political reasons

# Traumatic grief

---

Death of a family member or someone important to the child

May be sudden and unexpected (e.g. accident) or anticipated (e.g. illness or other natural causes)



# Historical Trauma

---

- Historical trauma is a form of trauma that impacts entire communities.
- It refers to cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, as a result of group traumatic experiences, transmitted across generations within a community

(Ford & Courtois, 2009).







Traumatic events With the Child's Age and Developmental Stage



## Trauma impact 0-12 months

- Sleep disruption
- Loss of acquired motor skills
- Lowered stress threshold
- Lowered immune system
- Fear response to reminders of trauma
- Mood and personality changes



# Trauma impact 0- 12 months

Loss of, or reduced capacity to  
attune with caregiver

Loss of, or reduced capacity to  
manage emotional states or self-  
soothe

Insecure, anxious or disorganised  
attachment behaviour

Heightened anxiety when  
separated from primary  
parent/carer



# Trauma impact 12 months – 3 years

---

- As for 0 – 12 months
- Increased resistance to parental direction
- Memory for trauma may be evident in behavior, language or play

# Trauma impact 3 – 5 years

- Behavioral changes
- Hyperarousal, hypervigilance, hyperactivity
- Loss of toileting
- Regression in recently acquired developmental gains e.g. eating skills
- Sleep disturbances, night terrors





# Trauma impact 3 – 5 years

- Enuresis and encopresis
- Delayed gross motor and visual-perceptual skills
- Fear of trauma recurring
- Mood and personality changes
- Loss of, or reduced capacity to manage emotional states or self-soothe

# Trauma impact 3 – 5 years

---

- Increased need for control
- Fear of separation
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Confusion about trauma evident in play ... magical explanations and unclear understanding of causes of bad events
- Speech, cognitive and auditory processing delays







# Trauma impact 5 – 7 years

- Behavioral change
- Increased tension, irritability, reactivity and inability to relax
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares, night terrors, difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Regression of behavior
- Lack of eye contact

# Trauma impact 5 – 7 years

---

- ‘Spacey’, easily distracted or hyperactive behavior
- Toileting accidents/enuresis or smearing of feces
- Bodily aches and pains – no apparent reason
- Accident proneness
- Eating disturbances





## Trauma impact 5 – 7 years

- Excessive absenteeism/truancy from school
- Fire-lighting, hurting animals
- Obvious anxiety, fearfulness and loss of self-esteem
- Specific fears
- Efforts to distance from feelings of shame, guilt, humiliation and reduced capacity to feel emotions



## Trauma impact 5 – 7 years

- ‘blinking out’ or loss of concentration when under stress at school with lowering of performance
- Explicit, aggressive exploitive, sexualized relating/engagement with other children
- Sexualized behavior towards adults
- Sexualized drawing

# Trauma impact 5 – 7 years

---

- Verbally describes experiences of sex abuse, pointing to body parts and telling about the 'game' they played
- Excessive concern or preoccupation with private parts and adult sexual behavior
- Verbal or behavioral indications of age-inappropriate knowledge of adult sexual behavior
- Running away from home





# What can I do?

- Begin to build a relationship, by being honest, reliable and doing what you say you will do
- Understand trauma
- Help them feel safe through nurture, structure and support
- Use boundaries and logical consequences
- Stay calm and well-regulated – even as you set limits on aggression – to avoid power battles

# What can I do?

- Understand your own traumas, so you can reflect on your own feelings and reactions
- Co-regulate with the child: use your calm to soothe and help them calm
- Don't take their behavior personally
- Use discipline without shaming
- Engage with family members and caregivers

Adapted from: Child Safety Commissioner, 2009, *From isolation to connection: a guide to understanding and working with traumatised children and young people*, [www.kids.vic.gov](http://www.kids.vic.gov).

# Shifting to a Trauma-Informed Lens

**From:** “What’s wrong with you?”



**To:** “What happened to you?  
(And how can I help?)”

***'Now if you-'***

# Traditional Reactions

---

- “Go to the principal’s office.”
- “Stop acting like a baby.”
- “Don’t you talk to an adult like that.”
- “It’s not that difficult.”
- “You should have never acted like that.”
- “Act your age.”
- “Stop whining.”





# Trauma-Informed Responses

“I’m here. You’re not in trouble.”

“That really set you back, didn’t it?”

“You’re allowed to have a voice. Let’s talk together.”

“I need to know how hard this is for you.”

“Sometimes life just gets too hard, doesn’t it?”

“Let’s talk about it.”

“I want to understand you better. If I know how you feel, I’ll be able to help you better. Use your voice.”



# Give Emotional Space

---

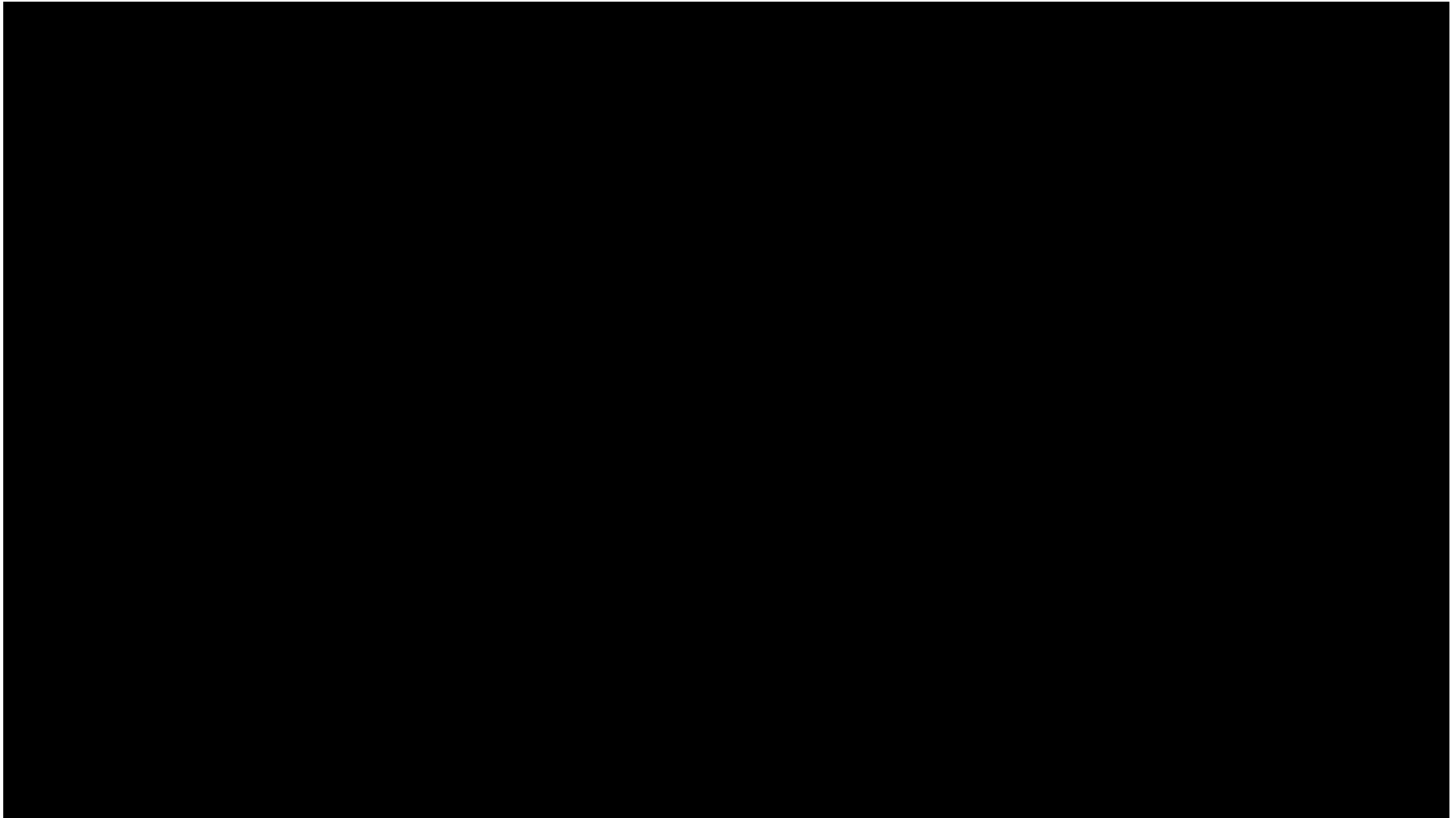
- Accept without trying to solve the issue.
- Ask probing questions to better understand what is going on inside your student.
- Allow the student to be upset.
- Give empathy to the issue (this doesn't mean you have to agree with it).

# Ask Yourself:

---

- What is driving my student's behavior?
- What else is going on here?
- What does my student need?
- How can I change my perspective?
- What keeps me only looking at behavior?
- What is this behavior communicating right now?
- What in the environment could be triggering the behavior?
- What can I do at this moment to improve my relationship with this student? What does my student need?





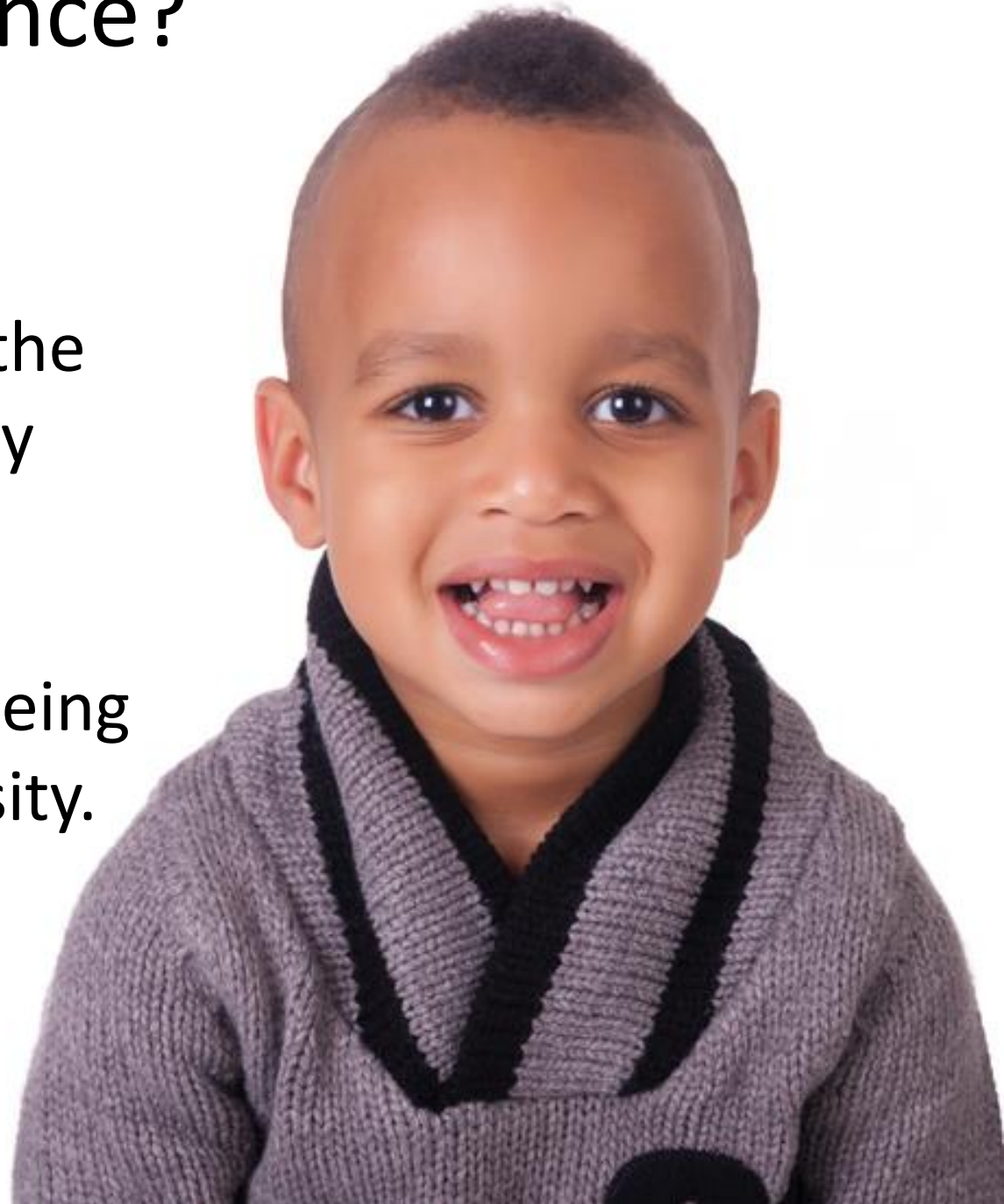


What “Single  
Stories” Do you  
Have About  
Families?



# What is Resilience?

Resilience refers to the ability to successfully adapt to stressors, maintaining psychological well-being in the face of adversity.





It's the ability to “bounce back” from difficult experiences.

Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions, that can be learned and developed in everyone.



# The Resilient Brain

---

The brain has the capacity to adapt and reverse the impact of early trauma.

# 3 Systems for Promoting Resilience



## CAPABILITY

- Intellectual & employable skills
- Self-regulation—self-control, executive function, flexible thinking
- Ability to direct & control attention, emotion, behavior
- Positive self-view, efficacy



## ATTACHMENT & BELONGING

- Bonds with parents &/or caregivers
- Positive relationships with competent & nurturing adults
- Friends or romantic partners who provide a sense of security & belonging, help with emotion coaching



## COMMUNITY, CULTURE & SPIRITUALITY

- Faith, hope, sense of meaning
- Engagement with effective organizations—schools, work, pro-social groups
- Network of supports/services & opportunity to help others
- Cultures providing positive standards, expectation, rituals, relationships & supports



# Attachment and Bonding

---

- Bonds with parents and/or caregivers
- Positive relationships with competent & nurturing adults







# Attachment and the Brain

The brain is constructed  
within the context of the  
child's first relationship.



The brain provides the **physical** foundation for positive relationships. Relationships are not only emotional, they also have **physical** component.



The brain's two prime directives are to stay safe and be happy. For this reason the **brain** stays on alert.



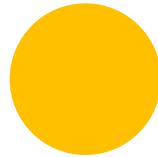
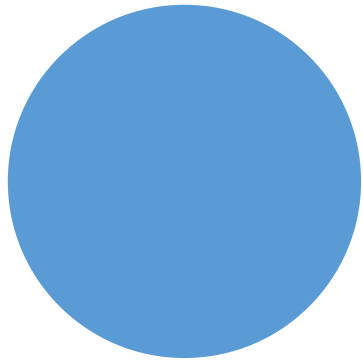
- 
- Children need to feel valued and safe in the classroom.





- Children who have experienced trauma **must** feel **affirmed** and **included** as valued members of the classroom community.






# Connecting With Parents Using Culturally Responsive Practices

Dr. Rosemarie  
Allen





What are your  
“take aways” from  
this Tedx Talk?

What Experts Say

Culturally Responsive Family  
Engagement Practices by:

[Jessica Lavorgna](#)

Five key practices to consider





In order to develop authentic partnerships with parents, the practitioner must honor the parent as the child's first and best teacher.



# 1. Build Relationships and Be Present

- Start with a conversation
- Be present in students' communities
- Develop mutual understanding and respect

Lavorgna, n.d.





Do We Really Honor Parents As the Child's First and BEST Teacher?



## 2. Recognize, Honor, and Promote Existing Knowledge

- Learn and understand what families know, then honor it
- Send a clear message to all families: they matter and they are a vital component of their child's education



### 3. Identify and Use What Works for Families

- The “one-size-fits-all” approach does not work
- Does the school’s culture and a family’s culture align?
- Imagine what family engagement looks like by engaging families in nontraditional, yet culturally responsive ways



## 4. Promote a culture of awareness, learning, and sharing

- Listen and observe before talking and acting
- Examine and challenge preconceived notions of others
- Take the time, energy, and effort to promote a culture of awareness, learning, and sharing





# What Are Some Non- Traditional Ways to Engage Families?

---





## 5. Foster Community by Building Social Capital

- Develop, support, and sustain community
- Establish an authentic sense of oneness
- Bring dissimilar groups together to build unity
- Focus on relationship building and resource-sharing on and *off* school property



Its All About Relationships!