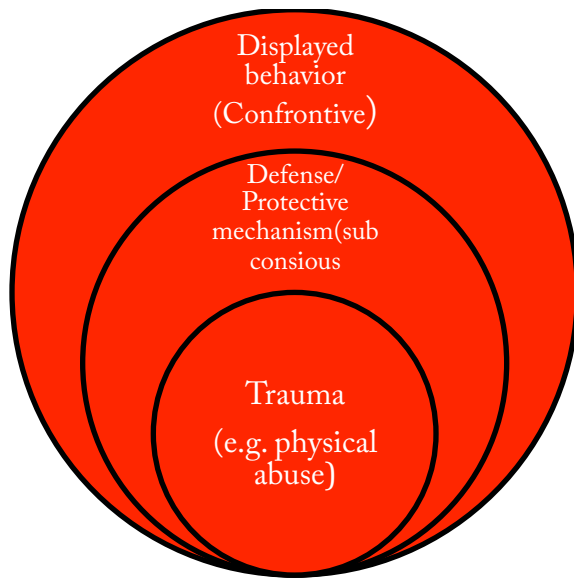


Trauma Adaptations

Week 3 Summary and References Sheet

What is a Trauma Adaptation?

- A trauma adaptation is similar to a psychological defense mechanism in which someone unconsciously “defends” against discomfort to protect him or herself. With a trauma adaptation however, the defense mechanism is specifically rooted in the context of the trauma (i.e., someone who has a defense mechanism of aggressiveness as a way to protect themselves from danger because they were abused growing up).



The figure on the left represents how traumatic adaptations get developed over time.

1. Trauma occurs as a result of a dangerous or threatening event (e.g., physical abuse).
2. The subconscious attempts to protect the individual. In those instances of abuse they may fight, flee, or freeze. In the example to the left the fight response may contribute to the development of confrontation or aggressiveness over time.
3. The out layer of the figure represents what you as the adult see and have to deal with.

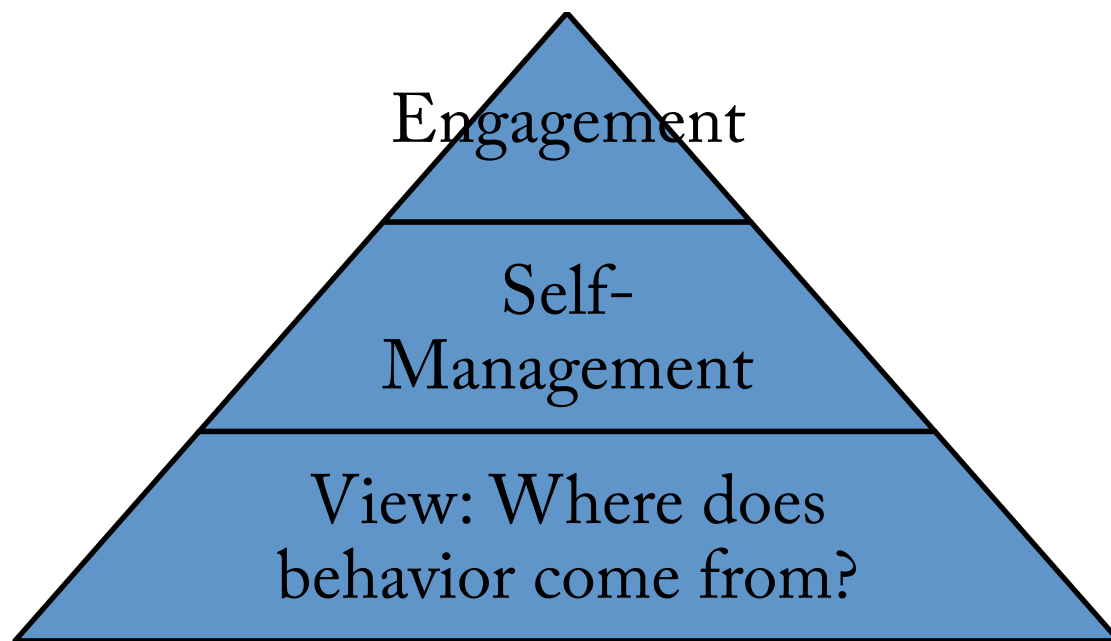
The Analogy of the Tree and Trauma Adaptations

- Think of a tree and all its roots as an analogy for traumatic adaptations: The roots represent the core traumas, ACEs, and other experiences the youth have had.
- The trunk represents the process of the adaptations forming over time (i.e., for the psychological and sometimes physical survival of the youth).
- The branches and leaves represent what we see as adults, the disruptive behavior, class clown, etc.



Pyramid of Skillfully Engaging Trauma Adaptations

- The below pyramid is one way to think of engaging youth when traumatic adaptations present themselves. The bottom layer's essential questions is, "How do we view where difficult or disruptive behaviors come from?" with an emphasis on looking at behavior via a trauma-informed lens. This layer informs one's whole outlook on working with youth.
- The middle layer focuses on how we as professionals manage ourselves, in the moment, when disruptiveness, aggression, etc. (e.g., experiences that may make us uncomfortable in some way) arise. Self-awareness is a key component to effective self-management.
- The top layer, engagement, is how we actually engage the youth we work with when they're presenting with an adaptation/defense mechanism. This is what we "do" or say in the moment and implementing interventions (see module 4) effectively highly depends on effective activation of the lower two layers of the pyramid.



Bottom Layer of the Pyramid: Skillful View

Key points:

- Resistance, disruptive behavior, aggressiveness, and other types of behaviors (i.e., they don't have to make you uncomfortable and can at times fly under the radar like over-compliance) can be psychological, interpersonal, and behavioral defense mechanisms that are rooted in the experience of trauma and the individual's method for coping with that trauma. Think of the analogy of the "Space Suit" and "Golden Buddha Statue."

- As a professional, your ego strength is critical. If you take behaviors personally it will be difficult to maintain a balanced state of mind, an essential for self-management and skillful engagement. Further, understanding your own implicit biases when it comes to race, sexuality, gender, class, etc. is critical to unearthing the multiple layers of your ego, and thus effectively “seeing” the youth you work with

Middle Layer of the Pyramid: Self-Management

Key points:

- Self-management is highly dependent on self-awareness. When you’re aware of your current experience, with an attitude of non-reactivity, you’re much more likely to be skillful in the next step, engagement.
- Mindfulness is the practice of present moment awareness of experience with an attitude of non-reactivity.
- A mindfulness-based acronym for use in critical (highly triggering) situations is T.A.P.

T. Take a Breath: Collecting yourself in the moment by taking a few breaths.

A. Acknowledge: Acknowledge how you feel in the moment; acknowledge that the youth’s behavior could be a result of trauma and therefore be compassionate.

P. Proceed: Choose the best intervention in the moment and move forward with it (more on this in module 4).

Top Layer of the Pyramid: Engagement

Key Points:

- After you’ve activated your self-awareness/self-management practice, the next step is to actually engage the youth. There are 3 basic concepts of engagement reviewed in the lesson; 1) Voice tone; 2) Questions rather than demands; 3) Positive reinforcement and gratitude when appropriate.
- **Voice tone:** This is simple. The less you yell and raise your voice at the youth you work with, the more likely they’re going to be receptive to you. This depends highly on your ability to be mindful in the moment.
- **Questions over demands:** Again, this could be viewed as a simple tactic, but in practice it can be difficult, especially if you’re used to blurting out orders. Simply ask questions rather than tell youth what to do. When we demand something, it’s more likely they’ll push back in some way.

- **Positive reinforcement:** Positive reinforcement is highly underrated, especially when it comes to working with teens (as compared to younger children). It's important to reinforce pro-social behaviors and show gratitude when appropriate (e.g., "Thanks so much for apologizing to the group. That was a great display of sincerity and I really appreciate it. It really shows your character.")

Key References from Trauma Adaptation Lessons

Metaphors (and much more) for Trauma Adaptations

Bugental, J.F.T.. (1999). *Psychotherapy isn't what you think: Bringing the therapeutic engagement into the living moment*. Zeig Tucker.

Kornfield, J. (2008). *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. Bantam Books.

Resources on Implicit Bias:

- Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (important for understanding our own biases and how they impact our interactions with youth and their trauma adaptations)
www.kirwaninstitute.osu.edu

Research on Positive Reinforcement:

Cameron, J., & Pierce, W. (1994). Reinforcement, reward, and intrinsic motivation: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 64, 363–423.

Chalk, K., & Bizo, L. (2004). Specific praise improves on-task behavior and numeracy enjoyment: A study of year four pupils engaged in the numeracy hour. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 20, 335–351.

Christensen, L., Young, K., & Marchant, M. (2004). The effects of a peer-mediated positive behavior support program on socially appropriate classroom behavior. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 27(3), 199–234.

Hansen, S. D., & Lignugaris-Kraft, B. (2005). Effects of a dependent group contingency on the verbal interactions of middle school students with emotional disturbance. *Behavior Disorders*, 30, 170–184.

Moore Partin, T., Robertson, R., Maggin, D., Oliver, R., & Wehby, J. (2010). Using teacher praise and opportunities to respond to promote appropriate student behavior. *Preventing School Failure*, 54(3), 172–178.

Sutherland, K., Wehby, J., & Copeland, S. (2000). Effect on varying rates of behavior-specific praise on the on-task behavior of students with EBD. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 8,