

Fostering Success: Trauma Informed Transition Services for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

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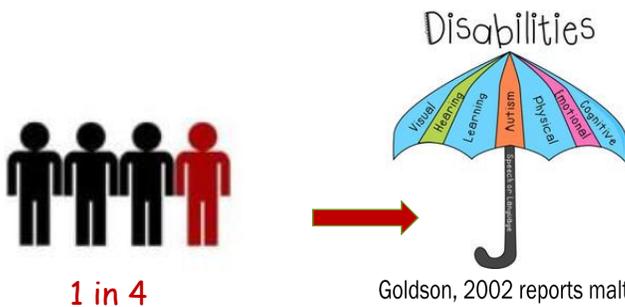
Session Outline

- Why do trauma informed transition services matter?
- What is trauma?
- How does trauma impact school success and post-secondary transition?
- What are the benefits of a trauma-informed approach?
- What makes transition services “trauma informed”?

Background

- The U.S. foster care system population reached 397,122 in 2012. Nearly one third of all children in foster care are between the ages of 14 and 20 years and meet the federal definition of “aging out” of care (AFCARS, 2013).
- Virtually every child in foster care has had trauma exposure. As many as 70% of these children meet criteria for complex trauma (NCTSN, n.d.).
- Approximately one third of foster children receive special education services (Choice et al, 2001; Runyan & Gould, 1985; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994).

How common is childhood trauma?



Goldson, 2002 reports maltreatment among children with disabilities:

Incidents per 1,000

	Children without Disabilities	Children with Disabilities
Physical Abuse	4.5	9.4
Sexual Abuse	2.0	3.5
Emotional Abuse	2.9	3.5

What is childhood trauma?



<https://youtu.be/z8vZxDa2KPM>

What is the impact of complex trauma?

*Scene from the movie
"Gimmie Shelter"*



Adolescent's Reaction To Trauma		
Internalizing Reactions		Externalizing Reaction
Emotional numbing	Somatic complaints	Interpersonal conflicts
Avoidance of stimuli	Sleep disturbances	Aggressive responses
Flashbacks and nightmares	Academic or vocational decline	School refusal or avoidance
Confusion	Suicidal thoughts	Substance abuse
Depression	Guilt	Antisocial behavior
Withdrawal and isolation	Revenge fantasies	

Sources: Adapted from Perry, et al., 1995; Perry & Pollard, 1998; Perry, 2009.

Survival Coping: Acting out versus Acting in

- **External defense**

- Anger
- Violence towards others
- Truancy
- Criminal acts
- Aggression



- **Internal defense**

- Denial, repression
- Substance use
- Eating Disorders
- Violence to self
- Dissociation/withdrawal



Time alone cures nothing.....

Self reported behavioral issues among youth 11 to 17 years old in foster care



Source: Casanueva, et al., 2011.

Trauma-related Conditions

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Substance abuse (SA) or dependence
- Anxiety/panic disorder
- Eating disorders
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD)
- Dissociative identity disorder (DID)
- Depression
- Medical illness and somatization disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Self-inflicted violence

Fast facts about students in foster care



Fast facts about students in foster care

Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2012	399,546
Average number of living arrangements during first foster care stay	2.8
Number of foster children of school age	249,107
Likelihood of being absent from school	2x that of other students
Percent of foster youth who change schools when first entering care	56%-75%
Percent of 17-18 year olds in care who have experienced 5+ school changes	34%
Likelihood of 17-18 year old foster youth having an out-of-school suspension	2x that of other students
Likelihood of 17-18 year old foster youth being expelled	3x that of other students
Average reading level of 17-18 year olds in foster care	7th grade
Likelihood of foster youth receiving special education	2.5 - 3.5x that of others
Percent of foster youth who complete high school by 18	50%
Percent of 17-18 year old foster youth who want to go to college	84%
Percent of foster youth who graduated from high school who attend college	20%
Percent of former foster youth who attain a bachelor's degree	2 - 9%

Source: National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2014)

Fewer than 20 percent of eligible youth in foster care go on to higher education compared to 60 percent of youth in the general population.

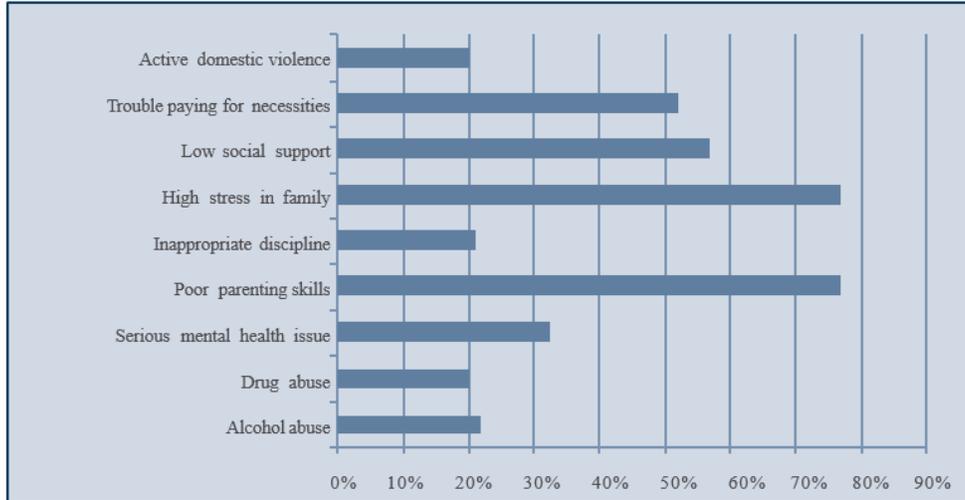
A trauma informed perspective asks:

What has happened to you?
Not, what is wrong with you?

**“Genetics loads the gun
and the environment
pulls the trigger.”**

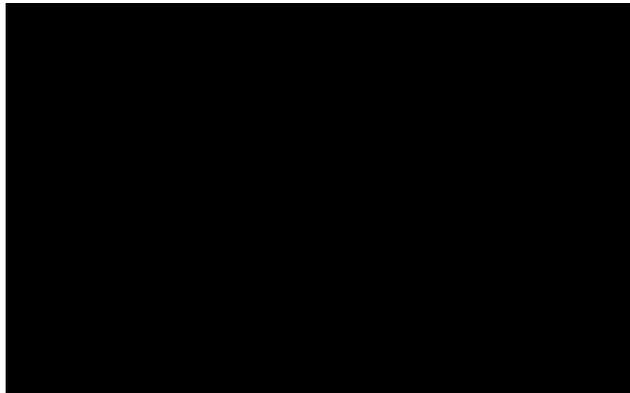
Dr. Francis Collins, director of
the US National Institutes of
Health

Caregiver Profile For Young People Involved In The Child Welfare System



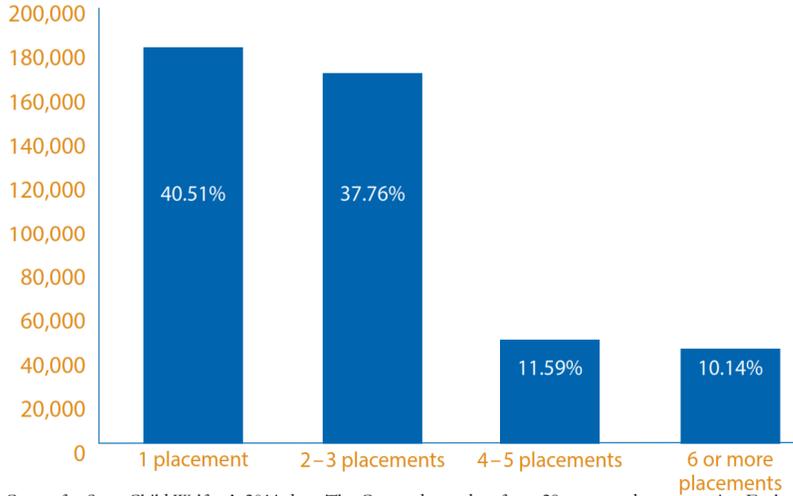
Source: Casanueva, et al., 2011.

Trauma informed transition services encourage, individualized, culturally competent programming and supports.



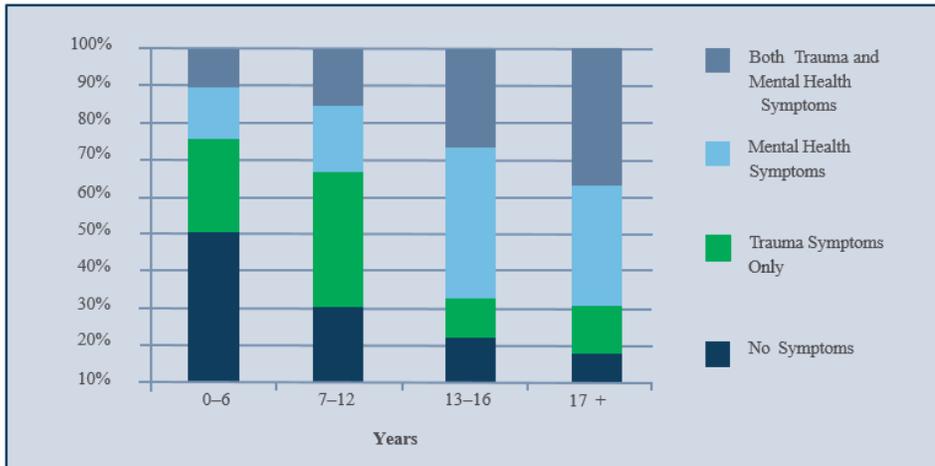
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School-Age Children and Youth in Foster Care (5-17 Years) Who Entered Care Between 2005-2009:
Number of Children by Number of Living Arrangements



Source: The Center for State Child Welfare's 2011 data. The Center draws data from 29 states and two counties. Each youth who first entered care between 2005-2009 is represented in this data. The number of living arrangements was counted from entry date through the end of 2011.

Presence of trauma and mental health symptoms in children and adolescents in foster care by age



Source: Samuels, 2011.

How trauma impacts learning and school success

A world gone awry

- Fear driven brain
- Survival focus
- Chronic dysregulation
- Stress vulnerability
- Sensory overload
- Negative self appraisal
- Cognitive distortions
- Intimacy distress
- Helplessness and despair

Classroom behaviors

- Aggression
- Defiance
- Impulsivity and reactivity
- Withdrawal
- Perfectionism
- Black and white thinking
- Poor attention and task motivation
- Lack of perspective taking
- Poor grasp of cause-effect relationships
- Low socio-emotional intelligence
- Poor problem solving
- Emotional immaturity

For students aging out of foster care transition planning can be overwhelming, exciting, and frightening

finances + money management

job + career

Life skills

identity

permanence

education

SELF care + HEALTH

HOUSING

TRANSPORTATION

community, culture & social life

How do trauma-informed services benefit students in foster care?

Promotes Grow

- Fosters safety and trust
- Allows youth to move beyond survival-oriented functioning
- Assists youth to develop relationships with caring, supportive adults
- Creates a felt sense of safety needed for learning
- Creates “chains of positive experiences¹” needed for youth to develop a sense of self-efficacy and resilience

Reduces Risk

- ↓ inaccurate labelling
- ↓ use of seclusion and restraint
- ↓ behavioral difficulties
- ↓ crisis
- ↓ social isolation
- ↓ negative self-fulfilling prophecies

¹ Rutter (1999)

Optimizing School Services and Environments for Traumatized Children

Avoid

- Stress and anxiety
- Teaching to the bell shaped curve
- Unsupervised peer relations
- Learning through criticism
- Uneven competition
- Punishment, including seclusion and restraint

Enhance

- Expressive learning
- Predictable structure
- More successes than failures
- Adult mediated peer interaction
- External cognitive structure
- Encouragement through relationship
- Teaching to the child’s individual learning style

Adapted from Ziegler (n.d.)

Optimizing School Services and Environments for Traumatized Children

Avoid

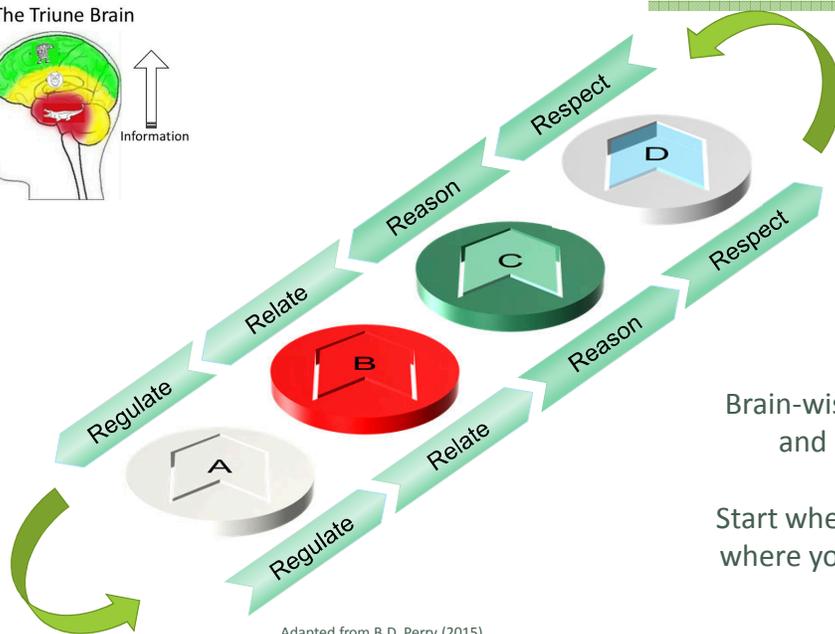
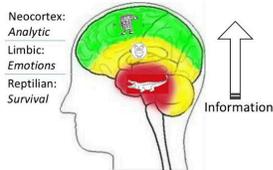
- Ridicule and coercion
- A constricting environment
- Rigidity
- Unrealistic expectations
- An environment that can be easily disrupted

Enhance

- Even competition
- Internalized goal setting
- Enjoyment and fun
- Variety of activities and help with transitions
- Choices in areas of the child's interests
- Group/cooperative efforts promoting teamwork
- Safety planning

Adapted from Ziegler (n.d.)

The Triune Brain

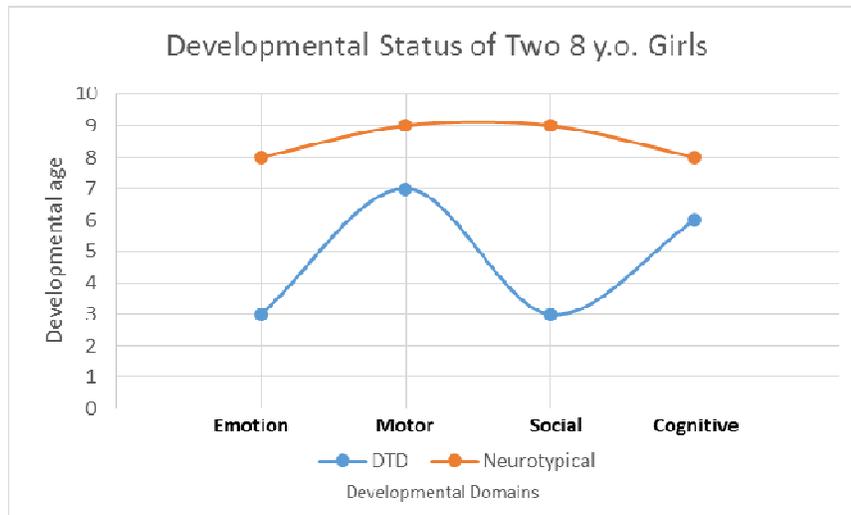


Brain-wise transition services
and school supports:

Start where the student is, not
where you expect them to be.

Adapted from B.D. Perry (2015)

Start where they are and scaffold



What makes transition services “trauma-informed”?

“A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

- *Realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- *Recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- *Responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
- Seeks to actively resist *re-traumatization*.”

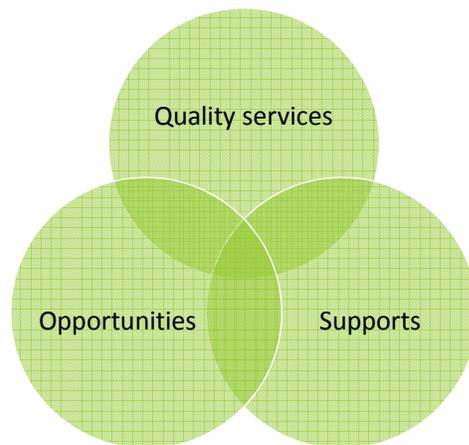
SAMHSA (2015)

SAMHSA's Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice and choice
- Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues



Keys to effective transition services for youth aging out of foster care



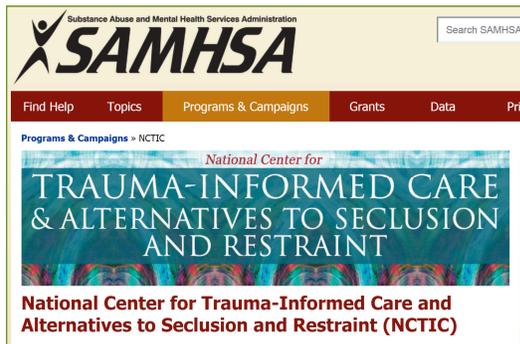
Keep it:

- Emotionally safe
- Reliable
- Relevant
- Respectful
- Challenging
- Legitimate
- Strategic
- Identity affirming
- Formative
- Relationally meaningful
- Guided, with clear boundaries and expectations

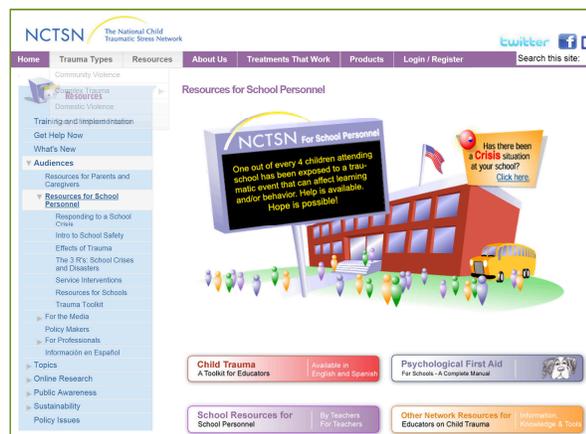
Schools matter

- Schools can play a critical role in helping maltreated and traumatized students to heal, learn, grow, and realize their potential.
- Trauma informed schools and transition planning are essential ingredients in helping students in foster care to successfully transition into adulthood.

Resources



<http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic>



<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel>

The Problem		The Solution	How We Get There		
1	Many students have had traumatic experiences.	3	Trauma-sensitive schools help children feel safe to learn.	5	Helping traumatized children learn should be a major focus of education reform.
2	Trauma can impact learning, behavior and relationships at school.		4	Trauma sensitivity requires a whole school effort.	

<http://traumasensitiveschools.org/>

Thank You for Your Interest!

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